

Forest resource utilization and management under Community Forestry in Eastern Bhutan: a case study in Khaling Gewog, Trashigang

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1. Introduction and objective

In Bhutan, all the forest became under Government Reserve Forest (GRF) after 1969. However, realizing the importance of involving community into management of forests, the government designed the first Community Forest (CF) in 1997. CF is a part of GRF designed to be managed by local communities. Till date over 500 CFs were established in Bhutan. Community Forestry in Bhutan is a newly introduced forest management system. Thus, actual impact of CF on rural livelihood in local level is not yet understood.

This research attempts to understand the role of Community Forestry in two villages in Khaling *Gewog* (block) in Eastern Bhutan. The two research sites, a remote village called Lemi village and another one just along the national highway called Mongnangkholo village, are selected. Field survey in the two villages was conducted in order to understand CF's impact on subsistence forest resource use and, income generation and management of forest and forest resources.

2. Rural livelihood and forest resource use in the two villages

Household interviews were conducted in order to understand the current rural life in the two CF sites. The research found out that in both villages 66% of the household income derives from selling potatoes and over 80% of the villagers have cattle. Forest resources are not benefitting individual household income, but rather important from subsistence use in villager's daily life. It was found out that timber and firewood are not just used in human settlement but are important for cattle. In winter, oak fallen leaves and ferns are collected for cattle bedding and then converted into manure. In such ways, forest resources are closely related with livestock and agriculture.

3. CF and forest resource use

Extracted locations of forest resources were asked and analyzed. For wood forest products, such as timber, poles and wet firewood, a majority of villagers collected them from CF. However, for non-wood forest products (NWFPs), people obtain resources from various locations including a leaf litter forest called '*sokshing*' (currently categorized under GRF) and other parts of GRF. *Sokshing* is a forest where local people had traditional rights, usually consisted of *Quercus* spp. in Eastern Bhutan. It is currently a part of GRF, but people still perceives *sokshing* as 'their' forest. For fallen leaves collection, around 80% of people in Lemi village access to *sokshing*.

4. CF and income generation

Income generated from forest resources in CF is deposited into CF fund so no individual earns income from selling forest resources. In Lemi village, interaction with an outsider who has well knowledge about plants was the reason for success of selling NWFPs.

5. General discussion

It was found that CF has significant role on wood forest product uses in terms of improved accessibility. On the other hand, for NWFPs, CF is not always the optimal place to access for collection. It was also confirmed that the role of *sokshing* is still currently important for villagers to access to forest resources.