



# Forests of Learning

Experiences from Research on an Adaptive Collaborative Approach to Community Forestry in Nepal

*A synthesis of lessons from the Adaptive Collaborative Management Research Project in Nepal, 1999–2002 and 2004–2007*

Cynthia McDougall, Hemant Ojha, Mani Ram Banjade,  
Bishnu Hari Pandit, Tara Bhattarai, Manik Maharjan and Sushila Rana



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## FOREWORD

Innovation in forest management systems and practices is needed if the increasing number of community-managed forests are to meet local and national livelihood and development goals. There is a specific need for innovation that enables diverse stakeholders to bridge the gaps that so often divide them and creates a means of working together effectively to meet social, livelihood, and environmental goals. An adaptive collaborative approach is such an innovation. This approach aims to improve community forestry systems by increasing their capacity for proactive adaptiveness, including learning within and across groups of stakeholders, and for inclusion, networking and collaboration. As outlined in this publication, the approach can be usefully and effectively applied from the *tole* (hamlet) level, to community forest user groups, and up to multistakeholder forums at the district level and even the national level. Overall, the approach is very pro-poor and inclusive, ensuring that management plans are driven by local people, especially by women and the poor, based on their needs and priorities.

The authors of this synthesis have been able to draw on the experiences of a successful multiyear partnership-based research project. Although an end product of the project, this book does not represent the end of the adaptive collaborative approach; the approach continues to be used by groups involved in the participatory action research and is being picked up by many community forest user groups and district or subdistrict forums.

I find the adaptive collaborative approach—and the practical synthesis of research lessons in this book—very exciting, useful and timely. Nepal is home to a myriad of national and international natural resource management and development professionals who are engaged directly or indirectly in meeting the poverty reduction and conservation goals of the country. There are many challenges to the achievement of these goals—including, in many cases, a transformation of the existing forestry and development professionals' paradigm and practice towards more inclusive and participatory democracy. I am sure that the adaptive collaborative approach is one of the ways to address these challenges and to move effectively—and equitably—towards our country's livelihood and environmental goals.



Dr Keshav Raj Kanel

Acting Secretary, Government of Nepal and

Former Director General, Department of Forests and Soil Conservation, Nepal

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project's success is directly linked to its web of collaboration. Although all actors engaged in the research are too numerous to identify here, our sincere thanks go to each of the collaborators and collaborating organisations and networks.

The lessons in this research synthesis were generated through the direct engagement of CFUG and meso forum members, and 'change agents' at both levels, in developing, leading and reflecting on CFUG practice innovations in the following 11 CFUGs and 7 meso forums:

- Manakamana, Andheribhajana and Pathivara CFUGs (Sankhuwasabha District)
- Bamdibhir and Deurali Bagedanda CFUGs (Kaski District)
- Khaniyubas Salleri and Handikharka CFUGs (Dhankuta District)
- Chautari CFUG (Morang District)
- Patle CFUG (Lalitpur District)
- Kajipauwa CFUG (Palpa District)
- Chautari CFUG (Nawalparasi District)
- Tinjure Hattisar CFUG Non-Timber Forest Product Enterprise Network (Sankhuwasabha District)
- Hansapur VDC-level CFUG Network (Kaski District)
- Ilaka-Level Meso Forum (Morang District)
- Community Forest Learning Group (Dhankuta District)
- Sishneri Range Post CFUG Coordination Committee (Lalitpur District)
- Nawalparasi District-Level Learning Forum (Nawalparasi District)
- Palpa District Meso Forum (Palpa District)

It is through these groups' reflections and wisdom that these lessons have come to life, and thus we deeply acknowledge their contribution.

We also sincerely thank the wider circle of collaborators in this project at the local, meso and national levels, including staff of the district forest offices, the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN), the bilateral and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in each of the project districts, and members of the National Policy Learning Group. All of these actors contributed their time, energy and insights to developing and supporting the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach. Our sincere thanks also go to the members of the CFUGs who contributed to the learning by participating as 'comparative case studies': Dophare, Andherikhola and Sunpadheli CFUGs in Kaski District and Makuwa, Chilaune Khark Simle Bhadaure and Deurali Titre CFUGs in Sankhuwasabha District.

Our sincere gratitude goes to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for generously providing the research grant to undertake the adaptive collaborative approach project in Nepal from 2004 to 2007 through the project entitled 'Enhancing Livelihoods and Equity in Nepal: The Role of Adaptive Collaborative Management'. It would not have been possible to create this synthesis without IDRC's support and input. We would especially like to acknowledge the valuable input of Liz Fajber of IDRC during the research period. We also express our gratitude to the Asian Development Bank for their generous support of the first phase of this research (1999–2002), through the research project entitled 'Planning for the Sustainability of Forests through Adaptive Co-Management'. We also express our thanks to the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, LIBIRD Nepal, the CG Systemwide Programme on Participatory Research and Gender Analysis for Technology Development and Institutional Innovation, and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) for their complementary contributions to the project.

Sincere thanks go to various individuals for their contributions to the research and this synthesis. First, our thanks to the anonymous reviewers of this report for their thoughtful reflections and useful suggestions. Doris Capistrano and Ravi Prabhu made very valuable ongoing contributions to the project as international advisors. Carol Colfer has provided the critical support, leadership, and encouragement to get this and related outputs through to completion. We gratefully acknowledge the advisory inputs to the research project on which this synthesis is based, including from the following colleagues: Bhola Bhattarai, Apsara Chapagain, Devendra Chapagain, Ram Chhetri, Bala Ram Kandel, Keshav Kanel, the late Damodar Parajuli, Bharat Pokharel and Mohan Wagley. We also recognise the guidance and collaboration of additional colleagues in the first phase of the research, including Steve Hunt, Nick Roche, K.B. Shrestha and Paul Sizeland. Among these, K.B. Shrestha, Keshav Kanel and Bharat Pokharel deserve additional recognition for their roles in linking the Nepal project to the international research group at various times. Our thanks also go to the advisors for the international ACM project who contributed greatly: Robert Fisher, Peter Frost, Don Gilmour and Irene Guijt. Rahayu Koesnadi has provided tremendous ongoing support of many kinds throughout the project and the production of this publication. Catur Wahyu and Gideon Suharyanto deserve many thanks for their inspired layout and great patience. Similarly, we acknowledge the contributions of those project researchers—Kamal Bhandari, Chiranjeewee Khadka, Raj Kumar Pandey, Naya Sharma Paudel, Shibesh Regmi, Kalpana Sharma, Him Lal Shrestha, Narayan Sitaula, Netra Tumbahangphe, Hima Upreti and Laya Upreti—and the many research assistants and field researchers in both phases who have not directly co-authored this work. Finally, sincere thanks also go to Sheri Englund for her wise editorial input and flexibility.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Exclusion, inequity and low livelihood benefits: The need for innovation in community forestry in Nepal**

Nepal's social and livelihood landscape is shaped by implicit—and sometimes explicit—sociopolitical struggles at many levels. These can be traced to historical patterns of hierarchy and inequitable power among actors interacting in, and with, a fragile environment. These patterns impact especially severely on poor and *dalit* people (from so-called 'low caste' groups) and women, and are manifested in social discrimination, relative exclusion from decision making, limited access to resources, and overall vulnerability in livelihoods.

Community forestry embodies these struggles and patterns in a vivid way. Forests are a fundamental part of rural livelihood systems in Nepal. As such, forests are also a key area of 'contested space' within communities and between communities and external actors. Through the considerable efforts of local people and governmental and civil society actors, the Nepal Community Forestry Programme has established more than 14,000 community forest user groups (CFUGs), many of which have improved their forest conditions. And yet, despite these achievements, policy makers and practitioners agree that community forestry in Nepal faces critical 'second generation' challenges. Fundamental among these is the prevalent inequity in decision making and benefit sharing among members of CFUGs, with the economically and socially marginalised peoples—such as women, the poor and *dalit* people—receiving small shares of forest benefits relative to their needs. Additionally, the contribution of community forestry to livelihoods is less than hoped for by many community forestry actors, especially in terms of poverty alleviation for marginalised people.

### **The Adaptive Collaborative Management Research Project**

To address the challenges of inequity and low livelihood benefits in community forestry in Nepal, CIFOR and the Nepali research organisations NewERA, ForestAction and the Environmental Resources Institute—along with multiple governmental and civil actors—carried out a partnership-based research initiative in two phases. The research was funded primarily by the Asian Development Bank (1999–2002) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), with

complementary funding from CIFOR and the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction in the second phase. The initiative was linked to a network of related projects led by CIFOR in Asia, South America and Africa.

### ***Objectives, focus and research questions***

The project's objective was to generate research-based lessons about ways in which actors at all levels can increase the equity and effectiveness of community forestry governance and management. Specifically, the project aimed to understand, and ultimately contribute to, the adaptive and collaborative capacity of groups of actors in governance and management so they can become more equitable and resilient as they operate in dynamic and complex systems.

The project investigated the viability and influence of an approach to community forestry management and governance that we refer to as an 'adaptive collaborative approach'. In this approach, groups of actors consciously and explicitly base decision making in social learning and critical reflection, emphasise inclusion and equity in institutions, and develop appropriate collaboration between actors and institutions.

The project framed its investigation around the following research questions:

1. Is an adaptive collaborative approach viable in community forestry? Can it be effectively catalysed and facilitated in CFUGs and meso (i.e., district and subdistrict) forums primarily by local and meso actors such as CFUG members, district forest office representatives and civil society actors? What factors, including human agency, enable or limit the ability to make and sustain the transition towards a more adaptive and collaborative approach?
2. What strategies, attitudes and skills, processes, and arrangements support an adaptive and collaborative approach in governance and management?
3. What are the outcomes of an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry, including in terms of social capital and livelihoods?

One key focus of the research at the local level was to explore the viability and influence of strategies for the enhanced inclusion of marginalised people in governance and a related expansion of the 'voice' of these people. Another key focus was the viability and influence of learning-based strategies for community forest user group members, especially the poor, to enhance their livelihood security and thus resilience. At the meso level, the project investigated social learning-oriented CFUG networking and multistakeholder forums in terms of strengthening CFUG capacity and voice in the larger landscape of community forestry actors. The national-level research—which is beyond the scope of this

report—focused on the potential for a National Policy Learning Group to add value to the policy process through multistakeholder policy learning.

### ***Scope and methodology***

The first phase research involved four main case study sites at the CFUG level, with preliminary assessment in 4 meso areas. The second phase expanded to 11 main case study sites at the CFUG level and 7 at the meso level. The meso-level forums were existing or potential multistakeholder ‘platforms’ that ranged from CFUG–CFUG support networks, to multistakeholder forums, to a commercial CFUG network enterprise. The sites, selected through stakeholder consultation for their representativeness in a number of key parameters, ranged from east to west and from the southern *Terai* (plains) to the mid-Hills area of Nepal. The research added breadth to the analysis by undertaking comparative CFUG studies: 8 in the first phase and 6 in the second phase.

The methodology for the CFUG and meso main case study sites combined both social science assessment and participatory action research (PAR). Specifically, the PAR was ‘sandwiched’ between the more traditional social science background and final assessments. This combined traditional–PAR methodology was developed as a means of achieving the multifaceted aims of:

- generating a rigorous understanding of, and base of information regarding, the contexts and changes to livelihoods and community forestry practices over time for the purpose of internal and cross-site comparison through the ‘traditional’ assessments; and,
- sparking adaptive and collaborative innovation in governance and management through PAR for the purposes of enabling experience-based research lessons about this innovation and catalysing local and meso benefit.

In the first phase, the adaptive collaborative approach was facilitated initially by researchers—who made efforts to transfer the role to local actors by the end of the PAR. In the second phase, from the outset the facilitators were all local or meso actors trained and supported by the research team and by each other. The facilitators’ primary role was to support the transition of the CFUGs or meso forums towards more inclusive and equitable governance and management, which was also network oriented, flexible and rooted in social learning.

## Outcomes and research findings

The research findings add knowledge to community forestry—and community-based natural resource management more broadly—in a range of areas, including:

- the feasibility of, and factors influencing, a transition to an adaptive collaborative approach;
- strategies, processes and arrangements that support adaptive and collaborative capacity; and
- the effects of such an approach on access to decision making, forest-related livelihood benefits, and distributional equity.

The research establishes that it is feasible for CFUGs to make the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach to forestry governance and management. Similar transitions are possible and desirable at the meso level, but are more challenging for a number of reasons, including the inherent complexity of the meso landscape. At both levels, two important lessons are that this transition can be effectively catalysed by committed local facilitators (or ‘change agents’) and that this transition relies on effective cross-scale linkages. These linkages include, but are not limited to, effective training and support to the facilitators, support by the facilitators’ own organisations, at least occasional engagement by critically reflective outside actors, and networking among facilitators, CFUGs and meso forums.

The research confirms that ‘nested’ CFUG decision making (with local hamlets and subgroups as the ‘first step’ and lead actors) and planning based on shared visioning and self-monitoring are potent vehicles for enabling more reflexive, inclusive—and ultimately equitable—governance and management. Essential to self-monitoring is the explicit tracking of equity. The most important innovations during the PAR at the meso level related to the strategies used by each forum to enhance its effective shared learning and collaborative action rather than to the specific structure (i.e., institutional arrangement or configuration) or type of forum. Key among these strategies were the meso actors identifying common ‘burning issues’ and developing appropriate strategies for effective CFUG input (such as CFUG–meso workshops).

The most significant outcomes of the transition towards an adaptive collaborative approach at the meso and CFUG levels included:

- meso forums that were more responsive to CFUG needs;
- more active meso support to CFUGs, including to marginalised CFUG members;

- more inclusive and equitable CFUG decision making;
- decisions that better addressed marginalised CFUG members' needs, especially shifts from forest protection to a mixed orientation including income generation; and,
- greater social justice in CFUGs in terms of redistribution of access to and creation of more forest-related livelihood opportunities, such as small loans and forest products, for marginalised CFUG members.

These outcomes suggest that increasing inclusion in decision making, combined with decision making based on shared critical reflection (e.g., through self-monitoring), can trigger shifts in the distribution of knowledge and the power to engage effectively in decision making. If catalysed by human agency—embodied by active local and meso facilitators, local leaders committed to transformation, and critically reflective external actors—these changes in governance can spark shifts in confidence and capacities as subgroups (especially marginalised people) become more engaged in community forestry processes and practices. Conflicts may surface in CFUGs as power issues are brought to light—for example, through explicit monitoring of equity—and the *status quo* is challenged by marginalised users who have a growing awareness of their rights. Yet ultimately, the heightened transparency and more equitable engagement of actors in decision making can enable CFUGs to govern more effectively. Furthermore, these factors combine with members' stronger sense of CFUG ownership and greater connections between CFUGs and meso institutions to create more opportunities for enhancing local livelihoods and the resilience of livelihood systems, especially for marginalised people.

The project's lessons underscore the fact that there are multiple challenges in applying social learning, inclusive governance, and collaborative action. Community forestry—like natural resource management in general—is a complex and dynamic environment characterised by struggles for power and resources and by differences in needs, worldviews and capacities. These struggles make inclusive-, learning- and linkage-oriented approaches, such as adaptive collaborative approaches, challenging. At the same time, these challenges are also the realities that demand the application of such approaches if we are ultimately seeking more resilient and socially just human–forest systems.

## ACRONYMS

CFUG	community forest user group
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
DFO	district forest office/officer
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
NTFP	non-timber forest product
PAR	participatory action research
VDC	Village Development Committee



# *Part 1*

## **Introduction**

1. Introduction to the Synthesis
2. Overview of the Adaptive Collaborative Approach Research Project







# *Chapter 1*

## **Introduction to the Synthesis**



## Who should read this synthesis?

This synthesis is for policy actors and practitioners involved in community-based natural resource management in Nepal and around the world who are seeking to strengthen resource governance and management from the community level upwards to the national level. It will be of particular interest to those seeking to increase equity in, and enhance benefits from, resource management—especially for people who have been relatively marginalised from it.

## What is this synthesis about?

This synthesis shares research-based lessons about the catalysation, practice and outcomes of an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry in Nepal. It focuses on the community forest user group (CFUG) and meso levels, that is, the multistakeholder interface at the subdistrict and district levels. An adaptive collaborative approach is an approach to governance and management in which groups of actors intentionally use social learning as the basis for decision making, emphasise inclusion and equity in process and outcomes, and activate effective connections among actors and/or groups of actors (Fisher *et al.* 2007). In this publication we focus on the practical and conceptual links of an adaptive collaborative approach to equity and livelihoods, especially for marginalised people such as the poor, women and *dalit* people<sup>1</sup>.

More specifically, the synthesis shares CFUG- and meso-level lessons regarding:

- conditions under which an adaptive collaborative approach may be needed and factors that enable or inhibit it;
- strategies, processes and arrangements<sup>2</sup> that support adaptive and collaborative capacity in community forest governance and management systems; and
- influences of such an approach, especially on quality of governance, generation of livelihood benefits, and distributional equity.

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<sup>1</sup> The caste system is a complex, traditionally held social framework and institution in Nepal. It has historically been a major determinant of power distribution in Nepal (Lachapelle *et al.* 2004). Although Nepal's legal code does not recognise caste distinctions, caste continues to play a major role in Nepali social hierarchies and access to opportunities and resources and resultant wellbeing. For example, in 2003–4, the percentages of people of Hill *Dalit* (so-called 'untouchable' groups) and Terai *Dalit* groups below the poverty line were 48 and 46 percent, respectively—which is significantly higher than the national average of 31 percent (DFID and World Bank 2006).

<sup>2</sup> By 'arrangements'—or 'institutional arrangements'—we refer to 'organisational structures' or formations, such as layers and kinds of forums and subgroups involved in governance and management, and their roles and the connections between them.

## On what research is this publication based?

The lessons in this synthesis are drawn from multiyear, multilevel partnership-based research into an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry in Nepal initiated by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). The research, which took place in two phases (1999–2002 and 2004–2007) is described in Chapter 2. Quotes from community forestry actors that appear in Chapters 5 and 6 were gathered during the research and translated from Nepali by research team members.

This synthesis is one of several outputs of the project. The sister publication to this synthesis is the guidebook entitled *Facilitating Forests of Learning*, which offers a practical framework and suggested steps for field-level practitioners who wish to implement the adaptive collaborative approach. This document also contributes to the International Union of Forest Research Organizations' (IUFRO) Task Force on Improving the Lives of People and Forests and to the ongoing Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) Series (with related publications by CIFOR, Resources for the Future and Earthscan). For information on these and other outputs and related resources, readers should refer to Annex I.

## Why was this synthesis written?

We have written this synthesis because the actors involved—including local people, meso-level practitioners, policy makers and researchers—generated lessons through the research that we believe are useful and timely. In particular, we believe they can support and further the direction that community forestry in Nepal—and community-based forest management worldwide—is moving: towards increasingly equitable, beneficial and sustainable resource governance.

We were spurred on to undertake this research for probably the same reason that others are venturing into related areas of research and innovation: concern for marginalisation of some forest users and what seemed to be less than optimal livelihood benefits from forests. In undertaking the research, and especially the participatory action research, the value of rooting governance and management at all levels in conscious reflection and shared learning emerged strongly as a pathway for positive change. What we—CFUG members, meso- and national-level actors, and researchers—discovered as we went was that this approach, while neither easy nor fast, does seem to trigger and enable increased group activity and effectiveness, enhanced inclusiveness, and greater equity. With this publication we want to share some of the key lessons learnt from our journey so that others may also benefit from them and incorporate them, as needed, into their own related journeys.



## *Chapter 2*

### **Overview of the Adaptive Collaborative Approach Research Project**



To address the challenges of inequity and low livelihood benefits in community forestry in Nepal, CIFOR and the Nepali research organizations NewERA, ForestAction and the Environmental Resources Institute—along with multiple governmental and civil actors—carried out a partnership-based research initiative. Carried out in two phases, the initiative was known as the ‘Adaptive Collaborative Management Project’<sup>3</sup>. The first phase of the initiative (1999–2002) was in collaboration with the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, and was funded primarily by the Asian Development Bank. The second phase (2004–2007) was funded primarily by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), with complementary funding by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction and CIFOR. The initiative was linked to a network of related projects led by CIFOR in Asia, South America and Africa.

The research took place simultaneously at three levels of forest governance: community forest user group, meso (district and subdistrict), and national. This synthesis highlights lessons from the CFUG and meso levels of research.

## Objectives, focus and research questions

The project’s objective was to generate research-based lessons about ways in which actors at the CFUG, meso and national levels can increase the equity and effectiveness of community forestry governance and management. Specifically, the project aimed to understand—and ultimately contribute to—the adaptive and collaborative capacity of groups of actors in governance and management so that they can become more equitable, effective and resilient as they operate in dynamic and complex systems.

As such, the project investigated the viability, influence of, and strategies for an approach to community forestry that we refer to as the ‘adaptive collaborative approach’. This approach is described in Chapter 4. An adaptive collaborative approach is an approach in which groups or networks of actors consciously and explicitly:

- base decision making in social learning and critical reflection;
- emphasise inclusion and equity in decision making and decisions; and
- develop appropriate collaboration among actors or groups (Fisher *et al.* 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> The formal title of the first phase was ‘Planning for the Sustainability of Forests through Adaptive Co-Management’. The formal title of the second phase was ‘Enhancing Livelihoods and Equity in Community Forestry in Nepal: The Role of Adaptive Collaborative Management’.

At the CFUG and meso levels, which are the focus of this synthesis, the project framed its investigation around the following research questions:

1. Is an adaptive collaborative approach viable in community forestry? Can it be effectively catalysed and facilitated in CFUGs and meso forums primarily by local and meso actors, such as CFUG members, district forest office representatives, and civil society actors? What factors, including human agency, enable or limit the ability to make and sustain the transition towards a more adaptive and collaborative approach?
2. What strategies, attitudes and skills, processes, and arrangements support an adaptive and collaborative approach in governance and management?
3. What are the outcomes of an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry, including in terms of social capital and livelihoods?

Within the parameters of these research questions, at the CFUG level the key research foci were strategies for:

- enhanced inclusion of marginalised people in governance and a related expansion of the ‘voice’ of these people; and
- increased livelihood security and thus resilience of CFUG members, especially the poor, through locally appropriate forest-related livelihood initiatives.

At the meso level, the project investigated social learning-oriented CFUG networking and multistakeholder forums as enabling more responsive meso-level



A researcher offers her reflections during the final sharing meeting with Chautari CFUG, Morang District. Photo by M.R. Banjade



decision making and strengthening the CFUG's voice in the larger landscape of community forestry actors. The national-level research component—which falls beyond the scope of this publication—generated lessons about strategies to engender inclusive and informed national policy dialogue, specifically through the development of and critical reflections on a multistakeholder policy learning group.

## Scope and methodology

The first phase research involved four main case study sites (with both social science assessment and participatory action research) at the CFUG level, with preliminary assessment in four meso areas. The second phase expanded to 11 main case study sites at the CFUG level, including continuation of the first phase sites, and seven at the meso level (Tables 1 and 2). The meso-level forums were existing or potential multistakeholder 'platforms' that ranged from CFUG–CFUG support networks, to multistakeholder forums, to a commercial CFUG network enterprise.

**Table 1.** CFUG main case study research sites

	<b>Forum name</b>	<b>District</b>
1.	Manakamana CFUG*	Sankhuwasabha
2.	Andheribhajana CFUG*	Sankhuwasabha
3.	Pathivara CFUG	Sankhuwasabha
4.	Bamdibhir CFUG*	Kaski
5.	Deurali Bagedanda CFUG*	Kaski
6.	Khaniyubas Salleri CFUG	Dhankuta
7.	Handikharka CFUG	Dhankuta
8.	Chautari CFUG	Morang
9.	Patle CFUG	Lalitpur
10.	Kajipauwa CFUG	Palpa
11.	Chautari CFUG	Nawalparasi

\* Long-term site, i.e., a main case study site in both phases one and two.

**Table 2.** Meso-level main case study sites

	<b>Forum name</b>	<b>District</b>
1.	Tinjure Hattisar CFUG Non-Timber Forest Product Enterprise Network	Sankhuwasabha
2.	Hansapur VDC-level CFUG Network	Kaski
3.	Ilaka-Level Meso Forum	Morang
4.	Community Forest Learning Group	Dhankuta
5.	Sishneri Range Post CFUG Coordination Committee	Lalitpur
6.	Nawalparasi District-Level Learning Forum	Nawalparasi
7.	Palpa District Meso Forum	Palpa

The site selection process sought to enable the ‘generaliseability’ of lessons by selecting CFUGs and meso forums that ranged from east to west and from the southern *Terai* (plains) to the mid-Hills area of Nepal (Figure 1). The CFUGs varied in membership size with eight CFUGs ranging between 130 and 190 households, and the other three having more than 200, 400 and 700 members. The community forests varied in terms of predominant species and stage, and ranged in size (7 were between 100 and 181 ha; others were 24, 48, 354 and 424 ha). Furthermore, through stakeholder consultation, CFUGs were selected for their representativeness in terms of a number of parameters, including that they were heterogeneous in terms of caste, ethnicity and wealth of members, and were considered ‘average’ for their district in terms of governance patterns, levels of conflict, and ‘success’ (as defined by stakeholders). Additionally, the research contextualised the CFUG main case studies by undertaking comparative CFUG studies (involving only social science assessment not participatory action research): eight in the first phase and six in the second phase.

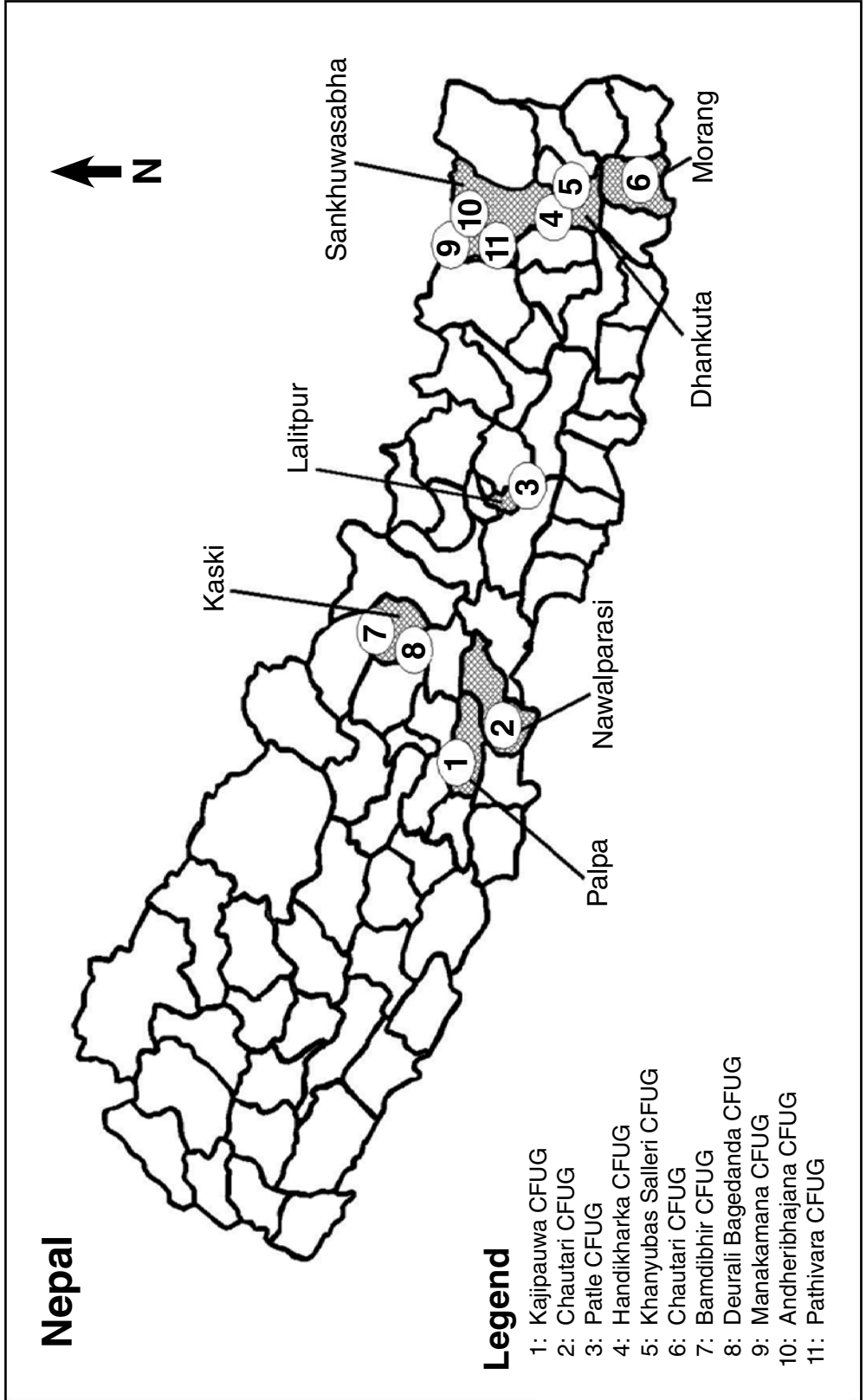
At the meso level, the site selection process took a different approach to reflect the more diverse and fledgling nature of meso-level community forest forums. Specifically, through stakeholder input, we sought a range of types of meso forums (CFUG networks, multistakeholder networks, a network non-timber forest product [NTFP] enterprise), so the research could generate lessons about the cross-cutting aspects of meso-level interaction and learning rather than be tied to a specific type of forum. The meso forum sites, which were spread across seven districts, are also shown in Figure 1.

The methodology for the CFUG and meso main case study sites combined both social science assessment and participatory action research (PAR) (see Box 1). Specifically, the PAR was ‘sandwiched’ between the more traditional social science background and final assessments. The focus of the PAR was the

**Box 1. Participatory action research**

*Participatory action research, as we use the term in this initiative, is a ‘local actor-centred’ (as opposed to researcher-centred) approach to research that both generates knowledge and catalyses social change (McDougall et al. 2007a). Participants in PAR engage in ‘praxis’, i.e., iterating between practice (action) and conscious critical reflection (theory) in order to improve their situation. In this PAR ‘learning loop’, actors collect, organise and analyse information to develop shared understanding and options to deal with problems or move towards their goals, implement actions, reflect and improve strategies, and continue to act and reflect (McDougall et al. 2007a; Selener 1997).*

Figure 1. Map of main case study sites: Community Forest User Groups and Districts of Meso Forums



transition of CFUGs and meso forums to an adaptive collaborative approach, primarily through facilitation by local and meso actors and learning-oriented linkages between CFUGs and meso forums. This combined traditional–PAR methodology was developed as a means of achieving the multifaceted aims of:

- generating a rigorous understanding of, and base of information regarding the contexts and changes to livelihoods and community forestry practices over time for the purpose of internal and cross-site comparison (through the ‘traditional’ assessments); and
- sparking adaptive and collaborative innovation in governance and management (through PAR) to enable experience-based research and to catalyse local and meso benefit.

Through methods including key informant interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, pebble distribution, wealth ranking, and document reviews, the background studies and final assessments enabled before-and-after analysis of sets of comparable socioeconomic, institutional and forest management information over time and across sites. Each main case study site also had an interim assessment at the PAR midpoint and ongoing local field recording throughout. The comparative sites in each phase used similar background assessment methods to gather related, although abbreviated, information sets for comparative purposes.

The PAR component of the methodology created the opportunity to investigate firsthand the catalysation or enhancement of an adaptive collaborative approach. In the first phase, this was facilitated initially by researchers in each main case study site, with efforts to shift this to local facilitators by the end of the project. In the second phase, the facilitation strategy was different: the facilitators were all local or meso actors working in teams. In this phase, these local and meso actors were trained and ‘backstopped’ by the researchers, but they were the primary ‘change agents’. The facilitators’ main role was to support the transition of the CFUGs or meso forums towards more inclusive and equitable, and proactively adaptive governance and management. As a part of the PAR, CFUGs connected in learning-oriented ways with meso forums in their area and—in some cases— even exchanged ideas with members of the national policy learning group.



# *Part 2*

## **Context and Key Concepts**

3. The Context: Community-based Forests and Livelihoods
4. The Adaptive Collaborative Approach:  
Concepts, Cornerstones, and Guideposts





## *Chapter 3*

**The Context:  
Community-based Forests and Livelihoods**





In this chapter we discuss the context in which the research lessons were generated: community forestry systems. We begin by exploring these conceptually and then move into more specifics of the Nepali community forestry context, in which the research took place.

## Community forests as complex and dynamic landscapes

Community forests are complex and dynamic contexts in many ways:

- *As natural systems:* As biological research has come to emphasise, forest systems are not stable, but everchanging. They are not only growing and shifting species slowly, but also dramatically influenced by more rapid events, such as fire and landslides. Furthermore, they are complex, with intricate—and not easily predictable—feedback loops, with time lags and variability between ‘cause’ and ‘effect’.
- *As interfaces between human and natural systems:* Forests and people interact with one another, and hence community forests form a higher-order ‘socioecological system’ than forest or people alone. Forests play multiple roles in diverse livelihoods and ways of life of different subgroups in the community, including cultural, subsistence and income-generating roles



*Tole* committee meeting in Patle CFUG, Lalitpur District. Photo by T. Bhattarai

**Box 2.** The importance of forests to rural livelihoods in Nepal

*In addition to their cultural value and the important environmental services they provide, such as slope stabilisation, forests are a fundamental part of rural livelihood systems in Nepal. Over 60 percent of Nepali people still rely on integrated forest and agriculture systems for their livelihoods (CBS 2002). Within this integrated system, forests are:*

- *an important element of the farming system—for example, trees provide food and bedding materials for livestock and supply timber, firewood and wood for agricultural implements;*
- *an important source of medicinal herbs and—especially for poor people in times of shortage—foods such as roots, vegetables and fruits; and*
- *a source of income generation for some rural households, through sale of fuelwood, charcoal, wooden pots and non-timber forest products, such as cardamom or Lokta paper.*

*Individuals' dependence on and relation to forests varies significantly across regions and even within communities. Interrelated factors such as caste/ethnicity, gender, occupation, and relative wealth or poverty greatly influence forest relationships. Poorer and/or trade-based individuals or families—such as those from the Chandara ('wooden pot-making') or Kami ('blacksmith') castes—tend to be more directly dependent on 'common property' forests, because of their lack of private resources or alternative fuels. Most often, it is women who are directly involved in managing fodder, fuelwood and other forest products for household subsistence needs. As a result, these people are the most vulnerable to changes in forest condition and use rights.*

(Box 2). Thus, forests shape and are shaped by the people who depend on them in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, in Nepal there are overlaps and potential tensions between local needs and other actors' values and interests, such as the tensions and commonalities between small-scale forest-based enterprises and biodiversity conservation. The challenge of responding to these changes is further compounded by the limited human, financial and other resources available within the government sector and—until recently—by the widespread, long-term armed conflict that gripped the nation.

- *As a sociopolitical sphere:* Community forestry has emerged as a distinct, complex and growing social field with an ever-increasing number of stakeholders. From the local, to the district, to the national level, actors hold various—and varying—interests and influences, shaped by their worldviews, motivations, social power, and contexts (Box 3). They engage in different ways, such as relying on forest products, stewarding forest and water systems, creating or

**Box 3. Forests and marginalisation**

*Because forests are a fundamental part of rural livelihood systems in Nepal, they are also a key area of contested space within communities and between communities and external actors. In the historical context of hierarchy and inequitable power relations, the governance of forest resources has tended to marginalise the poor, dalit people, and women. This marginalisation is manifested in multiple ways, including social discrimination, relative exclusion from decision making, relatively limited access to resources, and overall vulnerability in livelihoods.*

influencing policy, disseminating technical information, enforcing regulations, or providing financial, resource or institutional support. The roles, power and expectations of these actors are not fixed, but are everchanging—as are their tensions, conflicts and alliances. Together these actors constitute a dynamic and multilayered landscape of community forestry governance and practice, and each actor affects and is affected by the others.

This complexity and diversity means that in order to be successful in governance and management, actors need to be able to connect effectively with each other, constantly update their understanding and perspectives, and be flexible and responsive to rapidly changing pressures and opportunities.

## **Achievements and challenges in community forestry in Nepal**

Nepal has been recognised globally for its devolution of forest rights to local people. Through the considerable efforts of local people and governmental and civil society actors, the Nepal Community Forestry Programme has established more than 14,000 community forest user groups (CFUGs), many of which have improved their forest conditions (Winrock 2002; Nurse and Malla 2005). And yet, despite these achievements, policy makers and practitioners agree that community forestry in Nepal faces critical ‘second generation’ challenges. Fundamental among these is the prevalent inequity in decision making and benefit sharing among members of CFUGs, with the economically and socially marginalised peoples—such as women, the poor and *dalit* people—receiving small shares of forest benefits relative to their needs (Malla 2000, 2001; Acharya 2002; Winrock 2002; Kanel, 2004; Nurse and Malla 2005). Additionally, the contribution of community forestry to livelihoods is less than hoped for by many community forestry actors, especially in terms of poverty alleviation for marginalised people (Malla 2000; Kanel 2004).

## Patterns underlying key challenges

Our preliminary investigations revealed—and our in-depth research confirmed—two key patterns at the CFUG and meso levels, and even at the national level, that contribute to the limited equity and benefits:

- (i) *Community forestry management tended to be ‘linear’*. By ‘linear’, we mean that there was little direct feedback to decision makers about the effect of management actions or changes in the forest or community. Rather, decision making tended to be:
  - ‘blueprint’ style (i.e., reflecting more the application of a ‘standard’ plan than creation of plans to meet the unique context’s needs); and/or
  - ‘ad hoc’ (in that it followed ‘thinking in the moment’ of the decision makers rather than strategic plans linked to future visions or clear learning from the past).
- (ii) *Stakeholders tended to be ‘isolated’ and governance tended to be top-down*. Explorations of governance at various levels revealed patterns of relatively top-down, nondeliberative decision making, with little access to decision making for most marginalised people and weak linkages between actors within and across levels.

We note that these patterns are not unique to community forestry or to Nepal—in many ways these are ubiquitous and underpin the challenges of sustainable development worldwide (Box 4).

If Nepal is to move towards more socially just resource governance and enhanced livelihoods, and reduce the ‘fuel’ that fired the extended national conflict, then it needs to seek innovation in its approach to governance and management of community forests. This innovation must redress the linear, isolated and top-down patterns of governance and management while it contributes to equity and livelihood benefits. The question is, ‘Innovation of what kind?’ The potential innovation pathway our research project explored—an adaptive collaborative one—is described in Chapter 4; lessons emerging from its application are described in Chapters 5 and 6.

### **Box 4.** Shifting focus to the ‘intangible’ forms of capital

*Historically, support to community forestry focused on building up natural (forest) capital. In the larger sphere of development, the focus has frequently been on physical or financial capital. Our findings suggest, however, that addressing the challenges of inequity and low benefits requires increased attention to the ‘softer’, less tangible—and harder to ‘count’—forms of capital, namely institutional (group functioning), social (relations), and human (knowledge, skills, attitudes) capital. This is not to say that these other forms of capital are not important—they are essential—but they need to be balanced by strong, ‘intangible’ forms of capital.*



## *Chapter 4*

**The Adaptive Collaborative Approach:  
Concepts, Cornerstones and Guideposts**





*A need has emerged over the last few years for strategies that can add value to community forestry processes and relationships so that equity and benefits can be enhanced. The increasing number of CFUGs, service providing agencies, stakeholders, and complexities in their relationships, as well as the changing and dynamic context of community forestry at various levels point to the need for such a strategy to contribute to making community forestry concepts and procedures more collaborative, flexible, and adaptive (in the sense of 'proactively responsive'). The dynamic and multilevel nature of community forestry demands that such strategies be institutionalized in the implementation process as well as at the policy-making level.'*

Kanel and Pokharel (2002)

To effectively and responsively govern and manage a socioecological system—such as a community forest—actors involved need to recognise: (a) the inherent unpredictability of complex and dynamic systems; (b) the importance of learning in our efforts to deal with this complexity and dynamism; and (c) the necessity of formal 'decision makers' working closely with the diverse people who act at all levels within the system (Colfer 2005). In seeking to enable actors to meet this need, an adaptive collaborative approach combines two related elements—adaptive management and collaboration among the stakeholders—with social learning as a critical link between the two.

More specifically, an adaptive collaborative approach (Box 5) is an approach to governance and management in which groups of actors:

- consciously and explicitly base decision making in social learning and critical reflection;
- emphasise inclusion and equity in governance; and
- strive for balanced and strategic relations with other actors/groups of actors, including seeking to effectively manage conflict.

**Box 5.** The evolution of the term 'adaptive collaborative approach'

*We began the project using the term adaptive collaborative management because the main conceptual roots were adaptive management and the concept of collaboration. As the research progressed, we began to shift towards using the term 'adaptive collaborative approach to governance and management', so that we could emphasise the significance of the approach to governance and management equally. Furthermore, it was important to us to make sure the name was clearly distinguishable from 'collaborative management', which was a formal approach being trialed in the Terai by other actors during the same period.*



A small group assesses their CFUG using the locally developed indicators.

The purpose of the approach is to continuously enhance the quality of decision making and decisions in, and outcomes of, governance and management. The approach can be applied in various forms at all levels, from: decision making and planning of a single community forestry activity, such as income generation or silviculture; to CFUG annual or five-to-ten-year (i.e., operational) planning; to planning of district-level policies; and, up to and including the national-level policy development process (Box 6).

**Box 6.** How does the approach fit with the Community Forestry framework?

*An adaptive collaborative approach is a flexible approach to planning and decision making that fits inside—and complements—Nepal’s Community Forestry framework or other community-based natural resource management frameworks. In other words, it is a way of designing and engaging in community forestry planning and decision making in order to enhance the quality of processes and outcomes.*



## Cornerstones of the approach: Adaptive management, collaboration and social learning

At its core, the adaptive collaborative approach integrates two related concepts—adaptive management and collaboration—which are connected conceptually and in practice by social learning. In this section we explore each of these foundational aspects further. Additionally, the concept and practice of an adaptive collaborative approach, as we have used it, has been shaped by multiple other interconnected fields of theory and practice, including adult or popular education (especially the ‘Naming the Moment’ process; Barnt 1989), experiential education, deliberative democracy, and appreciative inquiry (Box 7).

### **Box 7.** Some ideas underlying an adaptive collaborative approach

*As described in Colfer (2005) and Ojha et al. (2008), the concept of an adaptive collaborative approach and its enabling strategies, processes and arrangements draw on ideas of learning and interaction from diverse sources. The approach builds on Lee’s (1993) idea of approaching policy as experiments and on transformation in dynamic and complex socioecological systems (Olsson et al. 2002; Capra 2002). From the field of organisational learning, it recognises the importance of ongoing learning in human interface and of creating shared visions of change (Senge 1990; Argyris and Schön 1996). The approach emphasises making explicit the often implicit assumptions in planning and using monitoring of action so that learning contributes to the reconstruction or transformation of perspectives (Taylor 1998; Guijt 2007). Cooperative inquiry (Dewey 1966; Dewey and Bentley 1949), and joint reflections and deliberations (Forester 1999) form the backdrop of the shared learning process—which is linked to action (Barnt 1989). The approach also reflects Berkes’ (2004) concerns for cross-scale institutions and adaptive approaches.*

### **Adaptive Management**

The adaptive management aspect of the approach emphasises that all management and governance can be taken as an opportunity for learning and continual adjustment and improvement in understanding, decisions and action. In his seminal book *Compass and Gyroscope* (1993), Kai Lee described adaptive management as:

*an approach to natural resource policy that embodies a simple imperative: policies are experiments: learn from them. . . . Adaptive management takes uncertainty seriously, treating human interventions in natural ecosystems as experimental probes. Its practitioners take special care with information. First, they are explicit about what they expect, so that they can design methods and apparatus to make measurements. Second, they collect and analyze information so that expectations can be compared with actuality. Finally, they transform comparison into learning—they correct errors, improve their imperfect understanding, and change action and plans. Linking science and human purpose, adaptive management serves as a compass for us to use in searching for a sustainable future.*

Adaptive management is built on the premise that natural resource managers cannot ever predict with 100 percent certainty what the outcome of a decision, policy or activity will be—even if they know what they think should happen. This is why adaptive decision makers aim to learn *proactively*—in other words, to make plans in a way that allows them to optimise their learning so that they can better respond and adapt to situations. This means intentionally building into plans clear ways to learn from management and governance—including from outcomes that don't live up to expectations—and then using that learning as the basis for improving governance and management (Box 8).

In this way, by enhancing their adaptive capacity, groups of actors—including forest user groups or multistakeholder forums—become better able to cope successfully with change and the complexities of the community forestry landscape. This is significant because the community forestry context continuously confronts CFUGs and meso actors—and national actors—with the need to meet diverse

**Box 8.** But actors in community forestry already learn and change—how is an adaptive collaborative approach different?

*Adaptation, like evolution, is a natural process. CFUGs do change over time, of course. And their members learn—this is natural and expected. And yet, much of this learning is an incidental by product of their community forestry experience. And institutional change is often largely in reaction to pressures once these pressures are overwhelming. We can call this 'passively' adapting. An adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry is a way of engaging in management and governance so that this adaptiveness is intentionally strengthened. By enhancing their adaptive capacity, the actors and groups involved become able to adapt more efficiently and appropriately to the pressures of rapid change and complexity that confront them.*

demands, to deal with uncertainties in knowledge, and to adapt plans and practices in time with changing environments, policies, risks and opportunities.

## **Collaboration**

The concept of collaboration, as we use it in this synthesis, refers to the seeking of inclusive, constructive and equitable relations within and between groups (Box 9). Aspects of collaboration—or ‘collaborative interaction’—include communication, efforts to balance power relations, conflict management, negotiations about understanding and decisions, and joint actions as appropriate.

**Box 9.** Is the concept of collaboration the same as ‘collaborative management’?

*In this synthesis and in the research, we used the terms ‘collaboration’ or ‘collaborative’ as guiding concepts; we did not use them to refer to any formal collaborative management framework. Thus, while the approach may share—or not—some ideas with collaborative management models of natural resource governance in various parts of the world, it does not refer to the frameworks being explored by the government and other actors in southern Nepal or elsewhere.*

To collaborate effectively, actors need to recognise the value of other actors, including that others have a valid voice and worthwhile contributions to make (Crossley 2004). Relatedly, collaboration is effective when actors identify an advantage to working together, rather than in isolation (Crossley 2004). These conditions for collaboration do not need to exist prior to starting an adaptive collaborative approach, however—in fact, engaging in the approach can help to develop them.

The fact that the concept of collaboration is framed around positive relations does not presuppose a lack of conflict in natural resource management. In fact, the use of collaboration as a foundation of the adaptive collaborative approach underscores the inevitable differences and emergence of conflict between actors in natural resource management. An adaptive collaborative approach emphasises the creation of space for groups to communicate about and negotiate their inevitably diverse interests and unequal power relations as they make and implement decisions over the long term. This is significant because a system involving multiple actors with overlapping claims cannot be governed sustainably by actors operating in isolation or with unaddressed conflicts. Appropriate and

effective collaboration is necessary to enable diverse actors to make and undertake effective and equitable decisions and actions.

### **Social Learning**

The essence of an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry is that groups of actors consciously use social learning as the basis for ongoing decision making and planning. This is the linchpin that links adaptive management with collaborative interaction. By social learning, we refer to a process in which ‘multiple stakeholders bring together their different knowledge, experiences, perspectives, values, and capacities for a process of communication and critical reflection as a means of jointly understanding and addressing shared issues, challenges, and potential options’ (McDougall *et al.* 2002: 28).

This type of learning differs in several ways from what is commonly thought of as learning. One way is that the learning that is emphasised in an adaptive collaborative approach is shared or joint learning among multiple actors.

Moreover, this form of learning is different from the simple accumulation of set knowledge, known in learning theory as ‘reproductive learning’. Reproductive



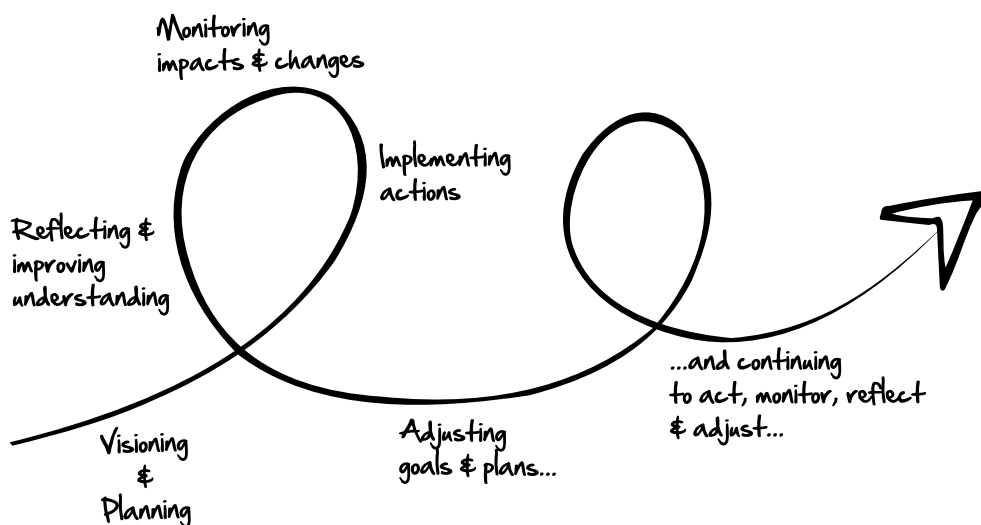
A small group develops its view of the CFUG's ten year vision, in pictorial form. Photo by T. Bhattarai.

learning, as happens in a training or classroom setting, does play an important role in building capacity and shortening the time required to put community forestry plans into action, but is not sufficient on its own (Vernooy and McDougall 2003). Social learning—like all collaborative processes—involves power-related interactions, including negotiation of meaning and even conflict management. As such, social learning is increasingly recognised in natural resource management as a ‘communicative learning’ process. This means that it is a process that recognises that there is no single ‘correct’ perception of a situation, and thus it encourages actors to create a common understanding and bridge the divide between their diverse worldviews, perspectives or ‘mental models’. At its best, social learning is a form of ‘transformative learning’. In other words, it sparks ‘ah-ha’ moments in which actors’ understanding of the world becomes more holistic or integrative. This creates more understanding between actors and better distribution of knowledge: in short, it reinforces their ability to work together as needed. Box 10 offers an example of social learning in action from the research cases.

**Box 10.** An illustration of social learning in action

*One practical illustration of social learning from our case studies is the joint monitoring of equity by members of community forest user groups. The CFUGs undertook this monitoring as part of their adaptive collaborative innovations to governance and management. This joint equity monitoring was focused on distribution of benefits among CFUG members of different genders, castes and socioeconomic groups. As a social learning process, the monitoring and its facilitated discussions triggered dialogue in the CFUG about equity. These discussions sparked CFUG members—rich and poor, so-called ‘high-’ and ‘low-caste’ people, and women and men—to question the ‘normal’ perceptions of fairness and of the rights of marginalised members. This questioning, combined with experiences of trying out different patterns of engagement, leadership and distribution, ultimately helped to transform some perceptions and power relations in the CFUGs. An example of this is elaborated further in McDougall et al. (2007b).*

Finally, the learning is ongoing, proactive and applied: it is linked directly to adjusting and updating knowledge and practice. As such, in practice, intentional social learning processes are often rooted in some form of a group moving through a PAR cycle or praxis (Barnt 1989). The basis of this is collective movement through an action–reflection–action process, as in a monitoring-based management system (Figure 2 and Box 11).

**Figure 2.** The adaptive collaborative approach as a spiral

**Box 11.** Active learning in practice: Self-monitoring as an action–reflection–action cycle

As outlined in Figure 2, active learning means that actors practise governance and management as an action–reflection–action cycle. As they move through this cycle, actors specifically make their learning active by developing and using a self-monitoring system as the basis for their governance and management. This means:

- identifying their vision and their expectations about what outcomes their management actions and governance will generate—but with awareness that these are only expectations, not certainties;
- carefully observing—in other words, monitoring—the impacts of actions and changes in the natural resource and related human system, including surprises and failures;
- improving their shared knowledge and understanding by reflecting on their observations and assessing the outcomes of their actions; and
- adjusting or correcting their governance or management actions to reflect that new understanding (and updating their vision periodically).

## The guideposts: Nine elements to translate an adaptive collaborative approach into action

To help facilitators translate the concept of an adaptive collaborative approach into action, we divided the concept into a set of nine elements. The first four relate to collaboration, the next four emphasise learning, and the last one

addresses both together through social learning. Our experience suggests that these elements can act as ‘guideposts’ for group facilitators and actors as they work to design and implement context-appropriate adaptive and collaborative processes and supporting institutional arrangements.

These nine guideposts are:

1. All relevant actors engage in decision making and negotiation and have the space and capacity to make themselves heard.
2. Actors communicate and exchange knowledge and skills with other actors in multiple directions.
3. Actors effectively manage conflict.
4. Actors implement actions together.
5. Management and governance are based on shared intentional learning and experimentation, and actors internalise and consciously apply this learning to improve their understanding and practices.
6. Planning and decision making include attention to relationships within and between human and natural systems.
7. Planning and decision making clearly reflect links to the desired future, and take into account information about key past and present trends.
8. Actors identify and deal effectively with uncertainties in knowledge, including risks, in their planning processes.
9. Actors join together in reflection and social learning processes, so that shared understanding or knowledge is created and learning is transformative.

### **Conceptual summary: How does an adaptive collaborative approach compare with typical governance and management?**

In its broadest sense, an adaptive collaborative approach differs from a typical approach to natural resource management in that it approaches management and governance as processes of ongoing cooperative inquiry—or social learning—and innovation for continuous learning and improvement, rather than as the implementation of plans or ‘management prescriptions’ to fulfil set goals. Table 3 highlights some of the specific ways in which the approaches differ.

It is very important to note that translating the concepts and elements of an adaptive collaborative approach into action is not as simple as applying a certain set of steps, practices or policies. Rather—as explored in Part 3 of this synthesis—the approach emerges from the convergence of human agency (including facilitation, leadership and action), relations among actors, and perceptions, ideas and information, and is supported by enabling processes and arrangements.

**Table 3.** Comparison of two models: Views on learning and other parameters

<b>In current commonly applied approaches...</b>	<b>In an adaptive collaborative approach...</b>
<i>Aspects of learning...</i>	
Learning is considered a by product of the management experience. It occurs to differing degrees, but may or may not be directly applied to shaping future plans.	Learning is a planned input and output of governance and management. It is built into and is the basis of the planning; it is intentional, proactive and applied.
Focus is on individual learning by one or more individuals.	Focus is on joint or shared learning.
If learning is sought out, the focus is on 'reproductive learning,' for example, through training.	Focus on 'communicative' and/or 'transformative learning,' with 'reproductive learning' as needed.
<i>Other parameters...</i>	
Plans are designed for implementing policy.	Plans are considered as means for learning from 'policy as experiments' (i.e., with uncertainties and opportunities to learn). There are both action plans and monitoring plans.
Limited or no 'feedback loops' are built into management and governance. Monitoring, if used, is often external; the focus may be largely on information collection relating to inputs or assessment of compliance.	Feedback loops—as mechanisms for learning from and about the management and governance effects and the system—are built in. Joint analysis of the monitoring is central.
Failure of plans to achieve expected outcomes is perceived as negative and linked to risk of punishment.	Failure is understood as an opportunity for learning.
Assumptions in understanding and planning are rarely highlighted or challenged.	Uncertainty is recognised and assumptions are made explicit and tested through experience.
There is often an implicit assumption of a single reality; views and perspectives are seen as either 'right' or 'wrong'.	There is an expectation and acceptance of multiple perceptions of situations and of the need to negotiate them.





# *Part 3*

## **Lessons from Research**

5. Lessons from the CFUG and Meso Levels
6. Discussion: Connections between an Adaptive Collaborative Approach, Equity and Livelihoods
7. Conclusion





## *Chapter 5*

**Lessons from the CFUG and Meso Levels**



The research investigated an adaptive collaborative approach in terms of its:

- viability and influencing factors;
- enabling strategies and supporting attitudes, processes and arrangements and
- its effects on equity and livelihoods.

In this chapter we explore highlights of lessons from the CFUG and meso levels, organised along the lines of the three research questions (Box 12). Discussion of causal linkages between the approach and changes noted are the focus of Chapter 6.

**Box 12.** The research questions

1. *Is an adaptive collaborative approach viable in community forestry? Can it be effectively catalysed and facilitated in CFUGs and meso forums primarily by local and meso actors, such as CFUG members, district forest office representatives, and civil society actors? What factors, including human agency, enable or limit the ability to make and sustain the transition towards a more adaptive and collaborative approach?*
2. *What strategies, attitudes and skills, processes, and arrangements support an adaptive and collaborative approach in governance and management?*
3. *What are the outcomes of an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry, including in terms of social capital and livelihoods?*



Tenth General Assembly of Chautari CFUG, Nawalparasi District. Photo by T. Bhattarai

### **Research Question 1:**

Is an adaptive collaborative approach viable in community forestry? Can it be effectively catalysed and facilitated in CFUGs and meso forums primarily by local and meso actors, such as CFUG members, district forest office representatives, and civil society actors? What factors, including human agency, enable or limit the ability to make and sustain the transition towards a more adaptive and collaborative approach?

***Lesson 1. An adaptive collaborative approach can be successfully catalysed both at the meso and CFUG levels, although the transition at the meso level is slower and more challenging.***

1.1 All 11 CFUGs involved in the participatory action research made a noticeable transition towards governance based on an adaptive collaborative approach. This transition included clear signs of shifting significantly towards more equitable access to CFUG decision making and learning-based planning. Furthermore, as illustrated by the quotes and stories offered in this synthesis, there are signs that CFUG members and leaders have increasingly internalised the spirit of the approach, including more pro-poor and gender-sensitive understanding and a conscious emphasis on learning.

1.2 The majority of meso PAR sites showed clear signs of starting a transition towards collaboration, more equitable internal access to decision making, and social learning—but the transition appears to be more challenging and slower than at the CFUG level. Specifically, five of the seven meso sites made structural and/or process shifts, such as creating space for CFUG input at the meso level or making more space for marginalised users to participate in and benefit from meso-level initiatives. Among the meso sites, the five that already had some history of multistakeholder sharing (e.g., Dhankuta), or at least a pre-existing forum (e.g., Lalitpur), became oriented towards active, social learning and collaboration more quickly than the others, especially more so than those with higher levels of actor conflict and polarisation.

At the meso level, building common understanding, reshaping the meso forum, and trying out initial collaborative action and reflection generally took the entire PAR period. Thus, even the five meso sites that were ‘on their way’ with an adaptive collaborative approach were not as established in the transition as many of the CFUGs that undertook the approach. The difference in the ease and speed of shifts between the CFUG and meso levels relates to a number of factors, including the relative scale and number of actors and institutions (i.e., one CFUG versus multistakeholder meso institutions); entrenched institutional

ties of individual actors; and the fact that the CFUGs developed ongoing, active cross-scale input (i.e., from meso actors), but meso forums had relatively less continuous external input from ‘higher’ scales (i.e., national actors).

***Lesson 2. The transition to an adaptive collaborative approach can be—and is most sustainably—facilitated by trained local and/or meso facilitators who have appropriate support and backstopping from, and connections with, ‘external’ actors.***

2.1 The adaptive collaborative approach was better and more sustainably internalised by CFUGs when they were facilitated directly by committed local actors rather than by external actors. The first phase of the research was initiated with researcher-led facilitation processes, whereas the second phase was facilitated directly by CFUG and meso actors—referred to as ‘change agents’—with researchers in a supporting role. Comparison of the two phases suggested that there was greater momentum for change and that CFUG members had a greater sense of ownership of the change processes in the second phase. This is significant because leadership by local facilitators is desirable for self-sufficiency and sustainability of the changes, as well as for potential scaling out of the approach.

At the same time, however, this point must be understood as emphasising local facilitation and leadership *that is linked with backstopping and support from external actors*. In other words, effective local facilitation is facilitation that is embedded in a larger community of practice (as described in Lesson 2.2)—not local facilitation that emerges spontaneously or operates in isolation from other actors or levels of community forestry. See Box 13 for more information on the change agents.

2.2 There was a significant and multifaceted supporting role played by actors and groups external to the CFUGs and meso forums—and this underscores the importance of cross-group and especially cross-scale linkages in institutional and social change. We observed that these important connections exist both vertically and horizontally.

*Vertical connections:*

- Meso actors engaged as change agents at the CFUG level;
- CFUGs provided active input to meso forums (i.e., the meso forums that used an adaptive collaborative approach created space for this—see Lesson 6.2);
- National actors from the National Policy Learning Group (which was the PAR forum in the national-level research) engaged with CFUG and meso actors through field- and Kathmandu-based dialogues and workshops; and
- Project researchers engaged intermittently at both CFUG and meso levels

**Box 13.** Change agents: Roles, capacity building and linkages

*The successful transitions of CFUGs and meso-level forums towards an adaptive collaborative approach were facilitated directly by teams of change agents from the CFUGs and from the meso areas. These change agents were women and men from and selected by the CFUGs and meso institutions, who were trained as facilitators of an adaptive collaborative approach by the research project. They worked in teams: two meso and two CFUG actors per CFUG; two meso actors per meso forum. They were backstopped by the researchers and networked with other change agents. The teams' main roles and responsibilities included:*

- *initiating and providing ongoing formal facilitation of inclusive learning-based processes, such as visioning and self-monitoring-based planning; and*
- *ongoing informal encouragement of CFUG members, especially leaders and marginalised people, to make the shift towards more bottom-up governance.*

*The change agents' effectiveness was linked to the capacity building and networking they engaged in and the support they received. These factors included:*

- *initial and 'refresher' training for change agents about the adaptive collaborative approach (organised and led by the research teams);*
- *networking activities such as study tours and learning workshops with other change agents; and*
- *backstopping in their sites by the research teams, including:*
  - *observation and feedback on facilitation;*
  - *occasional supporting facilitation;*
  - *joint reflection and discussion on progress, challenges and strategies; and*
  - *'trouble-shooting', such as help in addressing tensions in the site.*

*For information on how to facilitate the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, see McDougall et al.'s sister publication (2008), Facilitating Forests of Learning.*

contributing to capacity building of change agents and other actors, through training, backstopping, and joint reflection and 'troubleshooting' (e.g., helping to manage CFUG or meso confusion or tensions relating to the transition).

*Horizontal connections:*

- CFUG–CFUG and meso-to-meso actor sharing and support were important, including support through CFUG networks, meso forums, and 'study visits' and learning tours; and
- Change agents supported each other, including sharing ideas for facilitation and change processes and 'troubleshooting' challenges.



One underlying lesson here is that institutional and social transitions benefit from linkages across groups and across scales, including ‘upward’ linkages. As well as enabling the change agents (through process feedback or capacity-building support), connections with actors from scales ‘above’ appeared to enhance the personal and collective agency of CFUG and meso forum actors through encouragement, inspiration and validation of the change process and change agents’ roles.

A second lesson is that meso forums’ need for support from the national level should not be underestimated. Meso actors in the research remarked that their forums’ transitions towards a more collaborative and adaptive approach were limited by their relatively weak *upward* linkages. Specifically, they suggested that the researcher interactions and their own institutions’ vertical channels were not sufficient and that more frequent engagement of national actors in the meso forums and with the change agents would be beneficial to the flow of ideas, helping to ‘balance the playing field’ (by lending support to change agents’ facilitation of critical social reflection) and keeping the collective meso momentum going.

***Lesson 3. The transition to, and the sustainability and outcomes of, an adaptive collaborative approach are influenced by a balance of factors including support to and among facilitators and leaders and the nature of power as an on going struggle in common property resource management.***

**3.1 Supporting factors include:**

- (i) The need for change—a perception of ‘crisis’ or a ‘common burning issue’, such as an urgent social, environmental or livelihoods issue, sparks the transition. This was evident in the sites in terms of dissatisfaction with the local status quo; and the widespread civil conflict generated this perception in broader terms (Box 14).
- (ii) The engine for change—human agency and connections are paramount:
  - Competent and committed change agents—trained, supported and backstopped by critically reflective external actors familiar with the approach—build momentum for the transition. A number of factors influenced the success of the change agents in fulfilling their roles, including the support of their institution, their available time, and their skills and commitment level. All of the successful and active change agents were motivated by nonfinancial incentives, such as their own personal and community development goals and the feedback from the community.
  - Connections of CFUGs, meso forums, and change agents within and between scales spark reflection, change and momentum (see Lesson 2.2).

**Box 14.** The civil conflict and movement as influences on rural actors

*The Maoist conflict and civil movement created both barriers to and space and momentum for such a transition. The conflict added layers of mistrust, suspicion and stress as political alliances were often hidden, and accusations (by either the army or Maoists) were often played out violently. Widespread conflict also limited ability to travel and gather, and impeded service delivery. On the other hand, the ongoing civil movement associated with the conflict ultimately contributed to an overall climate of 'need for change', especially increased awareness of equity and power issues at all levels and an increasing interest in pro-equity change. Following on from the conflict's extended social stress and draining of sociopolitical energy, the success of the peace process in 2006 sparked optimism and energy for (re) democratisation at all levels.*

- The emergence of benefits, such as increasing livelihood options or equity from the approach, in an acceptably short period of time builds momentum for change.
- The cultivation of certain attitudes and skills and the use of enabling processes and arrangements can support adaptive and collaborative capacity. (These are the focus of Research Question 2; see Lessons 4, 5 and 6.)

## (iii) Space for change

- Commitment of actors, especially local and meso leaders, to the desired direction of change influences the speed and scope of change.
- Clear knowledge about potential benefits (especially the noneconomic ones) and burdens of making a transition to a learning and collaboration-based approach has a strong impact on the level of commitment and participation of all actors, including change agents.

**3.2 Limiting factors include:**

- Culturally-embedded norms and perceptions regarding gender; caste, class and related historical tensions; and mistrust and conflict among actors within and across these boundaries shape the speed and ease of a transition to an adaptive collaborative approach. This is significant because attitudes are the essence of the approach.
- The prevalent hierarchical nature of relations within and between organisations limits conditions for unconstrained deliberation, negotiation and shared learning.
- Leaders' resistance to processes that challenge the status quo—if unaltered—can limit the transition to the approach, especially at the meso level. At the CFUG level, leaders' resistance was less of a limitation, both because of

greater influence of external ideas and actors on the leaders, and because of the potential for more direct control of leaders by change-oriented CFUG members, through mechanisms like the selection of a new CFUG committee.

- Complexities at the meso level, such as the multi-institutional nature of the level, make the process more challenging for meso forums than for CFUGs.
- There are multiple potential constraints to effective facilitation and mobilisation, including bias in the selection of (inappropriate) change agents and a shortage of locally available high-quality facilitators in some areas.
- The need for backstopping and critical reflection from external actors may go unmet, especially for CFUGs in areas with a predominantly bureaucratic or ‘top down’ development model guiding meso actors, and for meso forums when links to national-level learning and collaboration-oriented groups are still weak.
- The adaptive collaborative approach can be difficult to understand, because it emphasises intangible concepts such as ‘social learning’, has multiple facets, and changes form from one situation to the next, rather than being predetermined or ‘one size fits all’.

### **Research Question 2:**

What strategies, attitudes and skills, processes, and arrangements support an adaptive and collaborative approach in governance and management?

***Lesson 4. An adaptive and collaborative approach and its outcomes emerge from the convergence of human agency (including facilitation, leadership, engagement and action), attitudes and perceptions, and connections and struggles among actors around the identified need for effective, responsive and equitable governance and management.***

Enabling governance and management processes and arrangements can effectively help catalyse and support—but neither drive nor guarantee—the approach and desired outcomes. As such, our strategy to effectively enable an adaptive collaborative approach involved trying to catalyse more effective pro-learning, pro-equity human agency, sparking shifts in perception through institutionalising critical joint reflection in decision making, and creating awareness of and platforms for equitable negotiation and collaboration. In more concrete terms, key points of our strategy for catalysing the shift to a more adaptive and collaborative approach included the following points::

- The groups planning to make the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach selected (with the research team) committed change agents



Small group discusses indicators during self-monitoring workshop in Manakamana CFUG, Sankhuwasabha District. Photo by Nepal ACM team member.

(facilitators) from within the local and meso area. These change agents developed their knowledge and skills relating to an adaptive collaborative approach, facilitation and related issues through training, workshops, study tours and being backstopped by researchers. The change agents networked with other change agents and actors to share learning, enhance capacity, and offer mutual and continuing support.

- The change agents actively engaged on an ongoing and regular basis with the groups to facilitate and support inclusive group negotiation, learning and adaptation. This engagement included:
  - facilitating large group and small group (such as *tole*) processes to build awareness of the existing situation and how that situation compares with the desired situation;
  - engaging the groups in reflection about the nature of their governance and management, including issues of learning, connections within and outside the group, and equity;
  - supporting the groups in identifying their learning needs, in ways to track change, and in ways to use their learning to adapt governance and practices; and
  - informal encouragement of individuals as needed (e.g., to participate, reflect or view issues from different perspectives).
- Based on their reflections, discussions and negotiations, the groups—and various subgroups—identified, developed and implemented innovations in

process and practice as ‘opportunities to learn’. Groups tried to follow through with their plans for learning about and from their experiences, adjusting accordingly on an ongoing basis. The groups and subgroups tried to explicitly discuss their perceptions and understanding of issues and situations, being conscious of their influence and how they change.

- The group developed or maintained learning-oriented connections to other groups and actors for shared learning, mutual support, and collective action. This included critical-thinking actors external to the group being engaged periodically, especially to share outside perspectives and offer critical reflection.

The effectiveness of this strategy was influenced by many factors—see Research Question 1.

***Lesson 5. Learning and ‘connection-oriented’ attitudes, skills and knowledge are critical for facilitators and for actors engaged in the adaptive collaborative approach.***

Changes in processes, institutional arrangements (structures), or tools alone cannot effectively enable inclusion, collaboration and learning. Rather, these phenomena are dependent on the agency and connections of the actors involved. Agency and connections, in turn, are shaped by the attitudes, skills and knowledge of the actors.

During the research, we observed several attitudes and skills that support adaptive and collaborative capacity. Note, however, that these are *not* prerequisites for trying the approach. In fact, engagement in the approach—with effective facilitation—seems to nurture and encourage them.

**5.1 Attitudes include:**

- reflexivity of individuals and groups in formal and informal settings;
- acceptance (i.e., non-discrimination) among gender, caste and wealth groups, and willingness of dominant actors to share control and benefits;
- confidence to engage in group decision making, especially for marginalised actors;
- flexibility and a ‘learning attitude’ to management and governance, including willingness to try new ways of operating, to experiment, and to view ‘failures’ as opportunities to learn and improve;
- openness to cooperation, sharing of information, and communication; and
- willingness to work towards honesty and transparency in leadership and fund management.

## 5.2 Skills and knowledge include:

- inclusive leadership, including the capacity to inspire and effectively involve others;
- knowledge of facilitation and participatory processes, including the ability to make processes accessible to nonliterate people;
- understanding of the concepts of an adaptive collaborative approach, including:
  - learning and experimentation in community forestry,
  - CFUG self-monitoring as a learning and planning tool;
- some technical forestry knowledge and skills; and
- appropriate and accessible record keeping and bookkeeping to enable transparency and communication.

***Lesson 6. Inclusive, nested decision making, combined with planning based on visioning and self-monitoring and reinforced by active facilitation and tools for critical reflection, can effectively support enhanced adaptive and collaborative capacity in CFUGs.***

6.1 The standard arrangements and processes in place in the CFUGs prior to the use of the adaptive collaborative approach, reinforced by existing attitudes, contributed to centralised and linear governance patterns in the CFUGs. The standard institutional arrangements and processes in place were the executive committee and general assembly and the discussions that took place within these (see Table 4). Several predominant governance and management patterns emerged from these:

- Local elite (typically male, so-called ‘high-caste’ or wealthy people) tended to formally and informally dominate CFUG positions and decision making, while women, the poor, and *dalit* members tended to be marginalised.
- Decisions tended to be based on leaders’ own ‘in-the-moment’ interests and priorities, with little clear linkage to the CFUGs’ long-term aspirations. Long-term plans (Operational Plans), largely framed by outside actors and leaders, often reflected leaders’ interests or ‘standard’ plans for CFUGs in the area, rather than members’ priorities or context-specific needs.
- When executive committee and general assembly meetings occurred, which was often irregularly, there was limited joint learning or explicit application of learning from implementation experience in current decision making.
- Implementation of plans was inconsistent—sometimes even lacking—and participation of or compliance by members in the plans was described by members in many cases as ‘imposed’ or ‘forced’.

**Table 4.** CFUG level arrangements and processes: Comparison of ‘status quo’ and adaptive collaborative approaches

	<p><b>‘Status quo’</b> (Synthesis of comparative sites and main case study sites prior to the participatory action research: ‘Before’)</p>	<p><b>Adaptive collaborative approach</b> (Synthesis of main case study sites using the approach during the participatory action research: ‘After’)</p>
<p>CFUG institutional arrangements (structure)</p>	<p>Decision making was centred in the <b>CFUG executive committee</b> and based secondarily in the <b>general assembly</b>. The former had responsibility for all ongoing decisions and leadership of any activities or actions, including most conflict management, while the latter usually met either every six months or annually (if it met at all). The large general assembly meetings—if used for decision making, rather than merely for informing members of decisions taken—left little room for marginalised members with low status or confidence and less information than others to speak. Even when ‘consensus decision making’ was used, it tended to hide the voices of minority groups, and instead legitimised priorities of more dominant actors. In some cases, <i>tole</i> committees formally existed, but were not active or highly engaged as decision-making platforms.</p>	<p>Inclusive, ‘nested decision making’ was based on these linked nodes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tole committees</b> (and <i>tole</i> representatives) were the base for all planning and decision making, including selection of executive committee member candidates and, in most cases, as a base for conflict management. <i>Tole</i>-level responsibilities included setting visions and priorities, selection of executive committee candidates, and assessments of strengths and weaknesses in CFUG governance and management.</li> <li>• <b>Executive committees</b> regularly worked together with <i>toles</i> through <i>tole</i> representative—executive committee joint meetings. Several CFUGs sought and institutionalised more equitable representation of women and marginalised users.</li> <li>• <b>General assemblies</b> were the final step in decision making, to formalise the plans and decisions generated from the <i>tole</i> and subcommittees. The assemblies were also a venue for action groups and subcommittees to share information and discuss their plans with others.</li> <li>• <b>Action groups &amp; subcommittees</b> led CFUG activities and action plans (e.g., income-generation groups, committees for equitable distribution of forest products).</li> </ul> <p>The CFUGs using the adaptive collaborative approach also featured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active facilitation by change agents from within the CFUG and meso levels, with the latter also playing the role of the ‘critically reflective outsider’;</li> <li>• Appropriate collaboration with external actors to support CFUG initiatives (but not to make the CFUG’s decisions).</li> </ul>

	<p><b>‘Status quo’</b> (Synthesis of comparative sites and main case study sites prior to the participatory action research: ‘Before’)</p>	<p><b>Adaptive collaborative approach</b> (Synthesis of main case study sites using the approach during the participatory action research: ‘After’)</p>
<p>Planning processes</p>	<p>Processes for the development of long-term (i.e., Operational Plan) and short-term priorities and plans within the CFUG tended to be linear or <i>ad hoc</i> in nature. For example, the Operational Plans were in some cases based on standard plans for the area, and annual plans and executive committee decisions were not clearly linked to past experiences or future goals, but were more ‘rote’ in nature or based on the thinking in that moment of the more influential individuals in the CFUG. Decision-making processes were largely discussion based only, without the use of any feedback mechanisms or tools for reflection. In one case, self-monitoring had been tried, but it was not used effectively to generate learning and improvement.</p>	<p>Planning was largely based in social learning and CFUG goals on an explicit shared vision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development, assessment and adjustment of plans and priorities was undertaken through an inclusive self-monitoring process that identified strong and weak areas of the CFUG’s performance according to its own indicators (see example in Annex III). The process was based around a cycle of shared visioning, creation and adjustment of indicators, assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and development, adjustment and implementation of plans by action groups.</li> <li>• There was active and transparent tracking and analysis of equity in benefit sharing as a part of the self-monitoring process.</li> <li>• The detailed planning of activities was learning-oriented, including regular reflection on experience, use of trial plots or experiments, and in some cases, analysis of risk and uncertainty.</li> <li>• Process design, active facilitation, and various tools (including heterogeneity analysis and ‘Social Analysis Systems’ [SAS] tools, such as Network Analysis or Trust Analysis) were used as needed to encourage learning on an ongoing basis. (See the sister publication to this one, ‘Facilitating Forests of Learning’, for specifics.)</li> <li>• The planning process involved ongoing two-way communication between the executive committee and <i>toles</i>.</li> </ul>



6.2 Multilevel or multinode decision making and planning based on social learning—combined with active facilitation and the development of enabling attitudes—supported more inclusive and effective governance and management at the CFUG level. Several key processes, arrangements and patterns emerged:

- The CFUGs created more space for input to decision making and enhanced information flow by anchoring decision making to the *tole* level. *Tole* committees became the starting point for all key CFUG decision making. *Toles* developed into active forums for deliberation, where members, especially marginalised ones, could share their views and engage more freely than in larger forums with mixed socioeconomic groups. One CFUG's use of *toles* to circumvent party politics is described in Box 15.
- Control over activities by small, voluntary action groups created meaningful space for marginalised users to control activities of interest and benefit to their own livelihoods. These action groups ranged from a women's group raising cardamom for sale, to a *dalit tole* spearheading the development of a sawmill, to a forest-product distribution committee striving to improve the CFUG's distributional equity by directly assessing forest product needs with each *tole*.
- By basing their annual planning and Operational Plan and Constitution renewal in a self-monitoring process, CFUGs were able to base their decision making in social learning. They generated critical reflection on multiple aspects of community forestry (including forests, livelihoods, institutions and equity) and used this to identify priorities and develop and adjust plans. As a part of this self-monitoring, internal analysis of equity in benefit sharing (i.e., 'equity tracking') was a very powerful means of making equity issues more explicit and transparent and therefore of addressing them effectively.
- CFUG leaders and change agents worked together to make sure that decision-making processes were more inclusive and participation more effective than in the past. This included many events and processes, including general assemblies being actively facilitated to enable inclusion and reflection. This, combined with the *tole*-level decision making, control by action groups, and self-monitoring, meant a significant shift towards active and voluntary implementation of actions by CFUG members.

In Figures 3 and 4, we offer a visual comparison of the 'status quo' approach and an adaptive collaborative approach to annual CFUG planning and governance. The figures incorporate the key aspects of the approaches described in Table 4. The difference in 'shapes' of planning between the two figures emphasises the 'reflexive' nature of the adaptive collaborative approach (i.e., the 'planning and learning loop') versus the 'straight line' of the more linear status quo approach. (See *Facilitating Forests of Learning*, McDougall *et al.* 2008, for more details on this and on long-term planning, including Operational Plan revision.)

**Box 15.** Reducing the tension of political ideology: Kajipauwa CFUG's use of toles to select the executive committee

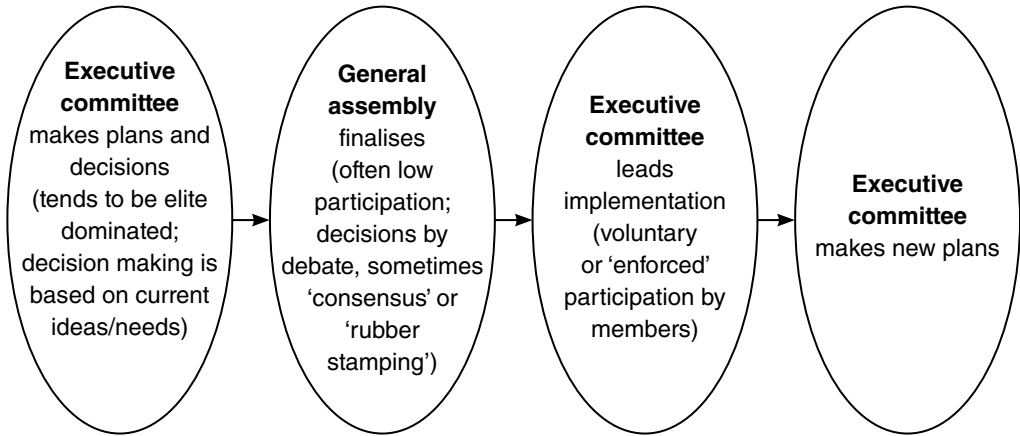
*Members of Kajipauwa CFUG in Palpa used to appoint their executive committee through their general assembly plenary. While reviewing the new executive committee panel in the CFUG, there was always hidden tension and competition among the leaders, particularly between nominees for chair and secretary. This was due to party politics within the village. The chair always wanted to have a secretary of his own political party to make his control of the executive committee easier—and this was normally played out in practice.*

*Recently, however, as part of the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, the CFUG adjusted its selection process to become more tole-based. With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, the CFUG had divided into five toles according to geographic location, so that tole users can meet easily. As they had a relatively small number of households (111) and small growing forest of 24.03 ha, the CFUG did not initially take the use of tole representatives seriously in community forestry processes. Slowly, however, with continued use of toles as decision-making and reflection units, they began to appreciate their potential.*

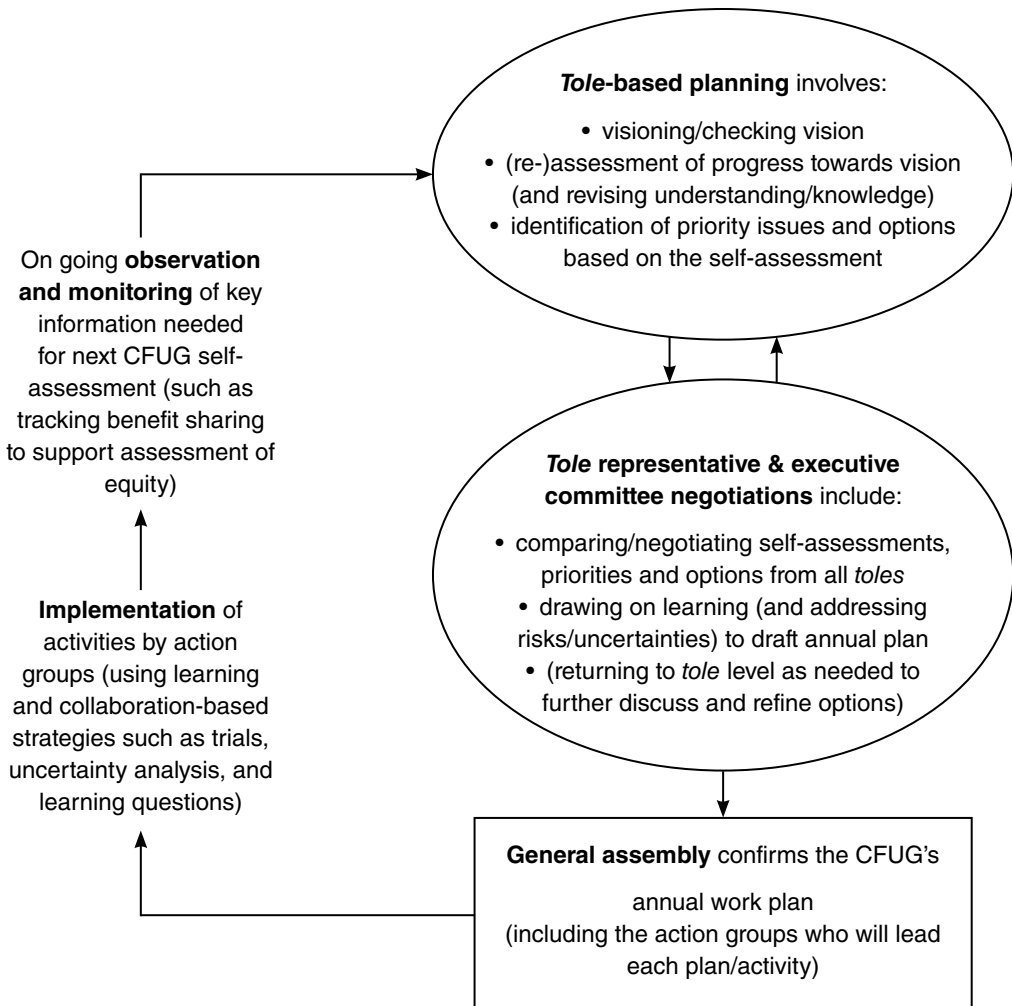
*In September 2006, the CFUG needed to select a new executive committee. Based on their new understanding of the value of tole-level input to governance, during the general assembly all users separated into five groups based on their toles. Each tole group was given three tasks within the time period: to identify any potential candidates for chair from each tole, so that there would be an election if two or more users wanted to have the position of CFUG chair; to select a tole representative from each tole; and to select two executive committee members (other than the tole representative). The tole groups carried out their tasks and the executive committee was selected based on tole group discussion of the candidates' potential strengths and weaknesses—without the usual ideological struggles. Following this executive committee selection process the then-CFUG secretary commented:*

*“Our general assembly ended in a fantastic way this time. We felt smooth to conduct the assembly as well, in which we had bitter experiences in the past. There used to be party ideology lobbying while selecting the executive committee, but we find this way easy going since the tole users were given the responsibility [to select potential executive members] based on the toles' trust in the potential executive committee members and [the potential members'] time and interest.”*

**Figure 3.** Commonly found approach to CFUG planning and decision making



**Figure 4.** Adaptive collaborative approach to CFUG planning and decision making



***Lesson 7. Groups of meso actors and institutions can become more inclusive, collaborative and adaptive through strategies such as active facilitation, regular input from CFUGs, and joint reflection and action on priority issues in context-appropriate meso forum arrangements.***

7.1 The ‘status quo’ processes and arrangements at the meso level (i.e., prior to the use of an adaptive collaborative approach) formally linked some meso actors with each other and with CFUGs, but these actors were often operating in relative isolation, with limited collective action, or there were unresolved power imbalances or conflicts. Some key points about the meso contexts from the pre-adaptive collaborative approach period include the following:

- Many of the meso areas had significant long-term tensions between community forestry actors.
- Even when networks officially existed, they were not necessarily active.
- Most of the meso areas had limited mechanisms for CFUG input to meso service providers and policy implementers. As such, even if they existed, meso forums were creating limited direct benefits for or improvements in service to CFUGs.
- In many cases, cross-institutional communication and learning regarding innovations in CFUG planning, decision making, and management were limited. There was some useful CFUG-to-CFUG knowledge sharing (e.g., learning tours) and some multistakeholder sharing in a few sites, but this was largely not linked to collective action. The CFUG networks provided space for CFUG-to-CFUG interaction, although this focused more on ‘data exchange’ (e.g., fund amounts and activities) rather than shared learning or collective problem solving.
- More powerful actors and organisations, especially district forest offices (DFO) and their staff, tended to be highly influential. Less powerful actors or groups tended to have much less influence on meso-level action and decisions. This included low representation of CFUGs, and especially of marginalised socioeconomic actors, in meso-level decision making.

7.2 Meso-level institutions in most of the PAR areas began to interact and connect in more inclusive, learning-oriented ways, using strategies and arrangements designed to suit their particular contexts and goals, including using the elements of the adaptive collaborative approach as the basis for forum self-monitoring. Here we offer some lessons from the case studies regarding the processes and arrangements that can support adaptive collaborative governance at the meso level:

- Effective meso forums can take many forms (e.g., CFUG–CFUG networks, enterprises or multistakeholder forums at the neighbourhood, range post, or district levels); they need to be appropriate to the participating actors, their needs, and local contexts.
- The critical change was not only mobilising forums through active facilitation and leadership, but also combining this mobilisation—and in some cases, adjustment in forum type/structure—with social learning processes and the encouragement of actors to be reflexive. Reflection-based processes included the critical review of governance, experiences and actions; teaching each other (e.g., CFUGs sharing new knowledge about fire lines or effective CFUG processes, rather than simply providing updates on their budgets); and joint observation and monitoring of some CFUG or meso practices (Box 16).
- One of the most important shifts at the meso level was the creation of space for CFUG engagement and meaningful information sharing between CFUGs and meso actors. This was significant in two ways: (i) because the enthusiasm, knowledge and experience of CFUGs using an adaptive collaborative approach ‘trickled up’ to the meso level to help with its transition; and (ii) because the direct communication between CFUGs and meso actors enabled meso actors to provide more informed and appropriate responses and service to the CFUGs.

**Box 16.** Meso assessment of adaptiveness and collaboration: Tinjure Hattisar NTFP Enterprise Network, SSB District

*During the Tinjure Hattisar Network’s workshop on the adaptive collaborative approach in April 2005, participants devoted a day to exploring the approach’s elements, criteria and indicators, and using them to assess their network. The elements they used related to: (1) vision (goals and objectives of the network); (2) mechanisms for communication; (3) mechanism for conflict resolution; (4) level of participation; (5) equity in decision making and access to resources; (6) reflection and learning; (7) collaborative action; and (8) dealing with uncertainties and risk.*

*Of the eight elements of the approach assessed for that period in time, the participants rated the level of all elements at only 20 percent success, except three elements (vision, mechanisms for communication, and level of participation), which they rated as 40 percent.*

Table 5 offers key points of comparison between the ‘status quo’ meso arrangements and processes (prior to the PAR) with the adaptive collaborative-oriented ones (developed during the PAR period).

**Table 5.** Meso-level arrangements and processes: Comparison of 'status quo' and adaptive collaborative approaches

	<p><b>Status quo</b> (Synthesis of main case study sites prior to the participatory action research: 'Before')</p>	<p><b>Adaptive collaborative approach</b> (Synthesis of main case study sites using the approach/during the participatory action research: 'After')</p>
<p>Meso arrangements (i.e., configuration/ types of forums)</p>	<p>The types of forums involved in the research were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no formal meso arrangements (i.e., no forum);</li> <li>• CFUG–CFUG networks;</li> <li>• a CFUG network NTFP enterprise; and</li> <li>• multistakeholder networks from the range post to the district levels (e.g., involving the DFO, FECOFUN, bilateral projects).</li> </ul>	<p>Some meso forums remained the same, while others adjusted the level and arrangements (configurations of meso-level interactions) to meet their needs more effectively, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shifting from only community forestry actors to a multi stakeholder forum;</li> <li>• shifting from a higher-level meso network to a more locally based network (e.g., from district to range post or neighbouring CFUG);</li> <li>• creating more explicit linkages with CFUGs; and</li> <li>• creating more space and benefits for marginalised forest users (e.g., the NTFP enterprise, which was restructured to include poor households as major shareholders and employees).</li> </ul>

<p>Planning processes and strategies</p>	<p><b>Status quo</b> (Synthesis of main case study sites prior to the participatory action research: 'Before')</p> <p>The various forums had different types of interaction and processes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• negligible interaction;</li> <li>• sharing of information; and</li> <li>• some learning-oriented sharing of experiences.</li> </ul> <p>There was relatively little collective action in the meso sites, other than in the NTFP enterprise site.</p>	<p><b>Adaptive collaborative approach</b> (Synthesis of main case study sites using the approach/during the participatory action research: 'After')</p> <p>Overall, the forums tried to design their governance processes so that they were more based on active co-learning and geared towards effective representation, inclusion and collaboration. As such, all five sites that made the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach used the elements of the approach to guide their practice. For example, four of the forums carried out self-monitoring using the adaptive collaborative approach's elements (see Chapter 4). The five forums using the approach put these elements into action through explicit deliberation, addressing some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leadership and facilitation of the forum, including shifting to joint leadership and development of active facilitation;</li> <li>• governance of the forum, including more equitable representation of women;</li> <li>• making the forum more accessible to all members, such as rotating locations to all members' sites;</li> <li>• planning specific events to get the input of CFUGs to make the meso level more responsive to the CFUGs;</li> <li>• emphasising reflection and shared learning in the forum;</li> <li>• exploration and identification of common 'burning issues' and/or joint visioning or goal setting;</li> <li>• strategising for collective action on burning issues (such as the mobilisation of meso resources to support income generation by marginalised CFUG members or enhancing local CFUG governance); and</li> <li>• making interaction a regular and ongoing occurrence.</li> </ul>
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### **Research Question 3:**

**What are the outcomes of an adaptive collaborative approach to community forestry, including in terms of social capital and livelihoods?**

In this synthesis, we focus the CFUG-level lessons on the effects (outcomes) of the approach on the main community forestry challenges identified in Chapter 2: equity in governance and livelihoods (Lessons 8–10). As the meso level can play an important indirect role in CFUG equity and livelihoods, we include a meso-CFUG interface section (Lessons 11–15) that addresses meso-actor agenda-setting, meso forums as vehicles to build marginalised actors' influence, and the success of a meso-level enterprise. In the meso section, we draw learning from all seven of the meso forums that were involved in the PAR. We learn from the five meso forums that made the transition (to differing degrees) to an adaptive collaborative approach during the PAR, as well as from the two that did not effectively make the transition. To distinguish between these in the text below, we refer to the five that did make the transition as the 'adaptive collaborative approach-based meso forums'. In the meso section, we focus on the following three points because of their relevance to and influence on the main research questions, and especially on equity and livelihoods of marginalised people:

- the responsiveness of meso forums to CFUGs and meso–CFUG relations;
- meso forums as vehicles to create space for marginalised people; and
- the success of meso-level non-timber forest product enterprise activities.

While causality of social or institutional change cannot be proven quantitatively, based on the assessment of local, meso and national actors and the perceptions of the researchers, the shift to the adaptive collaborative approach was the major catalyst for the outcomes described here (unless otherwise noted). It is important to emphasise that by this, we do not mean that the outcomes were created by the neat or discrete implementation of a set of processes or arrangements. Rather, in most cases, the main causal forces were interrelated efforts to trigger or make space for adaptive and collaborative-oriented shifts in human agency, including: perceptions and knowledge of CFUG and meso forum members and change agents; connections and relations among CFUG and meso forum members; the nature of CFUG and meso forum processes and arrangements; and linkages among the CFUGs and meso forums and some external actors and institutions. These, as well as some other causal forces, such as the Maoist movement, are further elaborated in the discussion (Chapter 6).

Finally, we note that while the goals of the PAR related to equity and livelihood benefits, the specific changes and outcomes in each of the CFUGs and meso forums were neither predetermined, nor even necessarily predictable. For



example, as outlined in the lessons below, initial stages of CFUG-based reflection brought latent tensions to the surface in some CFUGs, thus accentuating social conflict in the short term. This is the nature of an adaptive approach to a complex system.

***Lesson 8. The adaptive collaborative approach creates scope for more equitable access to decision making and a conscious redressing of unbalanced power in the CFUG, including a redistribution of leadership to women and the poor.***

8.1 Women, the poor, and *dalit* people were largely excluded from CFUG decision making in the ‘status quo’ that existed prior to implementation of an adaptive collaborative approach. Many women participated only when their male counterparts were unavailable. Even when marginalised users (male or female) did participate in the general assembly, their views tended to be overlooked. At times they were even humiliated by the scoldings from others who accused them of being ‘forest destroyers’ (Box 17).

**Box 17.** Reflection on women’s involvement in CFUGs prior to the adaptive collaborative approach

*‘We were also enthusiastic to participate in the general assembly of the CFUG in the past, but when we participated we were blamed repeatedly as forest destroyers, and this made us feel ashamed. It forced us to leave the venue before reaching any decision. Such assemblies were nothing but the venue to get scolded.’*

(A *daure* (firewood seller) woman in Handikharka CFUG)

8.2 An adaptive collaborative approach created significantly more ‘space’ for marginalised users to participate in decisionmaking through innovations to processes and institutional arrangements, especially nested (*tole*-based) decision making and active facilitation (see Research Question 2 and Box 18). This increase in opportunities for marginalised users to contribute through *tole* committees, action groups, and self-monitoring was very important for getting—and keeping—their interests on the CFUG agenda, as well as increasing their sense of ownership of and compliance with CFUG rules. The increased role of marginalised members also had the effect of reducing the burden on the executive committee. This occurred directly through the reduced workload of the committee, as responsibilities shifted to *toles* and action groups;

**Box 18.** Reflections on increased space for marginalised users in CFUG governance

*'The adaptive collaborative process has increased the representation of women in decision-making bodies. The participation for collective actions and access to resources is also increasing—that's why women are ready to continue the process in collaboration with men, even in the future.'* (A dalit woman general member)

*'The adaptive collaborative process has reduced the burden of executive committee members to manage the community forest; the tole committee and 'change agents' have been also providing support and necessary leadership roles to implement action plans very effectively. This kind of collective role and responsibility helps to sustain the adaptive collaborative process in the long run.'*

(Manakamana CFUG Chairperson)

**Table 6.** An example of changes in the working approach in Chautari CFUG, Morang: Thinning and pruning operation before and with an adaptive collaborative approach

<b>Difference point</b>	<b>Pre-adaptive collaborative approach</b>	<b>With an adaptive collaborative approach</b>
Discussion	Executive committee decided; asked <i>toles</i> to participate in the operation	Discussed and decided in the meeting of <i>tole</i> leaders, who later discussed in the respective <i>toles</i>
Supervision/ Monitoring	Executive committee members	In addition to the executive committee members, paid members and <i>tole</i> leaders also monitor
Decision and outcome	Executive committee decided; users did not follow the directives	Since decided together (with or without the executive committee), users follow the decision
Sense of ownership of users	Users felt that they were doing it for the executive committee	They owned and sensed that they were doing it for themselves

Source: Notebook record of a local change agent, Chautari CFUG, Morang District

and indirectly through increasing compliance with CFUG rules and decreasing internal CFUG conflict.

8.3 The transition to an adaptive collaborative approach appears to have contributed to shifts in power in the CFUGs, increasing the ability of marginalised users to effectively participate in and influence CFUG governance and decisions. In all 11 sites, researchers observed the following

changes between the period prior to an adaptive collaborative approach and the end of the PAR period:

- Marginalised users showed increased confidence and awareness of their own rights, and undertook new efforts to make their voices heard and exercise their rights—including strategic organisation and collective action for change (Box 19);
- CFUG leaders demonstrated more recognition of marginalised users' rights and views;
- More leadership roles were held by women and the poorer CFUG members (see Box 20); and

**Box 19.** Women working collectively for change

*Researchers noted that women are not only independently challenging power imbalances, but also doing so collectively. For example, in Bamdibhir CFUG, the women's group organised and removed the CFUG chairperson who had without authority been using CFUG cooperative funds for his own salary. This women's movement was under the leadership of a lower-caste woman. In Morang, once women became more aware of the CFUG policies and processes and their own rights and responsibilities, they asked the executive committee to form a separate subcommittee to ensure women's voice in the CFUG processes. Later one of the women's groups also took on the leadership and coordination of a community development activity on behalf of the CFUG.*

**Box 20.** Women and the poor in leadership roles

*Prior to the adaptive collaborative approach, the representation of women and the poor on CFUG executive committees was very low in most sites.*

*In the four main case study sites, the representation of women in the executive committees increased from an average of 14.75 percent in 2000 to an average of 35 percent in 2006.*

*The representation of people on the executive committee considered by their CFUGs to be 'poor' or 'very poor' increased as well. In the four long-term sites, representation of poor or very poor members increased from an average of 12 percent prior to the use of an adaptive collaborative approach (2000) to an average of 35 percent with an adaptive collaborative approach (2006).*

*We also saw the development of widespread new leadership positions in the form of tole leaders, and a significant number of women and the poor holding these positions. An increase in leadership positions does not necessarily guarantee a change in the actual decision making 'space', but combined with the shifts in power that appeared to take place, we view these new positions as significant.*

- CFUG priorities reflected pro-poor, *dalit* and women's interests to a greater extent.

In other words, marginalised people tended to use their voice more frequently in CFUG decision making—and to challenge decisions—and their voices appeared to be more respected, valued and incorporated by CFUG leadership. A woman *tole* representative from Patle noted: 'In the past our voice was not considered, but nowadays our sayings also are counted, and we are asked as well'.

While there have been very significant improvements in many cases, the issues of power have not been resolved in their entirety—nor could we expect them to be, especially in this relatively short period of time. Thus, rather than being perceived as a solution to power imbalances, an adaptive collaborative approach can be more realistically understood as a means of contributing to 'levelling the playing field', so that power can be more equitably negotiated among diverse actors over the long term.

8.4 One interesting—and unanticipated—outcome in some cases was that the critical reflection and enhanced space for marginalised people created by the approach led to the surfacing of latent conflicts, especially those relating to governance and equity. Conflicts surfaced as the critical consciousness of marginalised users regarding their own rights and the current



*Tole* committee gets ready to meet in Bamdibhir CFUG, Kaski District. Photo by B.H. Pandit

balance of power increased. This was triggered by reflection and social learning processes, such as heterogeneity analysis, as well as through reflective interaction with outside actors. As users began to claim their space and rights with the existing leadership, this triggered more explicit conflict, which then needed to be addressed directly. In Chautari CFUG (Nawalparasi District), for example, as poor users became more conscious of their rights and equity, especially through facilitated *tole*-level discussions, they started claiming more stakes in the CFUG. A delegation of poor users went to the executive committee to demand more community forest rights and benefits. These demands initially led to a clash between the executive committee and the poor. This conflict dissipated, however, after negotiations between the poor users and executive committee, and especially as the leaders began to recognise and respond to the needs of the poor—for example, by organising free CFUG membership and reduced prices on timber for the poor.

Thus, in more explicitly dealing with the underlying issues of governance and equity in the CFUGs, the adaptive collaborative approach ultimately supported CFUGs in addressing many of their recurring internal tensions and conflicts, and enhancing members' relations and sense of ownership. While differences in perspectives and forest needs continued—and will continue—these differences were managed within the CFUG systems more effectively and more proactively than they had been previously.

***Lesson 9. An adaptive collaborative approach contributes to CFUG members' livelihood resilience by sparking more CFUG-related livelihood options and more proactive strategies for their successful implementation.***

9.1 With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, the CFUGs have begun to strategise and engage more proactively in income-generation activities for the CFUGs and their members. With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, the strong trend across the CFUGs was a shift from a predominantly protection and/or subsistence orientation towards a multipurpose orientation, with at least some income generation. In line with this shift, income-generation activities began to increase. Prior to the adaptive collaborative approach, only 4 of the 11 CFUGs had any income-generation activities. By 2006, 10 of the 11 CFUGs had established income-generation activities of some kind for their members, such as those based on non-timber forest products, small-scale agriculture or livestock, or the creation of micro-loans.

9.2 Well being of households in the sites showed a positive correlation with the transition to the adaptive collaborative approach. Participatory wealth ranking in the four long-term CFUG sites indicated that the percentage of households in the ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’ categories has been dropping with the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach. In all four sites, the number and percentage of poor households was lower in 2006 than in 2000. The changes ranged from a drop of only 3.2 percent to a significant drop of 18.5 percent. In other words, the CFUGs—by their own standards—understand their communities to have fewer families facing extreme vulnerability (Box 21).

**Box 21.** Reducing vulnerability through changes in CFUG rules and livelihood support: The story of one poor woman from Manakamana CFUG, SSB District

*Manamaya Darji, aged 42, does not have lands but has a small thatched hut. In line with their ‘occupational caste’, Ms Darji and her husband are tailors. Her only child is disabled in that he cannot speak well. Her family falls into the ‘poor’ category of households, as per the CFUG’s 2002 wealth ranking.*

*In addition to her tailoring profession, Ms Darji used to collect firewood from the community forest and sell it in Khandbari bazaar. In 2002, when the CFUG scaled up its community forest protection, she was no longer able to collect firewood there. Her livelihood security was disrupted. Additionally, she was not happy with the CFUG committee because they had not offered her any other support.*

*During the PAR period of this project in 2004, however, she was able to raise this problem in tole meetings. The tole representatives lobbied on her behalf in the tole–CFUG meetings (created during the PAR)—and as a result the CFUG ultimately provided her a community forest firewood collection permit. With this, she was allowed to collect dead and fallen firewood from the forest for a fee of Rs 10 per back load/‘bhari’ (40kg). She agreed to pay this fee to the CFUG, as she could earn Rs 150 with one bhari of firewood marketed.*

*The CFUG also provided her with a small female pig under an IGA programme (supported by the NGO SODEC), and she received timber from the community forest to construct a small pig shed. In this way, she has expanded her livelihood options: as well as tailoring, she now pursues both firewood selling and pig raising as income sources.*

*The researchers noted that Ms Darji has become positive about the CFUG and has started to participate in the tole and assembly meetings regularly. Ms Darji expressed to them that these changes occurred because of the CFUG’s having started to use active tole-based planning.*

**Lesson 10. Inclusive governance and planning, rooted in ongoing critical social reflection, significantly contributes to equity in the sharing of benefits and burdens in community forestry user groups.**

*‘After... tole-level reflection and discussion, the real poor have accessed the community forest fund for income-generation activities in an equitable manner and increased [the participation of the] poor . . . in community forest management activities, which leads our CFUG towards sustainability.’*

(A dalit general member of Andheri Bhajana CFUG)

10.1 In the ‘normal situation’ prior to the project, the CFUGs had quite limited pro-poor distribution practices and initiatives. Despite poverty alleviation being a formal goal of the Community Forestry Programme, prior to the adaptive collaborative approach, only 1 of the 11 CFUGs had established an income-generation initiative targeted specifically at women or the poor, and only 5 of the 11 CFUG sites had any specific pro-poor loans. Even in these cases, the criteria or process for selecting the ‘poor’ recipients and the implementation strategies were not considered locally to be very fair or effective.

10.2 With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, CFUGs increased access to micro-credit (loans) and income-generation opportunities for marginalised CFUG members. In the period before the adaptive collaborative approach, only 1 of the 11 CFUGs had a specifically pro-poor or pro-women income-generation initiative (Chautari in Nawalparasi District, pro-poor goat raising). By the end of the second research period (2006), 10 of the 11 had pro-poor and/or pro-women income-generation activities under-way (often linked to CFUG loans or subsidies). The one CFUG that did not have such an activity under-way at that point in time (Patle) was planning one for the post-project period (2007) through collaboration with a meso actor.

With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, the CFUGs also significantly increased marginalised members’ access to CFUG loans. In the period prior to the adaptive collaborative approach, only 5 of the 11 CFUGs had pro-poor loans. By the end of the research, 9 of the 11 CFUGs had pro-poor loans established; the remaining 2 (Chautari [Morang] and Patle) had some form of loan planned for the 2007 post-project period. Furthermore, the total of pro-poor micro-credit funds (including loans for household or collective income-generation activities, such as sawmill development and funds for emergency medical loans) increased significantly during the implementation of an adaptive collaborative



approach. Specifically, in the four long-term sites, the total pro-poor loans ranged from none (zero) to Rs 20,000 at the beginning of the first research phase, prior to the adaptive collaborative approach; by the end of the current phase in 2006, all four CFUGs had pro-poor loans, ranging from Rs 55,000 to 100,000. Of the seven CFUGs that began the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach in the second phase, only two had any pro-poor loans available (Rs 15,000 and 40,000) in 2004; by the end of the phase (2006), all had either established micro-credit for the poor, or it was concretely planned for 2007 (ranging from Rs 17,500 to 120,000 in 2006; one CFUG was planning for Rs 206,565 in 2007).

Moreover, within the loans available for poor people, the more vulnerable subgroups of women and *dalit* (poor) people have gained more access to this micro-credit. In the period before the adaptive collaborative approach, women comprised approximately 28 percent of poor loan recipients; by the end of the project period (2006), women made up approximately 63 percent of poor loan recipients. Lower-caste people shifted from being 11 percent of the loan holders (from the poor class) to 22 percent in the same period.

**10.3 The increasing emphasis on equity that came with the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach also led to some pro-poor changes in access to CFUG forest products, including reduction in fees of various kinds for poor members.** Specifically, four of the CFUGs changed their membership and forest product fee structures from a largely equal cost basis to reduced fees or ‘subsidies’ for poor or very poor users. Chautari CFUG, Nawalparasi, for example, developed four different rates for timber and three for ‘*bakal*’ for different (wealth) classes of users. Additionally, by 2006, new users joining the CFUG paid a differentiated membership fee according to their wealth class. Changes such as these have supported the poorer households in their subsistence livelihoods.

**Quotes:** Pro-poor changes in access to forest products

*‘This type of tole meeting led to my getting firewood free of cost—as all learned of my [wealth] status—whereas other users have to pay 2 rupees per load.’*

(Poor user of Patle CFUG)

*‘Due to the provision of tole representatives, we could raise the voices of our tole users (particularly of the poor and marginalised) regarding the idea that there should be a different rate for timber according to the class of users.’*

(Tole representative of Chautari, CFUG, NP)



10.4 Several of the CFUGs made pro-poor changes to their norms and rules, including the legitimisation of fuelwood selling by *dalit* and poor households. Prior to use of the adaptive collaborative approach, firewood selling was ‘illegal’ in all the CFUGs, as per the CFUGs’ own Operational Plans. Thus, the marginalised users that relied on fuelwood selling for income—and who, in some cases, had been doing so since prior to the formal establishment of the CFUG—had to break CFUG rules to do so. This was especially an issue for the *daure* people—those for whom firewood selling is a traditional occupation—and specifically for the women of this group who were the main firewood sellers in their households. Moreover, those who traditionally rely on firewood selling tend to be poor and thus have few other livelihood options. The fact that this key livelihood strategy was prohibited created risk and hardship for firewood sellers, as well as mistrust and tension in the community (Box 22).

The increase in awareness of rights and needs for poor users during the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach led to shifts in rules and norms, including that some CFUGs began to allow the harvest and sale of firewood. Changing from illegal to legal firewood selling did not appear to influence the income created, but it was very significant in that it reduced the burdens and risks associated with this livelihood strategy and reduced tension and conflict in the CFUGs.

**Box 22.** Hardship for firewood sellers prior to an adaptive collaborative approach:  
The example of Handikharka CFUG

*Prior to the CFUG using an adaptive collaborative approach, CFUG members patrolled the forest on a rotation basis to prohibit ‘illicit’ cutting of the forest, including by poor CFUG members for their livelihoods. Firewood sellers, who were usually dalit women, reported that the patrol teams consistently reacted aggressively towards them. CFUG members and the executive committee told the involved households to stop firewood selling as an occupation, but as these households were poor, they had no alternative options. These users expressed that they felt they were being ‘forced’ not to sell firewood. In a research discussion with firewood sellers, one woman said:*

*‘There were many cases of confiscation of our sickles, rope and firewood at ‘dhat’ (check post) while we tried to carry firewood to the bazaar.’*

*Another women added:*

*‘No one recognised our problems. We were always blamed as forest destroyers. Everyone wanted the forest completely protected. Firewood collection and selling were defined as illegal.’*

**Quotes:** CFUGs' recognition that poor CFUG members' livelihoods depend on selling firewood

One *dalit* woman from Manakamana CFUG said:

*'I am happy that I got the loan from the CFUG to run an income-generation activity (pig raising) and formally got permission from the executive committee to sell the dry fuelwood (one bhari) for my family's livelihood needs. Now I don't need to steal the fuelwood from the community forest to sell in Khandbari. After selling one bhari of fuelwood, I get Rs 150, which is sufficient to manage daily needs and food for my family. I would like to thank the executive committee, change agents, and tole committee members who addressed my problem seriously in an equitable manner.'*

Another woman representative from the *daure* (firewood sellers) group remarked:

*'These days we have different options which support our livelihoods. Even firewood collection is legitimised, and we are aware of scientific management' [i.e., through technical training from the DFO that the CFUG organised for poor users/firewood sellers following legitimisation of firewood selling].*

10.5 The overall trend was that marginalised CFUG members perceived benefit sharing to be increasingly more equitable with the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach—however, not all distribution issues are yet resolved to marginalised members' satisfaction. As described in the lessons above, the trend across the sites was for CFUGs to become more pro-poor in distribution of community forest benefits. At the same time, however, the issue of equity in all sites was clearly not completely addressed, or resolved, during the study. In at least one CFUG (Kajipauwa), although the group had begun to internalise the concept of equity in the sense of creating some pro-poor activities, they had not yet shifted from an equality-based forest product distribution system. In other cases, although conditions had improved since the shift towards equality as a distributional principle, varying degrees of discomfort over some aspect of distributional equity remained in some or all class groups. In 2 of the 11 CFUGs, for example, marginalised users expressed some remaining dissatisfaction with equity at the end of the project periods specifically regarding the distribution of timber, despite an innovative CFUG strategy in 1 site to address this. Thus, while the progress towards equity in many sites was notable, the remaining dissatisfaction in some sites and on some issues does raise the question of why the poor were not yet sufficiently prioritised and flag the sensitivity and time-consuming nature of distributional equity, especially in relation to higher-value forest products.

***Lesson 11. With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, CFUGs began to engage more proactively in setting the agenda for meso service provision, which had previously been relatively independently set by meso actors.***

The introduction of the adaptive collaborative approach in meso forums created more space for CFUGs to express their needs and views directly to meso actors. The main mechanism for this was that meso forums, following reflection on their own visions, governance, information needs, and so forth, began to invite CFUGs to present their long- and short-term plans (five-year plan and annual plans) in meso forums. The forums thus had an opportunity to identify specific areas in which meso actors could make meaningful contributions. Forum meetings were then followed by bilateral meetings between the specific meso actors and the CFUG(s) to define specific modalities of collaboration.

Additionally, in contexts in which the involved CFUGs were also using an adaptive collaborative approach, CFUGs were undertaking more specific identification of their own needs than they previously had. As a part of their action planning, CFUGs began to make more proactive efforts to develop partnerships with meso actors to fulfil their needs. For example, Chautari (Morang District), Patle (Lalitpur District) and Kajipauwa (Palpa District) CFUGs each formed teams of CFUG members to investigate options for accessing information on markets and technological or financial support. To achieve their plans, these CFUG teams strategically visited appropriate meso organisations to discuss potential partnerships.



Members of Tinjure Hattisar Network selling nettle fibre cloth in an international trade fair in Kathmandu. Photo by B.H. Pandit.

***Lesson 12. With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, meso actors and CFUGs began to interact and share more regularly and, as a result, increased their collaborative and support initiatives.***

Before the use of an adaptive collaborative approach, almost all the CFUGs had relatively limited relationships with meso stakeholders, even with the prominent community forestry actors, such as the district forest office (DFO), range post, and FECOFUN. The relationship with the DFO was primarily for Operational Plan preparation and review. FECOFUN involved CFUGs in some advocacy activities and district-level development-related training and study tours. During the PAR, however, almost all of the CFUGs began to interact with meso-level actors and other CFUGs more frequently and regularly, especially through meso forums. Furthermore, in areas with more active CFUG–meso sharing (Kaski, Morang and Dhankuta districts), FECOFUN staff and other meso actors began increasingly to visit and provide institutional support to the CFUGs. An additional outcome was that joint CFUG and meso discussions and reflections opened up potential collaborative avenues beyond forestry. In Kajipauwa CFUG (Palpa District), for example, since CFUG–meso interaction increased, the non-forestry organisations, District Agriculture Development Office (DADO), Social Resource Development Center (SRDC), and Rural Economy Development Association/Local Initiatives Support Programme (REDA/LISP) have begun supporting CFUG members in fodder, seasonal and off-season vegetable, and ginger production.

***Lesson 13. The adaptive collaborative approach-based meso learning forums began to act effectively to promote the rights, voice and leadership of the poor, women and dalit people in local communities, and potentially at the national level as well.***

The meso forums' reflections on governance, supported by the change agents' active facilitation, led to meso members' enhanced sensitivity regarding inclusion of marginalised actors in the meso forums. In three of the five meso forums that started to use the approach (Tinjure, Lalitpur and Morang), the forums restructured themselves to enable the inclusion of women and poor representatives of CFUGs (which are often marginalised 'actors' at the meso level relative to others). For example, the Lalitpur multistakeholder forum formed a new committee that includes women representatives from each of the member CFUGs. The NTFP enterprise network of Tinjure Hattisar restructured itself significantly to enable marginalised people greater voice and a significant stake in the enterprise (see Box 23). In Morang, the multistakeholder forum added additional CFUGs to the forum so that issues and views of CFUGs could be better reflected at the meso level.

**Box 23.** Enhancing the voice of marginalised people at the meso level:  
Governance restructuring in the Tinjure Hattisar Non-Timber Forest Product  
Enterprise Network, Sankhuwasabha District

*Prior to using an adaptive collaborative approach, the Tinjure Hattisar Network's decision making was centralised in its executive committee, and there was no defined general assembly (i.e., discussing and voting body of members). In 2004, prior to the introduction of the adaptive collaborative approach, there were only three women and one poor member included in the executive committee, and they were relatively passive in decision making.*

*With the start of the PAR in 2005, the network undertook a self-assessment of its governance using the adaptive collaborative approach elements as key aspects. This self-assessment revealed a number of governance weaknesses, particularly regarding the involvement of marginalised people. In view of this weakness, the network made in-depth revisions to its decision-making structures, as well as its shareholding and benefit structure (see Box 24).*

*One main change the network made to its decision-making structure was the creation of a general assembly. This restructuring enables more members of the participating CFUGs to have ongoing engagement and input to decision making. This general body is involved in many processes and activities, including subcommittees. This also means more influence for CFUG members at large, including women and the poor, because the CFUG members elect the members of the general assembly, who in turn elect the committee members.*

*In order to address gender, caste/ethnicity, and class power imbalances specifically, each of the member CFUGs committed to identifying poor and marginalised households in their CFUG, so that they could select representatives from this group to the network's executive committee and general assembly. The participation of women and the poor is also built in constitutionally through the allocated percentage of seats in the general assembly. Of the 50 seats, 24 are reserved as a minimum for women and 11 as a minimum for marginalised members. In the executive committee, five seats are similarly reserved as a minimum for women and three as a minimum for poor representatives.*

*Thus by 2006, at the end of the PAR, all network members—including marginalised ones—had more opportunity to participate in and influence decision making and planning than they had previously. While these changes represent very significant improvements, at the same time, these mechanisms have not been able to create a totally effective space for the participation of women, the poor, and socially marginalised members of the network. These groups still often participate less fully than the more dominant groups; members are aware that the network still needs to seek strategies to address this remaining imbalance.*

Critical reflection on governance at the meso level has also led the meso forums to engage more actively in strengthening CFUG governance of their member CFUGs. All five meso learning forums that are using the adaptive collaborative approach have made some form of collective effort to enhance inclusiveness and equity in governance in the CFUGs in their area. These efforts were frequently through the extension of the adaptive collaborative approach (or parts of it) to the CFUGs, including facilitating CFUGs' use of 'equity tracking'.

**Lesson 14. Since the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, two of the meso forums have increasingly focused on livelihoods development for members of their area CFUGs, especially revolving loan programmes for the poor.**

Linked to their increased livelihoods focus, two of the five adaptive collaborative approach-based meso forums launched innovative pro-poor loan programmes in their CFUG areas during the research period. (Neither of the meso forums that did not shift to an adaptive collaborative approach started such initiatives.) The most significant meso forum transition towards pro-poor income development was by the Tinjure Hattisar NTFP Enterprise Network, which revised its overall goal to target livelihood enhancement, especially for poor and marginalised people, and created a loan programme to enable the poor to become both shareholders and employees of the network (see Box 24). In Kaski District, the Hansapur Village Development Committee-level network developed an overall objective of raising the income of poor and marginalised families through adaptive collaborative planning. This network made it a priority to catalyse micro-financing (through FECOFUN) for a small-scale sawmill in Deurali-Bagedanda CFUG in which six poor ironsmith-caste families get employment every year.

**Box 24.** Creating livelihood opportunities for the 'poorest of the poor' through collaborative action: The development of targeted revolving funds and employment in the Tinjure Hattisar NTFP Enterprise Network, SSB District

*Following the crystallisation of the Tinjure Hattisar Non-Timber Forest Product Enterprise Network's pro-poor livelihoods focus, the network began to look for ways to create meaningful benefits for the poor households of its member CFUGs. It was, however, immediately confronted with the problem that shareholding—which was one of the most significant forms of enterprise involvement—was out of reach for the poor because they could not afford the cost of shares. Thus, the network—in collaboration with NORM (funded by the IUCN), the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP), and NewERA partners—established a revolving fund to enable the poor to purchase network shares.*



**Box 24. Continued**

*Specifically, following the assessment of NTFP resources, the change agents helped each CFUG to organise social well being ranking in each of the toles of each member CFUG. Of the total 1,346 households in the 10 CFUG areas, 50 'poorest of the poor' households were identified based on criteria developed by the network itself. Each of the CFUGs organised a general assembly meeting to discuss the ranking and agree on the households. These 50 poorest of the poor households received revolving funds of Rs 200,000 to purchase network shares at a nominal interest rate of 3 percent. Using these funds, the identified poor members have been able to invest in the enterprise. In fact, as planned by the network's general assembly, now 20 percent of the shares belong to members considered by the network's own criteria to be poorest of the poor users. These households will pay back the loans that they borrowed from the revolving fund within three years. After three years, the funds will be mobilised for relending to the poorest households of the neighbouring CFUGs in a similar effort.*

*The other main branch of this pro-poor network design is that these 50 poor households are also provided with NTFP employment opportunities to work in their respective community forests. The member CFUGs and the network decided to give NTFP collection permits to these households. As a result, by the end of the project period, the 12 households of the 'lokta' (Daphne sp.) subgroup (from three member CFUGs: Kalika, Tinjure Hattisar and Pathivara) were supplying raw 'lokta' fibres to the network's main marketing centre in Deurali Bhanjyang. The 'allo' (Girardiana diversifolia) subgroup appointed 16 women in its factory, of which 4 are from the poorest of the poor households. The remaining 34 households will start working in the enterprise as soon as the other two network NTFP subgroups start operating their business in the near future.*

**Lesson 15. The emphasis on analysis of uncertainty and on collaboration sparked by the adaptive collaborative approach contributed to the effectiveness of a non-timber forest product enterprise group.**

The Tinjure Hattisar Network was the only PAR case study site that was a commercial non-timber forest product enterprise (as opposed to forums for mutual support or information sharing). The main goal of this network—since its revitalisation and reorientation during the project period—is to improve livelihoods of poor and marginalised families through effective management of NTFPs. In view of this goal, the network developed several action plans, one of which was to strengthen a nettle fibre cloth-making subgroup in the network by supporting them in the use of an adaptive collaborative approach. This subgroup was managed by poor women at Okhre CFUG, one of the network member

CFUGs. Box 25 highlights how the subgroup's use of an adaptive collaborative approach—specifically the consideration of uncertainty (i.e., unknown market information) and collaborative strategies—has helped this group of poor women increase its profits.

**Box 25.** Increasing income through uncertainty analysis and collaboration: The Women's Nettle Fibre Subgroup (Tinjure Hattisar Non-Timber Forest Product Enterprise Network, Sankhuwasabha District)

*The women's group of Okhre CFUG—one of the Tinjure Hattisar Non-Timber Forest Product Enterprise Network member CFUGs—started an 'allo' and cotton-weaving enterprise in 2001. This group of 16 women was initiated with support from CARITAS, an NGO funded by JICA and the Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project, and continued in 2002 with the support of the Livelihoods and Forests Project. External support included training in allo cloth weaving, record keeping, and financial management.*

*In their first two years, the profit margin (i.e., sale price minus expenditure) was low, as the group members were not very organised and their alliances with traders and other stakeholders outside the CFUG were not yet developed, so their bargaining power was weak. In their third year, their profit margin had only reached 18 percent. In the fourth year, the profit margin declined slightly, apparently again due to lack of organisation, linkages, and low bargaining power. Furthermore, group members did not have up-to-date market information, and they thus sold their products at low prices.*

*The group members realised the weaknesses of their approach when they did an uncertainty assessment exercise in the adaptive collaborative approach workshop held in August 2004 to start the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach. Immediately after the workshop, having identified 'allo group strengthening' as one of the network's priority actions, the network decided to send some members of their group on an 'exposure visit' outside the district. These women visited NTFP enterprises in regional cities and in Kathmandu, and they visited the Jiri enterprise of Dolakha district in December 2004. This visit provided them with ideas about NTFP enterprise management and information about the market price of allo cloth and other NTFPs. Furthermore, the group also undertook to remedy its perceived weakness of lack of market linkages by establishing linkages with regional traders in Biratnagar and Kathmandu. The local traders, who used to buy the product locally in the past, are becoming part of the allo enterprise team.*

*Based on its learning, the group has been increasing its bargaining power and collaborative capacity, which helped to increase its profit margin to 28 percent in the fifth year of their operation.*

(From Pandit et al. 2006)





## *Chapter 6*

**Discussion:  
Connections between an Adaptive  
Collaborative Approach, Equity and  
Livelihoods**



The previous section outlines lessons relating to equity and livelihoods, which were based on changes that took place in the CFUGs and meso forums during the participatory action research period. These changes include increases in—and support for—equity in governance, distributional equity, and the generation of livelihood benefits. In this section, we explore the connections between the adaptive collaborative approach and these changes. Specifically, we address the question of how an adaptive collaborative approach influences equity and livelihoods. This discussion draws a ‘large brush’ picture of patterns of change across sites from the perspective of the end of the research period. Within each case, and in the moment, the specific changes occurred along paths that twisted and turned in often unexpected ways, moderated by complex human perceptions and struggles.

### **Commonly found patterns that reinforce marginalisation and limited benefits**

As described in earlier sections, CIFOR and partners’ investigations into the factors underlying inequity and relatively low benefits revealed patterns of hierarchical decision making, little proactive feedback of learning to management and policy decisions, and weak linkages among actors within and across levels. From a theoretical perspective, this type of commonly found approach—leaning towards top-down, linear and isolated—represents a mismatch with the complex and dynamic nature of community forestry systems. From a practical perspective, this approach to decision making and the processes, arrangements and attitudes commonly connected with it contributes to the vulnerability of marginalised people along several interconnected pathways.

The commonly found governance arrangements—executive committee and general assembly—and processes used in them tend to create situations of ‘free competition’ for influence over decisions. In these situations, and reinforced by historical patterns of discrimination, actors who hold less respect from others, have less confidence speaking in public forums, and sometimes less information about CFUG decisions cannot compete effectively with others for decision-making ‘space’. Thus, these actors—typically women, *dalit* people, and the poor—have relatively less effective input to CFUG decision making. As a result, decisions made by the CFUG often do not reflect the needs or interests of marginalised users, and thus CFUGs create relatively few pro-poor initiatives (pro-poor distribution, loans or income-generation activities). Especially when two-way communication channels between the executive committee and general members are weak, understanding across different actors’ perspectives tends to be poor, information is distributed unevenly, and marginalised actors tend to feel relatively little ownership of decisions made by the executive committee or even the general assembly.

These conditions all contribute to tensions and disagreement within CFUGs, as well as low compliance with CFUG rules, which leads to decreased member engagement, decreased CFUG activity, and ultimately to the low generation of benefits. The linear nature of commonly found planning reinforces this. With the focus solely on implementation of set plans, rather than also on learning and improvement, governance and management do not readily adjust to new or diversified knowledge and experience or optimise opportunities. Many plans do not ‘get off the ground’ or are dropped when they face obstacles.

### **Adaptive collaborative approach-based patterns that enable equity and support livelihood generation**

Focusing on the outcomes described in Chapter 5, here we trace and discuss three interconnected patterns of change and their causal linkages:

- (i) engagement in and influence of marginalised CFUG members;
- (ii) the generation of livelihood benefits; and
- (iii) distributional equity within the CFUG.

The overlap of causal forces in the three discussions below highlights the nonlinear nature of the community forestry system and change processes and emphasises the linkages and feedback loops amongst the various patterns of change.

#### ***Changes in engagement and influence of marginalised CFUG members***

In Chapter 5 we noted that the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach appears to have increased the ability of marginalised users to engage effectively in and influence CFUG governance and decisions. This increased ability brought with it increased awareness among marginalised users of their own rights and their confidence to exercise those rights. It yielded greater collective action to effect change, enhanced recognition of marginalised users’ rights and views by CFUG leaders, increase in leadership roles for women and the poorer members, and CFUG priorities and initiatives that better reflected the interests of women, the poor, and *dalit* members.

We noted a multifaceted causal pathway regarding this increase in engagement and influence of marginalised CFUG members. Key aspects of this pathway included the following:

- Poor CFUG members’ awareness of their community forestry rights increased as they engaged more actively in governance, including through developing



A woman from Tinjure Hattisar Network preparing *Swertia chirayita* plant for sale in Madhimulkharka VDC. Photo by B.H. Pandit

their CFUG Constitutions and deliberating at the *tole* level. Marginalised peoples' awareness of their rights also increased in many cases through exposure to the Maoist movement, including the direct 'education' of rural people by Maoists. (This effect of the Maoist movement, and the momentum of the larger democratic movement, is of course not limited to the research sites—it influenced CFUGs across the country)

- As marginalised CFUG members' confidence and knowledge have increased, so has their pressure on CFUG leadership to ensure that their rights and views are respected (see Lesson 8). Relatedly, less powerful actors (such as woman and the poor in CFUGs or CFUG members in relation to the district forest office), worked collectively—in other words, mobilised themselves or created alliances across subgroups—to increase their power and influence others (Box 26).
- These shifts were reinforced by and translated into concrete changes in CFUG priorities through inclusive, 'bottom-up' decision making, such as *tole*-based (i.e., 'nested') visioning and planning, and leadership of activities by small action groups. The increase in pro-poor and pro-women decisions and actions served to boost these subgroups' sense of ownership and value of the community forest—and thus fed back to boost their engagement in decision making and activities (Box 27).

**Box 26.** An example of collective agency: A CFUG fights for its forest rights

*In one local research site, the CFUG felled some trees during road construction. The chairperson at the time disagreed with the CFUG's decision to fell the trees and—without discussion with the CFUG—reported this independently to the district forest officer (DFO), who subsequently tried to withdraw the CFUG's right to the community forest. The strength of the community's collective response, as described here by the field researchers and initiative researchers, was significant.*

*The DFO viewed the road construction through the forest as being against regulations, hence he intended to withdraw the CFUG's rights to the forest. He ordered the community to hand over their forest to the Department of Forests. Without public notice, the chairperson handed all CFUG-related documents to the DFO. The community and other executive committee members became aware of the chairperson's individual decision only after a month or so had passed.*

*Community people, along with the executive committee and the road committee, asked the DFO to return the CFUG's documents. The DFO agreed to their request initially only on the condition that the CFUG pay a fine for every member household. After repeated community visits and discussions, the DFO reduced this to a penalty of Rs 494 for each executive and road committee member. The two committees paid the fine.*

*The CFUG members, however, did not accept this decision, as they did not perceive the fine to be logical or in accordance with community forestry policy. The CFUG threatened to visit the regional forest office with a delegation if the DFO persisted with his request. In the face of this pressure, the DFO changed his position: he suggested that the CFUG make a written request to develop a fire line along the forest side. (This would document the road under construction in the form of a fire line in case any external monitoring team raised objections.) The DFO returned the penalty money to the executive committee and road committee members.*

*Within the CFUG, the chairperson was forced to resign in the face of this community solidarity. A new executive committee was formed after the next general assembly—composed of six women and five men who had taken lead roles in this process.*

- Self-monitoring processes involved all CFUG members and included ongoing assessment of governance, such as fair input to decision making and leadership roles. These processes got, and helped to keep, equity in governance and distribution on the CFUGs' agendas.
- Having leaders and general members—including marginalised ones—engaging in various facilitated reflection and social learning processes about governance (including self-monitoring) contributed to increased mutual understanding.

**Box 27.** A link between *tole* committees, benefits and participation

*One dalit member of Deurali Bagedanda CFUG in Kaski District expressed her perception of the connections between tole leadership, CFUG decisions and participation:*

*'Local women and marginalised users' representation has also increased in tole committees, which has generated enthusiasm in us. The tole committees are making decisions in favour of women and the poor to provide CFUG funds and forest resources in an equitable manner. After this type of direct benefits, women and the poor's participation have been increasing in CFUG activities including decision making. We are more hopeful that tole-level decision making and planning forums will continue in the future.'*

Critical questioning and sharing ideas about equity in governance by external actors—including meso-level change agents, researchers, and some representatives of other CFUGs or meso forums—also contributed to women's and poor people's voices being recognised as valuable by elites and leadership.

- In some cases where a nearby meso forum was involved in a shift towards an adaptive collaborative approach, the meso forum contributed to greater engagement of marginalised people in CFUG governance through mobilising support for CFUG governance reform or for inclusive and equitable Constitutions and Operational Plan revisions or governance reform at the CFUG level.

### ***Changes in the generation of livelihood benefits***

In the outcomes section, we noted increases in CFUG-related livelihood benefits. Based on CFUG members' input and researcher observation, the increases were likely driven by:

- more inclusive CFUGs (point i above);
- increased CFUG activity in making, and effectiveness in implementing, plans;
- shifts towards income generation and pro-poor orientation; and
- more proactive and effective seeking of collaboration and resources.

We explore each of these causal connections here.

With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, all CFUGs became more active and successful in making and implementing action plans. The trend across the sites was an increase in the number of CFUG goals and annual action plans and, more active implementation of these plans. As indicated by the CFUG self-monitoring and the perception of meso actors, the CFUGs also became more successful in implementing their plans and achieving their goals, including goals to improve CFUG governance. This increase in success was likely driven by a convergence of factors, including the learning and inclusive nature of governance enabling a clearer shared vision and plans, greater sense of ownership and less conflict among members, more effective planning, and proactive seeking of information and financial or other resources to implement plans. The transition of nearby meso forums to an adaptive collaborative approach also influenced CFUG success with their plans. As the meso learning forums developed, they began to engage in critical reflection of feedback to CFUG planning and implementation. The meso forums became vehicles for pooling CFUG experiences and generating knowledge to enhance the success of CFUG plans and practice, and CFUG representatives brought cross-learning back to their own CFUGs.

Second, the shift of the CFUGs' orientations to include income and pro-poor priorities contributed to the increase in livelihood benefits. This increase in pro-poor and income orientation was triggered by a combination of factors, including increases in space for marginalised members' input through *tole*-based decision making, keeping pro-poor and pro-women goals and initiatives on the CFUG's agendas through self-monitoring of progress towards shared visions, social learning through self-monitoring and other facilitated collaborative planning processes, and the influence of equity-oriented external actors, including meso change agents and researchers. All of these factors sparked and helped create space for marginalised actors to lobby for and take action on their ideas (Box 28). This progress was reinforced by meso forums' shift towards income and pro-poor orientation, as they made more effort to be responsive to CFUGs' and marginalised actors' priorities.

Third, the shift to more proactive and effective seeking of collaboration and resources contributed to CFUGs enhancing their livelihood benefits. One driving force for the increase in livelihood benefits—and more specifically, income-generation activities—is that CFUGs became more proactive in identifying and actively seeking external support and partnerships for their income-generation initiatives. This is a notable change from earlier patterns, when the CFUGs tended to be much more passive actors in the relationship with meso organisations and had fewer income-generation activities. This shift was related to the increasingly thorough planning process and the approach's emphasis on collaboration and cross-scale linkages, including self-monitoring by CFUGs of their relations and connections with outside actors.



**Box 28.** One low-caste group's journey to establish a sawmill: The Biswokarma tole of Deurali-Bagedanda CFUG

*In 2002, during the adaptive collaborative approach-based planning of the first research phase, the Biswokarma tole of Deurali-Bagedanda CFUG developed the goal of enhancing their livelihoods by establishing a sawmill. In fact, they proposed to take leadership and even sole management authority for the mill. This ambitious plan surprised and did not sit comfortably with the other CFUG members. When the tole proposed the plan to the CFUG committee and requested funding support from the CFUG and district FECOFUN, the other toles initially disagreed with the proposal. They particularly questioned the plan to allow the Biswokarma tole to lead the initiative.*

*With the pro-poor change agents' active facilitation of reflection in visioning and monitoring processes and specific discussions—and the tenacity of the Biswokarma tole members—further negotiations in 2004 led to other toles and the executive committee supporting the Biswokarma tole's plan in principle. The CFUG committee even undertook the necessary legal procedures, such as providing licenses to the Biswokarma tole to cut dead and fallen timber. The tole carried out a feasibility study and estimated the costs for establishing the sawmill. The research project's change agents helped to develop a proposal based on this information. The committee forwarded the sawmill proposal to the CFUG's general assembly in 2005, and the assembly approved it as an income-generating activity of the Biswokarma tole.*

*The stumbling block for the proposed plan was the funding to establish the enterprise. Neither the tole nor the CFUG had been able to secure the needed funds. At this point, with the encouragement and engagement of the adaptive collaborative approach-based meso network (the project's meso PAR site, Hansapur CFUG Network), the district FECOFUN submitted a proposal to NewERA for funding. (NewERA is a partner research organisation; it also has a branch—separate from this research project—for funding pro-poor, rural initiatives). FECOFUN succeeded in acquiring funds (Rs 80,000) for the initiative from NewERA in 2006.*

*Backed enthusiastically by the Hansapur CFUG network, FECOFUN is managing the sawmill funding as 'revolving funds'. Six poor members of the Biswokarma tole in Deurali-Bagedanda CFUG will work in the sawmill. The estimated income from the proposed furniture industry is Rs 27,000 per month, of which Rs 24,000 will be paid to the six labourers. Of the remaining monthly profit (Rs 3000), 50 percent will be deposited in the CFUG's bank account to be used later to provide loans to other poor members of neighbouring CFUGs, while the other 50 percent will be paid back to FECOFUN. In this way the sawmill will pay back its loan to FECOFUN in six years.*



Yak transporting 'lokta' bark for the handmade paper industry, Pathivara CFUG. Photo by B.H. Pandit

In some areas, the meso forums' shift towards an adaptive collaborative approach enabled enhanced collaboration between CFUGs and meso actors on livelihood initiatives and other priorities. As part of the shift, meso forums created more space for input from CFUGs, through CFUG–meso dialogues and follow-up planning processes. As CFUGs engaged in this way, they started questioning the meso actors' previously low level of involvement and encouraged them to make more direct collaboration or support available. Relatedly, increased 'peer pressure' between meso organisations (as they interacted more frequently through forum discussions) appeared to spark the meso actors to enhance their services to the communities. In some cases, ongoing interactions among change agents (operating at the CFUG and meso levels), researchers and meso actors sparked the meso actors' interest in learning from the CFUGs engaged in PAR, and thus increased their desire to engage directly with the CFUGs. Further, the meso forums' sharing—a part of their adaptive collaborative approach—helped to make explicit to meso actors the diverse perceptions, values and interests of meso actors and CFUGs, and built understanding among these actors. These improvements paved the way for enhanced collaboration and cooperation in CFUG support.

## ***Changes in distributional equity***

Prior to using an adaptive collaborative approach, many of the CFUGs implicitly or explicitly used the principle of ‘equality’ as the basis for distribution (i.e., equal shares of community forest benefits and costs, regardless of socioeconomic factors). And yet, as a distributional principle, ‘equal access’ did not mean equal livelihood outcomes and value for different socioeconomic groups, because the households of different wealth categories did not have equal dependence on the community forest or access to alternative resources, such as private forest resources or alternative fuels. In fact, because of the differences in resources, blanket use of the principle of equality as the basis for distribution actually appeared to have been a barrier to marginalised people’s livelihood security.

With the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, CFUGs largely shifted towards consideration of ‘equity’ as a distributional principle and made adjustments accordingly in their rules for access to forest products and other CFUG-related benefits. This shift and these adjustments came about as the CFUGs sought improvements in governance and relations, including reduction in conflict and improved outcomes from their community forest.

One of the main pathways that contributed to changes in distributional equity was the increase in marginalised CFUG members’ engagement and influence (point i above). Causal pathways linked to that engagement and influence include marginalised members’ enhanced awareness of the CFUG and their rights. This awareness and greater regular deliberation among marginalised actors and with change agents, and critically questioning outside actors sparked increased demands by marginalised actors for their rights. These demands in some cases sparked tension or conflict, which was then addressed through negotiation of rights and benefits.

One important practice that supported distributional equity was use of ‘nested decision making’, especially the use of *tole* committees and action groups as key actors in CFUG governance. These mechanisms for bottom-up decision making, combined with active facilitation to enable inclusive and reflective processes, allowed all CFUG members significantly more effective engagement and increases in input to distribution decisions. In other words, nested decision making ‘opened the door’ to more effective agency for previously marginalised members, including in terms of control over decisions regarding resources and benefits. The increased leadership of previously marginalised members—through new roles on *tole* committees and action groups and new executive committee positions—also supported distributional equity.

Another influence on distributional equity was the CFUGs' use of reflective processes, especially self-monitoring—including equity tracking—as the basis for CFUG decision making. The fact that the CFUGs' ongoing self-monitoring focussed on governance, including equity, meant that equity issues were made explicit and that they were 'put on the CFUG agenda' and kept there, because they were routinely revisited. The use of equity tracking as a part of this system meant that assessment of equity became more transparent and based on more concrete distribution and wellbeing information. These factors, in combination (in some cases) with other reflective tools such as 'perception analysis' (a Social Analysis System tool), contributed to shifts in perception and mutual understanding between actors, in attitudes towards equity, and ultimately towards practices relating to distribution of CFUG benefits.

These shifts in perception, attitudes and practice were also supported by the engagement of external actors with the CFUGs. These actors, including meso change agents, researchers and other equity-sensitive meso actors critically questioned existing CFUG practices, encouraged critical reflection and deliberation, and offered ideas for innovation, and, in doing so, contributed to the social pressure on leaders for governance reform.

While the progress towards equity in many sites was notable, the remaining dissatisfaction in some sites and on some issues does raise the question of why the needs of the poor were not yet effectively met. On a more fundamental level, this underscores the sensitivity of, and long timescale required to improve, distributional equity, especially in relation to higher-value forest products. Even within the relatively small setting of a single community forest user group, distributional equity remains a complex and dynamic issue to be negotiated on an ongoing basis, rather than a point to be permanently or rapidly resolved.



## *Chapter 7*

### **Conclusion**





Community forestry in Nepal and community-based natural resource management worldwide have made progress in many ways in the past decades—but they are now at a juncture in their development that requires tackling two pressing challenges. Specifically, if they are to contribute meaningfully to rural development, they need to address the challenges of equity and livelihoods benefits.

Among the influences underlying the existing inequities and the less than desired benefits in community forestry is the mismatch between the natural and human systems and the approaches used to steward them. Community forestry is complex and dynamic, not only in terms of natural systems, but also at the interface of the human and natural systems. And yet, while community forest management and governance have made progress in many areas, they still tend to be top-down and linear—and this hinders inclusion, flexibility and resilience in complex and dynamic environments.

Our research indicates that an adaptive collaborative approach can add value to community forestry—and more broadly, community-based natural resource management—by engendering adaptive and collaborative capacity in governance and management. We hypothesise that in doing so, the approach can contribute to increased equity and livelihood benefits. Human agency—embodied by active local facilitators, local leaders committed to transformation,



Member of Bamdibhir CFUG and surrounding landscape. Photo by C. Colfer

and critically reflective external actors to backstop and energise—is the main catalytic force in this transition. Sparked by this human agency and supported by inclusive and learning-oriented arrangements and processes, this enhanced adaptive and collaborative capacity strengthens ongoing local learning and knowledge generation about community forestry contexts, processes, practices and outcomes.

More proactive and effective adjustments in processes and decisions are the result of this enhanced learning, which make the governance and management system more responsive, successful and resilient. In concrete terms, we observed this to translate into the generation of more livelihood options and increased resources for all families, including the poor. The transition to an adaptive collaborative approach triggered shifts towards a multiuse orientation (including income), increased action plans, more efforts to collaborate with outside actors to implement plans, and ‘pro-marginalised user’ changes in access rules and loan distribution norms. These shifts resulted in most CFUGs having more livelihood options available to their members—particularly poor ones. Especially for the poor, who are more vulnerable to ‘stresses’ such as natural disaster, illness, conflict and even policy change, having additional options available for earning income creates much-needed security and resilience.





# *Annex I*

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## B. Additional Useful Resources

### ***Lessons from CIFOR and partner research on an adaptive collaborative approach***

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Wollenberg, E., Edmunds, D., Buck, L., Fox, J. and Brodt, S. (eds.) 2001 *Social learning in community forests*. CIFOR, Bogor, Indonesia, p. 1–20

***Journals on community forestry in Nepal, including learning and collaboration-based approaches:***

- *Journal of Forests and Livelihoods* (English)
- *Hamro Ban Sampada* (Nepali)

***Websites of the research partners:***

- Center for International Forestry Research: <http://www.cifor.cgiar.org>
- ForestAction: <http://www.forestaction.org>
- NewERA: <http://www.newera.com.np>



## *Annex II*

**Overview of Research Activities  
at the CFUG and Meso Levels**





## Phase II Research Activities<sup>4</sup>

### Project start up and groundwork (February 2004 to June 2004)

- Creation of research teams:
  - Initiative 1.1 (five CFUG and two meso sites—team from NewERA)
  - Initiative 1.2 (six CFUG and five meso sites—team from ForestAction)
- Developing terms of reference and signing of contracts
- Developing shared understanding, visions and plans for the project through a joint team workshop
- Further development of the research's conceptual framework, including draft site selection criteria
- Identifying and connecting with key stakeholders, including other IDRC projects in Nepal
- Development of analytical frameworks for background studies and methods; researcher training as necessary
- Development of analytical framework for interim assessments and ongoing field tracking and reporting.

### Site selection (March 2004 to July 2004)<sup>5</sup>

- Teams jointly developed draft site selection criteria for meso and CFUGs
- Preliminary scoping visits to the field, and discussions and consultation meetings with CFUG, meso and national actors; finalisation of site selection criteria and 'short list' of potential sites
- Initiative 1.1 (NewERA team) field visits and final site selection:
  - Preliminary visits to the four pre selected CFUGs (Manakamana and Andheribhajana CFUGs in Sankhuwasabha District and Bamdibir and Deurali Bagedanda CFUGs in Kaski District)
  - Selection of one new CFUG for PAR activities (Pathivara CFUG)
  - Selection of six new CFUGs from Sankhuwasabha and Kaski districts for comparative case studies: Dophare, Andherikhola and Sunpadheli CFUGs in Kaski District, and Makuwa, Chilaune Khark Simle Bhadaure and Deurali Titre in SSB District

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<sup>4</sup> We highlight only Phase II activities here for reasons of space; Phase I followed the same flow of activities, except that the researchers acted as the facilitators in that phase.

<sup>5</sup> Overlapping dates in this summary indicate the overlapping/concurrent nature of the activities. Site selection took this period of time for several reasons: the collaborative nature of the research required numerous consultation meetings in all districts, secondary data collection and field visits to candidate sites, delays in field travel due to security.

- o Selection of one new meso PAR site (Tinjure Hattisar) and pre selection of Hansapur VDC-level CFUG Network (i.e., past research phase site)
- Initiative 1.2 (ForestAction team) field visits and final site selection:
  - o Selection of six CFUG sites: Khaniyubas Salleri CFUG and Hadikharka CFUG in Dhankuta District, Chautari CFUG in Morang District, Patle CFUG in Lalitpur District, Kajipauwa CFUG in Palpa District, and Chautari CFUG in Nawalparasi District
  - o Selection of five meso areas (districts) for PAR: Morang, Dhankuta, Lalitpur, Nawalparasi and Palpa.

### Background studies (July 2004 to December 2004)

- Selected and trained local field researchers
- Carried out background studies in all selected PAR sites (CFUG and meso levels).

### Participatory action research (January 2005 to September 2006)<sup>6</sup>

- Selection of change agents:
  - o Organised stakeholders' meeting in each district to discuss change agents' roles and criteria for their selection
  - o CFUGs and meso actors selected change agents (facilitators) from their respective levels from a combination of government, nongovernmental and network organisations and CFUGs:
    - i. Initiative 1.1: Total of 22 change agents originally selected (from meso level: 6 Kaski and 7 SSB District; from CFUG: 4 Kaski and 5 SSB)
    - ii. Initiative 1.2: Total of 36 change agents originally selected (13 from meso level and 23 from CFUG level)
- Training change agents: A total of 58 participants from seven districts were active in the two original change agent trainings, which took place in Dhankuta in SSB District and in Pokhara in Kaski District in January and February 2005; each training programme was approximately five days long and covered adaptive collaborative approach concepts and facilitation strategies and skills, as well as the change agents' planning of facilitation strategies for their own districts

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, the adaptive collaborative approach and facilitation by change agents continued after this date independent of the research project because, and to the extent that, it was institutionalised by the groups and actors involved. We use September 2006 as the end of PAR because this is when the data gathering for the final assessments began.

- Engagement of change agents: The trained individuals engage in teams in each PAR site as ‘change agents’ by supporting, facilitating and/or catalysing an adaptive collaborative approach in selected CFUGs and meso level networks or institutions in their respective areas
- Selection and training of additional and replacement change agents as needed
- Ongoing support and additional capacity building for change agents, including:
  - Individual and collective reflection of the change agents and researchers for learning and improvement of the adaptive collaborative approach-based CFUG and meso processes
  - Occasional facilitation feedback, backstopping, ‘troubleshooting’, and process support by researchers in the sites
  - Several change agent ‘refresher trainings’, study tours and workshops.

### Ongoing data gathering and interim and final assessments (from March 2005; final assessment reporting ended in May 2007)

- Ongoing during PAR:
  - CFUG members, change agents, field researchers, and initiative team researchers observed and reflected on the site learning and changes
  - Field researchers documented processes and other changes in their field diaries
- Interim assessments:
  - Researchers on both teams analysed data as per agreed framework for all CFUG and meso sites in September 2005
  - Additional interim assessment by Initiative 1.1 in December 2005 and by Initiative 1.2 in June 2006
- Final assessments (October 2006 to May 2007, including all field time, analysis, writing, feedback and adjustments) included the following:
  - Temporal comparisons within each site
  - Cross-site comparisons to create comprehensive case studies
  - Cross-initiative, thematic multisite comparisons.

### Sharing, dissemination and wrap up (February–May 2007)

Ongoing formal and informal sharing of project experiences and lessons with local, meso and national actors through:

- Field-level wrap up and looking ahead:
  - Final joint reflections by the CFUG and meso-level institution members, including district workshops with representatives from all participating CFUGs and meso institutions, as the change agents and researchers

- o Workshops included discussions of lessons about the adaptive collaborative approach, reflections on the research project, and final discussions about the CFUG and meso site plans in the post-project period.
- Sharing between CFUG and meso actors involved in the PAR and the National Policy Learning Group
- Sharing lessons by Initiative 1.1 and 1.2 researchers with the National Policy Learning Group
- Sharing experiences and lessons by Initiative 1.1 and 1.2 researchers with other Nepali actors, including the Institute of Forestry, Kathmandu Forestry College, ICIMOD, and staff of the Leasehold Forestry Programme
- Submissions and presentations to national and international workshops and conferences, including the hosting of a national-level adaptive collaborative management training workshop.



## *Annex III*

**Example CFUG Case Study:  
Manakamana Community  
Forest User Group**



## Background

Key features of this site, as of the background studies in 2000, are shown in Annex Table 1.

**Annex Table 1.** Manakamana CFUG

Location	Khandbari Municipality, Ward no. 12 in Sankhuwasabha District
Number of member households	158
Ethnicity of members	Tamang (23.4%); Newar (18.4%); Majhi (17%); Chhetri (12.7%); Brahmin (10.8%); Rai (7%); Magar (3.8%); Kumal (3.8%); Gurung (1.3%); Limbu (0.6%); Sanyasi (0.6%); Damai (0.6%)
Distribution of households by wealth group (according to CFUG wealth ranking)	Of the total households: rich (23%), medium (41%) and poor (36%)
Forest area	132 hectares
Key tree species	Sal ( <i>Shorea robusta</i> ) Chilaune ( <i>Schima wallichii</i> ) (Forests in average condition relative to other community forests in district)
Market access	Close to the market center, Khandabari Bazaar, which is linked to Tumlingtar Airport by an unpaved road

## Major CFUG issues and challenges in the background study period (2000)

During the background studies, CFUG members and leaders, and researchers identified several key challenges or weaknesses:

- The poor felt their interests were not taken into account in CFUG decision making.
- The CFUG committee was comprised largely of the local elite, including only one woman in the executive committee.
- In the absence of a regular patrolling and monitoring system, forestland encroachment was high and boundary conflicts were common.
- The documentation and record-keeping systems were poor, and there were indications of misuse of funds by the chairperson.
- The executive and *tole* committee meetings were irregular, and communication between these committees and general users (and each other) was weak.
- There was a perception that the benefits from community forestry, including training and exposure visits, were going largely to the executive committee members and more powerful members of the community.

## Transition to an adaptive collaborative approach

Manakamana CFUG, with the support of the research team, started the shift towards an adaptive collaborative approach in its governance and management system in late 2000. This transition was facilitated initially by researchers, and then efforts were made to shift this responsibility to locally selected facilitators during the course of the first phase research. The second phase participatory action research began approximately two years after the first phase ended. From the outset, this second phase differed from the first in that it had local and meso actors working together in the lead facilitation roles. To build facilitation and leadership skills, the local and meso facilitators engaged in various adaptive collaborative approach capacity-building initiatives and were backstopped by the research team and other actors in a number of ways, including joint reflection and idea sharing.

Following considerable formal and informal discussion among researchers, CFUG members and committee members, the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach was initiated in the first phase through a self-monitoring workshop (which included experiential games about learning and collaboration, as pictured in the cover photograph of this Annex). After the self-monitoring workshop, participants shared their workshop learning with the CFUG committees and *tole* (i.e., hamlet) groups. The workshop and follow-up discussions—with encouragement and facilitative support from the researchers—motivated CFUG members to move their planning towards more of an adaptive collaborative approach and sparked several interrelated initiatives and changes in the CFUG and its *toles*. The CFUG incorporated these into its Operational Plan. For example, it began to use an action and reflection cycle in management, regularly revising and updating its annual plans based on its self-monitoring planning system. The CFUG formed action groups to lead its activities, including a forest encroachment monitoring committee.

During the gap period between research project phases (2002–2004), the CFUG lost some momentum. This appeared to have been linked to the absence of ongoing facilitation: the CFUG-based facilitators from the first phase moved on to district-level network positions and did not establish replacements, which is indicative of a lack of internalisation of the facilitation role by the CFUG. The CFUG's overall loss of momentum was also related to the group's failure to garner repayment of earlier loans from CFUG members, resulting in discouragement and shortage of funds.

The main focus of the transition in the second phase of the project was the 'routinisation' of (local- and meso-actor facilitated) adaptive collaborative-based planning and also the incorporation of a greater use of the approach in



activity-level planning. In January 2005, after their selection by the CFUG and adaptive collaborative training, the local and meso change agents reactivated the adaptive collaborative planning process at the *tole* level, especially the self-monitoring. Furthermore, they facilitated the formation of an action group to address the key challenge identified by the CFUG: the unpaid loans. Thus, the loan monitoring and repayment committee organised loan repayments, including opening a dialogue with borrowers; from the repaid loans, the CFUG invested in the poorest households' income-generation activities.

The main challenges in the transition to the adaptive collaborative approach included: (i) initial resistance by the executive committee; and (ii) the lack of facilitation in the period between research phases. The executive committee was initially reluctant to try the approach, because it had previously tried a monitoring activity at the *tole* level that had not been very helpful. This reluctance was addressed through ongoing informal discussions and formal meetings between the research team and local leaders and members, especially to establish the difference between what had previously been done (non-learning based, not linked to the planning process) and what was being proposed (learning-based, inclusive, integrated into the planning system). These discussions, in combination with an effective self-monitoring workshop, helped overcome misconceptions and reluctance regarding monitoring. The lack of an ongoing presence of trained and committed facilitators was addressed by the CFUG selecting new change agents from the CFUG and surrounding area ('meso actors'), who were connected to each other and, with facilitators from other communities, were trained and provided with some backstopping by the research team.

## **Comparison of governance before and with an adaptive collaborative approach**

### ***Before an adaptive collaborative approach***

The main institutions for CFUG annual planning and decision making were the general assembly and the executive committee. Officially, there were *tole* committees, but they were not considered to be decision-making bodies. Many general assembly meetings were postponed due to lack of a quorum. There was little representation of marginalised people in the committee.

The executive committee decided on plans for each year, but there was no clear system for prioritising issues, or for formulating action plans. Decisions were made largely by committee discussion, but these discussions tended to be dominated by a few individuals (committee leaders). The CFUG had tried a monitoring exercise in the past, but it had been fairly ineffective and without an effective

link to planning. The information flow in the CFUG was weak and unsystematic. For example, there was no mechanism for giving input to the assembly only, rare discussions among users, and very little interaction between the users and committee members. CFUG conflicts were managed through the committee. If needed, the CFUG called on the assistance of the district forest office, a network (such as FECOFUN), or occasionally, neighbouring CFUG representatives. Forest products distribution was based on the decision of leaders of the committee. The committee made most of the decisions regarding access to community forestry opportunities.

### ***With an adaptive collaborative approach***

The CFUG's main arrangements—executive committee, general assembly, and *tole* committee—continued, but with the addition of action groups and a shift to *tole* committees becoming active decision-making bodies. The representation of women and the poor in decision making increased through their direct involvement in *toles* and action groups, as well as through their increased presence in executive and *tole* committees. For example, the CFUG began to include at least two women—or in some cases four—per *tole* committee.

The CFUG's shift towards learning-based and inclusive governance and management processes was evident in its starting to use biannual self-monitoring and reflection amongst *tole* users as the basis for CFUG decision making. *Tole*-level meetings and decision making thus became active and an integral part of overall CFUG decision making. As noted in the discussion of outcomes, this bottom-up process enabled collective action in the CFUG, such as the construction of a community building, and triggered changes in CFUG rules, such as decreasing its forest product fees to poorest households and initiating low-interest loans to the poorest CFUG households for income-generation activities.

The CFUG's connectivity with external actors also increased. It developed a culture of inviting representatives of the district forest office, networks (such as FECOFUN), and other CFUGs to the general assembly and other initiatives, such as self-assessments and 'CFUG quiz contests'. The CFUG members and outside actors who engaged as facilitators or guests exchanged skills, knowledge and ideas about community forestry and institutional development.

### **Outcomes of the transition to the approach**

When asked about the most important outcome of the transition to an adaptive collaborative approach, most CFUG members indicated the shift towards equity

in process and practice. Specifically, they expressed that they valued the active participation of all members and felt that greater shared learning—through the *tole*-based reflection and decision-making system—had enabled women and the poor to increase their access to CFUG-related benefits, especially lower forest product fees and low-interest loans.

Here we provide an overview of main outcomes by types of capital.

*Institutional capital:*

- The CFUG developed a comprehensive and up-to-date Operational Plan, which has been approved by the district forest office.
- The CFUG has increased its number of action plans (from 6 in 2000 to 8 in 2006) and has made them more concrete and pro-livelihoods development. Six of the eight action plans created in the final year of the project were completed and two are ongoing.
- The CFUG strengthened its decision making, including shared learning and the quality of participation of women and the poor.
- The executive committee became more transparent and accountable.

*Social capital:*

- The CFUG strengthened its conflict management by enabling users to resolve most conflicts themselves through the use of action groups. These include, for example, the forestland encroachment monitoring committee, the forest product distribution committee, and the loan investment committee.
- The CFUG developed its relations with other actors. For example, one action group connected the CFUG with the municipality, which provided a tractor for the CFUG building construction, and the District Forest Coordination Committee visited the CFUG to learn about adaptive collaborative approach-based planning processes.
- Tensions in the CFUG decreased as marginalised members increased their access to CFUG opportunities, such as loans, training and employment.

*Human capital:*

- Female and poor CFUG members increased their engagement in capacity-building opportunities, including for leadership. For instance, in 2000, only male members participated in leadership-related trainings; in 2006, almost half of the participants (6 of 13) were women.
- Marginalised people and women enhanced their role and skills in leadership, facilitation, participation and conflict management.
- The information-sharing system was strengthened through *tole*-level meetings and regular exchanges between *tole* representatives, change agents and executive committee members.

- CFUG members, including marginalised ones, increased their knowledge of self-monitoring, technical forest management, record keeping, and forest policies.
- CFUG members' attitudes began to shift positively regarding gender, poverty, rights, power and learning.

*Financial capital:*

- The CFUG increased from zero income-generation activities in 2000 to six in 2006.
- The CFUG increased from zero pro-poor or pro-women income-generation initiatives to one pro-woman and three pro-poor initiatives in 2006 (goat raising, poultry farming and a mobile shop).
- The overall CFUG fund increased by almost 50 percent from the level noted during the background study period.
- Improvements in documentation and record keeping have strengthened the financial management system.
- Financial management, including decision making about allocation of CFUG funds to users, is more transparent.

*Natural capital:*

- Forestland encroachment, illegal extraction, and incidence of fire and landslides have all been reduced, according to the CFUG's own observation.
- The active volunteer patrolling system (one household after another takes a turn) has helped to maintain forest health.
- The CFUG has been following the sustainable forest product harvesting practices outlined in its Operational Plan.
- The CFUG has established a demonstration plot.



*I find the adaptive collaborative approach—and the practical synthesis of research lessons in this book—very exciting, useful and timely.*

**Dr Keshav Raj Kanel**

Acting Secretary, Government of Nepal and  
Former Director General, Department of Forests and Soil Conservation, Nepal



In recent years, awareness has grown in Nepal and globally regarding two of community forestry's most critical challenges: equity and livelihoods. Yet even as understanding of these challenges has improved, actors from the local to the national levels in Nepal continue to be confronted with the dilemma of how to address these challenges in such a diverse, complex and dynamic context.

This synthesis explores an adaptive collaborative approach to governance and management as one avenue to meet these challenges. This approach integrates inclusive decision making, networking, social learning, and pro active adjustments of practice and policies based on learning. The synthesis' lessons are drawn from a six-year partnership-based research initiative in Nepal—spearheaded by the Center for International Forestry Research—which spanned the local, district and national levels. Key points of learning discussed in this book include factors, processes and arrangements that support—or limit—adaptive and collaborative capacities, such as active facilitation, 'nested' decision making, and learning-based monitoring. The book also explores both the conceptual underpinnings of the approach as well as its effects in research sites, including in terms of benefits for the poor, women and other traditionally marginalised people.

This book is intended as a resource for policy makers and civil society practitioners alike, as well as researchers and others interested in pro-equity and livelihood innovations in community forestry. Through its clear conceptual and research lesson focus, this synthesis complements and is a sister publication to the hands-on guidebook entitled *Facilitating Forests of Learning*.

