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INCREASING FOREST BENEFITS THROUGH THE LEASEHOLD FORESTRY AND LIVESTOCK PROGRAMME

IMPROVING ITS IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS



Photo by Gyanendra Kayastha, LFLP

Land under Leasehold Forestry planted with napier grass.

Summary

Nepal introduced various community based forest management (CBFM) programmes that aim to improve forest management while improving the livelihoods of the forest dependent poor. One of these programmes is the Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme (LFLP). Various studies have demonstrated its positive impacts but several studies also pointed out its unintentional negative impacts. This policy brief presents implementation and related design constraints facing the LFLP and suggests ways to resolve them and improve programme outcomes. This brief is based on our review study of the institutional constraints to the LFLP in achieving its poverty alleviation objective. Proper implementation of the programme is constrained by a lack of awareness of the

people about it, which can be attributed to the lack of capacity in the implementing line agencies, and also to programme design weaknesses. To improve its effectiveness and impact, awareness campaigns should be improved using diverse modes of communication, more line agencies should be involved in the implementation by transferring the implementation responsibility to a district-level project coordination committee, and some programme provisions should be changed in favour of the poor.

The Leasehold Forestry programme

The Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme aims to improve both forests and livelihoods by leasing degraded land to selected poor households. It was initiated in 1993 through the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP) which is acclaimed for its positive impacts on both forests and livelihoods (Ohler 2003; HLFFDP 2003). The project was then made a national programme, extended for another 10 years and expanded to cover 26 additional districts of Nepal. Although considered successful, several studies also have shown that the programme had negative impacts of Nepal on the poor including exclusion from use of leasehold forest and a reduction of benefits from the leasehold forests as a result of the implementation of the programme (see Grinten and Dhakal 1997; Baral and Thapa 2003; Joshi et al. 2000; and Bhattarai et al. 2004; Thoms et al.

2006). A commonly identified reason for these is the weakness in programme implementation which we further attribute to its design.

Implementation constraints

In the implementation process, various factors contribute to the unintentional negative impacts of the LFLP:

Lack of awareness of the programme. One simple reason for the exclusion of the poor is that the targeted groups are not aware of the programme. The evaluation report of the LFLP shows that not all poor households received prior information about the selection of leasehold forestry user groups (LFUG) members.

Lack of community consultation. The lack of awareness among the people about the programme is due to a lack of community consultation prior to its implementation although the instructions for implementing the programme require that the whole community be consulted in the identification of degraded land and/or in identifying the poorest people.

Lack of capacity of implementing line agencies. The earlier reasons can further be attributed to the lack of capacity in the implementing line agencies. The LFLP is primarily being implemented by the Department of Forest (DoF) through its District Forest Officers (DFOs) and forest rangers who are already implementing other CBFM programmes. With no additional staff added to implement the LFLP, the DFOs and staff have to juggle their time and resources to accommodate the LFLP, often resulting in shortcuts in the processes; and consequently, to lower quality outputs.

Design constraints

To a certain extent, effective implementation of the programme and avoidance of its negative impacts can be made difficult due to constraints inherent to interventions targeting the poorest and especially those in remote areas. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the programme is constrained by its implementation design and livelihoods provisions.

Targeted poorest lack capacity. Many of the constraints to its proper implementation can also be attributed to the fact that the programme is targeting the poorest people, who lack the capacity to participate in the programme because they are illiterate, are living in remote areas, or have limited time to spare for meetings. Some poor households have dropped out their membership as they could not fulfil some requirements of LFUG membership such as regular attendance in meetings and other activities required to maintain membership (LI-BIRD, 2004).

Limited group size. The lack of capacity of the LFUGs can also be attributed to their very small membership composition (i.e. 7-10 households). This poses a constraint in accessing support services because NGOs and other government line agencies prefer to collaborate with sizable community groups. For example, the District Agriculture Development Office and other district line agencies require larger membership for them to provide support services.

Restricted time-frame of support services. The LFUGs are supported by the DFO for the initial year and the District Livestock Services Office (DLSO) in the second year, and usually after that, the LFUGs do not get further support. Some communities even complained that the visit of rangers and their provision of support services become scarce immediately after the first year of implementation (LI-BIRD 2004).

Limited livelihood options under the LFLP. The limited implementation of the programme can also be attributed to its provisions restricting the cultivation of cereals and vegetables, allowing only grasses, fodder, and trees, which could make food less secure for the poor. For a poor farmer who cultivates vegetables or cereal crops on 'degraded' land, joining the LF program with the land as a leasehold forest would mean that he/she will no longer be allowed to cultivate vegetables and cereals. Growing grasses or trees would not be rational because it would take months or even years before they are harvested.



Photo by Gyanendra Kayastha, LFLP

A focus group discussion with LFUG members.

A stakeholder analysis: who does what in the LFLP?

Clearly, various interrelated reasons can be attributed to the weak implementation of the LFLP. This too indicates the need for various and collaborative interventions among different actors. In order to identify a starting point for reform, we conducted a stakeholder analysis identifying the key actors in the programme.

The major stakeholders in the LFLP include the government, forest users, donors including IFAD, and the social advocates including local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Within the government, an important stakeholder is the LFLP Office under the DoF which has the legitimacy, interest and power in implementing the programme. This also includes the National Planning Commission (NPC) (which is responsible for preparing the national poverty reduction strategy paper for Nepal the primary document used in designing poverty reduction programmes such as the LFLP)

the main implementing agencies at the district level (i.e., the DFOs and DLSOs), and other government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture Office (DADO) (which has the mandate to implement agricultural related activities) and the District Development Committee (DDC) (which is the district level local government body authorized to manage district resources including forest resources as mandated by the *Local Self-Governance Act of 1998*.)

From the stakeholder analysis, it was observed that: a) forest communities and other line agencies such as the DDC, DADO and NGOs involved in social mobilization process have interest in LF but lack the legitimacy and power to influence leasehold forestry institutions; and b) the stakeholders that have the interest, legitimacy, and power to change LF institutions include government line agencies such as the DoF through the LFLP and DFOs as well as other stakeholders such as IFAD and the DLSO (Figure 1).

Direction for interventions

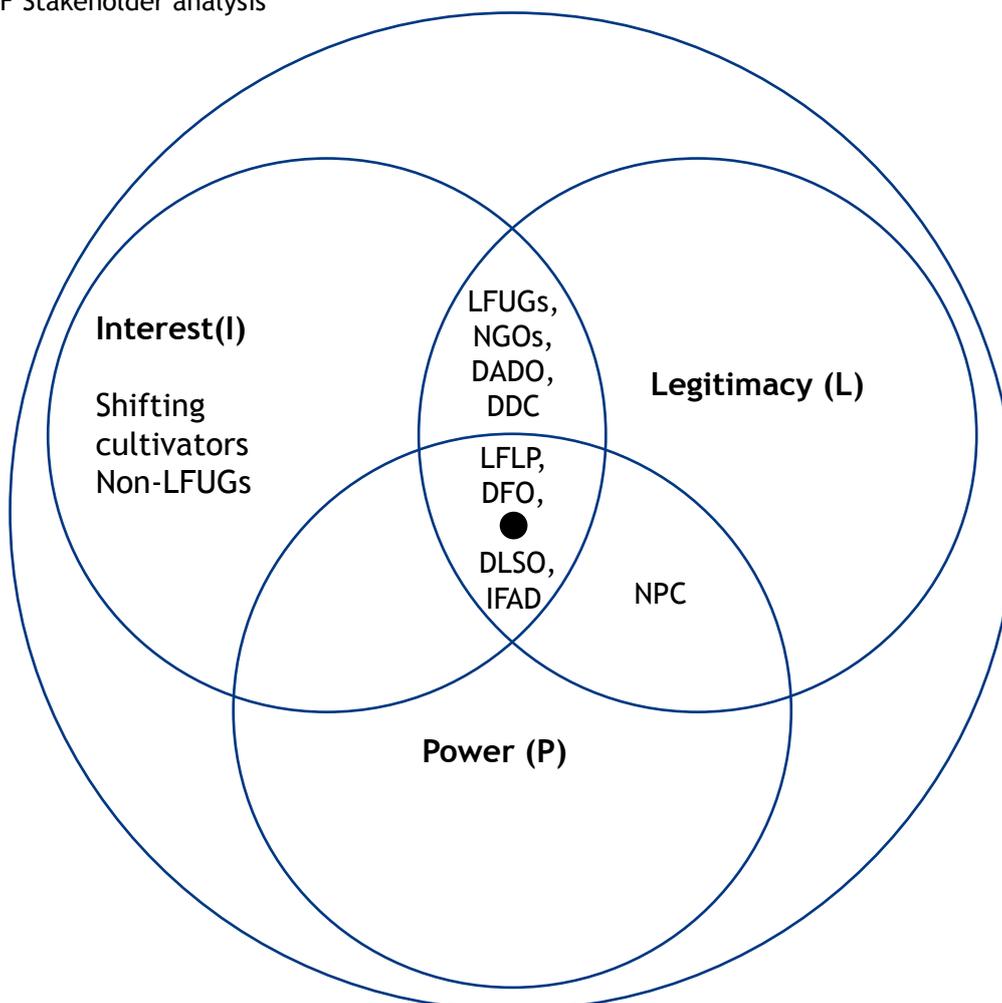
Given the analysis of the roles of the various stakeholders in the programme, we identify various areas for interventions to improve its implementation and consequently, its impact.

Pro-poor sensitization and awareness campaigns. At the community level, awareness among the targeted poorest about the programme needs to be improved through innovative means of information dissemination. This may include placing information materials (e.g. posters about the proper process of handover) in locations frequented by the targeted poorest, and use of local radio to reach remote locations. Awareness campaigns may also target not just the recipients but also the wealthier and the privileged groups in the community, with the aim of changing their attitude to be more favourable toward the poorest.

Larger group formation and formalization. Awareness campaigns should also include LFUG members' awareness of their rights and responsibilities after joining the programme. Since LFUGs are not required to have a constitution because of their size and lack of capacity (LFUGs need heavy external assistance in just preparing their Operational Plans), LFUGs should be supported to organize into inter-groups and cooperatives, which would necessitate the preparation of their constitution and by-laws.

Broaden collaboration among line agencies. Both DFOs and DLSOs – the primary implementing agencies of the programme

Figure 1: LF Stakeholder analysis



- are limited in their capacity partly by their number of staff but especially by their sectoral mandate. Other government line agencies such as the DADO, District Soil Conservation Office, and the District Development Council (DDC) need to be involved in the implementation of the programme. We propose that a district-level project coordination committee should be formed to manage or supervise the implementation of the LF programme. This committee shall be under the chairmanship of the DDC chairperson. Following the *Local Self-Governance Act of 1998*, which gave the DDC greater jurisdiction over forest resources, the DDCs have the mandate to implement government programmes at the district level and to coordinate various sectoral activities from various government departments. The DFO could be the secretary of the DDC and all the other district line agencies, including representatives from NGOs and user groups shall be members. This reorganization in the implementation of the programme is needed because the poorest have diverse needs (e.g. food and nutrition, education, health, income, etc.) and they need integrated and varying interventions to address these needs.

Secure funding and ensure continuity of services. This proposal to place the LFLP under the leadership of the DDC while involving more line agencies in the implementation also addresses the anticipated budget constraint of the current implementing agencies. As the programme is now, the implementing agencies will not be able to sustain their services to LFUGs, as they are intended to last at for at least 40 years. This reorganization would need clarification of the roles of the line agencies currently involved (and that shall be involved), as well as the distribution of programme and project funds. It is anticipated that the DoF will oppose reducing their share of the budget while all others will want their share. Since this is a controversial issue, we recommend further consultation involving the various stakeholders. We also anticipate that this re-organization will take some time and effort to be resolved as we are aware of additional complications in coordination among the line agencies. This can be facilitated by supporting pilot projects that would implement the programme with the proposed organizational structure to see how this recommendation can actually be realized.

Reform programme design through dialogue. Many of the constraints discussed can be attributed to the design of the programme (e.g. limitations in land quality, cultivable crops, land area, membership composition); thus, the design and provisions of the LFLP needs to be changed. The current design has its own rationale and supporters, however, (e.g. to improve forest cover, easier administration) and so changing will not be easy. A way forward is to start a dialogue among the concerned stakeholders, helping them to discuss and agree on a compromise that ideally will satisfy the interests of all stakeholders and particularly the poor. These dialogues may be initiated by any of the stakeholders with interest, legitimacy and power over policy-making such as the DoF

and donor agencies such as IFAD or by those representing the interest of the poorest such as the civil society organizations including the organization of forest users (i.e. FECOFUN, NEFUG).

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Endnotes

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