Model Community Forest

Background

Nepal's forest occupies 44.74% including Other Woodland of the total area of the country, of which 30% is managed by 22,266 community forests user groups. This participatory model of managing forests under the ownership of local communities has not only become an example in the sector of natural resource management but has also set a benchmark for other development sectors to achieve.

Community Forests program was conceptualized and implemented four decades ago and since then, it has contributed to increasing the forest area of Nepal. In addition, it has helped local communities, including women, Dalit and marginalized groups to enhance their capacity regarding forest management, biodiversity conservation and advocacy; in the meantime, diversifying their livelihood options.

Despite these achievements, sustainable forest management for resources should be adopted more effectively for ensuring regular supply as well as optimum utilization of forest resources in the years to come. Sustainable forest management refers to prudent management of forest, increasing/maintaining continuous flow of forest products and services without reduction of its inherent values and future productivity, and keeping balance between social, economic and environmental aspects. Various government policy documents have described 'sustainable forest management' as the practice of forest resource management in order to maintain/increase continuous flow of forest products and services without reduction of its inherent values and future productivity, and keeping balance between social, economic and environmental aspects.

In this context, FECOFUN, Hariyo Ban Program, has introduced the concept of Model Community Forest with a primary aim of incorporating sustainable forest management as the core element of community forest. FECOFUN will pilot the concept of model community forest in selected community forests within the working areas of Hariyo Ban Program. This will provide an opportunity to create proven methods, processes and successes that can be replicated in other community forests throughout the country. The implementation of the model community forest will be guided by Forest Act, Community Forest Development Guideline, 2071 and the concept of sustainable forest management.

Goals

The main goal of the model community forest is to improve the livelihood status of forest dependent, disadvantaged, Dalit and marginalized communities. It further aims to enhance participatory biodiversity conservation and maintain or increase the continuous flow of forest products and services for long-term-use through sustainable forest management.

Objectives

- Improve management of community forests in terms of its productivity and yield of forest products and services
- Conserve and improve status of biodiversity within the community forest by implementing relevant forest conservation, promotion and utilization methods.
- Build leadership capacity and increase access to resources and rights of forest dependent, poor, women, Dalit and marginalized groups following principles of transparency, accountability and gender equality and social inclusion
- Equitable distribution of forest-based products and services to improve livelihood of forest dependent, poor, women, Dalit and marginalized groups through development of forest-based entrepreneurship and other livelihood options.
- Increase community forests' capacity in climate change adaptation.
- Develop model community forest as a learning center by documenting and showcasing good practices and results.

Concept of Model Community Forest

The model community forest has three interwoven pillars that will work hand in hand for sustainable forest management. They are:

a. Management of Forest (Environment)

The community needs to adopt proper methods of forest conservation and promotion by addressing the demands of forest users and considering the context and environmental condition of the forest. For this, consumers will be provided with skills and knowledge about Community Forest Development Guideline 2071, policies, and provisions regarding community forest.

b. GESI and Management of Users' Group (Social)

Community Forest Users' Group committee should be made inclusive and accountable. For this, capacity building programs will be conducted to promote poor, women, Dalit and marginalized groups' leadership and effective role in the decision-making process. Necessary reforms will be carried out to make community forest management inclusive, transparent and accountable based on the criteria specified in the Community Forest Development Guidelines.

c. Livelihood and Enterprise Promotion (Economic)

For economic empowerment of the forest users; particularly poor, women, Dalit and marginalized groups; community forest should utilize its forest products and support forest-based entrepreneurship whenever possible. In addition, they can also coordinate with cooperatives and private sector to promote forest-based enterprises.
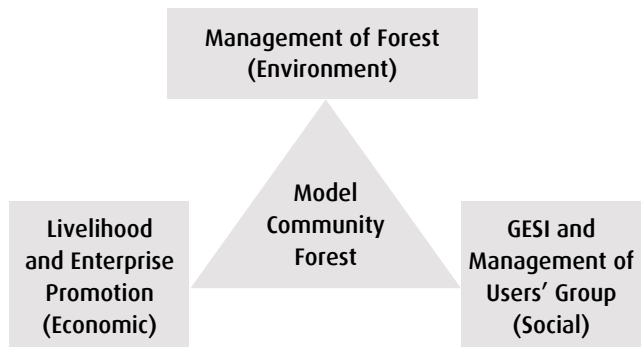
Basis of Selecting Model Community Forest

FECOFUN will select model community forests in consultation with its central committee as well as district and local chapters. As per need, Hariyo Ban Program core team will also be consulted. Following factors will be considered in selecting model community forest:

1. Should have met all legal provisions related to community forest (e.g. Community Forest Operation Plan (CFOP) renewal, annual audit, etc.).
2. Should be within the working area of Hariyo Ban Program for initial stage. It could also be beyond Hariyo Ban working area, if the CFUG can mobilize internal resources and needs just technical support from Hariyo Ban Program.
3. Should have good forest status and be in an accessible location (demonstration purpose).
4. Should be diverse in terms of social and economic representation.
5. Should have motivated user groups ready to contribute in form of labor and finance when required.

Strategies to Establish Model Community Forest

a. **Collaboration and consultation** with Hariyo Ban Program consortium partners, Division Forest Office, local government and other government and non-governmental organizations throughout the process.
b. **Focus on mobilization of local resources** to create the feeling of ownership among the community as per suggestions provided by local community forest members.
c. **Cooperation with neighboring community forests** to replicate and advocate good practices.
d. **Developing as learning center** by documenting and showcasing best practices in the areas of governance, sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation, women empowerment and social inclusion, and entrepreneurship.
e. **Local resource leveraging** from related stakeholders, local government and different governmental and non-governmental organizations.
f. **Participatory approach in preparation of** goal, strategic action plan, approaches, implementation process, and monitoring mechanism, which is widely shared with all users ensuring participation of women, Dalit, indigenous, poor and forest depended users.
g. **Gender equality and social inclusion and governance** followed throughout the program and guided by Community Forest Development Guidelines, including transparency and accountability.

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h. **Monitoring and evaluation** using integrated monitoring approach with focus on self-evaluation of CFUG committee and users.
i. **Technical support** to be taken from relevant government agencies like Division Forest Office, Hariyo Ban Program and any other agencies.

Steps of Establishing Model Community Forest

Steps	Activities
Step I	a) Preparation of Model Community Forest Concept b) Selection of Community Forest c) Resource survey and social analysis
Step II	a) Orientation and discussion on vision b) Vision statement finalization and preparation of strategic action plan c) Facilitator selection and capacity-building training

Step III	a) Participatory implementation of strategic action plan prepared based on community forest's vision:
	  ■ CFOP and annual work-plan revision to include activities of strategic action plan
	  ■ Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) plan formulation
	  ■ Livelihood improvement and enterprise plan formulation
	b) Mobilize resource person of model community forest to reach out to neighboring community forest and advocate to replicate the best practices

Step IV	a) Monitoring and Evaluation
	  ■ Regular review and self-assessment
	  ■ Joint monitoring and evaluation
	  ■ Periodic review and reflection of 5-10 years strategic action plan

Expected Output of Model Community Forest

- Improvement of forest quality ensuring smooth and continuous flow of required forest product and services.
- Establishment and implementation of mechanism for equitable distribution of forest-based products and following the criteria of Community Forest Development Guideline.
- Consensus on equitable distribution of forest resources among the users of community forests.
- Improved livelihood of women, Dalit, indigenous, poor and forest depended users through forest-based enterprise and other livelihood options.
- Documentation of biodiversity available in the forest and necessary steps taken to identify and conserve habitat of species under threat of extinction.
- Increase in good practice of social justice and security along with minimal or no incident of gender-based violence.
- Inclusion of necessary measures for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in Community Forest Operation Plan and implementation of the same.
- Users are aware, committed and united to implement the vision of community forest user groups.
- Enhanced capacity to coordinate and collaborate with different government and non-government agencies.
- Regular collaboration with neighboring community forests to replicate the best practices and methods and sharing of resources like forest fire-fighting equipment, skills for silvicultural operation, etc.
- Enhanced capacity of neighboring community forests in term of good governance, sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation, gender equality and social inclusion, livelihood and entrepreneurship development.

Nettlepowder enterprise
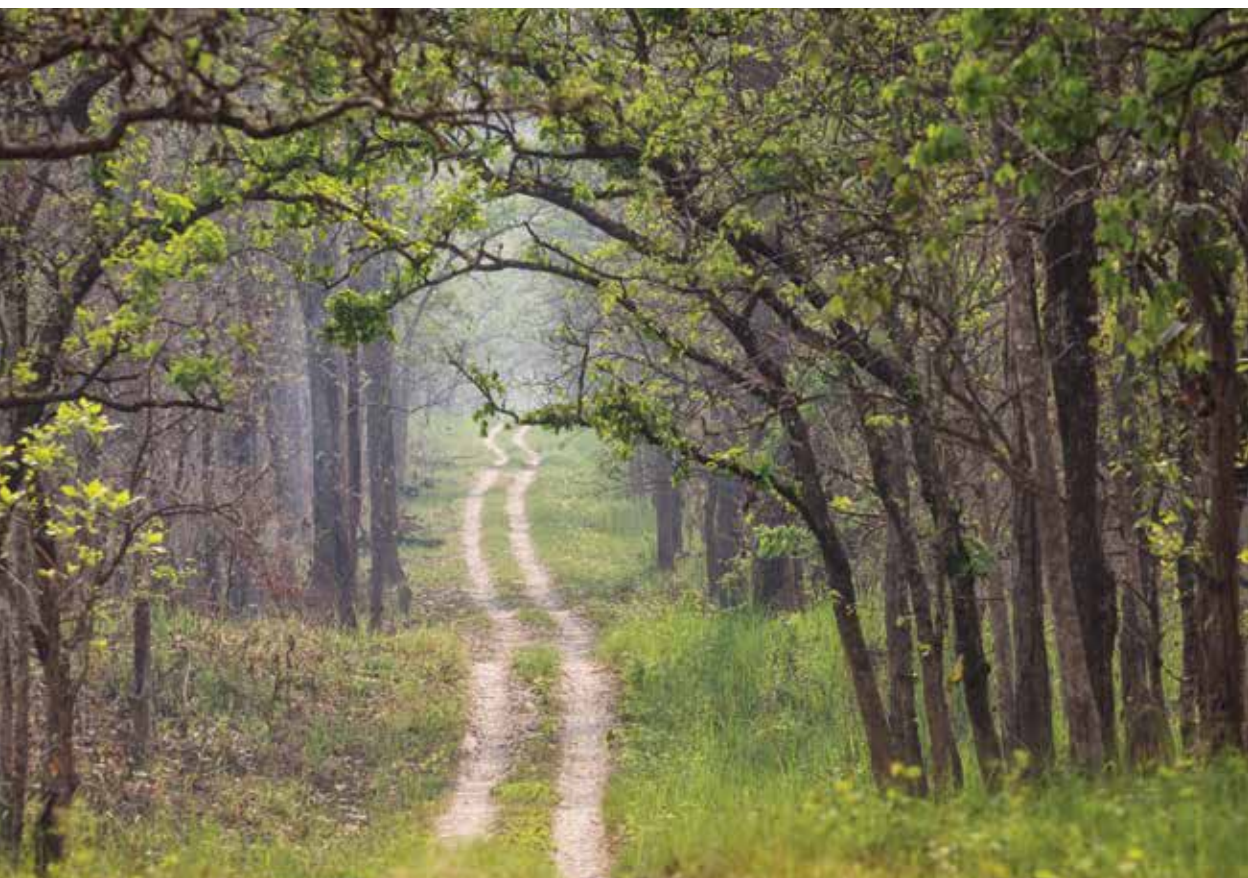© WWF Nepal, Hariyo Ban Program/Nabin Baral

Monitoring, Evaluation and Documentation of Model community forest

The feedback received from monitoring and evaluation will be crucial to achieve the goals and objectives of the Model Community Forest. Community forest user groups can self-assess, self-evaluate and document their achievements, learnings and success stories, as mentioned in step IV above.

Stakeholders of Model Community Forest

Following are the key stakeholders of Model Community Forest:

1. Community Forest User Group
2. Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) (Local, District, Provincial and National Federation)
3. Hariyo Ban Program consortium partners and other community forestry related projects
4. Division and Sub-division Forest Offices
5. Local Governments: Rural Municipality, Municipality, Sub-Metropolitan City, Metropolitan City
6. Provincial Directorate of Forests
7. Department of Forests and Soil Conservation
8. Ministry of Forests and Environment
9. Other social organizations

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