

Governance and Community Forestry in Bhutan

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Rationale and Goal

Governance issues have to be addressed to ensure that Community Forestry (CF) in Bhutan can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities. The Participatory Forest Management Project (PFMP) currently works on indicators for good governance in CF and looks at the linkages between CF and local governance with the goal to develop a "governance toolbox" for CF.

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews with members of Community Forestry Management Groups (CFMGs), foresters and other stakeholders;
- Wealth-ranking for the selection of interview partners;
- Synthesis to develop practical indicators of good governance in CF;
- Discussion of the draft indicators with representatives of CFMGs, local governments, and of the Department of Forests.

Governance Toolbox for CF

The "governance toolbox" for CF will include "best practice guidelines" for improved internal governance of CFMGs and external links to local governance. These will *ia* provide guidance to CFMGs and the facilitating extension staff in the formulation of group by-laws.



Equity & Inclusiveness

- No exclusion of poor households
- Lower transaction costs for poor households
- Pro-poor provisions in the by-laws
- Equitable benefit sharing

Efficiency & Effectiveness

- Easier and secure access to forest products
- Use of CF funds and its impact
- Achievement of goals set in the plan

Participation

- Bottom-up request for CF establishment
- Active participation of all members in meetings
- Discussion of controversial issues
- Seeking for consensus
- Quorum for CFMG meetings

- Increased "ownership" over forest resources
- Informed and motivated CFMG members
- Increased capacities for community-based work
- Poverty alleviation
- Improved leadership skills
- CFMGs become functioning local institutions

Rule of Law

- By-laws effectively implemented
- Compliance with government rules and regulations

Transparency

- Regular meetings held
- Committee informs members about decisions and balance of CF funds
- Clearly defined CF boundaries and rights over forest products

Accountability

- Record and book keeping
- Committee reports to members on activities and finances
- Members report on their activities

Link to Local Governance

- Increased sense of responsibility and interest for community development
- CFMGs serve as platform for building social cohesion
- CFMG members have a good understanding of local democratic processes and participate actively in local decision-making
- Executive committee serves as a platform to develop leadership skills
- Local government participates in CFMG meetings
- Discussion of CF-related topics in block and district assemblies

Observations and Challenges

- Equality *vs* equity: most CFMGs are concerned about equal benefit sharing;
- Avoid free-riding whilst keeping the CFMGs open for new households;
- Tendency of CFMGs to avoid conflicts instead of managing them;
- Ensure gender-balanced composition of the executive committee. Encourage women to play an active role in CF and decision making;
- Need for sensitisation of extension staff to address soft issues;
- Inclusion of good governance principles in government rules and regulations.

