

Community Forestry from Wealth and Caste Perspective: Elvira Graner in the Dock

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Abstract

This article assesses the validity of blame that Community Forestry discriminates against the lower caste and economically disadvantaged people in Nepal. The article is based on two case-studies from two Districts of Nepal. Those case-studies, using two sets of database on the Forest User Groups (FUGs) of Lalitpur and Kabhrepalanchok revealed that People have equally benefited from the community forests, regardless of wealth and caste through augmented supply of forest products for farm-household activities. Hence, the findings of the article refute an earlier claim by Ms. Elvira Graner (1997) regarding the discrimination of lower caste and economically disadvantaged people in Community Forestry. The paper recommends for the continuation of subsistence oriented Community Forestry Policies in Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Community Forestry is being poised as a glaring success in Nepal. The latest statistics (released on 11/12/2001, Source, Department of Forests, Nepal.) shows that about 10969 Forest User Groups¹ (FUG) are managing 847,782 hectares of community forests with 1.2 million beneficiary households. His Majesty's Government of Nepal considers Community Forestry as a vehicle for rural development and poverty reduction (NPC, 1998). A Departmental-level taskforce has revised the Operational Guideline for Community Forestry and has incorporated the mentioned policy statements in the Guideline.

However, Some people often blame Community Forestry for discriminating against the lower caste and economically oppressed people. There is also an increasing concern that the community forest management has failed to benefit more to the poor than the rich households. Based on the case-studies from Sindhupalchok District, Graner (1997) concludes that Community Forestry based on FUG concept may not be a viable development strategy for securing the basic needs, mainly because of the dominance of elites and high caste people in the FUGs, argue in that:

1: Forest User Group: All members of a community that regularly use a forest to meet their household needs, organize themselves as a group to protect, manage and utilize the forest as per the Forest Act in Nepal.

- I. members of FUGs are predominantly from economically advantaged groups.
- II. economically disadvantaged groups are often excluded from membership, and
- III. economically disadvantaged group may lose access to VITAL resources.

Based on those findings, Garner validates Goldsmith's criticism of Social Forestry of being little help to the poor actually, on contrary, contributing to their further impoverishment (Goldsmith, 1985 as quoted in Graner, 1997).

Graner observes, "Lower caste and economically disadvantaged people are excluded in the FUG formation process". This magnitude of exclusion cannot be determined due to the lack of reliable methodology and appropriate tools. Nevertheless, sharing of benefits from community forests, mainly in terms of forest products distributed by wealth and caste can be quantified and compared. Hence, this article attempts to examine the validity of Graner's statement particularly in the context of sharing forest products within the groups.

This controversy regarding Community Forestry's role as a viable strategy for development necessitates a serious research work as the outcome can give significant policy feedback. Hence, this article exclusively focuses on the issues by keeping a track on sharing of benefits from community forests by wealth and caste. The benefit is quantified in terms of forest products being distributed within the FUGs. Thus, it helps in getting an insight on the issue of discrimination in Community Forestry against the people of lower caste and economically disadvantaged group. A limitation of this article is the issue regarding the exclusion of lower caste and economically disadvantaged people in the formation process itself.

METHODOLOGY

The crux of research is to quantify the amount of forest products being distributed from the community forests by wealth and caste. For the sake of convenience, two categories of caste: higher and lower², are used. Similarly, the terms rich and poor are used for denoting respective economic standings. Socio-economic stratification by Wealth Ranking is a valid tool for this purpose (Filius and Sharma, 1999). Two separate studies are conducted in three FUGs at Badikhel, Panauti, Ugratara and Mahendra Jyoti Village Development Committees (VDCs) in Lalitpur and Kabhrepalanchok Districts respectively.

² The term higher denotes to Brahmin, Chhetri and Baisya while Sudra represent lower caste. The discrimination by caste, though legally abolished is still an inevitable reality in the rural life.

Altogether ninety-two households are surveyed for quantifying the amount of forest products being distributed from community forests. Kumariban FUG, Badikhel is selected for Lalitpur District while FUGs of Taukhel, Basdole, Jyalachiti, Senagal, Adhikarigaun and Mahendra Jyoti represent Kabhrepalanchok. Analysis of variances (ANOVA) is used for determining the significance of differences regarding the distribution of forest products by wealth and caste.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Magnitude of products distribution

The distribution of forest products by wealth and caste in Kabhrepalanchok and Lalitpur is summarised in Table-1. Kabhrepalanchok encompasses fifty households while Lalitpur comprises forty-two households. The number of households belonging to each of the categories is given in the parenthesis. On average, poor households in Lalitpur used more firewood than their rich neighbours while at Kabhrepalanchok there was no distinct manifestation. In contrary to Kabhrepalanchok, the lower caste households of Lalitpur used more firewood than their higher caste neighbours. Average utilisation of grass by poor and lower caste households in Lalitpur, is also comparatively higher than the rich and higher caste households. While Kabhrepalanchok study fails to reveal any such differences. The lower caste households used more leaf-litters than the higher caste in Lalitpur while such differences neither existed by wealth nor by caste in Kabhrepalanchok.

Analysis of Variances (ANOVA)

The results of ANOVA for the utilisation of forest products in Lalitpur and Kabhrepalanchok are presented in table 2 and 3 respectively. The table 2 shows that variations in the distribution of forest products are manifested in terms of caste than the wealth class. While ANOVA on the distribution of forest products by wealth is significant only in case of firewood. This variation in firewood distribution is still significant while considering all together as a group. However, table-3 fails to reveal any significant variations in the distribution of forest products by wealth and caste.

Table-1 Statistics regarding the use of forest products from the community forests by wealth and caste (all except timber in Bhari¹ while the number of households is in parenthesis)

Kabhrepalanchok					Lalitpur				
Households	Rich (15)	Poor(35)	Higher (43)	Lower(7)	Rich (21)	Poor(21)	Higher (16)	Lower(26)	
Total amount of forest product used ²	Firewood	344.0	806.0	1022.0	128.0	182.0	521.0	51.0	652.0
	Timber (cft.)		-	-	-	362.0*	304.0	162.0*	504.0
	Grasses	304.0	627.0	817.0	135.0	356.0*	725.0	188.0	893.0*
	Leaf-litters	445.0	1213.0	1368.0	290.0	483.0	566.0	255.0	794.0
Average amount of forest products	Firewood	22.9	23.0	23.8	18.3	8.7	24.8	3.2	25.1
	Timber (cft.)		-	-	-	18.1	14.5	10.8	19.4
	Grasses	20.3	17.9	19.0	19.3	17.8	34.5	11.8	35.7
	Leaf-litters	29.7	34.7	31.8	41.4	23.0	27.0	15.9	30.5
Variances	Firewood	445.6	547.4	528.4	412.6	152.6	676.7	81.2	534.3
	Timber (cft.)		-	-	-	189.0	144.8	242.5	101.1
	Grasses	567.4	362.3	445.8	389.6	537.5	2029.4	431.3	1733.0
	Leaf-litters	182.0	256.4	179.4	572.6	835.7	880.3	427.4	1038.5

* : one household missing

1: Bhari is a back load. The estimated mean weight for one Bhari firewood = 34.5 kg, and for grasses and leaf-litters is about 20 kg.

Table 2 Analysis of variances (ANOVA) for the utilization of forest products from the Community Forests at Lalitpur.

Forest product	Source of variation	SS	MS	F	p value
<i>1. Considering all groups together ($\alpha=0.05$, $df=3,80$ $F_{critical} = 2.72$)</i>					
Firewood	Between group	7482	2494	6.40	0.001
	Within group	31162	390		
Timber	Between group	836	279	1.75	0.164
	Within group	12408	159		
Grasses	Between group	8471	2824	2.23	0.092
	Within group	98861	1267		
Leaf-litters	Between group	2276	759	0.91	0.440
	Within group	66694	834		
<i>2. Poor –rich as groups ($\alpha=0.05$, $df=1,40$ $F_{critical} = 4.09$)</i>					
Firewood	Between group	2736	2736	6.60	0.014
	Within group	16586	415		
Timber	Between group	135	135	0.81	0.374
	Within group	6487	166		
Grasses	Between group	2865	2865	2.20	0.146
	Within group	50800	1303		
Leaf-litters	Between group	164	164	0.19	0.664
	Within group	34321	858		
<i>3. Lower and higher caste as groups ($\alpha=0.05$, $df=1,40$ $F_{critical} = 4.09$)</i>					
Firewood	Between group	4746	4746	13.02	0.001
	Within group	14576	364		
Timber	Between group	701	701	4.62	0.038
	Within group	5921	152		

Grasses	Between group	5606	5606	4.55	0.039
	Within group	48060	1232		
Leaf-litters	Between group	2112	2112	2.61	0.114
	Within group	32373	809		

Table 3 Analysis of variances (ANOVA) for the utilization of forest products from the Community Forests at Kabhrepalanchok.

Forest product	Source of variation	SS	MS	F	p value
<i>1. Considering all groups together ($\alpha=0.05$, $df=3,96$ $F_{critical} = 2.70$)</i>					
Firewood	Between group	181	60	0.12	0.950
	Within group	49519	516		
Grasses	Between group	63	21	0.05	0.986
	Within group	41449	432		
Leaf-litters	Between group	818	273	1.18	0.323
	Within group	22235	232		
<i>2. Poor –rich as groups ($\alpha=0.05$, $df=1,48$ $F_{critical} = 4.04$)</i>					
Firewood	Between group	0.01	0.01	0.0002	0.989
	Within group	24850	518		
Grasses	Between group	58	58	0.14	0.713
	Within group	20388	425		
Leaf-litters	Between group	262	262	1.11	0.296
	Within group	11265	235		
<i>3. Lower and higher caste as groups ($\alpha=0.05$, $df=1,48$ $F_{critical} = 4.04$)</i>					
Firewood	Between group	181	181	0.35	0.556
	Within group	24669	514		

Grasses	Between group	0.5	0.5	0.001	0.973
	Within group	21061	439		
Leaf-litters	Between group	557	557	2.44	0.125
	Within group	10970	229		

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

No discrimination in product utilisation

The distribution of forest products is not marred with any discrimination by wealth and caste as is evident from the statistics on distribution from the community forests. Statistics regarding the use of forest products from the community forests by wealth and caste fails to reveal any discrimination against poor or lower caste people. Both studies show diverse pattern in Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the utilisation of forest products from the community forests. This suggests higher localisation of the outcome.

Community forestry: a viable development strategy

An important policy feedback of this article is "Community Forestry based on FUG concept still remains a viable development strategy for securing the basic needs". Community forestry can contribute to poverty reduction because the poor and lower caste households have easy access on forest products. Hopefully, their reported exclusion will be properly dealt with the implementation of revised Operational Guideline for Community Forestry.

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