

AGRARIAN STRUCTURES AND DISTRIBUTIVE OUTCOMES

A Study of Community Forestry in Nepal

A thesis submitted by

Bimala Rai Paudyal

(Nepal)

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Thesis Committee

Promotor:

Professor Ben White
Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands

Co-promotor:

Dr David Dunham
Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands

Examiners:

Professor Carla Risseuw
Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

Dr Marlène Buchy
Political Ecologist, Langport, England

Dr Bharat Kumar Pokharel
Swiss Foundation for Development and International Cooperation,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Dr John Cameron
Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands

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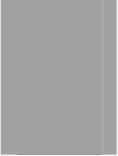
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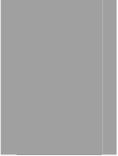
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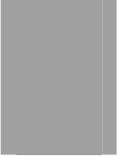
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Glossary

<i>Aama Samuha</i>	Mother's group formed for sectoral development purposes
<i>Ailani</i>	Common property land forcibly occupied by landless migrants for shelter and for cultivation
<i>Agnirekha</i>	Fire line, involves digging around the forest
<i>Ban</i>	Forest, jungle
<i>Bari</i>	Non-irrigated terraced land
<i>Bhari</i>	A local measurement of head load; one <i>bhari</i> weighs approximately 30 kg for fodder and 40 kg for fuel wood
<i>Bigha</i>	Unit of land measurement used in the Terai. One <i>bigha</i> is equivalent to 0.67 hectares of land
<i>Birta</i>	A land grant awarded by the King or ruler to a certain deserving group of people
<i>Bista</i>	Patron client relationships between artisans and the higher caste groups. The artisans serve the higher caste and refer to them <i>Bistas</i>
<i>Bote Majhi</i>	An indigenous ethnic group (fisher folk) in the Terai
<i>Brahmin</i>	Priests and high caste group in the Hindu caste hierarchy
<i>Cbhetri</i>	A warrior high caste group in Hindu caste hierarchy
<i>Dalit</i>	Political connotation used to denote the lowest strata of the Hindu caste hierarchy and so-called untouchables
<i>Damai</i>	Tailors, so-called untouchables
<i>Dashain</i>	The great Hindu festival
<i>Gaun</i>	Village, settlement cluster
<i>Gitti Kutne</i>	Stone crushers
<i>Ghar</i>	Home
<i>Haat bazar</i>	A local weekly/fortnightly market
<i>Inar</i>	A well (water well)

<i>Jaban</i>	Husband or wife; family members
<i>Janajati</i>	Indigenous ethnic groups
<i>Jyotish Mantra</i>	Horoscope verses
<i>Kami</i>	Blacksmiths, so called untouchables
<i>Khar</i>	Thatching material
<i>Khet</i>	Terraced irrigated land
<i>Kulo</i>	A small irrigation channel
<i>Muluki Ain</i>	Civil Code of Nepal
<i>Newar</i>	An indigenous ethnic group about half of whom are Buddhists and half Hindus. They are popularly known as business community
<i>Niguro</i>	Fern shoot used as vegetables
<i>Numbari</i>	Registered land
<i>Panchayat</i>	Local administrative and political unit during Panchayat regime, similar to a Village Development Committee today
<i>Perma</i>	A mutual labour exchange in the community
<i>Pewa</i>	Private property of a woman/girl
<i>Rana</i>	An influential Chhetri family who ruled Nepal for 104 years (1846–1951). Shah kings were celebrities during this period
<i>Rojiroti</i>	Work for bread and butter
<i>Ropani</i>	A unit of land measurement used in the hills, one <i>ropani</i> is equivalent to 0.051 hectares
<i>Sal</i>	<i>Shorea robusta</i> , a timber species common in lower belt of Nepal
<i>Samiti</i>	Executive committee of a community based organisation. Executive committee of Forest User Group is commonly known as <i>Samiti</i>
<i>Sarki</i>	Cobblers, so-called untouchables
<i>Sukumbasi</i>	Squatters, illegal immigrants
<i>Tamang</i>	An indigenous ethnic group originated from the hills
<i>Terai</i>	Lower plain belt of Nepal
<i>Tharu</i>	An indigenous ethnic group originated from the Terai
<i>Thekka</i>	A form of land lease
<i>Tole</i>	A Nepali term to define a settlement cluster or hamlet
<i>Ward</i>	Smallest administrative unit. Nine wards make up a Village Development Committee (VDC)



Acronyms

ADB	Agricultural Development Bank
BISEP-ST	Bio-diversity Sector Programme for Siwalik and Terai
CA	Constituent Assembly
CBO	Community Based Organization
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CF	Community Forest/ Community Forestry
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Accord
CPR	Common Property Resource
CPRM	Common Property Resource Management
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DFO	District Forest Office/ District Forest Officer
DFSP	District Forest Strategic Plan
DOF	Department of Forests
DSCO	Department of Soil Conservation
EC	Executive Committee
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal
FSCC	Forest Sector Co-ordination Committee
FUG	Forest User Group
GA	General Assembly
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEWG	Gender and Equity Working Group
GON	Government of Nepal
HMG/N	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
LFP	Livelihoods and Forestry Programme
LSGA	Local Self-Government Act
MFSC	Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation
NACFP	Nepal Australia Community Forestry Project
NACRMLP	Nepal Australia Community Resource Management and Livelihood Project
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPC	National Planning Commission

NWC	National Women's Commission
ODG	Overseas Development Group, UK
OP	Operational Plan
P&E	Poor and Excluded
PPSI	Pro-Poor and Social Inclusion
RP	Range Post
SFDP	Small Farmer Development Programme
SPA	Seven Party Alliance
VDC	Village Development Committee
WC	Ward Committee



Abstract

Explanations of the limited achievements of common property resource management (CPRM) organizations in securing equitable distributive outcomes at local levels are insufficient because they have insufficient understanding of the influence of the community structures in which they operate. Taking the example of community forestry strategy in Nepal, and comparing the outcomes of forest user groups in the distinctly varied locations of hills and plains (Terai), this study provides a detailed empirical exploration of local-level structures, relationships and processes that result in inequitable distributive outcomes.

The study uses comparative case study methods. It proposes a shift in emphasis away from the ‘unitary’ model of community and exclusive focus on access to forest products as the major incentive for people to become involved in forest management. Instead, it suggests a focus on the complexities and variations in agrarian communities in terms of internal differentiation, and of forest and non-forest (i.e., economic and political) incentives derived from user groups in order to adequately explain the distributive outcomes of these organizations.

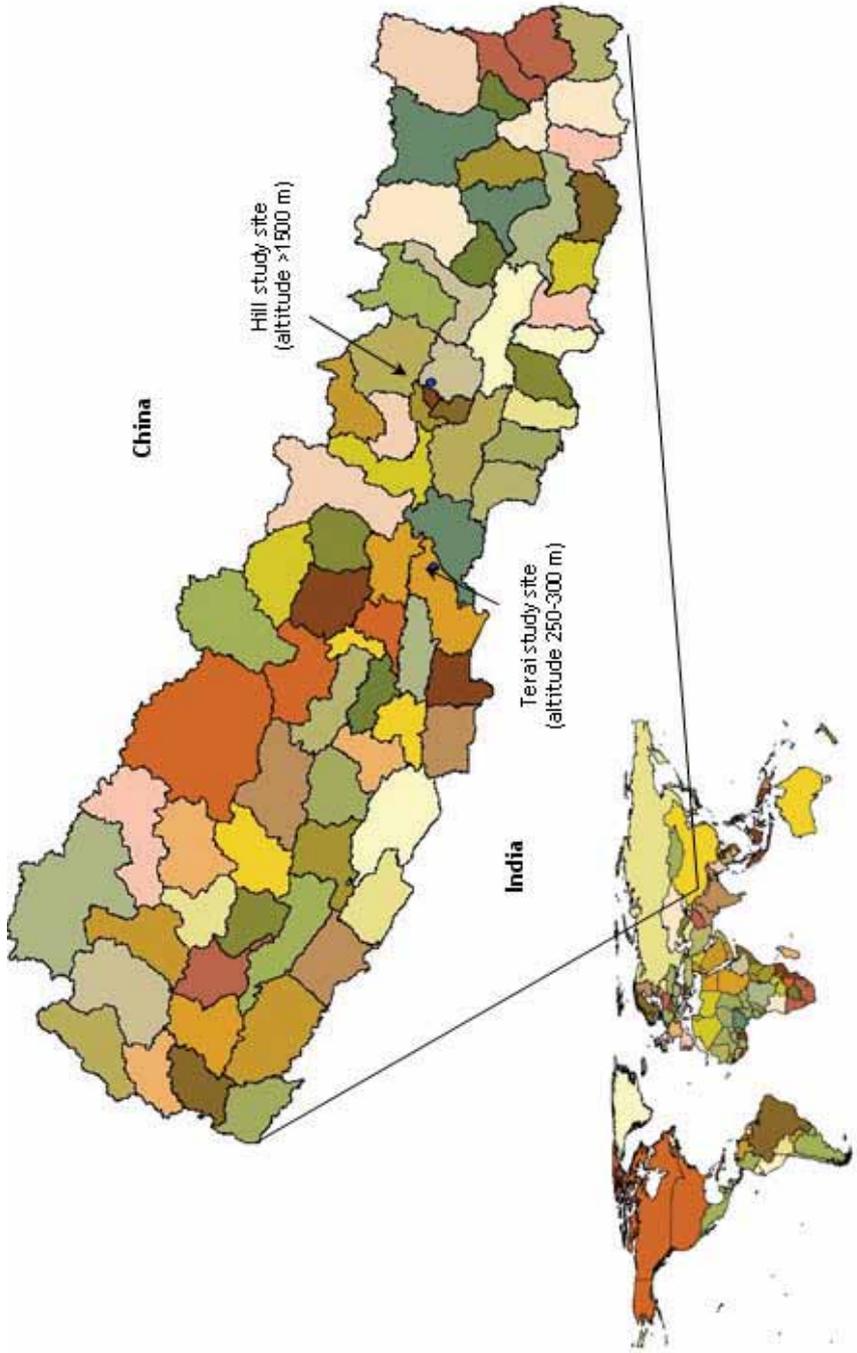
The study demonstrates that the communities in which user groups function are diverse and internally differentiated. It is argued that economic and political structures and social institutions set the context for individual and group behaviour. How economic and social groups act and behave is shaped in large part by local-level structures and institutions that are characterized by exploitation, exclusion and unequal access to resources, opportunities and voices. The complexities of formal rules and the mechanisms of user groups are guided by informal rules, mechanisms and processes embedded in the way people relate to each other in differentiated communities.

Highlighting the pivotal contrasts between the hill and Terai communities, this study demonstrates that powerful underlying structures operate in agrarian communities to benefit certain classes and groups. At the household level, differential access to benefits from community forestry is greater in communities with a high degree of economic and social differentiation.

The influence of gender relations is more visible in a community with less economic differentiation. Macro-level structures and processes by which policies are developed and implemented also reflect the same local-level realities of exclusion, exploitation and unequal power relations that favour some class, caste and/or gender. The study thus raises questions about the usefulness of highlighting the role of 'communities' for equitable distributive outcomes when wider macroeconomic and political factors do not encourage a transformation of unequal power relations in the communities.

Keywords: common property resources (CPR), community forestry (CF), equity and access (EA), participatory exclusion (PE), forest resource use, distributive outcomes, Nepal

Location of study area in physiographic zones of Nepal



1

Agrarian Communities, Forests and Common Property Institutions: Theoretical and Methodological Issues

1.1 Introduction

This study attempts to understand the distributive outcomes of community forestry strategies and to explain the mechanisms that produce differential outcomes for different economic and social groups. Based on a detailed comparison of two villages in Nepal, it demonstrates how the mutually reinforcing processes of economic relations and power structures in communities shape the functioning of Common Property Resource Management (CPRM) organizations and their outcomes. The objective is to understand local-level structures, relationships and processes that result in different distributive outcomes from the same (general) strategy of forest management.

The decentralization of forest management has emerged as an important strategy for environmental management in the past few decades. There is also a growing consensus that the objectives of poverty reduction and natural resource conservation need to be reconciled if the poor are not to bear the burden of environmental management. In line with this is a popular trend in developing countries towards the increasing decentralization of forest management from state to local CPRM organizations.¹ It is assumed that local organizations increase democratization by allowing local communities to make decisions on the control and use of forests, leading to the sustainable and effective management of resources. This arrangement, it is also argued, will provide local communities with new revenues, and contribute to a more equitable distribution and to poverty reduction in the long run by increasing access to forest products by the poor and the disadvantaged. However, the common assumption that there are inherent complementarities between these objectives appears to be weak on empirical scrutiny (Graner 1997, Larson and Ribot 2004, Pacheco 2004, Blaikie 2006).

Despite the abundance of theoretical and analytical literature on the effectiveness of CPRM in Nepal, Asia and elsewhere (Ostrom et al. 2002;

Agrawal and Chhatre 2006), the crucial relation between the community structure and eventual outcomes remains virtually unexplored. The performance of CPRM organizations varies enormously, even among projects with the same institutional design. A number of key factors have been identified to explain the variability (Agrawal 2001, Ostrom 2005) but the focus has been on the institutional design and effectiveness of CPRM institutions for resource conservation. The role of the sociopolitical structures of communities in shaping performance has not been sufficiently explored; nor is there sufficient explanation of the differential social (distributive) outcomes despite their obvious importance, especially in poor countries. While some studies on political ecology (Khan 1998, Nygren 2000, Klooster 2000a and Blaikie 2006, for example) have focused attention on the diverse means by which power is exerted in the struggle for access to and control over forest resources among various actors, less attention has been paid to the micro socioeconomic and political conditions in which actual negotiation and resistance take place.

Distributive outcomes of forest organizations are shaped in important ways by the structure of the community, especially by the incentives provided by the organizations and the power of various economic and social groups to claim these incentives. As a result, outcomes that are seemingly participatory, equitable and efficient result in substantial class, caste and gender-related inequities and ineffectiveness. Highlighting pivotal contrasts between the community structures of hill and Terai (lower and plain belt of Nepal) locations, and distributive outcomes of forest organizations of similar institutional design, this study provides a detailed empirical exploration of local-level structures, relationships and processes, especially related to class, caste and gender that produce unequal and ineffective outcomes.

Organization of the study

The study comprises six chapters. This introductory chapter sets the context. Section 1.2 defines the research problems. Section 1.3 provides an overview of key terms, concepts and literature relevant for the study that form the basis for the analytical framework. The research design and methods employed to gather and analyse data are discussed in section 1.4. The last section (1.5) provides reflection on research engagements at various levels.

Chapter 2 outlines macro-level sociopolitical issues in Nepal that help to understand the context in which the current community forestry strategy and forest policies were formulated and modalities were developed. This chapter also examines the characteristics of forest-sector administration that

shape the policies and implementation modalities of the strategy. Chapter 3 takes us to the agrarian communities where Forest User Groups (FUGs) operate and policies are implemented in practice. It demonstrates the differences in agrarian structures and in characteristics of forest resources between the hill and Terai locations.

Chapters four and five provide a detailed account of the institutional attributes of forest-user groups, their formal and informal rules, regulations and mechanisms which shape their functioning and the outcomes achieved. They show that class, caste and gender relations in agrarian communities shape the functioning and outcomes of forest institutions in many important ways resulting in differential and inequitable distributive outcomes. They also demonstrate how differences in community structures produce different outcomes from the same strategies. The final chapter provides a summary of the findings and reflections on research questions, objectives and implications.

1.2 Problem Definition and Objectives of the Study

The community forestry programme operates in all 75 districts of Nepal and receives high priority from both the state and donors. From the start of the programme in 1990 to end of 2005, nearly 38% of all Nepalese households have been organized in over 14,500 the community-based forest organizations or FUGs. FUGs have managed and controlled about one million hectares of forest land and the trend is increasing (LFP 2006). The programme has two major objectives. The first is to address widespread forest loss by managing forests better, and the second is to reduce short-term poverty through active participation of the poor and equitable access to benefits (HMG/N 1988, MFSC 2002). Over time, it has become in many ways the prototype for other group-based development initiatives in other sectors, including irrigation management.

Central to the belief that community forestry increases democratization and equitable access to forest products for the poor are a number of assumptions: that the FUGs are all inclusive; that the executive body will represent all the various interests groups in the community; that all users are equally affected by the rules and the regulations; and that all users will have an equal share in the benefits of the forest. An increasing number of empirical studies, however, clearly demonstrate that these assumptions are invalid: most user groups are exclusive in terms of participation and access to the incentives derived from community forests (Chakraborti 2001, Agarwal 2002, Rai Paudyal 2002, Richards et al. 2003), and the interests of disadvan-

taged social groups, especially the poor and women, have been consistently ignored (Hobley 1990, Graner 1997, Bhattarai and Ojha 2000, Malla 2001, Richards et al. 2003).

The differences between the expectation and the performance of the user groups reflect the contexts under which they operate. As Khan (1998: 97) argues,

Strategies for natural resource management cannot logically be considered except in relationship to their specific and social setting. They are a part of the complex system of relationships and institutions.

Probably for reasons of conceptual simplicity, the socioeconomic and political contexts of the agrarian communities in which these user groups operate have not been adequately considered and incorporated into the design and implementation of community forestry strategies. The major objective of this study is therefore to explain the influence of community structures in shaping the distributive outcomes of community forestry. The main research question is the following:

'To what extent and in what ways do community structures—particularly economic and political processes in communities and class, caste and gender relations—shape the outcomes of community forestry strategy, and how does the influence of these processes differ between locations?'

The question has two interrelated aspects: (1) the agrarian structure and the characteristics of class, caste and gender differentiation in the communities in which community forestry strategy is implemented; (2) the functioning of user groups and distributive outcomes at local levels.

1.3 Analytical Framework and Explanatory Concepts

Forest organizations operate and function in situations with a variety of biophysical, community and institutional attributes. To explain the influence of the agrarian structures on the functioning and outcomes of these organizations (in this case, FUGs), several central theoretical concepts and analytical tools have been used. The following section provides an overview of key terms and concepts relevant for the study and a brief discussion of the relevant literature. These concepts and tools together form a basis for an analytical framework (section 1.3.5) to explain the distributive outcomes of forest organizations.

1.3.1 Forest resource use

Spatial and temporal variation

The important role that forests play in rural livelihoods, especially for the survival of the poor, is well recognized.² Forest products often have multiple uses for multiple purposes. Characteristics of forest resources and the value associated with them are not only physical but also socially constructed and dynamic in nature. They differ among people, between places and over time, based on changing opportunities for economic and political exploitation of the products (Dietz 1996). Byron and Arnold (1999: 792) broadly categorized forest resource use based on alternative objectives—for subsistence (through the direct use of products for consumption), and for income.

Sunderlin et al. (2005: 1387) provide a typology of long-term changes in forest resource use along with the changing livelihood patterns from an earlier stage (hunting and gathering age) to a later stage (agriculture and forest frontier age). They assert that when populations in forested landscapes become more integrated into the market economy, forest resources that tended to have a high use value (direct use in the household) and low exchange value (income through sale) in the earlier stage typically shift to a low use value and high exchange value at the later stage. But there are also important exceptions to this overall pattern in recent times such as in remote locations in the hills of Nepal, where use values still predominate. Factors including the availability of market connection, seasonality of products, the seasonality of demand and the availability of labour determine the potential for the commercial use of forests (Agarwal 1992, 1999). Such physical, temporal and spatial variations in the use and value of forests in different contexts may explain multiple forms of interests in forest resources.

Multiple interests and interaction

From a neoclassical perspective, the use of a particular forest resource is about 'reconciling specific ends with scarce means' (Khan 1998: 17). Several political economists have questioned the applicability of the neoclassical perspective and emphasize the need to recognize the complexity of a dynamic population with heterogeneous interests and capabilities in a rural setting in order to understand the dynamics of forest resource use (see, for example, Blaikie 1988, Chambers et al. 1989, Khan 1998). As Nadarkarni et al. (1989: 19-20) argue,

in contemporary societies with the diverse interests among the individuals and actors competing to establish their own rights on forests, the problem and

processes of forest use and management become ‘no longer purely economic’ but tend to be determined through a struggle between and among the (differentiated) actors at various levels.

Interests in forest resource use operate mainly at three levels: local, intermediate and national or state (Khan 1998: 21). Local interests involve the livelihood demands and subsistence needs of local people. Commercial—intermediate—interests involve the use and exploitation of forests primarily motivated by the principle of the money economy and profitability. State or national interests tend to be for revenue generation, redistribution and as mediation between the local and external by applying its constitutional power. However, dominant and commercial interests might influence the performance of state agents in mediating the interests of locals (Chambers et al. 1989). This is especially true in contexts where decentralized rural development efforts are often hijacked by local elites, companies or government agencies for their own benefits (Wiggins et al. 2004, Veron et al. 2006); and the state lacks downward accountability (Sundar 2001, Nygren 2005, Ribot et al. 2006). More importantly, amongst local interests, there can be important imbalances of power, which can influence people’s dealings with others.

Even at the local level, individuals and groups might have multiple interests and occupy a plurality of roles that can influence their actions at the particular location, stage and time. They compete in a variety of methods, in formal and informal ways, to translate their interests into actions (Malla 1996, Upreti 2001). As a platform for negotiation between the interest groups, a relatively small group of people are selected as representatives for a negotiated settlement. Representation thus becomes a crucial issue. Who represents a given category and how representatives interact with their constituencies are important to understand who gains and who loses from the negotiation. It is most likely that representatives lose their effectiveness and become absorbed in the collective culture established under social pressure in the forum (Roling 2002). Even when the representatives represent their constituencies effectively, negotiations with different groups will not necessarily take place on an equal footing, especially when there are unequal power relations between them (Biesbrouck 2002). The winners of these competitive relationships are most likely to improve their living standard and position in society at the cost of their fellow beings. In additions Est and Persoon (2001) suggest considering ‘the future’ while investigating the current action of actors and outcomes. They assert that social actors not only learn from the past but are also future-oriented, though in a hidden manner. While the earlier perspective of multiple interest holders and differ-

ent ways and abilities of translating them into actions helps to understand the conflict evident in the user groups aspiring for greater access, the latter perspective of considering future-oriented hidden motives is particularly helpful in analysing hidden motives behind the actions taken by people and their representatives.

Class-gender specificity of forest resource use

Many policies that are designed specifically to protect forest resources are likely to impose additional costs on some economic and social groups. How heavy these costs are depend in part on the importance of the resources in question to the livelihoods of affected groups (Wiggins et al. 2004, Sunderlin et al. 2005). Based on the importance of the resource to livelihoods, forest users can be divided into two groups—forest dependents and forest users (Byron and Arnold 1999). Forest dependents are those for whom forests are an integral part of their livelihood without which they cannot survive—a symptom of their limited options and/or poverty. For forest users, on the other hand, forest products, though important, form a lesser part of household livelihood system.³ This class specificity of forest product use provides important insights into differential impact of change in access to common forests.

Over and above class specificity, forest resource use has specific gender dimensions. The gender division of labour within the household and in communities requires women in particular to rely on forest resources to perform gender specific tasks. This can result in a situation where loss of access to forest products means that women suffer more than men within the same economic group. Agarwal (1997a) relates the class–gender effect of changes in access to forest resources to six critical aspects: time, income, nutrition, health, social support networks and knowledge systems.

Many authors agree that there are differences between women's and men's environmental relations and that these differences should inform policy on environment management (Shiva 1988, Braidotti et al. 1994, Agarwal 1998, Agarwal 2000). However, there is disagreement on the nature of the relationship. The ecofeminism perspective views the women–nature link as a biological and ideological construct and argues that women have been biologically, culturally and ideologically constructed as being closer to nature and thus have especial affinity with natural resources (Margrit 1999). Feminist environmentalism, on the other hand, sees the importance of material and economic links in explaining women's interest in nature (Thomas-Slayer et al. 1996). Both these perspectives tend to treat 'women' as a single category which is problematic given the sociocultural and economic differ-

ences among women (Leach, Joekes et al. 1995, Agarwal 1998, Agarwal 2001). The feminist political ecology perspective interprets women and environmental relations in political and gendered terms. The category of women can also be differentiated in terms of their social and material position, and these diversities play an important role in determining their relations to the environment (Rocheleau 1995, Agarwal 1998). For feminist political ecologists, gender is a critical variable in shaping resource access and control, interacting with other variables such as class (Rocheleau et al. 1996).

To adequately explain the link between multiple and diverse interests for forest resource use and differential ability of individuals and groups to meet those interests, it is important to understand the dynamics of agrarian structures and power relations where the interests emerge and struggles for access take place. The concepts of agrarian structure, differentiation and power relations, which are discussed in the next sections, provide important theoretical insights.

1.3.2 Community attributes: agrarian structures and differentiation

Agrarian structure and class differentiation

Agrarian structure is a complex set of relations and arrangements that governs the relationships among people, resources and power in rural societies. It is comprised of various classes, roughly classified as privileged and non-privileged. The concept of class has been used here in a Marxian sense to imply objective economic conditions or unity of communal economic interests. For Marxists, 'the key to understanding agrarian structure in any period lies in the mode of production' (Appelbaum 1970: 83). Land is the most important means of production in the agrarian economy, complemented by other material elements. Control over land determines the share of 'wealth', opportunities and power.⁴ It also serves the sociopsychological purpose of providing incentives for and assurance of participation and investment in institutional arrangements or any other new schemes (Khan 1998). As Das (2001) asserts, class analysis of agrarian structure identifies classes, their relations, and the ways in which these relations block or further productive capacities of society.⁵

Agrarian differentiation reflects changes in the pattern and magnitudes of ownership of and control over means of production. White (1989: 25) defined it as 'a dynamic process involving the emergence or sharpening of differences within the rural population.' The process involves a cumulative and permanent (noncyclical) mechanism of change in which different

groups of rural society (and some outside it) gain access to the products of their own or others' labours based on their differential control over production resources (*ibid.*: 19).

Models of differentiation in both the Leninist (class-based) and Chayanovian (family development cycles) traditions place much emphasis on the size of landholding as a major determinant of agrarian differentiation.⁶ Analysis of land control is important in the examination of distributive outcomes of forest organizations as it determines the extent and nature of people's dependency on forests and their access to its products. However, though important, excessive focus on the size of landholding becomes narrow, especially where potentials for non-farm income also exist. As White (1989: 19) argues, the process of differentiation is not necessarily based on increasing inequalities in access to land. Agrarian surplus may also be derived from other productive resources and non-farm incomes including remittances and labour exchange.⁷ Differences and inequalities in farm and non-farm rural resource control may in theory either offset or reinforce each other, though in practice the latter is more likely.

Agrarian relations refer to the relationship among classes of persons involved in agriculture, and landed interests and social groups that occupy certain positions in the society (Thapa 2000). The relationship between the resource-rich and resource-poor (privileged and non-privileged) in an agrarian society is likely to be based on social relations of production and reciprocal exchange. The social relations of production are specific relations people enter into with one another in the course of production, distribution and exchange. Reciprocal exchange refers to informally enforced agreements for the mutual exchange of goods and services, which include labour, information and money (Rahman 1986). The ways and processes of sharing rights and claims in the means of production and production itself is the core of agrarian relationships.

Traditionally, the debate on differentiation has been restricted to class formation with a focus on access to means of production, division of labour and theories of exploitation. Confining the analysis of differentiation to income or wealth alone serves to convey the impression that inequalities in agrarian societies are largely an economic issue. Though economic class is a basic component of class positions and structure in society, systematic disparities exist in opportunities and control among people even within the same economic group based on social identities—caste, ethnicity, age and gender—often not reducible to differences in income or economic resources (White 1989, Sen 1992, World Bank 2000). These social identities encompass elements of injustice which stem from the dominant values of a

society (Kabeer 2000). Excessive focus on economic class may not explain the causes of such inequalities within economic groups.

Gender differentiation

Gender relations between men and women is a social variable which cross-cuts class and all other forms of social differentiation. It is socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically determined, and thus is variable over time and space across class, caste, ethnicity and age. Women's subordinate position to men in agrarian society comes from the patriarchal structure and culture—i.e. gender division of labour, unequal access to and control over productive resources and women's systematic exclusion from participation in household and public decisionmaking fora. These disparities are likely to reinforce gender inequalities in access to and control over rural resources, including those obtained from the village commons.

Gender division of labour involves both productive and reproductive activities done by women and men. Productive work involves the expenditure of energy and resources in such a way that a product is made or a service is rendered. Reproductive work includes activities directly related to biological reproduction and reproduction of household members and work force (Pearson et al. 1981). The gender division of labour rests on a cultural construction that guides all practices, perceptions and actions in the society (Krais 1993). Kabeer (1999: 441) argues that some needs and interests of men and women are self-evident, emerging from routine practices of daily life and differentiated by gender. However, there are other needs and interests which 'derive from a "deeper" level of reality, one which is not evident in daily life' because it is inscribed in the taken-for-granted rules, norms and customs within which everyday life is conducted.⁸ The gender division of labour is understood here as socially and culturally situated.

Gender inequality is upheld by social institutions like the family, the state and patriarchal religions (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988). Linking unequal gender relations to institutions and outcomes, Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1999: 12) assert that gender relations 'are an aspect of broader social relations and, like all social relations, are constituted through the rules, norms and practices of society by which resources, tasks and responsibilities are assigned, value is given and power is mobilized.' In other words, gender relations do not operate in a social vacuum but 'are products of the ways in which institutions are organised and reconstituted over time'.

Male domination in society might have various forms. Physical and structural domination, like the lack of inheritance property rights or physical violence, are visible and relatively easy to recognize and to be questioned.

But domination through norms, values and practices are invisible, and act upon women to maintain a position of subordination at all levels and also 'prevents domination from being recognized as such' (Krais 1993: 172) and 'from being thought and affirmed' (Bourdieu 2001: 34).

Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1999) propose to move analysis of gender relations beyond the household to other key institutional sites—the state, the market and the community. They argue that this is necessary because, though different organizations may operate in their own distinct ways, there are certain common norms, beliefs and values which cut across the different institutional sites that may lead to the systemic and widespread construction and reinforcement of certain social inequalities. The family is a primary institutional site for the construction of gender relations because it is where the process begins by which biological difference is reconstituted as gender inequality (ibid.: 16). The same cultural values and practices may lead to a situation where men from any given economic and social class are in general more able than women from the same economic and social class to mobilize resources from a broad range of organizational domains, including the community, market and state. For example, control over land has important economic, political and social significance in women's life (Razavi 1999, Panda and Agarwal 2005). But with the example of South Asia, Agarwal (1994) demonstrates that the state—especially by granting inheritance property rights only to the men—plays an important role in maintaining unequal gender relations. This study takes into account the patriarchal structure, gender division of labour and the interplay of formal and informal rules, norms, values and practices in explaining gendered processes (membership and participation) and outcomes (access to benefits) in forest management.

Power relations, reaction and resistance

Class and gender relations discussed above are highly resistant to change because those in positions of privilege seek to preserve their superiority and the means to maintain and extend both the material and symbolic reach of their power. Power entails 'the capacity to exercise control over one's own future and that of others' (Postone and LiPuma 1993: 4). In the context of decentralization, power can be defined as the ability to influence processes by which individuals create rules, make decisions, implement and ensure compliance, and adjudicate disputes (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). The distribution of power is asymmetrical if one group of actors controls the context in which power is exercised. As discussed earlier, in an agrarian society, power and position are directly linked to the material resource endowment. Material resources (also called 'assets') are 'not just things that people have,

but they are also sources of their power' (Bebbington et al. 2006). Different economic and social groups strive to maximize their power and use various forms of resources as means to acquire more power (Calhoun 1993). The process can involve degrees of collaboration, competition and conflict.

For Marxists, class struggle—basically the resistance of the weaker against the oppressor—is the most important element for social change (Bryson 1992).⁹ Capacity and agency of individuals and local organizations can challenge the structures of power (Agarwal 1994, Bebbington et al. 2006). However, capacity for resistance also depends on economic, social and political endowments and it is less likely for the poor peasants to take the risk of direct confrontation with their patron, especially when confrontation is likely to be at the costs of their livelihood.¹⁰ In additions, dominant groups in society maintain their dominance by securing the co-operation of subordinated groups and their view becomes the consensus, although in fact it serves only the interests of the dominant groups (Strinati 1995). Subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group. Such ideological domination ('hegemony' in Gramsci's term) is likely to result in the avoidance of confrontation between the classes as much as possible (ibid.). Thus, in the Third World, it is rare for poor peasants to confront their authorities unless inspired and supported from outside or even from above (Wolf 1971, Scott 1985).

The role of state in differentiation

The state, in terms of both its policy-making role and the functions it executes through its apparatus, can shape the differentiation process by increasing the ability of weaker groups to claim productive resources and by enabling them access to political and social positions, leading towards changes in economic and political relations. State here encompasses more than the group of people comprising the government. Gellner (2002) defines the state in terms of economics, politics, and morality. Economically, states are organizations for extracting and occasionally redistributing the surplus from those who produce it. Politically, they are organizations that dominate the means of coercion. Juridically or legally they claim a monopoly of legitimate leadership, and therefore of the means of administering justice. The modern ideal type is, of course, subject to challenge in actual practice (Pierson 1996). As Rahman argues,

...in the society with unequal assets holding and unequal power structure among social groups, it is most likely that the rich peasants dominate the various institutions, committees and organisations through which government assistance is channelled. Their domination in the local institutions and organisa-

tions enable them to become in a position to appropriate most of the benefits channelled through the state and its apparatus. (Rahman 1986: 196)

Mikesell (1999) argues that state often represents an illusory 'general interest', but actually consisting of ruling class interests that are placed over and against the interests of the individual and competing classes. Its hegemony is affected or sometimes challenged by institutions such as family, unions, political parties and information media. These institutions make it seem that this apparent 'general interest' of the state actually belongs to the individual and is guided by the interests of the ruling class. The real practical struggles between different economic and social groups in society sometimes make it necessary for the state to intervene through the illusory 'general' interest. Since the ruling classes control the state, this intervention is generally to their own advantage (*ibid.*: 63).¹¹

1.3.3 Participation discourse: interplay of formal and informal institutions

Discussion on the sustainable management of environmental resources and CPRM strategies are closely linked to the discourses of sustainable development and participation. 'Sustainable development' refers to the means by which development is made to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (WECD 1987). In an environmental context, it involves the conservation of biodiversities, maintaining ecological functions as well as maintaining supplies of natural products which are essential to the livelihoods of local people (Colchester 1994: 70).

Participation implies the willing, informed and active involvement of people in the implementation and decisionmaking process in activities and issues affecting their lives (Utting 1994). The theorizing of participatory approaches is often dichotomised into means (planner-centred) and ends (people-centred) classification, and the appearance participative action takes is dependent on the ideology of the 'implementing organization' (Oakley and Marsden 1984).¹² The first rests on an efficiency argument that considers participation as a tool for achieving better and low cost project outcomes. The second rests on equity argument that looks at participation as a process towards transformation and empowerment aimed to enhance the capacity of individuals, especially the poor, to improve their own lives through collective consciousness (UNRISD 1981, Chambers 1983, Nelson and Wright 1995, Michener 1998). Both arguments have remained at the core of CPRM. However, a large body of literature demonstrates the failure

of participatory approaches to achieve meaningful social changes and especially to engage with issues of power and politics (Agarwal 2001, Cooke and Kothari 2001, Cornwall 2003). Three important areas of concern raised by the literature have implications for this research.

The first area of concern is the potential of participation to challenge power relations in the community. On the one hand, it is argued that participatory approaches place too much stress on solidarity within communities and often understate the local power dynamics resulting from differential access to resources and processes of conflict and negotiation among differentiated actors (Cooke and Kothari 2001, Vira and Jeffery 2001). Without a realistic view of local power dynamics and the role of external interventions, dominant interests within communities may use the space provided by a participatory approaches to reinforce existing power relations (Guijit and Kaul Shah 1998, Cleaver 2001, Kothari 2001, Cornwall 2002a, Nuijten 2004). On the other hand, authors also argue that certain participatory approaches may help in addressing inequalities by 'creating spaces and atmosphere in which people feel free both to express and to change their views' (Hickey and Mohan 2004, Kelly 2004: 206). Participatory approaches tend to succeed in challenging unequal power relations if they aim specifically at participation of marginalized and subordinated groups and if they are located within a wider transformative political agenda (Hickey and Mohan 2005). In an agrarian community with highly unequal power relations, however, the effectiveness of participatory approaches in empowering the marginalized and producing transformation is less likely.

The second concern is about incentives and the costs associated with participation. Discussion in participatory discourses often places importance on incentives. It is assumed that assured benefits and a sense of social responsibility will make people participate effectively in community affairs. Such a perception allows little place for personal psychological motivations for participation. But costs and incentives associated with participation can be mediated and perceived by people differently (Cleaver 2001). Some people may find participation a means of acquiring recognition, respect and social status, which may be independent of other material benefits. While for the poor, the chances may be seriously limited as they might lack resources for effective participation, others may find psychological motivation more important than the material benefits derived from such participation.

The third concern is about the interplay between formal and informal institutions in determining the process and outcome of participation. Assessment of participation tends to focus on formal institutions, assuming that providing a legal framework enables people to participate effectively (Os-

trom 1990, Uphoff 1992). Such assumptions ignore informal local norms of decision-making and representations in agrarian communities. Cleaver (2001) emphasizes the importance of informal interaction, processes and mechanisms in the analysis of participation. Informal processes that take place outside formal organizations are more influential in shaping the modes of co-operation and participation than public negotiation. Similar possibilities are explored by others in the study of forest management (Agarwal 1997b, Leach, Mearns et al. 1999, Brown and Rosendo 2000, Agarwal 2001).

Weinberger and Jutting (2001) suggest a number of factors at personal and at environmental levels that might determine people's participation. Factors at the environmental level are: the existence of conducive conditions, especially institutional, economic and socio-cultural structures; availability of resources such as time and budget; and access to information and communication systems. At the personal level are: the interests and information-searching behaviour of individuals, attitudes towards political and social behaviour, and perception of power relations. Though personal factors—especially knowledge and recognition of needs and own interests—are key determinants of participation, they need to be seen as dependent, not independent, variables, because they are induced by the cultural, economic and societal framework (*ibid.*). Some social and familial constraints, including social norms can also constrain participation, especially of women, by defining what is acceptable behaviour (Kabeer 1999, Agarwal 2001).

These discussions thus suggest shifts in the analysis of participation from an uncritical view of solidarity in the community to more reflection on micro-level power dynamics within it; and from preoccupation with 'local' to relatively more attention to the influence of wider economic and political structures in order to understand whether and under which conditions participation might (or might not) address the unequal power relations. More importantly, it is important to know whether active, effective and meaningful participation is possible and not just whether it is formally possible given the institutional set-up.

1.3.4 Institutional arrangements in common property theory

Common Property Resource Management is an institutional arrangement to manage resources held in common by the users themselves in a group with a fully regulated process (McCay and Jentoft 1998).¹³ CPR theorists identify several principles—called 'design principles'—for communities to design effective local organizations to manage common property resources (Ostrom 1992, Wade 1994, Mckean 1998, Agrawal 2001). The role of commu-

nity has been central to the common property theory as it is seen as the basis for organizing users, distribution of benefits and sharing of burdens between economic and social groups. Thinking about who constitutes 'the community' and how the community's interests are understood and addressed in CPRM is thus critical for the analysis of distributive outcomes as they determine who have access and who are excluded.

The notion of community: assumptions and their applicability

The notion of 'community' is a complex and highly debated concept in CPRM.¹⁴ The CPR theorists conceptualize community in major three aspects: community as a small spatial unit, as a distinct social structure with shared interests, and as a set of shared social norms (Agrawal and Gibson 1999b, 2001c). These aspects which are supposed to be inherent in agrarian communities are argued to enable them to work collectively through institutional rules and regulations (Ostrom 1990). Several authors, however, highlight the inadequacy of this conceptualization and critique of the ideas of the community as a 'myth' (see for example Guijit and Kaul Shah 1998, Cleaver 1999, Leach, Mearns et al. 1999, Sundar and Jeffery 1999, Varughese and Ostrom 2001). These aspects are particularly important from the perspective of distributive outcomes and are elaborated below.

The emphasis on the attribute of community as a geographically-bounded small spatial unit comes from the fact that the renewable resources that the communities use, manage and protect are themselves usually located near territorially fixed homes and settlements, and members of small groups sharing the small geographical space are more likely to interact with each other. Regular contact may reduce the costs of undertaking collective action (Agrawal and Gibson 1999b). But the idea of the territorial attachment of small groups that manage resources may not fit a situation where the geographical spread of the resources is larger than that of settlements. The bounded and stationary character of resources like forests makes it difficult to allocate them to particular spatial communities. More importantly, where users come from more than one settlement across political and administrative boundaries, those who live closer claim primary use rights and want those who live farther away in another jurisdiction to pay for the forest products they use (Varughese and Ostrom 2001). In both situations, the inclusion of one community may become cause for the exclusion of others.

The assumption about community as a homogenous entity with shared interests comes from the fact that people living within the same location may indeed hold similar occupations, depend on the same resources, use the same language and belong to the same ethnic or religious groups (Agrawal

and Gibson 1999b). These similarities may facilitate regular interactions among group members. Such homogeneity is often assumed to further cooperative solution, reduce hierarchical interactions and promote better management of resources (Ostrom 1990). But as discussed in earlier sections, multiple axes of differentiation and social hierarchies exist that result in multiple interests arising for the same resources in the same community.

CPR theorists also assume that community has a set of shared norms, values and trust, which are often treated as 'social capital', that facilitate cooperation and co-ordination in the management of common resources. Trust refers to the belief and confidence in other agents to behave as expected despite uncertainties, risks and the possibilities for them to act opportunistically. Shared norms define what actions are considered acceptable or unacceptable and include customs of co-operation and reciprocity. Social capital is the norms, networks and social relations embedded in formal and informal institutions of the society that enable people to co-ordinate collective action (Putnam et al. 1993: 167). Trust, norms and values together increase the effectiveness of conservation by specifically prohibiting some actions and by promoting co-operative decisionmaking within the communities (Agrawal 1999a). Social norms and values can also be created and managed by local organizations in communities maintaining trust among the members (Gibson and Koontz 1998, Klooster 2000a). Some forms of social capital, like that of membership in organizations and networks, can be important for the poor as they tend to reduce vulnerability (Grootaert and Narayan 2004).

However, as Francis (2002) argues, norms and values guided by institutions and practices that are good for many, may simultaneously be bad for others. Interest groups that capture political influence disproportionate to their size can distort policy in favour of particular interests, with the result that overall welfare and efficiency is reduced (Olson 1965). More importantly, some social norms and values may have an adverse effect on weaker sections of communities as they can reinforce hierarchical social relations. For example, social norms that define which tasks men and women (of different age groups) should perform and how they should interact in public tend to enhance gender disparities in the communities (Agrawal 2000). The maintenance or strengthening of social norms and values, which are built upon existing hierarchical structure may thus hinder, rather than promote, equitable outcomes. In a differentiated community, it is most likely that emphasis on harmony de-politicizes community work so as not to require the negotiation of differences and conflicting interests. As a result, questions of justice are routinely diminished, if not avoided (Fraser 2005).

On institutions, organizations and exclusion

Institutions can be seen as the 'rules of the game' (North 1990). They comprise sets of formal and informal rules and norms that shape interactions of humans with each other and with nature by constraining some activities, while facilitating others (North 1990, Agrawal and Gibson 1999b). Institutions distribute resources, both symbolic and material; as such, institutional rules are, among other things, rules about membership and access (Kabeer 2000). Organizations comprise structures and groups of people who administer the functioning of institutions. CPRM organizations perform their roles in three major areas: making rules about the membership, use, management and conservation of resources; implementation of rules that are made; and resolution of disputes that arise during the interpretation and application of the rules (Agrawal 2001b). In analysing the outcomes of these organizations in an agrarian community, it is important to explore who in the organization exercise the authority to make rules, what the rules consist of and how they are negotiated.

Authors demonstrate the importance of both formal and informal institutions in analysing organizational effectiveness (Cleaver 2001, Molen 2001). In principle, as Agrawal and Gibson (1999b) argue, formal institutions, once formed, exercise effects that are independent of the forces that constituted them. In practice, however, enforcement of rules defined by the institutions tends to vary and thus becomes more important than the formation of institutions (Barrett et al. 2005). Local power dynamics and informal institutions can influence the formation of formal institutions and the enforcement of their rules, resulting in different outcomes than those envisioned.

The institutional mechanisms through which resources are allocated and their values assigned may operate in such a way as to systematically deny particular groups of people the resources and the recognition which would allow them to participate and access the benefits, resulting in their exclusion (Kabeer 2000). Exclusion refers to the result of institutional processes and mechanisms by which people are excluded from full participation and access to benefits.¹⁵ The institutions can enable or constrain human interaction resulting in either inclusion or exclusion (de Haan 1998). As Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) argue, problems associated with exclusion are partly income-determined. However, income, though an important factor, should not be considered as a sufficient guarantee that groups of people are assured access to basic human needs and inclusion. There can be other important variables related to power relations, culture and social identity which determine the processes and mechanisms resulting in exclusion.

Dilemma on commons and theoretical advancement

Recently there have been important theoretical developments in the study of commons dilemmas (see Ostrom et al. 2002). Variables identified in the literature that influence commons can be grouped into four: characteristics of the resources, the nature of the groups that depend on these resources, particulars of the institutional regimes by which resources are managed, and the nature of the relationship between a group and the external forces and authorities such as markets, states, and technology (Agrawal 2003, Agrawal and Chhatre 2006).

At the operational level, the opportunities and challenges for good governance in community forest organizations have also been researched within Nepal by several authors (Pokharel 1997, Varughese 1999, Pokharel and Niraula 2004).¹⁶ Some studies have indicated procedural and political factors, such as shortcuts in the process, capitulation to political pressures, and a lack of active support by the service providers behind the weak institutional performance (Britt 2002, Bampton, Vickers et al. 2004, Shrestha et al. 2004). However, despite such theoretical and analytical advances, the crucial relations between community structures and pivotal outcomes have received limited attention. The influence of internal dynamics and power structures affecting institutional performance remains unexplored.

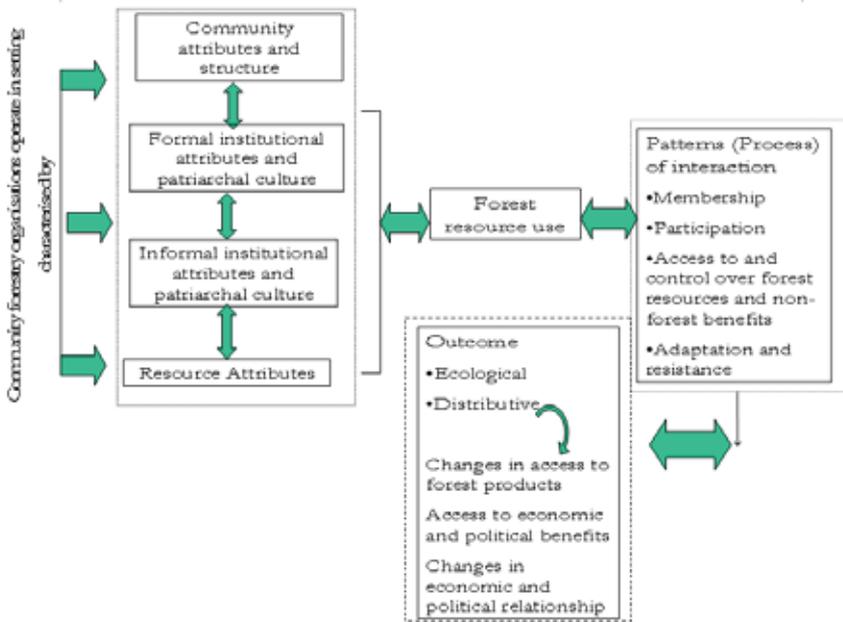
1.3.5 Patterns of interaction and distributive outcomes: from critique to analytical framework

Distributive issues in forest management concern the allocation of resources and ability to benefit among diverse economic and social groups. This involves analysis of processes and patterns of interaction by which some sections of a community (the privileged) enjoy greater access to resources and benefits, while the weaker and powerless (non-privileged) are denied of them. The discussion in earlier sections suggests that community attributes and forest resource characteristics form the context within which institutions and forest organizations operate (Figure 1).

Community attributes include characteristics of agrarian structure, differentiation, patriarchy and power relations in a community. Institutional attributes include formal and informal rules, norms and values defining membership, representation and participation of users; development and enforcement of rules, sharing of costs and benefits, and relationship with external authorities. These also consist of gender- and caste-based cultural norms, rules and values that shape how individuals and groups act and behave in communities. Resource characteristics determine the use and market

value of forest products within the community and institutional setting. The actions (forest resource use) that diversified forest users take through formal and informal institutions in specific agrarian context create the patterns of interaction and produce the outcomes. The process of inclusion and exclusion are usually mediated through institutions at various levels. Thus, it is essential to understand the nature and characteristics of institutions, how they function and how they result in the exclusion of certain sections of communities.

Figure 1
Framework for explaining distributive outcomes of forest organizations



As shown in Figure 1, forest organizations can result in the exclusion of the poor and weaker sections of communities in four major stages (processes) resulting in differential outcomes in an agrarian community. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a detailed account of these distributive processes in practice and their implications for the outcomes.

Membership

A forest user group is a pool of forest users who share the same rights to products from a forest as well as the associated duties. Clearly defined membership criteria are considered as major characteristics in determining the robustness of user groups (Ostrom 1990, Ostrom 1994, Hobley 1996, Mckean 1998). In principle, if membership is confined to a certain number and the criteria do not allow the number to expand rapidly, the user group tends to become more stable and to function effectively (Mckean 1998).

Two important mechanisms—i.e., criteria and the unit of membership—can result in the exclusion of certain sections of the community. Criteria for membership can be exclusionary in two ways. First, as said earlier, CPR theory looks at community as settled and consisting of households based on stable marriages. Membership criteria based on such assumptions automatically exclude the migrants and distant users who may not necessarily live within the particular geographical boundary set by the group but use the forest in question. Second, some criteria such as high membership fees and requirement of proof of permanent occupancy (i.e., land and/or house ownership) may result in the exclusion of the poor and the landless migrants even if they live within the same geographical territory.

Participation

Membership provides legitimacy to participate in groups but it may not be sufficient for some members to participate effectively. An individual's decision to participate (or not) is shaped by incentives and constraints that vary between economic and social groups. When the institutional arrangement of resource use and management involves active steps to conserve resources, costs are usually incurred in the current period while benefits only come later. Those with a shorter time horizon, mostly the poor, may adopt strategies that yield immediate results and thus might choose for voluntary exclusion (Cleaver 2001, Jeffery and Vira 2001).¹⁷

As said earlier, participation in forest management can take different forms (Agarwal 2001). Active and empowering (i.e., effective) participation requires that people's views are effectively taken into account and that their views can influence decision-making (Agarwal 2001, Eder 2005). Participation in the implementation of activities does not necessarily mean effective participation. Given a community with differential division of roles and responsibilities, and differential control over resources, effective participation of the weaker section of the community is most at risk of subordination by local-level and possibly 'top-down' political processes (Sundar 2000, Natcher and Hickey 2002). Chapters 4 and 5 provide several illustrations of

how formal rules for participation in user groups are dominated by informal rules and local power dynamics in agrarian communities.

Access to and control over resources and benefits

Access is about all possible means by which a person or group is able to benefit from things. Ribot and Peluso (2003) argue that right of access implies an acknowledged claim that society supports whether through law, custom or rules based on institutions. Ability is akin to power and is broader than right. There might be range of powers—embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes and social relations—that affect people’s ability to benefit from resources, and this determines access. These powers constitute the material, cultural and political-economic strands within the ‘bundles’ and webs of powers that configure resource access (ibid.: 154).

Defining access in terms of ability thus brings attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone. Property is ownership or title as defined by law, custom or convention. While property relations examine only relations of resource ownership and control sanctioned by some social institutions, analysis of access locates property as one of the important set of factors in a larger array of institutions, and social and political relations that shape benefit flow. Access to resources may be enabled directly through property rights and indirectly through means that are not intended to impart property rights or are not socially sanctioned by law. Without allocating rights per se, ideological and discursive manipulations, as well as relations of production and exchange, profoundly shape patterns of benefit distribution (ibid.: 156). In this sense, access includes both the *de jure* and *de facto* or extralegal rights and ability to use and benefit. Individuals with capital or a particular status can use a given resource, even without the rules made by the society. Others cannot use the resource even when they have clear rights and legal status.¹⁸

Access relation is dynamic in nature and may change depending on individual and group positions and power within various social relations. Mechanisms, structures and processes supporting access serve in both its maintenance and its control. Maintenance of access is about ‘expending resources to keep particular sort of access open for one’s self or others while access control is the ability to mediate other’s access’ (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 159). In this sense, access can occur with or without control depending on the individual’s place and power within the society (Ribot 1998). As shown in the empirical chapters, a number of economic and social vari-

ables—including technology, capital, information, social identities and relations—can shape or influence access to forest resources from user groups.

As in other participatory discourses, much discussion on the CPRM approach places emphasis on material incentives derived from organizations. This tends to neglect the importance of psychological and political motivation of people to participate. Some people may find membership and participation in forest organizations more beneficial politically, in terms of improved personal qualities, enhanced status and social control in the community. Though in principle, these organizations open these opportunities to all members equally, differential impact can result from the differences in ability of different economic and social groups to make claims. Ability to claim and benefit from such non-material (psychological and political) incentives can also derive from the past accumulation of wealth, greater network of social relations, better education, or privileged access to markets where critical inputs such as credit and manpower could be obtained.

Finally, as said earlier, exclusion—as a process as well as an outcome—is often mediated through various forms of institutions. Access and exclusion in one institutional domain can be offset or exacerbated by access and exclusion in another. For example, disadvantages associated with gender within the households and community may be offset by the ability and agency of women to access resources held by the forest organizations or it may be deepened through discrimination in the organizations. Thus, as Kabeer (2000) argues, along with the endowments that individuals or groups start out with, the norms and rights which prevail in a society serve to systematically differentiate their access to other resources, and hence their ability to improve on their situations.

1.4 Research Orientation, Strategies and Methods

1.4.1 Orientation and strategies

Community forestry is an ecological intervention introduced in the community. ‘Ecological anthropology’ had been used for a long time as a way of investigating the social and economic (mainly human) aspects of such interventions. The basic unit of analysis for ecological anthropology is ‘the ecological population and the ecosystem treated, at least for analytical purpose, as discrete and isolated units’ (Kottak 1999: 24). Though the approach has the advantage of enabling in-depth and detailed understanding of people–forest relationships in a specific cultural set-up, it has been criticized for narrowing spatial and temporal horizons and neglecting economic and so-

ciopolitical forces that could shape and influence the result of the analysis (ibid.).

'Political economy' approaches have also been increasingly used in studies of forest resource use and management. This approach was born largely out of a concern for the way various class interests, arrangements of power and dependency are embedded in the history of global capitalism. Blaikie and Brookfield combined the concerns of ecology with political economy to 'encompass the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources' (1987a: 17). This approach, widely known as 'political ecology', has been used to explain the role of political structure and the existence of external social agents in shaping institutional outcomes (Graner 1997, Khan 1998, Taylor and Zabin 2000). The political ecology approach 'considers how resource distribution, policies, existing economic and political relations and market forces influence the allocation and use of resources among the people in any resource regulatory systems' (Khan 1998: 19). It recognizes that ecological characteristics and the constraints posed by them are not sufficient to explain people-environment relations and that political factors should be given priority (Bradnock and Saunders 2000). However, the approach has been criticized most fundamentally by its too great focus on political factors and relative neglect of other physical and biological factors that may affect the outcomes (Vayda and Walters 1999).

This study is influenced by the political ecology approach as it recognizes the importance of historical, economic and political factors in shaping forest resource use and the outcomes of CPRM institutions. However, in order to avoid possible bias from excessive focus on economic and political forces, other important factors, including characteristics of forest resource and physical attributes of the community in question, are given due attention.

The principal task of this research was to understand the ways community structures shape the distributive outcomes of CPRM organizations. There were two broad interrelated aspects to be analysed with regards to community structure: class, caste and gender relations; and the functioning and distributive outcomes of forest institutions. Thus, the concept and methods of analyzing agrarian structure, the process of differentiation and the institutional dynamics of CPRM organizations required an important place in the methodology.

In discussing problems in the empirical analysis of agrarian differentiation, White (1989) raises a number of methodological issues that were relevant for this study. He stresses a need to differentiate the process of differentiation itself and the various aspects of that process: namely, the causes, mechanisms and indicators of differentiation. Similarly, it is important to

analyse external forces and historical political contexts of the rural society under study, as these can exert great influence on the mechanisms and forms of differentiation (*ibid.*). Acknowledging these analytical concerns, the study therefore started exploring about community structures with the examination of:

- a. The historical background and sociopolitical context of the communities in question.
- b. The distribution of ownership of means of production and the accompanying social and gender division of labour
- c. Relations of power between economic and social groups, and formal and informal relations that people enter with others.

Wherever possible, community attributes (Chapter 3) have been compared and analysed with reference to the national economic, political and social contexts (Chapter 2) in order to place the communities within their wider contexts.

The next aspect of the research question was to analyse the functioning and the distributive outcomes of user groups which as CPR organizations, regularize people's access to and control over forest resources and associated benefits in community forestry. Ostrom's design principles are frequently used to assess institutional 'robustness' of CPR organizations (Ostrom 1990, 2000). These principles included the following:

- a. The members and the boundaries of the resource to be managed should be clearly defined.
- b. A clear set of rules and obligations should be established that are adapted to local conditions.
- c. Members should collectively participate in making and modifying their rules according to changing circumstances.
- d. An adequate monitoring system with enforceable sanctions should be in place that keeps an eye on resource conditions as well as on user behaviour.
- e. The organizations, if not empowered or recognized by the government authorities, should at least not be challenged or undermined by them.

Most of these principles were useful to assess the efficiency of institutions towards their sustainable functioning and towards the outcome on conservation and protection of resources. But they were not sufficient to analyse the effectiveness of organizations for equitable distributive outcomes in the communities and among people of different economic and social groups.

These design principles were thus modified that not only incorporated issues of distributive outcomes but were also relevant to the sociopolitical contexts in which user groups operated. The modified criteria included:

- Resource boundary
- Incentives for forest management
- Criteria and unit of membership
- Composition of Executive Committee (EC, samiti)
- Decisionmaking mechanisms (formal and informal)
- Participation in the protection, management of resource and decisionmaking
- Product use rules and enforcement mechanism
- Sources and utilization of funds
- Existence of conflict and its resolution mechanism
- Relations with service providers and other organizations

Each user group was assessed separately against these criteria. The influence of community structures was analysed in two ways. First, the influence of class, caste and gender relations in shaping institutional attributes and the functioning of user groups was examined. Second, the implications of the functioning of user groups for different economic and social groups was analysed in terms of their access to forest products and to other cash and non-cash benefits associated with it.

The fieldwork in Nepal was carried out from January–December 2002 (13 months) and from May–June 2003 (2 months). It combined both macro- and micro-level research with its major focus at the micro level. Major methods used at the macro level involved library research, personal interaction and observation of events/forums at national and district levels. At the micro level, the research used comparative case-study methods involving two significantly different locations—hill and the Terai.¹⁹ Structural differences between the locations are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

1.4.2 Design and methods

A comparative case-study method was used. A case-study method can be remarkably effective in providing in-depth knowledge of specific conjunctures, highlighting the importance of processes that are significant in them (Ragin 1994). They are also effective tools to specify the contextual features that lend a particular case its leverage over outcomes (Ragin 1997). The method is widely used to build upon theory, to challenge and to explain a situation. The advantages are its applicability to real life, contemporary human situation. The comparative case-study method enabled the researcher

to understand how different community structures can produce different outcomes from the same (general) strategy and to explain the complex real life situation of different economic and social groups in a differentiated community. Multiple user groups were selected with different resource and group attributes that permitted an analysis of the variation in outcomes, both between and within locations.

Levels, cases and units of study

This study used multiple units of data collection and analysis. Village was used as a basis for the analysis of community (agrarian) structure. FUGs, which are autonomous groups organized under the Forest Act of Nepal (1993), formed the cases for analysis and comparison of institutional attributes and functioning mechanisms. Households under the area of community forestry were studied to analyse inter-household differences and relationships. The study covered both member and non-member households of different economic and social groups and analysed their access to forest resources and other benefits associated with community forestry, to understand the differential outcomes between the households. Finally, individuals of the selected households were interviewed to examine the intra-household differences, relationships and inequality.

Village: a basis for the study of agrarian structure

The study was conducted in two villages representing communities in mid-hills and inner Terai settings. As the village is basis for the study of agrarian structure, it is relevant to discuss some methodological issues related to the village as a study unit. As explained above, the village is not only an important administrative unit but also an economic and political unit in Nepal. Village-level study has the advantage that the detailed information acquired enables analysing social phenomena and changing processes of society in a comprehensive manner (Breman 1997). It allows the examination of other dimensions besides the institutional, by covering various economic, social and political aspects of village society and social phenomena which have important significance in the functioning and outcomes of institutions. However, village-level study also suffers from some limitations. Main criticisms question the village as an isolable research unit in the context of increasingly open communities and its limited scope and validity for generalization (*ibid.*). These limitations had to be addressed in the research. The main limitation was addressed by taking into account external influences, such as external economic and political forces operating at various levels.

The concern for validity was addressed with the use of multiple sources of evidence and by establishing a chain of evidence (Yin 1994).

Selection of villages and user groups

From the national database of community forestry maintained by the Department of Forests (DOF), I identified potential districts in hill and Terai locations that had established community forests of different ages, sizes and types of forest conditions. Discussion with key informants, forestry officials and analysis of database on FUGs across districts were the basis to identify provisional villages in both locations. Tukucha in Kabhre from hill locations and Rajhar in Nawalparasi from Terai locations were purposively selected. Below is a listing of the specific characteristics considered in selecting these hill and the Terai villages.

Characteristics	Hill	Terai
Topography	Undulated	Plain
Establishment	More than 200 years ago	In late 1950s
Physical nature of settlement	Divided into separate hamlets, each with relatively homogenous caste and ethnic composition	Continuous with diverse caste and ethnic groups living together
Main occupation	Agriculture, with few non-farm income opportunities	Agriculture, with diverse non-farm income opportunities
Infrastructure	Settlement without direct connection to roads suitable for motor vehicles and associated infrastructure	Settlement with direct connection with road suitable for motor vehicles and associated infrastructure

The characteristics considered for the selection of village are derived from the conceptual and analytical framework discussed earlier in section 1.3 where it is argued that forest resource use and community structures would explain the unequal distributive outcomes of community forestry strategy. The selected villages allowed the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of a complex real life situation of agrarian communities and helped to explain the deeper causes behind the unequal distributive outcomes.²⁰ The selected villages are also typical of many hill and Terai communities in the country.²¹ Three FUGs representing different characteristics were studied in each village, making six in total. Two major criteria were considered in selecting the six user groups: that the FUGs should have ex-

isted at least five years within the legal framework of community forestry and that they were contiguous both in terms of resource and users.

Conceptualization of the household as a unit of study

Households are arenas of consumption, production and investment, within which both labour and resource allocation decisions are made. Since the household is used as a unit of analysis to understand inter-household differences and social relations, and to analyse differential outcomes, it is important to briefly conceptualize the term. Households and family are often used interchangeably in the literature (Agarwal 1997c) but by a household (*gbar*) I mean a residential unit, or unit of joint property ownership, where a 'group of relatives live in the same dwelling and or share common kitchen, budget and other essentials of daily living' (CBS 2003b).²² The family consists of a wider network of kinship and relations which may not necessarily live in the same household.

Households vary in membership composition from units of a single person, to those with parents and children, to those with additional relatives: siblings, grandparents, and sometimes non-relatives such as hire-in servants. Economic literature on the household focuses on the notions of production, consumption and investment (Horwitz 2005).²³ This conventional approach exemplifies a non-conflictual view of the household and its diverse organizational forms and relations. Though members of households are economically and socially dependent on each other and hold rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis one another, the household constitutes multiple actors with varying preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and realize those interests. The inequalities within a household are mostly caused by gender and generational differences (Sen 1990, Hart 1993, Kabeer 1994, Agarwal 1997c). In order to capture these intra-household dimensions of inequality and their outcomes, the research has examined gendered differences in control over means of production, the division of labour and participation in decision-making processes within household and community spaces; and its implications on the FUG's dynamics. Generational differences have been captured by analysing division of labour and demonstrating impact of increased (and curtailed) access to benefits of children and the elder members within households and groups.

Sampling for household survey

The study utilized multi-stage quasi-randomized sampling techniques in order to select households required for the survey. Selection of households for quantitative survey involved a stratified random sampling technique while

that for the in-depth qualitative survey (interview) involved a purposive method.

a) For first round survey (economic and social classification)

i) Hill sampling

Tukucha, a hill village, had distinct settlements (toles), each managing a separate patch of forest. The primary focus of the research was on three out of the nine toles in the village. The preliminary survey and discussions with key informants (KIs) provided important insights on the economic and social life of the village, and generated reliable data on the number of households. The three settlements were physically isolated but, in agricultural production processes, were highly interdependent. Though only one of the three was homogenous in terms of caste composition, the other two were also dominated by a single caste or ethnic group. Similarly, though farming was the main occupation for almost all households, the influence of caste and ethnicity was evident from their non-farm engagements. The three toles selected in Tukucha had only 129 households. Thus census of all 129 households was carried out to analyse the inter-household differences and relationships.

ii) Terai sampling

Selection of households from the Terai village was complex because of its relatively large size (1800 households) and continuous settlement. A total of 150 households were sampled for the first-round survey. The following steps were taken for household selection in the Terai village.

a) Reducing the population size

According to the Population Census (CBS 2001), 1842 households reside in the studied village, Rajhar. The Village Development Committee (VDC) office had maintained a list of 1800 households. These were settled both north and south of the highway. Discussion with key informants revealed that households residing in southern settlement (along the bank of Narayani river) had no involvement in community forests because they lived far from community forests and were involved in a buffer-zone forest management group (a different forest management modality being used in national park areas) for the use of forest products. Omitting the southern settlement reduced the sampling frame from 1800 to 1200 households. This included 6 out of 9 wards (smallest administrative unit) of the VDC.

b) Stratification

The preliminary survey, discussion with VDC representatives and key informants in the Rajhar VDC office revealed that there were at least five

types of peasants: the landless, small peasants, middle peasants, larger, and exclusive landlords. The discussion identified a set of characteristics for each of these categories. Main criteria that emerged after discussions were landholding, food sufficiency and income sufficiency to meet basic livelihood requirement. A participatory wellbeing ranking was carried out for each ward separately at the VDC office with elected ward-level representatives (ward chairperson) and some key informants. A total of 1200 households who were residing in north belt were classified into these five classes. When it was difficult to locate households on specific wellbeing criteria because of the variation in their income sources, associated characteristics were used to classify them (see Annex 1 for detailed criteria used in the wellbeing ranking). Stratified sampling ensures a greater degree of representativeness of households with different characteristics by producing a homogenous population in a stratum, which helps decrease the probable sampling error (Babbie, 1990).

c) Household sampling

As the households were stratified into different economic categories, the sample of 150 households was also classified accordingly. The sample was distributed to the different strata on the basis of proportional distribution of the households by strata. It ensures that the size of the sample being selected is weighted by the size of the households in each stratum. Simple random sampling technique was used to select households. In random sampling, every household in the sampling frame (list of households) has an equal chance of being selected for inclusion in the sample by ensuring against any possible human bias (Babbie 1990). This technique was used in selecting households for all strata. In some cases, some households were absent because they migrated to other places, some were absentee landlords and business people. This sort of problem arose due the fact that the source of the household lists was the voter list, which was made some years ago. Such households were replaced by subsequent households from the list, so that the total number of households in the sample was intact. The sample was also kept representative in terms of caste identity. However, achieving a perfect representative sample in terms of caste identity was not possible for all categories, as for example, none from the large farmers and exclusive landlord category were lower caste.²⁴

In both locations, respondents were heads of the households. In cases where the official heads of the households were absent, *de-facto* heads were interviewed. The first-round household survey collected data on personal history, family history, household size and composition, asset ownership (including land, livestock and other non-farm income), access to education,

and participation in political structures (including VDC, District Development Committees—DDC—and political parties). This helped to examine inter-household differences and relations in the community.

b) For second-round survey (in-depth analysis of outcomes and relationships)

Based on the findings of the first survey, households were positioned in specific economic, caste and ethnic categories. From the list of households that went for the first-round survey in each location (i.e., 129 hill and 150 Terai), a total of 40 households were selected in each location (80 households in both) for an in-depth analysis of changes in access to products (outcomes) and relationships. The following were considered in selecting the 40 households for the second-round survey.

- The number in each category was maintained in the same proportion as their proportion in total (150).
- Ensured that selected households had members and non-members from all FUG areas under study

The second-round survey collected data on membership and participation in user groups, changes in the use and access to community forest resources, costs and benefits derived from community forest management and changes in economic, political and gender roles and relations as an impact of community forestry strategy. Respondents for the second round of the survey included both men and women of the households together as much as possible. As in the first-round survey, in cases where official head was absent, the *de-facto* head of household provided the information for both.²⁵

c) For separate interviews with samiti members

Each user group under study had an executive committee (locally known as samiti) composed of 11–13 member households. The first and second household survey did not cover all member households participating in the samiti due to the random sampling. A separate questionnaire survey was administered to all samiti members. The objective was to reveal socio-economic positions of households that participated in the samiti and the extent of their influence over decisions in user groups. As the questionnaire survey for this purpose included all samiti members, there was no need for sampling. This applied to both locations. Data on their access to financial and political incentives from user groups (as illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5) is mainly based on this interview.

d) For illustrative case-study households

During the fieldwork, the researcher was able to identify a few households in the village that had experienced considerable impact from the community forestry intervention. Those households were not included in the survey because they were outside the sample. They were identified during the latter part of the fieldwork. An in-depth interview was conducted with men and women separately in these households in order to understand the detailed outcomes of community forestry in terms of their livelihoods. Thus, though many qualitative statements and cases presented in the study were obtained from survey households, a few of them have also come from households that were not selected for survey earlier. This again applies to both locations.

Methods of data collection and the strategy for data analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used, qualitative methods predominating. Household surveys, structured and semi-structured interviews, before and after comparison of the changes over time, direct observation, participatory resource mapping, focused group discussion and review and analysis of documents (including meeting minutes and account registers) were the principal methods used. The researcher also attended and observed various events—mass meetings, forest management activities, product distribution processes and executive committee meetings.

The study used comparative, contextual, descriptive and statistical analysis. Household-level data were analysed by cross-tabulation, trend analysis, and before and after analysis. The results are supplemented with descriptive and comparative analysis techniques including illustrative cases and quotations. In each location, descriptive and contextual analysis was used to describe the agrarian setting and the influence of economic, political and cultural forces.

1.4.3 Basis for caste and ethnic groupings in the study

In order to analyse inter-household differences, this study has used economic class, caste and ethnic identity as major variables dividing people into different economic and social groups. Several criteria were developed locally to identify economic classes. The surname of the individuals was used to classify them in caste and ethnic groups. At this point, it is important to provide the basis for classification and to distinguish complex forms of castes from ethnic groups in Nepal. The formation of caste and ethnic identities in Nepal results from a complex interplay of different social processes aimed at

diverse economic and political goals (Bista 1991). A caste group denotes a population with a social identity that falls within the Hindu Varna System. There are four Varnas: Brahmin (priests), Chhetri (warriors), Vaishya (traders) and Shudra (untouchables). The notion of caste hierarchy, and purity and pollution of castes and foods characterize the Varna and caste system (Bhattachan 2003, NTG 2006). The first two are so called 'high caste touchable' and the last is 'low caste untouchables'. The notion of caste hierarchy, and purity and pollution of caste and foods characterize the Varna and caste system (NTG 2006: 4). Though the National Code 1854 (*Muluki Ain*) incorporated indigenous ethnic groups (Janajati) into the middle rank, they were not originally part of the system. Many still follow their own Buddhist faiths; they have their own distinct language, different cultures and historical territories. They existed prior to the formation of modern nation-state by the newcomers (ibid.). In other words, caste groups are vertically stratified by ritual status while ethnic groups are horizontally distributed in space (Gurung 2003). For this study, caste means Hindu caste groups and ethnic groups (Janajati) mean indigenous nationalities.

The population census of 2001 identifies 60 ethnic groups residing in the country and no one group is in a clear majority (refer to Annex 2 for details). Out of the country's total population of 23 million, the so-called high-caste groups occupy nearly 33% and nearly 38% of total population comprises ethnic groups. The low-caste group that comprises about 12% of the total population is currently termed Dalits.²⁶ Within the caste group, higher caste for the study area included Brahmin/Chhetri and lower caste or Dalits included Kami (blacksmith), Sarki (cobbler) and Damai (tailor).²⁷ Within ethnic groups, hill Janajati included Newar, Magar, Gurung, Tamang and Terai Janajati included Tharu.

1.5 Research Engagements

Macro/micro-level engagements

As noted earlier, most research work was conducted at the micro level with the focus on understanding the local specific context. To capture wider historical and sociopolitical processes, I also interfaced with policy makers, service providers, donors' representatives and civil society organizations at various levels. During the period, I engaged in a variety of discussion forums, observed and participated in a wide variety of workshops, trainings and interactions organized by the major actors at national and district levels. The most significant activities during my research were involvement in the development of the 10th Five Year Plan for the forestry sector of the GON

and participation in national community forestry workshops. These provided important insights into how policies and plans for the sector are developed at the national level, and whether learning from the field feeds into the policy process. At the community level, I attended samiti meetings and training events especially in the Terai. In both the locations, when I conducted structured and unstructured interviews with both men and women of sampled households and samiti members, I often had to make arrangements to talk to women separately to avoid interference from men. I also experienced, especially in the group discussions at FUG and samiti levels, that many people—mainly the poor, Dalits and women—could not express their views comfortably in front of other members. This required me to arrange separate individual meetings. Such individual and informal meetings, especially at their work place, were important to gain more in-depth understanding of power relations and its influence on how user groups function. Often I used these exercises not only to generate data for my study, but also to share my observations and experiences in order to promote gender and social equity issues in community forestry in general. In sum, the research went beyond a traditional ethnography by prioritizing application of research such as producing diverse written reports, providing policy recommendations and sharing insights in the policy debates of forestry sector of Nepal in mostly unwritten ways.

Identity and positioning self

Positioning myself as a research student often made it possible to access a wide variety of organizations and information. This identity also enabled me to express my ideas, concerns and seek explanations without fear and hesitation. Despite this identity, however, I had my own professional and personal identity that had implications for research methods and outcomes. Inherent identity, especially related to caste and gender, had both positive and negative implications for the research experience. For example, being a Nepali woman, who herself faces economic, social and political disparities in various spheres, made it easier to understand the hidden barriers for rural women to participate and benefit equitably from the development interventions. However, I was different from the rural women (and men) in the sense that I was not a forest user directly, nor had I first-hand knowledge of dependency on CPRs for survival. This sometimes made it difficult to feel the depth of hardship people experience due to the lack of access to the products.

In one of the hamlets in hill location, my identity as a Brahmin woman became a constraint in getting sensitive information. High-caste groups

dominated two of the hamlets selected for the study and one was composed of only Dalits. Because of the security situation, most of the discussion and interview at the household level and even at the interest-groups level took place inside the house. I had to get there early in the morning to allow respondents to work in the field during the daytime. Usually I took my lunch in the same house where I spent the morning and went along to the fields, which helped to build rapport and trust with the villagers. While the strategy worked well in earlier two settlements (Newar and Chhetri tole) it was problematic in the latter (Sarki tole). The people did not allow me to enter their houses. The reluctance was not because of them or me but because of the fear that after I return, the high-caste group would make it an issue and punish them for polluting a high-caste woman. This required me to stay outside the house for discussion and in this open sphere, women were hesitant to discuss the issue of gender and caste-based disparities. In addition, often I had to discontinue my discussion to let them eat and also to seek food for me in another high-caste group's settlement. Such strict caste-based isolation was not evident in the Terai.

I had also a second identity as an NGO activist. This had both positive and negative effects in the process of data collection and analysis. On the one hand, I got easy access to documents and people at the national level and even got the opportunity to observe and participate in the forums of policy makers and donors. These provided important insights about the development of policies and plans at the macro level and the constraints of translating them into practice, which contributed to my learning. On the other hand, my interaction with the disadvantaged section of communities about the economic and political relations they are involved with and about the access to benefits from the user groups often raised expectations for help to change the conditions. Often I was asked to raise the issue of inequality in the samiti, make the government's District Forest Officer (DFO) aware of the inequality and advocate for change. As this was not the intention and was outside of the scope of the research, often after the discussions, especially among the landless immigrants and Dalits in the Terai, I felt helpless and regretted not being able to help them directly to come out of their deprived situation.

Undertaking research in armed conflict situation

Throughout the study period, the country was badly hit by armed conflict. The Maoist insurgency against the government, first declared by Communist Party Nepal (CPN-Maoist) in February 1996, continued in a series of waves claiming around 15,000 lives in the past eleven years (1996–2006) and

only came to a halt with the formal ceasefire and Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the government and the Maoists in November 2006. The first state of emergency was declared in 2001 by the government, immediately after I started my fieldwork. Attacks in towns, cities and rural areas were continued with bombs and blockades. The insurgents continued destroying infrastructure such as roads, bridges, government offices, police posts and service centres and telephone booth in rural areas, and mobility was highly constrained due to frequent crossfire between the government security forces and the insurgents. Though the security situation was more serious in the hills and remote villages than in the Terai and more accessible areas, the call for general strikes disturbed the entire country. The gradually deteriorating security situation during the fieldwork period gave rise to many dilemmas for the research.

The primary effects of the conflict on the research were on the selection of the research site and on the mobility of the researcher. The villages which I had selected in the hill locations for detailed study had to be changed twice mainly due to the security concerns. Changes in the village research site resulted in the wastage of efforts gathering secondary information and rapport building with district-level stakeholders and the community. The security situation also affected the type of research site. For example, my original plan was to select a hill village quite far from a road head and from the influence of the market. But this had to be changed due to the worsening security situation in less accessible areas. Government security forces were confined to the district headquarters and surrounding villages and they could not ensure the security situation away from the district headquarters. Thus, the security situation and accessibility, which were secondary criteria during the research design period, turned out to be the primary criteria for the research. Though the security situation continued to deteriorate later even in the villages selected (including a bomb blast in the VDC building), these happened during later stages of my research and thus had less effect on it. Frequently-called general strikes by the rebels and other political parties, however, restricted mobility of the researcher throughout the research period.

Another effect of the conflict was on my ability to observe some important events in the communities. Due to the state of emergency imposed by the government, user groups in the hills had to postpone the implementation of forest management activities, especially those which involved gathering of people and working in groups in the forest. As a result, I could not observe the management operations and general assemblies of the user groups which would have provided important insights into labour contribu-

tion and participation in decision making. Many times it also interrupted interaction with the villagers. For this, I had to rely on the respondents' perception and experience rather than my own observation and interaction. In the Terai, this was not a major problem.

More importantly, the country was (and has been even after the peace agreement of November 2006) wrapped in a climate of unease and suspicion, so that unfamiliar visitors asking questions about household assets, about functioning of institutions and about local politics were not always warmly welcomed either by the residents or by the officials. It required enormous effort to build the trust and confidence essential to get the data and information. Due to the sensitivity of the information about household assets and use of the information by the rebels, extra caution had to be taken for the safe storage of the questionnaires and for confidentiality.

Consideration of the effects of the worsening security situation and chronic political instability on the implementation of research is one matter. However, as ODG (2003) argues, one cannot ignore or isolate the effects of political instability from the struggles over access and use of forest resources. The current situation of Nepal can, as a result of conflict, be characterized as 'weakened or non-existent public institutions and local government structures, withheld and contested external legitimacy of the state; a strong parallel or extralegal economy; existence of, or high susceptibility to, violence; livelihoods highly vulnerable to external shocks and widespread serious poverty' (*ibid.*: 22). The contest for the forest resources and the extra legal economy that flourishes around them are intrinsic to rather than separate from this wider context.

Notes

1. It is common in CPRM literature to use institutions and organizations interchangeably, but in this study, institutions are perceived as a set of formal and informal rules, norms and values while organizations comprise structures and groups of people who administer the function of institutions.
2. I have used the term 'livelihoods' here to mean the assets, the activities and the access to these that together determine the living gained by an individual or a household (Bebbington 1999, Ellis 2000).
3. In a contemporary society, forest-dependent groups might include poor rural immigrants who occupy forest land as a source of new agricultural land and other economic opportunities; rural poor who derive supplemental or emergency income from forest; smallholder farmers for whom forest provides important farm inputs; and finally artisans and formal or informal forest industry workers (Scherr et al. 2004).

4. The term 'control' used in this study includes the two important concepts of ownership and authority. Ownership alone does not necessarily imply authority, especially in making decisions related to the asset. Control consists of the ability to mediate access for others (Ribot and Peluso 2003). This is a function of power to direct and regulate actions.
5. Marx contends that in a class society, class tends to polarize increasingly, and the society splits into two: a minority of people who increasingly accumulate society's wealth form one class (oppressing class), and a majority of people including the landless, land-poor and agricultural labourer (oppressed class). During the process, they become more homogenous internally, with other groupings absorbed into either of the two classes. The process reaches to a crisis point when revolution terminates the existing arrangements and a new classless society emerges, with the formerly oppressed class in power (John 1991).
6. Lenin's conceptualization of social differentiation sees the role of market as an important factor in shaping the process and magnitude of differentiation in agrarian society (Lenin 1974, 4th edition) while Chyanovian sees family development cycle (mainly the family labour) as an important determinant of it (Chayanov 1925, 1966 edition).
7. Consideration of rural non-farm activities and income is particularly important in contemporary agrarian communities as these factors not only diversify the rural livelihood options and influence the process and magnitude of differentiation but also provide an understanding of how the agrarian communities link to the wider economy.
8. Kabeer here acknowledges Bourdieu's idea of 'doxa'—the aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken-for-granted that they become naturalized—and argues that the passage from 'doxa' to discourse, a more critical consciousness, only becomes possible when competing ways of 'being and doing' become available as material and cultural possibilities (Kabeer 1999: 441).
9. Bryson (1992) argues that the goals for greater equality in agrarian societies are not achievable through reform within the existing class framework. Though Marx considered the poor peasants to be largely passive in the class struggle, Marxist activists such as Mao placed the peasant at the centre of the revolution aimed at equality.
10. The term 'peasant' is used to denote the cultivating community with or without rights on the land they cultivate.
11. In studying the role of the state in Indian agrarian differentiation, Das (2001) provides examples where state interventions in the form of tenancy reforms give ownership rights to some of the former richer tenants and turn them into rich peasants and capitalist farmers while also 'breaking the anti-landlord unity of the peasantry' (p. 158).

12. There are wide varieties of frameworks available for the assessment of participation. Cornwall (2003: 1327), for example, uses a typology that distinguishes modes of participation: functional, instrumental, consultative and transformative. Agarwal (2001: 1624) uses typology of forms ranging from passive to active and empowering. Nelson and Wright (1995: 6) distinguishes it in various steps, ranging from mere presence of local people to people trying to determine their own choices and direction independent of the state.

13. Common Property Resources (CPRs) include all resources accessible to the whole community of a village, to which no individual has exclusive property rights, such as common forests, village pasture, and rivers (Jodha 1986). As Ostrom (1990) suggests, this study uses CPRs for the resource itself and Common Property Resource for the resource management regimes where property rights are held by local people, i.e., communities in groups. There are four management options usually applied for management of commons: privatization, centralization by state, communal ownership and co-management between communities and (mostly) state.

14. For conceptual clarity, it is useful to distinguish 'communities' from 'villages'. A village refers to the physical area, a territory, and community refers to the people residing within it (Uphoff 1998). Community, as a concept has both physical and emotional aspects that are experienced by the members. As a physical locale in which people live together, share services, and identify it as their home, the community functions as one of the most basic levels of organization of humans in time and place. It also embodies the shared experiences that connect people living in the same locality resulting into emotional attachment and cohesion (Zanetell and Knuth 2004).

15. Exclusion has been used in many different ways to explain multiple forms of social disadvantages (see, for example, Gore et. al 1995, Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997, Andersen and Siim 2004). The term here is defined as a process by which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live (de Haan 1998).

16. Pokharel and Niraula (2004) provide a comprehensive list of important criteria to assess good forest governance and analyses governance of different agencies at different levels: personal, political and policy levels; service-provider and user-group levels.

17. However, this variation in time horizons may be related to the initial distribution of wealth. Level of wealth of the poor users may be so low that their participation in collective action violates their survival constraints. The constraints artificially tend to reduce their time horizons since they are forced to attach considerable importance to their present incomes.

18. *De jure* denotes the formal legal rights enforced by formal legal authorities and *de facto* denotes those based on rules made among resource users (Ribot 1998). Extra legal mechanisms, structures and relations governing resource use may include

social identity, including status based on caste, gender, age; social relations based on friendship, family, historical ties; coercion and trickery including misinformation or threats of violence or physical circumstance such as location or structure.

19. Hill locations include areas from Siwaliks foothill range of Himalayas. Terai for this study includes the plains region adjacent to the foothills, which is geographically and culturally distinct from the hills. Two geographical terms frequently used to refer to the Terai region of Nepal are inner Terai (*bhitri madesh*) and outer Terai (*madesh*). This study has included only the inner Terai part which is significantly different than outer Terai, not only in terms of geography, but more importantly in terms of population composition, economic significance and cultural characteristics (Gaige 1975).

20. Though it is often argued that one cannot generalize findings on the basis of a single case study, Ragin (1992) illustrates that generalizability can be increased by the strategic selection of cases. More importantly, as Flyvbjerg (2004) argues, from both an understanding-oriented and an action-oriented perspective, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur.

21. Though the worsening security situation, caused by the ongoing conflict (1996–2006) between Maoist insurgents and government security forces, forced the researcher to change the study locations twice, the criteria for selecting the villages remained the same. In the later selection, however, I paid due consideration to possible threat (the effect of conflict on selection of the study site is discussed later in this chapter).

22. *Ghar* is used to refer both to household and to the dwelling it occupies.

23. White (1980) and Netting (1993) provide useful discussion about the household as a unit of study and the difficulties involved in it, especially in the context of Asia.

24. Landlord is used as a generic term for the person who transfers the rights of cultivation to a tenant. He/she may be the landowner or the landholder.

25. To protect the respondents and to maintain confidentiality, the real names of the settlements and user groups are omitted. Location and user groups are identified by the name of Village Development Committee (VDCs). Pseudonyms are used for respondents.

26. Although there is controversy on the use of the term Dalit, the Dalit movement of Nepal has accepted the term (Bhattachan et al. 2002). In India, the term Dalit is a common usage in Marathi, Hindi and many other Indian languages, meaning the poor and oppressed (Shah 2001). In Nepal however, the definition of Dalit also differs from one source to another. According to Koirala (1996) Dalit refers to a group of people who are religiously, culturally, socially and economically oppressed. On the other hand, Bishwokarma (2001) uses the term Dalit exclusively for the so-called 'untouchable' caste group defined by the Varna system.

²⁷. Throughout the thesis, I use the terms untouchable, low caste, artisan and Dalit interchangeably to refer to those persons or groups who are considered by birth to be ritually impure in the caste hierarchy. The local terms for these people are Dalit and *Sano jaat*.

2

The Macro Context of Community Forestry

2.1 Introduction

Explanation of differential outcomes in an agrarian economy requires an understanding of the economic, political, social and institutional contexts, both at macro (national) and micro (community) level. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the macro-level context in which community forestry policy is made, and the modality for implementation is developed and practised.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The next section examines major characteristics of agrarian and social differentiation in Nepal. It shows significant inequalities between economic and social groups that are reflected in differential access to and control over means of production, opportunities for development and social services available, and unequal participation in public and political affairs. The inequality varies across space, caste, ethnicity and gender. Section 2.3 locates forest policies in this context. It provides a historical background of forest sector development in relation to peasants' access to forest resources in Nepal. The section also examines the major characteristics of forest department's and donor's involvement in the sector. The final section summarizes the major arguments.

2.2 Nepalese Economy and Agrarian Differentiation

2.2.1 Poverty and inequality

Nepal is a small developing country with a largely agrarian economy. The country is among the poorest in South Asia, with a per capita income of US\$ 240 in 2002. Since 1951, when the country's modern history of development began, much change has taken place in the economic and social sectors, including development in infrastructure, improvement in education and health services, and expansion of non-farm income-generation opportunities. However, the distribution of the benefits from development has

remained unequal (Pandey 1999). While the country as a whole has witnessed dramatic progress in cutting poverty from 42% in 1996 to 31% in 2004, this development is not equitable. In nominal terms, the bottom 80% of the population earns only 47% of income while the richest 20% earns 53% of total income (CBS 2004b: 36). Two important characteristics of the composition of poor in Nepal are: first, that poverty continues to be a rural phenomenon; and second, that substantial disparities exist across ecological zones, development regions, castes and ethnicities.

Spatial variation

The country is divided into three ecological zones: mountains, hills and plains (Terai).¹ The incidence of income poverty is most pronounced in the mountains, followed by the Terai and the hills. The Nepal Living Standards Survey (2003/04) indicates severe inequality between rural and urban population, showing that the average income for rural people is 2.7 times lower than the average income of urban people (CBS 2004b: 37). Table 1 shows spatially disaggregated poverty status and human development indicators (HDI).

Table 1
Spatial characteristics of poverty and human development indexes

	Human Development Index (HDI)	Human Poverty Index (HPI)	Total Population (%)
Ecological belt			
Mountain	0.386	50	7
Hill	0.512	41	43
Plain	0.478	43	50
Urban/rural			
Urban	0.581	25	15
Rural	0.452	42	85
Nepal	0.471	40	100

Source: Population Census (2001); CBS (2004a), UNDP (2004:18-20)

As the table shows, HDI in the urban areas (0.581) outstrips that of the rural areas (0.452) in which the majority live. The same applies for literacy rates, rural areas being the most disadvantaged (UNDP 2004).

Caste and ethnic dimension of poverty

As pointed out in the first chapter (section 1.4.3), Nepalese society is also stratified by caste and ethnicity that reflect variations in poverty rates (Table 2).

Table 2
Trend in the incidence of poverty (1995/96 and 2003/04)

Caste and ethnic groups	% of population below poverty line		Decrease in poverty incidence (from 1995/96 to 2003/04)	
	1995/96	2003/04	Number	%
National average	42	31	11	26
Brahmin/Chhetri	34	19	15	44
Dalits	59	47	12	20
Janajati (except Newar)	49	44	5	10

Source: DFID and World Bank 2006:1

As the Table 2 indicates, though the poverty incidence has fallen for all caste and ethnic groups, the Brahmin/Chhetri have the fewest households below the poverty line and the fastest decline of poverty incidence. In contrast, almost half of all Dalits still fall below it.

In the last few decades, a number of studies have analysed the reasons for poverty and growing inequality in Nepal. The most significant studies were those of Blaikie and Cameron et al. (1980 revised ed. 2001), Bista (1991), Shrestha (1997), Pandey (1999), Dahal (1999) and Bhattarai (2003). Though these studies differ in their perspectives in analysing the causes, all agree to the situation of general stagnation or retardation and deprivation, i.e., in Blaikie's terms, 'a state in crisis'. Most recently, the influence of caste, ethnic and gender discrimination in shaping poverty outcomes have also been recognized as barriers to poverty reduction and social inclusion (see for example Lawoti 2005, DFID and World Bank 2006). Since agriculture and agrarian relations have remained the important basis of economic and social differentiation, the following sections provide a brief discussion of the characteristics of Nepalese agrarian economy.

2.2.2 Characteristics of agrarian economy and class relations

Agricultural stagnation, rural landlessness and marginality

Agriculture has remained the most important sector of the Nepalese economy, where over 65% of population are still directly engaged in. However, its contribution to GDP has been declining over time from about 50% in the 1990s to less than 40% in 2000 (Table 3).

Table 3
Distribution of the economically active population and GDP (1991-2001)

Sectors	Economically active population (%)		GDP (%)	
	1991	2001	1990-91	2000-01
Primary production*	81.03	65.86	48.17	38.38
Secondary production incl. manufacturing	2.67 (2.52)	13.20 (8.81)	17.04 (6.80)	20.87 (9.04)
Trade and Commerce	14.49	9.99	14.25	18.58
Services	3.76	10.72	20.53	22.17
Unknown (others)	1.33	0.23	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100

* Primary production includes agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and quarrying; Secondary production includes manufacturing, electricity, gas and water and construction. Figures in parenthesis is the share of 'Manufacturing'

Source: Computed from National Population Census, 1991, 2001 and (Bhattarai 2003)

Table 3 illustrates a shift of both labour force and GDP away from the primary production sector to the service sectors; the manufacturing sector remains the weakest with the share in GDP still well below 10%. Though the agricultural sector has remained the largest sector contributing to national economy, the agricultural economy itself is characterized by low development of productive resources. The domination of traditional factors of production, low cropping intensity, predominance of cereal crops in the total area under production, the low value of production and sluggish growth rate have resulted in agricultural stagnation (Bhattarai 2003). The agricultural production in 2002/03 registered 2.1% growth which is less than the population growth rate of 2.3% per annum. This trend has remained unchanged for the past few years.

The slow growth of agriculture is partly related to the economic policies of the country. The wave of economic liberalization that took virtually the entire global economy in its grip during the decade of the 90s has had an

enormous impact on the economic and sectoral development policies of Nepal. The most significant measures of economic reform that affected agricultural production included privatization of state-owned enterprises and contraction of subsidies on agricultural input. The elimination of subsidy on fertilizers, agricultural tools and improved seeds, resulting in higher prices, was so prohibitive that farmers—especially small farmers and remote villages—decided to stop using them at all. As Mishra (1997) argues, the reduction in subsidies inhibited the development of the vast rural agricultural sector and intensified poverty while at the same time aggravating economic and political gaps between the urban, modern sector and the rural traditional sectors.

A comparative analysis of characteristics of agricultural households in Nepal shows two important characteristics of the contemporary agrarian structure (Table 4).

Table 4
Characteristics of agricultural households (1996-2004)

Category	Nepal living standard survey	
	1995/96	2003/04
Agricultural households with land (% of the total households)	83	78
Average size of agricultural land (in hectare)	1.1	0.8
% of agricultural households operating rented-in land only	4.8	7.3
% of agricultural households operating less than 0.5 hectare	40.1	44.8

Source: (CBS 2004b Tables 9 and 9.7)

First, as the Table 4 shows, though the percentage of Nepalese households with land (working on more than 0.013 hectare land) has decreased during the past eight years, the proportion of landless (who operate in rented land only) has increased along with decreased average size of agricultural land.² Second, and more importantly, the problem of marginal landholding—i.e., small farm size operating at less than 0.5 hectare land—is more serious than that of landlessness in Nepal, although alternative data sources show far more landless people in the country.³

Table 5
Land distribution pattern by farm size (1991/92-2001/02)

Farm size (operated)	Year 1991/92		Year 2001/02	
	Agricultural households (%)	Total land area operated (%)	Agricultural households (%)	Total land area operated (%)
< 0.5 ha (small)*	43	11	47	15
0.5- 2.0	46	47	45	54
2.1-3.0	6	15	5	14
> 3 ha.	5	27	3	17

Total operated area = area owned by a household - own area rented out to others + area rented in from others; figures are rounded.

* Agriculture Census (2001) considers farm size less than 0.5 ha as small and marginal farm. The percentage varies slightly from that of Nepal Living Standard Survey which estimates nearly 44% small farmers in 2004.

Source: computed from (CBS 1993; CBS 2003a)

Nearly 85% of agricultural households operate the land they own and the remainder (about 15%) are involved in various forms of tenancy (CBS 2003b). This indicates that the access to land for cultivation is highly linked to land ownership but is skewed.

As Table 5 shows, the bottom 47% of agricultural households in Nepal operate 15% of total cultivated land, while the top 3% occupy 17%.⁴ Though inequality in land distribution is found decreasing over the time, showing that the land is becoming more concentrated in the middle range (0.5–2.0 ha), the large gap between the size operated by small farmers and that by large farmers (with more than 2 ha land) still reflects significant inequality in land control. Skewed land control is much higher in the Terai (Gini coefficient 0.57) than in the hills and the mountains.

A large majority of the agricultural population depend on small farm size for cultivation. Cultivation on small farms is not always economically viable and the problem of skewed land distribution becomes more acute when seen in terms of land quality. Big farmers also own better quality land, *khet* (i.e., irrigated flat land), while small farmers have mostly low quality land, *bari* (non-irrigated terraced land) (RRN 2006). Thus agricultural production and self-sufficiency in food is directly related to the size of landownership and the quality of land cultivated. Among those who live in a food deficit situation are the landless and land-poor households. As the Agriculture Census (2001) indicates, among the small farmers, only 4.6% are food-sufficient. Most landless and land-poor engage in various forms of tenancy to supplement their food requirements. The total area under tenancy consti-

tutes 9.3% in Nepal and this number is about 13% in the Terai (CBS 2003b). As the fieldwork data demonstrate later, these are the means of appropriation of social surplus in an agrarian economy.

The traditional land grant systems: a basis for class formation

The unequal pattern of landownership has its origin in the traditional land grant system whereby land was granted by the ruling class to the public in various forms. The most comprehensive study of traditional land tenure and taxation was undertaken by Regmi (1978). It offers an understanding of the significance of the historical land grant systems in generating the unequal distribution of land ownership we observe today. Prior to the unification of the country in the 18th century, land distribution was associated more with the dynamics of household size (Seddon 1987: 10), i.e., similar to the kind of differentiation that Chayanov identified among the Russian peasantry. After unification, the state took control of the land under the *Raiker* system⁵ and retained authority to grant the bulk of agricultural lands to a small proportion of landowners and institutions in return for performing various administrative functions of the state, including helping the state for tax collection from local farmers.⁶

The land grant and assignment policy followed by the state favoured particular sections of Nepalese society at the cost and exclusion of others. Those given large blocks of land were in most cases Brahmins, and Chhetri, whose social and political status corresponded to that of the ruling class itself (Seddon 1987, Thapa 2000). These local tax collectors also became feudal landlords who exercised the power devolved from the state (Karki 2003). Historical bias in favour of the high-caste and ruling classes enabled them to establish a position of economic and political dominance, which today ensures that division of caste and ethnicity largely coincide with class differences. Inequality in land control and marginalization of small farmers is reproduced over time through control over land being passed from one generation to the next. Though there have been various attempts at redistributive land reform since the early 1950s, they have been largely ineffective in providing equitable land control (Gaige 1975, SEEPOR 2000, Karki and Seddon 2003) and none addressed the issue of marginal landholding by the majority (47%) of small farmers, which is more important than the size of landholding.

Non-farm income, remittance and indebtedness: perpetuation of class relations

Small and marginal peasants rely on different income sources for their livelihoods. The increasing reliance on income from non-farm sources has come, to a small extent, from the expansion of local non-farming activities, but to a major extent from migration—predominantly global labour migration. Non-farm activities with the highest potential for income generation are also those with the highest barriers to entry and they are therefore concentrated among middle and rich rural households. Those who have limited access to land from which to derive their own food are also among those who have limited access to non-farm incomes and therefore are the most vulnerable (Seddon and Adhikari 2003).

Remittances received from labour migration within and abroad are of crucial importance to sustain lives of rural poor and contribute a major portion of Nepal's economy, comprising an estimated 15% of GDP (Shakya 2002). Official figures estimated the value of remittances in the year 2004 to be around US\$ 0.884 billion (NPC 2006).⁷ This has significantly affected the structure and dynamics of the agrarian economy. On the one hand, a diminishing proportion of the rural population is able to survive on the basis of food self-sufficiency. On the other, a diminishing proportion needs to survive on the basis of its own farm production.

There exists a huge gap between the overseas wages and the amount that can be earned locally and even from neighbouring country, India. Wages earned overseas are significantly higher, which encourages people to migrate overseas. The main overseas countries which offer better remittances include Arabian, East Asian and European countries. Similar to the access to non-farm engagements, the labour migration to countries with highest potential for income generation is also limited for land-poor. A substantial amount is required to pay agents for securing overseas jobs, and specific knowledge and skills are required for such jobs (Smith 2004). This requirement puts poorer groups further behind in a local economy dependent on foreign remittances. In this sense, as in other South Asian countries, diversification of rural livelihoods through non-farm engagements and remittances have merely served to widen the divide between the rich and the poor (Rigg 2006).

Indebtedness is widespread in the hills as well as in the Terai. The incidence of indebtedness is higher in the rural areas and among the households from the lower income category (CBS 2004a), indicating growing vulnerability among the rural poor for their survival. Access to credit from the formal sector (banks and co-operatives) is highly constrained for them. This is be-

cause land is the most important source of collateral, and those who lack land also lack access to loans from formal sources. The Agricultural Census (2001) points out that more than 70% of small holdings—with less than one hectare of land—take loans from informal sources such as private lenders and relatives. In contrast, more than two-thirds of large holdings borrow from formal credit centres such as the Agriculture Development Bank and co-operatives (CBS 2003a). The nexus of social relationships encourages the poor peasant and sub-marginal producer to borrow from wealthier neighbours at higher interest rates. Most loans for the poor go for consumption purposes to meet immediate survival needs and interest rates for such loans are governed by ‘market forces’ which in this case, are equivalent to ‘feudal forces’, and not by the relevant law which disallows such exploitation (Pandey 1999: 78).

The implications of informal indebtedness are manifold. Those in debt may be obliged to sell assets to make repayments and thus further their incapacity to ensure their own subsistence requirements. Where tenants are in debt, they often lack the ability to exert their proper tenancy rights. While analysing the land and social change in Nepal, Caplan (1970) emphasizes the way indebtedness generates a nexus of what he calls ‘convergent ties’ and argues that indebtedness can carry political and social obligations as a result of which the debtors lose their freedom and remain in inferior and subordinate positions. Such economic, political and social dependency between the creditor and debtor is important when it comes to the way they participate in public affairs in an agrarian economy.

2.2.3 Caste relations: social form of class formation

Dalits comprise nearly 12% of the total population and remain at the very bottom of Nepal’s caste hierarchy (Gurung 2003). As we saw earlier, historically they have been excluded from land grant schemes, which only benefited the high caste. About 23% of them are landless and about 50% control less than five *ropani* (0.25 ha) of land (Aahuti 2003: 6). The severity of landlessness among the Dalits is more pronounced in Terai where about 95% of the Dalit population are landless (Bhattachan et al. 2002). This is mainly because many Dalits settled themselves on the land of big landlords of the Terai as labourers to farm their land. Even if some Dalits do control a little land, it is either infertile for agricultural production or occupied by the house itself. As a result, food deficiency is highest (49.6 per cent) among this caste group (Bishwokarma 2005), they generate the lowest per capita income, and have the highest debt burden amongst all the caste and ethnic groups (Mijar 2004).⁸ Dalits also have the highest migration rate for wage

labour and the lowest consumption of food and other goods and services, including the access to health and education facilities (Gurung 2002). DFID and World Bank's analysis on poverty and social exclusion suggests that higher poverty incidences among Dalits is determined by their lower levels of resource endowment including landownership, educational attainment and consequent lack of access to more productive occupations compared to high caste groups who have been historically privileged (2006).

Over 200 forms of caste-based discrimination have been identified in Nepal. For example, Dahal et al. (2002) note,

The 'Upper caste' and Indigenous people ... have the deep rooted negative attitudes towards Dalits that they should not be given loans (they won't pay back), tickets during the elections, (they will lose), give milk and yoghurt (it will spoil cow's milk) or allow entry into temples and water sources simply because of the fear of some possible misfortunes.

Though the discrimination is more entrenched in the country's less-developed areas, caste continues to influence interpersonal behaviours throughout the country (DFID and World Bank 2006). Such disparities based on caste identity are also reflected in other spheres of society where high caste and dominant ethnic groups have better access to major economic opportunities, social services and political structures. For example, Dalit children still face economic and social problems when it comes to accessing formal school education, and their representation in the executive bodies of political parties remains very low, with only one Dalit member of the House of Representatives elected in 1991 (*ibid.*: 16).⁹ The same disparities exist in their access to employment in government and nongovernment service sectors (BK 2005).

The ideas of 'caste' have acquired considerable social, cultural and political force. It is not therefore surprising to see a positive association between the class and caste status in an agrarian economy. However, this association is not rigid. As the fieldwork has pointed out, so-called high-caste groups can be landless or poor peasants and low-caste groups can control substantial amounts of land (see Chapter 3, the case of hill community). In this sense, caste identity is not a rigid determinant variable for economic condition but it is an important social basis for class formation (Seddon 1987).

The issue of caste-based social discrimination in Nepalese society has recently been brought into the public debate, especially after the 1990 constitution, and more importantly after the insurgency by the Maoists (1996–2006) in the country and the people's movement (2006), but very little has been done to correct the situation. As a result, patron–client relations be-

tween the high-caste and low-caste groups persist and there is limited involvement of the latter group in village and community-level affairs.

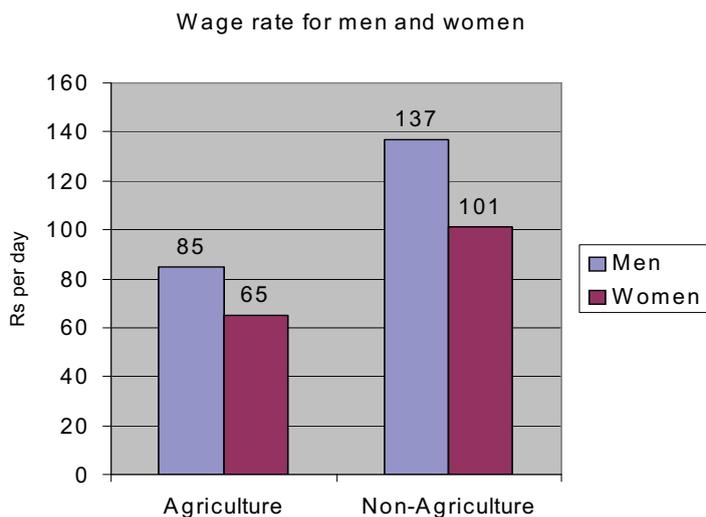
2.2.4 Characteristics of gender differentiation

As in most South Asian countries, women agricultural workers exceed their male counterparts as a percentage of the total employed (FAO 2002, CBS 2003b). In their varied roles, ranging from agricultural labourers to the managers of their homesteads, they are active participants in the sector. Despite the critical involvement and contribution of women in agriculture, their presence is officially invisible. Women have no ownership of land, house or livestock in more than 80% of Nepalese households and only 10% of households have parcels of land registered in women's names (Acharya et al. 2004). The Nepalese law of inheritance, included in the Civil Code 1964 (*Muluki Ain*) provided for inheritance rights of both movable and immovable family property to sons on an equal basis and until recently, the law did not entitle daughters to parental property. The Land Reform Act of 1978 also prohibited women from being considered as a tenant by the landlord and in distributing land to the landless, the certificate of ownership is only issued in the name of a man (MGEP 2002a). Though the recent 11th amendment of the civil code has brought some positive changes that give daughters equal inheritance rights to ancestral property, its implementation requires them to return their share to the oldest male heir after marriage whereas sons do not need to do so (FWLD 2001).

Agricultural workers are the lowest-paid employment segment and women receive the lowest remuneration within the sector if they are paid at all.¹⁰ There is a significant difference in the average daily wages received, with men earning approximately 27 to 35% higher wages (Figure 2).

Wage rates are based on social systems of payment in rural areas and thus are deeply entrenched, so that any attempt to increase the wages on one farm is met by combined resistance from other landowners (see Chapter 3 for example). Similar disparities exist in women's access to non-farm income and opportunities for women to participate in global labour market. The establishment of viable non-farm income-generating enterprises requires investment, but women face multiple barriers in obtaining the loan for such purposes, including the lack of collateral (Haq 2002). Similarly, women have been discriminated against in accessing information and resources to benefit from foreign labour migration. The money they require makes them dependent on a host of people within the family and outside (Adhikari et al. 2006).

Figure 2
Difference in wage rates between men and women



Note: 1 US \$ = Rs 66 (approx)

Source: CBS (2004b:63)

A gender dimension of poverty affects human development outcomes—especially education and health—and leads to greater economic insecurity for vast majority of women (Table 6).

Table 6
Human development indicators by sex (2001 and 2004)

	Men	Women
Life expectancy (years)	60.1	60.7
Literacy rate (6 years above)	63.5	38.9
Literacy rate (15 years above)	64.5	33.8
Infant mortality (per 000)	64.4	79.2
Under 5 mortality (per 000)	91.2	112.4
Representation in parliament (1999 election) (in %)	94	6

Source: CBS (2001); CBS (2004a) and UNDP (2004)

As Table 6 illustrates, Nepalese women suffer from low literacy rates, higher infant and under-five mortality, and less participation in the public affairs than men. Until the 2001 Census reported for the first time that female life expectancy in Nepal was slightly higher than male life expectancy, Nepal was one of few countries in the world where a woman's life expectancy was lower than that of a man. Similarly, the underrepresentation of women in political processes and government is glaring. Nepalese women, who comprise 51% of the total population, have only 6% representation in the national parliament. Of the total 10,856 positions in government civil service, women hold only less than 5% (RRN 2006). Gender discrimination applies to all women irrespective of their economic and caste positions, albeit to a differing extent.

Lack of control over means of production is also reflected in their subordinate position in the household and their limited participation and access to economic and political sectors. For example, male dominance remains the norms in decision-making, both in households and in public affairs (Miller 1990). A woman's position in the household depends a great deal on her husband. If the husband supports his wife—and more importantly, if he fathers children with her—her status in the household is considerably improved.

In both private and public aspects, wife must show respect to her husband. The wife's public behaviours towards her husband are always marked by humility and deference. She must walk behind him, carry burdens for him, eat after he has finished and try to serve him in every way possible. (Bennett 1983: 176)

Women are usually assigned to a class on the basis of their husband's relations to the means of production. While the patriarchal social structure has severe effects on Nepalese women's inequality, other social variables such as class, caste and ethnicity intersect with gender, resulting in inequities between women (Smith 2004, Caplan and Bujra 1978). Within economic classes, women are divided by caste and ethnic identities, by ideological and cultural barriers, by generational differences, and in their relationships to men. Hindu women, for example are especially subjugated to religiously sanctified exclusion, according to concepts of purity and impurity. The concepts have also been transferred to political, social, economic and cultural domains (Geiser 2005). In particular, high-caste women suffer more from subordination and seclusion by their male family members (Kondos 1989, Bista 1991). The subsistence needs and economic vulnerability of lower caste groups cannot bear the cost of such seclusion because women often need to work outside home for their livelihood. Women from some ethnic

groups (such as Tibeto-Burman groups) are said to have more egalitarian relations in general between the sexes but, as Bhattachan (2000) argues, they occupy limited positions in society due to the power and privilege of high-caste Hindu groups.

Though recent years have witnessed some progressive measures from the state, specifically targeted at addressing gender equality at policy levels, the implementation of these policies and legal provisions have not been easy and they are proving a challenge.¹¹

2.2.5 Struggles against inequalities and exclusion

The democratization process of the 1990s and recent movement of 2006 for the restoration of democracy have created space for the growth of civil society organizations and allowed fostering of media as well as networks based on ethnic, caste and gender identity. The term 'civil society' refers to a forum in which citizens come together to advance interests that they hold in common (Edwards 2001). These organizations have been influential in raising awareness on the disparities between social groups and in organizing the excluded at least at the national level. As a result for example, the post-1990 period witnessed the dismantling of the old projection of a 'single Nepali culture' based on upper caste Hindus. Self-chosen terms like Dalit and Janajati emerged to displace terms like 'tribal' and lower caste (*sano jaat*) that had been used to describe ethnic and low-caste groups. This section briefly outlines characteristics of the struggle related to class, caste, gender and ethnic disparities through the civil society organizations.

The struggle against caste-based discrimination and for ethnic identity

Although the Dalits are the most discriminated group, they received relatively little attention until 1990. With the restoration of democracy, a number of Dalit organizations and federations emerged and the Dalit movement experienced tremendous momentum (Geiser 2005). These organizations mainly focus on advocating against the practice of untouchability and are involved in the struggle to eliminate such practices.¹² As a response to the growing pressure of Dalit activists, the government established National Dalit Commission (NDC) especially to address the issue of caste-based discrimination.

Despite all efforts, however, caste-based discrimination prevails. Dalits in the rural areas and even in urban centres among the poor segment remain oppressed and experience widespread discrimination. This indicates that although at the national level, Dalit organizations have been able to receive government and public attention, and although a variety of programmes and

plans to empower the Dalit communities exist, in rural areas, people are unable to benefit from them. Either they are not aware of these initiatives (Geiser 2005) or, as discussed in the chapters later, the poor economic condition and vulnerable livelihood situation on the ground does not allow them to organize and stand against the disparities and exclusion. Where Dalit organizations have reached and have supported them in the struggle, the movement has remained scattered and parochial rather than social in nature.

In additions to their untouchable status in the larger Hindu model, Dalits themselves practise untouchability in their day-to-day life, and there is clear ranking of status among them (Cameron 2005, reprint). The discrimination among Dalits themselves is distinctly observed in their eating and drinking practices and while performing life-cycle rituals such as marriage (Bhattachan, Hemchuri et al. 2002, Dahal, Gurung et al. 2002). Such hierarchical caste structure among the Dalits hampers the formation of a united Dalit movement for collective interests, resulting in the limited success of the movement against untouchability on the ground.

The 1990 constitution opened up space for the emergence of a large number of ethnic groups and federations that are promoting ethnic issues in mainstream development. These ethnic-specific groups and federations are mainly involved in two fields of activities: the preservation of their own culture, and the struggle for equal rights and participation in state affairs (Geiser 2005). Compared to the Dalits, the ethnic movement has been more successful in establishing a united agenda and an umbrella organization—Nepal Janajati Mahasangh, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN). As Geiser (2005) points out, the inherent strength of the NEFIN lies in the unity of diverse groups with their distinct language, ethnicity, religion, culture and territory. In addition, the movement is also more successful in raising awareness at local level. However, the government's initiatives for the inclusion of Dalits and minority ethnic groups in mainstream economic and political development have remained limited.

The struggle against gender inequality

A number of national and local level organizations are active in raising the issue of gender inequality. These organizations have focused their activities in three major domains: increasing women's access to economic and social services; building their organizations and influence; and changing gendered rules, policies and values through awareness-raising, law reform, capacity-building and advocacy at various levels. Increasing pressure and lobbying from women's organizations for equality and inclusion has led to some re-

cent policy reforms, especially in relation to the laws of inherited property rights and citizenship rights of women. The government has also formed a National Women's Commission (NWC) to address the issue of gender inequality.

However, despite the large number of women's organizations, women's wings of the major political parties and the government, their performance in creating pressure and bringing about meaningful change remains insufficient. The movement is highly fragmented and the effect of the women's movement, if any, has been limited to a few urban centres. The majority of rural women are unaware of the initiatives and even of the provisions of women's rights in the law and constitution. At a political level, women themselves come from different economic, caste and political backgrounds. Thus, like the Dalit movement, the women's movement is fragmented with diverse interests and approaches (Geiser 2005: 32). Socioeconomic and political division among women as a category often results in a lack of unity and thus synergy in the movement against wider issue of gender inequality. As a result, the pressure exercised on the government and on the society for meaningful change has remained insufficient.

Armed conflict and class struggle

As already noted in Chapter 1, the country experienced violent civil conflict for a decade (1996–2006) that ended only recently. A number of studies from different perspectives have examined the reasons for the conflict and most believed that it is a combined outcome of inequality in a variety of economic, political and social arenas (Karki and Seddon 2003, Deraniyagala 2005, Lawoti 2005, Pathak 2005, Sharma 2006). Economic deprivation, disparities in the provision of goods and services amongst economic and social groups, and geographical isolation leading to exclusion from political participation and development failure, together with the shortsightedness of ruling elite, have been considered to be the key factors contributing to the break-out of armed conflict. The conflict grew rapidly as the Maoists attracted sympathy, initially by targeting landlords and moneylenders in the villages, and destroying mortgage documents at Agricultural Development Banks and Small Farmer Development Programmes (SFDPs). It also received considerable support from the poor, especially from Dalits and minority ethnic groups (Karki and Seddon 2003, Pathak 2005). The economic deprivation and exclusion from social and political participation worked as push factors (Lawoti 2005). The Maoist agenda for radical transformation against the inequalities, proclaimed more forcefully than any other main-

stream political parties in the country, worked as pull factor, leading to a high participation of poor, women, Janajati and Dalits in the armed conflict.

Some studies on social change during the conflict period suggest that the armed conflict has influenced the social norms and values in a positive manner, especially for the elimination of caste- and gender-based discrimination in rural areas. A few examples of such changes included women wearing combat dress and discarding jewellery, decrease in polygamy and domestic violence, Dalits and non-Dalits eating together (Lama-Tamang et al. 2003: 20–23). However, as these authors cautioned, it remains to be seen if norms and values have changed fundamentally or are mainly based on threats and fear.

Nevertheless, the civil conflict had become an important determinant of economic, political and social life in Nepal. On the one hand, there has been a sharp increase in political awareness in rural Nepal, especially among the poor, women, Dalits and ethnic minorities. Such increased political awareness was evident in recent movement of 2006 against the constitutional monarchy (*Janaandolan-2*) where a large majority of demonstrators were from these groups. More importantly, by strongly raising the issue of inequality and exclusion, the insurgency has ‘contributed to forcing the dominant society to recognize the inequality prevalent in the society and to reflect upon social and political institutions of the country’ (Lawoti 2005: 59). On the other hand, the conflict has had significant effects on economic activities and livelihoods of the people. The decline in economic growth and the destruction of infrastructure hampered the provision of services for the needy. Restrictions on mobility and movement of food supplies until recently, and the loss of the most able-bodied household members, who have either been killed or have left rural areas, have increased the vulnerability of those left behind. The armed conflict seriously constrained the country’s prospects for development by restricting state apparatus and other non-governmental mechanisms to respond to the increasing demands for goods and services (Hussain and Seddon 2002). Forest sector development was not an exception to such situation.

Post-April 2006: a new political context

After a series of attempts on the part of government, political parties and civil society organization to negotiate peace, Nepal experienced a people’s movement—i.e., *Jana Andolan-2* in early 2006. The movement was led by seven major political parties and received active support from civil society groups and professional associations, including ordinary people, especially the young generations of men and women who participated in peaceful

demonstrations throughout the country demanding a) independence both from the monarchy and its supporters and from the Maoists, and b) the restoration of parliamentary democracy that was removed by the successive interventions of the king. As a result, the House of Representatives that was dissolved four years previously was reinstated. The movement provided a mandate for the newly formed government to hold an election for a Constituent Assembly (CA) and a peaceful settlement with the Maoist movement. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the GON and the Maoists has taken the peace process forward by establishing a framework for the military demobilization and initiating a political process towards the assembly, a revised constitution, a referendum and eventually an elected government. Simultaneously, the reinstated parliament has made momentous proclamations such as: reduction of the royal power; the declaration of Nepal, which was the only Hindu kingdom in the world, as a secular state; and allocation of at least one-third of the seats in all political and state administrative structures for women.

The provision of a Hindu state was the underlying cause of Brahmin hegemony for the last 237 years. One state religion means the dominance of one culture, a few castes, one language, and even one gender. The declaration (for secular state) fulfils one of the main demands of indigenous and ethnic groups. (Dr KB Bhattachan, an activist and professor of Tribhuvan University, Nepal)

Though these initiatives have yet to address the widespread poverty and social exclusion, the new arrangement has certainly paved ways towards a long-lasting peace and political stability in the country, while also addressing most of the sources of caste, ethnic and gender disparities that shape the characteristics of agrarian societies and national polity.

The foregoing discussion has outlined the historical and current socio-economic and political context under which forest policies have been formulated and are operating today. The following section examines the characteristics of forest sector development, policies and the Department of Forests that implements the policies on the ground.

2.3 Community Forestry and Forest Sector Development

2.3.1 Development and evolution of community forestry

Forests in Nepal cover 5.8 million hectares—approximately 40% of the total national area. As in other developing countries, Nepal has experienced a rapid decline in its forest resources over recent decades, particularly from

the 1950s to the 1980s, with far-reaching environmental, social and economic implications. The loss of forest products as a result of depletion, changes in tenure system or changes in the management system had an adverse impact on forest users. However, the nature and magnitude of the impact varied according to the ability of individuals and groups to substitute new products.

The development of forestry administration and management in Nepal has different historical roots in the highlands and the plains that reflect the different interests, priorities and influence of ruling classes under different political regimes (see Bajracharya 1983, Gilmour and Fisher 1991, Hobley 1996, Malla 1996, 1998, Biggs and Messerschmidt 2003). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Terai forests (which border India in the South) were maintained by the Shah King (1768–1846) as a physical barrier against possible invasion from the British East India Company. Later, during the Rana period (1846–1951), they were exploited for sale to British India, adding to the wealth of the Rana families. The Ranas, in later years, employed British forestry experts from the Indian Forest Service to supervise the felling and export of the Terai Sal forest to India for use in the construction of the Indian railways. Since then, forests of the Terai have been the focus of commercial interest to both Nepali rulers and Indian contractors. The story of management in the hills is different. Historically, forests have been used and managed by local people under various types of local management systems to support subsistence needs rather than for commercial purposes or profit.¹³ This different history still has an important effect on the way forest policies are formulated, manipulated and implemented in the two locations.

In both locations, farmers traditionally combined forestry with agriculture and livestock, ensuring fulfilment of local demands and sustainable use of the forests.¹⁴ Though there are regional and cultural variations, forest use was often part of the general livelihood strategies of local people, and management and protection of forests were linked to sociocultural and religious traditions. These traditional systems and informal practices were not always equitable and egalitarian, especially in the distribution of benefits, but they were said to be efficient in meeting the subsistence demands of local communities (Khan 1998: 28). However, closed local traditional systems have been gradually eroded. Market and non-market mechanisms—such as exposure to economic incentives, market, demographic pressures and other sociopolitical interventions operating within and outside community spheres—tend to erode characteristics of traditional communities (Baland and Platteau 1996).

Nepal has been used as a testing ground of various global development strategies since the 1950s. This is evident in the way the forestry sector administration has followed global development strategies. With the increasing influence of industrial forestry, the government of Nepal nationalized all non-registered forest and wastelands in 1957.¹⁵ The nationalization of forests prevented local people from entering them to collect grass, firewood, fodder or timber. It disrupted traditional and indigenous management systems, resulting in uncontrolled exploitation of forests, especially in the hills. In the Terai, people began to clear forests to convert them into agricultural land to avoid nationalization of the forest land that they had occupied (Pokharel and Amatya 2000). Political changes during the 1950s and 1980s were also detrimental; forests were used to serve the political interests of various political parties, either in the form of resettlement for potential voters or of commercial exploitation to generate money for elections (Malla 1998). The centralized approach to forest management was an outright failure. Forests were no better managed than before, widespread deforestation led to environmental degradation and the government proved unable to reverse the trend.¹⁶ Of particular concern was the reduced access of local communities to forest products, such as fuel wood and fodder that were critical to the maintenance of their livelihoods.

The Community Forestry (CF) strategy in its contemporary form was a response to the growing realization that effective forest management was not possible without active participation of the local people (Eckholm 1975, World Bank 1978, Hobley 1996, Gilmour, Malla et al. 2004).¹⁷ The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (1988), a detailed 25-year management plan for the forestry sector of Nepal, legalized the concept of community forestry and adopted a strategy to hand over all accessible forest to FUGs, provided that they were able and willing to manage them (HMG/N 1990, Gilmour and Fisher 1991). Though there have been other forest development and management programmes within the sector, community forestry has remained the dominant forest management approach.¹⁸

2.3.2 Operational mechanisms of community forestry

The formation of FUGs, comprised of member households of a confined geographical area, is the most important element of the community forestry modality. The Forest Act of Nepal explains the FUG as an autonomous and corporate body with perpetual succession (HMG/N 1993). Creation of user groups—especially identifying members and legitimizing them—takes place with a significant involvement of the Department of Forests (DOF). During FUG formation process, user households are identified on the basis of

proximity of their residence to the forests and their willingness to participate. User groups then prepare their own constitutions and a five-year Operational Plan (OP) that governs functioning of user groups and management of forests. Once the constitution and plan are approved by the DOF, these groups are entitled to develop, conserve, use and manage the forest, and to sell and distribute products and other benefits among the members, fixing the price independently. A certificate signed by the District Forest Officer confirms these rights.

The household is the unit of membership of a FUG which comprises a General Assembly (GA) of all members, and an Executive Committee (*samiti*) elected by the general members, 33% of whom by law must be women. FUGs perform a range of functions, commonly including the framing of rules and policies on forest protection and forest use, allocation of benefits and sanctioning of rule breakers. In principle, the assembly decides all rules and regulations regarding forest management, allocates responsibilities for their operationalization to the *samiti* and monitors its performance in carrying them out. Often in practice, however, the *samiti* formulates the policies, frames rules and secure consensus in the general assembly, and this is where the local power dynamics play important roles.

2.3.3 Achievements and dominant contentions

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, since the start of the community forestry programme, nearly 15,000 FUGs are managing nearly 1.2 million hectares of the country's forest land. Two important and significant achievements envisaged by the Master plan through the community forestry programme were: the improvement in the physical conditions of the forest through decreased deforestation and increased protection; and increased access to forest products for the people whose livelihoods were dependent on them (HMG/N 1988). Although challenges exist in measuring the improvement in physical conditions of the forests because of conceptual inconsistencies, lack of agreed criteria and scarcity of comparable data (Poteete and Ostrom 2004), a number of authors have documented significant evidence of decreased deforestation, improved forest coverage and increased volume of forest products in rural communities (Kanel 2004). Project-level studies conducted in various parts of the country provide ample evidence that the condition of the community forests has substantially improved since the handover. This trend applies to all parts of the country, albeit to differing extents and assessed in different ways (Branney and Yadav 1998, Jackson et al. 1998, Gautam et al. 2003, Bampton et al. 2004).

FUGs have also generated significant income from the sale of products that are being spent mainly in forest development and community development activities. According to one estimate, total income from the sale of products from community forests throughout the country is about 747 million Rupees. Converted to market prices, this would be 1.8 billion Rupees (Kanel and Niraula 2004). The same study also points out that in 2002 the total income generated from FUGs was more than the annual budget of the Department of Forests in Nepal, the latter being 680 million rupees (approx. US\$ 10 million). Two important points to note here are the income potentiality of community forestry and the share of the Terai forests. The annual budget of the department for providing forest-related services throughout the country is less than the income generated by the FUGs that cover only 25% of the country's forest land. This shows the tremendous potential of FUGs in generating incomes. Next, as mentioned earlier, among more than 14,000 user groups throughout the country, only about 5% are in Terai whereas the contribution of Terai in generating income is about 35% (Kanel 2004). These together show a huge income potentiality of community forestry that can be mobilized to promote livelihood opportunities for rural poor. However, as will be demonstrated in empirical chapters, the inequitable governance has remained a major challenge in realizing these development potentialities from community forestry.

The post-2000 period has been seen as having positive and negative effects on the development of community forestry. The revised forest sector policy for 2000 and the 10th Five-year Plan for the sector (2002–2006) emphasized the social objectives of community forestry and provided specific directives to the sector to meet the basic needs for forest products on a sustained basis, and to create opportunities for income generation and employment for the rural poor (MFSC 2002). In recent years, there have also been initiatives for experimentation and implementation of pro-poor initiatives in community forestry, with few successes ensuring a greater proportion of benefits accessible to the poor and most disadvantaged users (Allison et al. 2004, Kandel and Subedi 2004). However, these successes are disproportionately confined to small areas where donor projects have a physical presence with high financial and technical investments. In most cases, the transaction costs of managing community forestry such as time and lost wages are borne by the poor and by women (Hobley 1990, Graner 1997, Agarwal 2001, Agarwal 2002).

Along with the emphasis on the social objectives of community forestry and increasing experimentations and investments by the government and non-governmental sectors to achieve the objective, the post-2000 period has

also seen attempts from the government to reverse some forest policies through departmental orders, policy circulars and amendments. The potentiality of community forestry to generate financial resources was not central to many policy narratives during the early period of community forestry development. The issue of revenue, however, has recently become central to forest sector policy processes as forests matured and as FUGs especially in Churia hills and in Terai increasingly started managing forests of potentially high and saleable timber values (Biggs and Messerschmidt 2003). The struggle for power and control over forests at the macro level tends to divert policy attention away from the objective of benefiting the poor and the disadvantaged communities.

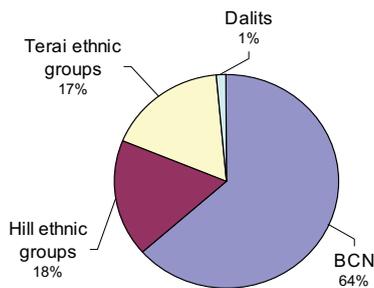
2.3.4 Characteristics of forest sector administration

Community forestry was ostensibly introduced to make room for wider participation of the local people in forestry for effective forest management and utilization. Since the introduction of the programme in late 1980s, the forestry sector has opened a space for a variety of actors to be involved in the process of forest management. The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC) and Department of Forests (DOF) at the central level represent the interests and activities of the state in relation to forest management and utilization in the country. While the ministry develops legislation and strategic plans and makes arrangements for the financial, human and material resources for the implementation of plans at various levels, the forest department is primarily responsible for recommending policies for the forest sector to the national government and for their implementation. In addition, other organizations involved in one way or other in the development of community forestry include international donor organizations, NGOs, federations, professional organizations such as associations of Rangers, foresters and service providers, traditional non-formal groups and private sectors (FECOFUN 2000, Baral and Thapa 2004, Pokharel, Ojha et al. 2005). The following section briefly examines the characteristics of the DOF that has direct presence in the community and has legitimacy for the implementation of community forestry. As a large proportion of the department's budget for the implementation of community forestry comes from the international donors, the section also briefly examines the characteristics and effectiveness of donors' support to the sector.

Organizational structure and characteristics of the Department of Forests

The DOF was established in 1942 with merely a dozen staff to keep record of the timber harvest in the Terai to supply to India. Nationalization of forests in 1957 resulted in an increased role of the department in managing the country's entire forest resources. Currently it is one of the most resourced departments in the country in terms of both, financial and human resources (Timsina 2002). The objectives of community forestry envisaged in policy statements and plans demand a clear shift in the department from policing and controlling roles to organizing and facilitating roles, enabling users to sustainably and productively manage the forests, and providing the poor with equitable access to benefits. However, the department lacks the organizational preparedness to achieve these objectives. As in other bureaucratic organizations in Nepal, the organizational structure of the department is dominated by high-caste men. Of 6670 staff in the department, only 2% are women. Among men, the staff composition is dominated by high-caste and ethnic groups (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Staff composition of the department of forests by caste and ethnicity



BCN= Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar

Source: MFSC (2003)

As the Figure 3 shows, Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar (BCN), who together constitute less than 40% of the national population, occupy about 64% of positions in the department. In contrast, Dalits, who constitute 12% of the national population, occupy only 1% of positions in the department.

of the total population of the country, occupy only 1% of total staff composition. Various interrelated reasons explain the situation. As Malla (2001) argues, a job in the Department of Forests not only provides a means of livelihood for forestry personnel and their families, it is also the means of power and prestige in society. There exists competition to access the jobs. The landed class has historically been able to afford better education, has had better national and international exposure, and has had personal and political linkages with the bureaucrats and state apparatus. These are important entry requirements to the civil service in Nepal. The department's organizational structure and staff composition reflects a similar pattern of domination by landed-class high-caste men. The effect of this non-inclusive structure of the department is evident in terms of the limited realization and internalization of policy intention among forestry officials. As Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate, many forestry officials at district level are either not aware of the social objectives of community forestry mentioned in the various planning documents or have limited commitment to work achieving them.

Rent-seeking and profit-seeking behaviour on the part of government officials is another important issue of concern in the Nepalese forest sector administration. Examples which reflected this behaviour are policies to thwart local profit-making activities from FUGs by imposing tax on the incomes obtained from surplus timber sold outside the group, amendment to the Forest Act to reduce the power of FUGs and increase control from the DOF especially regarding user-group activities and their funds (Shrestha 1999, Shrestha 2001, Britt 2002). Revision of forest policy and other related guidelines are also being criticized for the lack of consultation (Ojha 2002, Nightingale 2005). Such ambiguities and rent-seeking behaviour have a negative impact on community forestry development. More importantly, the contentions on policy issues and rent-seeking behaviour of forest officers divert their attention concern for the poor and the most excluded. The implications of rent-seeking behaviour on distributive outcomes are elaborated in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Donors influence in the forestry sector

As discussed earlier, international donors have significant influence over forestry sector policy development in Nepal. Financial assistance from the donors for the Nepalese forestry sector started after the 1950s. Until early 2005, donor support in community forestry existed in more than 66 of Nepal's 75 districts, where six major donors (UK, Switzerland, Denmark, Australia, USA and Germany) effectively covered the entire operational budgets of the District Forest Offices within the support districts. The financial

support from these donors accounted for about 80% of the total community forestry development budget of the country. In addition to the financial contribution, the donors had expatriates providing technical support for the sector. Because of their large financial and technical contributions, until recently, the donors in Nepal had been able to influence a range of forest sector policies and programme modalities. However, following the royal coup (1 February 2005) many donors withdrew their financial support from community forestry and only 3 donors (UK, Switzerland and USA) remain in 23 districts to support community forestry (Pokharel 2006).¹⁹ These donors channel most of their resources through area-based programmes with some support at national level for policy development and sectoral reform.

Though the donors' contribution to community forestry is said to have helped increase forest coverage and improve biodiversity throughout the country, they are said to promote their own agenda and keep shifting their approaches and positions according their own priorities (Timsina 2002). Choice of programme and the volume of assistance are very much driven by their prevailing priorities and operating cultures. The assistance is often criticized as being supply-driven and target-oriented, undermining the need for process-oriented long-term projects for sustained social change.

In the early days, donors were under pressure to spend money within the given period of time and also tried to show their influence in forest sector through coverage. District forest officials wanted to please donors by increasing number of user groups formed. Those officials who formed more number of groups received incentives as training and scholarship for further study abroad. Though the donors now realize that there are problems related to good governance in FUGs, only a few realize that the lack of proper homework and too much emphasis in meeting the numeric target are the main reasons for this. (Personal communication, Dr B. Bhatta, December 2003, WINROCK)

Supply-driven assistance from donors and emphasis on quantity often encourages forest officials and field workers to take help from local elites who have sufficient time and resources to become involved themselves in the process leading to the exclusion of others. The Kabhre and Nawalparasi districts, where this study took place, were under the aid support of the Australian and the British governments respectively. The support had been channelled through the District Forest Offices. Effects of donor support on the functioning and outcome of user groups are discussed later in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the macro environment of community forestry in which policy decisions are made, interpreted and manipulated. The discussion has focused on three major issues that tend to influence the functioning and distributive outcomes of user groups at local level. First, the chapter showed that Nepalese society is highly differentiated. Major problematic themes that have arisen include unequal access to and control over land and other productive resources between people of different economic and social groups; domination by the landed class in most economic and political affairs; and continuous marginalization and exclusion of land-poor, including lower-caste groups and women. Kinship, connections and political constituencies shape the power relations which reinforce the hierarchical social structure. In addition, patriarchy results in the subordinated position of women. As a result, women are far behind in terms of control over means of production, access to opportunities and voices, compared to men of the same economic and social groups.

Though the country experienced several political changes during the last decade, exclusion and inequalities persist, and many hierarchical institutions—especially the powerful informal networks, behavioural norms and expectations—remain unchanged. As observed in Chapter 3, the finding corresponds to the agrarian communities that reflect similar characteristics of economic and social differentiation.

Second, the chapter provided a historical account of community forestry policies. It is argued that forest sector administration in Nepal has followed global development strategies. Donors and international communities have great influence on the development of community forestry policies and guidelines, including the Master Plan, Forest Act and Forest Regulations. These documents have been instrumental in promoting community forestry that now covers all 75 districts and comprise more than 35% of total national population. However, forest sector administration, especially the DOF, suffers from limited organizational preparedness and commitment especially to achieve the goal of benefiting the poor and the disadvantaged with increased access to benefits from community forestry. The chapter demonstrated the non-inclusive structure of the department. The implications, it is argued, are evident from the districts where forest officials lack internalization and commitment towards policy intentions. More focus on achieving the physical targets and rent-seeking behaviour throughout the sector have resulted in a relative neglect of differential (social) outcomes of community forestry.

Though donors had large financial and technical contributions towards scaling up community forestry and covered a large proportion of the development budget for its implementation, the support suffers from the greater focus on fulfilling the physical target. The strategies and support modalities of donors have done more to strengthen government capacity rather than support the greater need of transformation at the local level. As the empirical chapters later illustrate, these macro factors together tend to undermine the value of policy statements and intentions of community forestry in practice.

Within this broader sociopolitical policy and institutional context, a number of FUGs have been formed and provided with the authority for forest management and utilization. In the following chapters, we provide a detailed account of the local context and argue that the agrarian communities where the FUGs function reflect the same hierarchical structures resulting in similar contentions and struggles between different economic and social groups for control over forests.

Notes

1. The Terai accounts for 23 per cent of the land area of the country and nearly 50 per cent of the population while the hills account for nearly 42 per cent land and nearly 43 per cent of the population. The remaining 35 per cent of land is occupied by mountain that hosts only seven per cent of the population. These three zones are distinct economically, culturally and socially (CBS 2001, Thapa and Mainali 2006).
2. CBS (2004b) defines agricultural household as an economic unit of agricultural production under single management comprising all livestock and poultry kept and all land used wholly or partly for agricultural production purposes, without regard to title, legal form, or size. Agricultural households are grouped into: households with land—i.e., those cultivating at least 0.013 hectare (1458 sq. ft)—and households without land—i.e., those with two or more cattle and operating less than 0.013 hectare of land for agricultural purpose.
3. Agricultural households with land in the table include all households who cultivate land without regard to title and legal form. The number of landless households in Nepal is more than this figure when landless wage labour (farm and non-farm), households operating in unregistered land (with no legal title) or the households involved in tenancy are added to this category. The fieldwork (Chapter 3) shows that there is a significant number of landless households in the agrarian economy—especially in the Terai—who do not cultivate land but work as wage labourers in agriculture and other sectors. Similarly, considerable numbers of agricultural households do not own (in legal terms) the land they cultivate. In this sense, the proportion of landless rural households is much more than that estimated by the

agricultural census. It is estimated that about two million people in Nepal are absolute landless. But there has been no authentic study on landlessness.

4. Ownership of land entails the possession of land that provides legal authenticity to use and to sell as personal property. Land operated is the land currently under cultivation by a household. This can be more or less than the owned area as households are involved in renting out or renting in land for cultivation.

5. *Raiker* is a system in which individuals cultivate land but ownership and control over the decisions to sell or mortgage is retained by the state (Regmi 1978)

6. The major forms of grant were *Jagir* (assigned to a government employee or functionary in lieu of salary), *Birta* (given for special services) *Guthi* (assigned to a religious institution to perform their functions) and *Kipat* as communal tenure (Regmi 1978, Caplan 1970).

7. The figure could be much more higher than this if transfers of remittances through informal networks are taken into account (RRN 2006)

8. According to one study, 80% of the Dalit population live below the poverty line with per capita income of US\$ 39.6 compared to the national average of US\$ 210, only one per cent of whom possess cultivable land (Mijar 2004).

9. The recently held constitution assembly (CA) however has 601 members. The body is much more representative of Nepal's diversity than any previous legislative bodies. Most notably, one-third of its members are women, which according to the United Nations, puts Nepal in 14th place in the league table of women's representation in national elected bodies. This however has come from proportionate election where reservation was made for women, Dalits and other caste and ethnic groups according to their population share.

10. In many instances, when small holdings exhibit declining returns, farmers substitute hired male labour with female household members who are unpaid helpers (Haq 2002).

11. Examples of policy reform to address gender inequality include property rights for daughters equal to those of sons (though she needs to return the property after marriage and sons do not), a 20% reduction in the registration fee by state if land is registered in a woman's name, and the recent decision of a quota of at least 33% for women in all political and administrative structures.

12. To reach to this goal, they demand a secular state, free access to public spaces, affirmative action and positive discrimination as well as the modernization of traditional professions.

13. The term 'subsistence' is used here to mean the direct use of product for consumption at household level.

14. Traditional societies are those which were relatively closed to external influences, in particular to those forces which bring in their wake market mechanisms, significant and more or less continuous technological change, new sets of values

and aspirations centred on consumption and individual development (Baland and Platteau 1996).

15. Industrial forestry is defined as the system where high-value forests are controlled by the traditional forest department under the state, principally for supplying material to highly capitalized, technologically-oriented industrial sector.

16. Failure was attributed to various reasons. First, given the great diversity of resource types, it was difficult to establish a straightforward management prescription that could be widely followed. Second, it was difficult for the government to enforce its rules. Effective supervision of thousands of patches of forest scattered throughout remote hill terrain, accessible only with extreme difficulty proved impossible. Third, and most important, relations between rural people and the state bureaucracy were distant and antagonistic, providing an incentive for rule violation and non-cooperation. Users tended to view local resources as government property, seriously eroding their motivation to protect natural resources (see Baland and Platteau 1996).

17. Community forestry involves the governance and management of forest resources by communities (through user groups) for commercial and non-commercial purposes, including subsistence, timber production, non-timber forest products wildlife, conservation of biodiversity and environment, social and religious significance (Gilmour et al. 2004).

18. The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector has altogether proposed six priority programmes. Out of these, the community forestry and private forestry programme is given highest priority (Chapagain et al. 1999). However the master plan, which was developed 20 years ago, is too old and does not recognize the governance issues that are evident today.

19. Of the 23, UK, USA and Swiss governments support 15, 5 and 3 districts respectively.

3

Agrarian Structures and Forest Resource Use in the Hill and Terai

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines major characteristics of the agrarian structure and forest resource use of hills and Terai communities. The purpose is to provide a necessary overview of the micro-agrarian contexts in which community forestry user groups exist and function today. Discussions around agrarian structures involve history of the settlement and of the processes by which access to and control over productive resources were shaped and changed among different economic and social groups. Since ownership of means of production, hierarchy in social relations and forest resource use have historically been determined by caste, ethnicity and gender, the analysis is disaggregated for these variables. The data sources for this chapter are from discussion with elderly and key informants, a structured household survey and interviews with men and women of different groups.

There are a few similarities and many differences between agrarian communities of the hill and Terai. The hill community has a relatively long historical background. It consists of people who originated from the same district and descendent groups with historically determined inter-household dependency and relationships that still exist, resulting in a community that is more cohesive in nature. This may partly explain the highly romantic view of the 'community' in the CPR literature. We do not expect such historical attachment and interdependencies in the Terai community. The community in the Terai consists of people with diverse economic and social backgrounds. The Terai community is also endowed with basic infrastructure, in particular a road that opens up the possibility of links to market. This chapter demonstrates the significance of these factors, which separately and in combination result in the high degree of economic and social differentiation in the Terai compared to the hill.

In terms of gender, the chapter demonstrates few significant differences between the two locations. Patriarchal structure and gender division of la-

bour have remained important, resulting in women's limited access to opportunities of economic and political significance, and their subordinate position within the household and the community. In terms of forest resource characteristics, the hill community is endowed with planted and regenerated forests while the Terai has natural timber forest with high cash value. The dependency of poor and Dalit households on community forests for basic products is higher compared to others. The gender division of labour requires women to be primarily responsible for the collection and use of forest resources. This situation applies to both locations. These elements of agrarian structure and forest resource use are discussed separately for each location in the second and third sections, following the same structure. Major similarities and differences between the locations are discussed in section four. This is followed by chapter summary.

3.2 Tukucha: A Typical Mid-hill Village in Central Nepal

3.2.1 The village setting

Tukucha is a mid-hill village, located in Kabhre district of central Nepal. It lies 40 km northeast of the capital city Kathmandu, at an altitude of 1500 m. The settlement under study consists of three small but separate hamlets (toles). These hamlets are different in terms of caste and ethnic composition, non-farm occupations and the ways in which people participate in wider economic and political processes. Individual hamlets are relatively homogenous in terms of these variables.

The land assessment in Tukucha took place during the Rana regime in 1890 and again in 1973. Boundaries between agricultural, grazing and forest land are known by the villagers and generally uncontested (Hobley 1990). The village is relatively rich in terms of forest coverage. Also due to the regeneration of natural water sources that started at the beginning of forest conservation under community forestry in 1983, the village today has better access to irrigation than many hill villages.

A seasonal gravel road is about 40 minutes walking from the village that has given villagers easy access to the Kathmandu valley, at least during dry season. But the transport service is not regular, taking nearly 1.5 hours walking to reach Banepa bazaar, a small town connected to Kathmandu by the Araniko highway. There is no running water in people's homes. It is typically the women's responsibility to carry water from communal water springs. Electricity first came to the village in 1990 with financial support from an Australian donor agency through the Nepal Australia Community Forestry Project (NACFP). Two of the three toles are now connected with

electricity. The village is adjacent to different patches of forests, each hamlet having its own community forest with a distinct geographical boundary. Establishment of the community forest groups in the village was supported by the Australian forestry project. Tukucha was selected as a study area for its physical and socioeconomic characteristics typical of many mid-hill communities and for the existence of long-established community forests, our central interest being to examine the influence of community structure on the functioning and distributive outcomes of community forestry strategies.

3.2.2 Historical background and demographic characteristics

The settlement in Tukucha is said to have started about 200 years ago. It consists of 129 households with average family size of 5.2, slightly lower than the national average of 5.4 (CBS 2002). The first settler was Hari Bahadur Pandey who was originally from Gorkha, a Western Hill district. According to family history, Pandey was bestowed with a *Birta* (a land grant) of 444 *ropani* (22.4 ha) *kbet* and 360 *ropani* (18 ha) *bari* land in recognition for the services provided to the monarchy (*ropani* is a local measurement of land; one *ropani* equals approximately 500 square meters or 0.05 ha).¹ The land where they established the settlement is known as Chhetri gaun.²

The highest ranked caste in Tukucha is Chhetri followed by the Newar. Chhetri clans are Pandey. Similarly, the lowest ranked caste (Dalits) includes goldsmiths (Kami) and leatherworkers (Sarki). They came along with Pandey from the same village. They were brought as service providers to high-caste groups on an annual contract basis (called *Bista*) and given a small piece of land in marginal areas as means of subsistence.³ As has been noted in Hindu communities in Nepal and India (Michael 1979, Cameron 2005), caste groups are not equally distributed, for two reasons. First, specific caste groups have developed clusters of households based on lineage relationships and joint family structures. Second, high-caste groups sometimes discourage low castes from settling near them as neighbours. Thus, no three hamlets are alike in caste composition. Currently, the Pandeys are in the majority in Chhetri tole (38 out of 44 households), with six households of Kami settled on marginal land. All Sarki (29 households) are settled separately in the adjacent hamlet, Sarki tole. Newars, who are in bazaar area, first came to the village as administrators and tax collectors during the Rana regime, but later turned to farming.

Though living separately in different clusters, interdependency between high-caste and lower-caste group is very pronounced. The settlement history, especially the land grant given to the Pandeys, is still very significant. Economic and social strength of the Pandeys is highest, followed by the

Newars. The majority of Pandeys are rich in terms of their possession of assets (land, livestock and non-farm sources of incomes), reside in relatively large houses with tin or concrete roofs, and wood or cement floors. They possess home appliances such as radio, TV or even gas stove. In contrast, most Kami and Sarki own less productive assets, reside in small houses with a mud floor and thatched roofs, and have less access to higher non-farm incomes. The latter are highly dependent on wage labour, mostly hired by Pandeys and Newars. They are also considered untouchable by the high-caste groups, a social disadvantage caused by Hindu caste hierarchy. The practice of untouchability, though illegal according to the constitution of the country, persists and has not been challenged at local level. This inequality in economic strength and social positions between the caste and ethnic groups is also reflected in the size and type of the community forest claimed by them. Sarki own the most unproductive small plot of new plantation forest compared to others.

Most households (86%) are officially headed by men. A large proportion of men are out during a given year, but they are considered heads of the households. Of the rest, 14% of households are headed by women, but all these women are widows. Farming is the main occupation for everybody, but in addition, some people (mainly men) have non-farm engagements for other income. Of the latter, the state is the major employer for Brahmins/Chhetris who are mostly in the armed forces (Nepal army and police force) or in the teaching profession; Newars are more active in business and administrative sectors of the state or the private agencies. Among the Dalits, Kami make agricultural tools and household utensils, such as sickles, knives, hoes, shovels, plough tips, nails and axes. They serve the higher-caste groups by making these products on a contractual basis but in limited capacity. The Sarkis make leather shoes, sandals and other products. In addition, Dalit women work as agricultural and construction wage labour while men usually migrate, especially in winter, and sell their skills of making leather goods in nearby cities where demand for leather goods is high.

3.2.3 Characteristics of production

Two types of land are under cultivation. *Khet* is irrigated flat land with relatively higher productivity. Though the productivity of land depends heavily on the ability of peasants to use other inputs associated with it, usually *khet* can accommodate double or even triple cropping in a year. *Bari* is dry, non-irrigated less fertile land. This difference in the quality of land is important in relation to production. Because of the undulated topography, the amount of *bari* land is more than *khet* in the village.

Most peasants produce major food grains (rice and maize); the produce is in most cases insufficient or just sufficient for household consumption. In addition, all farmers produce potatoes both for consumption at household level and for sale in the market. However, there is difference in the scale and purpose of potato production. For land rich households, selling potato has remained an important source of profit and accumulation. For the land-poor, income derived from potato is also oriented towards fulfilling the households' basic needs (such as food grains) rather than towards making profit.

Along with increased crop intensity and the introduction of potato as a cash crop (after the mid-90s), the use of improved seed and chemical fertilizer has also increased in the village over the last ten years. However, the peasant's use of such inputs is highly determined by ability to pay, access to credit and related information. High-caste groups are in the majority among the farmers using them. Leaf litter (*Sottar*), which comes entirely from the community forest, is the main source of compost used in the fields. The common practice is to collect litter from the forest, use it as animal bed and later as compost. It can also be directly used in the field. Use of leaf litter is important for all peasants, but especially for the poor who cannot afford to buy chemical fertilizers. Some 60% of peasants depend entirely on leaf litter for compost and have never used chemical fertilizers on their farms.

Cattle, goat and poultry are the major livestock and all (except poultry) are stall-fed. Goat-keeping is common and the most favoured for both economic and social reasons. Economically, a goat tends to have higher liquidity in the market than cattle. Women prefer goat-keeping as it provides them an independent source of income (*pewa*). For aesthetic reasons, goat is the most common and highly sought animal during Dashain (the great Hindu festival). For many, this is the only time when meat is cooked and consumed in all families.

3.2.4 Agrarian structure and differentiation

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the process of agrarian differentiation involves changes in the ownership and control over means of production and the social division of labour. In this section, our analysis is limited to whether or not differentiation is taking place in Tukucha and if so, in what ways. Explicit focus on variations in landholding as a measurement of agrarian differentiation and accumulation is too narrow, especially when opportunities for non-farm income exist (White 1989) and when changes in labour relations become an important component of the peasant societies (Pincus 1996). To overcome these analytical concerns, study of differentiation here

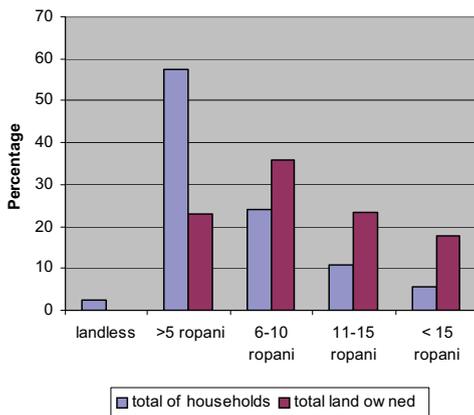
includes: the distribution of landownership, livestock and labour; the division of labour; labour relations; access to non-farm incomes; education; and access to major power structures in the village. These variables are aggregated by caste, ethnicity and gender. We do the same for the Terai village in later section.

Ownership of means of production

All households in Tukucha are farmers and cultivate land, but the distribution of and ownership is wide ranging from 0.5 *ropani* to 22 *ropani* per household. As Figure 4 shows, of the 129 households surveyed, almost 60% of the population own less than 5 *ropani* and more than 80% are small farmers with less than 10 *ropani* (>0.5 ha).

Table 7 also shows skewed distribution of land compared with population share. The bottom 60% of landowning households own less than 25% of the total land available for cultivation in the village, while top of 16% own more than 40%.

Figure 4
Distribution of landownership, Tukucha



Source: Household survey (2002)

Table 7
Ownership distribution of means of production, Tukucha

	Land categories (<i>ropani</i>)					
	Landless n=3	< 5 n=74	6-10 n=31	11-15 n=14	15-20 n=5	>20 n=2
Proportion of total (%)						
HH	2	58	24	11	4	1
Land owned	0	23	36	23	12	6
Ave. size of land cultivated (<i>ropani</i>)	4.3	3.2	7.7	12.2	17.4	21.5
Average size of ownership						
Total land (<i>ropani</i>)	0.0	2.8	7.3	12.2	17.4	21.5
<i>Khet</i> land (<i>ropani</i>)	0.0	1.2	3.2	6.4	7.6	10.5
<i>Bari</i> land (<i>ropani</i>)	0.0	1.6	3.8	5.8	9.8	11.0
Draft animals (no.)	1.6	0.9	1.7	2.1	2.6	1.5
Goat owned (no.)	1.6	2.1	2.5	2.3	2.4	4
Average HH size	7.6	4.8	5.1	6.5	6.2	5.5

Note: Total cultivated land is more than the total amount of land owned because of double counting as tenancy exists for only one crop in a year i.e. potato. HH=Household.

Source: Household survey (2002).

As Table 7 indicates, the amount of land cultivated is strongly correlated with the size of ownership (correlation coefficient is 0.953), showing that those with little land cultivate small-sized land plots and vice versa.⁴ Similarly, large landowners also own a large proportion of *khet* (more productive land) while the proportion of *khet* is less among small farmers. However, as the table indicates, only a small proportion (2.3%) is completely landless and engaged in sharecropping. Among the landless are Dalits. The landless are Dalits.

The unequal pattern of access to land is also reflected in the unequal distribution of other resources, more importantly livestock. Those who have a large amount of land tend to keep more livestock. Most small farmers (84%) own less than two oxen. Only households who own more than 10 *ropani* of land own an average of two oxen, which is the minimum required number for ploughing. Those owning less than 2 oxen are usually involved in reciprocal exchange (called *perma*). If paid in the form of human labour, it requires two working days of men in exchange for one working day of oxen. Finally, the table shows a weak but significant positive association (correlation coefficient 0.29) between the livestock ownership and average household size. The positive relation, though small, shows the importance of the family labour force in peasant production.

Table 8
Ownership distribution of means of production by caste and ethnicity, Tukucha

	Caste/ethnic groups			
	<i>Chhetri/ Brahmin</i> N=49	<i>Newars</i> N=39	<i>Dalits</i> N=37	Others N=4
Proportion of total (%)				
HH	38	30	29	3
Land owned	47	32	19	2
Average size of ownership				
Total land (<i>ropani</i>)	7.1	5.9	3.9	2.6
Khet land (<i>ropani</i>)	3.1	3.3	1.5	1.0
Bari land (<i>ropani</i>)	3.9	2.6	2.4	1.6
Draft animals (no.)	2.5	1.1	1.0	2
Goat owned (no.)	2.5	2.5	1.5	3.2
Average HH size	4.7	5.4	5.8	4.5

Source: Household survey (2002).

As indicated earlier in Chapter 2, access to the principal means of production in Nepal is strongly determined by caste and ethnicity and biased towards high-caste groups. Tukucha also reflects a similar bias where ownership of land and other means of production closely parallels caste hierarchy (Table 8).

Table 8 shows that Chhetri are in the most privileged position in Tukucha, with average landownership of more than seven *ropani*, which is almost double the size owned by Dalits. Similar disparities exist in ownership of livestock: Chhetri are in a better position with an average value of more than two draft animals while Dalits and Newars own only one. This requires them to hire draft animals from Chhetri for ploughing.

Tenurial arrangements

One way the land-poor meet subsistence deficits is through tenancy. The most common land tenancy is called *adhiya* (sharecropping). Sharecropping exists in particular between land-poor (with less than 10 *ropani* land) and land-rich households (with more than 15 *ropani* land). Those who are involved in sharecropping do so within the village for only one crop, e.g., potato. Long-term involvement in tenancy relations and sharecropping in paddy production does not exist. As there is a small amount of *khet* compared to *bari* in the village and as paddy can only be cultivated in *khet*, the amount of paddy produced is generally insufficient (or sufficient just for one year) for the majority of peasants without sharing. Even some food

surplus households rent out *khet* for one season because they fear the tenancy rights tenants may claim.⁵ Households who rent in land for only one season are often Dalits and those who rent out are Chhetri. Because of the limited land available for sharecropping, subsistence of marginal farmers, especially the lower caste critically depends on access to wage labour and non-farm income.

Tenancy in large livestock (cattle and buffalo) is not common but in the case of goats, it exists. Goats are sharecropped on the condition that half the born goats go to the owner of the goat with the mother. Sharecropping in goats is the way people without a goat can acquire one, without spending cash. It is mostly women who are directly involved, both as owner and as tenants in the arrangement, as this is the most important source of independent incomes for majority of women. As observed in land tenancy, mostly Dalit women keep goats for a Chhetri owner.

Labour requirements and employment relations

Labour for agricultural production in Tukucha involves three main types: family labour, hired agricultural labour and reciprocal exchange. Because of the small farmholdings of most of the households, peasants use family labour for production. But potato and paddy cultivation require much labour at the critical times of planting and harvesting. Households which have more land than their family labour can cultivate use labour from other households either on a reciprocal exchange basis (*perma*) or on daily wages. *Perma* is the predominant form of labour exchange but exists only within the same caste group. Due to their social prestige, Chhetris and Newars do not enter into the labour exchange with Dalits. For them, the demand for labour at the critical time is largely by hiring of Dalits and land-poor households. Almost 67% of all households in the village provide agricultural wage labour. Among them, 72% own less than 5 *ropani* land and the majority (79%) are Dalit women.

There are two important characteristics of labour relations in Tukucha: firstly, wages for agricultural labour remained unchanged between 1996 and 2002 and was lower than the wage obtained in construction sectors; secondly, there is a gender difference in the wage rate, women receiving less than the men (Table 9).

Table 9
Difference in wage rates for agricultural and construction labour, Tukucha

	Wage rate (Rs. per day) without food	
	Agriculture labour	Construction labour
Men	100-120	150-180
Women	50-60	100-120

Source: Household Survey (2002)

Since the flow of labour to and from other villages is low (almost nil) in the hills, the relationship between labourers and farmers is relatively close, often of a 'patron-client' nature, reducing the bargaining power for higher wage on the part of labour. But, though there is a clear distinction in the village between the economic and social position of labour-buying and labour-selling households, it does not provide evidence that the people are polarizing into agricultural labourers and capitalist farmers. It is mainly because a significant number of households are involved in construction labour and other non-farm activities on regular basis, supplementing household income that differentiation has not progressed further.

Non-farm income and credit relations

About 52% of households are involved in regular employment in non-farm sectors. Major sources for such income include monthly salary from government service and business enterprises, remittances, pensions and labour in construction and leather factories. In addition to this, poor and Dalit women also work as agricultural wage labourer which is seasonal in nature. Though this involvement is important to supplement household income, the remuneration and their contribution to the household economy differs significantly according to the type of non-farm activities (Table 10).

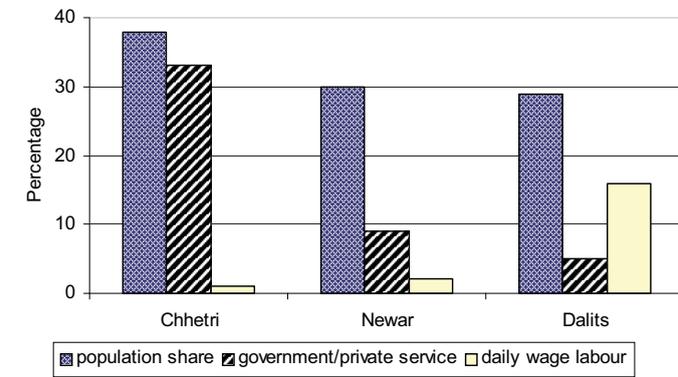
Table 10
Range of income obtained from non-farm engagements, Tukucha

Types of non-farm engagement	Range of incomes (Rs. per month)
Government salary	5,000-8,000
Business	4,000-7,000
Construction labour	2,500-4,000
Agricultural labour	1,500-2,000

Source: Household survey (2002); Rs. 1000=US \$ 15

As Table 10 indicates, the income received by government employees or from business involvement is significantly higher than that from wage labour. The former is also associated with the high social prestige and power while latter group is dependent on the former for wage labour resulting in highly unequal relationships, like that of a patron and a client. As Bista (1991) points out, the majority of Nepalese do not have enough choice of non-farm occupations because it is determined by birth—i.e., by caste and ethnicity—and favours the high caste. Figure 5 shows similar pattern of inequality in Tukucha.

Figure 5
Access to non-farm source of income by caste and ethnicity, Tukucha



Source: Household survey (2002)

The majority of Chhetri have access to employment in government and the private service sectors. Chhetri have been serving in the national army since modern Nepal was established and do so even today. A few households are also involved in teaching. Those retired with pension participate actively in local politics and even in forest user-group activities. On the other hand, Sarki work as labourers in factories and receive less income. Differential access to non-farm income has a significant influence on the way they interact with the wider economy and participate in user-groups affairs.

Access to credit is an important way of meeting immediate expenditure needs, especially for the poor. Access to formal credit is virtually nil in the village though informal credit (taking loans from relatives, neighbours and

local moneylenders) is common. Land-poor households of all caste groups take credit to meet their immediate expenditure such as the cost for medical treatment while credit for productive investment is rare. Households with relatively better incomes from non-farm activities are also the local lenders within the village. Informal credit does not need collateral and is thus preferred by small peasants. The mode of payment involves both cash and kind. Charging interest for a small amount of credit is not common, at least between the households of the same family group. Among the households who take loans are the Dalits. Analysis of caste relations shows that Dalits tend to borrow both from Chhetri and Dalit lenders while a few poor Chhetris and Newars who borrowed did so only from same family groups. Borrowing from same family group is considered good, especially for the borrowers as they become less vulnerable to losing other assets in case they cannot pay the agreed amount on time. The option, however, is not always available for Dalits as there are only two Dalit households in the village with ability to lend some money within the community.

Interaction with market and wider economy

Though most of the households in Tukucha interact with the wider economy for various purposes, the scale of their interaction and its outcomes are significantly shaped by class, caste and gender. As mentioned earlier, most peasants produce food grain (paddy and maize) mainly for consumption at household levels and only a few households sell the surplus grain. The nearest market for food grain is Banepa Bazaar which is approximately 4 km from Tukucha. Some land-poor also sell grain but a common trend observed is that they produce and sell good quality paddy at a better price and buy low quality rice for family consumption at cheaper prices.

Potato is the main cash crop that is produced both for family consumption and for market. Potato produced in Tukucha is considered of high quality and thus has good market value, even in Kathmandu (40 km) and other cities. Both large and small peasants produce potato and export it through middlemen, albeit in different capacity and with different purpose. While land-rich make profit from potato production oriented for market, for land-poor peasants, potato production is oriented to meet the food requirement for the households. Usually, poor households buy food grains with the money earned from the sale of potato. In exchange for agricultural products, peasants buy other necessary commodities—mainly oil, sugar, species, vegetables, clothes—or invest in health and education of the family members. Selling and buying meat and milk products are confined mainly within the village. Usually Pandeys and Newars, with sufficient private trees

to feed the animals, are involved in this business. Though a few Sarkis also produce sufficient milk products to sell, they cannot sell in local market due to their caste (untouchable) identity. It requires them to travel 3 km far to the government-owned Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) to sell their products. The concept of untouchability, which is prevalent in the community, discourages them from keeping milch animals even able households.

The changes in asset ownership

Inheritable property rights are the basis for most of the inequality in land-holding shown in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Nearly 85% of households own only inherited land while a few (13.4%) own both inherited and purchased land. There is a clear tendency for upper caste groups, especially Chhetri, to buy land to maintain the size of land that would otherwise be reduced by the division of property between brothers. This tendency is not clearly manifested in lower caste groups.

An analysis of the changes in landownership over the last ten years (1992–2002) reveals that only a small proportion of households realized the change. Only two households, both belonging to high caste groups, reported buying plots of land (from the income received as remittances). Similarly, only one household in the village (Dalit) reported selling land and becoming landless over the past 10 years. The sale of land was to divide property among sons who wanted to establish a leather shop in Banepa with the money. The study thus provides little evidence of the sale of land by the land-poor due to the economic crisis. Three interrelated reasons would explain the situation of slow and insignificant changes in landownership distribution. Firstly, because of the limited opening of new land for agriculture over the last few decades, land expansion is currently difficult. The hilly undulated topography discourages people acquiring land far from the village because the cost for cultivation becomes high (though few have done it in the past). Secondly, though many small peasants (nearly 80% of all households in the village) are not food-sufficient from their own production, their vulnerability is not severe enough to force them to sell their land. This is mainly because of income received from non-farm sources to supplement food requirements. Thirdly, peasants with surplus production (4%) may accumulate some capital through the surplus and through their involvement in better paid non-farm activities, but they do not show clear tendencies to acquire and accumulate land elsewhere; rather they are found investing in children's education.

The same applies to changes in livestock ownership among different groups. Among 115 households who own draft and milch animals, 114 reported that with the exception of goat, livestock ownership had not changed though exchange had taken place. Surprisingly, the existence of the community forestry programme since late 1980s had not influenced the number of livestock in the village, even when a large number of small peasants own less than the required minimum number of draft animals.

Occupational mobility

As mentioned in the historical background, Tukucha consists of specific occupational caste groups—Kami and Sarki—who had come with Pandey at the establishment of the community. These groups, due to the limited demand for their traditional skills and products, are obliged to supplement their income by carrying out tasks other than their traditional occupations of iron and leather work. But this does not mean that they have completely left their occupations. Kami still provide iron work services to high caste groups, though on a reduced scale. Though there is an increasing trend among Sarki to work as agricultural labour and factory workers, at least one member of the family has migrated temporarily and continue their caste-based occupation. Of the 29 Sarki households in the village, 21 have at least one member temporarily migrate to other towns where demand for their skill is high. The majority of migrated Sarki still earn their livelihood from leather work, though on a seasonal basis. This suggests that artisan's work is not fully displaced. Occupational mobility is taking place, but only moderately.

Local elites and power relations in the village

Class and power are positively associated with caste structure. From the evidence of history of landholding, other material resource endowments and contemporary labour relations in Tukucha, it is clear that power in the form of land is a fundamental source of high-caste domination over lower caste. Frequently, those who are rich and powerful belong to the higher caste and the poor to the lower caste. The economic dependence of the low-caste households on the high-caste households is extensive.

The majority of the poor, mostly Dalits, are in part dependent on the land-rich for land to cultivate, for wage labour, for their traditional service, and for access to loans in case of emergency. The landed class also controls all local power structures, including representation in Village Development Committees (VDCs) and local political parties. This dependency creates a

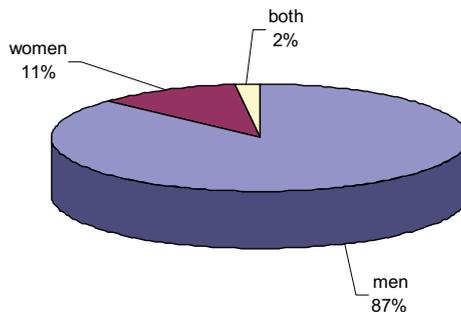
situation in which patron–client relations exist between land-rich (often high caste) and land-poor (often Dalits).

Few Dalits who have relatively more land than the majority of their caste also suffer from informal strict rules promulgated in the village to maintain the ritual purity of the high caste. The concept of ‘untouchability’ affects their social dignity and prestige. Thus, while economic class determines the relationship within the same caste group, class and caste are highly inter-linked with each other. Often, caste appears in Tukucha as a mechanism through which individuals are excluded from access to means of production and from power structures. The material resource asymmetry and the perpetuation of privilege in the context of gender relations are discussed in the following section.

Gender dimension

Women in Tukucha are the primary carers of farm and household, but the ownership of land, the principle means of production, is almost entirely with men (Figure 6).

Figure 6
Gender distribution of landownership, Tukucha



N=126 households (excluding the landless)

Source: Field Survey (2002)

About 87% of households have land registered in the names of males. The 11% who have land registered in a woman’s name, are all widows. This situation applies to all caste and ethnic groups. The fact indicates that the availability of more land does not necessarily make landownership more favourable for women. It is not the availability of land but the state’s law of

inheritance that is more important for gender disparity in landownership. Even in case of the two% who have some plots of land registered in the name of women, men retain the control with all the authority to make decisions related to it.⁶ The same gender bias is reflected in the control of livestock, other than the case of goats and poultry, for which most of the decisions related to the management and marketing rests with women.

Women assisted by children, mainly girls, are primarily responsible for reproductive or domestic work, including the caring and maintenance of family labour force. Women are also principally responsible for tending livestock. Men, on the other hand, have limited involvement in reproductive work. Men and women are involved in at least three categories of productive works—family farm production, non-farm activities and artisan work (for Dalits). Agricultural tasks performed by men and women are usually different, with men mainly involved in ploughing and harrowing with the use of draft animals, and women in hoeing, planting, weeding, harvesting and carrying. However, the multiplicity of jobs and their frequent urgency—such as planting after rain, harvesting before rain—often results in an undifferentiated division of labour, except for ploughing and harrowing, which are exclusively done by men. Children start helping elders to do domestic work even before they reach 10 years old. The work they are involved in includes gathering fuel and leaf litter, fetching water, caring for small livestock and for younger children.⁷

There are differences between landed and land-poor women in types of productive activities they are involved with. For landed women (mostly Chhetris and Newars), productive work includes agricultural work for their own farm. Few Newar women also help their husbands for family-run business (shops). For land-poor women, it includes agricultural work for their own farm and for other's farms. In addition, Dalit women work as construction labour (in brick factory) as well as help male family members for artisan work.

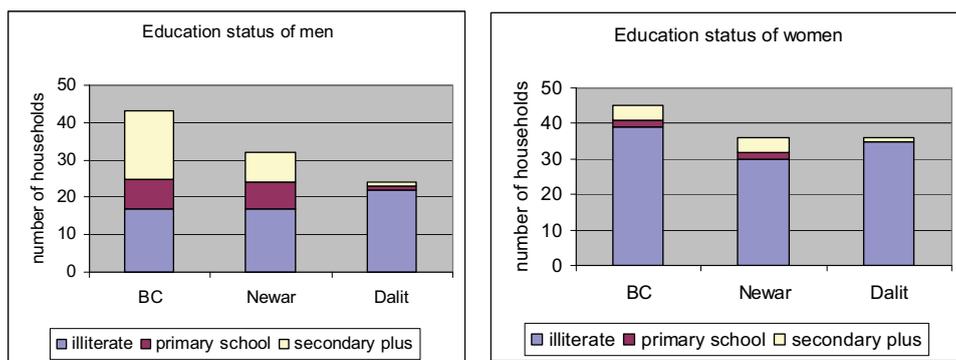
Together, women consist of almost 87% of the agricultural labour force in Tukucha. Yet, as shown earlier (Table 9), they receive lower wages than men. In principle, the difference in wage is usually justified on the grounds of differences in the nature of tasks performed, which itself is highly subjective, based on value judgement. The judgement reflects historically and culturally institutionalized gender bias and a perception that the tasks performed by men require more physical strength than those performed by women. In practice, such bias exists even when the same tasks are performed. One landless Dalit woman explains:

Women do all work related to farming except ploughing. They carry heavy loads and perform weeding, planting, harvesting, threshing, and processing everything. They even till the soil with spade. If my husband and I work together harvesting paddy, my husband gets Rs. 120 and I get Rs. 60. Working hours are equal for the same type of work and still women get only half the wage of men.

Gender disparities also exist in reciprocal exchange of labour where women pay with double working days for the work done by men. Though these disparities based on the sex of the worker are against the current wage law of the country, they have remained unchallenged. A poor Dalit women explains the reason,

It is not that we do not complain. We complain, but usually we work for rich high caste families. These families know that if we do not work for a wage, we cannot survive in summer because we do not have other options. So they, even women, do not listen to us.

Figure 7
Education status of men and women, Tukucha



Source: Household survey (2002)

This indicates that women themselves come from different social and economic backgrounds, making it difficult to organize in a group which supports the wider interests of women demanding equal wages. In addition, analysis of the education status of household head couples (heads of household and their spouses) shows that high castes were better educated compared to Dalit compared against their population share (Figure 7).

As Figure 7 shows, women of all caste and ethnic groups are less educated than men of the same group. The situation is worst among Dalit where 95% of women are illiterate. Gendered norms and values constrain women's access to education and non-farm employment, especially when it requires travelling and staying outside of the village. In the 129 households which participated in the survey, only two households (Chhetri) had women engaged in non-farm employment (teaching).

There are limited employment opportunities within the village. Only schools and the VDC office can employ some local people and they prefer employing men because women in our village are not educated. They lack exposure and hesitate speaking to outsiders even within their village. There are some opportunities outside the village, in Banepa bazaar. But this requires women to stay out of village which is not acceptable. Society laughs at such men who have their women [basically wives] staying outside of village and husband looking after children. People call them servant of wife [*joru ko gulam*]. (Brahmin man in Newar tole)

Inequality rooted in gendered norms and perception influences the way men and women participate in family decision-making as well as in economic and political processes, including participation in the FUGs. The subordinated position of women compared to men applies to all economic and caste groups. A Sarki woman from landed class family explains

A husband does not even clean a glass in the kitchen when he has a wife at home. If he is a service holder [*jagire*] outside and brings money home, then he treats his wife less than a fly [*makeho naganne*]. He takes most of decisions on his own except the one related to what vegetables to cook in kitchen. Sometimes if I opine differently on family decisions, he says, 'you do not interfere what I am doing'. This power [*tagat*] comes from the money he brings in and the house he owns. Women are defeated by fate [*karma le bareko*]. We cannot earn money.

As in other Hindu communities of Nepal (Cameron 2005), there exist a culture of impurity between a man and a woman in Tukucha within the family that also leads to subordinated position of women in the family and in community. Women, including the high castes, are untouchables during their menstruation (*nachune bhako*) and childbirth (*jutho*). There is a strong belief that a woman should not cook, worship, enter the kitchen garden, attend religious and social events in community or touch a man during menstrual period. A high-caste man who touches a menstruating woman or a low caste becomes impure and needs bathing immediately to become pure again. The practice of untouchability between a man and a woman affects

their ability to participate in public affairs and more importantly, it affects to their self-dignity. Such patriarchal culture, material resource asymmetry, gender division of labour and devaluation of women's work have important implications on user groups functioning and gendered outcomes that is illustrated in Chapter 4.

3.2.5 Forest resource use

Forests have always been of central importance to life in Tukucha. They consist of broad leaf species—i.e., Phalate (*Quercus glauca*), Chanp (*Michelia champaca*), Katus (*Triticum doica*), Chilaune (*Schima wallichii*) and narrow leaf species of Chir pine (*Pinus roxburgii*). The household survey reveals that firewood, fodder, grass, leaf litter and small timber remain the major products currently used by the farmers. Major sources for these products were traditionally public forests and, more recently, a combination of private and community forests. In this section, the class-gender dimension of the four major forest products use (firewood, fodder, timber and leaf litter) is discussed.

Major products and their use

Firewood

Firewood is the principal source of fuel in Tukucha. Some 94% of households use it as the only source for cooking. The remaining 6% use it but as a secondary source. For them, the primary source of fuel is non-forest items such as kerosene, gas and electricity. As Messerschmidt (1985) found, the definition of firewood includes two distinct types of products based on its physical and technical characteristics and sources. One, called *Jhikra* consists of old fencing materials, dry twigs of fodder trees and plant residue like maize stalks, cobs and husk that are found around the villages and can be collected at any time of the year. Cooking with *Jhikra* is a tiresome option because it burns fast, requiring a large amount to be cooked for one meal, and does not produce *koila* (charcoal) that can be reused as fuel. The other, *Daura*, consists of fresh (wet or green) wood and/or dead dried wood that is collected directly from the forest. Though *Daura* is the most preferred option for all households, at most times, because of the scarcity, people use a combination of different types available.

The amount of firewood a household needs to collect depends on various factors; most importantly, these are: the family size, availability of agricultural by-products and private trees, and the ability of the household to afford other (non-forest) supplements. On average, *Daura* is collected once

a year from community forests, usually in winter when fieldwork is at a minimum and women have relatively more time and *Jbikra* twice a week from surrounding places. Firewood is collected both from private and community forests, though large proportions of households are dependent on community forests (Table 11).

Table 11
Major sources of firewood by landholding category, Tukucha

Landholding classes (<i>ropani</i>)	Total households	Main source of firewood (in % of household within the land class)		
		Private forests only	Community forests only	Private + Community forests
< 5	73	1	67	32
6-10	28	7	54	39
10-15	14	0	43	57
> 15	6	0	16	84
Total	121	3	59	39

N = 121 (out of 129, only 121 households used firewood as main source of fuel for cooking)
Source: Household Survey, 2002.

As Table 11 illustrates, community forest is the only source of firewood for nearly 60% of the households. About 40% also uses community forests but supplement their requirements from private trees. The proportion of households entirely dependent on community forest is higher among the land-poor. The table also reveals a positive association between the landholding and the contribution of private forest to supplement the firewood requirements. The dependency on community forests decreases with the increase in landholding size. This class specificity has a significance for the distributive outcome of community forestry as those who are entirely dependent on community forest (about 60% in this case) are likely to suffer more from the access restriction. This is illustrated in detail in Chapter 4.

Fodder

The major portion of animal feed consists of agricultural by-products and floor grass. Floor grass (*bhui ghans*) comes from edges of agricultural and public land such as schools, temple grounds, edges of irrigation canals and riverbanks. As the harvest of fodder (i.e., *dale ghans* that consists of young branches and leaves of trees) is not allowed from community forests and there is no access to national or public forms of forests in the village except

community forest, people mostly replace the use of fodder with floor grass. The amount of grass required by a household depends on the number and types of livestock it owns and the availability of alternate sources to supplement the product. On average, women bring at least 2 *bhari* (approx. 30 kg) of grass per day. The collection time varies according to the season, even for the same household, depending upon the availability and distance of the source from the house. In the rainy season, grass collection requires relatively less time than in winter. On average, however, it takes about 3 hours to collect one *bhari* of grass from public sources, while collection from private sources does not take more than an hour. Renting in land for grass is also in practice but only on a limited scale, mostly among the land-poor.⁸

Table 12
Major sources of leaf litter by landholding category, Tukucha

Land category (<i>ropani</i>)	Total number of households	Sources of leaf litter (% of households within the land category)		
		Private forests only	Community forests only	Private + Com- munity forests
< 5	65	5	86	9
6-10	30	3	77	20
10-15	14	7	79	14
> 15	6	0	83	17
Total	115	4	83	13

N=115 (among 129 household surveyed; only 115 reported collecting litter from forest).
Source: Household survey (2002).

Leaf litter

Leaf litter is a major and often the only source of compost used for farming. It is also the only material used for animal bedding, important in summer to protect animals from the wet floor and in winter to protect them from cold. Community forests are the major sources of leaf litter for all economic and caste groups (Table 12).

Unlike the other products, leaf litter is cost-free and is collected once a week from respective community forests. The amount of leaf litter used by a household depends on the size of landholding and number of livestock, more livestock requiring more for animal bedding. On average, a household collects 2 *bhari* of leaf litter a week. The time required to collect leaf litter varies from 1 to 2 hours depending on the distance of the house from the

forest. The availability of leaf litter is said to have increased significantly. An old widow of Pandey tole explains:

Before community forestry started there was severe scarcity of leaf litter. Panchayat leaders opened forests only once a year and we had to provide 6 *mana* [approx. 3 kg] grain per adult member in the household, which was quite a lot. Those who could not give grain were denied access to the forest. Over the last 5–6 years, the amount of leaf litter has significantly increased in the forest. Now if it is not collected weekly, there is a danger of fire because of dried leaf on the ground.

Timber

Timber in Tukucha is used mainly for three purposes: to make farm implements; for the construction and/or maintenance of houses and for basic furniture. It is accessed either from the community forests or from private trees, the former being the main source for the majority. The use of timber is not as common as the use of other products. Among 129 households who took part in survey, only 43% had used timber from private and community forests in the past three years. Two reasons explain the limited use of timber. First, timber is not harvested regularly, as harvesting timber reduces the number of trees and is considered loss of the product unless a thinning is required. Next, buying timber is more expensive (Rs. 30–40 per cubic feet) compared to firewood (Rs. 5–10 per *bhari*). Thus, the use of timber by the land-poor is rare. A poor Kami from Pandey Ban explains:

After about 15 years of continuous protection, Pandey Ban became green. But still, the poor can only see the green trees; they cannot afford buying. Increase in timber in the community forest is of little use for the poor.

Together, the discussion above suggests that forest products are an essential component of the rural economy in Tukucha. All households, irrespective of their economic and social position, use forest products from community forests. However, use of these products is meant for consumption at household level, not for commercial exploitation. No household was found selling products obtained from the community forests in the market. Even for the subsistence use, the degree of dependence on community forests varies according to the economic situation of the people, more importantly according to the alternative sources available to supplement the products. The dependence on community forests for forest product is greater for landless and land-poor.

Gender specificity

In terms of gender, as women are principally responsible for cooking and tending livestock, they bear the primary responsibilities of collecting firewood and grass. But the tasks associated with the collection of forest products, especially that of firewood, are shared between men, women and children to a greater extent than might be expected from the gender-environment discourse (Table 13).

Table 13
Gender division of labour in forest product collection, Tukucha

Forest product collection	Principal responsibility (in % households within the caste/ethnic category)			
	Women	Men	Men & women	Women & children
Fuel wood (n=119)	55	21	12	12
Grass collection (n=68)	68	16	7	9
Leaf litter (n=117)	62	13	4	21
Small timber (n=56)	41	43	16	0

Note: n varies according to the number of households collecting that particular forest product.

Source: Household survey, 2002.

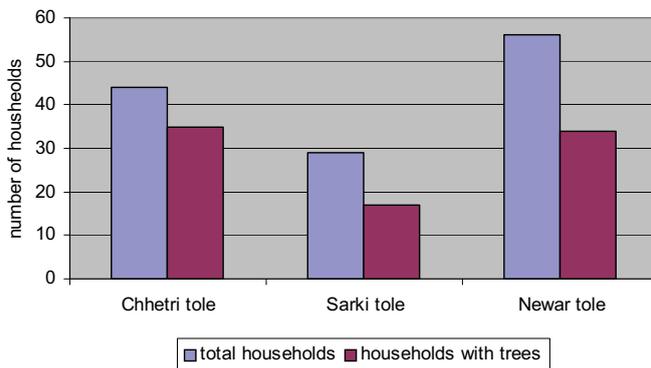
Use rules and gender-specific technology of harvesting the products largely explain the sharing of responsibilities between men and women. For example, community forests are usually open only once a year for firewood collection. Because of the time bar, each household tries to maximize the amount collected within the limited time available involving maximum numbers of household members. In addition, harvesting firewood from forests requires people to climb tree and break the dead and dried branches. Climbing trees is usually considered a man's job, though women also do it when the man is absent. Flexibility in gender roles, especially in firewood, is however limited to the community forests. Collection of firewood elsewhere is exclusively the women's responsibility, though it takes more time and effort. This suggests that the increased sharing by men is not associated with changes in gender roles in any wider sense. Women still have the primary responsibility of collecting forest products and lack of access to these products affects their ability to perform the gender-specific tasks of cooking and caring for livestock. However, the implications of changed access to products differ among women, depending on the economic class they belong to.

Women with enough trees in their private land reported suffering less from the scarcity of firewood and fodder than poor women without land. Class and gender are interlinked, determining the dependency and use of the forest resources in Tukucha.

Private forestry: a relevant option for the land rich only?

A direct positive association has been observed between the commencement of the community forestry and increased tree planting on private land in Tukucha. When forests were accessible to all, people did not need to think of planting trees on the private land. But when there was severe scarcity of firewood and fodder, especially during the informal protection period, Tukucha started exploring alternatives. When access to common forest was banned during initial years of protection, people started allowing regeneration of trees and even planting seedlings on private land, mainly in *bari*. In addition, as a part of the national policy, Department of Forests (DOF) officials, with support from Australian forestry project, encouraged people by providing seedling and technical assistance all free of cost. As a result, as Figure 8 illustrates, most households in Tukucha (60–80%) have at least 2–3 species of fodder trees on the edges of their private land. However, the number of trees in private land varies from 2–35 and is positively associated with the landownership favouring Chhetris the most (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Number of households with private forests, Tukucha



Source: Household survey, 2002

As illustrated earlier Pandey Chhetri have remained the wealthiest group in Tukucha. These were also the first to receive external support provided to the communities. As a result, they have the largest number of private trees in Tukucha. Most of them are able to meet 50–70% of their demands for firewood and fodder from private sources. On the other hand, only 17% of households in Sarki tole meet about 50% of their demand for these products from private trees. Within Pandey gaun, however, the Kami hardly have any land for tree plantation. They depend entirely on the communal forests and public land to meet the demand for firewood and grass. This suggests that, though tree plantation on private land has significantly increased and private forests have remained an important source of forest products for people in Tukucha, this option is relevant only to those who have sufficient land. For the landless and land-poor, who are often Dalits, private forestry offers little opportunity to meet their demand of forest products.

3.3 Rajhar: A Locus of Immigration in the Inner Terai

In this section, we discuss the main characteristics of agrarian structure and forest resource use in the Terai village, Rajhar, that are significantly different from the hills.

3.3.1 The village setting

Rajhar is one of the 74 Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Nawalparasi district in western Nepal. The village is situated at an altitude of 250–300 meters above sea level (msl). It is about 169 km southwest of the capital, Kathmandu. The east-west highway (Mahendra Rajmarga), built in 1974–75, divides the village into two: into a north and a south belt. The northern belt mainly consists of people from the hills—mostly Brahmin/Chhetri, Dalits and hill ethnic groups (e.g., Tamang, Magar, Gurung)—who migrated and settled in the village after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s. This north belt is relatively rich in terms of cultivable land and natural forests which are currently managed as community forests. The southern belt lies along the Narayani river and falls within the boundary of a national park. It consists of indigenous ethnic groups of Terai origin, mostly Tharu, Satar and Majhi. Though these people used the forests historically, immigration from the hills pushed these traditional forest users down to the riverbank.⁹

Since the village is connected with the highway, means of local transportation are available to Narayangarh market. However, there is no other in-

frastructure (such as bus stop, parking areas) developed for transportation. Toles in the village are connected with each other by narrow gravel road. The bicycle is the commonest form of local transport but people also own motorbikes and four wheelers. Nearly 80% of households in Northern belt are connected with electricity and few have running (piped) water. Households without access to electricity and water are squatters. Rajhar in the northern belt was selected for the study because of its physical and socio-economic setting typical of many inner Terai villages in Nepal and because of its long history of established community forests.

3.3.2 The historical background and demographic characteristics

The peasantry in the Terai has a recent history and differs from the peasantry in the hills. Malaria was endemic in the region until the 1960s and some indigenous ethnic groups (e.g. Tharu and Bote Majhi), who were resistant to malaria, were the only groups to settle there. As in other parts of the Terai, in Nepal, the village changed dramatically after the 1960s, when the state launched the National Malaria Eradication Programmes and encouraged hill migrants to clear the forest for farming under resettlement schemes. The migrants came mainly from two regions—adjacent hills and the Indian part of *Gangetic* plains; the former account for more than the latter group. Now the village is mixed in terms of origin and caste/ethnic composition.

Family histories reveal that two types of people migrated to Rajhar from adjacent hills (mainly from the Gorkha, Gulmi, Kaski, Tanahu and Lamjung districts). First, there were those who had a better living status, who migrated to Terai in search of more opportunities and a comfortable life. This was because the Terai had better infrastructure than in the hills, opening the door to both commercial farming and non-farm engagement within and outside the village.¹⁰ The second type of migrants in Rajhar consisted of labourers who came to work for construction of the east-west highway during 1972–76. Dalits came to the village either associated with higher caste migrants to provide services, or in search of wage labour. Most of them are currently settled alongside the road or near the forest as squatters, and cultivate *ailani* land.

Rajhar today consists of 1842 households with an average family size of 6.2. Upper caste groups (Brahmin Chhetris) are the largest with 43% of population, followed by the hill ethnic groups (Tamang, Magar, Rai, Gurung), Dalits (Kami, Sarki and Damai) and the Terai ethnic groups (Tharu, Bote Majhi and Kumal). Farming is the main occupation for all. In addition, upper castes are employed in government organizations, business centres,

teaching and other non-governmental organizations within and outside of the village. The recruitment of at least one person from each family in the British or Indian army is common among the hill ethnic groups. The most marginalized group are Dalits who are often also the landless and land-poor. These people have three major options for survival: seasonal agricultural labour within and outside the village, stone crushing in the river (*gitti kutne*), and seasonal migration to bordering Indian cities where they work as construction labour. Among the Terai ethnic groups, the majority of Tharus are farmers. Some work as agricultural labour for land-rich farmers but are less involved in non-farm sectors than other groups.

As in the hill village, nearly 80% of the households are officially headed by men. Among them, about 40% of these male heads of households live outside the village for over six months in a given year, and the women with children manage the agriculture and related activities as *de-facto* heads. Some 20% of total households are officially recognized as headed by women.¹¹

3.3.3 Characteristics of production

As in Tukucha, two types of land, *khet* and *bari*, are under cultivation. Major crops grown are paddy, maize, mustard, wheat, lentil and potato. Crop intensification has occurred with the introduction of improved varieties of wheat and paddy, but as both require high inputs of fertilizers and irrigation, this intensification has not benefited small farmers. About 50% of households produce grain just sufficient for one year and about 46% are food insufficient in production. Cattle, buffalo, poultry and goat are the major livestock. Aside from subsistence use, agricultural and livestock products are also marketed. The local market for the agricultural produce is Narayanghat, which is about 22 km from Rajhar.¹²

Unlike Tukucha, where peasants are either labourers cum producers or producers only, in Rajhar, as we mentioned in methodology in Chapter 1, peasants can be broadly classified into five distinct classes: landless, small farmers, middle farmers, large farmers and exclusive landlords. *Bigha* is a local unit of measurement of land used in the Terai; one *bigha* equals approximately 0.67 hectare.

- i) **The landless** cultivate as tenants, as well as work as wage labourers.
- ii) **Small farmers** usually own less than 0.5 *bigha* of land. Small farmers use mainly family labour for production and supplement food requirement from tenancy or non-farm employment.
- iii) **Middle farmers** usually own land of less than one *bigha*. They work on their own farm and hire labour during the peak agriculture season, but

on the whole do not work as wage labour outside their farm. Most food for this category of farmers comes from own production. Few also make surplus.

- iv) **Large farmers** produce a surplus. They use family labour but the larger proportion of labour requirement is met by hiring seasonal or permanent labours.
- v) **Landlords** have large landholdings usually more than 3 *bigha*. They usually do not cultivate but rent out all cultivable land. Such households are food sufficient with few surpluses for market.

The second, third and fourth groups form the majority. They are also the ones who participate actively in the public and political affairs in the community. Though few, the first and fifth groups have a significant role in the way a forest-user group functions. Although there are overlapping in characteristics, making it sometime difficult to categorize them distinctly, there are significant differences in the economic and political status between large peasants with tenants (and labourers), and peasants employing largely household labour or working mainly as wage labourers. This difference is significant both in terms of their resource endowment and in terms of the way they participate in economic and political processes, including community forestry.

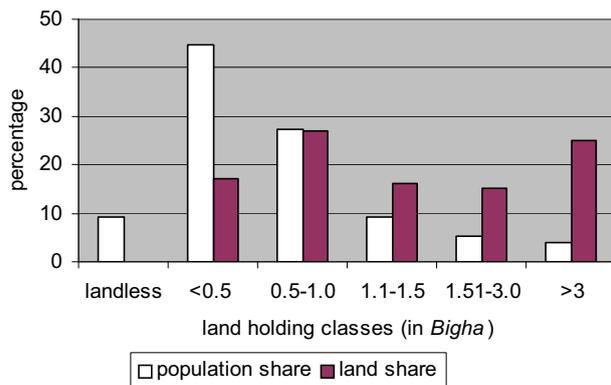
3.3.4 Agrarian structure and differentiation

As discussed earlier, the community in Rajhar is of recent origin compared to that in the hills, and it is connected with rapidly growing urban centres. As a result, there is increasing influence of growing capitalism. Population is heterogeneous in terms of caste and ethnicity and there is a stark division between indigenous Terai ethnic groups and hill migrants. Within this context, the analysis in this section is limited to the question ‘What are the main characteristics of its agrarian structure and in what ways is social differentiation taking place in this typical Terai village?’

Ownership of means of production

About 90% of households own cultivable land, but the size and type of landownership differ. Land distribution is skewed, ranging from the landlessness or near landlessness to ownership of seven *bigha* or more. As the Figure 9 illustrates, of 150 households who took part in survey, the bottom 55% of households (who own less than 0.5 *bigha*) own only 17% of the total land available. In contrast, the top 10% (who own more than 1.5 *bigha*) own 40%.

Figure 9
Landownership compared to population share, Rajhar



N=150

Source: Household survey (2002)

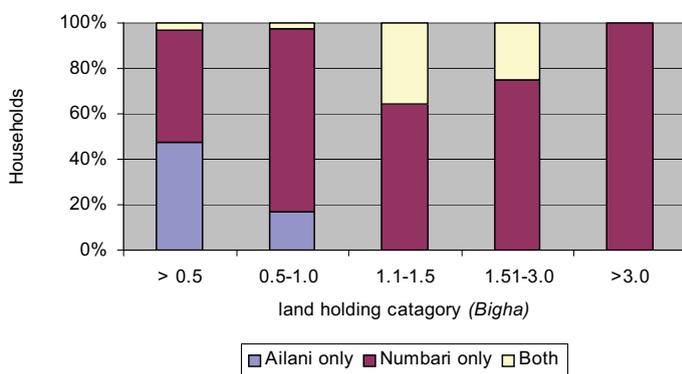
The history of settlement in Rajhar has great significance not only for the size of ownership and quality of land, but for the legal status of the land owned by the different categories of peasants. According to the legal status, land under cultivation in Rajhar is of two types: *numbari* (which is legally registered in the name of the owner as a personal asset) and *ailani* (not registered but occupied illegally). Since illegal encroachment has been common in the Terai, many immigrants hold *ailani* land, which they cultivate but because they lack the legal status of ownership, they cannot therefore sell or use it as collateral. Relations between *ailani* landholders and local forestry officials have been a matter of conflict from the beginning. Although, after the initiation of community forestry, new encroachment on forest was said to have stopped, in reality, the nexus between the encroachers and state officials continues.¹³ Often, local officials demand a share of the crop produced in *ailani* land as a return for turning a blind eye to its continued occupation. This makes *ailani* landholders more vulnerable than those who own *numbari* land.

About 26% of households have cultivated only *ailani* land for the last three decades. Among them, the majority are small farmers with less than 0.5 *bigha* land (Figure 10).

About 80% of Dalits hold only *ailani* land while, among upper castes, the proportion is less than 10%, indicating the significance of caste structure in

the current inequality in landholdings. *Ailani* is not legally recognized as personal property and cannot be sold but has been under cultivation for the past two decades. Lack of legal recognition of the land they occupy leads to exclusion of Dalits from membership in some user groups that require evidence of permanent occupancy as membership criterion. This issue is illustrated in Chapter 5.

Figure 10
Legal status of landholding by size of holding, Rajhar



Source: Field Survey (2002), N = 136

The distribution of landownership is shown in Table 14. Since both types of land have been under cultivation for the last two decades and the use of *ailani* is also inherited among the family members, this analysis of landownership distribution includes both.

As the table shows, the majority of peasants own a small piece of cultivable land, the produce of which is far from sufficient for household consumption. The size of land cultivated is closely associated with the size of landownership (correlation coefficient 0.719). However, close analysis of the table also reveals that the areas under cultivation are not same as the areas owned in almost any land class, suggesting that a significant number of peasants are involved in tenancy relations. Peasants who own less than 1.5 *bigha* of land are producers-cum-tenants: they rent land for cultivation from large owners but also produce on their own. Those who own more than 1.5 *bigha* are producers-cum-landlords: they rent out land but keep some for family production. As in the hills, there is a high association between land-

ownership and size of *khet* owned (correlation coefficient 0.924), indicating that the small and medium peasants hold more *bari* and large peasants more proportion of *khet*. This has considerable effect on the ability of different groups to produce more from the size of land they hold.

Table 14
Ownership distribution of means of production, Rajhar

	Land categories (in <i>bigha</i>)					
	Landless n=14	< 5 n=67	0.51-1.0 n=41	1.1-1.5 n=14	1.51-3 n=8	>3 n=6
Proportion of total (%)						
HH	9	45	28	9	5	4
Land owned	0	17	27	16	15	25
Ave. size of land cultivated (<i>bigha</i>)		0.4	0.9	1.6	1.8	3.3
Average size of ownership						
Total land (<i>bigha</i>)	0.0	0.3	0.8	1.4	2.3	5.1
<i>Khet</i> land (<i>bigha</i>)	0.0	0.2	0.6	1.2	1.5	4.3
<i>Bari</i> land (<i>bigha</i>)	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.3
Draft animals (no.)	0.4	1.45	2.4	2.8	3.8	4.5
Goat owned (no.)	3.2	1.6	2.1	2.1	3.4	4.7
Average HH size	4.6	5.4	6.0	6.9	9.3	9.5

Source: Household survey (2002); 1 *bigha* = 0.67 ha; N=150

Table 15
Ownership distribution of means of production by caste and ethnicity, Rajhar

	Caste/ethnic groups				
	Upper cast groups n=71	Hill ethnic groups n=37	Terai ethnic groups n=16	Dalit n=21	Others n=5
Proportion of total (%)					
HH	47.3	24.7	10.7	14	3.3
Land owned	61.4	22.0	11.6	3.5	1.5
Land cultivated (<i>bigha</i>)	0.9	0.6	1.5	0.3	0.4
Average size of ownership					
Total land (<i>bigha</i>)	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.2	0.4
<i>Khet</i> land (<i>bigha</i>)	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.1	0.3
<i>Bari</i> land (<i>bigha</i>)	0.1	0.2	0.8	0.1	0.1
Draft animals (no.)	2.3	1.7	2.4	0.7	2.4
Goat owned (no.)	1.7	2.4	3.7	2.2	1.2
Average HH size	5.7	6.2	6.8	5.9	7.4

The inequality in landownership is reflected in other important means of production, including the number of draft animals (correlation coefficient 0.503). Though the size of a holding tends to increase with family size, the association is not strong (correlation coefficient 0.375), indicating the weak influence of family size in ownership distribution. Ownership of land and other means of production is influenced far more by caste and ethnicity (Table 15).

As the table indicates, upper caste households (with 47% share in total households in the village) own more than 60% of cultivable land. On the other hand, Dalits with 14% share in population own less than 4% land. Average size of the upper caste household farm is five times larger than the average size of farm owned by Dalits. The same applies to all other productive resources, including the ownership of draft animals and goats, indicating the influence of the caste and ethnicity on ownership. One way land-poor households meet subsistence deficits is through land (and livestock) tenancy. Rented land is a critical addition to the farming resources and, clearly, the subsistence of marginal farmers—especially the lower caste—critically depends on it.

Tenurial arrangement

The most common forms of land tenancy in Rajhar are share-cropping and leasing out with a fixed amount of produce or cash (*thekeka*). Though households with surplus land rent it out to landless or land-poor peasants for cultivation, most of them also keep some land for family production. A few (only 4%) are exclusively landlords. However, there is a significant difference in economic and the political status between the exclusive landlord and landlord-cum-cultivators on the one hand, landowner-cum-tenants and exclusive tenants on the other. As Tables 3.9 and 3.10 illustrate, most tenants come from the land-poor class. On the other hand, households who rent out land come from 1.5 *bigha* or more land-owning class. Among the landlords, the majority are Brahmin Chhetri, while most tenants are Dalits and Terai ethnic groups (e.g. Tharu).

Demand for involvement in a tenancy relation is higher than supply, and results in frequent changes of tenants. There appear to be two reasons. First, because of the high demand of land on the part of potential tenant, the frequent change of tenants tends to strengthen landlords' bargaining power. Second, changing tenants more frequently avoids any risk associated with the tenancy rights that a tenant may claim on the land he/she cultivates. Because of the uncertainty involved, there are unequal power relations between these two groups, tenants being compelled to pay more to the

landlords, mostly in the form of free labour. In some cases, it also involves the labour of other family members.

The demand for tenancy is so high that all want to please the landlord for the land. So we need to negotiate [*samjbauta*] with whatever he says. [A high caste man who owns only 0.25 *bigha* land and involves in sharecropping with another high caste household].

The work I do for *jamindar* [the landlord] includes harvesting grain, cutting firewood, pulling cart and transporting grains to the market. My children look after his livestock. It depends on the mercy of the *jamindar* whether he wants to pay for my labour. This is an informal arrangement to secure tenancy for the next year. Where do I go if I do not get land to cultivate next year? (Dalit tenant who also cultivates in 0.25 *bigha* of *ailani* and involved in sharecropping with a high caste landlord)

Though the statements above suggest the dissatisfaction on the way free labour is extracted by the landlords in the name of tenancy, the tenants rarely oppose and argue against landlords in public for fear of losing the tenancy. The unequal relationship between a tenant and a landlord affects not only the economic wellbeing of tenants, but also the ways these tenants and landlords participate in the public sphere, especially in a forum that involves the interests of both.

Labour requirement and employment relations

As in Tukucha, there are three types of labour arrangements for agricultural production: family labourers who work in their field without being paid, reciprocal exchange, and hired labour. The use of family labour is the most predominant, and this applies to all economic and social groups. Reciprocal exchange takes place only between the same caste and ethnic group. Small peasants are active both in hiring-in and hiring-out labour. They hire wage labour during the peak agriculture season, but also work as seasonal wage labour if there is surplus labour in the family (Table 16).

A total of 73 households (out of 136) who cultivate land do so by hiring labour during the peak season and of those, 71% are middle peasant (>0.5 *bigha* land-owning class). On the other hand, 66 households supply agriculture wage labour and 79% are landless or land-poor (<0.5 *bigha* land-owning class). Most Dalits belong to this group.

Unlike in Tukucha, where employment relations between the landlord (mostly high caste) and wage labour were found relatively close, the relationship in Rajhar is not. On the one hand, the reverse seasonality in the construction industry allows many landless people to move between agricultural and non-agricultural work. On the other hand, there is high flow of

agricultural labour to and from other villages because of access by road. There is also an influx of wage labour from the neighbouring Indian states Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who come regularly during the peak agricultural season because the wage rate is higher in Nepal than in India. This influx of labour makes it difficult to make wages competitive in the labour market. As most wage labours are poor and Dalits, they are vulnerable and dependent in part on landlords for an appropriate wage.

Table 16
Pattern of labour hire between households by landholding category, Rajhar

Landholding class (in <i>bihga</i>)	Percentage of household within each landholding category		
	Hire-in (n=73)	Hire-out (n=66)	Not involved (n=11)
Landless	0	71	29
< 0.5	30	63	7
0.51 - 1.0	68	27	5
1.1-1.5	64	14	22
1.5-3.0	88	12	0
>3.0	100	0	0

Source: Household survey (2002)

Non-farm income and credit relations

About 75% of households—including the landless labourers, small peasants, medium and large peasants—obtain a significant proportion of their income from non-farm sources, but they do so in different capacities (Table 17).

Non-farm sources vary from low-paid low-skilled jobs (e.g. daily wage labour, forest guards and night watchmen) and the high-paid high-skilled jobs yielding a good salary (e.g. teachers, lawyers, government service-holders), to income obtained from business, pension and remittances. The poor are mostly engaged in low-paid jobs while landed class usually have more access to the high-paid jobs. The income received varies significantly from Rs 1500 to 10,000 (US\$ 23–152) a month. Earnings for some households who have their members in the Indian and the British army range from Rs 35,000 to 100,000 (US\$ 530–1515) per month. A significant number of households derive income from more than one source.

Table 17
Access to non-farm income by landholding category, Rajhar

Landowning class (in <i>bigha</i>)	Types of sources of non-farm incomes (in percentage within the land class)				
	Salary (n=36)	Wage (n=20)	Pension/ remittance (n=17)	Business (n=16)	> 1 sources (n=12)
Landless	30	40	0	20	10
<0.5	34	30	9	21	6
0.51-1.0	47	10	23	7	13
1.1 - 1.5	23	8	38	15	15
1.51-3.0	16	0	50	16	16
> 3	50	0	0	17	33
Total (n=112)	40	22	19	18	13

Note: Among 150 HH surveyed, only 112 (75%) had non-farm engagement

Source: Household survey (2002)

As in Tukucha, access to non-farm income has specific caste, ethnic and gender dimensions. The main employer for high caste men is the state, either in the bureaucracy or the army. High caste men are also involved in teaching. Some households, mainly the Tamang, Gurung and Magar receive pensions and remittances for serving in the British and the Indian armies. For the poor and the Dalits, however, access to such employment is limited. Poor women usually work as wage labour within and outside the village, most commonly as stone crushers, while men generally migrate to other parts of Nepal or to India as factory workers. Some have low-salaried jobs like that of forest guards, drivers, runners in local offices and watchmen for local factories/business complexes. Few artisans continue to provide services to higher caste families but they no longer do so solely for fixed annual payment in kind, but also work on a 'piece rate' system. Most artisans have turned to wage labour in agriculture and construction sectors.

The changes in asset ownership and occupational mobility

Land and livestock, which are the principal means of production, are inherited and/or acquired in Rajhar. But while in Tukucha, inherited land was the main reason behind the current inequality in landownership, this is not the sole reason in Rajhar. As Table 18 shows, a significant number of peasants—27% of those who own land today—did not inherit, but purchased land.

Table 18
Mode of land acquisition by caste and ethnicity, Rajhar

Caste/ethnic groups	Mode of land acquisition (in % of HH within the group)		
	Inherited only	Purchased only	Both
Upper caste groups (n=62)	69	27	4
Hill ethnic groups (n=20)	55	45	0
Terai ethnic group (n=10)	100	0	0
Dalits (n=4)	100	0	0
Others (n=2)	100	0	0
Total	71	27	2

N=98 (Among 150 households surveyed, 14 were landless and 38 cultivated *ailani* land only. These are not included in this analysis).

Source: Household survey (2002)

Those who purchased land are upper-caste and hill ethnic groups. The Terai ethnic group and Dalits own only the inherited land. These groups are unable to purchase additional land, though the average land they own is smaller than size owned by upper caste groups and is insufficient to meet their annual food requirements.

A total of 28 peasants (19% of the total) had purchased land over the previous ten years; of these, 68% were upper caste and 32% were hill ethnic groups. Similarly, about 12% (all upper castes) increased their landholdings in the past 10 years. Income obtained from non-farm sources, mostly from employment in government and private organizations has remained the major source of income for buying land for upper castes, while remittances from abroad have enabled some Tamangs to acquire land in the last ten years. As mentioned, high caste groups have been in a position to acquire larger share of non-farm income and to invest it in land.

On the other hand, about 13% of households have experienced a decline in landownership. The reasons for this include family separation and indebtedness, the latter being common among the Dalits, indicating that the poor are more vulnerable to the risk of having to sell the assets during emergencies. The greater incidence of land transaction in Rajhar indicates higher economic mobility than in Tukucha. Though there were no significant changes in livestock (draft and milch animals) holdings, goat-keeping is significantly reduced. Nearly 50% of households experienced reduced herd size in Rajhar over the past 10 years. Most prominent reasons for this are said to have been the initiation of community forestry that banned free

grazing and fodder collection from the nearby forests. This issue is discussed in Chapter 5 in detail.

Similar to the higher economic mobility, Rajhar also has higher rate of occupational mobility. Caste-based occupations, especially those of blacksmith and tailor, are disappearing at a faster rate than in the hill village. There are two reasons. First, because of the low social status accorded to people of occupational castes, younger generations do not want to reveal their caste and avoid being involved in occupations that might reveal it. Second, because of the influx of cheap synthetic products in the market, there has been decreasing demand for their specific skills, and occupational caste groups adapt to more demanding options that are available, including working as agricultural and construction labour. In addition, the occupation of blacksmith is being threatened by community forestry in Rajhar (Chapter 5 for details).

Local elites and power relations in the village

Peasants in Rajhar are therefore highly differentiated in terms of their access to productive resources within and outside the community. Landholding and income from farm and non-farm activities vary significantly between the economic and social groups. Brahmin and Chhetri, though they account only about 43% of the total population, are not only endowed with better landholdings but also control all the major economic and political structures. They have wide connections in the local bureaucracy and politics and by virtue of their caste and historically maintained linkages in the state bureaucracy, they have access to government employment and local administrative bodies, which is sound both in terms of financial gains and social prestige. More than 75% of positions in the VDC (i.e., the local administrative unit) are occupied by them.

Landless migrants and the Dalits are the most vulnerable groups, having limited access to means of production and to power structures and subjected to low economic and social status in the village. Most Dalits are poor, landless and subsequently have low social status. Representation of Dalits in the VDC structure is nil though they share about 25% of VDC population. They have historically been dependent on the high caste groups for wage labour to sustain their livelihoods. They are as a result, often excluded from decision-making or remain silent in the presence of the land-rich high caste groups, even when the decisions being taken could adversely affect their interests.

Gender dimension

The characteristics of gender relations in Rajhar do not vary significantly from that of Tukucha. As in Tukucha, women constitute nearly 52% of the population of the village, but only 9% of the total holdings are registered in a woman's name. For more than 90% of women, the access to land is mediated through men who are mostly husbands. As discussed in Chapter 2, the disparity mainly originates from the law of inheritance which favours men.

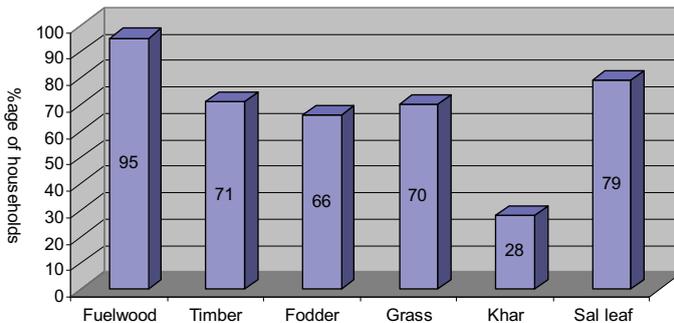
Women of all economic and caste groups perform on average over twice as much work in productive and domestic domains as their male counterparts. As in Tukucha, there are differences between landed and land-poor women in the types of productive activities they engage in. While landed women mostly work only on their own farms, the land-poor work on their own farms as well as in farms of others. Land-poor and lower caste women also work as non-farm labourers, mostly as stone crusher and factory workers. Men are more involved in non-farm income-generating activities and community affairs compared to women. A static view of men's and women's involvement in the reproductive, productive and community spheres in a peasant household in a normal season is given in Annex 3.

Nearly 70% of agricultural labourers in Rajhar are women, yet they receive almost half the wage rates (Rs. 60–70) that men receive (Rs. 100–120). In principle, there is no gender difference in wages for similar work, but women are usually hired for weeding, planting and processing while men for ploughing, digging and levelling. The fact that women receive almost half the wages of that received by men shows that women's work is undervalued compared to the work of men. Influx of labourers during the peak agricultural season reduces bargaining power of women labourers to increase wage rates. The same disparities are reflected in access to education and non-farm employment opportunities, where women are disadvantaged compared to men of the same economic and caste categories. However, there are some differences that can be observed between women in access to education. Higher caste women are more educated than the lower caste women and thus among women, they are more active in community affairs such as mother's clubs and forest user groups. Implications of the difference between men and women, and the difference between women of different economic and caste groups have important significance in user groups' functioning and outcomes, a point that is illustrated in later chapters.

3.3.5 Forest resource use

As in Tukucha, forest products form an important component in the livelihoods of the people in Rajhar. Forests in Rajhar consist of natural Sal trees with a wide variety of tropical and sub-tropical broad and narrow leaf species. Most serve multiple purposes, both for subsistence use and for income. For example, the Sal is well known as the best quality timber for building construction and furniture. It is one of the most valued and expensive timbers in the Nepalese market as well as abroad. In addition, Sal is also preferred for firewood, fodder and leaf plates. Similarly, bamboo, which is one of the preferred species both in private and community planting, is well known for its effectiveness in soil conservation. In addition, bamboo clan is widely used as fencing materials and poles for construction, leaves are burned as fuel, the young shoots (*tama*) are used and sold as vegetables and the outer cover is used for handicrafts.

Figure 11
Percentage of household using different types of forest products, Rajhar



Note: Households use multiple products
Source: Household survey (2002)

Major products obtained from the forest include firewood, fodder, grass and timber. Other minor products include thatching materials (*khar*), Sal leaf for making plates, raw material for handicrafts, edible products such as vegetables and wild fruits and products of religious and medicinal importance. Most households use multiple products (Figure 11).

As the Figure 11 shows, firewood is an important product obtained from forests for most of the households. This is followed by Sal leaf, timber and

grass. Of the 150 households who took part in surveys, 94% use forest products only for household consumption, about 6% use them both for consumption and for sale.¹⁴

Major products and their uses

Firewood

Four major types of cooking fuel are in use in the village: *daura*, *jbikera*, *guitha* (dried animal dung with or without agriculture residue) and non-forest sources.¹⁵ As in Tukucha, *daura* is preferred over *jbikera* and *guitha* because of its durability. Since one type of fuel is not enough, people use a combination of the types mentioned above to meet their requirements. However, use of *guitha* was found more common among Terai indigenous ethnic groups who have special skills of making it from dung. Before the start of community forestry, government forest (the current community forest) was the main source of firewood for all households. Currently, firewood is obtained from three major sources: community, national and private forests. However, community forests have remained the most important source for about 70% of the users. Private forests are the major supplement but only few (9%) are dependent solely on private forests for firewood. Land-poor form the major proportion of households depending exclusively on community and national forests (Table 19).

Table 19
Major sources of firewood by landholding category, Rajhar

Land owning class (bigha)	Total number of HH	Sources of firewood (% of HH within land category)			
		Private forests	CF only	National forest	More than one
Landless	14	0	79	7	14
< 0.5	65	5	82	3	11
0.51-1.0	39	8	64	8	21
1.1-1.5	11	0	64	9	27
1.51-3.0	8	63	0	0	38
> 3	6	33	17	0	50
Total	143	9	68	5	18

Note: Only HH who used firewood as the most important fuel for cooking were included in the analysis.

Source: Field Survey (2002) N=143

As the table points out, community forestry has remained the most important and only source of firewood for nearly 70% of households and majority of them are land-poor. In terms of caste, the majority of households (85%) who use only community forests for firewood are Dalits. Thus changes in access to firewood from community forest would mostly affect to the land-poor, mostly Dalits.

Fodder and grass

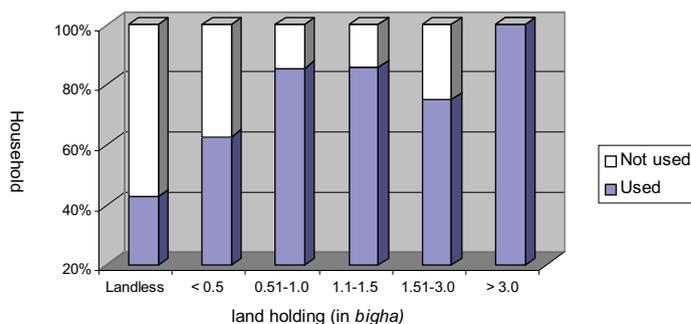
Before the introduction of community forestry, open grazing was the main way of feeding livestock. About 80% of households used to take livestock to the forest and public land for grazing. Community forestry replaced free grazing with stall-feeding. As with firewood, the source of fodder also varies according to landholding. Among households who use fodder today (some 67%), major sources are private forests for 36% and community forests for 35%. Nearly 30% of households use more than one source. The use of fodder from private forests is positively associated with land size. Grass is an important supplement for fodder. Among 70% of sampled households who use grass as an important supplement for livestock, 68% derive it entirely from private land from the edges of *khet* and *bari*. Public land is the most common source of grass for the land-poor.

Timber

Timber is one of the most important forest products in Rajhar. According to its quality and potential use, timber obtained from forests can be classified into three major types: processed, non-processed and by-products. Processed timber (*chirani kath*) is preferred over unprocessed (*bakal*) and by-products (*balla balli*). Before the establishment of the community forestry, all households reported use of timber each year for various purposes. However, after its introduction, only 72% were using timber over the last three years. Majority of the timber users after the start of community forestry are large landowners (Figure 12).

The community forests are the main and the only source of timber for the majority (94%) of households. The quality of timber also differs between the classes. The best quality (processed timber) is used mostly by the non-poor users while the land-poor and the Dalits use the by-products. This issue is discussed in detail in looking at distributive outcomes in Chapter 5.

Figure 12
Proportion of households using timber, Rajhar



N=150

Source: Household survey (2002)

Gender specificity

As in Tukucha, women work more in collection of firewood, fodder and other minor products than do their male counterparts (Table 20). On the other hand, making agricultural tools and managing construction-related tasks (including construction of animal sheds and house maintenance) are largely considered as men's tasks. Men are therefore involved more than women in the collection and use of timber. This gender specificity in forest resource use applies to all economic and social categories, albeit in different capacities.

Table 20
Gender division of labour in forest product collection, Rajhar

Collection of products	Principal responsibility (in percentage within the caste and ethnic categories)				
	Women	Men	Men & women	Women & children	Hired labour
Firewood	48	15	33	3	1
Fodder	61	13	23	2	1
Leaf	91	3	4	2	0
Grass	86	3	9	2	0
Timber	14	75	7	0	0
Thatching material	44	15	41	0	0

Source: Household survey (2002)

Table 20 and discussion with the men and women in Rajhar indicate that the responsibility for collecting certain products—especially firewood, fodder and thatching material—is shifting from only women to both men and women. As in Tukucha, such flexibility in gender role is visible only in certain products that have time restriction on access. It is less visible in the collection of other products that do not have such restrictions. This indicates that the flexibility in gender role is more related to the forest product-use rule of community forests and less due to the wider level of changes in gender roles.

The relevance and contribution of private forests

As the ownership of private forests is positively associated with landownership, the proportion of users supplementing their requirements from private forests is higher among the land-rich. But, unlike in Tukucha, where most rural households plant at least 2–3 tree species on the edges of *bari* land, the number of households with private forests is lower in Rajhar. Of 150 households, only 28% had trees on their private land. Among them, the majority owned only 1–2 species of trees. Because of the greater demand for cultivable land and land-based income, not all farmers were in a position to invest land for tree plantation.

In addition, as Subedi and Messerschmidt (n.d.) illustrate, some legal and practical problems even discourage land-adequate farmers from investing in private trees especially for profit. On the one hand, farmers who are involved in tenancy relations or those cultivating *ailani* lands are discouraged from planting trees because the current law does not provide tenurial rights to any trees grown on land under tenancy arrangements, and the cultivation of *ailani* is considered illegal. On the other hand, current forest law requires private forests to be registered with the DFO. This arrangement would pose no real problem, but to sell firewood and timber from private forests needs a recommendation from the local authority leader and then the purchase of a permit from the DFO with the recommendation. Farmers with no personal and political linkage find this process difficult, discouraging them from investing in private forests. All these factors in one way or another explain the limited contribution of private forests to meet the requirements for forest products in the Terai.

3.4 Similarities and Differences between the Locations

Physical setting and demography

People in the hill community are settled in distinct and separate hamlets, each consisting of relatively homogenous caste and ethnic groups with people from same patrilineal descent. People are therefore relatively homogenous in interests, occupation and sociopolitical positioning. Small settlements with few caste and ethnic groups from the same descent reinforce social cohesiveness in the hills. In contrast to this, settlement in the Terai is continuous, historically younger, geographically more dispersed and sociologically more diverse. Together with the expanding market, this leads to differential interests, occupations and sociopolitical positioning. A large population with different caste and ethnic identities resides in a continuous settlement, often resulting in the diverse and conflicting interests. Social cohesiveness among the people even within the same caste and ethnic group is therefore less in the Terai than the hills. This may have a significant impact on the composition of forest user groups.

The hill village is not directly connected with the road infrastructure and thus the market. This restricts the mobility of people and the transfer of commodities and labour between the villages and the market. The same applies to forest products, which have little market value because of high transportation costs. In contrast, the Terai is well connected with basic infrastructure including roads and markets, leading to high mobility and commodity transfers between the villages and the cities. Access to roads and markets has opened up the opportunities for diversified livelihood options for all categories of peasants.

Immigration is not common in the hills, but in the Terai there is continuous flow of migrants from adjacent hills and neighbouring villages. Access to roads, market facilities and the availability of non-farm activities are important pull factors for migration. Male migration out of villages to India and neighbouring cities for employment is the most influential socio-demographic force both in the hill and the Terai community. But the pattern of migration differs and is important to user group functioning. In the hills, one or two male family members migrate to near-by cities and migration of the whole family is rare. Even though people migrate, they leave their spouses and children behind and are not therefore fully detached from the community. The relationship of the emigrant and the family and the community remain intact. In Terai, both seasonal and permanent migrations are common. When people migrate on a permanent basis, they often migrate with the whole family and seek alternatives for livelihoods. They be-

come completely detached from community affairs. Migration of the poor to Indian cities is more common in the Terai. As a result, the relationship of emigrants with their family and community is disturbed, at least for the short run. These differences between the locations have a significant impact on the functioning of forest user groups.

Agrarian structure and differentiation

Although agrarian histories are different, ownership of means of production is quite similar; only minor differences are noticed. In both the locations, landownership is the most important determinant of the economic well-being and social position of individuals, households and groups. It is positively associated with access to and control over other means of production, including non-farm sources of income and control over the power structures. The ownership distribution of land is skewed in both locations, favouring high caste men, but its concentration is higher in the Terai than in the hills. In the hills, there are very few landless and all (even the landless) are cultivators; there are no landowners with enough land to live on without working the land. In the Terai, rural landlessness is higher and the community includes individuals who are exclusively labourers and tenants at the one end and those who are exclusively landlords at the other. There exist unequal power relations between the two parties as tenants are dependent on landlords for the land they cultivate.

Employment relations between the landlord (mostly high caste) and wage labour (mostly Dalits) differ between the locations. In the hills, because of the absence of labour flow between villages, the relationship between the landlord and labourers was found to be relatively close, of a patron–client nature. In the Terai, however, the relationship between the landlord and wage labour is not so close because of influx of agricultural wage labour from other villages and even from India. As most of the wage labourers are from the poor and lower caste groups, they are more vulnerable and dependent in part upon the employer for appropriate wages and thus for livelihood.

There is considerable economic inequality in both the hills and the Terai. In the hills, however, the economy is relatively stagnant, with limited mobility of households in terms of economic strength over the last 10 years. Economic differentiation can be said to have been derived from internal processes and historically defined interdependencies and power relations. Relative lack of market penetration and flow of labour from outside prevent the process of differentiation from being rapid and increasing. In the Terai the economy is more dynamic. Land poverty is high and changes in the

ownership of assets are faster. Employment relations between the labour and the landholder, and tenancy relations between the tenants and the landlords are more unequal than in the hills.

Though agriculture is important for both locations, non-farm income provides more opportunities for accumulation and reinvestment in the Terai. While the land-poor engage in non-farm activities, they are also involved in inferior jobs, many requiring travel outside of the village (and country) for limited incomes. Since medium and large peasants are endowed with education, information and other access qualifications, they have access to better paid jobs. The magnitude of differentiation in the Terai is therefore more pronounced than in the hills and can be said to be derived more from external factors.

In both the locations, class and power are positively associated with caste structure. More often than not, those who are rich and powerful are high caste. Few lower caste households who do have more land than the majority of others still suffer from strict informal rules, maintaining the purity of the high caste. The concept of 'untouchability' affects them in relation to dignity and prestige. Hence, Dalits are socially and politically less influential than people of higher caste groups even within the same economic class. Economic class determines the relationship within the same caste and ethnic group. In both the locations, the hierarchies of gender and caste structure conduce to the hierarchy of social relations of production: landless, low caste and primarily female labourers who work for land-owning upper caste households.

There is a decline of the village artisan, both in the hills and in the Terai, though the extent of this disappearance varies. In the hills, the decline of the artisan has taken a particular form, leading to generational and partial rather than total migration from the village. For example, the Sarkis of Tukucha (mainly men) still follow their occupation though they do so mostly outside the village (in cities where demand for their skills is higher). A significant proportion of artisans have at least one male member in the household working in another city as a shoemaker along the roadside. In the Terai, few artisans have continued their occupation. Most have completely abandoned it, choosing to work as agricultural labourers, construction workers or stone crushers.

Gender relations

Women are in a subordinate position to men due to lack of ownership of important means of production, through limited access to education and non-farm income opportunities. The means of production such as land is

inherited through the male descendents. Where a parcel of the land is registered in the name of a woman, she does not have exclusive authority over it. The same applies to access to education and non-farm income. Differential control over productive resources and opportunities explain women's limited—and often lack of—bargaining power in household and community affairs, especially when it involves arguing against men.

When it comes to gender roles, the reproductive role of a woman does not vary significantly between the locations, indicating substantial influence of gendered values in the allocation of tasks. The gender division of labour confine women to the periphery of households, restricting their interaction with wider economic and political processes. Gender roles of men position them with superior decision-making power and economic privilege, while their dependent wives and children are subordinate. Amongst women there are some differences between the locations. In the hills, very few women are educated and women's involvement in regular non-farm employment is almost nil except among Sarki women who work as construction labourers. Women in the Terai have more access to these opportunities. This difference may be important when it comes to women's ability to participate in and benefit from user groups.

Characteristics and use of the forest resource

Forests serve as an important input to the livelihoods of peasants in both locations, but in different capacities. Hill forests consist of relatively few species with less diversified use in the economic production system. They are mainly for consumption within the household rather than for surplus income. The lack of direct access to market means that forest-based income is almost nil and the competition for greater access to products is also limited.

Terai consists of natural forests with high value of timber and non-timber products that provide a range of opportunities for use. Access to market has further increased the economic value of forest products. Those that are used for household subsistence can also be sold in the market at good prices. The expanding market for forest products has created a situation where the consumption value of all products is less than their cash value as received from the market. There exists competition for access to forests not only among peasants but also among other actors in and outside the village (Chapter 5 for details).

Community and private forests are the only sources of the forest products in the hills. While the land-poor depend heavily on community forests, the land-rich supplement a large proportion of the products from private

forests. In contrast, the Terai community has more ways to obtain products, including community forests, government forest, national parks and protected areas, private forests and the market. Among the members of user groups, the poor mostly depend on the community forests. They supplement their requirements from government-owned forests though it involves the risk of being caught by forest guards or attacked by wild animals. Significance of private forests to supplement the requirement is less in the Terai than in the hills.

Though both men and women use forest products, women are the main collectors and users of firewood, fodder and Sal leaf, while men are the main collectors and users of timber and thatching material. This gender specificity in the use of forest products comes from the historically- and culturally-defined gender roles, especially the gender division of labour which remains more or less similar in both the locations. Yet women are also divided by economic and social positions, and thus vary in terms of degree of dependency. As illustrated in later chapters, in both the locations, hardship related to scarcity of forest products from community forests falls more on poor and the Dalit women.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that the hills and the Terai communities provide different historical, physical and political contexts. They also have different forest resource bases, which though of an ecological nature, are used in the context in which the community is situated. Because of differences in the forest resource base and in community structures, we expect a significant variation in the functioning of user groups in the two locations and even within a location between different user groups, resulting in the different social outcomes.

As conceptualized in Chapter 1, this chapter has illustrated that, neither in the hills nor in the Terai, communities are homogenous. Both the hills and the Terai communities are highly differentiated. Inequality and differentiation is caused by the class, caste and gender relations. The influence of these variables on economic wellbeing and social position of individuals, households and groups is similar to that at the national level (as discussed in Chapter 2). The next two chapters explore the influence of these unequal economic and political relations on the functioning and outcomes of forest user groups.

Notes

1. There is important difference between *khet* and *bari* land. *Bari* is unirrigated and less productive land that generally gives one crop per year, while *khet* is irrigable, a more productive land that usually accommodates up to three crops year
2. Source: personal communication and copper inscription (*Tamrapatra*) maintained in the temple.
3. *Bista* is an annual contract of an informal nature whereby blacksmiths, tailors or cobblers provide their services to high caste groups and in return get a fixed amount of grain or cash annually. The payment for the service received at the end of the contract is called *bali*.
4. Owned land is the land possessed by a household. Operated land is the area under cultivation by a household which is equal to area owned plus the area rented-in minus the area rented-out.
5. Legally, Nepalese tenants have the right to claim land they have cultivated for more than three years provided they can provide evidence that they have done so continuously, paying the half of the produce to the landlord.
6. Source: personal communication with women during a focused group meeting in 2002.
7. However, due to the increasing school facilities and increasing consciousness among parents of the value of child education, their involvement in domestic work is said to have been significantly reduced over the last 10 years.
8. The amount spent on such an arrangement ranges from Rs. 100 to 900 depending upon the size of the land rented in. The average rate for renting-in or -out land for grass purposes is Rs 100 for 1 *ropani* a season.
9. Though people residing in southern belt are also adjacent to natural forests, the entire block is managed by the government as a national park for wildlife conservation. In recent years, the exclusion of people from the southern belt in FUG membership and access to forests has become a real issue of contention in the Terai districts including Nawalparasi. Some communities in the southern belt are being organized into the Collaborative Forest Management Group (CFMG) to manage some parts of national forests.
10. The government's forest policy during the 1950–70s (clearing forest and resettling migrants) also served as a pull factor for migration. Migrants who came to Rajhar during this period included Burmese refugees who were Nepalese by origin and had returned from Myanmar (then Burma) during the 2nd World War. They are said to have received 4 *bigha* (2.7 ha) of land per household from the state and all who received land grants were from higher caste groups.
11. There is a difference between woman-headed households and absentee-men-headed households. In former, women have sole control over decision-making on the matters related to production, consumption and household's participation in

other economic and social affairs. In households where the male heads are absent, women as *de facto* managers perform all these tasks alone but have limited control over decision-making.

12. There are three options of selling surplus production. One, the farmers carry surplus to the local market on their own, usually within the months of harvest. Second, local traders buy paddy, wheat, lentil and mustard from a number of farmers at the farm-gate price and sell it within few months of the harvest. These are mostly common for small farmers who are in immediate need of cash. The surplus is less, as the supply of products tends to be higher in the local market immediately after harvest, reducing the prices. The third option is to hold the product in storage for some months and to sell it either directly or through middlemen who then export it to other cities. This is the most profitable and more common among the large farmers.

13. Personal communication, VDC official, 2002, Rajhar.

14. The number of households selling forest products is more than the figure obtained in the household survey. Informal discussion with villagers suggests that many households sell their share of timber to neighbouring villages and to the local sawmill. The poor also sell wild fruits, vegetables and firewood from national forests and wildlife reserves. But they do not mention it, as selling forest products is illegal even within the village. This figure does not include such informal and illegal selling.

15. Subedi and Messerschmidt (n.d.) provide a whole taxonomy of cooking fuel used in eastern Terai villages in Nepal that demonstrates the importance and scarcity of cooking fuel in Terai villages and the wealth of knowledge associated with it especially among women.

4

User Group Dynamics in a Hill Community

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is about the local dynamics of forest user groups and their impact on different economic and social groups in the hill community. It aims to analyse the functioning and outcomes of user groups, focusing on the institutional dynamics and differential access to forest products and other benefits. In analysing institutional dynamics, I explain the major attributes of user groups and the influence of class, caste and gender relations on them. User groups for this purpose are assessed against a set of criteria described earlier (Chapter 1). In analysing the outcomes, I focus mainly on participation and on control over decisions, access to forest products and access to other financial and political benefits derived from community forests. The aspects of formal and informal institutional and community attributes are interwoven throughout the discussion.

Analysis in this chapter is based on a detailed study of three community forest user groups in the hill community Tukucha. These community forests are allocated to three hamlets separately, resulting in relatively small-sized forests and user groups. Members of the groups live in separate hamlets. Though in other parts of hills, duplication of membership is a common phenomenon, it does not exist in the study area, nor are households excluded from membership found. However, as the hamlets are different in terms of their economic and social strength, significant variation is expected in functioning and outcomes between the user groups even within the locations.

Methods used to generate data for the chapter include document review (consisting of analysis of constitutions, meeting minutes and operational plans of individual FUG), a structured interview with the samiti members, a structured survey with user households of different economic and caste groups, focused group discussion with men and women separately in individual FUGs, discussion with interest groups separately, and participant ob-

servation in discussions, meetings, workshops and interactions. Selected users (men and women) and key informants were interviewed to document the informal rules and mechanisms that exist and to understand the internal and external factors that tend to undermine the formal rules and mechanisms of these organizations.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The next section (4.2) provides a brief historical account of community forestry in Tukucha. Section 4.3 highlights basic characteristics of individual FUGs and incentives for people to participate in community forest management. This is followed by a detailed discussion on the institutional attributes of user groups under the study (4.4). A final section (4.5) illustrates differential impact of user groups to different economic and social groups in terms of access to different types of incentives. The same strategies, methods and sequence are followed in Chapter 5 for the Terai community.

4.2 The Historical Background of Community Forestry

In this section, I briefly discuss the history of forest degradation, initiation of the community forestry process and its contribution to the conservation, mainly of vegetation and water sources. The description is based on information obtained from a document review and from discussion with elderly and knowledgeable people in Tukucha.

4.2.1 The history of forest degradation

Before the 1850s, forest resources were relatively abundant and the traditional methods of exploiting them posed no severe problems. As in most other mid-hill villages, the main factor that limited deforestation was the relatively small population and the lack of commercial exploitation (Arnold and Campbell 1986). Hobley (1990) provides a useful discussion on the history of deforestation in Tukucha. Until the start of the Rana regime, forests were communal and access to them was free for all. However, in 1895, the Ranas, who were increasingly under the influence of the British India Company, registered the communal land under the government and converted it to 'government property'. To facilitate its control, the Rana established a forest office (called *ban goshwara*) in Kathmandu and appointed forest guards (*Dittha*). On the one hand, the forest guards restricted local people's movement in areas demarcated as government forests, thereby restricting people's access to forest products. On the other hand, rulers harvested a large numbers of trees to construct beautiful wooden houses and palaces in the Kathmandu valley. Despite the restrictions, people still continued collecting fire-

wood and timber, especially at nighttime, evading forest guards (Hobley 1990). Forest degradation was most rapid in 1933 when an earthquake destroyed most buildings in the valley. Rana rulers then decided to open all the forests for public reconstruction of houses and construction companies were asked to supply timber to the valley for reconstruction. Local people were also allowed to collect broken trees for the damage reconstruction, but felling a standing tree was still fined. This policy continued until the 1950s.

After the overthrow of autocratic Rana regime with the dawn of democracy in the 1950s, rules for forest protection were relaxed. Increasing population, along with relatively relaxed rules, encouraged people to harvest forest products. Within a decade (1951–1960s), availability of forest products decreased, resulting in hardship for the local people, especially the women responsible for collecting firewood and fodder for use at the household level.

Daughters and daughters-in-law had to walk to Chhahare Ban which is about 3 *kos* [6 miles] from Chhetri gaun. Most of them used to leave their houses at 4 in the morning in a group and return home in the evening with one load of firewood. They were also harassed frequently by the forest guards. Cooking with maize stalk and other agricultural by-products made it a time consuming and difficult task. (Explains an old man, Ram Bahadur Pandey of Chhetri-gaun)

Scarcity made local people realize the value of forest conservation and then start exploring ways to protect forests adjacent to their settlement. The first afforestation attempt was made in Tukucha during the 1960s with Khote Salla (*Pinus roxburghii*). The afforestation division employed guards to help the villagers protect the plantation area from animals and other forms of damage.

4.2.2 Early community initiatives and user group formation

Local people started protecting forests and plantations in the hills in the 1960s, but it became more visible in 1976 when the national forestry plan recognized the importance of encouraging the transfer of community or government land to the Panchayat (local administrative and political unit during the Panchayat regime) and passed a new law for forest protection under the legislation of ‘Panchayati Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest’ (Gilmour 2003).¹ According to this legislation, forests located in one Panchayat were to be handed over to the Panchayat body for its protection, conservation and management. This delegation of responsibility to a political body for forest management led to a changed pattern of forest use. Up-

land forests that had been open to villagers were protected by surrounding villages, and so Chhetri gaun and neighbouring villages had to seek alternative resources for forest products. The new rule encouraged each settlement to protect forests that lay in their ward (the lowest administrative and political unit) and to exclude outsiders, retaining access rights and control over the forest within their boundaries.

Different settlements adopted their own forest protection practices, but they all employed a forest guard. The degraded forests were allowed to regenerate. In Chhetri Ban, forest guards were appointed after a meeting convened by elders of the village. Each household had to pay one *pathi* (2.5 kg) of rice during the harvesting period as a contribution to the forest guard. In return, they would get leaf litter, which was open for collection once a year during *Baisakh* (April–May).

This rule was difficult to follow for some poor villagers. They had to borrow grain from other villagers to pay for the guard. (Personal communication, Maya Pandey, Chhetrigaun)

Though this informal system of protection with a village guard was started from Chhetri gaun and was adopted by all settlements in the village, many could not continue it. Disputes emerged between the villagers regarding the use of forest products. In the absence of strong local leadership, some users started stealing products at night when forest guards were at home and, in some cases, there were reports of forest guards being bribed by wealthy and politically influential villagers. These disputes between villagers made the informal systems of protection ineffectual. Only Chhetri gaun managed to continue it because of the strong leadership of a local Panchayat leader. Panchayat legislation provided local leaders with the authority to make and enforce local systems for controlling the forests.

My father was Panchayat leader during that period. He had sole authority to make rules and enforce protection measures. Some villagers, mainly the poor, were not happy with the protection initiatives but my father insisted continuously till the end of Panchayat. When the group turned into community forest, he remained chairperson that he handed over to my uncle only recently. (Bishnu Pandey, Chhetrigaun)

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, during the 1980s, efforts of donors went into developing and testing modalities for the planning and implementation of community forestry. Donors first intervened in Tukucha, where the Nepal Australia Forestry Project (NAFP) established a forest nursery to supply seedlings for the new Panchayat forest. The Department of Forests provided forest guards for the protection. During the late 1980s, strong

emphasis was placed on identifying existing groups of forest users and legitimizing the groups to act more effectively. As a result, villagers in Chhetri gaun who protected the forests were registered as an autonomous forest user group (Chhetri Ban) and they were handed over the 27 hectares of forest that they were protecting. Since there was no legal framework covering the forestry sector to hand over forests to these communities, the group was registered under the Local Development Office (LDO).

The handover of Chhetri Ban to the community legitimized their efforts for forest conservation as well as their decisions to exclude people from other wards from access to the forests. The result was an increased interest in adjacent toles (Newar gaun and Sarki gaun) to form user groups on their own. The Nepal Australia Forestry Project and the Department of Forests (DOF) supported them. As a result, two other informal groups, Newar Ban and Sarki Ban, were also registered in the village. All these groups were aligned to the forestry sector as community forests only after the Forest Act of 1993 was developed which legitimized all existing informal user groups as formal autonomous organizations.²

4.2.3 User groups and their resource endowment

While the forest user groups are situated within the same community, they differ significantly in the size, age and the quality of resources they are endowed with. Table 21 provides some basic statistics on these user groups with emphasis on their organizational and resource characteristics.

As Table 21 shows, Chhetris who started protection of adjacent forests in the 1960s are now endowed with natural regenerated forests (Chhetri Ban) with a wide range of matured tree, including broad leaf species. These species are preferred for fodder, firewood and timber. The size of the forest is also large compared to the others and an assessment of the forest condition shows that the resources available meet the need for basic forest products of group members. In contrast, Sarki gaun and Newar gaun are endowed with plantation forests dominated by a single narrow leaf species which has little use for firewood and fodder. Though the species has commercial value when it starts producing resin (a commercial product used in turpentine industry), the plants are not matured enough to produce resin yet.

Table 21
Resource characteristics and other basic statistics on the forest user groups,
Tukucha

	<i>Chhetri Ban</i>	<i>Newar Ban</i>	<i>Sarki Ban</i>
Informal protection began (year)	1960	1990	1996
FUG formation (year)	1986	1990	1998
Forest handed over (year)	1988	1991	1998
Size (in ha)	27	18.6	7.7
Number of user HH	42	58	29
Density (area/HH)	0.64	0.32	0.26
Major caste/ ethnic groups	<i>Pandey</i> (36 HH) <i>Kami</i> (6 HH)	<i>Newar</i> (39 HH) Others (9 HH)	<i>Sarki</i> (all 29 HH)
Type of forest during hand over	Regenerated natural forest	Plantation (old)	Plantation (new)
Condition during hand over	Good	Medium	Poor
Major forest species	Broad leaf species i.e. Phalate (<i>Quercus Glauca</i>), Chanp (<i>Michelia champaca</i>), Katus (<i>Urtica Doica</i>), Chilaune (<i>Schima Wallichii</i>)	Narrow leaf species i.e. Chir pine (<i>Pinus Roxburgii</i>)	Narrow leaf species i.e. Chir pine (<i>Pinus Roxburgii</i>)
New plantation			
• Area	0.5 ha	0.25 ha	0.2 ha
• age	1987	1996	1999
• species	Broad leaf species	broad leaf species	Broad leaf species
Current forest status			
• Thickness	Medium	Thin	Thin
• State of generation	Good	Medium	Poor
• Ability to meet need of members	Yes	No	No

Note: Current forest status cited here is according to the technical assessment done by forest officials during the revision of Operational Plans.

Source: Operational Plan (OPs) and constitutions of user groups and observation.

The Sarki own the smallest and the most unproductive (newly planted single species) forest of the three. Discussions with the group revealed that like the Newars, Sarki had been involved in the protection of a forest adjacent to them since 1990 that was part of a single forest (Thuloban) serving three different settlements. The forest then consisted of both natural and plantation area. Since it had been protected by a government-employed forest guards for a long time, the natural forest was relatively rich in products. The FUG continued protecting it with the newly appointed village forest guard from 1993 to 1998. However, in 1998, Chhetris of the user group demanded separation from the Sarki on the grounds that the forest area and user community were too large to manage effectively. As a result, local forest officials divided the Thuloban into three separate (but small) user groups. Each group was made homogenous in terms of caste composition. In the process, two neighbouring Chhetri toles received regenerated natural forest plots while Sarki gaun received only a plantation plot to be managed as community forest. The plot is also at a greater distance from their settlement than the two plots claimed by the Chhetri. Sarki women explain the process of unfair separation of forest as follows:

In fact, Chhetris had already met and discussed it with forest officials and convinced them to claim forest nearer to us. We were worried from the beginning about firewood and fodder as we knew that pine forest is not good for these products and a pine tree does not allow soil around it for regeneration. It is also difficult to protect forest which is far from us. We asked our men to speak against the decision and not to accept it. We asked them to bargain for the plots that are near to our tole. But our men did not listen. They do not value women's suggestions. Chhetris dominated the whole process of separation and claimed better forests.

Though in theory, proximity is the main basis for the allocation of forests to communities, Sarki gaun provides an example where criteria of proximity were overruled by the influence of dominant caste groups. This disparity has an important influence today in terms of the capacity of user groups to meet needs and demands of their members for forest products.

4.3 Incentives for Forest Management

The question of incentives is extremely important for people in common property resource management because incentives encourage individuals to act collectively for the common good (Hobley 1996). Users attend meetings, donate labour or money for protection and take part in the management

activities associated with a particular forest so they can claim the benefits (Box 1).

Box 1

Potential benefits derived from involvement in user groups in the hills

Direct benefits

- Legal access to subsistence forest products (firewood, grass, leaf litter and timber) through membership and participation
- A more productive resource base (cultivated land and forest) because of increased product availability and the regeneration of natural water sources

Indirect benefits

- Improved social status and prestige (especially for samiti members)
- Personal development and capacity building (especially for samiti members)
- Pride and identity (i.e. no fear of being caught by government officials)

(Source: Interview with *Samiti* members and group discussion with users in Tukucha, 2002)

As Box 1 shows, a survey carried out of 129 household heads revealed that community forestry in Tukucha provides direct and indirect incentives to its members that encourage them to be involved in the group activities. Legal access to forest products is the most important incentive for a household to join in user groups and to act collectively for community forest management. Firewood, fodder and grass, leaf litter and timber are the main products obtained from community forests. In addition, availability of water is an important tangible benefit experienced by all the users.

Since the protection started, sources of water are protected and we have natural water flowing in canals (*kulo*) and streams throughout the year. Before protection of the forest, this area was dry and we used to rely only on the monsoon to irrigate the field. Now we can get water to irrigate at any time. Two crops have been possible even on *bari*, which was a dream before. (Users in a FUG meeting in Tukucha)

The impact of forest conservation on water sources has been important for production and wellbeing of farmers as an indirect outcome of forest conservation, whose benefits are not restricted only to the members of FUG.

In addition to access to forest products and an enhanced productive resource base, discussion with samiti members revealed that involvement in user groups, especially participation in the samiti, was also related to the

maintenance of social prestige, power and personal development in the society. While resource-related benefits—such as access to forest products and improved resource base—are visible and realized by the majority of users, albeit at different levels, sociopolitical benefits, which are mostly indirect, may be invisible in the short run and accessible to only a few users in the communities.

The extent to which a user group provides these latter incentives depends on the resource characteristics of the forest in question, institutional attributes of user groups and mechanism of decision-making. Within a group, the ability of a member to claim and access incentives varies according to his (or her) economic, political and social strength in the community, a point discussed in later sections. In the following section I outline major institutional attributes of user groups that determine the types of incentives and their differential access.

4.4 Institutional Attributes of User Groups and their Implications

4.4.1 Resource boundaries

For CPRM institutions, it is important that the resource and the users of the resource are clearly defined and that the appropriators are able to sustain legal claims as owners of it (Ostrom 1992). The literature indicates many areas where forest ownership is contested in Nepal because of poor surveys and has led to conflict between user groups or between the government and user groups (Baral 1993). However, forests in the mid-hills exist in several small patches adjacent to the settlement that makes it easier to mark the boundaries. FUGs in Tukucha also have clearly defined boundaries and there is no evidence of major disputes resulting from the boundaries. Clearly marked boundaries enable the users to avoid risk of any (unintentional) invasion from outsiders, but this is not sufficient to prevent intentional invasion. As will be illustrated later, the effectiveness of invasion control depends on the ability of user groups to enforce laws related to protection and patrolling.

The increasing evidence of invasion was found in one user group, Sarki Ban, where users from another community forest (outsiders) entered the forest and stole the products. As illustrated in Table 21, Sarki Ban is the smallest group, composed of poor lower caste people. Being small, with limited human and financial resources at its disposal, it cannot afford the time and resources required for effective protection and patrolling. This issue is illustrated further in later sections. The other two user groups, which

are, composed of high caste people show little evidence of forest invasion by outsiders.

4.4.2 Membership criteria and inclusiveness

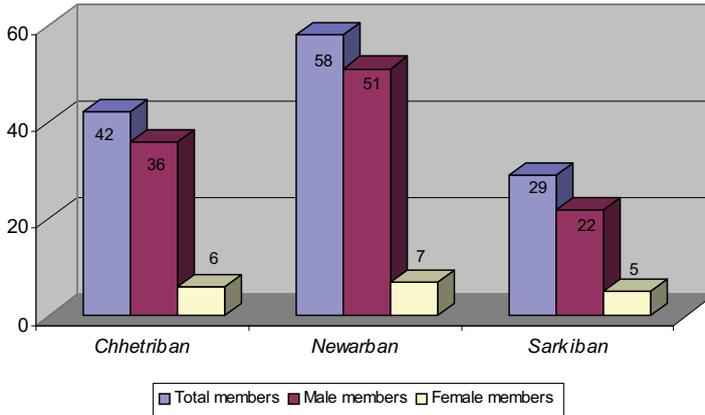
In principle, identification of the user in a FUG is based on residence, proximity and willingness and capacity to protect and manage the forest. In a typical hill setting—where people are clustered according to caste groups and historically-connected economic and social relations coming from the same descendant—it is relatively easy for a villager to identify a permanent resident and the user of a particular resource base. Permanent mobility (both in and out of a village) is limited, resulting in a relatively stable group size. Membership comprises households residing in the settlement and using products from the forest. New households are automatically included in a FUG when they notify their residence in the village. All FUGs charge a minimum annual fee from their members as a user fee, ranging from Rs 5–12 per year, and have devised internal rules to include new households. This also applies for newly formed households in communities.

When sons split from their parental house, they notify the samiti of their residence as a separate household and are then included as separate members in the user group. (Personal communication with samiti representatives)

The rules for membership based on residency provide little chance for user groups excluding households residing in the village. Since all surrounding villages have their own community forests, all households in the community are members in the FUG of the forest adjacent to them. Flexibility in including new households in the group (be they newcomers or newly established households) and the minimal user fee tend to make the membership criteria more inclusive. However, using the household as a criterion for membership has specific gender implications. Women have less membership compared to men (Figure 13).

Male membership ranges from 80–88%. Among the 12–20% women members, more than 90% are widows. As illustrated in Chapter 3, some 86% of households in Tukucha are officially headed by men, though a significant number of male members are out of the community for most of the time in a year, either in regular government service or in search of wage labour. As a result, there are a large number of women who are *de facto* household heads but are not recognized officially as the head of household. Gender distribution of membership also shows this practice where *de facto* women heads are not authorized members.

Figure 13
Composition of forest user group by gender, Tukucha



Source: FUG registers and constitutions (2002)

The fact that membership is in the name of the male household head does not prevent women from attending and participating in the user assembly, but it affects their ability to represent the household in the samiti and to influence its decisions. This is because in all user groups, representation and participation in the samiti is restricted to authorized members only. Similarly, in principle, any member of a household can access the forest products even in the absence of the male heads of household, but in practice, the absence of samiti members (often men) affects the functioning of user groups and product distribution processes.

The forest opens for product distribution only when the samiti meets and decides the date and procedures. Seven (out of nine) samiti members are out of the village to Kathmandu and Pokhara working as shoemakers. It is difficult to bring them all together at a time. Thus, the forest has not been open for product distribution for the last two years and will not be opened unless samiti meets and decides. (The chairperson of Sarki Ban, Tukucha, 2002)

The *de facto* women heads cannot represent absentee men for samiti meetings. Though the practice of waiting for absentee samiti members to make decisions affects all users by restricting their regular access to forest products, the impact varies depending on the ability of a household to use

alternate sources for the product. The class–gender outcome of such exclusion is discussed further in later sections while analysing access to benefits.

4.4.3 Composition of the samiti: the influence of class and gender relations

Formally, the General Assembly (*sadbaran sabha* or *aam bhela*) is the main body of the user group that prepares and amends its constitution and operational plans, and makes any major decisions affecting the forest and the users, and the samiti executes the decisions. In practice, however, all these functions are carried out by the samiti. Though the assembly retains the power to reject initiatives for endorsement, there is no evidence of any case where the assembly has used this power, or taken its own initiative against the samiti. This applies to all the user groups. Representation in the samiti is therefore important as these are the people whose decisions and actions affect both the forest condition and the welfare of user households. A comparison of the socioeconomic composition of the user group with that of the samiti (Table 22) indicates a clear influence of class, caste and gender relations.

As Table 22 shows, men dominate samiti composition in all FUGs. In user groups with mixed caste composition, they are composed of the higher caste. In terms of food sufficiency and landholdings, representation in samiti is influenced by the composition of users. For example, the proportion of users who are relatively better off in landholdings and in food sufficiency, is high in Chhetri Ban, and the proportion of the poor and food-insufficient households is higher in Sarki Ban. Newar Ban is relatively more heterogeneous both in terms of landholding and food sufficiency. The same trend is reflected in the samiti composition. But as Table 22 shows, amongst the samiti members, key decision-making positions like that of chairperson, secretary and treasurer are often dominated by men of the relatively better-landed, food-sufficient and better-educated class compared to other members of the samiti and the FUG.

Table 22
Socioeconomic composition of current samiti members, Tukucha

Attributes	Composition in percentage					
	Chhetri Ban		Newar Ban		Sarki Ban	
	FUG n=42	Samiti n=9	FUG n=58	Samiti n=9	FUG n=34	Samiti n=9
Sex						
Female	14	22	12	9	19	33
Male	86	78 (CST)	88	91 (CST)	81	67 (CST)
Ethnicity						
Others	0	0	7	0	0	0
Dalits	16	0	2	0	100	100 (CST)
Newars	0	0	70	67 (CST)	0	0
Brahmin/Chhetri	84	100 (CST)	21	33	0	0
Landholding (in ropani)						
<5	57	0	57	33	70	56
5-10	27	56	21	22	24	33 (ST)
11-15	9	33 (ST)	18	33 (C)	3	
>16	7	11 (C)	4	11 (ST)	3	11 (C)
Food sufficiency level of household						
Insufficient	70	11	73	44	86	8 (ST)
Sufficient	23	56 (ST)	25	44 (ST)	11	11
Surplus	7	33 (C)	2	12 (C)	3	11 (C)
Education level						
Illiterate	43	0	56	0	67	56
Just literate	0	67	2	22	17	22 (T)
Primary	11	0	22	22	16	22 (CS)
Secondary	32	11 (C)	18	22	0	0
Higher education	14	22 (CT)	2	33 (CST)	0	0

(Continued)

Table 22 (continuation)

Attributes	Composition in percentage					
	Chhetri Ban		Newar Ban		Sarki Ban	
	FUG n=42	Samiti n=9	FUG n=58	Samiti n=9	FUG n=34	Samiti n=9
Source of non-farm income						
Monthly salary	52	33 (S)	18	33 (T)	14	11 (S)
Pension	9	33 (CT)	4	0	0	0
Business	0	0	4	22 (C)	3	11 (C)
Remittances	2	0	2	11	0	0
Wage labour	3	0	5	0	52	67 (T)
None	34	33	67	33 (S)	31	11
Involvement in other voluntary organizations						
None		22		22		33
1-2		44 (T)		33 (T)		44 (ST)
>2		33 (CS)		44 (CS)		22 (C)

CST represents Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer respectively, which are key positions in the samiti.

Source: Structured questionnaire interview with samiti representatives, 2002.

In addition to farming, most of the households these key position holders come from (except 2 from Sarki Ban) receive income from non-farm sources including monthly salary, pension or family business (Figure 14).

As Figure 14 shows, more than half of key position-holders in samiti rent out land to the land-poor for potato cultivation, and a majority hire labour during the peak agricultural season, a sign of better economic and social strength in the agrarian community. Their social and economic strength is also visible to outsiders in the village from the appearance of their houses. Houses the key position-holders live in are relatively bigger in size. They also own relatively more furniture and home appliances, such as radio and TV, in their houses. Most of them (except two Sarkis) own land that produce grain sufficient for family subsistence or even for surplus, and the majority revealed that the income they receive from farm and non-farm activities is sufficient to meet basic subsistence needs for food, education, medical treatment of their families. Other villagers consider them wealthy and powerful.

Figure 14
Socioeconomic positioning of key position holders in samiti, Tukucha



n= 9 (including Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer of three user groups)

Source: Household survey (2002)

Involvement in other voluntary groups and organizations in community—such as youth clubs, mother’s groups and co-operatives—reflects ‘societal position’ of a member and that has shown a positive influence, especially among men in Tukucha. The situation opens up two possibilities. Households who are involved in voluntary organizations are relatively more active in economic, political and social affairs in the village and thus have a better chance of being nominated to the samiti. But there is also the possibility that, because of their representation in samiti, these people get more exposure and are thus involved in more voluntary organizations, increasing their social status in the long run. While both possibilities exist, the former is more common in Tukucha and in turn supports the latter reinforcing their political positions and power. These socioeconomic characteristics of individuals and households are important in determining who are selected in the samiti for the key positions and how they impact others.

It is usually the village elders or the politically active village leaders who propose the names in the assembly. Though in theory, all user households have equal rights and opportunity to be represented in samiti, informal discussions with the user groups indicate that in practice some basic criteria apply for the nomination of candidates, especially for the key decision-making positions like chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The proposed candidate should:

- have sufficient time to attend meetings regularly;
- be educated enough to talk about forest policy, rules and regulation so that they can argue with the forest officials when required;
- have a personality that is listened to by most users and an ability to resolve disputes between users in the group;
- be able to make decisions in meetings and communicate decisions to other users.

These informal criteria that exist in practice tend to favour grain-sufficient, high-caste men as they are the only people in the community to meet these criteria. Each samiti is supposed to have 3–5 years of tenure as provisioned in operational plans unless the user assembly votes for change or the members want to resign. The most striking characteristic in Tukucha is that in two of the three user groups, the same samiti has continued to exist since its establishment. Though few members are changed, people in key decision-making positions have remained unchanged, except in one which only changed recently. It suggests that there is an established interest among the village elites to be represented and participated in samiti.

As Table 22 indicates, there is a clear gender gap in samiti composition. Representation of women ranges from 1 to 3 women per samiti. Discussion with the first woman samiti member of Chhetri Ban revealed that during the early years of user group formation, village elders did not nominate women because attending meetings was supposedly a man's task. Women's attendance in FUG meetings was not considered necessary.

There were no women in meetings earlier. Village elders used to call meetings where only men attended. Project people told the villagers that there must be some women in the meeting as they are the ones who need and collect forest products. Village elders first did not take it seriously. But later they were convinced when a project officer said, there must be women in meetings to get any support from the project. Uncle (secretary of the group) took my name. I was nervous before but he asked my husband and my husband agreed to put my name there. Ganga joined later when her husband came to village and my uncle approached him. (Mathura Pandey, a samiti member of Chhetri Ban)

Though the current constitutions of user groups have a mandatory provision that there must be at least 33% women in samiti, this is not followed. Women members for the samiti are nominated by the chairperson just to fulfil the commitment made with the donor's project and the forest officials. Nominated women are often widows or *de facto* heads of households who are more disadvantaged economically and socially compared to other

women in the community. This affects their ability to attend the meetings and influence the decisions.

4.4.4 Decision-making mechanism

As said earlier, samiti and assembly meetings are important, as they are the forums where user groups make and endorse the decisions. However, surveys among 129 user households and analysis of meeting minutes revealed that about 50% of users do not attend user's assemblies regularly and among those who attend, very few stay at the meeting until decisions are made. In 66 meetings held in Chhetri Ban from its establishment in 2002, only 23 meetings (about 35%) were attended by more than 50% users. The same situation exists for all user groups. To overcome this problem, some have made a local rule in which if a member is absent in a meeting, he/she pays fine in cash. There are a few examples of such rules increasing user's attendance in assemblies but forced attendance did not turn into effective participation.

After introduction of the fine, people from all user households appear at assembly, but many return immediately after putting their signature in the register. Very few, mostly elder men, stay till decisions are made. The chairman and secretary need to make a door-to-door visit after each assembly to let users know about the decisions made. (The chairperson of Sarki Ban, 2002)

Attendance in the meeting is particularly difficult for poor households who work for wages for subsistence. As illustrated earlier in Chapter 3, a significant number of land-poor in Tukucha (16% of total households) make their living by wage labour either in the agricultural or construction sector. These wage labourers and woman-headed households are restricted because of the relatively higher opportunity costs of time involved for them. Therefore, the rule of fines becomes a burden for many, especially for poor and women.

For the poor, if there is no work, there is no food. Attending assemblies is good but I do not get wages and the meeting cannot feed my children. I attend meeting just to avoid the fine but have never stayed longer than an hour. I go early and ask permission from the chairperson to leave for the factory. (Sanu Kanchha VK, a poor user who works for a brick factory in Banepa)

Poor from all the three gaun also face similar constraints. Though formally possible, and user groups have made mandatory for all users and samiti members to attend assemblies and participate in decision-making, economic conditions of poor households make it difficult for them to do so resulting in their limited involvement in decision-making. Even for those

who attend assemblies, the poor feel they are not heard and are discouraged to raise issues. Relationships that determine access to the means of production and labour relations also determines who speaks and whose voices are heard in the meetings. Kanchha VK of Chhetri Ban who usually attends meeting says:

If we do not go, Chhetri say, Kami do not get involved in community works because they are selfish. If we go, they do not listen what we say. Everyone listens to rich only, not to poor. Chairperson and secretary ask the rich and their brothers for their opinion. No one asks a poor person what he thinks. There is no point of sitting in the meeting the whole day when no one listens to you and you can do nothing. I go there just because my *Bistas* want me to attend especially when a Ranger and project officers are coming.

In terms of gender, there remains a large gap between men and women when it comes to attending assemblies. On average, only 11% of those who attend assemblies are women. Gender division of labour has remained one of the constraints for a woman to attend assemblies. A majority (more than 80%) of women I spoke to mentioned lack of time for not attending assemblies.

Ghar dbanda ra mela pat le phursad nai bunna, kasari baiṭhak ma janu ra... Due to the domestic work and farm activities, I do not have time left for meetings. My children cannot go to school if food is not cooked on time and livestock remain hungry the whole day if I do not bring two *bhari* of grass for them every morning. Who does this work if I go to meetings? (A Chhetri woman from Newar Ban who had never attended assemblies though her name is in the list of members of the FUG)

As Chapter 3 has demonstrated, like many other villages, almost all reproductive tasks ranging from household chores, child care and the management of livestock to farm activities are considered to be women's primary responsibility in Tukucha. Most of the tasks of community affairs like that of attending meetings, village assemblies and involvement in political and decision-making forums fall to men. Usually, men are reluctant to accept more flexible gender roles especially for the domestic work.

Lognemanṅbhe le bhat pakaune, bacḥha lai kḥilaune, luga dhune garna ta milena ni, samaj le dinna... Society does not accept men cooking, feeding children or washing clothes. These are women's job. It is good if a woman does both household chores (*ghar ko kam*) and community work (*samaj ko kam*) but they cannot. Tell me one thing, if I attend meeting and I ask my wife to follow what is decided here, why is this necessary to bring her in the meeting especially when she already has lots of work at home. Even if I bring her in the

meeting, she cannot give solid suggestions for the samiti. (The vice-chairperson of Newar Ban)

For a joint family, crossing the boundaries by participating in village and community affairs requires a woman first to convince her family members, especially her husband and in-laws, as to why she needs to do so. The outcome depends on her ability to convince or to resist opposition from male family members. As the latter is most unlikely, given a woman's subordinate position to that of a man, in a male-headed household, it is always the man who attends the assemblies and meetings. Women attend only when men are temporarily absent or when the household is permanently female-headed. This applies, not only to assemblies, but also to samiti meetings. A woman samiti member explains:

If a meeting is called when my husband is here, then he goes to attend it even when my name is in the samiti. In front of *Sasura* [father-in-law], I hesitate to say that I also want to go along with my husband. Once I quietly told my husband that I wanted to go with him and tried to convince him that I needed to go to such meetings when he left the village to rejoin the job and that it was good if I attended this one along with him. But he refused. Rather he said, when I am going, why do you need to go? You stay at home. I attend meetings only when my husband is out for his job and my father-in-law falls sick at home. (Mathura Pandey, a woman samiti member, Chhetri Ban in women only group discussion, 2002)

Women recognize that the patriarchal structure results in their inevitable domination by men. With regards to whether husbands share decisions taken in the CF meeting to their wives, a woman whose husband is chairman of a user group commented:

Sharing! No way. Sometimes when he comes home late, I ask what happened. He has a ready-made answer, 'Why do you need it? When it is important for you to know, I let you know'. I know he thinks it is worthless to share things with me. He is a big politician, is more educated and a big man in our tole. He brings cash and pays children's fee. I do not. In his eyes, I am an illiterate woman and more importantly I am just his wife. People recognize me only by his name and I do not exist without him.

The discussion above shows that the cost of attending assemblies among the poor is higher, affecting poor's willingness and ability to attend assemblies. Those who attend also feel that their voices are not heard. Relationships resulting from unequal control over means of production also determine the way rich and poor participate and influence decisions. In addition, women of all economic and caste groups feel excluded. Patriarchal struc-

tures and processes—such as gender division of labour, undervaluation of women's work and capabilities and family values—result in a low level of willingness and ability of women to attend meetings.

However, do all men and women who attend meetings feel their voices are heard and they influence the decisions? Informal discussion with men and women who participated in at least 50% of assemblies and samiti meetings revealed that they are not heard and their concerns are not taken into account when decisions are made.

Two years ago, there was a meeting at school. Everyone was asked to attend. I also went. The chairperson proposed cost-free labour from all villagers for cleaning and thinning. In additions, Kami were assigned to prepare a fire line (*agnirekha*). We are only six Kami in the village and three were already out to brick factory with their wives. I said, this would take longer for three men to complete the task and would be more difficult to work cost free. I also suggested hiring wage labour for the task if there are no sufficient people for digging. But no one listened. It took three days to complete a fire line and prepare new plantation plot. All Kami had concern about cost-free labour for three days, which is a big thing for us, but no one argued against *Bista's* [patron's] proposal. We asked him personally if it is possible to get wages for those three days, he said, there will be no payment for community work. (Thulo Kanchha VK, Chhetri Ban, 2002)

Though the poor, mostly lower caste, also recognize the relationship of exploitation between the rich and the poor in the meetings, due to the poor economic strength and the lower caste status, they lack bargaining power and feel powerless to change this relationship.

In addition to the poverty that affects both men and women, women face additional constraints due to gender bias that affects their ability to influence decisions. Conflict between men and women, even within the same class and caste, is more visible in the public sphere. Women feel they are brought into the meeting and are expected to contribute in the discussions as much as the men, but it is hard for them to speak and make men listen to them, especially when it is required to oppose ideas shared by men.

Usually men do not say women should not speak. They show with some nice words that they encourage women to speak. But in reality, no men like to hear women arguing against them. If a husband does not want his wife arguing, why should other men in community listen to her? (Women users in a group discussion, 2002)

Women from land-rich households also face the problem of not being heard, both in household decision-making and at public meetings. When

asked why men do not listen to their wives, one woman from a non-poor group (whose husband is a government employee) explained:

This is simply because they [men] bring money from outside and we work inside house. We also work whole day producing grain, cooking, washing, feeding and caring them. But in a monetary world, it is the money that counts, not the hours you work or types of work you are engaged in.

Perception of men and women about their capability to make decisions also creates tension in samiti and this applies to all caste and economic groups.

Women are best in doing domestic work that men cannot do. In the public place and meetings, women just sit and listen. They do not know about policies and they cannot deal with outsiders or even with the villagers when there is an issue that needs discussion and negotiation. Women are also illiterate. They cannot keep account [*hisab kitab*]. Men can do these things better. Therefore, for women, home is the best place. We kept names of women in samiti because it is necessary by law. But in reality, people comment if a woman comes out of home and speaks loudly as other men in the community. I do not feel good if my sisters or wife come to the public meeting and argue in front of so many elders. Others also feel same for their family members. (Vice-chairperson of Newar Ban responding why women samiti members do not attend meetings)

As the discussion shows, though the constitutions and operational plans of user groups have provisions for all to attend meetings and participate in decision-making, the poor and women are constrained in a number of ways from participating effectively. For the poor, opportunity cost of the time spent in meetings and assemblies is higher than for others because of their survival constraints. Even when they decide to bear the costs, they feel their limited influence in decisions and thus are discouraged to raise concerns. While this applies to both men and women from poor households, the gender division of labour and the subordinated position of women in the household further constrain a poor woman from becoming involved actively in decision-making. Often, the chairperson and secretary are the real decision-makers. Both the poor and women recognize class, caste and patriarchal structure resulting in their exclusion, but they feel powerless to change the relationship.

4.4.5 Protection and silvicultural operations

User groups devise informal rules for the protection and management of forests. Initial practice was to hire local guards for the purpose, members

contributing either in grain or in cash to pay for the guards.³ For the initial 3–4 years, it was difficult for the user groups to enforce financial contribution from the members for hiring the local forest guards. The effectiveness of the system varied among the user groups, depending upon the composition of users and their ability to pay. Groups with a higher proportion of food-deficit households also experienced less effective protective measures.

Hiring a forest guard required each household to pay Rs. 35 a month. The inability of a household to pay regularly led to a fine of Rs 10 a month. The poor found it increasingly difficult to pay and the samiti had to deal with a long list of households who had to pay a fine each month. We know all users and their miserable economic condition and we all belong to the same family so we cannot force them to pay. Therefore we decided to drop this rule and changed to an informal patrolling system which is less effective in controlling outsiders. (The chairperson of Sarki Ban)

The other two user groups in the same community did not experience the same difficulties in hiring local forest guards. One was able to receive external assistance from the Australian project, while the other sold timber to pay for the guard. Sarki Ban, which is the smallest and owns the poorest quality forest, was neither able to access external assistance nor to meet the expenditure from its limited FUG fund.

Currently, all user groups have informal protection (patrolling) systems where users contribute their time. The effectiveness of patrolling also varies between the user groups depending upon the proximity of the forest to the community and, more importantly, users' willingness and ability to contribute the time required. For example, Chhetri Ban is just above the settlement. Thus anyone breaking the rules and harvesting illegally can be detected easily. But for a user group whose forest is relatively far from the settlement, this option does not work. In addition, for a small group like that of Sarki Ban, the informal and voluntary arrangement of patrolling, where each household sends one family member (adult men or women) in rotation to patrol the forest, is also less effective. There have been several incidences of outsiders entering the forest and stealing the products, and forest conditions are said to be 'not good' according to the Ranger's assessment in the current operational plan of the group, which compares unfavourably with other community forests.

Users in Sarki Ban are poor compared to other group members. Most men are out throughout the year to earn. Women are either busy with domestic work or work for others. They cannot spend the time required to patrol regularly. Stealing by outsiders is therefore greater in our forest than in other

neighbouring groups. We have caught some of them but there are many who escape. (The chairperson of Sarki Ban, Tukucha)

Studies on the effectiveness of institutions protecting communal resources argue that small size is better for effective protection (Ostrom 1994, Mckean 1998). But the evidence above points to a different story. Rather than size, it is the ability of users to afford the time and resources. Very small user group with small and low-quality forest can be disadvantaged in its efforts to generate sufficient human and other resources to monitor and enforce local rules. In addition, the burden of sharing time and resources on the individual user is greater in a small group, discouraging patrolling by users. Livelihood options of the community also influence the effectiveness of a patrolling system. For example, unlike the users of Newar Ban, where both men and women are present in the village for most of the year, most male members in Sarki Ban are out of the village working as wage labour. Sarkis also migrate seasonally with the whole family to work in a brick factory as it is the only option for a livelihood. They therefore cannot invest the time and resources required to patrol, resulting in less effective protection of the community forests.

Major silvicultural operations and other management activities devised by groups include digging and cleaning the fire line, thinning, pruning, and digging holes and planting new seedling if there is space in the forest. Members provide cost-free labour for a fixed number of days for these activities. The samiti decides the number of working days required each year depending on the tasks to be done, and divides it equally among user households irrespective of family size, composition and their ability to contribute free labour. Though such rules based on equality seem to be simple and appropriate in avoiding intra-group conflict, they tend to have negative implications on the livelihood of the poor and on female-headed households. This is because wage labour is an important component of their survival. Providing free labour for community forestry means a loss of income.

The samiti asks us to work for five days cost-free each year in the forest. This rule is problematic for people like me who need to work as wage labour to feed family members. I lose the income of five days each year that is more than 500 rupees. If I refuse to work free of cost, the samiti does not allow me to collect firewood and grass from the forest. (A landless poor member of Chhetri Ban)

For a grain-deficit household, wage labour is the main source of living. When they are not paid, it directly impacts on their ability to fulfilling a basic need of family. Female heads of poor households are further marginal-

ized with the triple work burdens of earning for food, looking after household chores and providing labour as a contribution to forest management. While most of them do not agree with the concept of an equal labour contribution, none opposed the rule in assemblies and meetings.

The rich can hire labour to work on their behalf. If there are adult men and grown up children at home, they can divide the work. But the rule of free labour contribution is not fair for poor women like me, who can neither hire labour nor have husbands or other members to work. The rule requires working cost-free in the forest no matter whether I am sick or I have food to eat at home. The rule is very simple, if you do not work, you do not get products obtained from management activities. Since this community forest is the only source of firewood, there is no option but to work in it. (A poor woman in Newar Ban)

Gender difference in preference for tree species is clearly observed in making plantation decisions. In an analysis of which species men and women prefer for plantation, most men preferred species that produce good timber to make plough (*halo, juwa*) followed by firewood and fodder while women preferred broad leaf species that yield fodder and firewood.

Mabila lai syaula hune, ramro balne ra badi sottar hune ramro lagbha... (women like species that give fodder, litter and good quality firewood because women need them to feed the family and animals.) Men do not care where the fodder and firewood comes from because they do not cook and feed children. They only see timber in the forest. (Radhika, Sunkumari and Laxmi Sarki, women samiti members, Sarki Ban, 2002)

Overall, women assign the greater importance to those products on which they expend the greater time and efforts for collection. The difference between men and women in species preference is rooted on the gender division of labour. But discussion with women revealed that their concerns regarding the species selection were not heard.

When the DFO allocated this piece of forest to us, it was planted with pine. I asked my husband (chairperson) to lobby for the plots that had fodder species. Pine cannot be used as fodder. Neither he nor other men listened to me. Rather, they were happy that the pine forest would give timber. After the hand-over, women again suggested bringing some seedlings of Chilaune [*Schima Walichii*] which is good for fodder, leaf plate, litter and for timber. They did not take the suggestion seriously and brought pine seedlings only. We got seedling of Chilaune only last year. Yet we are not sure whether they survive because pine trees have made soil very dry and unproductive. (A Sarki

woman in a group discussion whose husband has remained chairperson since the establishment of Sarki Ban)

Out of 23 samiti members (including four women from three user groups) who participated in the survey, seven (including all women) said, the decisions for species selection was not taken in samiti meetings.

The chairperson and secretary talk and finalize the list. They never ask women what species they want. When I heard that chairperson was going to Banepa to bring seedlings, I suggested to bring *Kattus* [*Urtica Doica*]. *Kattus* is good not only as firewood and timber but also as fruit tree. Many women prefer this plant for its multiple use and good quality fodder. He said okay but when the seedlings arrived, all were pine. This is very frustrating. (A Newar woman who was member in earlier samiti, 2002)

Since women have limited influence in decisions, their needs and interests are not adequately addressed in the decisions made regarding species selection and related works.

4.4.6 Product use rules and enforcement mechanisms

Though forest resources under user groups vary in size and vegetation, rules for product use and distribution do not vary significantly. Use rules are based on the idea of rationing access to products by limiting their use to particular periods and a set of prices (Table 23). Rules are enforced through informal patrolling and a written set of fines by which all members should abide.

The general assumption underlying the CPR institution is that local people are first to know about the resource conditions and able to devise use rules according to the changing resource conditions of their forest (Ostrom 1990, McKean 1998). However, comparison of product rules between the user groups in Tukucha does not follow this assumption. Most use rules were devised during the first operational plan preparation (during the hand-over of forest) and were never revised. For example, Chhetri Ban had use rules devised by the village elders first time during 1970. In the initial years, there was a complete ban of harvesting any products (except leaf litter); these rules were revised in 1988, at the time of user group formation and were listed in the first Operational Plan (OP). Since then, neither use rules (frequency and time of harvest) nor prices (except for firewood) which have been revised, though there has been significant increase in forest products like fodder compared to the initial years of the hand-over. The other two user groups have also experienced an increase in forest products. They have not revised old rules related to product distribution nor have they any plan

Table 23
Product use rules in community forests, Tukucha

Products	Chhetri Ban		Sarki Ban		Newar Ban	
	Frequency of access	Price (Rs)	Frequency of access	Price (Rs)	Frequency of access	Price (Rs)
Firewood						
dried fallen twigs	Twice a month	Free	Once a month	Free	Once a month	Free
wooden firewood	Once a year	10 per <i>bhari</i>	Once a year	5 per <i>bhari</i>	Once a year	5-10 per <i>bhari</i>
for religious ceremony	On request (up to 4 <i>bhari</i>)	Free	samiti decides	Free	Samiti decides	Free
for cremation	On request	Free	Samiti decides	Free	Samiti decides	Free
Fodder/grass						
Fodder	Complete ban		Complete ban		Complete ban	
Grass	Not in practice		Once a week	Free	Once a week	Free
Grazing animals	Complete ban		Complete ban		Complete ban	
Leaf litter	Each Saturday	Free	Each Saturday	Free	Each Saturday	Free
Timber (in cubic feet)						
agricultural tools	Once a year	samiti decides	On request	Free	Complete ban	samiti decides
construction	On request (up to 10 cft)	35 per cft	On request	30 per cft	On request (up to 10 cft)	30 per cft
fire victims	On request (up to 10 cft)	free	Samiti decides	Free	On request (up to 20 cft)	Free
for charcoal	Complete ban		Complete ban		Complete ban	

Source: Operational Plans (2002)

to do it in the near future. Such rationed use or complete ban in collection for certain products such as fodder and timber since the establishment of user groups negatively affects the livelihoods of poor households who have few alternative ways to supplement the requirements. Though all user groups have a clear set of product rules, as the table shows, samiti retains control over access to certain products. Because of this, the relationship of members with samiti becomes important in determining who gets access to the products from community forests.

In some cases (like Chhetri Ban), a significant proportion of firewood and fodder are derived from private sources and so there is no pressing demand from users for product rule revision. Though the user group consists of six poor lower-caste households who lack products from land, they are not represented in the samiti and even if they were represented, they would have limited voice in decision-making.

Ek ta garib, tyahi mathi sano jatko swasnimanchhe! (A poor, and on top of that a woman from the lower caste group!) My name was put in the earlier samiti because my house is very close to the forest and people thought I can easily detect if someone enters to steal products. When I was nominated, I wanted to make some use rules better for the poor. I suggested the rest of the samiti members make timber available at a cheap rate for the poor and provide fodder from forest so that poor like me can keep some goats. But other samiti members who are richer said rules should be equal to all to avoid any confusion and conflict among users. Even the other women in the samiti did not support my proposal. When no one heard about my concerns, I left samiti showing time constraints as a reason. (A poor Dalit woman of Chhetrigaun, who was earlier in the samiti)

User groups follow consensus rather than the democratic method of voting in discussions and making decisions. Local power and politics play an important role in the process of building the consensus. The poor and the women representatives in samiti can neither represent their constituencies effectively nor can influence any decisions made on their behalf.

These samiti members, when consulted individually, expressed dissatisfaction with the situation and showed a willingness to change. (They say they want to change the situation but do nothing.) But as we illustrated in Chapter 3 earlier, the livelihood of the majority of poor and Dalit women in Tukucha is partly dependent on Chhetri user group which provides them land for cultivation as well as wage labour for their sustenance. They therefore hesitate to argue against the rich. Rather, as the statement shows, they prefer to leave the position and remain quiet to avoid any possible confrontation and potential negative effect on their livelihood.

Except in Chhetri Ban, the rules of rationing access are enforced through a clearly mentioned set of fines (Table 24).

In Chhetri Ban, cases of rule violence are rare and there is no fine set yet. In the few cases where the rules are broken, the constitution and operational plan give authority to samiti to decide on the punishment.⁴ As the table shows, fines set by Sarki Ban are relatively higher compared to Newar Ban. The higher rate of the fine is said to discourage the increasing number of rule violators.

Table 24
Rule enforcement mechanisms developed by user groups, Tukucha

Forbidden activities	Rates for fines if rules are transgressed*		
	Chhetri Ban	Sarki Ban	Newar Ban
Plant cut/broken	samiti decides	Rs. 10-40	Rs. 5-50
Firewood collection	samiti decides	Rs. 100-400	Rs. 25-100
Fodder collection	samiti decides	Rs. 100-400	Rs. 25-100
Floor grass cutting	samiti decides	Rs. 25-100	Rs. 20-100
from restricted plots			
Animal grazing	samiti decides		
goat		Rs. 25-100	Rs. 5-15
cattle		Rs. 50-200	Rs. 10-100
Leaf litter collection	samiti decides	NA	Rs. 20-100
Timber cutting	samiti decides	Rs. 100-400	Rs. 100-400
Not attending meetings	samiti decides	Rs 20 for assembly Rs 50 for samiti	

* Lower limits for first time, higher limits for multiple breaches.

Source: Operational Plans of user groups (2002)

Discussion with users revealed that where there is little threat to the forest or where the user group is confident enough about the non-invasion (such as in Chhetri Ban), rule enforcement mechanism is less prescriptive. Similarly, where users belong to the same descent group, samiti usually does not punish to the culprits even when found guilty. In a few cases, when rule breakers belong to the poor women, user groups were also found waiving fines from them even though they were not of the clan.

... In a few cases, some women were caught with firewood stolen from the forest. But considering their miserable economic condition, we asked them to apologize [*mafi magne*] for the first time, got their commitment not to repeat it in the future and let them use what they had collected. (The secretary of Chhetri Ban)

As indicated in Table 24, fine amount ranges according to the frequency of rule-breaking. A first-time rule-breaker pays the lowest in the range that increases along with the increase in frequency until the third time. In policy, if someone is found guilty of breaking the same rule for more than three times, he/she faces suspension from membership, but there is no evidence of existence of such situation yet.

If members of a user group have higher economic and social strength, outsiders do not usually steal products from their forests. On the other hand, some user groups (like Sarki Ban) suffer from invasion, both from the users and from the outsiders. Such user groups tend to have higher fines

that increase along with the occurrence of such events. Chairperson of Sarki Ban, which has recently increased the fine, explained it:

The rules are broken more often by outsiders who are not poor but have a tendency to undermine rules. To discourage them, we had to devise very high rate of fine. This year, three people from another group were caught stealing timber from our forest. We fined them 1100 rupees.

Some user groups also encourage users to identify the culprit and to report the event to the samiti by providing cash incentives to the reporter. Amount of incentive ranges from 25–50% of the total amount fined. Such rules are an effective part of the enforcement mechanisms where users themselves, motivated with cash incentives, informally keep an eye on the resources but it also makes the poor more vulnerable of being caught and fined even for minor offences which are committed towards meeting subsistence needs for the products.

4.4.7 Source and utilization of funds

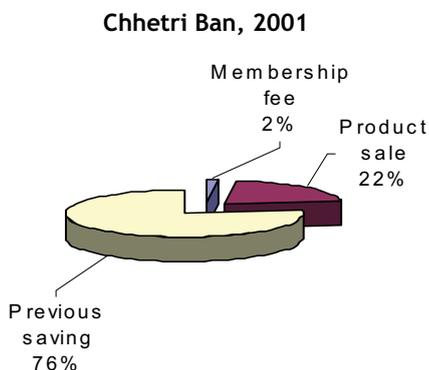
Current forest policy in Nepal grants autonomy to user groups to raise funds selling products and to use them for the benefit of the forest or for the community (HMG/N 1993). The financial position of a group depends on the quality of the forest a group owns and its ability to receive external assistance. Compared to many user groups in the mid-hill and Terai that generate significant amounts of funds locally (Kanel 2004) selling their products, user groups in Tukucha have limited opportunities for generating income from forests. Income generated from forest products in user groups ranges from 4000 to 25,000 rupees a year (less than US\$ 400 annually). The amount is smaller compared to user groups in the Terai community (Chapter 5). This is because of the small forest size and limited availability of forest products for harvest and for sale.

As shown earlier (Table 21) Chhetri Ban owns a forest in a better condition (i.e. regenerated natural forest with broad leaf species) compared to other two groups that own plantation forest with narrow leaf pine species. This difference between groups is important in determining their forest-based income (Figures 15 and 16).⁵

The annual income of Chhetri Ban was four times higher than the annual income of Sarki Ban. In addition to forest-based income, Chhetri Ban had received a grant of Rs 30,000 (approx. US\$ 400) from the Australian forestry project. Newar Ban had also received a grant of Rs 35000 (US\$ 466) from government line agencies for irrigation and a drinking water tap. Discussion with the user groups revealed that Chhetri Ban had been receiving

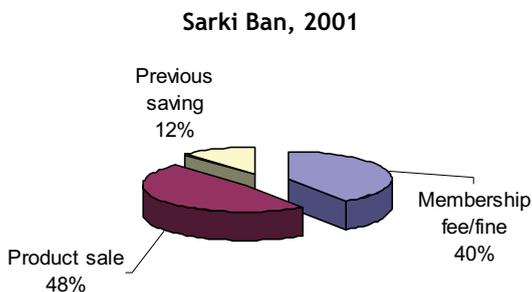
cash from the donor project for various purposes. Earlier (until 2001) the support to user group was to pay a forest guard. Recent support is for electricity line extension in the village.⁶ Except for the grant that is spent for such specific purposes, the major areas of expenditure for user groups include forest protection and management-related activities, training allowance and for community development activities including the temple and water tap construction (Figure 16).

Figure 15
Sources of income in forest user groups in 2002, Tukucha



Total income in a year = NRS 19,500 (US \$ 260)

Source: FUG register and Samiti members

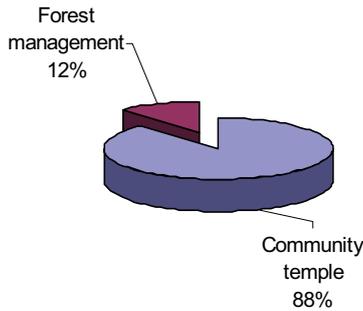


Total income in a year = 4200 (US \$ 56)

Source: FUG register and Samiti members

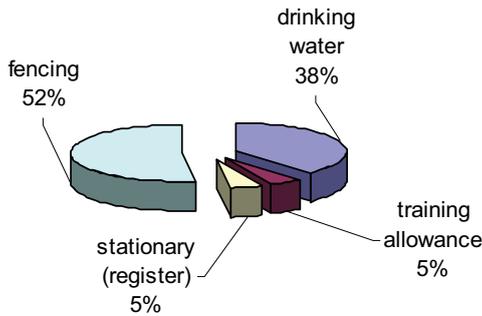
Figure 16
Areas of expenditure in forest user groups, Tukucha

Chhetri Ban, 2001



Total expenditure in a year = 17000 (US \$ 226)
Source: FUG register and Samiti members

Sarki Ban, 2001



Total expenditure in a year = 3843 (US \$ 52)
Source: FUG register and Samiti members

Even for such small amounts of funds, a review of meeting minutes and records revealed that user groups in Tukucha lack the technical skills to maintain their accounts properly, providing much room for interpreting data. Except in Chhetri Ban, user groups do not have clear record of income and expenditure maintained in a separate register and no groups have accounts opened in a bank. In response to the researcher’s query about the situation, the chairperson of Sarki Ban explained:

There are very few literate Sarki. Only two (the chairperson and the secretary) have attended primary schools. Even if we write good account [*bisab kitab*], no one reads. But samiti members have statement of income and expenditure clear in their head. The amount is so small that we remember it. Each year, we present it in assembly and members also know it when we present.

Despite the claim of the chairperson, however, general members and even samiti members are unaware of the amount generated, investment made and current balance in user groups. When women samiti members in Sarki Ban were asked about the status of the FUG fund and their interest to use it, two of the three women said the amount should be more than 5000 rupees. But the chairperson mentioned later that it had less than 500 rupees saving and that too was borrowed by the secretary of the group for two months. Similar situations of less transparency and unawareness among users exist in two other groups. However, the situation is not only related to the lack of education and literacy but also to people's interest and the socio-economic position of a person who keeps records and maintains the account.

I am less interested to know about income and expenditure. What is the benefit of knowing the fund size when you cannot use it for personal benefit? People here do not worry about the fund because, the secretary, who is handling the money, is a school teacher with good economic status and reputation [*dhani and ijjatdar manchhe*]. All in the village believe that he does not misuse rather works to increase the fund. This year also, he brought money for electricity from project people. (Shyam Chhetri, a user of Chhetri Ban, 2002)

The statements above suggest that though there is lack of transparency about the income and expenditure of the groups in Tukucha, user groups do not show evidence of misuse and misappropriation of the FUG fund by the samiti members, a situation that is very different to the user groups of Terai community (Chapter 5).

4.5 Sociology of Access: Class, Caste and Gender Relations

4.5.1 Access to forest products

This section demonstrates changes in people's access to four major forest products—firewood, fodder, leaf litter and timber—after the start of community forestry. The influence of class, caste and gender relations is demonstrated throughout in determining the magnitude and effect of the changes in access.

Access to firewood

As mentioned earlier under forest resource use (Chapter 3), two types of firewood are used in Tukucha for cooking: *daura* (wooden firewood) and *jhikra* (gleaning and bi-products). *Daura* is preferred for its durability and the quality of the energy produced. Some people also use kerosene and LPG gas but exclusive use of these products is rare. Most sources of fuel are used in combination. All households in Tukucha reported a severe scarcity of firewood before the start of community forestry. Community forestry has resulted changes in the types and amount of alternative fuels used. The analysis of changes in the use of firewood in 38 households revealed that the quality of firewood used in Tukucha has improved, i.e., the use of *daura* has increased, replacing *jhikra* in the last 10 years. This applies to all economic and caste groups albeit in different capacity (Tables 25 and 26). A majority (55%) mentioned use of *daura* as the most important source of fuel today compared to only 24% ten years ago.

Table 25
Changes in types of cooking fuel by land category, Tukucha

Land category (in <i>ropani</i>)	Most important sources of cooking fuel by landholding (in %)					
	<i>Daura</i>		<i>Jhikra</i>		Gas/Kerosene	
	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago
< 5 <i>ropani</i> (n=22)	55	18	36	82	9	0
5.1-10 <i>ropani</i> (n=10)	60	20	20	80	20	0
10.1-15 <i>ropani</i> (n=2)	100	50	0	50	0	0
> 15 <i>ropani</i> (n=4)	75	50	0	50	25	0
Total (n=38)	55	24	26	76	19	0

Source: Household Survey (2002)

The reasons for the shift toward *daura* are two-fold. Before the protection, forests in Tukucha were either protected by government forest guards (restricting the access of villagers) or else they were badly degraded. As illustrated earlier, people had to walk up to 6 miles to bring one head-load of *daura*. Local protection imposed a complete ban on firewood collection from the community forests. The rules were inflexible. This meant villagers had to rely on *jhikra* for cooking. Now, however, the ban on firewood col-

lection is waived. The user groups open forests for *daura* collection once a year which users harvest, pay and store for use throughout the year. This applies to all user groups in Tukucha. In addition, households which planted trees during the protection period started to harvest producing *daura*. The latter is especially true in Chhetri Ban where the majority of households derive more than 50% of forest products from their own trees, while the former situation prevails in Newar Ban. Access to *daura* from Sarki Ban is still limited and most users continue to rely on *jbikra*.

When caste and ethnic dimensions of change in the types of fuel use are analysed, it indicates that over a ten-year period, the use of *daura* has increased significantly for Brahmin/Chhetri and for Newars who are endowed with better forest and have more trees on their private land (Table 26).

Table 26
Changes in types of cooking fuel by caste and ethnicity, Tukucha

Caste/ethnic groups	Most important sources of cooking fuel (in % of households)					
	<i>Daura</i>		<i>Jhikra</i>		Gas/kerosene	
	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago
Brahmin/Chhetri (n=10)	60	20	10	80	30	0
Newars (n= 12)	75	17	8	83	17	0
Dalits (n=16)	38	31	50	69	12	0
Total (N=38)	55	24	26	76	19	0

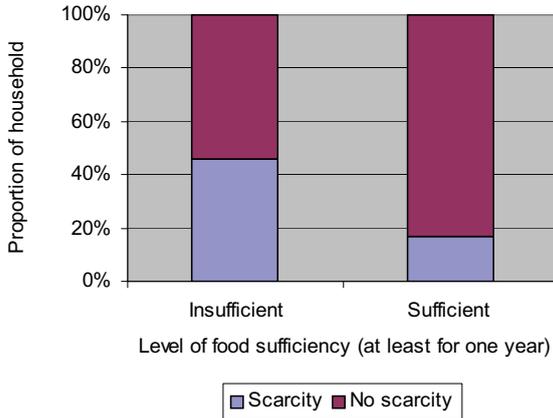
Source: Household Survey (2002)

As Table 26 shows, about 50% of Dalits continue to rely heavily on low quality firewood. This is because the majority of them do not have enough trees on their private land. The forest allocated to Sarki is the smallest and is relatively new. Newly planted areas do not meet the users' requirements for good quality firewood.⁷

The amount of firewood required for a household ranges from 120–180 *bhari* a year, depending on the family size. But the amount supplied from user groups ranges from 60–100 *bhari*, indicating a considerable gap between requirements and supply. However, while all households reported a severe scarcity of firewood before the start of community forestry, only 14 (of 38) households reported a similar scarcity now. Grain-sufficient households experienced less scarcity while grain-deficient households experienced

more scarcity of the product. The scarcity of firewood is positively associated with the level of food self-sufficiency (Figure 17).⁸

Figure 17
Proportion of households with scarcity of firewood, Tukucha



Source: Household Survey (2002); N=38

Figure 17 shows that the proportion of the households experiencing scarcity of firewood is higher among the food-insufficient groups. Among the 14 households who continue experiencing severe scarcity, a large proportion (57%) is Dalit consisting of Kami and Sarki.

The harvesting and distribution of firewood is not regular. Two of the three user groups in Tukucha had not opened the forest regularly for firewood collection.⁹ The effect of the closure of the forest for long periods varied. The majority of Chhetris in Chhetri Ban revealed that they supplement the requirement from private trees, and that anomalies in firewood distribution did not affect them much. The Kami households of same group, who are also the poorest, felt the hardship differently.

The majority of *Bista* [patrons] use firewood from their own trees. Their women are not worried about firewood and therefore do not force their men to open the forest. Our men do not cook and they do not know where the firewood comes from. I worry every morning about how I am going to cook food. I have been using dry leaves and maize husk to cook. It takes hours to

cook and often the food does not get cooked properly. (A land-poor Kami woman in Chhetri Ban, 2002)

The hardship associated with the lack of firewood varies even among women depending on the land-holding categories they belong to. The land-poor women who have few alternatives to supplement the requirement of firewood suffer most from the anomalies. When the firewood distribution takes place, the quantity of firewood allocated by the community forest does not consider differences of family size, composition and its requirements. In all user groups, forests open for specific periods of time. Those households which have more hands to work can also collect more bundles of firewood from forests during the limited time. Often, men climb trees and break off dried or diseased branches. The women and the children collect branches and carry the load. A problem arises when there are no men in the household because traditionally, women do not climb big trees. It is also physically difficult for them. Widows or households with absentee male members suffer, as they cannot collect sufficient firewood during the period of collection.

Those who have husbands [*jaban*] at home collect more. Some women in Chhetrigaun hire labour for firewood collection if their husbands are not at home. Hiring men increases the actual price of firewood, which we cannot afford. Our husbands are out for wage labour [*rojiroti*]. They come only twice in a year during the festivals. They cannot come in between just for the sake of firewood. It costs up to 300 rupees to travel. In addition, they lose their wage for that period. Firewood collected by only women is almost half compared to that collected by both men and women. (Dalit women of Chhetri Ban and Sarki Ban, in a group discussion, 2002)

Usually, for agricultural tasks, female-headed households arrange *perma* (reciprocal exchange of labour) where men from the same caste group work for them. But for firewood, the *perma* system does not exist because the forest opens for a limited period and all the households need to collect for their own use within the limited time. *Perma* with neighbouring tole for forest product collection is not permitted.

For the last few years, new types of fuel such as LP gas and kerosene have been introduced in the village after the construction of a gravel road that connects Tukucha to the nearby market, Banepa, during the dry season. However, the use of these alternative sources of fuel is very limited. Among 129 households surveyed, only 18 (14% of the total) had started to use gas and kerosene for cooking. Among them, only 7 (5% of total) use it regularly. The latter requires a regular cash income to buy them, which is a more

expensive and more comfortable option compared to forest-based products. Among the seven who regularly use gas as cooking fuel, five are in key decision-making positions in the samiti. It indicates that those who do not need firewood make the decisions related to its use. In contrast, those who mostly depend on firewood obtained from community forests (poor and women) have little control over the decisions related to the product.

Access to grass, leaf fodder and grazing land

The main sources of grass and fodder in Tukucha are cultivable land (private and rented) and the community forests. Fodder comes entirely from private trees, as harvesting fodder from community forest is not allowed. Agricultural residue (maize stalks, leaves, cobs, rice straw, husk, etc.) is the major supplement for animal feed. About 60% of households depend entirely on the community forests or public land for grass and among them, the majority are poor.

There is a common assumption that communal management would increase the availability of fodder to poor households, enabling them to keep more livestock and increase their incomes. The increase in herd size would then be an indicator of increased fodder availability in the village. As shown in Chapter 3, the number of livestock a household owns is positively associated with the amount of private land owned by the household.

Although overall fodder and grass availability is said to have increased, the size of livestock holding has not significantly changed over the last 10 years in Tukucha. There is limited access to grass and fodder from community forests. This applies to all user groups. When the relationship between the community forestry and changes in livestock ownership was analysed among the 38 user households, it revealed that the grazing ban and the lack of regular access to grass and fodder from the community forests were found to have hit the poorest hardest, with a resulting decrease in herd size and income. A land-poor Dalit in Chhetri Ban who works as an agricultural labourer explains:

Keeping animals is not a problem for the rich. They can cut fodder from their own trees and can bring grass from their own farm. Poor have neither sufficient trees nor land for grazing. Look at me. Before the protection started, I had about 10 goats and my children used to take them for free grazing. When grazing stopped, I sold out all the goats. During the rainy season, my wife and I both work for wage on *Bista's* farm. In winter, we both work in the brick factory in Banepa. Stall-feeding requires time. If we had private land for grazing, children would manage the goats. But we do not have enough land for grazing and buying grass from other people's land requires Rs. 800 per year. It

is not profitable. So we decided to sell all the goats. If the samiti allows us to collect fodder from forests then I would keep goats again but I do not think they will allow it. Most Pandeys have private trees for fodder. They are not willing to help the poor by providing fodder and grazing land in the community forests.

The assumption that the community forestry would increase the availability of grass and the poor households' access to it does not hold true in practice with the ban on grazing and limited access to fodder.

The gender division of labour requires women to take most of the responsibilities when it comes to caring for livestock, especially collection of fodder and grass. The ban on open grazing requires them to collect grass and fodder regularly. This applies to all the women irrespective of their economic and social positions. Although men occasionally help women to harvest fodder from the private trees, they do not experience the same hardship due to the lack of fodder because feeding livestock is not their primary responsibility. The perspectives of men and women on the availability of grass also differ significantly, even within the same economic group. While the majority of men, including samiti members, said that access to grass is not a problem in the village and is easily available on public land, women even from the non-poor households reported a severe scarcity, especially during the dry season.

Access to timber

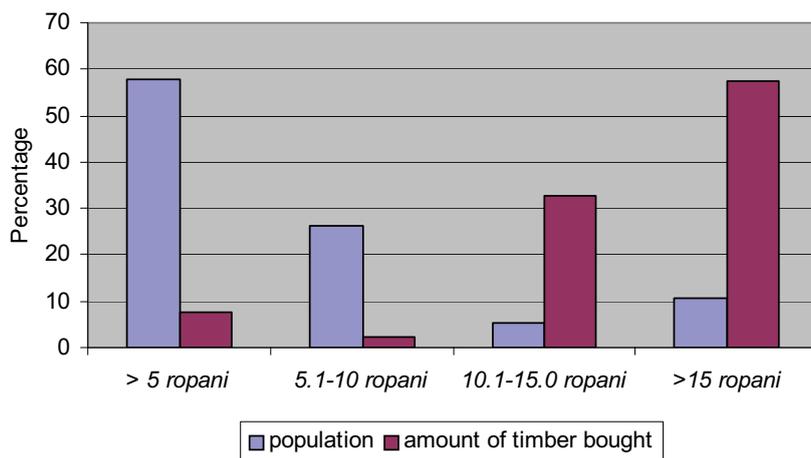
Timber is mainly used for agricultural tools, houses and furniture-making and maintenance. Commercial exploitation of timber does not exist in Tukucha, mainly because, unlike natural forests in the Terai, regenerated and newly planted forests in Tukucha do not produce good quality timber. Second, even if there is a market for poor quality timber (for example for brick factory and small saw-mills), undulating topography leads to high costs of processing and transportation from the forests to the market.

Timber availability has increased in community forests since protection started, but access to timber is not equitable. An analysis of data for a period of three years on timber sale from community forests shows that timber access is positively associated with landownership (Figure 18).

As the figure shows, households with more than one *ropani* land (almost 84% of surveyed households) bought about 10% of total timber sold from community forests during the past three years. In contrast, the landed households with more than 15 *ropani* land (nearly 10% of population) bought nearly 60% of the timber sold by user groups. A majority of timber

buyers belonged to food sufficient group with access to regular cash income.

Figure 18
Patterns of timber distribution by landownership category, Tukucha



Source: Household survey (2002) and FUG records

The situation can be explained in two ways. First, the price for timber is higher (Rs 35 per cft) than for other products and it is difficult for the poor to gain access. Access to cash income plays an important role in obtaining timber—both from the community and from others' trees.¹⁰ Those who have a regular cash income are in a better position to buy timber for house maintenance or furniture. Food-deficient households or those without cash income find it difficult to afford timber from the community forests. Among the 38 users surveyed, all indicated an annual need for timber, albeit of different quantity. The gap between need and the actual quantity bought indicates the inability of the majority of users (especially the poor) to afford timber because of high prices. For example, in Sarki Ban user group, only two users had been able to buy timber over the last three years and the amount they bought varied greatly. Second, timber is mainly used for construction or repairing of houses and furniture. In addition to timber, performing these tasks require other inputs including brick, cement and labour. Poor food-deficient households with limited or no cash income cannot in-

vest on these things and are therefore discouraged to buy timber even when the price for it is cheaper than in the market.

Ban bata kath kinna ta painchha, bajar bhanda sasto pani chha, tara kath le matrai ghar bandaina (I am eligible to buy timber from community forest, it is also cheaper than the market rate but timber only is not sufficient for repairing a house). This is not only about buying timber. Even if I manage to buy it, I cannot afford buying other construction materials such as bricks and cement or hiring labour for the task. There is no point of buying only timber if I cannot use it for the purpose. (Thulo Kanchha VK, Chhetri Ban, 2002)

Though each user group has a provision for free timber of up to 10 cubic feet to victims of fire or other natural disasters, they do not have a provision of free timber for very poor households whose houses need repair and maintenance. A household survey and discussions with lower caste groups also indicates that the inability to buy timber negatively affects the continuation of traditional caste-based occupations in the village. Both Newar Ban and Chhetri Ban consist of a few Kami who are traditionally dependent on iron work for their livelihood. The occupation involves making of agricultural implements and household utensils. The work requires regular access to charcoal from the forests. Kami provide this service to high caste households (called *Bista*) and in return get a certain quantity of grain during the harvest season (*bal*). As most households in this caste group (all in our sample) are landless and poor, none is represented in the samiti and consequently none of the user groups in Tukucha has provision for them to be provided with charcoal from community forests to continue their occupation. As a result, the caste group has been forced to leave its occupation or to reduce the size of the business, resulting in the loss of income. The availability of substitute products in nearby markets has also meant that high caste groups are not interested in the service provided by the Kami. Better implements are available at relatively cheaper prices at the market. A poor landless Kami from Newar Ban explains:

Previously, I used to get grain for my service that was sufficient to feed my family. Now I hardly have 5–6 regular *Bistas* who pay in grain. Others either exchange service in charcoal or give some cash, which is not sufficient to feed my family even for three months. *Bistas* are now buying utensils from Banepa. Now they need our service only for the things that they do not get easier in market.

Kami still run iron enterprises (*aran*) but in reduced scale. The benefit from the iron work is also substantially reduced—whatever is earned goes to get charcoal. The complete ban on making charcoal from community

forests has remained a major concern of this caste group but is never raised formally in the assembly of the user group, nor is it addressed.

I requested the earlier samiti members to lift the ban but they said, the government has given the responsibility of protecting this forest to villagers and the use of forest for charcoal production is against the rules. I also complained about it to the ranger but he said the samiti decision is final and he cannot help. When I know no one listens, what is the benefit of spending the whole day in assemblies? I have stopped participating in assemblies now. (A poor Kami of Newar Ban in response to a question why he does not raise this concern during the assembly)

Though the community forestry policy gives sole authority to a user group to decide on the use of the products from community forests, Kami have little awareness about this authority. The decisions taken by the samiti, composed of high caste groups, do not represent the interests and priority of the Kami. There is some evidence, especially in larger sized groups, that members are involved in illegal cutting of timber from the community forests to meet their immediate requirement.

Last year, when I severely needed some poles, I brought it hiding inside the grass load. I would have been fined if was caught, but god saved me. I used that poles to repair my *kbat* (bedstead) but no one knew about it. No one enters to house of a Kami. (A poor Kami of Newar Ban, 2002)

These users are vulnerable to being caught and fined.

Access to leaf litter

Leaf litter (*Sottar*) in Tukucha is used mainly for animal bedding and for manure. Unlike grass, firewood and timber, to which there is restricted access, leaf litter collection opens once a week throughout the year free of cost for all user groups. Since the availability of leaf litter has increased in the forests since the conservation and there is danger of fire from dried leaves, the collection of leaves each week is considered necessary in all the user groups, especially during dry seasons.

All users in Tukucha reported a significant increase in the availability of leaf litter and considered it the most important product obtained from the community forest. When the forest was under the control of the government (mainly Panchayat representatives), each household in the village had to pay grain in exchange for leaf litter. The amount was used to hire a local guard to protect the forest. As a result, the landless and the poor had no access to leaf litter because they were unable to pay the required amount of grain. However, most user groups gradually lifted the restriction on its col-

lection as initiation of protection in community forests gradually increased the amount of leaf litter. As a result, even poor households have regular access. However, the quantity of litter used by individual households varies according to land size, livestock and labour available in the household for collection. On average, the amount of litter collected by those households that owned more than 10 *ropani* of land ranges from 100–180 *bhari* per year while that for small landholders (with less than 10 *ropani*) ranges from 60–120 *bhari*. The benefits obtained from litter use also vary accordingly favouring to the land-rich households.

4.5.2 Access to financial and political benefits

Class and caste dimensions of political benefits

As seen earlier, forests in Tukucha have limited potentiality to generate cash income and the FUG fund is small. Therefore, there is no provision to benefit from cash as an FUG member. Rather, involvement in the samiti is a financial liability. Hosting meetings and assemblies is usually at the cost of the chairperson and secretary. Though each user group has some funds, they are not spent on meetings and gatherings. This is a typical characteristic of hill user groups and applies to them all in Tukucha.

Chairpersons and secretaries have bigger houses than others in the village. They are expected to host samiti meetings and general assemblies in their houses, as there are no separate offices of the user groups. Though not compulsory, they usually offer tea and snacks to all the participants in the meetings. It is also related to social status in the community and has become a tradition now. It involves cost. As the samiti does not have provisions to cover these expenses, usually it is considered as voluntary contribution. It is good that persons who hold such positions in the samiti are rich. If they were poor, they would have faced problems. Though it is not written anywhere, it has become one of the criteria to select chairperson and secretary for the user groups now. (The secretary of Chhetri Ban)

Though it seems that the involvement in the key decision-making positions in samiti is a direct loss in terms of cash as they need to spend money which is not reimbursed, this also serves their purpose of retaining social status, political control and power in the society. Should they hesitate to meet these expenses, they take the risk of losing their political and social clout especially if someone from a poor household or a Dalit comes forward to meet these expenses. For the non-poor high caste group, therefore, the political and social gains outweigh the direct costs involved in organizing meetings and spending on them.

In addition, investment of time and resources in the samiti usually provides indirect benefits to its members in the form of personal development, such as access to opportunities like participation in training and workshops, and increased personal contact with forest officials, project staff and the network of users. As these benefits are directly related to positions and power in the society, these can be seen as political incentives derived from the community forests. Access to such political incentives tends to motivate the non-poor high caste samiti members to invest time and resources for collective action, especially to participate actively in the process.

A survey of the samiti members in Tukucha indicates that incentives that motivate different users to participate in the samiti vary from personal development to increased social status and prestige (*man, ijjat*) in the community. Among the 23 samiti members who responded, 16 (70%) mentioned increased social status, prestige and recognition in the village as a result of their involvement in the samiti. In addition, the chairperson and secretary usually get opportunities to participate in training and workshops organized outside the village, mostly by international organizations involved in promoting community forestry strategy. Participation in training is found important for personal development in the form of self-confidence, increased knowledge, skills and linkage. As we illustrated earlier, key decision-makers in the samiti are always dominated by economically better-off households who often have relatively large landholding and access to regular source of non-farm incomes, and thus have high economic and social strength in the village. Active participation in the samiti further provides them a forum to strengthen their economic and social positions in the long run. While in the groups with mixed caste composition, economic class and caste position determines the member's ability to claim such benefits, in the groups with homogenous caste composition, economic class becomes a determining factor for this.

For example, Sarki Ban is composed of only Dalit households. The chairperson is the wealthiest among the group with large (23 *ropani*) landholding and a small shoe business in Banepa for additional income. He is also the political representative of the ward and represents Dalit in the VDC. Thus his economic and political status is already better than many other Dalits in the village.

I have passed only fourth grade from school but in my caste and age group, I am the most educated. Young boys are educated up to high school but none of them stays in the village. All are out in cities to work. Since I am the only one in the Sarki gaun who can invest time and can talk to forest officials, I have remained in this position since the beginning. On the one hand, most

members of my caste group are poor who work as wage labour and find it difficult to invest time and money required for active participation in the samiti. On the other hand, ordinary members do not listen to samiti member who are very poor. Poor samiti members cannot enforce the rules effectively in the user groups. (G.K. Magranti, chairperson of Sarki Ban).

Active involvement in the samiti also allows the members to enhance skills and self confidence and this applies to all the caste/ethnic groups.

I have attended some training and workshops organized by project people. It has increased my leadership skills, which is very important to build up my political career in VDC. Previously, I was not able to speak in front of other VDC representatives who were more educated and belonged to high caste. But after my continuous involvement in the samiti and my participation in leadership training, provided by the project, I feel now confident enough to argue in front of others. (The chairperson, Sarki Ban)

In some cases, increased self-confidence and leadership skills not only benefit the person involved but also benefit all members collectively, especially when it involves challenging some kind of social form of subordination from outsiders. For example, during 1999, three forest user groups in Tukucha decided to renovate a temple (*Bhagawati mandir*), which is situated in Chhetri Ban. A committee with the representatives from all user groups decided to contribute timber and labour. The Dalits also made the contribution for the renovation with labour and timber. But during the inauguration, the temple construction committee denied the Dalits entry, considering them lower caste and 'impure' to worship the god. The committee's decision was influenced by the high caste village elders (including the priest) with the logic to maintain the purity in the temple. A Dalit woman in an informal group discussion explained:

When we contributed timber and labour from the community forest, they [the high caste group] did not say anything but when we wanted to worship the goddess, they did not allow. We complained this to our chairman. He argued with Chhetri and threatened that we can complain about it with the CDO [chief district officer]. After a series of dialogues, the temple committee took its decision back and allowed us to enter the temple though still we need to wait till the high caste women complete their worshipping. At least now, we can enter and worship in the temple, which would not be possible if our chairman had not argued.

Such increase in self-confidence and sense of solidarity is one of the positive outcomes observed, especially in Sarki Ban, which is composed of only Dalits. The case above shows that a user group as an organization pro-

vides a forum for socially marginalized group to organize. Access to opportunities for self-development and leadership skills through participation in the samiti enables them to challenge the disparities faced on the basis of caste identity. But as mentioned earlier, in a mixed caste group, access to such opportunity is often restricted for the poor and the lower castes. Even in a homogenous caste group, economic conditions remain a main barrier among the poor users when it comes to accessing such opportunities.

Gender relations and access to political incentives

In addition to class and caste relations, gender relations further constrain the ability of women to access the political benefits that are important to challenge their subordinated positions in society. The women in a samiti often have limited knowledge of policy and the legal processes of user group forestry. An interview with women samiti members in Tukucha revealed they are aware of product use rules and rules related to enforcement mechanisms but unaware of the legal rights and responsibilities of a user in user groups. Similarly, compared to men, women samiti members are unaware of the amount and the sources of income and of areas of expenditure of the FUG fund. Several factors explain this situation.

First, from the beginning, representation of women in the samiti has been necessary to fulfil the quota commitment of forest officials and donor projects (Hobley 1990). User groups do not consider it important to improve unequal gender relations in the community or that participation of women could contribute to it.

When the samiti nominated two women, they were not informed timely about meetings. Women samiti members are informed only when it is very urgent for women to participate or when some project people come to the village to observe samiti meetings. It is also discouraging when men do not ask opinion of women in the meeting. (Ganga Pandey, a woman samiti member, Chhetri Ban)

Often, as mentioned earlier, women samiti members are widows or *de facto* heads of households who already have the additional burden of managing household chores and farm activities in the absence of men. In addition, their socioeconomic position is already vulnerable. Most are illiterate; because of the vulnerable economic and social positions in the community, they enjoy little or no influence in the decision-making processes of the user groups. More importantly, patriarchal culture and women's subordinated position make men reluctant to listen if they speak. Most women samiti members in Tukucha complain about the increased workload caused by

their representation in the samiti where they lack any stake in decision-making.

Women's presence in the meeting is just show for outsiders. When women speak, men never listen. I know many men in our user groups who feel embarrassed if women argue against their proposal in the general assembly. A man always tries his best to dominate a woman who speaks in the meeting so that she does not comment against his argument. When women cannot speak even in front of villagers, how do we learn to speak confidently in front of outsiders? (Mathura Pandey, women samiti member, Chhetri Ban)

However, Tukucha also provides evidence that a few women (three out of the seven) who attend meeting occasionally experience increased self-confidence.

There is a little difference I felt it after I started attending meetings. Previously, I was afraid to go in front of men older than me. My face used to turn red in front of them. Now I feel better. At least I can sit and listen to them comfortably. (Mathura Pandey, a woman samiti member, Chhetri Ban)

This suggests that even mere attendance in meeting without any significant stake in decision-making, may make women more confident, at least to the extent of sitting comfortably in front of men. If women samiti members get the opportunity for self-development through their participation in training and exposure, they could presumably become more confident, and it will enable them to change their subordinated positions in the household and in the community in the long run.

However, none of the women samiti members participated in any kind of training and workshops organized by forest officials or bilateral projects working in the area. There are three major reasons. First, none of the women (with exception of one of the seven) had any formal education. Usually they are not eligible to participate in training because most opportunities require minimum skill in reading and writing. Second, even when some capacity-building events do not require literacy skills, familial constraints (especially the gender division of labour that requires women's continuous presence in the house to care for children and the elderly) impose a barrier on their participation.

Sometimes samiti calls meeting to nominate people to participate in training and workshop. Often, project sends invitation for these events. As these take place out of village (often in Banepa or in Kathmandu), it is not possible for women to participate. How can a woman leave house and stay overnight for training? Men can leave if they have wives at home but women cannot. (Mathura Pandey, a woman samiti member, Chhetri Ban)

Such perceptions of restricted mobility of women are also rooted from patriarchal culture. Some rules and norms that define what acceptable behaviour is for men and women discourage women and their family members from letting them participate, especially when they require long travel or overnight stay.

Staying outside home unaccompanied by men is not acceptable for a woman, no matter whether she is rich or poor and belongs to lower caste [*sano jaŋ*] or high caste [*thulo jaŋ*]. This is one reason why the women samiti members are not nominated to participate in training and workshop outside the village. (The chairperson, Sarki Ban)

Evidence shows that due to patriarchal structures and culture that defines gendered norms and values, women are constrained from access to opportunities for personal development, which is associated with power and benefit in the long run.

4.6 Relationship with Stakeholders and Influence on the Outcome

The District Forest Office and a bilateral forestry project funded by the Australian government are the major stakeholders with whom the user groups in Tukucha maintained contact for various purposes. This section explores the relationship between user groups and these stakeholders. Objective is to understand their influence on the outcome of the user groups.

4.6.1 District Forest Office

The District Forest Office (DFO) is primarily responsible for the implementation of all forest sector activities in the district including community forestry. The DFO in Kabhre district is comprised of 92 government staffs including one district forest officer, four assistant forest officers and 13 field technicians (rangers). In terms of community forestry, the DFO is responsible for ensuring that the user groups in the District get adequate levels of pre- and post-formation support and for monitoring their performance in terms of sustainable forest management and equitable distribution of benefits under the legal framework. Range posts are the smallest unit where the user groups directly interface with the field technicians. There are eight range posts in the district. In additions to supporting other forestry components, on an average one range post is expected to provide service to 40 community forest user groups. In terms of composition, all forest officials in the district, including the field technicians are high caste men.

In terms of community forestry, principle tasks of a ranger includes providing pre- and post-formation support to user groups such as facilitating them for user group formation, organizing assemblies, and preparation and revision of constitutions and operational plans; enhancing ability of user groups for technical forest management, record-keeping and monitoring progress; ensuring their effectiveness for sustainable forest management and equitable benefit distribution; and providing timely advice to ensure that chosen silvicultural options meet their needs (Pokharel, Gayfer et al. 1993, Baral 1994). However, samiti members of all user groups revealed that they do not receive adequate post-formation support. Usually rangers do not come to the village unless there are some incentives deriving from field visit. The secretary of Newar Ban summarized his experience with rangers in the following terms:

I had not seen the ranger of this location since past two years. Last year [2001], the ranger sent a letter asking us to revise our Operational Plan. In the letter, it was written that if it is not revised on time, we cannot use products from the forests. I visited the range post with the letter and asked about the procedure and technical help. He said, it costs 10,000 rupees to revise the plan according to the new guidelines and a user group should spend it as DFO does not have money for the purpose. User group had only 4000 rupees savings which was not sufficient. Later, another ranger came who suggested us selling some products and revising the plan with the money. We had some fallen trees due to wind last year that we sold as timber. By-products were sold as firewood. Together, we generated about 25000 rupees. When we agreed to pay, two rangers came and prepared the plan for 10,000 rupees. We also had to feed them for five days when they came to our forest. The plan got approved last month without any hassles. I know, it would not have been possible if we had not paid them.

While Newar Ban was able to get technical help for which they paid, Chhetri Ban had problems dealing with the forest technicians resulting in the ban of using forest products. The secretary of Chhetri Ban explains:

Since 1988, we have been preparing our user group's plan on our own. But since past two years, the department has issued an inventory guideline for user groups to follow while preparing their plans. The guideline is very technical and only a forest technician can follow it. Now they are asking money to prepare the plan according to the guideline. I think, this is just a way of forest officials getting money from users. If they really want users to implement the plan, then they should allow us to prepare it. I argued about it with the ranger who did not accept the revised plan I prepared. Last year, I received a letter from the DFO asking not to perform management operations in the forest

including thinning, pruning and harvesting until the plan is revised. Since then, the forest is not opened for firewood. It has also hampered the protection of forest from mite (*dhamira*). Mites are spreading in our forest and killing young trees. We are not allowed to uproot even the affected trees as in eyes of a ranger, cutting a diseased tree is also harvesting products.

As the statement reveals, forest officials retain all the power to control all decisions and processes in the user groups. The decision to ban a user group from management operations affects regular distribution of forest products in the group. Though it affects all users, the poor suffer most as they lack alternatives for products obtained from community forests. On the other hand, because forest officials retain the power to disband the user groups, samiti of the user groups, are often required to be more accountable to the forest officials than to users. The following case illustrates.

We cannot deny rangers' advice even when it is not good for a majority of users. Earlier ranger said our forest is not protected well and suggested me to hire a forest guard. I told him that we do not have money for this but he did not listen. We had to ask users to pay 35 rupees a month for the guard. Many users were angry at this decision. I explained them that the ranger might report to the DFO on our inability to protect the forest well and the DFO can take the forest back from the group. I stopped hiring forest guard only when the earlier ranger got transferred and a new ranger had not joined the office. (The chairperson of Sarki Ban, 2002)

Discussion with the forest officials regarding the inequitable sharing of costs and benefits in the community indicates that they are either not aware of the social objective of community forestry mentioned in the various planning documents or have limited commitment to work for them.

Similar to the poverty concerns, forest officials also lack understanding of gender relations and ways of addressing them. Few officials recognize women's role in protection and management of forests but wider issues of gender relations and ways of addressing them are not recognized and acted upon.

Bringing women in community forestry is good for conservation but it increases their workload. We cannot expect men to share household chores. Project is always concerned about women's participation but does not think about the increased workload for the women. Considering women's workload, I would encourage men to bring their [women's] concerns in the meetings and find ways of addressing those concerns. If this happens, there is no need for a woman to attend meetings that only increases her workloads. (A ranger sharing his views on women's participation in decision-making)

The discussion illustrates that the user groups do not get adequate level of post-formation support from district forest officials. The objective of helping the poor and women through community forestry is not internalized among them, resulting in a clear lack of commitment in addressing them. Rather, in many cases, their interference with controlling mechanisms makes it difficult for user groups to function independently. This affects the user groups' ability to perform regular silvicultural activities in the forest and to harvest forest products, thereby negatively affecting the interests of the poor.

4.6.2 Donor-funded forestry programmes

As said earlier, forest user groups in Tukucha were formed with the financial and technical support from an Australian Forestry Project through the DFO. The Australian assistance in forestry sector in Nepal started in 1962. In the early years assistance was to develop forest resources in the Kathmandu valley and to ameliorate the degradation of surrounding hills. Subsequent phases supported the community for the planting and protection of forests adjacent to their settlement. As the new plantation forests were not providing products, this intervention had little impact on individual's access to forest products. The interaction of the project with people had primarily been confined to discussion with members of the Panchayat hierarchy and the payment of nursery staffs (Hobley 1990).

Discussion with user groups revealed that since the beginning, the project had encouraged women's participation in assemblies and committees. However, it had adopted a reformist approach of participation where women's participation was sought on the grounds that they are the primary users of forest products because of gender roles. The inherent rights of women to participate and influence decisions and to access equitable share of benefit was not emphasized, and neither the class and gender-specific constraints were recognized and addressed. As a result, as discussed earlier, the project's emphasis on women's participation remained rhetoric.

In terms of benefiting the poor, till 2002, the project's support was at user group's level. Household-focused interventions were designed only during the later years. The assumption of earlier phases was 'aggregate benefits of the project will mainly benefit wealthy households but will also percolate to the poorer households' (Hobley 1990: 307). Though the fifth phase (May 1997–April 2002) aimed at poverty reduction and equitable benefit-sharing, the support was channelled entirely through the forest officials with little direct engagement with the user groups (except for supporting with a few event-specific grants and capacity-development training). The support

channelled through DFO was focused on the improvement of literacy and management abilities of the user groups through training, networking and increased access to external sources of support. Benefiting from the event-specific support varied depending upon the access to information and ability of user groups to influence the project and forest officials involved. There is a positive association between the ability of user groups to access support provided by the donor project and caste composition of the group. Chhetri Ban, which was the first user group formed in the district, had been receiving support from the project until 2001. Support from the project to Chhetri Ban included grants to hire forest guards, infrastructure development, literacy class and training to samiti members.

I knew project officials before the formation of user group. Nepali and Australian [*bideshi*] officers from the project used to come to my house when my father was head of the Panchayat. My father worked with them for the formation of this user group. The project started to bring people from other villages to Chhetri Ban to show how community forestry can function. It was also a place for foreigners to visit and write books. The project did not have office in our village but officers used to come frequently. When there was only one user group in the village, they provided money even for forest guards. They trained me on record-keeping, group formation and social mobilization. I worked for them as community facilitator for two years and helped them for the formation of other five user groups in the district. The relationship developed before still works. Project officers still remember me and call for participation when there are some trainings or exposure visits organized by them for user groups. (The secretary of Chhetri Ban, 2002)

As the statement revealed, though the direct involvement of the project with the user group ceased in 1997, Chhetri Ban has been able to maintain the relation that has helped the group gain access to information about the opportunities and offers for support. As a result, until recently, Chhetri Ban received some support directly from the project in the form of grants and skill development training. On the other hand, Sarki Ban, which is composed of Dalits, lacks such personal linkages and access to information, resulting in the lack of access to such tangible support from the donor project.

Earlier I was unaware of why the user group is required and where the support for the group comes from. Project people used to come in our village with rangers but most often they stayed and ate in Pandey's house and provided direct support to them. When I heard that Chhetri Ban was receiving a grant for forest guards, I went to project office and asked for the similar sup-

port, but the programme officer said, they had already stopped providing money directly to user groups. (The chairperson of Sarki Ban, 2002)

The employee in government and project offices mostly belong to high caste groups as they are better endowed with education, information and related entry qualifications. When they make field visits, they tend to live in the same caste households, which is more comfortable and socially acceptable. While they stay, they also provide information and support to host households about any development opportunities available to the individuals and the user groups. Because of the low caste status, Dalits often lack access to such information and supports.

Despite the fact that the project and resources were to help groups for sustainable forest management and equitable benefit distribution, evaluation studies have shown that meeting the objective of equitable distribution of benefits remained a challenge for the project even in those that had the project's direct support (NACRMP 2003). While some specific activities such as literacy, the Women Empowerment Programme (WEP) and capacity development of user groups on gender and equity issues are said to have increased the representation of women and Dalits in assemblies and samiti (NACRMP 2003), the participation has remained rhetoric which is clear from the fact that women have no effective participation and influence in group's decisions. The project has rather provided capacity development opportunities to few non-poor high caste men through the samiti in user groups (as discussed earlier in access to economic and political incentives), and thereby enabling them to maintain their economic and political positions in the community.

Everyone listen to the rich, not to the poor. This is a long tradition. Panchayat came and made rich people leaders. Project people and government staff came, they met with rich Panchayat leaders. Rich are outspoken. They come upfront and demand what they need. No one asks if poor also have some expectations. Poor also cannot come in front to talk directly to the outsiders. (The secretary, Sarki Ban)

The project itself had recognized its limitations in bringing about wider changes in caste and gender relationships (NACRMLP 2002) without which the achievement of equitable benefit distribution, the stated goal of the project in its last phase, was unlikely. This is also evident from the Programme Design Document (PDD) proposed for the extension of project (6th phase that started from 2003) until 2009, the Australian government decided to shorten the project and bring it to a close in mid-2006 on the grounds of limited visible impact of the support (NACRMLP 2006).

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed account of institutional attributes of three forest user groups situated in a hill agrarian community and demonstrated influence of class, caste and gender relations to shape their outcomes. The case study revealed following interrelated themes.

Forest degradation in Tukucha predates the memories of villagers. Community's initiative for protection was a result of population-led demand for forest products. Regenerated and plantation forests provide significant input in production and reproduction of farm and labour. FUGs are situated separately among three hamlets, each being relatively homogenous in terms of caste and ethnic composition. But the allocation of forests demonstrates bias towards high caste groups. Lower caste groups, due to their historically-constructed caste and class hierarchy, lacked bargaining power to claim for better quality productive forests and related support from the service providers. Membership is inclusive but rich and high caste men dominate other poor and lower caste men in decision-making. The latter are constrained to participate and influence decisions due to their historically-maintained unequal (dependency) relationship with the high caste group. Women saw their exclusion from meetings as part of the patriarchal framework through which relationships between men and women are constituted at household and at community levels. The decisions related to plantation, protection and product rules often do not reflect the needs and priorities of the poor and women. There is a complex interaction between class, caste and gender resulting in mechanisms and processes that are exclusive.

In terms of access, while the total availability of forest products has increased in all groups (albeit in different capacity), the chapter demonstrated that the access to products among the poor and the lower caste has not increased accordingly. Access to some subsistence products like leaf litter has improved, but that of other important products such as fodder, firewood and timber are still restricted. For those households with limited or no access to trees on their own land, and limited sources of cash income, the assignment of monetary values to a previously free good meant they would have to reduce the use of the product. The effect of assigning monetary value and of anomalies in product use rules is most pronounced among the poor. This is due to their proportionately high level of dependence on community forests for these products and their inability to claim the access rights because of insufficient income to pay. Because the gender division of labour requires women to depend more on forest products to perform their reproductive tasks, the restricted access to forest products hits poor women most, even within the same caste groups. Although rhetoric speaks of par-

ticipation of the poor and women and increased access to FUG benefits through the facilitation support of government and donor project, in reality, as the chapter has demonstrated, the poor, lower caste groups and women experienced consistent exclusion from access to and control over means of production. Caste-based structure and patriarchy further constrained Dalits and women to participate and benefit from the government and other external service providers including the donors.

Notes

1. The early forest policy framework, through this legislation, recognized two distinct forms of community forests. Panchayati Forests (PFs) were plantation forests, which were established largely on bare land by communities and subsequently protected by them. Panchayat Protected Forests (PPFs) were degraded natural forests which were to be rehabilitated primarily by community protection efforts (Gilmour 2003).
2. Scholars such as Gilmour (1990), and Gilmour and Fisher (1991) helped to legitimize the process by documenting the widespread existence of indigenous forest management systems similar to that of Chhetri Ban in other parts of the middle hills. These documentations provided much of the rationale for shifting the focus of community forest responsibility from Panchayat political units to forest users. It led to the preparation of a national legal framework for user group forestry that further legitimized both the local users and the forest officials to become involved in the community forestry process.
3. Being the first FUG formed in the district, Chhetri Ban received financial assistance from the Nepal Australia Community Forestry Project (NACFP) to hire a local forest guard for the initial five years after hand-over. The other two FUGs, however, did not receive external assistance from the project except for plantation and some training to samiti members.
4. Samiti members in Chhetri Ban felt that the fines were not necessary for them because of the two reasons. First, the forest is very close to the settlement and entering the forest is risky for the offenders, resulting to the rare cases of offences. Second, all FUG members (except seven Kami who are highly dependent on Chhetri for livelihoods) are descendents themselves. Though few households (including two Kami) had offended rules earlier, they were not fined but given the warning in consensus in samiti meetings. There is no evidence that samiti's decisions were objected to in the group.
5. Except in Chhetri Ban, user groups did not have accounts maintained in separate registers. Sources of data here include meeting minutes and discussion with respective chairpersons. Information was shared with the secretary and treasurer of the respective groups.

6. It is said that the demand to the donor project for a forest guard increased after the formation of Newar Ban and Sarki Ban. With the increased demand, the donor withdrew its direct support to Chhetri Ban and the user group started informal patrolling for the forest protection (personal communication, chairpersons, Sarki Ban and Chhetri Ban, 2002)
7. Resource assessment by forest officials during preparation of the recent operational plan (2000–01) clearly points out that Sarki Ban in its current state, cannot meet the needs of its users for firewood, fodder and timber.
8. The food-sufficient group include households who have been food self-sufficient for at least one year from their own produce. The insufficient group includes households that have not been food-sufficient for one year.
9. Two of the three user groups had not opened the forest regularly for firewood collection. Reasons varied. In Sarki Ban, it was due to the inability of users to call for a general assembly that sets timing for harvest as most of the samiti members were out of the village working as shoemakers in Kathmandu. In Chhetri Ban, it was mainly due to the inability of the group to revise their operational plan before the deadline set by the District Forest Officer, with the result that the harvesting was not authorized.
10. A few households (two with a landholding of 15-20 *ropani*) also sell timber from private trees within the village.

5

User Group Dynamics in a Terai Community

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is about the functioning of user groups and their impact on the Terai community. As seen in Chapter 3, significant variations exist between hill and Terai communities in terms of agrarian structures, social differentiation and forest resource use. These variations are expected to influence the local dynamics of user groups, producing different outcomes. Institutional attributes and distributional outcomes of institutions are assessed against the same criteria as mentioned in the methodology and used in Chapter 4.

Analysis is based on the detailed study of the three user groups in Rajhar, which is located in an inner Terai range of the Western region of Nepal. Unlike the hill village, the user groups in the Terai are not divided into separate clusters but are contiguous in nature. A large continuous block of the forest is divided into three community forests and allocated to three user groups. Members live in contiguous settlements and there is thus an overlap in membership, providing opportunities for individual households to be involved in more than one user group while many other households are excluded from them.

A similar strategy and methods were used for data collection and analysis as in the case of the hills. In addition, selected users (both men and women), key informants and other stakeholders were interviewed separately to document the informal rules and mechanisms that are practised and to understand the extra-local factors that tend to undermine formal rules and mechanisms of the institutions in ways that are significantly different from the hills. The chapter follows the same structure and sequence as Chapter 4.

5.2 Historical Background of Community Forestry

5.2.1 Forest degradation

The degradation of forests in Rajhar is said to have started in the 1960s along with the eradication of Malaria from the Terai belt. A few indigenous ethnic groups, who were resistant to the disease, were previously using the forests for subsistence living. The Malaria eradication programmes associated with government resettlement schemes and the East-West highway construction project resulted in an inflow of migrants. Oral history from elderly people in the village reveals that two types of migrants—those who received a land grant or purchased land, and the landless, who came as wage labourers in the agricultural and construction sectors—exploited forests in one way or another but in different capacities. The former exploited it for use at household level as firewood, fodder and timber. Some of them, with personal and political links to the state apparatus and business centres are also said to have been involved in timber smuggling. The latter type also exploited forests for their use. They cleared forests for settlement and cultivation without state approval. The land they occupy and cultivate is still not registered legally (called *ailani*, the issue of cultivating in unregistered land is discussed in Chapter 3). They also generated additional income by selling firewood, wild fruits and vegetables.

In addition, as in other parts of the Terai, Rajhar forest was also influenced by the unstable political situation of the country, especially during the last decade of the Panchayat regime (1980–90). Oral histories revealed that local Panchayat leaders encouraged squatters to settle in the forest and used them as a vote bank by making a false promise that they would register the land they occupied after the election. They also worked with local smugglers and timber contractors to generate the additional money required for the election campaign. Forest guards hired by the government were often unable to act against the big smugglers. When the movement against the Panchayat regime was at its peak, forest degradation was also fast. Even forest officials at higher levels took advantage of the situation and were making additional incomes.

Two brick factories were set up in the neighbouring village. The factories required a huge amount of wood to burn bricks and this forest was the only source. Government officials did not find people cutting timber for brick factories nor were they able to punish big timber smugglers with loads of Sal trees [*Shorea robusta*] in big trucks. Often, we saw forest officials turning a blind eye to the big smugglers because of the bribe that they had received. It was the poor immigrants who were caught and punished for selling firewood,

which they did to make a living. (An old man, a founder member of Kalika CF)

The trend of forest degradation and open grazing of livestock badly affected regeneration. There remained bare land with some Sal trees waiting to be felled. The government was completely unable to protect the forests from further degradation. Though the staff strength in the Terai belt was already higher than in hill districts, political and economic forces behind the scene resulted in government failure to control degradation (Hobley 1996, Malla 1996).

5.2.2 Introduction of user group forestry

While community forestry was already practised in the hills in the late 1980s, in Terai, neither government officials nor donors felt the need for it. Until the end of the 1990s, Terai forest was still seen by the state as a source of national revenue through forest-based industries and economic exploitation (Hobley 1996). Informal discussions with key informants revealed that the interests and introduction of the community forestry in Rajhar emerged when two local residents started campaigning for it in 1990. One was a lawyer and lecturer in a local college, and the other a new migrant from a hill district, who had been involved in a user group for five years in his native village and had significant knowledge and experience of it. Informal sharing of information and discussions between them and a few others resulted in a campaign to initiate informal protection of the forest and a team was formed for that purpose. The team was led by the lawyer who has remained chairperson of the user groups for the past four tenures. The protection campaign not only generated discussion about the importance of community forestry but also began a legal procedure for its establishment in Rajhar. The importance of community forestry was spread in the other belt of the district as well.

The informal protection group set some local rules to protect the forests from further destruction, including a complete restriction of tree felling, open grazing and the harvesting of firewood both for consumption and for market. The group also organized the plantation of about 6000 seedlings for the first time in 1991.

As the protection measures applied by the group were detrimental for many exploiting the forests (both for use at household level and for income), they actively protested against the group. The forest was officially under the control of the District Forest Office. Those who did not like the

work of informal group started questioning its legality and authority. The group encountered strong resistance, making rules difficult to enforce.

The ban on cutting firewood and on open grazing made women more aggressive. Each day, the committee faced groups of women who continued harvesting firewood and left animals for grazing. Fining a few of them further increased the conflict between the protection committee and the rest of the villagers. (Juddha Wagle, team leader of the protection committee)

Unlike Tukucha where forest officials were supportive of the local initiatives for protection, officials in Rajhar showed little interest. Protection team members had to use their personal and political linkages to influence forest officials for legal recognition of their efforts. This use of personal and political linkage has remained a major influential factor today, determining the functioning of user groups in Rajhar.

A mass meeting was called in 1992 to prepare the users list, and to draft the constitution and the operational plan for the user group that were necessary for hand-over of the forest. But the majority, mainly the firewood sellers, were unaware of the development. Those who were aware refused to attend the meeting as it would mean their acceptance of protection rules that restricted their regular access to the forest.

Only 28 households attended the first mass meeting, which was not sufficient for the formation of a user group from a big settlement of about 24 toles in the proximity of the forest. In order to increase the number, we included names of outsiders, including government employee, people of nearby villages or even from Narayanghat market in the list. We also recorded the same households more than once. Husband, wife and brothers were registered as separate user households in the list of users and were finally able to produce a list of 75 user households (The secretary, Kalika CF, 2002)

This user group formation process has had a tremendous effect even today, resulting in the permanent exclusion of many households, especially the poor. When traced back to households who did not attend the meeting, it provides evidence that lack of motivation and fear of losing their only source of livelihood generated by the forest were the main reason for self-exclusion. A poor man from a non-member household who used to sell firewood before the protection initiatives started and now makes living from stone crushing in a river explains:

They (the protection committee) had called us to a mass meeting for user group formation. But I thought attending the meeting is accepting rules, which restrict regular access to forest. First I did not understand why they were interested in protection of the forest, which was the task of the govern-

ment. When I knew they were taking this responsibility from government, I understood the immediate effect forest closure would have on my firewood business and that joining them was to accept the restriction imposed. Forest closure was going to leave us with a hungry stomach. I could not sleep the whole night due to the fear of the immediate loss of business.

Many poor migrants share similar stories where the lack of immediate benefits and the possibility of negative effects on their livelihoods discouraged them from participating in the user group formation process. Though they adopted strategies to counter the restrictive rules by organizing a series of protests and by defying the rule, they could not continue it for long. First, standing firm against the protection campaign led by the local village elite was difficult. Second, firewood selling was itself illegal even when the forest was under the control of the government.

5.2.3 Political influence and spill over effects

Forest officials showed reluctance to hand over the forests to the newly-formed user groups. This required the user group to use its political linkage to force forest officials to hand over.¹ Finally, the first user group was handed over in 1994 with natural Sal forest (205 ha) for protection and 375 ha of degraded Sal forest for protection.

After the hand-over, the new user group became more rigid on access rules and only allowed access to community forests to members of the group, which was composed of a few households of the three wards of the Bazaar area. After the restriction on the use of the forest in proximity, most poor people in Kalika who were not included in user group, turned to the neighbouring Wards for the forest products. On the one hand, people of adjacent Wards were worried about the increasing pressure on the forests of their proximity. On the other, there was a fear that the new community forest would increase the area of protection and would claim the remaining forest, making their entrance more restricted. In addition, the user group started to fine non-authorized users (mainly women and children) for the collection of fodder. All these factors forced adjacent wards to seek alternative options immediately. As a result, two other groups were formed, covering people who were not included in the earlier group. Like the earlier one, these user groups encountered resistance from local firewood sellers in implementing informal protection measures. Similar reluctance came from forest officials when asked to legalize the local initiative. However, as in earlier case, local village leaders used their personal contacts with higher government officials and political leaders to speed up the hand-over process.

5.2.4 User groups and their resource endowments

User groups own natural forests which are rich in economic terms, due to the abundance of tropical and sub-tropical timber species such as Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Sissoo (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and Khair (*Acacia catechu*). Most of them offer multiple uses for subsistence and for income. Table 27 provides the basic organizational and resource characteristics of three user groups under study.

Table 27 indicates three major characteristics of Terai user groups that are significantly different from those in the hills. First, they vary in the size of their resource endowment, but all are endowed with forests consisting of wide range of broad leaf species that have multiple uses. Second, all user groups are large and heterogeneous in caste and ethnic composition compared to those in Tukucha. Third, according to the assessment of the forest condition by the forest technicians, user groups in Rajhar (other than in Barpipal) have sufficient resources to meet the need of firewood, fodder and timber of its member households for use at household level.

There was a significant improvement in forest conditions after the hand-over to user groups. All received degraded natural forest with almost bare land. Lack of regeneration because of continuous harvesting and animal grazing remained the major reasons for the degraded condition of the forests. As protection initiatives in the FUGs regularized use and harvest of the products and free grazing was completely stopped, the degraded forest started regeneration. Current assessment of operational plans and observations from the villagers provide the evidence of significant improvement in the forests' conditions.

Table 27 also shows the interesting fact that the number of members during the hand-over of forest is significantly lower than the current membership. This applies to all user groups. As discussed earlier, lack of sufficient information and limited extension coverage, and the fear of immediate loss because of strict protection rules were the major reasons behind the reluctance of the majority of the poor households to join user groups when group formation was initiated.

I had never heard about the community forestry policy. Suddenly we found that some village leaders had decided to close the forest from use. Neither the rangers nor the village leaders tried to explain to us why they were doing so. I realized the benefits of becoming a member in the user groups only when the forest was handed over and the samiti restricted entry in the forests for non-members. (A new member of Kalika CF)

Table 27*Resource characteristics and other basic statistics on forest user groups, Rajhar*

	<i>Kalika</i>	<i>Phulbari</i>	<i>Barpipal</i>
Formal protection began (year)	1991	1995	1995
FUG formation (year)	1994	1995	1996
Forest handed over (year)	1994	1996	1996
Number of wards included	Three (1, 2, 7)	Five (3, 4, 5, 6 and lower belt of 8)	One (higher belt of 8)
Number of toles included in FUG	17	12	1
Size (in ha)	600 ha	354.7	46.4 ha
Number of user households			
▪ At the time of hand over	75	275	80
▪ Current membership	675	652	104
Density (area/HH)	0.89	0.54	0.44
Major ethnic groups (in percentage)	High caste (69) Dalits (8) Terai ethnic groups (14) Hill ethnic groups (9)	High caste (63) Dalits (4) Terai ethnic groups (14) Hill ethnic groups (19)	High caste (6) Dalits (25) Hill ethnic groups (67) Others (4)
Condition of forest during hand over	Degraded natural forest	Degraded natural forest	Degraded natural forest
Major five species in forest	Broad leaf species (<i>Sal</i> , <i>Saaj</i> , <i>Harro</i> , <i>Barro</i> , <i>Jamuna</i> , <i>Bamboo</i>)	Broad leaf species (<i>Sal</i> , <i>Saaj</i> , <i>Kadam</i> , <i>Chilaune</i> , <i>Bamboo</i>)	Broad leaf species (<i>Sal</i> , <i>Karam</i> , <i>Chilaune</i> , <i>Jamun</i> , <i>Bamboo</i>)
New plantation			
▪ Area	25 ha	4 ha	16.16 ha
▪ Plantation year	1991	1996	1998
▪ Planted Species	Sisau, Masaala, Bamboo, Amriso and Ipil Ipil	Sisau, Bakaino and Bamboo	Bamboo, Bakaino, Ipil-Ipil, Masaala and Badahar
Current forest status*			
▪ Thickness	Good	Medium	Good
▪ Age	Young, medium and matured natural trees	Young, medium and matured natural trees	Mostly medium
▪ State of generation	Good	Good	Good
Ability to meet demand for forest products	Yes	Yes	Not only from this forest

Note: Current and earlier forest status cited here is according to the technical assessment done by forest officials during the preparation and revision of Operational plans.

Source: Earlier and Current Operational Plans of respective user groups (2002)

Though the people's awareness of the provisions of community forestry was increasing in Rajhar after the formation of the first group, the groups formed later did not include all potential users. This is evident from the increasing number of members in all user groups compared to the period when they were formed. There are a significant number of households who are still excluded from membership.

Box 2

Potential benefits derived from involvement in user groups in the Terai

Direct product benefits

- Legal access to subsistence forest products (firewood, grass, fodder, timber and other minor products like Sal leaf, Khar) through membership and participation
- More productive resource base (land and forest) because of increased product availability and re generation of natural water source
- Increased productivity of land because of the flow of dried leaves from foot hills

Direct financial benefits

- Cash in the form of salary and allowances for Samiti members and office bearers
- Cash in the form of wages for poor and ordinary users
- Profits from the sale of products from an individual member's share

Indirect political and social benefits

- Improved political status and influence leading to a secured political career
- Improved social status and prestige through use of the decision making forum
- Personal development and capacity building
- Pride and identity

(Source: Interview with samiti members and group discussion with users in Rajhar)

5.3 Incentives for Forest Management

Terai forests are productive with high cash value and they are close to roads. The latter is important for transportation, processing and marketing the products. The combination of high cash-value timber with access to roads makes the Terai user groups significantly richer than in the hills. Active participation in groups enables members to control resources of high economic value, which is often associated with increased financial and political strength in the community. As a result, Terai user groups tend to be more

competitive, especially in representation and participation in the samiti and in access to the benefits obtained from it. A survey among the users and samiti members suggests that the involvement in the Terai forest management provides a wide range of direct and indirect benefits consisting of products, cash and social status (Box 2).

In principle, all members of user groups and of the samiti can claim equal access to all the incentives that are mentioned in the box above. In practice, however, incentives differ. While a direct benefit is an incentive for all the members in user groups (whether the member is in the samiti or not), indirect benefits in the form of social status and a secured political career apply mainly to samiti members and to advisors of user groups. This is because, being in the samiti, they can use their decision-making power and influence decisions to meet their political interests (a point that is elaborated in section 5.5.2). More importantly, the ability to claim incentives provided by user groups differs considerably among users even within the samiti. The following two sections provide a detailed account of the functioning of user groups and the influence of class, caste and gender relations within the group in shaping the member's ability to claim for incentives.

5.4 Institutional Attributes of User Groups and their Implications

5.4.1 Resource boundary as a matter of dispute

Unlike the hills, where forests are in small separate patches adjacent to the settlements making it easy to identify the boundaries, ownership of forest is contested in the Terai. This is mainly because the forest is a continuous block, making the identification of a clear boundary, agreeable to all parties through consensus, a difficult task. Though user groups in Rajhar have clearly defined boundaries for the forest resources they are endowed with, there is a tendency among user groups to limit the size of membership on the one hand and to increase the size of the forest on the other so that more forest products are available per member household. As a result, inter-group dispute is common in Rajhar.²

Setting the boundary of community forests in the Terai often involves a series of dialogues and, at times, use of financial and political power becomes important. Though in most cases, the political (administrative) boundary such as ward-level demarcation and the customary rights of those living within the proximity have been used to identify boundaries, in some cases, groups with strong leadership and political backing undermine both. For example, Kalika user group of ward 7 had claimed part of the forest

that falls in ward 8 of Rajhar Village Development Committee (VDC). Barpipal, which lies in upper belt of ward 8 stood against the claim on the grounds that people of that ward were using the forest products from the same forest. When meetings between user groups, the VDC officials and political representatives could not resolve the dispute, it was taken to the DFO. Finally the decision was made in favour of Kalika even though Kalika already had more forestland available per household (0.89 ha) than Barpipal (0.44 ha). Discussion with key informants clearly illustrates the importance of leadership in deciding the boundaries and the size of community forests in the Terai.

Kalika's chairperson is a lawyer and is an active political leader in the village. The user group is also rich in monetary terms. So they were able to bribe the forest officials who decided in favour of them. The chairperson of Barpipal is weak in dealing with forest officials. Perhaps Barpipal also did not spend money to bribe them. Thus it ended up losing the forest even when it clearly falls to them. (A school teacher, Rajhar, 2002)

The user groups with better resource status and strong leadership backed up by political linkages tend to influence decisions in their favour at the cost of others with relatively weaker leadership, especially when dealing with forest officials and related agencies.

Box 3

Criteria for membership in user groups, Rajhar

A household in the Terai is only eligible for membership if it meets the following criteria.

- Has permanent residency in the village
- Owns a piece of land and / or a permanent house in the respective ward, where the forest is located
- Has citizenship and migration certificate as evidence of local residence
- Has head of household aged 18 years and over
- Pays a membership fee as assigned by the user group

(Source: Constitutions of three user groups under study and interview with users in Rajhar, 2002)

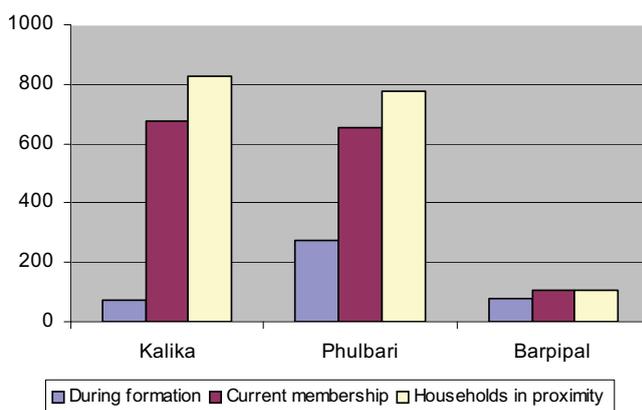
5.4.2 Membership criteria and exclusion of the poor and women

According to policy, members in the user groups need to be identified on the basis of proximity. Households in proximity to it, who use the forest and are willing to be involved in the group, are eligible to claim membership (HMG/N 1993). In practice, however, criteria vary among groups. Unlike in the hills, where membership was open to all households living in the settlement, in the Terai it is more formalized with a series of access criteria that tend to be exclusive in nature (Box 3).

While other criteria are similar, the membership fee varies among user groups. As the criteria above indicate, on the one hand, user groups in Rajhar tend to follow the political and geographical boundaries to determine the eligibility of households who wish to apply for membership. On the other hand, households need to pay a membership fee (also called share). These criteria are important in shaping distributive outcomes as they tend to include some and exclude others, especially the poor. In addition, as a newly established community, Rajhar still faces migration in and out of the village resulting in a less inclusive and less stable membership size.

Figure 19

Differences in user group size and households eligible for membership, Rajhar



Source: Records maintained by user groups and VDC

In principle, users of a particular forest bear the primary responsibility for defining criteria for membership in user groups. The criteria mentioned

above are also said to have been set by the people themselves in the first meeting. However, only a few households attended the first meeting, the majority being either unaware or unwilling to join. Thus the first meeting that decided the membership criteria cannot be considered representative. Next, in a highly differentiated and dynamic community like Rajhar where a few economically better-off and politically active households were leading the user group formation process, there is no doubt that the process of formulating criteria for membership was largely dominated by them. As a result, a large number of potential users have been excluded from membership from the beginning (Figure 19).

While a significant proportion of households are still unable to join the user groups because of their inability to pay, the fee for membership is continuously increasing (Table 28).

Table 28
Increase in membership fee in user groups, Rajhar

User groups	Membership fee (in Nepalese currency)	
	During the year of formation	Current (2002-03)
Kalika	275	1050
Phulbari	225	500
Barpipal	0	100

Note: 1 US\$ = 75 NRS

Source: Registers maintained in user groups and samiti members (2002)

As Table 28 indicates, the membership fee in Rajhar has increased two- to four-fold since their establishment. Though the forest policy does not mention the required payment of membership fees in user groups, neither the forest officials nor the village leaders have restricted the user groups in Terai to use fee payment as one of the criteria for membership. A survey of 150 households in the three user groups identified four types of households based on the membership status in Rajhar. They include:

Non-member households: those households who do not have legal membership in any of the user groups either because of lack of interest or because of their inability to meet the criteria. About 16% of the sampled households were found in this category and most reported inability to pay as a reason of their exclusion. Non-members do not have legal access to products or any other benefits deriving from the community forests.

Households with single membership: those households who have met the membership criteria and have secured access to forest products and other benefits. About 71% households are members in one of the three user groups in Rajhar and membership is granted to the head of the household.

Households with double membership: those households who pay membership fees equivalent to two user households. This was found common only in Kalika where about 35 households (out of 675) have more than one membership (up to 3) from the same household in the same user group.³ Households with double membership get access to a double share from any forest products distributed among the members. Though few in number, double membership has tremendous implications in the product distribution pattern in the user groups. Both husband and wife (and unmarried brothers in some cases) have been granted membership.

Households with membership in more than one user group: households who have land or houses in more than one ward belonging to different community forests. Such households, if interested to pay the membership fee, are eligible to get membership in more than one user group. About 12% of sampled households had membership in more than one user group. They were eligible to claim forest products and related benefits from all groups they were member in.

Class-caste dimension of membership

The analysis of membership distribution among different economic and social groups reveals that economic and caste position is important in determining a household's ability to claim membership (Tables 29 and 30).

Table 29
Distribution of membership by landownership category, Rajhar

Landownership category (<i>bigha</i>)	Membership status in user groups (in % within land category)			
	Non-member	Membership		
		Single	Double	More than one CF
Landless (n=14)	57	36	0	7
<0.5 (n=67)	21	67	0	12
0.51-1.0 (n=41)	5	84	0	10
1.1-1.5 (n=14)	0	79	0	21
1.51-3.0 (n= 8)	0	75	0	25
> 3.0 (n=6)	0	67	33	0

Source: Household survey (2002)

Table 29 shows a positive relationship between landownership and membership status in user groups. Among the landless, only 43% are members and more than 50% do not have membership. Among the land-poor households (with less than 0.5 *bigha* of land), only 79% are members of user groups. All landed households (with more than 1 *bigha* of land) are members, some of them have membership in more than one CF and some have double membership in the same CF. The fact that none of the households from landed category are excluded from membership—and are in fact even privileged with double memberships—and about 60% of landless are not members shows a clear influence of landownership on the distribution of membership in the user group when it comes to meeting the combined criteria related to land, houses and membership fee. Landless or those who live in *ailani* land often find it difficult to provide evidence of permanent occupancy in the village, an important formal criterion for membership in user groups. Providing membership for such households depend on the mercy of samiti members.

Table 30
Distribution of membership by caste and ethnicity, Rajhar

Caste/ ethnic category	Membership status in user groups (% within caste/ethnic category)			
	Non- member	Membership		
		Single	Double	More than one CF
Brahmin/ Chhetri n=71	4	86	3	7
Hill ethnic group n=37	14	68	0	18
Terai ethnic group n=16	25	44	0	31
Dalits n=21	48	48	0	4
Others n=5	40	60	0	0

Source: Household survey (2002)

As indicated in Chapter 3, landownership in Rajhar is positively associated with caste status and access to regular cash income. Among land-rich households, the proportion of Brahmin/Chhetri is higher. They also enjoy access to lucrative non-farm employment, mostly in government or business sectors because of their historically-determined personal relations and relatively better access to political structures and the state bureaucracy compared to other caste groups. This association is also reflected in the distribution of membership where a large proportion (96%) of high caste groups

(Brahmin/Chhetri) has membership in at least one FUG. On the other hand, about 48% of the Dalits do not have membership in any user group (Table 30).

The high rate of exclusion among the land-poor and the Dalits can be explained in two ways. First, a significant proportion of land-poor households depend entirely on wage labour to meet the family food requirements. Since a major portion of their income goes to buy food grain, they cannot invest cash to buy membership in the user groups. Because of the isolation from economic and social spheres, Dalits also have limited access to information and awareness about user-group formation compared to other caste groups. Among non-members, their inability to pay the membership fee has remained an important reason for exclusion for about 74% of households. This was followed by the lack of proper information during group formation (13%). The following statement from a landless man who is not a member but lives within five minutes walking to Phulbari community forest explains:

The membership fee was less in the beginning. But I was not convinced earlier about the ban on grazing for the sake of community forest. Now I am convinced that membership is necessary to benefit from the group but the fee is high. I do not own land and I need to buy food grains from the wage I get working in other's farm. There is no saving at all. I cannot buy the membership now though I want to do so.

Some Dalits, mostly landless migrants who came after the formation of the user groups, are denied membership because of their inability to show evidence of permanent occupancy. Next, an individual's decision to buy membership in a user group is shaped by the incentives that emerge from economic and institutional arrangements. The landless and land-poor households who spend a major portion of their income on food grains cannot afford buying quality forest products obtained from the community forests even if they have membership. By-products and gleanings obtained from the silvicultural operations in the forest are usually accessible for both member and non-member households provided. This issue will be illustrated in later sections. It discourages poor households from investing in membership, especially when there are other priorities such as food and children's education. About 12% of non-members were discouraged from membership for this reason.

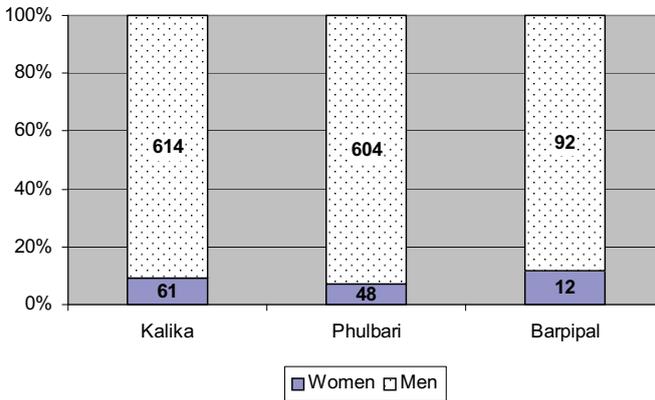
Non-members often show their dissatisfaction with the increasing fee, rigid membership criteria and their inability to join the group but as they have no legal rights to participate in assembly, concerns raised by them on an individual basis are not heard or discussed properly. Usually, requests for

membership come individually to some samiti members. There were also a few cases in the past where some influential samiti members, on their own initiative, have provided membership to non-members on an individual basis. But often such initiatives and decisions are taken as charity on the part of samiti members, not by recognizing the rights of the individual for membership. This again creates the opportunity for a few influential samiti members to strengthen already existing unequal economic and political relations.

Gender dimensions of membership

Over and above class and caste specificity, the membership criteria outlined by user groups have important gender outcomes. As mentioned earlier, officially, about 80% of households in Rajhar are headed by men. The others include households where men are permanently absent, either because of death or because of permanent employment elsewhere. However, a significant proportion of households (about 40%) have *de facto* women heads where men migrate on a seasonal basis in search of wage labour and the women manage houses for most part of the year. These *de facto* heads, the majority of which are poor and Dalit, are not considered for membership. As a result, the proportion of women in the membership list is significantly low varying from 8–15% (Figure 20).

Figure 20
Proportion of men and women in user groups, Rajhar



Source: Records maintained by user groups (2002)

Membership criteria set by user groups do not restrict it to men. But given the enormous differences and inequality between men and women, especially in access to and control over productive resources and their sphere of involvement, the person who represents the household in the user group is mostly the man. Patriarchal structure that determines control over means of production also determines who in a household gets membership in user groups.

In this village, households are recognized by the name of men, most commonly by the name of the father, husband or son because land, house or any other important transaction takes place in their name. As women are recognized in relation to men as wife, mother, daughter and daughter-in-laws, their names are hardly known to the public. When a woman's name is not known, it is not possible to include it in the list unless a husband or a son wants it specifically included. The man's name is automatically entered on the list of users as we do not ask the individual household for their choice of name to be entered on the list. (The chairperson of Rajhar VDC who is also secretary of Kalika CF)

The subordinate position of women in the households and men's perception of the ability of women in decision-making also affects their membership.

In a male-headed household, it is always men who decide whether to take membership or not in the user group. Women make decisions only when they are widow or when their husbands are out for longer periods. So there is no point writing a woman's name in the list. Even if we write her name, she cannot decide anything on her own. When men are the decision-makers, there is no point in listing women's names unless they are very much interested on this. (An advisor of Kalika user group, who is also a district level political leader)

This clearly shows the reluctance of men to include women in the membership list. Though the unit of membership is the household, only that member of the household whose name is registered in the list can legally claim benefits associated with the user group. Women, who in practice bear the full responsibility of household head but who are (officially) unrecognized, are most likely to suffer from this. Because they lack legal membership, they are not in a position to participate in user's assemblies, to be in the samiti or to access resources on their own. User groups devise local rules that allow other members of a household to represent absentee member but they are often restrictive, especially in terms of participation in decision-making (Box 4).

Box 4**Local rules for the representation in user groups from member households, Rajhar**

Local rules for participation can be divided into four major areas and rules vary depending upon the purpose.

- a. Providing a contribution (labour and other): This does not require authorization from the concerned member. Very often, women and other adult members in the family (also children) participate in forest improvement/management activities even when men are present in the village during the specified period.
- b. Claiming products from the forest: In order to claim products, other members of household should have an authorization letter (*manjurinama*) from the member whose name is registered in the list.
- c. Attending the user assembly: Under normal conditions when the assembly does not involve major decision making, any adult member of a household can take part and put their concern. But if it requires voting, only the member whose name is in the list can participate.
- d. Candidacy and participation in the samiti: Only the member whose name is registered in the user group has legal rights to put him/herself forward as a candidate. Similarly, if the selection of Samiti members involves voting, only he/she can take part. Participation in a Samiti meeting or any events that involves decision making is restricted to the person registered in the membership list.

(Source: Interview with samiti members and review of meeting minutes, 2002)

The rules shown in the box are not written into the constitution or operational plans but have been in practice since the user groups began and have a significant distributive impact. The impact was realized at least at two levels, the intra-household and household level. Due to the denial of direct access to products and access to decision-making, other members of the household have lost their inherent rights to unmediated access to communal forests. This is in denial of their basic human rights to express their opinion on the management and utilization of communal property. On the other hand, rules for representation that requires women and other family members to contribute labour without any stake in decision-making further exploits them with an increased work burden.

I go patrolling and work during management operations. If I do not work on management activities, I am not eligible to collect firewood and fodder. I used to attend user's assemblies in the absence of my husband. But during the assembly last year, samiti members said I am not an authorized member and thus cannot vote. This year, I did not go. Why should I spend the whole day when I am not authorised for vote or to make decisions. (A poor woman, who is a *de facto* head of household in Phulbari group)

A significant number of women share a similar experience of exclusion. They take on the extra burden of contributing labour with no stake in decision-making. Current provisions for participation in the user's assembly and samiti affect not only women but also the welfare of the entire household, especially among the poor who cannot maintain their presence even for important events like elections in the user group. For example, one of the three user groups held an election in 2001 when it could not reach consensus on the selection of samiti members. Three candidates stood for the position of chairperson. Of 623 eligible households of the user group, only 351 households (56%) used their voting rights. The first candidate received 242 votes and the other two received 70 and 39 respectively. The remaining 272 (44% of eligible households) did not participate in the election—had they participated, the outcome of the election might have been different. (Personal communication, chairperson of Phulbari CF).

The major portion of the households who did not participate in the voting was from the land-poor category. Seasonal migration is common for poor households in the village. In most of them, male members (mainly husbands) were out working in other cities or in bordering Indian cities during the election. Representatives from such households were not eligible to participate in the voting nor were they eligible as candidates.

When the voting took place last year, there were some concerns raised in the meeting about the large number of absentee members. Women from these households also asked for voting rights. But the election commission, which was formed locally, did not accept it saying that it would be against the law of democratic process (*prajatantra*) which allows only authentic members to vote. (The chairperson of the user group who was elected)

The issue of membership and rules related to participation has remained an important concern in Rajhar for the last few years but are unaddressed. Though the absence of men from the village is not confined to the poor, as many men from the non-poor households also reside outside the village because of their regular employment, often they attend, especially when the groups are dealing with important issues. The poor who work as wage labour cannot afford it as the cost of participation affects their livelihood.

5.4.3 Samiti composition and the influence of class and gender relations

Composition of the samiti

Representation in the samiti is important since these are the people who make decisions that affect the forest condition and the welfare of ordinary

users. An analysis of the composition of the samiti indicates the domination of middle-class high-caste men (Table 31).

Though Dalits comprise a significant proportion of the population in Rajhar, they are not in the samiti. Table 31 indicates three different scenarios in caste composition of samiti but in each case, caste hierarchy within the user group is found influential in determining representation. Where the user group consists of a large proportion of high caste Brahmin/Chhetri, the samiti is composed entirely of them. When the samiti is heterogeneous in terms of caste composition, key positions (e.g. chairperson, secretary and treasurer) are always held by Brahmin/Chhetri. In one user group (Barpipal), where the proportion of Brahmin/Chhetri is minimum (only 6%), the samiti is composed of hill ethnic groups (Tamang) and there is no representation from the Dalits who comprise about 25% of user group's population. This suggests that the caste hierarchy within the user group plays an important role in determining who is represented in the samiti and that it is always the higher caste that dominates the composition.

Though user groups consist of a large proportion of the land-poor, less educated and food-deficient households, the majority of samiti members are land-rich, relatively more educated and belong to food-sufficient households. Similarly, in each user group, most samiti members are either regular employees in the government and non-government sectors or are engaged in business; both types of engagements are highly sought after because of the high level of income, social status and prestige in the society. Table 31 also indicates a positive association between involvement in samiti and involvement in other voluntary organizations.

As in the hill village case study, the key positions are occupied mostly by men who have access to education, employment and political structures. All key position holders of samiti receive income from monthly salary, pension or from their involvement in business and own land where they produce grain sufficient for family subsistence or even for surplus. The economic strength of these households can also be observed in the village from the big concrete houses they live in and their involvement in large number of political and volunteer organizations of different sectors. As Chapter 3 has shown, due to the scarcity of cultivable land in Rajhar, there exist unequal relations between a tenant and a landowner. Similarly, there is a gap in social status between the labour-selling and labour-buying households in the village. When characteristics of key decision-makers in the samiti was analysed from this perspective, a majority belonged to the latter category (Figure 21).

Table 31
The socioeconomic composition of samiti in Rajhar

Attributes	Composition (in percentage)					
	Kalika		Phulbari		Barpipal	
	FUG n=56	Samiti n=11	FUG n=63	Samiti n=13	FUG n=31	Samiti n=11
Sex						
Male	91	82 (CST)	92	85 (CST)	87	82 (CST)
Female	9	18	8	15	15	18
Caste groups						
Brahmin/Chhetri	69	100 (CST)	63	69 (CST)	6	0
Hill ethnic groups	9	0	19	31	65	100 (CST)
Terai ethnic groups	14	0	14	0	0	0
Dalits	8	0	4	0	25	0
Others	0	0	0	0	4	0
Landholding (in bigha)						
Landless	9	0	10	0	10	0
< 0.5	50	0	29	0	67	27
0.51 - 1.0	25	46	32	46 (C)	10	64 (ST)
1.0 - 1.5	7	27 (S)	16	23	3	0
1.51 - 3.0	7	27 (CT)	6	23 (ST)	10	9 (C)
> 3.0	2	0	7	7	0	0
Food sufficiency level of household						
Sufficient/surplus	66	100 (CST)	64	100 (CST)	13	67 (CST)
Insufficient	34	0	37	0	87	23
Education level						
Illiterate	18	0	18	0	35	18
Just literate	51	40	55	38	59	28
Primary	2	10	7	7	3	18 (C)
Secondary	9	20	16	54 (CST)	3	36 (ST)
Higher education	18	40 (CST)	5	0	0	0
Source of non-farm income						
Monthly salary	39	36 (CS)	30	31 (S)	16	9 (C)
Pension	5	10 (T)	8	15	6	0
Business/ enterprise	22	18	10	39 (CT)	10	37 (ST)
Remittances	4	0	11	15	6	0
Wage labour	11	0	17	0	23	9
None	19	36	24	0	39	45

Involvement in voluntary organizations (other than FUG)			
3 and more	82 (CST)	54 (CST)	28 (CS)
1-2	18	38	36 (T)
None		8	36

Note: Data on gender composition is taken from whole FUG population but that on other attributes come from sampled population. CST represents Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

Source: Household survey and Structured questionnaire interview with samiti representatives, Rajhar 2002.

Figure 21
The socioeconomic positioning of key position holders in samiti, Rajhar



n= 9 (including Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer of three user groups)

Source: Household survey (2002)

Except the treasurer of Barpipal, no key decision-makers cultivate other’s land or sell family labour for subsistence. Rather, as in Tukucha, they often rent out land to land-poor and a majority hire labour during peak agricultural season, indicating their economic and political strength in the agrarian community. Such economic and social strengths of key position holders in samiti are important in determining decision-making process in user groups and their outcomes. This issue is discussed further in later sections.

Most landless and the poor members think they are not eligible to be member of samiti simply because they are very poor. When a landless mi-

grant, Ram Kumal, who has lived within five minutes walking distance from community forests for the last 15 years and who participates in patrolling and silvicultural activities in the forest, was asked whether he is interested to stand for election for the samiti member, he explained:

My god! Landless migrants are not eligible even to work as forest guards in the community forests. How is it possible to stand for the samiti election? Participating in the samiti is like a fruit in the sky, mostly out of reach for the poor (*sukumbasi lai chaukidar ta painna, samiti ma kasari sambhab chha ra? Tjo ta hamro lagi aakash ko phal ho...*)

Such a perception of domination and power relations between the poor and the non-poor members affect the poor's interest and ability to participate.

Influence of party politics in samiti composition

As in Tukucha, most samiti members were found to be involved in more than two non-forest-related voluntary organizations in Rajhar but the nature of voluntary involvement differs between the locations. While in Tukucha, most samiti members were involved in non-political organizations such as farmers' groups, women's organizations and youth clubs, in Rajhar, about 75% of samiti members including all chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers were persons involved actively in a political party at village or district level. This indicates towards more possibilities of political influence in the functioning of user groups in the Terai compared to the hills.

Samiti are formed by nomination, selection being by consensus or by election. During the early years of user-group formation, assemblies used to select samiti members by consensus. However, with the increasing size of the user groups and the increasing number of people interested in being representatives, the selection of samiti from a mass meeting becomes increasingly difficult.

In the initial years, a few advisors and village political leaders would propose a list of people to represent in the samiti and the user's assemblies would endorse the list. But in later years, as the funds of the user group increased, a meeting allowance and salary was introduced for samiti members. It resulted in an increase in interest to participate in the samiti, making it increasingly difficult to arrive at consensus without election. The last two samiti were formed by election. But the election process also came under the political party pressure. Each political party had its own panel for the samiti. Users were also divided according to political ideology. When one panel won, another panel did not support them. Also those samiti members who were elected started showing to favour only those who campaigned or supported them in the election. Conflict increased within the user group resulting in frequent changes in the

samiti. With such bad experience, we again decided to form the samiti by consensus amongst major political parties. (The secretary, Kalika CF)

The interest of users in participating in the samiti increases as the funds increase. Except in Barpibal, political parties have a determining influence in samiti composition.

The current samiti (2001–02) is formed by consensus among the Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal United Marxists Leninists (CPN UML) and National Democratic Party (RPP), which are the major political parties in the village. The selection of samiti members was done well ahead of the general assembly by a joint meeting of leaders of these parties. All major positions were then divided among the party representatives. Usually if one party takes chairperson, another claims the position of the secretary. The current samiti has a chairperson from the NC, vice-chair from RPP and secretary from CPN (UML). This list of samiti members was proposed to the assembly for endorsement. Since the list included names of economically and politically powerful [*thata batha*] members of the community and all political parties had representatives, ordinary members did not raise any objection to the proposed list. (The secretary of Kalika group who is also a village-level political leader)

Unlike the hills, where changes in samiti and the formation of new samiti are rare, in Rajhar they were frequently changed but the majority of the members found in the samiti had served more than twice, indicating an established interest to remain in the position.

Gender dimension of samiti composition and decision-making

The proportion of women in samiti ranges from 15–18%—higher than their proportion in FUGs members. As in Tukucha, these women fill mandatory positions in the samiti. However, there are significant differences between locations on the type of women who serve in samiti. First, while in Tukucha, women samiti members belonged mainly to poor and female-headed households, in Rajhar they are all high caste and belong to the non-poor male-headed households. Women samiti members in the Terai were also actively involved in local political parties through their husbands.

Second, in contrast to Tukucha where all women samiti members used forest products from the community forests and thus were directly involved in collecting them, in Rajhar, women samiti members were not involved in collection and use of firewood and fodder, the most basic forest products of interest to women. They all used a gas (or kerosene) stove to cook for the family. A few hired labourers (*berali*) for the care of livestock, while others do not keep livestock and thus do not need fodder and grass.

In terms of attending samiti meetings, they were more regular than those in Tukucha in attending the meetings (Table 32).

Though Table 32 and the discussion above indicate better women's representation and participation in the Terai user groups, how effectively these women represent their constituency and the interests of the majority of women users is questionable. Most of their arguments are influenced by their husbands and are not necessarily in their own interests.

Women need their husband's support to take part actively in any public events like assemblies and samiti meetings. If your husband encourages you, society and even other family members do not comment or discourage. But if husband is against your actions, then you can do nothing. My husband, who is a government employee in Kathmandu, encouraged me to participate in the samiti. Personally, he is very interested to participate but his job requires him to stay away from home most of the time. I was not personally interested to get involved in user groups, as I never go to the forest to collect firewood and fodder. But my husband suggested I give the candidacy in the election and said participating in the samiti is good for personal development and social status. First I hesitated but he persuaded me and I won the election. (Sita Sharma, a woman samiti member, Phulbari CF)

Table 32
Average number of samiti meetings and attendance, Rajhar

	No. of samiti meetings		Total no. of participants in samiti meetings		
	Total	Average per year	Men	Women	Average per meeting
Kalika	242	35	3711 (88%)	498 (12%)	17
Phulbari	85	17	928 (95%)	50 (5%)	12
Barpipal	75	15	677 (81%)	159 (19%)	11

Note: Average number of participants also include advisors and sub committee members, thus the number is more than the size of samiti.

Source: Registers and meeting minutes maintained by user groups (2002)

Four out of the six women samiti members said their decision to participate reflected the interests of their husbands. In this sense, more women in the samiti and their regular attendance in meetings (at least better than the hill situation) is not necessarily an indication of improved gender relations.

When the quality of their participation in the samiti was analysed from a gender perspective, it was noted that some women members are influential in decision-making. Observation also shows that it is not their gender that makes the difference, it is the economic and political positions of their household. What is important is not whether the samiti member is a man or a woman but which family he/she belongs to. People do not listen to the poor or a Dalit or a woman one's husband does not like. First, such women can never be in samiti and even if they are, they can never speak. People highly value a woman's proposal if she is from a rich and high-caste household or a politically active woman. Maya Khadka, a woman samiti member of Kalika CF and wife of a political leader in Rajhar, explains:

If you are lucky enough to have a rich husband with good political status, you belong to same class [*barga*] and people give same respect to you. Women's own personality also matters but more important is her husband's status in the village when it comes being heard in the meeting. Personally, as a woman, I do not feel any difficulties raising my voice in a meeting. The samiti listens and takes account of what I propose. Last year, I proposed to use the user group's fund for temple and small pond construction and the samiti approved it. This year, when I proposed a grant for the construction of a building for *ama samuha* [Mother's group], the samiti approved it too. This is my second tenure in the samiti and till now, no one has argued against any proposal I made. If my husband were not the leader of the village, no one would have listened to me.

While women give importance to their husband's position and support for them to participate effectively, men are less confident about women's ability of contributing in user-group management. Like others, one of the influential samiti members in Kalika user group says:

Women are not capable of managing a large amount of revenue raised from the sale of timber because they are less educated and are not experienced on this. Even if we keep more number of women in the samiti, they need help and suggestions from their husbands for each and every decision. Women are kept in the samiti because the constitution requires it. In fact, it is still their husbands who indirectly influence decisions through their wives. (Ram Khadka, an advisor for Kalika CF)

Such attitudes, considering men more capable than women in decision-making, are rooted in historically-defined and maintained gender roles and women's subordinate position in their households and community. Though these problems are more critical in the hills, user groups in Terai are also not immune to the same tendencies.

5.4.4 User's assembly and decision-making mechanism

As mentioned earlier, user groups usually function in two tier structures: the general body of member household and an executive committee (*samiti*). However, in the Terai where a group usually consists of more than 500 users, it maintains multi-tier structures with sub-groups (*upa samuha*) and sub-committees (*upa samiti*), formed under the group and *samiti* respectively. Multi-structures are common features especially in large groups in the Terai, where meetings of sub-group representatives and sub-committee members replace many functions carried out by the assemblies.

Though sub-groups and sub-committees are necessary for effective implementation of product rules, the provisions for group leader representing the interests of ordinary users have tremendous implications for access of the poor and Dalits in the decision-making process. The provision restricts an ordinary member's direct access to decision-making processes. In a differentiated agrarian society like that of Rajhar, the poor and the weaker sections of the communities cannot always raise their concerns with the group leaders who mostly belong to the non-poor and politically influential high caste men. Even when they put their concerns to the leaders, it is more likely that their concerns are filtered out in the process and only a few, those the group leaders are convinced about, are brought to the assemblies. In cases where the concerns are brought to the meeting, the absence of the real users who raised the concern further reduces the chances of their being heard and acted upon. The discussion below further illustrates these issues.

Table 33
Average number of user's assemblies and attendance, Rajhar

	User groups		
	<i>Kalika</i>	<i>Phulbari</i>	<i>Barpipal</i>
Year of hand over	1995	1997	1997
Total no. of assemblies	12	5	5
Average no. of assemblies per year	1.7	1	1
Average no. of attendants in assembly			
Total	239	270	78
(% of total no. of attendants)	(35)	(41)	(75)
Male (%)	89	93	65
Female (%)	11	7	35

Source: Registers maintained by user groups (2002)

Class and caste dimension of participation

An analysis of users' attendance in assemblies reveals that though the latter are called regularly (and sometimes more frequently as in the case of Kalika), on average, less than 50% of users attend (Table 33).

As Table 33 illustrates, except in Barpipal, the two other user groups already suffer from low attendance of both men and women in assemblies. Two interrelated factors explain the difference between groups. The attendance of members is lower in groups where users are supposed to bring concerns through sub-group leaders. In Barpipal, individual's attendance is made mandatory in order to raise any concerns in the assembly. The next factor is related to the group composition in terms of religion. The Barpipal user group comprises mainly Tamang and Dalit. The majority (about 90% of households in the village) are Christian who assemble in a local church every Friday. Chairperson of the user group is the religious leader who performs prayer in the church. Usually, user group-related announcements and meetings take place on Friday at church after the prayer. This also explains the higher attendance of women (35%) in Barpipal compared to 7–11% in the two other user groups. The other two groups are heterogeneous in terms of religion they follow. Though most people are Hindu, they do not use temples for user-group matters. This further emphasizes the importance of community attributes determining group's functioning. However, even in Barpipal, all men and women who attend assemblies do not stay till the decisions are made (personal communication, the chairperson, Barpipal CF).

Various economic, institutional and socio-cultural factors explain the low attendance and participation of men and women in assemblies. Poor households, who meet major proportion of their food requirements from wage labour within and outside the village, hardly know about the time and purpose of assemblies. Even when they do know, they find it difficult to devote the whole day to the meeting. As in Tukucha, the opportunity costs of time are higher for them than for the non-poor members. The concept of sub-groups that requires that they bring their concerns through leaders further demotivates ordinary users, who are mostly poor. Their attendance makes no difference to the decisions.

Views of ordinary users are never heard in the assemblies. The samiti advisors [*tatha batha*] and group leaders discuss first and decide all the agenda. They even decide the selection of the next samiti members before the assembly takes place. Users' assemblies are called just for the formality. There is no need to attend a meeting where everything is decided beforehand. (Ram Hamal, a poor user from Kalika)

The attitude and perception of power relations is another important factor influencing participation. Poor users—the lower caste groups in particular—do not feel comfortable speaking in front of local village leaders and remain silent even when they attend the meetings.

I attend assemblies as I want to know what people decide and see if it benefits me. I need some timber to repair my house. My children sleep on the mud floor because of the lack of *kbat* [bed frame]. I cannot afford buying timber from the samiti office as the price is too high for me. Only the assembly can decide on pricing matters and subsidies. The secretary suggested bringing the concern to the assembly through the group leader of my tole. I shared it with him and I do not know whether he took it to the samiti. The assembly has not discussed on this issue. I cannot raise my personal problem freely in front of people in the assembly. When all big village leaders [*thula bada*] discuss how to protect forests from theft and how to raise money for development, it is not good to raise issue for personal benefit. They decide as they think appropriate. They are more knowledgeable and they know what is good for the community. (Sita Ram VK, a poor Dalit user of Phulbari who attends but never speaks in the assemblies)

Analysis of meeting minutes further indicates that the discussions in user assemblies focus more on technical and bureaucratic organizational management issues, including revision of the constitution, auditing and relationships with other organizations. Often, assemblies assign the samiti to discuss and decide on issues related to product use rules, mainly the pricing and timing of the harvest of major products which are of interest to the poor and women.

Less representation and less participatory decision-making are common not only in a multi-level structure of the user groups but also in groups where the attendance and participation of ordinary members are made mandatory. For example, some user groups organize tole-level meetings—consisting of a smaller number of members—prior to the assembly meeting to facilitate effective participation of all members.⁴ Studies indicate that tole meetings are more effective in raising users' attendance, in bringing a wider range of issues into the discussion and facilitating effective participation of poor and marginalized groups (LFP 2005b). However, evidence from Rajhar suggests that tole meetings are effective in raising users' attendance but are not sufficient to ensure that issues from individual members are heard and addressed in the final decisions. This is because recommendations made by small tole-level meetings often remain in the proceedings and are filtered out in the process that leads up to actual decisions.

For example, in 2002, a Phulbari user group in Rajhar was in the process of revising its constitution and operational plans (OP), including product access rules. The users' assembly formed an *ad hoc* committee for this purpose, composed of a few samiti members and other educated and active members of the group. The committee was given a mandate to collect users' feedback and suggestions for the revision. A series of small meetings were organized among users to get feedback.

In addition to various small changes, tole meetings suggested the following major changes. In the constitution, they suggested a provision that would give membership to the household, not to the person, so that representatives from the member households can participate in decision-making if the head is absent. On the operational plan, discussions took place regarding the amount of application fee and the pricing of products. Three of the five tole meetings proposed lowering the application fee from Rs 50 to Rs 25 (i.e., *maag dastur*, which is non-refundable and paid to make formal demands for timber to cover the administrative costs). Regarding prices of the products, one tole meeting recommended different prices of timber for different user categories depending on economic status and ability to pay. The existing price for timber was Rs 300 per cft for members and Rs 450 per cft for non-members. It suggested reducing the price for the poor and keeping the same price for the non-poor.

When the proceedings of the tole meetings were published, the changes proposed during these discussions were not there. The chairperson of the user group explained the reason:

When the proposal was discussed in the samiti, some members and advisors strongly opposed the idea of having different prices. They argued that if different prices for products are introduced, it may create conflict among users, as all users want to claim lower prices. It may also reduce the size of FUG fund. Similarly, the idea for providing voting rights for representative was also discarded on the grounds that voting rights are purely an individual matter. It must be reserved for the person whose name is on the list. When both the samiti members and advisors rejected the proposed changes, I decided to take that issue out from the proceeding because keeping these things in paper and not following might create tension later.

The discussion illustrates that the samiti has the power to include—or not to include—suggestions made in small tole-level meetings, and can make the decisions in its (Samiti members') favour at the expense of interests of ordinary users. The majority of poor and lower caste users feel excluded and claim that the samiti's decisions on the use of forest products rarely reflect their interests and priorities. However, they rarely attempt to

raise their voices against it, especially when there is a possibility of negative consequences on their livelihood. Ram Hamal, a poor user in Kalika explains:

The samiti does not like users who argue against its decisions in the assembly. In the past two assemblies, I raised the misuse of timber by a few samiti members and argued that the poor should get some timber free of cost or at least at lower prices when there is ample timber in the office and the samiti is selling to outside villages. I used to work as a wage labourer in the forest during the timber harvest season. This has stopped as some samiti members no longer want to hire me as wage labour. They might have thought that I would disclose the illegal sale of timber they were involved in. I have learnt a lesson now that I should not attend assemblies because if I attend, I speak, and the samiti does not like it. When they do not like it, my family suffers, as I lose the opportunity to work in the forest.

This further confirms the discrepancies between what is on paper and what actually happens in practice. Though formal rules allow all users to participate effectively in the assemblies, there are informal mechanisms that dominate formal rules, making it difficult for poor users to influence decisions. Some environmental factors—such as time, venue and access to information—further constrain the attendance of the poor users. The following statement, made during an informal discussion by a political leader in Rajhar (who is also the secretary of one of the user groups), shows the influence of informal mechanisms on decision-making when time becomes a major constraint for the poor and for women to participate in assemblies, resulting in a lack of effective participation.

When the samiti announces an assembly meeting, the majority of members attend. The samiti immediately asks them to put their signature (or finger print if they are illiterate) in the register book maintained in the office. Then starts the formal procedure including welcoming the participants, a briefing on the objectives of the meeting, speeches from invitees, advisors, sharing progress reports and some very formal events like honouring guests and invitees. The formal session usually takes about 2–3 hours. The users, mainly those who need to get back for wage labour and those who need to take care of household chores, children and farming, leave the meeting during the formal session and they do not return. After the end of the session, we serve some tea and snacks in the meeting. At the end of tea, we find only about 20–25 people left, mostly samiti or advisory board members. Decisions take place only among these people who stay until the meeting ends. Later when samiti makes the decisions public, most of the users do not even know the decisions were made in the meeting they attended. Usually people feel bored listening to

formal speeches and cannot afford the time, as they need to get back to their work. (The secretary of Kalika CF who is also a politician)

Some women members, who attend meetings regularly but never stay for the whole day meeting, also commented:

We would prefer to have discussion on forest-related matters and decisions first and speeches later. But who listens to us? The samiti needs our signature and after that there is no value of members in the assemblies.

Not all samiti members agree to the domination of the samiti in decision-making and there is also evidence of wider participation from the register book maintained in the office that contains signatures of more than 66% of the total users. The reality however remains the same.

Whatever is maintained in the register and said in the constitution, it is only the samiti and even in the samiti, only a few influential members, who make decisions on the use and management of forest products. One can find signatures of 66% or even more users having signed in the register. These are the legal tools that we need to maintain at the office. But actually those who have put their signatures on the register know very little about the decisions made and written in the register (The secretary of Kalika CF who is also the VDC chairperson)

The decision-making process in user groups does not vary significantly. All have similar formal arrangements on paper but similar domination of informal mechanisms follow in reality. These processes together make decision-making mechanisms in Terai less representative and less participatory. The poor and the Dalits hardly have any influence on discussions in the assembly and decisions.

In terms of the samiti, most members—irrespective of class and gender identity—attend the meeting regularly. All user groups devise a local rule providing meeting allowances. The allowance ranges from 80–100 rupees a day. While the intention of these allowances is to compensate samiti members for the time invested in the meeting, the allowance has been an important incentive for many samiti members to stand for election and to attend the meeting regularly (personal communication, ex-chairperson of Phulbari user group).⁵ However, not all samiti members have same level of participation and influence over decisions. The ability of members to influence decisions varies significantly. Often people endowed with better economic conditions and political positions in the community influence most decisions, irrespective of the positions they hold in the samiti. Even some advisors, who are mostly ex-samiti members, influence decisions while other members have a limited say. An analysis of the awareness of and participation in

decision-making among samiti members indicates that about 50% of samiti members are unaware of important decisions like investments and the use of funds and that the few who are aware, are in no position to influence them. Often the persons I spoke to said, the chairperson and secretary, who are politically active village leaders, dominate decisions.

Gender dimensions of participation

Except in Barpibal, women have even lower attendance rates, ranging from 7–11% in the assemblies. The situation is due to a series of interrelated sociopolitical and institutional factors. First, as discussed earlier in the membership section, only about 12% of women in Rajhar are registered as authentic users in the users' list though they constitute about 51% of the population. Low membership affects their participation in the assemblies. As said earlier, the local rules devised to represent absentee member in assembly do not allow a representative to participate in decision-making, especially when it involves voting.

Women are highly valued during the assembly. If women do not attend the assemblies, the samiti cannot meet the quorum because usually men cannot come from their work just to attend meetings. But when the quorum is reached, nobody cares about women. Women are not allowed to vote on behalf of husband but are counted when there is a need to make quorum. (Shova Adhikari, a *de facto* head of household and user of Kalika CF)

Second, as in Tukucha, the gender division of labour requires women to spend most of their time at home while men go out. The unequal division of labour within and outside the household applies to all rural women irrespective of the economic and caste positions of the household they belong to. Even women from the economically better-off households are not immune to this situation. The wife of a chairperson of a user group explains:

Being wife of a leader is more difficult than being a wife of an ordinary user. My husband was already engaged in politics. Now he is chairperson of the community forest. He hardly gives any time for house, children and farm. This has already affected farming. I am happy that he has become a big person in the village. But I am paying the cost with increased workload and he does not realize it. (Sita Adhikari, wife of the chairperson of Phulbari CF)

In addition, women's lack of knowledge and limited involvement in local decision-making processes tends to make men reluctant to let women represent them in the samiti or in other decision-making.

Even if women are allowed to make all decisions on user group's matters, I do not think they can make a significant contribution different from men. They

do what their husbands suggest. In addition, lack of education makes them narrow in their thinking. They do not have a long-term vision on the use and management of community forests nor do they have the capacity to think of forest use in more productive ways to generate income that is important for community development in the long run. (An advisor, Kalika CF)

But the perceptions related to women's ability differ between men and women. Maya Khadka, a woman samiti member whose husband is advisor of the user group, says:

Women may not be able to work in office (paper work) because of lack of education but since they use firewood, fodder and other products daily, there is no question that they do not know how to manage forests better. They can work better than men in managing forest products in a more sustainable way, provided they are given the authority. But men do not want to give this authority to women.

As with the perception of abilities, the agendas of users' assemblies also differ between men and women. Meeting minutes reveal that usually men put on the agenda the timber harvest, increasing the amount of the fund, allocation from the fund for a school, road or increasing linkage with NGOs or other agencies. The agenda women raise includes scarcity of firewood, fodder and timing of the harvest, allocations from the fund for drinking water and the availability of low interest credit for women. The difference also reflects the influence of the gender division of the labour between men and women in households and in communities. However, such gender differences in agenda setting were not clearly observed in samiti meetings.

5.4.5 Participation in protection and silvicultural operations

User groups in Rajhar hire forest guards for patrolling and protection. The monthly allowance paid for forest guards, ranges from Rs 1500 to 2000 (approx. US\$ 23–30). The guards are hired from FUGs' own resources. Patrolling by hired forest guards is considered to be more effective than informal patrolling by users as the former are more accountable because of the salary paid. User groups also devise calendars for silvicultural activities based on their requirements. The calendars include timing, methods and labour requirements for cleaning, pruning, and thinning and fire line preparation in the forests. Unlike the hills, where all users irrespective of economic and caste groups participate and provide free labour for such operations, in the Terai, the amount of and reward from a labour contribution differs between the poor and the non-poor and between the ordinary users and the samiti members. Usually, activities such as cleaning, thinning and

pruning yield by-products that can be used as fuel, and poor members who cannot afford to pay for good quality firewood contribute labour in such activities and get these by-products free. On the other hand, members who can afford to buy do not contribute labour but buy good quality products directly from the offices of the user groups. For other activities—like digging and cleaning the fire line—the usual practice is to hire wage labour. Usually, the poor members or the non-members work on such operations and get wages.

Similarly, during the harvesting season, the samiti hires labour for cutting trees, processing timber and carrying them to the office.⁶ The main products obtained during harvesting include firewood and timber blocks which are brought to the office where the users can buy them. The costs for the harvest and processing are usually borne from the FUG fund. The samiti members who monitor and supervise harvesting operations are also paid in cash as daily allowances. In this sense, unlike the hills where users contribute free labour for forest improvement activities, users in the Terai are paid either in cash or in kind for their labour. It motivates them to participate actively in such operations. However, the return from participation varies significantly according to their type of involvement and position of an individual in the user groups.

While ordinary users, who contribute labour, receive only the gleanings obtained from such operations to use as firewood, samiti members, who do not usually contribute any physical labour but are involved in monitoring and supervision of the work, get allowances that range from Rs 100 to 150 per day.

During the informal discussion, many also said they are against the system of allowances for samiti members because it resulted in competition among ordinary users to become samiti members. Some also question the significant amount of money spent on meetings, daily allowances and salaries. However, none speak freely about such matters in assemblies or in the samiti meetings, as they feel powerless to change the system.

5.4.6 User rules, enforcement mechanisms and their impact

Though user groups are endowed with different-sized forests, the quality of forest products do not vary significantly, leading to similar user rules among the groups (Table 34).

In order to discourage intergroup flow of products and illegal selling, all groups in Rajhar apply the same rules and assign the same prices for products. However, timing for silvicultural operations and harvest differ to allow

households with membership in more than one user group to participate in all the groups they are involved in.

Table 34
Product use rules in community forests, Rajhar

Collection of products	Kalika		Phulbari		Barpipal	
	Fre-quency	Price (Rs)	Fre-quency	Price (Rs)	Fre-quency	Price (Rs)
Firewood related						
dried fallen twigs	Twice a year	Entry fee	Twice a year	Entry fee	Twice a year	Entry fee
firewood (per hundred kg)	Once a year	75	Once a year	100	Once a year	75
religious purpose	On re-quest	samiti decides	On re-quest	samiti decides	On re-quest	samiti decides
for cremation	On re-quest	Free	On re-quest	Free	On re-quest	Free
Fodder/grass related						
Fodder	Feb-April	Free	Feb-April	Free	Feb-April	Free
Grass (from selected plots only)	Regular	Free	Regular	Free	Regular	Free
Grazing related	Complete ban		Complete ban		Complete ban	
Timber related						
for agricultural tools	On re-quest	samiti decides	On re-quest	samiti decides	On re-quest	samiti decides
for construction (per cft)	Once a year	200-300	Once a year	200-300	Once a year	200-300
for victim of natural disaster	On re-quest	samiti decides	On re-quest	samiti decides	On re-quest	samiti decides
for charcoal (gol)	Complete ban		Complete ban		Complete ban	

Note: Non-members can also collect and buy firewood but at higher prices. Access to fodder and timber is limited only to the members.

Source: Operational Plans (2002)

As Table 34 shows, there are different rules associated with different products and even for the same product; use rules vary depending on the quality of the product and the purpose of the use. Often the poor find it difficult to buy and end up using low quality products obtained from the forest during management activities. Women, who are the primary users of

the product, suffer from lack of access to quality firewood. The poor recognize this disparity and relate it to the unequal power relations between the rich and the poor.

In the samiti and user groups, there are two types of people, those who use firewood to cook and those who use gas and kerosene. Firewood users should decide the price of the firewood collected from the forest but here the people who use gas and kerosene decide it. They make the price higher so they can get more money for their allowance and can spend it on gas. No one complains because no one wants to argue against these big people [*thula bada*]. (A poor woman of Kalika CF)

When the higher prices set for *daura* and their implications for poor women were discussed with samiti representatives, they indicated that the motive was to lower demand.

We cannot reduce prices as the demand for firewood is higher than supply and an increase in prices is necessary to reduce demand. (Devaki Sharma, a non-poor woman samiti member of the same FUG Kalika who uses gas as cooking fuel)

As the increasing population of the village has resulted in an increase in demand, some user groups provided grants (of Rs 1000) for member households who want to establish a biogas plant. However, the ability of members to establish biogas depends on the number of livestock to meet the demand for dung and their ability to invest in a plant. It is mostly the non-poor households who use the grant scheme for biogas plants as they have sufficient livestock for dung and sufficient land to feed the livestock.

Use rules associated with timber also put it out of reach for poor users. On the one hand, timber is accessible to members only, thereby excluding access of non-member households. On the other hand, access to timber costs more than the poor can pay and involves administrative procedures which the poor and uneducated find difficult to follow (Box 5).

The poor and the female-headed households who often lack educated members in the family, find it difficult to make an application in writing to make a formal request for products. In addition, the non-refundable application fee makes them reluctant to apply when they are unsure whether the samiti will approve the request, especially if there is limited timber available for sale. Several cases have been reported where demands from the poor households were not accepted by the samiti, either because they were unable to submit the formal request on time or because of their inability to pay the full amount in advance. In a few cases, where there was limited stock of timber in the office, the poor were denied access even when all steps men-

tioned above were completed on time. The outcome of the access rules is illustrated in later sections.

Box 5

Prices and access rules to timber from community forests, Rajhar

The following steps are involved when making a formal request for timber. It applies to all members in user groups in Rajhar.

- Members make a formal request with a written application addressed to the Samiti along with an application fee. The fee ranges from Rs 25 to 50 per application and is non-refundable.
- If the samiti accepts the request, users should deposit the full amount of money in the bank account and submit the receipt (bank voucher) to the samiti. Failure to deposit money in advance results to rejection of the application and lack of access to timber.
- Prices vary depending on the quality and potential use. Processed timber (chirani kath) is the main trunk of matured tree that costs Rs 300 per cubic feet (cft) after processing. Bakal is the outer part of the main trunk and a major by-product obtained from the processing that costs Rs 150 per cft. Balla balli (minor by-product) costs Rs 100 per quintal that can be used as firewood or as charcoal.

(Source: Operational Plans and discussion with Samiti members in user groups, 2002)

As the table 34 indicates, the community forests are open only for specific time periods for fodder and grass. All the user groups in Rajhar have completely banned the grazing of animals in the forests. The decision for a complete ban on grazing was taken by the samiti immediately after the informal protection started and was never revised despite continuous requests from the women to allocate some plots in the forest for grazing. As the poor women have limited influence in the samiti that makes the major decisions related to product rules, they have not been able to lift the ban on grazing. Consequences of the ban on open grazing and curtailed access to fodder is discussed in detail in distributive outcomes later.

As with grazing, user groups also banned the use of charcoal from community forests, which has a direct negative effect on the livelihoods of Kami (blacksmiths), a lower caste group. As in Tukucha, there are several cases where Kami have lost their incomes due to the unavailability of charcoal. Some people who continued this occupation earn less because the number of clients (*bali ghar*) has fallen. Others are completely displaced from their

occupation and have returned to wage labour. Consequence of the product use rule associated with charcoal is again discussed in the later sections on distributive outcomes.

One of the user groups also provides small plots (100m x 14m) in community forest to a few members of the group for personal use. These are called 'personal plots'.⁷ The members who receive personal plots in community forests are involved in cleaning, planting and management of the plot on their own, and enjoy unrestricted access to the plots with the unmediated rights to use, sale or exchange of products other than timber. Extension or withdrawal of the arrangement remains with the user group. Management of the plot, including harvesting and utilization of the products obtained from it, does not involve restriction. The members regularly collect firewood and fodder from the plot allocated to them. However, the distribution of such plots is not equitable and the number of personal plots is less than the number of members in the user groups. For example, of 675 members in Kalika, only 252 (37%) have personal plots in the community forest.

The purpose of personal plots was to recognize people's contribution during group formation. Some members in this village had worked very hard for the hand-over of the forests to user groups. These households were given priority in plots distribution. Those who had double membership (share) also received two plots. The demand for personal plots continued increasing when new households joined and since 1995, we have stopped distributing them further. Those who have already received a plot can continue using it for as long as they want. Since many landless and land-poor households did not join the group early, the majority of them do not have personal plots allocated in the community forest. (The chairperson of Kalika CF)

As discussed earlier, local village leaders who belong mostly to the non-poor highcaste group initiated user group formation in Kalika because these were the people in the village with access to information and the personal linkage required for its hand-over. As a result, these groups also claimed most of the personal plots from community forest. The poor—mostly those who used to sell firewood for a living—were not involved in the initial years and are in the main denied of access. They are disadvantaged in two ways. First, the proportion of the poor receiving such a plot is very low. Next, the qualities of plots they receive are inferior to that of others. Because of their low bargaining power, the poor suffer from frequent changes in their personal plot.

The samiti listens to rich members only and they do not follow the rules properly. In the initial years, they asked me to clean and develop plots for dis-

tribution in the forest. In return, the chairperson promised to give me one plot from the community forest for my personal use. I got the plot, which I had cleared myself. I worked hard to make the plot better to produce good quality fodder and grass. The fodder obtained from my plot was sufficient to feed five goats. But after four years the chairperson said, they needed that plot back and suggested me to take another plot. First I objected but he said my plot was going back to the whole block of community forest. This time I got a plot, which is far from my house. It is covered with *kehar* that cannot be used as fodder. Later I knew that the chairperson had lied to me. My plot was not taken back to the community forest but was allocated to *Sapkota Baje* [local landlord in the village]. I would not have given it back if I had known that they were giving it to another person. The rich can make anything possible [*Dhani le je gare pani bunchha. Garib ko kebi lagdaina...*]. (Ram Hamal, poor member of Kalika CF)

In addition to this unequal distribution, user groups suffer from the exploitation of personal plots by members to generate cash and other associated benefits. In principle, selling or renting out personal plots is not allowed but the practice continues. Informal discussion with members indicates that of the 252 households who received 'personal plots' from community forests, some 25% do not use it themselves but rent it out to others in cash or kind.

I have been requesting a personal plot for the last two years but the samiti says it does not have any more plots to distribute. My landlord who is a government employee [*sarkari jagire*] has two plots for his use. He cooks food on gas and does not keep livestock. So he does not need the plots. He has already sold one and gave another to me. As I have rented goats from him, he has allowed me to use the plot while I keep his goats. (Ram Bahadur Pariyar, formerly a firewood seller)

These cases illustrate that some product use rules (like that on the distribution of firewood and personal plots) have a differential impact and unfair distribution. The landless and the land-poor, who depend more on the community forest, lack access to regular sources of fodder and grass while the land rich and non-poor households who are influential in the samiti not only have access to such plots but also use the plot as a means to enhance their economic and social positions in the community. The samiti is responsible for ensuring that all users follow the rules and that there is no misappropriation of products. The users who break rules are subject to fine and punishment. As in Tukucha, all the user groups devise rules for enforcement that include fines, though the amount of the fine differs between user groups (Table 35).

Table 35
Fines associated with the violation of rules, Rajhar

Types of offences	Level of fines (Rs) (range indicates inter-group variation)
Plant cut/ broken	50-200
Firewood collection	50-100 per <i>bhari</i>
Fodder collection	25 per <i>bhari</i>
Floor grass cutting	10-25 per <i>bhari</i>
Animal grazing	
goat	5-10
cattle	20-25
Timber cutting/ carrying	200-500
Bamboo shoot harvesting	100

* Lower limit for first time, higher limit for multiple breaches.

Source: Operational Plans of User Groups (2002)

According to product use rules, fine rates do not vary between the user groups. User groups rely on forest guards and ordinary members to identify culprits. Ordinary members are given 20–25% of total fined amount for spying and reporting on culprits. This arrangement tends to reduce the number of offences by increasing the risk of being caught.

Previously, ordinary users did not care even when they saw some members stealing products. It was considered the responsibility of the samiti and the forest guards. Now all members keep an eye on the forest and immediately report to the samiti anyone breaking the rules. The samiti keeps the name of the reporter confidential to minimise the risk of reprisal. (The chairperson of Phulbari, 2002)

Analysis of the minutes of user groups and discussions with the forest guards reveal that it is mostly poor households who steal products from the forests. Among them, women are caught and fined for grass, fodder and firewood, while men are caught and fined for small (pole-sized) timber. In theory, the rules associated with fines are applicable for all users irrespective of their economic and social positions. In practice, implementation is confined to poor members only. This is because of the different ways in which poor and non-poor break the rules.

On paper there are lists of fines associated with the rule-breaking. But these fines and rules apply to the poor who do not have a say in the samiti. The rich and political leaders buy products of their share from the community forests and sell it to the non-members or even outside the community, which is illegal, but they are never fined. The samiti finds it easier to fine a poor woman

with a small load of firewood and fodder collected from the forests, but turns a blind eye to the rich political leaders who break the rules to make profit. (Ramesh Nath Adhikari, a land-poor samiti member in Kalika)

In two of the three user groups, fines collected from users have become an important source of revenue, indicating a higher incidence of rule-breaking and rule enforcement. In contrast, Barpipal has no evidence of collecting fines from member households, even though the rules exist. Occasionally, rules are found to have been broken both by members and non-members. The reason for this is the same as in hill user groups. The chairperson of the user group explains:

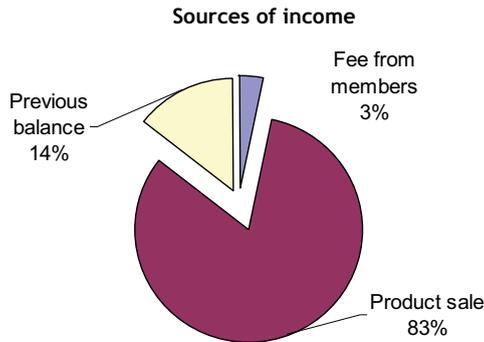
Mostly women bring firewood hiding in the grass and fodder when forest is open for grass cutting. Those who steal are very poor. They steal firewood because they have no alternatives to cook and they cannot pay fine when they are caught. If they had money for the fine, they would not steal the products. The samiti does not fine them but asks them to apologize and make commitment not to do it again. But whenever the rule is broken by outsiders, we have fined them.

As illustrated earlier in the discussion of resource endowment, Barpipal is more similar to a hill-type user group, with mostly hill migrants settled in a relatively small and separate clusters with the domination of Tamang, followed by Dalits. This is composed of a large number of poor and lower caste households. In addition, unlike the other two user groups, in Barpipal, the two major caste and ethnic groups (Dalits and Tamang respectively) adhere to the same religion, Christianity. This increases the sense of belonging among the users. As a result, the implementation of rules tends to be more flexible and less effective than in more heterogeneous groups. These demographic characteristics make Barpipal different than other two Terai user groups. Rather, it resembles characteristics of a hill user groups as discussed in Chapter 4. However, the resource type it owns is significantly different. Differences in resource type but similarity in community attributes result in a similar outcome in relation to rule enforcement mechanism—further illustrating the importance of the community structure.

5.4.7 Source and utilization of funds: issue of transparency and benefit-sharing

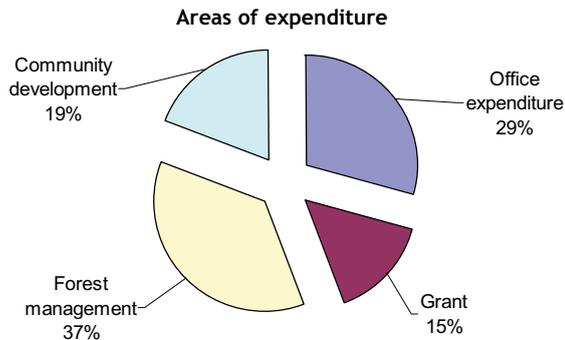
User groups in Rajhar have relatively larger funds compared to those in Tukucha. Sources of income do not vary significantly but size of the funds generated and patterns of expenditure vary between the locations and also between user groups.

Figure 22
Source of income and patterns of expenditure in forest user groups, Rajhar



Total income in a year = Rs 1168406 (US\$ 15578)

Source: Account register of a user group (2002)



Total expenditure in a year = Rs 922206 (US\$ 12296)

Source: Account register of a user group (2002)

Sources of funds and pattern of investment

The resource-rich forests of Rajhar provide significant income from the sale of forest products. Other major sources include fees collected from the membership and access to products and grants received from government and non-governmental organizations to implement activities. Community forestry legislation requires forest user groups to invest at least 25% of their funds in forest development (*ban bikaash*) activities including planting, protection and silvicultural operations. User groups have the autonomy to de-

cide on the use of the rest (75%) of the funds. User groups in Rajhar were found to invest on forest development as well as on organizing assemblies, training, and workshops among members; salary and allowances for office bearers and samiti members; grant support for members and community infrastructure development and office management. Figure 22 illustrates the sources of incomes and patterns of expenditure in a user group in Rajhar. Similar patterns are found in the other user groups.

As Figure 22 indicates, income for FUGs in the Terai comes from the users' own contributions in terms of fees or from product sales. Investment in forest development activities and utilization has remained the main area of expenditure. This includes costs related to silvicultural operations, harvesting and processing of products. In addition, user groups spend a significant amount of their incomes (29%) as office expenditure. This includes salary for office bearers, allowances for samiti members and costs of assemblies and meetings. Most user groups in the Terai have set up their own offices in permanent office buildings and maintain a staff. While this indicates stronger community-based organization which might have a positive impact on the sustainability of institutions, it also requires that a major part of the funds be spent on administrative matters, mainly salary and allowances for office bearers and executives. As all user groups in Rajhar spend a significant proportion of the FUG fund on maintaining the office, it tends to affect their ability to spend equitably among members.

Similarly, as the figure illustrates, user groups in Rajhar also spend funds for community development activities. This includes investment on infrastructure such as drinking water, trail and path improvement and construction of schools and temples. In additions, all user groups spend a significant proportion (15–20%) of their income in grants and interest free loans. This includes providing funds to individuals and organizations according to their requests. Of this, about 49% was spent to establish biogas plants for member households and provide interest-free loans for goat-keeping for women. The remaining 51% went directly to government and non-governmental organizations. In addition to grants in cash, user groups also provide a significant amount of timber (ranging from 10 to 200 cft) to organizations free-of-charge for house construction and furniture. Organizations that receive a grant or timber support from forest user groups include schools, colleges, health posts, police posts and voluntary organizations such as mothers' groups, youth clubs, NGOs, co-operatives and federations at various levels. Because of the high resource value of the forest and relatively large size of the funds generated from it, most organizations are interested

to be involved with user groups in one way or another, which is not the case in Tukucha.

A two-way relation exists between user groups and other organizations. Most forest user groups provide grants (cash) and timber support to these organizations. In return, some organizations such as district forest offices, range posts (RP), schools and colleges provide technical assistance and volunteers to user groups on a regular basis, while others (such as health posts, women's groups, youth clubs and NGOs) assist in specific events, like awareness-raising campaigns and for communication purposes during assemblies and other important occasions.⁸

Though in theory, user assemblies are entitled to decide on relations with other organizations—including the provision of support outside the membership—in practice, the samiti and advisors (and even in some samitis, often only the chairperson and secretary) receive requests for support and make decisions. Furthermore, as discussed in an earlier section, most samiti members and advisors of user groups are involved in more than three voluntary organizations. Often they make requests to the user groups in the name of organizations they are involved with.

Our chairperson is lecturer in two private colleges. One of them was not able to pay the salary of its teaching staff. The chairperson made an official application, on behalf of the college, requesting money from the FUG fund. The samiti decided to provide 55 thousand rupees (US\$ 800) to the college to establish a trust fund, which can be used to provide a monthly salary for teachers. In addition, 42 cft of timber was provided for furniture. Other samiti members were not happy with such big support for a private college as the majority of children from our user group attend government colleges and government schools, But the chairperson was determined to provide this support and made it through the samiti. (A samiti member, on condition of anonymity)

As with decision-making, there is no significant difference between the men and the women samiti members in their influence on the use of funds, where women representatives belong to households with economically and politically better positions than other members of the samiti. The support received from user groups helps them increase their social status and political position in voluntary organizations, which is important for their economic strength, social status and prestige in the community.

Last year, *ama samuba* decided to construct a small building for the group. Since I am also in the samiti of the forest user group, other sisters in the group asked me to bring some timber and a grant for the building. I proposed it in the samiti meeting and got Rs 15,000 (US\$ 227) and some timber. As I was able to

generate fund and timber for building construction, other sisters in the group asked me to remain the chairperson. (Maya Khadka, a woman samiti member in Kalika user group)

Other user groups share similar experiences where a few samiti members make decisions to provide cash and timber to organizations that they are involved with. The poor and the Dalits hardly benefit from the support user groups provide to other organizations. Providing a grant to government offices such as district forest office, health posts and local police is considered important to extend personal and organizational linkages and relations. In one sense, such relations are important if the user groups are to receive technical support and material support from these organizations. Next, as samiti members are involved in making the decisions, it gives them the opportunity to extend their own personal linkages and relationship with officials, which in turn pays them by increased economic and political status in the village.

As the figure illustrates, user groups in Rajhar have invested significant FUG funds in community development, including the establishment of a drinking water scheme, school building construction, teachers' salaries, and trail and path improvement. A total of eight schools and one college in Rajhar receive regular financial support from forest user groups to meet the costs of teachers. But access to the benefits from investment differs among different economic and social groups. Non-poor users claim a larger proportion of the benefits than the majority of poor users. Even when the investment is targeted to benefit the whole community—as in the case of community drinking water schemes and temple renovation—Dalits cannot benefit because of caste-based hierarchies. The issue of differential outcomes between the economic and caste groups is discussed in more detail in a later section.

Transparency and accountability

The majority of users, even samiti members, do not know about the FUG's income, investments or the amount of funds in balance. In the general assembly there is a system of presenting only the total amount of income and expenditure. Interested members are usually asked by the samiti to come and check the account at the office after the assemblies. It raises more suspicion.

Looking at the harvest of timber, there must be a large fund but I hear that there is small balance left in the account. I wonder where all the money has gone. Of the 5.5 million rupee (55 *lakh*) income in the last two years, only 27 thousand is in balance. The chairperson has bought a motorcycle. The secre-

tary bought land for a house in the last two years. Users pay for the price of products and raise the fund. The samiti takes that money as allowances and salary and spend it for their personal benefit. (A poor samiti member of Phulbari user group)

In some cases, external factors—such as a need to bribe and meet unofficial demands from a government or nongovernment official—affects transparency in the samiti as the secretary of one group explains:

A forest official came to the office last year and asked me to provide Rs 10,000 from the FUG fund to repair his office vehicle. If I refuse, he won't provide support next time. I spoke to Chairperson of the samiti and provided the amount. Such expenditure cannot be shown publicly as it is illegal to meet such a demand without a decision of the user's assembly. Often we manage such unofficial demands by maintaining two accounts, one to show to the public, another to keep within the samiti.

The tendency of the samiti members to hide the details of income and expenditure not only makes most of the ordinary users suspicious about the use of the fund but also discourages them to participate in the user groups as they no longer see any benefits derived from their involvement.

Samiti members say they need to pay 40% of the fund generated from timber to the government as revenue. In the remaining 60%, they show half going to salary and living allowances, remaining half goes for wages and operational costs for the forest management. The balance is always nil. The poor users contribute labour for the protection and management of this forest with the hope that it will benefit them. But when nothing remains at the end of the year and the samiti shows zero balance, I feel very bad. I am no more interested to work without wage in the user groups. (A poor landless member of Kalika who lives in squatter and works as a wage labourer)

Except in Barpibal, the samiti have been charged by the users for the overharvesting of products and misuse of the FUG funds. Typically, user groups form an investigation committee (with an auditor) to investigate financial misuse. However, the effectiveness of such committees in investigating the charges of the misuse of authority is questionable. Usually people who are in the samiti and investigation committee to investigate the misuse belong to the same economic and caste groups and often to the same descent groups. These personal relations influence their effectiveness. For example, in the 2001 assembly, misuse of the FUG fund became a major issue in one of the user groups. An investigation committee was formed consisting of five members from the community. The committee took two months to investigate the matter and finally dismissed the charge against samiti

members as no evidence was found for any types of misuse. One of the ordinary members of the same user group complains:

... is a thief as well as police [*chor pani apbai, police pani apbai*], how do we expect proper investigation? Everyone knows that there is misuse of the FUG fund this year. The chairperson said they had to bribe forest officials to get approval for the overharvesting of timber that was required for office building construction. Since such an amount cannot be shown in the balance sheet, they can easily put some in their own pocket. A few clever samiti members are involved in it. But the investigation committee pretends that it got no evidence because if the evidence is made public, the wife of the committee leader will be charged for the corruption as she is also in the same corrupt samiti.

Such charges of misuse of the authority, especially the issue of overharvesting of timber and misuse of funds, has remained important issues in two of the three user groups for years. Some users, especially the political leaders, admit the practice of misuse of the fund and take it as an incentive for those who have contributed time for the establishment and management of the user groups indicating the institutionalization of misuse and corruption.

Those who attempt to harvest honey from the beehives will have to lick their fingers [*Jasle maha katchbha, usle baat chatchbha*]. We know that there are some misuses especially from chairperson but he had worked hard for the formation of user groups and hand-over of this forest, and it is obvious that he wants to get some benefits from it. (Sitaram Prasain, an advisor of Kalika CF)

Though the majority of ordinary users I spoke to are dissatisfied with the misuse of fund, they find themselves powerless to correct the situation.

5.5 Sociology of Access: Class, Caste and Gender Relations

5.5.1 Access to forest products

Access to firewood

There have been significant changes over the last 10 years in the most important types of fuel used for cooking among different economic and social groups. A household survey on the use of fuel indicates that in total, the proportion of households using good quality firewood (*daura*) has fallen in Rajhar from 90 to 23%, while that using gleanings [*jhikra*] and alternative sources (LP gas/kerosene) has increased significantly (Table 36).

Table 36
Changes in types of cooking fuel by landholding category, Rajhar

Land category (in <i>bigha</i>)	Most important sources of cooking fuel for different economic groups (in %)					
	<i>Daura</i>		<i>Jhikra</i>		LP Gas/Kerosene	
	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago
Landless	33	100	67	0	0	0
Less than 1 <i>bigha</i>	26	89	56	11	18	0
1-3 <i>bigha</i>	0	86	14	0	86	14
More than 3 <i>bigha</i>	33	100	33	0	33	0
Total (% of N)	23	90	47	8	30	2

1 *bigha* = 0.67 ha, N=40. Source: Household survey (2002),

As Table 36 indicates, before the start of community forestry, most households in Rajhar used *daura*, irrespective of their economic status. All the categories of households have since experienced change in the type of fuel. Landless and poor households (with less than 0.6 ha cultivable land) started using low quality firewood because they lacked the ability to pay for the good quality. On the other hand, the majority of land adequate households (with more than 0.6 ha land) use gas and kerosene for cooking, which is a sign of improved access and their ability to pay. The fact suggests that community forestry in Rajhar has not increased access to firewood for the poor and lower caste groups. It has instead made the situation worse as they now have to rely on poorer quality firewood for cooking.

Table 37
Changes in types of cooking fuel by caste and ethnicity, Rajhar

Land category (in <i>bigha</i>)	Most important sources of cooking fuel by caste and ethnic groups (in %)					
	<i>Daura</i>		<i>Jhikra</i>		LP Gas/Kerosene	
	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago	Current	10 years ago
Brahmin/Chhetri	5	79	42	16	53	5
Hill ethnic group	70	100	20	0	10	0
Terai ethnic group	0	80	80	20	20	0
Dalits	17	100	83	0	0	0
Total (% of N)	22	90	47	8	30	2

Source: Household survey (2002), N=40

When this is analysed from caste and ethnic perspective, it shows that access to firewood is biased towards Brahmin/Chhetri (Table 37). Before the introduction of community forestry, the important fuel for cooking was *daura* for all caste groups except for a few Brahmin/Chhetris.

The type of main fuel has been changed significantly over the past 10 years. For the majority of the Dalits, community forestry has seen *daura* replaced by *jhikera* and agricultural by-products, low quality fuel. On the other hand, Brahmin/Chhetri households have replaced the use of firewood with gas and kerosene. Among the 12 sampled households who used gas and kerosene as the most important fuel for cooking, 85% were Brahmin/Chhetris. The trend suggests that community forestry in Rajhar has not increased access to firewood for the poor and lower caste groups. It has instead made the situation worse as they now have to rely on poorer quality firewood for cooking.

Like in Tukucha, all households who use gas or kerosene for cooking belong to the food-sufficient category and most have additional regular sources of non-farm income. This means that only households who do not need to buy food grains and have a regular source of cash income are able to invest in these products and to use them, and a majority of them are samiti members. Lack of regular access to firewood from community forests has a limited effect on these households. A large proportion of Dalits and Terai ethnic groups depend on government-managed forests to supplement firewood and fodder requirement. Despite the fear of being caught by guards and of attack by wild animals, they—mostly women—consider cutting firewood from the government forest less risky than bringing it from the community forests.

In government forests, there is only one forest guard and it is easy to deceive him. Other people do not care even if they find us cutting green trees in the government forest. Even if we are caught by forest guard, there are chances of convincing or bribing him to waive the fine. But in community forests, all samiti members are forest guards. Other villagers also report to the samiti. If we are caught, the fine is high and the possibility of getting exonerated is very limited. (Bhakta Bahadur Pariyar, a poor non-member who lives in close proximity of Kalika)

Some households with access to cash income used to buy firewood even before the introduction of community forests. They still buy but the source is changed. Previously, they used to buy from *daure* (local firewood sellers) but now they buy directly from the community forests. The change has led to the displacement of the *daure* and ensured access to products from community forests through membership. They are all high caste households.

The quality of firewood obtained from community forests also differs even among the members. As mentioned earlier, poor households contribute labour during forest management activities and use the gleanings from thinning, cleaning and pruning as firewood, which is of lower quality. Non-poor households buy good quality firewood wood from the samiti office without contributing cost-free labour. For non-members, buying firewood from the community forest is illegal even when they are ready to pay.

Before the establishment of community forests, poor households faced no scarcity of firewood as they could harvest it as and when required. The scarcity of firewood was felt more by non-poor households who did not work physically in harvesting but preferred to buy it from the local firewood sellers. With community forestry, the scarcity increased among poor households as regular access to the forest was banned. On the other hand, for non-poor households, buying firewood from community forest became more profitable as the prices are lower and more reliable than in the market because members have legal access to it. A number of firewood sellers have lost their source of income and have been forced to leave the village in search of alternative employment. In most cases, men displaced from firewood business have migrated to Indian cities to work as construction labour while women work along the riverside as stone crushers.

Curtailed access to firewood from community forests also results in the displacement of poor households from their only source of income. As mentioned earlier, these include firewood sellers and blacksmiths, the latter considered a traditional occupation. About 5.3% of all households (516 in the total population) in Rajhar belong to this caste group (CBS 2001). Ironwork is their traditional occupation. On the one hand, as in Tukucha, the demand for the service of blacksmiths was already declining when goods and services that had earlier been provided only by blacksmiths started to appear in local markets at cheaper prices. On the other hand, blacksmiths were unable to continue producing goods that were not fully replaced by market because of the lack of regular access to charcoal.

Since most households in this caste group have either no land or very little of their own, the only source of charcoal for them was communal forests. As in Tukucha, when community forestry started, user groups in Rajhar completely banned the collection of wood for charcoal from forests. As a result, they are said to have lost the income from the occupation. Sundar Vishwokarma, 56 years old, who is renowned for quality iron work in Rajhar over the last 22 years, explains:

Getting charcoal from this forest was not a problem before. People from 4–5 villages used to come to Rajhar for ironwork. I had about 50 *bali ghar* [house-

holds with an annual contract for service] and I used to get about 20 *muri* [i.e. equivalent to 976 kg] of paddy from them each year (one *Muri* of paddy is equivalent to 48.8 kg). The grain was more than sufficient for my family. Those people who did not have an annual contract for service used to pay in cash. Life was better than it was in the hills because I used to earn more here. But over the last 6–7 years, community forestry has completely banned the collection of firewood and timber for charcoal. Now I need to buy charcoal and so I need to work more for cash than for grain. Last year I had only 11 annual contracts and received only 6 *muri* grain which was insufficient to feed my family. This year, I have asked the chairperson of Kalika to provide some charcoal free. Last year, he allowed me to buy 12 quintals of roots [*jarajuri*] from fallen trees. But this year, he says, I may not get it as other peoples also want it and use of forest for charcoal is not in policy. Even roots of fallen trees are not available for charcoal from the community forest now.

The majority of Kami in Rajhar have changed their traditional occupation and have all become seasonal agricultural labourers. In many cases, men displaced from firewood business have migrated to Indian cities to work as construction labourers while women work along the riverside as stone crushers.

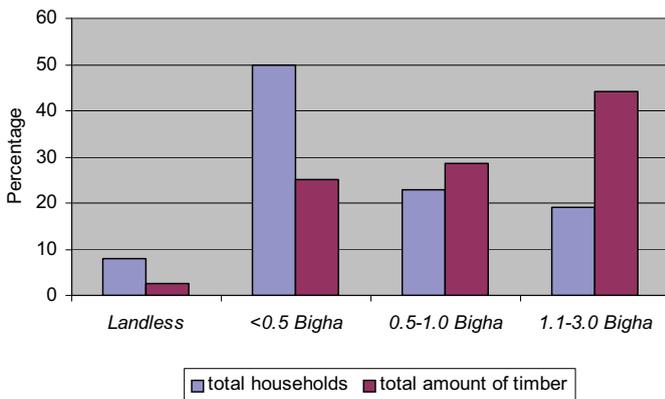
Access to timber

Sources of timber vary between members and non-members. Community forest is the only source used by FUG members. Though the village is physically linked with the market, the prices set by user groups are below the market price and thus timber is sold but not bought from the open market. As illustrated earlier, access rules associated with timber are more formal and more exclusive than those for other products. About 16% of sample households in Rajhar are not members of any user groups. Non-members buy timber from the members or from local sawmills at higher prices. (Market price of timber is Rs 600 per cubit feet, double the price set for community forests.)

All users in Rajhar accept that the availability of timber has increased in community forests because of effective protection and rationed access. In principle, increased availability should result in increased access for members. But analysis of the pattern of timber accessed from community forests by different economic groups over the past three years shows that this is skewed. As Figure 23 shows, the amount of timber accessed from community forest varies according to economic status and is positively associated with landownership.

Figure 23

Patterns of timber distribution by landownership categories, Rajhar



Source: Household survey 2002 and FUG records

Of the 40 households who took part in survey, 36 mentioned buying timber from community forests over the past three years. As Figure 23 shows, households with more than one *bigha* land (19% of timber buyers) bought 44% of all timber sold by community forests during the period. In contrast, about 60% of land-poor households (with less than 0.5 *bigha* land) bought less than 30% of it. When the record of timber distribution was analysed according to the level of food self-sufficiency, the average amount of timber bought in a year by food-sufficient group was 40 cft per household, four times more than the average amount bought by a household of food-insufficient group.

When the need and scarcity of timber is analysed, it reveals that 33% faced scarcity for house maintenance and furniture. All belonged to landless and land-poor groups with less than 0.5 *bigha* land. Lack of sufficient cash income has remained the main reason for this inability of poor to buy timber. Other reasons include their inability to follow the formal procedure. As mentioned earlier, access to timber requires members to make a formal request in writing with a non-refundable application fee, depositing the full amount in advance directly in the bank. These rules associated with the high price for timber means that the poor are unable to claim their share of timber from community forests even when they seriously need it. Analysis of meeting minutes and discussion with members reveals that the pricing of

timber is never discussed and set by assemblies. It is always decided by the samiti meeting.

Poor members continue living in a house without a door and a majority sleep on the floor, a symptom of a lack of timber. Sleeping on the floor is dangerous especially in summer as the incidence of snakebite increases, sometimes resulting in loss of life. For example, Krishna Kumari Paudel, a poor member of Kalika user group whose husband died five years ago, owns only 4 *kattha* (equivalent to 0.1 ha) of land. This is insufficient to meet the annual food requirements of herself and her two children, so to supplement it, she works as a wage labourer in a local factory. The work is seasonal and she gets Rs 74 a day for the days she works. She already has about 5000 rupees in loans from different neighbours, taken mainly to buy food grains. During the summer of 2000, her only son died of snakebite while he was sleeping on the floor. She explains her inability to buy timber as the important reason for losing her son.

Buying a readymade *kebat* (bedstead) from the market is more expensive than buying timber and making it locally. I had been asking the chairperson and secretary to provide timber from my share so that I can make them before the monsoon starts. But they asked me to deposit the full amount in advance. I needed about 5000 rupees that I did not have at that time. During last summer, as usual, I slept with my daughter in one corner and my son slept in another. I did not know when the snake entered and bit him. I found him unconscious early morning. My neighbours helped me to take to the hospital but it was too late. If I had money to buy some timber last year, I would not have lost my son from snakebite. He was my only hope for a better future after the death of my husband. For poor members, access to timber is a fruit in the sky that can be seen but cannot be reached [*garib ko lagi kath bhaneko aakash ko phal, aakha tari mar jastai ho...*].

Though the case above is extreme and rare, it does indicate the severity of the problem and impact of curtailed access to timber on living conditions of poor people. Informal discussion also reveals that after this incident, there has been an increasing realization among user groups that there is a need for special provisions lowering price of timber for basic house maintenance and furniture for poor members (personal communication and discussion with chairpersons of all user groups). However, the realization is not materialized in practice, nor has there been any attempt to revise the access rules in user groups.

In addition to high prices, lack of bargaining power and influence in the samiti further reduce the poor's access to quality products from community forests. Informal mechanisms associated with unequal power relations be-

tween members of different economic groups tend to create a situation where those with higher economic and political status in the village influence the decision of the samiti and claim the required amount and quality of the products, while for others, membership and payment do not guarantee that they get access to the product of their share. This is evident from the following experience of Ram Hamal, a landless squatter and member of Kalika:

I asked the office secretary to write an application for me making a request for three quintal of *bakal* [unprocessed timber] and deposited the money in the bank. I also selected some good *bakals* from a big pile of timber. As timber distribution was not started yet from the office, I left them in the office. Later when the samiti opened the distribution, I found that Subedar Buda (a rich old Brahmin man of the village) had already taken the *bakals* I had selected. I complained to the samiti but they said I can take similar *bakals* when another lot of timber comes to the office. Subedar Buda liked my selection and the samiti gave it to him even though I had already paid for it. The next lot of timber came to the office after two weeks. The amount I deposited was not sufficient for *chirani kath* (processed timber) and the *bakal* that arrived this time was not good enough for *khat*. Now I need to wait for next harvest season. Anything is possible for the rich and this samiti is in the hands of rich people.

A number of other members also share similar experiences. The majority is landless or land-poor migrants living in a squatter settlement (*sukumbasi tole*). Most of them complain that the samiti only listens to rich political leaders and that the distribution mechanism is not equitable. However, none of them make formal complaints against the samiti. Their perception of power relations inhibits their ability to do so.

In Nepal there is no system of listening to poor people [*Nepal ma garib le boleko sunne chalan chhaina*]. All the big leaders of the village and the VDC representatives are in the samiti. If we complain about them, they can displace us. As *sukumbasi* do not have their own land, the government can claim the *ailani* land at any time if political leaders want it. So it is better to keep quiet. (Dukhi Lal Vishwokarma, a poor landless member of user group in Kalika)

Access to fodder and other minor products

Community forests, private land and government forests are the major sources of fodder and grass in Rajhar. As with firewood, people often use various sources to meet their requirements. Community forestry has had important implications for changes in the use of fodder, its amount and the sources available to people of different economic and caste groups. One

important implication of the community forestry in Rajhar is the ban on grazing. It has had tremendous effect on herd size, especially goats.

In 1987, I bought 10 goats with a loan from Agriculture Development Bank Nepal (ADB/N). Goat-keeping was beneficial as it required less effort to look after but produced goatlings and *juto* (goat droppings). Grazing was open at that time. The number of goats in my herd increased to 25. I used to receive up to 80 Rupees a day from one sack of droppings. The income was sufficient to feed the family and to pay the loan on instalment. Suddenly, the policy of community forestry was implemented in 1991. I do not understand where it came from. The samiti banned goat grazing. It became difficult to feed 25 goats in the shed. So I decided to sell 15 goats. Now I have only 10 goats left. I also bought membership from Barpipal in the hope of getting fodder and grass but community forest does not allow daily fodder collection. The income from goats is reduced by half now but the instalment payment for the loan has remained same i.e. 222 Rupees a month. All the income from the goats now goes to repay the loan, and is still not sufficient. (Sagar Tamang, a land-poor who had been involved in goat-keeping with a loan from the ADB/N)

Similar examples have come from other user groups where the landless and the land-poor households have experienced loss of income because of the complete ban on goat grazing. Rules related to the access to grazing land and to fodder has similar impact on women even from non-poor households. As mentioned earlier, goat-keeping has remained an attractive and independent source of income for most women irrespective of their economic and caste positions. A significant number of women are involved in a goat-keeping women's group (Bakhra Palan Mahila Samuha) that was formed with financial assistance from the ADB just before the initiation of community forestry. The lack of access to grazing land inside the forest and lack of regular access to fodder forced most women to sell their goats and the group dissolved shortly after the protection initiatives began in community forests. Kopila Tamang, the then chairperson of goat-keeping group explains:

I used to have 150 goats in my shed and we were ten such women in our group. Goats used to graze freely in the forest and we had a good market in Narayanghat for goat and meat. After the start of community forestry, the samiti decided to ban goat grazing in the forest. The women's group for goat-keeping requested the provision of one plot, available regularly for goat grazing in the forest on a rotational basis but the samiti did not listen. Even my husband who is chairperson of Barpipal user group said goats destroy the forest. Actually, these men are interested in timber and they do not know that

goats do not eat trees. When they did not provide grazing land, all women who had borrowed from the bank were forced to sell and return the loan to the ADB/N. Since we all wanted to sell, the supply of goats increased resulting in lower prices and we all incurred a loss. I am lucky in the sense that I still manage 10 goats with my own fodder trees on private land. But many sisters in my group who had little land and no fodder of their own do not have even one pair of goats now, which is a big loss to them.

While women, irrespective of their class and caste positions, reported loss of livestock and loss of the income obtained from it, about 80% of women still keep goats, though the herd size is smaller than before. They reported that the time spent on fodder collection had doubled after the initiation of community forests. All user groups provide regular access to forest for members for grass-cutting, and forests open once a year for a three-month-period for fodder collection, but this provision applies only to the members. Non-members are legally excluded and the majority depend entirely on government forest for the product. In contrast to firewood and timber that are bought, collecting grass and fodder is cost-free for all. In principle, this arrangement would benefit all equally, at least among the members, but in practice poor members of user groups experience their exclusion from access to benefits. The control over means of production, especially the ownership of livestock determines the proportion of benefits received from this arrangement.

Kamis are poor. They cannot buy cattle. They hardly have 2–3 goats. It is mostly rich who have more cattle and more goats. It is not that poor do not want to keep cattle. They want but it requires money to buy them and a space for shed. Kamis are not that lucky to have both money and space for cattle. Rich people who have more cattle and goats also bring more fodder and grass from community forests. Those without cattle do not bring fodder. It would be good if samiti provides some charcoal for Kami who do not need fodder. But it does not. When I do not have cattle, what is the benefit of providing me free fodder? Rather, I would benefit more from free firewood and some roots of fallen trees to make charcoal. (Ram Bahadur VK, a landless squatter and member of Phulbari CF)

Even among the households who own cattle, access to fodder is determined by their economic and political strength in the community. Those who have access to personal plots in community forests have regular unrestricted access to their plots for fodder and grass. Others who are not provided with personal plots are disadvantaged. As said earlier in product use rules, the proportion of the poor receiving private plots in community for-

ests is very low, resulting into unequal access to fodder even when there are no monetary values assigned to the product.

Apart from firewood, fodder and timber, community forests in Rajhar are also rich in terms of minor non-timber forest products such as Sal leaf, medicinal plants and seeds of Ipil Ipil (a leguminous tree). Ipil Ipil seed is in high demand in the market. Before the community forestry started, these minor forest products provided an important source of seasonal income, especially for poor women. The collection of these products from community forests still continues but now the income from the product goes to the user groups fund rather than to individual user who collects them. Sun Devi Pariyar, female-head of a poor household and member of Barpipal user group explains:

About 3 kg of Ipil Ipil seed can be collected in a day in its season. The price for one kg seed is 60 Rupees in Narayanghat market. But the samiti does not allow an individual member to sell the seed directly. We need to sell it to the office of the user group. The office pays only 20 Rupees per kg for the seed. We lose 40 rupees per kg. Later the samiti sells it in Narayanghat at 60 Rupees per kg and the surplus goes to FUG fund. Spending the whole day collecting seed in the forest is no longer profitable.

Poor women collecting minor forest products now receive only a small portion of the income, which is just equivalent to (or even less than) their wage. They would receive more income if they were allowed to sell the product directly but the groups prohibit that.

5.5.2 Access to financial and political benefits

Financial incentives from community forests in Rajhar emerge in two ways: direct cash benefits in the form of salaries, allowances, wages, grants and the low interest rate on credit; and indirect cash benefits in the form of profit either from timber rent (buying and selling forest products obtained from community forests) or making use of the decision-making forum of user groups for business relations which provides cash in return. Access to salaries and allowances is limited to office bearers and samiti members. All members of a user group, at least in principle, can claim grant and credit. Access to wage labour is open even to non-members.

Direct cash benefits (salaries, allowances, wage, grant and loans)

As mentioned in section 5.4.7, user groups in the Terai spend a significant amount of income (29%) for administrative purpose and office bearers in the form of salary. Participation in the samiti provides an opportunity for a

member to claim the daily allowances for the time they spend, especially in meetings, assemblies and monitoring and supervision of forest management and utilization activities. Their allowance ranges from Rs 50–100 per day. In addition, the chairperson and secretary claim a monthly salary for their involvement. The salary ranges from 1000–2000 rupees a month. However, access to cash benefits has now become a major attraction for members to participate in the samiti, leading to the increased competition and conflict in the process of samiti formation. But as discussed earlier on the composition of the samiti, high caste men who have large landholdings and access to cash income dominate the samiti. Access to direct cash incentives from the community forest is also concentrated in these groups.

Ordinary users and even a few samiti members are in principle against rules paying salaries and allowances.

Users and samiti members both work in forests. Users do cleaning, pruning and thinning in the forest, samiti members monitor whether these are done according to operational plans. Both get forest products (gleaning, fodder and grass) for this labour contribution and all need to pay cash for firewood and timber. In addition, samiti members get daily allowances for the time they spend in monitoring but users do not. If samiti members get allowances, ordinary members should also get some amount equivalent to the wage as they also spend equal time in the forest. But samiti members are big people and no one wants to take risk of damaging his/her relations with them raising this issue formally in samiti. (A poor member of Kalika CF who works in the forest and use gleaning as firewood)

As the statement shows, though ordinary members are against the use of the FUG fund for salaries and allowances, because of existing economic and social relations in the community, none of the ordinary members attempt to raise their disappointment related to the matter publicly in meetings and assemblies. Even samiti members cannot influence the rules, especially if the decision involves argument against the chairperson.

Most members of user groups, especially unemployed members, seek an opportunity to work in the community forest as office bearers. The office secretary, accountants, assistants and forest guards are four positions common to all user groups who work as office bearers and draw a regular salary. Analysis of the office structure and staff profiles of the user groups indicates that access to regular employment from the community forest (especially of office secretary, accountants and assistant) is mainly concentrated in male siblings of high caste samiti members. This can be explained in two ways. First, accessing these positions requires a basic formal education and technical skills to deal with formal office management affairs. As mentioned

earlier in Chapter 3, access to education and technical skills in Rajhar is strongly determined by economic endowment, caste positions and gender. Very few members from landless and land-poor households have any formal education. In addition, women are less educated than men, even in the land-rich and high caste households. This class, caste and gender specificity in access to education and technical skills has a direct influence on the composition of office bearers in user groups. Next, usually, samiti members—mainly the chairperson and secretary—share the responsibility for the recruitment of office bearers and wage labourers. This authority gives them the opportunity to enhance their own positions by employing relatives and people of own economic and political groups. Personal relations have remained influential in determining who gets access to regular employment in community forests.

A significant proportion, on average 15% of the total income of a user group, is spent on the payment of salaries for office bearers. As access to such employment by landless and land-poor households is rare, they lack access to the cash benefits derived from it. Availability of wage employment, especially during silvicultural operations, is another important cash incentive for members to be involved in user groups. A large number of poor households seek an opportunity to work as daily wage labour and forest guards in community forests. In contrast to the access to salaries and allowances, access to wage labour is a major incentive for landless and land-poor members who have limited opportunity to obtain regular employment. Most wage labourers working in community forests are men and women of landless and land-poor households. While employment in the office is restricted to members of the user groups, working as wage labour is open to both member and non-member households. Similarly, unlike the position of office bearers, which is entirely dominated by men, a large proportion of hired wage labour hired consists of women.

However, the regularity and amount received from a salary and allowances on the one hand, and wages on the other, differ significantly. Salaries and allowances are regular in nature and available throughout the year, but the opportunity to work as wage labour is seasonal and available only in specific time period (3–4 times in a year for about 15 days each time). More importantly, the amount received from salaries and allowances ranges from Rs 1000–1500 a month for samiti members and 2500–4000 Rupees a month for office bearers. At the other end, the maximum wage claimed from working in the forests ranges from Rs 4800–7200 a year (i.e., Rs 80–120 a day, which is hardly available more than four times a year, for two weeks each time).⁹

Some user groups have provisions to use the FUG fund directly for the benefit of poor member households. Such targeted intervention to benefit the poor includes an interest-free loan for women for goat-keeping and a grant for households who want to establish a biogas plant for cooking.¹⁰ But analysis of the members who received such funds indicates that the proportion of landless and land-poor households is very small. Most households who benefit have more than 0.5 *bigha* land and all belong to the high caste group. The situation can be explained in two ways. First, both the loan and grant are meant only for member households. As a significant proportion of the landless and land-poor are not members of FUGs, they are not eligible for the loan. Next, grazing and the collection of fodder are restricted from community forests. Very poor households do not have sufficient private land for grazing or fodder purposes and are thus discouraged from taking a loan for goat-keeping. Sun Devi Pariyar from a landless female-headed household in Phulbari user group explains:

The samiti and advisors in user groups pretend that they think of us but in fact they think of themselves. In the last assembly, the samiti said they would give some credit for poor members for goat-keeping. But when I asked, if they allow cutting fodder from community forests or allowing small plot for grazing, they said no. What does a goat eat then? Wives of samiti members and advisors who have sufficient land received credit for goat-keeping as they can feed goat from their own land.

Women from such households work as wage labour either in agriculture or in construction industries and have limited time available to collect fodder from government or other public sources, which are relatively far from the village. As a result, they cannot benefit from the fund allocated for goat-keeping even when they are legally and explicitly targeted. The same applies to the grant to establish biogas plant. On the one hand, land-poor households do not own enough livestock to produce the dung required to run the plant. On the other, they cannot invest the additional cash required to establish a biogas plant, resulting in a similar situation of unequal access to benefit. Among the 15 households who have received grants for biogas plant from FUGs, all are high caste with more than 1 *bigha* land.

Indirect cash benefits

Apart from the direct cash benefits mentioned above, resource-rich community forests in Rajhar provide incentives for some members to earn incomes by exploiting their membership and increased access to forest products (mainly timber). In principle, the products obtained by users from community forests are meant only for subsistence and not for profit, but in

practice the rules do not apply to all members in the same way. While some users, especially poor firewood sellers, incur a loss with adverse effects on their livelihoods because of the restriction on selling, a few influential members continue making a profit especially from access to their share of timber. They do so through the use of economic and personal influence in the community and around.

Rules in operational plans are only for the poor people, not for the rich. There are people in user groups who buy their share of timber at 300 rupees and sell it to sawmill at 450–600 Rupees. Rules do not restrict them from making money out of the product they receive. But last year when one old poor man cut one tree from the edge of public irrigation canal to maintain his old house, the samiti complained about it to forest officers and handed him to custody. He had to pay a fine for the tree he cut and spent the whole night in custody. Money can buy not only the samiti members but also the government officials. But for the poor, there is always a restriction, no matter which system of management operates here. (Ram Bahadur Pariyar, poor member of Kalika user group)

Making money from forest products has remained one of the important debates among members in user groups especially in Phulbari and Kalika, which harvest relatively more timber a year than Barpipal. User groups sell timber internally to members at a price significantly lower than the prevailing market price. Local market price for Sal timber is 600–800 per cft (US\$ 8–11). The subsidized prices for Sal sold internally within FUG are around Rs 150–300 (US\$ 2–4). While many poor cannot even afford buying at subsidized rates, non-poor with sufficient cash income buy their share from the forest and sell them in the market at higher prices. It is difficult to get data and evidence about who has sold the timber and how much profit was derived from it because selling timber is still illegal, but analysis of the timber flow in a sawmill suggests that a significant number of users who have regular sources of income buy their share of timber from community forests and sell it to the sawmill making a profit.

About 80% of the timber used in this sawmill comes from community forests. Both the user groups and ordinary members sell surplus timber. In addition to this sawmill, timber from community forests also reaches neighbouring villages. This year only, community forests in Rajhar sold about 4100 cft timber of which I bought 1600 cft for my sawmill. Some samiti members in Rajhar prefer to take their share of timber to other villages so that no one knows where the timber came from. (Sitaram Prasai, sawmill owner, Rajhar)

The general tendency is to buy one's own share and later sell it to sawmills or to non-members (within and outside of village) at higher prices. Sawmills are also at an advantage in getting low-price timber from community forests. Sitaram admits:

Previously, though the timber harvest was more from this forest, the harvested timber used to be smuggled and was not available on the local market. Now, because of the provisions in community forestry, user groups can legally harvest timber according to their operational plan, sell the surplus timber and generate revenue for the group. Buying timber from a user group and from members is more beneficial than buying it directly from the market even when the price set by user groups is higher for sawmills than for members.

ODG (2003) call these 'hidden subsidies'. The ability to make profit through this mechanism is largely determined by their economic endowment, mainly a regular flow of cash at hand and personal and political relations within and outside the user group. An informal alliance exists between a few members of user groups who sell their share of timber, and sawmill owners who buy the timber, especially to maintain the confidentiality about the transaction. On one hand, this alliance works against the interest of poor users because it creates a situation where the demand for timber is always higher among users, leading to the continuous rise in the prices and more formal (and rigid) mechanisms to follow which restrict access of the poor to timber. On the other hand, because of the cash incentives derived from this hidden subsidy, the samiti (and even forest officials) fail to implement the product rules and enforcement mechanism effectively, especially in relation to the misuse of timber.

Benefits from investment in community infrastructure

As illustrated earlier, user groups in Rajhar spend about 15% of the fund on the development of community infrastructure. There are four main items of expenditure related to it: water and sanitation facilities, supporting schools, road construction and building community halls. While it is to be greatly appreciated that forest user groups play a role that in fact should be played by local development bodies such as the DDC and VDC, the benefits derived from this investment are uneven. For example, investment in secondary schools and colleges provides little benefits for the majority of the poor and Dalits, whose children either do not go to school or if they do go, end up in government school at primary levels. Lack of access to alternate sources of income restricts the opportunities for children of poor households to attend formal education and thus to benefit from this investment. On the other hand, benefits obtained from investment in drinking water are

not accessible to landless migrants and to Dalits. They still rely on river water. The control over means of production determines access to the benefits derived from user group's investment on infrastructure.

The water pipe is distributed only in the bazaar area. Migrants are not eligible for electricity and water schemes funded by VDC or by the FUG as we live on *ailani* land. We drink water from the river. (Ram Hamal, a landless squatter and member of FUG Kalika)

Political benefits and accumulation of power

As indicated in earlier section of this chapter, about 75% of current samiti members in user groups are active in a political party at some level. Those who are not directly involved belong to households where at least one member of the family (especially the husband in the case of women samiti members) is actively involved in party politics. On the one hand, as shown in Chapter 3, most political positions in Rajhar, including representation in the VDC and ward committees, belong to food-sufficient, high caste men. The same trend can be observed in the composition of the samiti of user groups. The same members of the community occupy key decision-making positions in user groups, the local political structure and other community self-help groups and organizations, notably in school management committees, irrigation user groups or women's groups. This applies to all user groups.

The questionnaire survey among samiti members of the three user groups also illustrates this. Increased self-confidence and social recognition is a major benefit realized by members from their representation and participation in the samiti. For the 23 out of 25 samiti members who responded, increased social status (*man samman*) and leadership skills were major personal benefits derived from community forests as a result of their involvement in the samiti. Tanka Adhikari, who has remained in the samiti for the last four years, explains it.

Villagers respect me more now than before. For all the forest products and allowances, I have personally benefited from increased recognition, respect and social status in the village. As soon as I started to be involved actively in user group matters and when I represented in the samiti for the first time, I observed a change in people's behaviour towards me. Now villagers recognize me as an important person and show respect. Ordinary users, who are in trouble, come to me for any forest-related matters. It has increased my self-confidence and I decided that I would continue to be involved in the samiti though it demands a significant amount of my time.

Similarly, Krishna Dhungana who is a teacher in a government school, an active political leader in the the village development committee and samiti member of Kalika explains:

A political leader does not have anything to offer to voters. It makes the public more frustrated. But involvement in the samiti provides opportunity to serve people. Now people come to my home and ask me if I can help them to get access to products or loan from the FUG fund. As a samiti member, I can raise their concerns in the meeting and can do my best to help them. This could be a reason that I have experienced increase social respect from the villagers. It encourages me to be more involved. I have become more active now both in politics and in village-level affairs.

Most of the current (and previous) samiti members share similar experiences of increased social status in the village after their involvement. In addition, some members (especially those who serve for the first time in the samiti and women) have experienced increased leadership skills and self-confidence from their involvement in the samiti.

Though my husband has remained a political leader and there is always a flow of people in my house, I used to hesitate to speak in front of outsiders. But now, I speak in front of anyone in the village. I do not hesitate to ask questions and put my concerns even among externals. Last year when forest officials came from the district, I asked them whether the samiti is allowed to fell green trees from community forest. I was not able to do so before. (Maya Khadka, a woman samiti member, Kalika)

As mentioned earlier on the selection of samiti members, political influence has been a major characteristic of FUGs in Rajhar from the beginning. There remain continuous political interventions and interests in the selection of the samiti and its functioning. Some samiti members, mostly those who are in key decision-making positions, represent the interests of the political party they are involved with, when composition of the samiti involves making a balance of political interest (personal communication, the VDC chairperson, Rajhar). It tends to create a situation where samiti members become more accountable to the political party they are involved with rather than towards ordinary users, as the former is more important in enhancing their influence and strengthening their political career in future.

Though rare in Rajhar, on occasions, a few samiti members have provided direct support to the district and central level party committee they are involved with. Such supports include both cash (in the form of a donation for a specific purpose) and kind (in the form of timber for office, furniture or firewood for picnic and gatherings organized by political bodies).

Since such support is illegal and against the guidelines of user groups, there is a general tendency to hide those supports from the main account. Discussions with some political leaders reveal that contribution to a political party is important to secure a position in the party for next election.

Political parties evaluate their members not from the perspective of how they served the people, but whether they contributed to the party's financial status and control in the village and whether they can maintain it in future. (The secretary of Kalika CF who is also an active political leader of VDC)

Though user groups in the hills also provide political incentives and benefit non-poor more than others, the exploitation of political incentives and the competition related to it is more prevalent in Terai.

5.6 Relationship with Stakeholders and Influence on the Outcome

Forest user groups interact with a wide range of stakeholders at various levels who influence their functioning and outcomes. These include the District Forest Office (DFO), other government organizations, NGOs and voluntary organizations. Among them, the relationship with the DFO has remained important in shaping the outcomes of user groups.

5.6.1 District Forest Office

District Forest Office (DFO) in Nawalparasi is comprised of one district office, four area offices and 15 range posts. As in Tukucha, range posts are the smallest unit of the DFO, responsible in providing service to the user groups and monitoring their performance on technical forest management and pro-poor benefit distribution. In addition to one district forest officer, there are four assistant forest officers and 25 rangers to provide service to the user groups. As in Tukucha, they are all high caste men. Analysis of the relations between user groups and forest officials reveals that the support and monitoring functions of forest officials are insufficient and ineffective. Though their interaction in Rajhar are more than in Tukucha, it started only after the hand-over of the forest and up to now, the forest officials have only been involved in monitoring the timber harvest and utilization of the fund. Their technical and institutional support is rare. For example, Operational Guidelines (1992) for community forestry provide authority to user groups to harvest only trees that have completed their growth cycle. But in practice, all three groups studied in Rajhar admit that growing trees have

been cut because of their lack of expertise in identifying those that have completed the growing cycle. The secretary of one of the user groups says:

It requires technical assistance from rangers. But each time the samiti requests support, we get the response that they are too busy and cannot provide. Either we pay for their service or wait forever for their assistance. We get technical support from forest officials only if things are settled with financial incentives [*arthik milapatra*]. Otherwise, they behave like police, not technical helpers. (The secretary, Kalika CF)

On the one hand, the district forest office lacks sufficient field-based technical staff and the workload for existing staff is already high (personal communication, DFO Nawalparasi). In addition, the ranger is also responsible for ensuring effective technical management of other forest regimes in the area, including national forest and national parks. This clearly shows inadequate staff at the district forest office to meet demand of user groups for technical service. On the other hand, even in areas where field-based staff can provide supervision, they are usually reluctant to do so if the user group fails to meet their demands, especially for field allowances which can be both in cash or kind.

The interactions between forest officials and the user groups are limited to samiti members and local rangers. Officials at district level are unaware of many issues that user groups are facing. When the researcher shared observations about their functioning in a meeting with the DFO, it was found that he was totally unaware of the concept of shareholding, membership fee and exclusion of poor households from membership because of their inability to pay. More importantly, neither the DFO nor local forest technicians are aware of the structure of user groups and decision-making mechanisms in the assemblies that have significance for distributive outcomes.

The district forest office seriously lacks the human and financial resources to monitor each FUG regularly. Its workload is already too high for a ranger to provide service to user groups. User groups send an annual audit report to the District Forest Office. This is the only information that is used annually as monitoring tool. We send additional staff for investigation only when there is a complaint against the samiti or our own staff members. (District Forest Officer, Nawalparasi in 2002)

This simple method of monitoring does not ensure that user groups function according to plan. District forest officials are also aware of the ineffectiveness of the monitoring system.

There are educated, clever and powerful people in the samiti. You can find lawyers, teachers, politicians and college lecturers in the samiti of user groups

in the Terai. They are very good in paper work. They produce legal documents that are sufficient to hide any malpractice and misuse of authority by the user group. I am aware that there are discrepancies between operational plans and real practice in user groups. Some user groups have been involved in the overharvesting of timber and the revenue generated from product sale does not benefit all users equally. But on paper everything is done according to the operational plan of the user groups. The district forest officer has no legal mechanism to punish or take action against a samiti when there is no evidence. (District Forest Officer, Nawalparasi, 2002)

Though in both locations, there are discrepancies between operational plans and real practice, its consequences are greater in the Terai than in the hills because of the financial benefits Terai community forests provide to all involved in them. This is also reflected in the attitude and response of the DFO. When undesirable alliances and lack of accountability on the part of forest officials was discussed with the DFO, he indicated that looking at Terai forest is completely different from looking at hill forest, resulting in different behaviour of forest officials between the locations.

Terai forest is cash that has high liquidity. The cash is associated with the power and prestige. Who wants to lose it? All politicians, forest officials and village leaders want to have this source of cash under their control. One user group has an annual budget of Rs 30–40 lakh [3–4 million] Rupees in comparison to a VDC which has an annual budget of only 5 *lakhs* [0.5 million]. Misuse of the fund and an unequal distribution of benefits are inevitable when such a big resource is handed over to the community. (District forest officer, Nawalparasi in informal discussion, 2002)

As this statement indicates, Terai forest has been seen as an important source of power and this applies to all stakeholders, most importantly to state agents. Reluctance to facilitate the user group formation process thus reflects their reluctance to hand over power. But when forests have already been handed over despite their reluctance, field-based staff seek and develop an alliance with the samiti to serve their interests in having control over a regular source of income (personal communication with samiti members, a previous government forest officer and an NGO activist working at Rajhar). Forest officials turn a blind eye to any misuse of authority and unequal distribution of benefits in user groups. The alliances and personal relations maintained with forests officials enables samiti member to retain their position and continue benefiting. On the other hand, local forest officials benefit with cash and non-cash incentives derived from the samiti as reward for their involvement in such an alliance.

Sometimes, when the DFO receives formal complaints about the misuse of authority or the intentional exclusion of community members from user groups, the DFO sends a team of technicians to inspect and recommend appropriate action. But in practice, poor and excluded members rarely complain and even when they do, their concerns are rarely heard. First, very few users complain against the samiti or field-based staff. Those who are excluded from membership or from access to products are economically poor. They rarely attempt to complain about the samiti members who are economically and politically influential. Next, even when they do complain, there is little evidence for the District Forest Officer to act on. One NGO activist working in the District says:

The DFO listens to its field-based staff more than to individual users. The samiti does everything to make field-based staff happy. They provide cash to forest officials, especially during harvesting period. In the last harvesting, there is a rumour in the village that the ranger got motorcycle as a gift from samiti for his approval for the over harvesting of timber which is not mentioned in any of the official documents of the user groups.

There is evidence of a strong alliance between some influential members of the samiti and local forest officials as a result of which field-based staff tend to be more accountable to the samiti than to ordinary users. There are no mechanisms in the District Forest Office to cross check the ranger's own ability, commitment and accountability towards users or to check the reliability of the feedback provided by rangers (personal communication, DFO Nawalparasi).

In monitoring the functioning and outcomes of user groups, forest officials are more concerned about technical outcomes, mainly towards the forest conditions. This is linked to their academic orientation. Forest officials are technicians who are trained for the protection and management of forests. Their lack of social orientation makes them more concerned about the technical outcome of community forests than its distributive outcomes.

If the forest condition has not deteriorated since its previous status, we do not bother much about how the group functions. The condition of the forest is easy to assess, as it is visible. The matter of distribution is not our concern as a forester. This is important but NGOs should work on this aspect. (District Forest Officer, Nawalparasi in 2002)

Interaction between user groups and local forest officials increases during the time of product harvest, especially during the timber harvest. Current legislation on the harvesting of timber from community forests requires approval from rangers even when it is done according to the operational

plan of the user group. This requires user groups to maintain good relations with them. On occasion, in the name of maintaining 'good relations', samiti members justify an alliance and illegal dealings with them. The secretary of one of the user groups confesses:

Demands for money and timber come anytime. Some organizations make formal demand in writing that can be dealt with officially. But sometimes demands come informally mainly from the police, army and forest officials. Just three months ago, the DFO asked for 10,000 Rupees from the samiti to buy petrol for his vehicle. Such informal demands are difficult to decide. It is illegal to provide cash to forest officer from the user group's fund, especially when they come unofficially. It is also difficult to deny, as it would hamper relations between the samiti and the DFO. In such a situation, the chairperson and the secretary discuss and decide to provide the amount without sharing the information with other samiti members or the users. Such expenditure is mentioned under the heading miscellaneous in the accounts. (The secretary of one of the user groups in Rajhar)

All this has important consequences for the transparency and accountability of the samiti and government officials. When officials who are responsible for the monitoring and supervision of user groups are involved in illegal dealings with samiti members, the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism becomes highly questionable. Personal relations tend to make forest officials more accountable to the samiti than towards the ordinary users. More importantly, as illustrated earlier, key decision-makers in the samiti and the forest officials involved in such dealings often come from same economic and caste group and thus have similar class interests. Such expenditures by the samiti, though it may seem forced as such, can lead to higher return in the future. If the return from investment is high enough to generate benefit in the long run, it remains profitable for samiti members to comply. In addition, personal relations established with forest officials enable them to enhance their economic and political strength at the cost of the majority of poor and disadvantaged users.

5.6.2 Donor-funded forestry programmes

Unlike in the mid-hills where the forestry sector received donor support for 20–25 years, the Terai has received it only recently.¹¹ Donor support to forestry sector for Nawalparasi district started in 2001 under the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) through Livelihoods and Forestry Programme–Terai component (LFP–Terai). LFP is basically a livelihood programme and considers forestry as a more viable

entry point for improving livelihood options for the poor and socially excluded people (LFP 2000). The programme has a twin-track approach. Track one is an area-based support to district forest offices, user groups and communities through government and nongovernment service providers (NGOs). Such area-based support is provided in 15 districts (out of 75 in Nepal). Track two involves a national-level component that supports policy development and sector reform. The first two-year phase of the Terai programme (2001–03) was to facilitate the development of strategic district forest sector plans (DFSPs) with district forest offices. Except for few event-specific support through the DFO, the programme did not have presence and influence at the community level during the first phase. The second phase of the programme started in 2004 after the endorsement of the draft district plans in November 2003 (LFP 2003). Currently the programme supports a variety of activities in the six prioritized thematic areas including community forestry.¹²

Support to community forestry user groups is provided through social mobilization programmes in partnership with NGOs. The objective is to improve governance issues in user groups and to promote social inclusion (LFP 2006). Social mobilization involves direct support to communities through social mobilizers (*Sabajkarta*). Their support includes training for improved accounting, record-keeping, communication and reporting, the promotion of pro-poor and inclusive provisions in constitutions and operational plans (OPs) and income-generation activities targeted at the most poor and excluded (P&E).¹³ The LFP's support is limited to a confined area where only 17 FUGs (out of more than 150 user groups in the district) have been covered. None of the user groups under study fall under LFP's support areas. Thus, the study provides no evidence of any direct or indirect influence of donor interventions on the outcome of user groups.

Within the areas of LFP's support, recent studies on the effectiveness of social mobilization in improving FUG governance suggests that the NGOs work through local social mobilizers have been effective in raising awareness among users about legal aspects of community forestry, increasing representation of the poor and women in samitis, improving internal governance of user groups and in influencing samitis to make the constitutions and operational plans of user groups more sensitive to the needs and priorities of the poor (ERI 2006, LFP 2006a). However, the studies have also raised questions on its effectiveness to address unequal power relations in the community and to have a sustainable and meaningful impact. In many cases, the presence of women and poor is yet to become significant in the key decision-making positions, and where it has happened, the user group's deci-

sion reflects an attempt to attract funding from the programme rather than a genuine commitment (ERI 2006). Social mobilizers who are supposed to empower the poor and excluded in the community themselves feel powerless when it comes arguing against the samiti dominated by the village elites.

Social mobilizers must be empowered to question or even challenge power relationships that maintain the status and resources of the elite. A young NGO worker as a social mobilizer finds it difficult to work with samiti that are dominated by these elites. Key decision-makers in samiti do not listen to social mobilizers unless there is some tangible benefits (in terms of cash or opportunities to participate in training) coming to them. In such situations, the representation of poor and women becomes tokenistic. Rather than challenging the unequal power relations, the social mobilizers tend to make them happy so that they can work with the group without any problem. (Coordinator of an NGO working with LFP in Nawalparasi)

More importantly, LFP and its interventions related to community forestry are primarily concerned in addressing issues of poverty, gender and equity (so-called second-generation issues) in forestry. All support including the capacity-building, small infrastructure and funding for income generation are channelled through the user groups. The working modality which confines the interventions and monitoring to the forestry sector only raises questions on the effectiveness of the LFP in improving livelihoods and reducing the vulnerability of poor and excluded in the long run. On the one hand, channelling all resources through the user groups meant that the poor who are not member of forest user groups are legally and automatically excluded from receiving any benefits derived from the donor support. Though our work has seen that the exclusion of poor from membership is more in the Terai community, hill user groups are also not immune to the situation (HURDEC 2004). On the other hand, as the interventions and the changes are very much confined to the user groups, the broader social and cultural sphere wherein gender and caste-based discrimination tends to be more pronounced seem to have escaped attention (ERI, 2006). User groups do not operate in isolation but in the social set-up which is characterized by these forms of discrimination. Limited attention to addressing the inequities in broader social and cultural spheres therefore raises questions on the sustainability of the impact made by LFP interventions and its effectiveness in achieving its goal of gender and social equality within its working areas.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed account of institutional attributes and distributional outcomes of three forest user groups situated in the Terai community. The following interrelated themes have emerged from the discussion. The history of forest degradation in the Terai is relatively recent. The degradation has been influenced by external factors, including immigration and timber logging. These extralegal economic and political forces have also influenced community forestry initiatives. After the regeneration of the degraded forests, Terai today consists of natural forests rich in economic terms with high cash-value timber. Unlike in the hills, FUGs are situated in a contiguous settlement and all are heterogeneous in terms of caste, ethnicity, occupation and economic strengths. Unlike in the hills, where forest officials and donor agencies organize users and facilitate the user group formation process, in the Terai most user groups emerged on their own initiative and received the rights of forest management through direct political influence. This had a significant influence on the way user groups function today.

In terms of functioning, the criteria for membership and participation were found to exclude the poor and all women. Dalits and women were consistently left out from the FUG membership. The excluded households, mostly the poor and Dalits, expressed poverty as the main reason for their self-exclusion. The relations of production that determine the economic and social strengths in an agrarian community also determine the membership and participation in decision-making in the user groups. Women experienced patriarchal structure and domination of men in household and community sphere as the direct cause of their exclusion from membership and participation in decision making.

In terms of outcome, the chapter demonstrated that resource endowment (mainly land and a regular source of cash income) determined access to products from community forests and access to and the use of financial incentives derived from them. Though illegal, some members of user groups use their economic and personal relations to appropriate surplus from the products obtained from community forests. On the other hand, landless and land-poor members lack access to these products even for subsistence use because of their inability to meet the access criteria that are set. Class and gender relations among the members in the user groups therefore result in a situation where the objective of community forestry to increase access to firewood for the poor has remained an illusion in Rajhar.

The chapter also demonstrated that among the service providers, there is recognition that discrimination exists in community forestry and there is a

need to address specific needs of the poor and excluded to enable them to benefit. However, commitment and interventions to address these issues have not been adequate. Rather, the service providers' involvement with the user groups many times has contributed to poor governance and inequities.

Notes

1. Informal discussion with key informants reveals that the first user group in Rajhar was handed over under the direct order of the Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC). The minister provided direct approval and instructed the district forest officer for endorsement according to the national provision of the community forestry policy.
2. All three user groups in Rajhar had a problem identifying their boundaries and it led to intergroup conflict. While two were able to settle the conflict, one (Kalika) still experiences problems with its neighbouring VDC.
3. The main reason for allowing double membership was to increase the number of members on the list as it was necessary to have a significant proportion of users on the user list for registration purposes. A few households were also said to have received it in recognition of their contribution to forest protection and the hand-over during the initial stage. Double membership is concentrated mainly to non-poor high caste groups who are often active in local politics. This shows a strong influence of economic and political relations in access to membership.
4. Tole is small hamlet usually composed of people of the same caste (or occupation) group. This is smaller unit than the ward and informally organized.
5. There is a significant difference between the hills and the Terai in the incentives for samiti members to attend meetings regularly. In the hills, user groups face low attendance and participation of members in samiti meetings. As a result, two of the three user groups have decided to fine absentee members. This rule of participation was found effective in making users attend the meetings regularly even when there are no direct additional benefits associated with it. In the case of the Terai, user groups have introduced allowance whereby each samiti member gets a daily allowance (ranging from 80–100 rupees a day).
6. Usually, labourers involved in cutting trees and processing timber get Rs 100 per day while those involved in carrying timber get Rs 10 per cubit feet. The former is mostly done by men and the latter by women.
7. The term and the concept of a 'personal plot' is different from private forest. Personal plots are areas of community forests allocated by the user group to individual members to manage and utilize for a certain duration of time. On the other hand, private forest is the area allocated for and planted with tree species on personal land. The landholder is the owner and retains full authority to manage, utilize and sell the product and even sell the plot.

8. For example, all user groups in Rajhar provide a significant amount of support to schools and colleges on regular basis. Such supports include cash (for a teacher's salary or trust fund) and timber for the construction and maintenance of buildings and furniture. In return, information about specific events like user assemblies, meetings and management activities is channelled from the samiti to ordinary members through school children. School teachers often work as mediator or facilitators, especially during users' assemblies and meetings when conflicting issues come that need mediation from a third, independent party.
9. There are gender differences in the types of activities men and women are involved in and thus the amount they receive varies. Usually, among wage labourers, men are involve in felling trees, cutting firewood and timber-processing while women are involved in gathering and carrying firewood and timber from the forests to the office. Men claim the wage according to the working hours while for women it is paid according to the amount gathered or carried in a day.
10. In 2001 above, Phulbari user group provided Rs 48,471 (US\$ 735) in loans for member households for goat-keeping. Similarly, Rs 19,000 (US\$ 29) was provided as a grant to establish biogas. Both have been used mostly non-poor member households.
11. The reluctance of donors to be involved in Terai forest management issues was largely because of the ongoing conflict between communities and the government regarding the management of the high-value timber forest in Terai. Currently, donors who have been supporting community forestry in the Terai belt include the Bio-diversity Sector Programme for Siwalik and Terai (BISEP-ST) supported by the Netherlands and the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP) supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).
12. The six thematic programmes supported by the LFP in Nawalparasi district include community forestry, government-managed forest, private and agro-forestry, soil conservation and watershed management, alternative energy promotion and public land management (LFP, 2005).
13. LFP has developed pro-poor and social inclusion strategy (LFP 2005a) to guide its interventions towards poverty and social inclusion issues in user group forestry. The strategy defines poor and excluded (P&E) as intended beneficiaries. The term P&E comprise economically-poor households and women, Dalits and disadvantaged Janajati. The approach reflects recommended strategies outlined in DFID's Policy Paper on Reducing Poverty by Tackling Social Exclusion (DFID 2005).

6

Conclusions: The Determinants of Community Forestry Outcomes

The starting argument of this study was that explanations regarding the distributive outcomes of common property resource (CPR) strategies are insufficient because of their limited understanding of the role of community structures in which the CPR organizations operate and the influence of economic and political processes in which people are embedded. The study proposed a focus on economic and social differentiation in the community, potential incentives from forest management, the divergent interests of multiple actors in the community, the processes through which these interests emerge and the formal and informal mechanisms by which their interests are met.

It has explored contrasts between the Terai and the hills on a number of dimensions, notably in terms of the history of the community, types of economic and social differentiation and the value of resources under the control of user groups. It is argued that understanding the implications of these differences is important in order to establish (and facilitate) more inclusive user groups with more egalitarian distributive outcomes in both the hills and the Terai.

The study has demonstrated that agrarian communities are internally differentiated in terms of access to means of production and are embedded in historically-created and -maintained social relations based on class, caste, ethnicity and gender. As a result, community members have differential ability to participate and to benefit from the same general strategy of forest management. Rather than benefiting the poor and marginalized, the strategy provides an opportunity for privileged sections of the community to accumulate surplus, often reinforcing already existing unequal power relations between economic and social groups. The differential outcome can be more severe in communities with high economic and social differentiation.

The study has also demonstrated that community forestry in Nepal has changed the benefits structure, in the sense that more benefits generated by forests remain at the local level. However, these benefits do not penetrate

down to the poor members of communities. The reasons behind the unequal distributive outcomes are structural, caused by class, caste and gender relations, which are the most profoundly difficult to change through policy processes and technical fixes, without being involved in political processes and commitments.

6.1 Differences between the Communities

There are distinct differences between the hills and the Terai on three major aspects. One relates to the geographical and spatial setting of the community where user groups exist. The second relates to the economic value and incentives derived from the resources that the user group controls. The third, and most important, is the degree of differentiation between different economic and social groups. These three variables often interact with each other in determining outcomes at the local level. In addition, exogenous variables—regulatory mechanisms from forest authorities, macro-level political and economic actors and market factors—also play a role in shaping the outcome. Though the main focus of this research was to understand the influence of community attributes, the effects of resource characteristics and external variables were often interlinked and they have been emphasized where needed.

Geographical setting, caste and ethnic composition

Agrarian communities in the hills are settled in distinct and separate clusters. Each cluster is relatively small and homogenous in terms of caste and ethnic composition and types of non-farm occupations. There exist strong but unequal interdependencies between economic and social groups based on caste identity that were created historically and maintained over time. In contrast, settlements in the Terai are contiguous in nature and the population is diverse in caste and ethnic composition and types of non-farm occupations. Being recent in origin, and because of market integration, there is less interaction, less cohesion and less interdependency between economic and social groups.

The influence of geographical setting and the composition of settlements is directly reflected in user group composition. In the hills, user groups are small and users are relatively homogenous in caste composition and non-farm occupations. In contrast, in the Terai, they are large and more heterogeneous.

Forest resource characteristics

Common forests play an important role in the livelihood of peasants. These resources are contested locally but the meaning of the resource for the population is different between hills and Terai locations.

Hill forests consist of relatively few species with relatively less diversified use. The main products obtained from hill forests are firewood, fodder, grass, leaf litter, small timber and some herbs of local medicinal value. Due to the lack of direct access to market, forest-based income is almost nil and competitiveness for greater access to product is limited to subsistence use at the household level.

In the Terai, natural forests with high cash-value timber and non-timber products provide a range of opportunities for multiple use and economic exploitation. Access to market has further increased the economic value of these products as the same products which are used in households for subsistence can also be sold in the market at good prices. The expanding market for forest products has increased the competition for access to the products not only among peasants and between different groups but also among other actors in and outside of the village.

Economic and social differentiation

Communities in both locations were internally differentiated on the basis of resource endowment (class), caste, ethnicity and gender. As Chapters 2 and 3 have shown, differential access to and control over land and land-based resources were the most important cause of economic and social differentiation, leading to differential access to opportunities and capabilities between groups. Landownership had a positive influence on access to education, non-farm sources of incomes and access to and participation in power structures creating highly unequal power relations along lines of class, caste and gender.

Economic class and caste identities were often positively associated, i.e., the majority of lower caste groups (Dalits) are also economically poor. The landed class with cash income who are often high caste dominate economic, social and political life in both communities. Though differentiation, exploitative relations of domination and exclusion exist in both locations, the Terai is characterized by a higher degree of economic differentiation. This means that inequalities in economic relationships are more severe in the Terai community leading to more exploitation and exclusion of the poor and Dalits.

In terms of gender, in both locations, there are significant differences between men and women in their access to and control over means of production, opportunities, power and positions. Women are subordinated to men, because of persistence of patriarchal structures, norms and values mediated through social institutions at different levels. However, women as a category were divided by the caste and economic class of the households from which they come, resulting in significant variation between women of different economic and caste groups. The distinctions were more visible in the Terai than in the hills, resulting in significant variations in the ways women participated and influenced (or did not influence) user group decisions.

6.2 Community Structures and Group Dynamics

6.2.1 Factors influencing user group formation processes

There are serious discrepancies between actual forest user group (FUG) formation and hand over processes and the formal process requirements as spelled out in the guidelines and theoretical underpinnings of the common property resource management (CPRM). This finding coincides with the general finding that CPR organizations operate in ways different from those envisaged by the theoretically designed principles (McCarthy 2005). User groups followed a different process of FUG formation, which influenced their functioning. In the hills, user groups had a relatively long history (since the 1960s). Forests then were not directly exposed to the market, and all economic and social groups had similar interests in meeting their subsistence needs for forest products at the household level. Group formation was influenced and guided by an indigenous resource management system where a few local village elders formulated rules and others followed them. Though the process was not fully egalitarian in terms of the participation of different economic and social groups in the formulation of rules, it was informal, non-political and inclusive at least at the household level. User groups today reflect the same informality and inclusiveness, at least in terms of membership and access rules.

In contrast, user group formation in the Terai has a relatively recent history, initiated with the dawn of democracy in the country in the 1990s. A small number of local elites, mainly educated, high caste political leaders initiated the process, which involved a series of confrontations and struggles between various interest groups from the very beginning. Chapter 5 has shown that the elites involved faced reluctance from the government's Department of Forests to hand over forests and created an alliance with politicians and altered the formal procedure. The limited application of formal

procedures and greater economic and political influence resulted in a more exclusive process of user group formation where large numbers of households were excluded. Economic and political influences remain important today in the way user groups function in the Terai.

6.2.2 Factors affecting the functioning of user groups

In both locations, the functioning of user groups also reflected serious discrepancies between actual processes and formal processes as envisaged in guidelines prepared by the Department of Forests. Even at the local level, what was written in the plan and constitutions and what happened in practice were different and a whole array of informal and extralegal mechanisms shaped the reality of forest management by user groups. When examined from a class, caste and gender perspective, the study found that FUGs violated many of the conditions deemed as prerequisite by several scholars (see Ostrom 1990, McKean 2000, Agrawal 2001b, Agarwal 2002). These violations were due to the informal institutions and social relations in the communities where they operated. Though this applied to both locations, user groups in the Terai faced more economic and political pressure in a number of key areas. Differences are summarized below.

Membership criteria

Membership is the most important element that provides legitimacy for participation and secured access to benefits in user groups. Non-members are legally excluded from participation and access to any benefits derived from the group, including access to forest products. If they continue to utilize these products, their action is illegal and they are subject to financial and legal prosecution.

The criteria in the hills allowed all interested households residing in the community and using a particular patch of forest to claim membership. The concept of a user fee rarely existed and where it did, it was very small. Membership size was relatively stable and disputes about membership did not exist.¹ This made user groups more inclusive, at least at the household level. In contrast, membership distribution in the Terai user groups was more exclusive and biased towards the privileged.

Membership criteria in the Terai presented a number of complex issues that were important in shaping distributive outcomes. First, membership was only granted to settlements north of the road. Population living in the south are now distant from the natural forest. Those now nearest the forest are more recent migrants from the hills. The divide between those who live to the north and those who live to the south has become a major distribu-

tional and equity issue (ODG 2003, Sigdel et al. 2005). Even within the northern settlement, membership depended on whether the household had legal rights to the land on which it was settled. This automatically excluded large numbers of households who were settled on *ailani* land. Though user groups did not seem to apply this restriction in practice, they were reluctant to invest FUG resources on infrastructure development in these settlements, discouraging squatters from claiming membership. In addition, the price of membership was high. On the one hand, this resulted in exclusion of poor households because of their inability to pay. On the other, non-poor households claimed more than one membership (either in the same or in an adjacent user group) and a double (even triple) share of benefits. Inclusion on the basis of proximity and ability to pay are typical and disturbing features of user groups in the Terai. Exclusive membership criteria had a significant influence in distributive outcomes as non-members were legally excluded from access to participation and benefits.

Women's membership varied from 12–20% in the hills and 8–15% in Terai with high male domination in both locations. While patriarchy was an important barrier for women when it came to accessing official membership in forest user groups, the severity in terms of outcomes was more explicit in the Terai, where provisions for women to represent absentee male members were restrictive. Restrictive criteria not only affected the ability of women to participate and benefit directly from user group but also affected the welfare of the entire household, especially in the case of *de facto* female heads, by restricting direct access to decision-making. The situation was more prevalent among landless and land-poor households in the Terai.

The composition of the samiti and the decision-making mechanisms

The composition of the samiti was influenced by class, caste and gender relations. A few selected households who had more land, higher incomes, better access to education and more involvement in voluntary and political organizations occupied key decision-making positions, and this applied to all user groups in both locations. Where user groups were heterogeneous in caste and ethnic composition, the samiti was entirely dominated by high caste groups. In groups of homogenous caste and ethnicity, they were dominated by the economically better-off and politically influential households.

The process of samiti formation and the influence of political interests varied between locations. In the hills, samiti were formed by consensus where few economically and socially influential village elders nominated the members. Though the criteria used for nomination included the economic

position of the household and educational level and leadership skills that automatically excluded the majority of poor, Dalits and women, there was no direct influence of party politics and economic motives behind the process. In contrast, formation of samitis in the Terai involved direct influence of economic relations and party politics. Samiti members tended to be selected from a small circle of self-appointed candidates who lacked broad support and credibility among users. Though in theory they seem to be selected from mass meetings, informal meetings and alliances were important when it came to selection.

From a gender perspective, though the mandatory provision resulted in a higher percentage of women in samitis than in the user groups, no women were in key decision-making positions. This applied to all user groups in both the locations. However, there were significant differences between locations when it came to the socioeconomic characteristics of female samiti members, affecting their ability to influence decisions. In the hills, women samiti members mostly belonged to poor, female-headed households who had limited influence on decisions. In contrast, women samiti members in the Terai belonged to non-poor, food-sufficient, male-headed households who—either themselves or through their husbands—were involved in local-level political structures and other voluntary organizations. Female samiti members in the Terai were therefore more active and influential than even male members of poor and lower caste groups. While in the hills, gender relations affected women of all economic groups, in the Terai the economic and political position of the household of the member was more important than gender relations when it came to influencing decisions in the samiti.

The decisions made by samitis display a stark distributional bias. Concerns of the poor and of Dalit groups were rarely discussed in meetings where decisions were made. While this applied to both locations, the outcome was severe in the Terai. This is because in the Terai, the samiti consisted of members who were not dependent on community forests for their basic forest products at household level. This resulted in situations where decisions did not reflect the needs and priorities of users who were mostly dependent on community forests for their livelihoods. In addition, economic incentives derived from user groups and the exogenous political influence made decision-making in the Terai less transparent and less participatory, providing room for decision-makers to design and interpret provisions according to their interests.

Though users assemblies are fora where individual members have legal rights to agree (or not to agree) with decisions, economic, institutional and socio-cultural factors determined their ability (or their willingness) to raise

their voices in assemblies. First, multilayered structures formed in FUGs under the leadership of the samiti members replaced many functions of users assemblies. The process restricted access of ordinary members in the decision-making forum. When they attended, the poor, Dalit households and women (even those from non-poor households) did not stay until decisions were made because of the higher opportunity cost of time. Secondly, the attitude and perception of power relations constrain the desire and ability of the poor and of Dalits to raise their voice in the assemblies. Often they did not find it comfortable (or beneficial) to comment in meetings, especially when it involved arguing against the patron. On the other hand, large landownership, access to higher income, access to political structures and high caste identity facilitated non-poor high caste households to participate in assemblies and meetings and to influence decisions.

Women faced additional constraints on effective participation where gendered space, norms and values—like that of female seclusion—discouraged them to voice and influence decisions in assemblies. The finding is consistent with a range of literature that has looked at other models of CPR in other parts of Asia and Southern Africa (see Shackleton et al. 2001, Agarwal 2002, Adhikari, Falco et al. 2004; Wiggins et al. 2004, Agrawal and Gupta 2005). But the study also shows that where economic differentiation is high, relations of production dominate the influence of gender relations at community levels.

Product rules and their compliance

Product use rules lack an equity perspective despite tremendous differences within user groups in terms of need, priority and ability to claim products, and this applied to both locations. There were nevertheless significant differences between locations in terms of access criteria and rule compliances. Hill user groups were more interested in conservation than in the utilization of products. Harvesting of products was far below the capacity of the forest, resulting in a large gap between needs, demands and the actual supply of products, creating a scarcity which was felt mostly by the poor who did not have supplementary options. However, for the products that were harvested and available for distribution from community forests, the access criteria (procedures and prices) were informal, flexible and relatively more affordable for all. As a result, most members had more or less equal access to products except for timber. In contrast, Terai user groups had more products available for users from community forests, but access criteria consisting of formal procedures and higher prices often discouraged poor and illiterate from seeking access.

In general, user groups in the Terai were more effective in rule enforcement compared to the hills. However, the manner in which rules were enforced varied among users. While they were more rigid for poor members (resulting in high fines and punishment even for minor violations), economically and politically influential members on many occasions interpreted the rules differently in their favour or simply flaunted them for personal benefit. Formal rules were often undermined by informal rules and mechanisms when it came to the privileged. More importantly, discussion with the rule breakers at various levels indicated that these fines were not perceived by them as fines but as part of operating costs, and did not discourage them from breaking the rules in future. Such perception raises questions on the sustainability of forest management by the locals.

Sources and the utilization of funds

Resource-rich forests in the Terai provided large income derived from the sale of products from community forests. Being relatively larger in size, user groups also made significant income from membership and associated fees. As a result, FUG funds were significantly larger than in the hills. Because of these large funds, there was significant investment in forest development, organizational development and community development activities. The distribution of benefits from investments showed a serious bias between economic and social groups and was in favour of non-poor high caste groups. This bias was not evident in the hills that had limited funds for investment.

User groups in both locations lacked transparency in the sources and utilization of their funds. Member of user groups in the hills, even the samiti members, lacked the technical skills needed to maintain accounts and thus lacked the ability to make financial statements clear and transparent to users. Users were also less interested to know about it. In contrast, lack of transparency in Terai was more a matter of attitude, and the economic and political motives behind it. This also had significant influence on the outcomes.

Relations with service providers

In both locations, government agencies remained inadequate in providing technical assistance to user groups. The Forest Department and its functionaries neither had the capacity nor did they show responsiveness and accountability to poor and excluded people. User groups in the hills suffered more as they were unable to revise their plans in the time required to perform technical assessment of forest productivity and harvesting mecha-

nisms. Limited income from the forest and small-sized funds did not allow them to buy the services available elsewhere. This has a tremendous effect on the ability of the user group to manage and utilize the forests. User groups in the Terai with larger funds were in a better position to buy technical assistance and had minimal effect of inadequate technical assistance from the government.

The monitoring function of forest officials remained weak in both locations. In addition, user groups in the Terai reveal evidence of alliance between key decision-makers in the samiti and local forest officials. Such alliances made the samiti more accountable to forest officials than to ordinary users. Similarly, local officials were more accountable to a few samiti members who were part of the alliance and who turned a blind eye when it came to regulating certain activities of the samiti, especially the misuse of authority and inequity in benefit sharing. The finding is in line with Sundar (2001) who observed a similar lack of downward accountability of forest officials in joint forest management in India. The situation raises questions about the ability and real commitment of the Department of Forests to helping the poor through community forestry.

User groups in the hill received considerable financial and technical support from donors but access was largely determined by caste composition. Groups composed of high caste, with better access to information and use of personal linkage, were able to influence government staff and donor representatives, and accessed more support compared to the groups composed of low caste. Involvement of donors in the Terai was recently started and they had no presence when it came to influence the functioning and outcomes of user groups at community levels.

6.3 Results and Discussions

The analytical framework used in this study permits exploration of the processes and mechanisms that produce an unequal distributive outcome in a resource and community context. Though the major focus was on processes resulting in distributive outcomes, environmental aspects, such as the physical condition of the forest in question, could not be ignored as they were clearly linked to the incentives for people's involvement in user groups and ability of the groups to supply forest products and other benefits. The assessment of processes producing distributive outcomes was made in two aspects: access to forest products, and access to economic and political benefits. While the former has remained a major (stated) objective of com-

munity forestry policy, the latter, though not visualized in designing policy, has become an important element of user groups, especially in the Terai.

6.3.1 Improved forest conditions and access for the poor

Despite differences in terms of community structure, forest value and institutional attributes, conditions of forests in both locations were found improved compared to their previous state when under government management. This result is conceded by several other authors who have also reported an increase in the volume of forest resources and biodiversity under the community forestry regime in Nepal (Kanel 2004, Pokharel, Stadtmuller et al. 2005). Even Terai villages with direct access to roads have experienced improved forest conditions than under the state regime. This finding is in line with some recent studies on institutional effectiveness of CPRs (Gautam et al. 2003, Agrawal and Chhatre 2006).

Substantially improved forest conditions meant that community forests were better able to meet subsistence needs for basic products than earlier. Like many other scholars who have argued that CPRs are of greater importance and relevance to the livelihoods of the poor and that their access has a potentially redistributive role to play (Beck and Nesmith 2001, Sunderlin et al. 2005), this study showed that poor people have a greater reliance on CPR. However, it challenged the simple proposition that the availability of forest products under a CPR regime leads to greater access for the poor. The study found that user groups were unable to benefit the poor by providing them better access to forest products. All user groups in both locations were characterized by unequal sharing of costs and benefits favouring non-poor high caste groups. Where the degree of economic and social differentiation was high, user groups resulted in more inequity and exclusive outcomes and vice versa.

This study questioned an important proposition that the availability of products in the forests through better conservation and management would increase supply of the products and access by the poor. This did not hold in reality. As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, an increased harvest and supply of products does not guarantee that poor and marginalized sections of the community will receive an increased (or even equal) share of it. Though the volume of forest products and supply from user groups was less in the hills than in Terai, differential access to forest products was more serious in user groups in the latter. In the hills, all households (irrespective of economic condition and caste identity) had seen a marginal increase in their access to products other than timber. In the Terai, lack of access to products was less related to the availability of the product itself than to the ability of the poor

to claim their share. Ability here refers to their ability to pay and their influence on decisions related to access.

In order to cope with scarcity, the poor used several strategies, including using less and inferior quality products, reduced herd size, shifted occupation (especially for firewood sellers and blacksmiths) and living in a house without maintenance and furniture—decisions that directly affected their quality of life. Access restriction in community forestry also led some users to steal products from elsewhere, mostly from government forests. This was especially evident in the Terai where government-managed forests were located near the community. This observation corresponds to that by Chakraborty (2001) that people resorted to government forest to meet their needs as a response to the access restrictions imposed by user groups. The situation leads to the poor and vulnerable being caught, fined and imprisoned. More importantly, it also questions the attainment of the objective of sustainable forest management when forests under one regime are protected at the costs of forests under other regimes.

6.3.2 Distributive structures and processes

Distributional bias and differential access to forest products are less related to the amount of resources available and more to exclusion from membership, formal and bureaucratic procedures and the high prices for products which were previously available free of cost. Similarly, access to non-forest (economic and political) benefits is directly related to opportunity and constraints imposed by class, caste and gender identity, and perceptions of power relations between economic and social groups. Though some factors resulting in bias could be corrected by insisting on more effective implementation of guidelines and more facilitation as well as monitoring of services by the state and other stakeholders (ODG 2003), this will not be sufficient to rectify the serious distributional biases uncovered in Chapters 4 and 5 unless the structural constraints caused by class, caste and gender relations are transformed through political processes. The research demonstrated that unequal access to benefits was the result not only of procedural factors but more importantly of community structures through various interrelated economic and political processes. Community forestry policy and practice have largely ignored these highly differentiated and unequal structures within the rural communities.

Processes of distributional bias

The process of exclusion starts from the membership. As the research has shown, membership criteria devised by the user groups are exclusive both at

household and intra-household levels. The outcome of membership exclusion can be more serious in the communities that are more differentiated in economic terms and are endowed with high cash-value forests. The non-participatory process of user group formation and higher entry fee for the newcomers are the main barriers of inclusion for the poor even when there is willingness to join and when there is a serious need on the part of the poor for access to products from community forests. Patriarchal structures, basically the lack of control over means of production, lack of women's own identity and gendered attitude (of considering women not able to make decisions related to forest management) are important barriers for women's inclusion in the user groups. Where the rule restricts membership to only one person per household, the male household head tends to join, excluding women. Exclusion from membership meant exclusion from access to benefits derived from community forests and the benefits derived from government and donors who channel their interventions and supports through the user groups.

As the study has shown, the product use rules in the user groups are based on equality. In an agrarian community with unequal control over means of production, the needs and priorities from community forests vary between economic and social groups. More importantly, some of the formal rules that govern resource access, like that of firewood and timber access in the Terai, provide opportunities for forest organizations to rent seek through illegal selling and corruption, resulting in false shortages and unequal access to products.

Membership in a user group does not guarantee participation of the poor or their influence over decisions. Though in theory, the assembly decides all rules including the management and use of the product, in practice, as we have seen from Chapters 4 and 5, the samiti makes decisions. Local elites control the samitis and decision-making authorities, and this is where the local power dynamics play important roles. They make the decisions that meet their own interests. Unequal relations of production and the perception of power relations determine who has the influence in decisions made and whose interests are served. Allowing effective participation of the poor and women in decision-making requires a wide range of reforms, including restructuring of samiti and decision-making processes, empowering them for questioning and influencing the decisions in their favour, transparency in product harvests and their transactions, and downward accountability by local institutions. Most of these are not possible within the existing hierarchical structures and power relations.

It is argued that the capacity and agency of individuals and groups challenge the structure of power (Bebbington et al. 2006). This study also demonstrated that the poor had recognized the exploitation and inequality. But the perception of power relations and a need to depend on the privileged for their livelihoods often discouraged the poor from directly confronting and protesting against the exclusionary rules and processes. The capacity and agency on the part of the poor and the most disadvantaged did not materialize in practice. Raising one's voice against inequality and exploitation is a highly political action and its effectiveness is dependent both on the capability of the individual to exercise influence in decision-making arenas and on incentives for those engaged in the decision-making process to heed the raised voices (Hobely 2007). This study demonstrated that lack of livelihood security of the poor is the major barrier restraining them from raising their voices against the inequality.

Comparative literature also shows the possibility of alliance formation when two or more individuals find their interests similar and feel it is advantageous to work together to achieve them (Long and Ploeg 1994). While this applies to both the privileged and the excluded, in practice the coalition of the excluded was the most unlikely to be formed. On the part of the poor, on the one hand, the multilayered structures headed by a few samiti members replaced functions of users assemblies where the poor and excluded would collectively raise their concerns. On the other hand, as for individual agency, perception of power relations hindered their willingness and ability to stand, even as a group, against the decisions made by the samiti as the cost of resistance was more likely to disadvantageously affect their livelihoods. Rather, a coalition existed among the few key decision-makers in the samiti and the government officials that sanctioned the unfair decisions made by the samiti. This finding is in line with many other studies that evaluated effectiveness of decentralized rural development efforts in forestry and other sectors (Bampton and Cammaert 2006, Blaikie 2006, Ribot, Agrawal et al. 2006, Veron et al. 2006).

Ability to benefit from forest resources is mediated by constraints established by the specific political-economic and cultural frameworks. In a differentiated society with unequal control over resources, a user's access not only depends on membership and participation, but also on his/her ability to exploit it. As the cases illustrated, user groups provide 'equal' opportunities for members to obtain forest resources. However, the poor, especially the landless and squatters, did not 'need' certain products such as fodder because they did not own livestock (or owned only a small number). Consequently, they were excluded from the ample FUG benefits obtained by the

more well-off FUG members. The poor were not allowed to harvest the products that they needed in place of the products they do not need. For example, timber for charcoal was one of the important products for landless Kami households. But charcoal was not provided in place of fodder and the latter was not required for Kami who did not own livestock. The finding is similar to Bampton and Cammaert (2006) who highlighted unequal benefits derived from the 'equality'- and 'need'-based use rules in the FUGs from other parts of Nepal.

Assigning monetary value to products that were previously free and the complex administrative procedures that are difficult for the poor and women to follow seriously constrain their ability to benefit from the forest products derived from community forests. In such a situation, the poor cannot access the products even when the prices are subsidized (i.e., set lower than the market price). Rather, as Chapter 5 revealed, those who availed themselves of the subsidized price of products were those with sufficient cash income to afford the quota.

The management of FUG funds is far from transparent, with probability of corruption. FUGs, particularly in Terai, harvested more than the quantity specified in the operational plans and underreported the income, probably having sold part of the extra products illegally and accumulated the surplus. In such situations, the whole notion of reasonable or equitable access to resources becomes meaningless.

Surplus extraction and accumulation

One important difference between locations was that the high value forest of Terai user groups generated considerable direct and indirect cash in the form of salaries, allowances, subsidies and hidden transactions. However, a key characteristic of these incentives was their skewed distributional profile. As Chapter 5 has shown, non-poor high caste men who dominated the samiti and the position of office bearers were the only ones eligible to claim a salary and allowances and accumulated cash benefits. The poor and Dalits did not meet the minimum access criteria (namely educational level, skill and personal relations) required for these positions. Few households received plots in community forests for personal use, where they were sole beneficiaries of those plots; they were able to pay for multiple memberships and claimed a double or triple share of products from community forests and accumulated surplus products. The surplus derived from double/triple membership and personal plots inside the community forest was sold to poor non-members at higher prices or exchanged for free labour. In addition, forest products (mainly timber) were sold each year at highly subsi-

dized rates, and users who could buy it mostly belonged to non-poor, high caste group who had a regular source of income from non-farm sources. The same applied in access to benefits derived from FUG fund investment in various development activities. Thus, rather than benefiting the poor, the economic surplus derived from user groups was claimed by non-poor high caste groups that further increased the inequality. The finding supports works of scholars who demonstrated similar hidden economies of timber rent in other districts of Nepal's Terai (Iverson et al. 2005).

The study also demonstrates the importance of political benefits derived from user groups in the form of increased self-confidence, leadership quality and enhanced relations with other power structures and networking. Access to these incentives was also unequal. There was a clear association between people's involvement in (party) political structures and their participation in user groups to exert influence over decisions. Access to opportunities for personal development was highly restricted for the poor and Dalits. It was usually non-poor high caste men who had the information and resources to participate in user groups and to exploit the forum for their political interests, building increased social status and political positions in society. Even within small and relatively homogenous caste groups in the hills, economic barriers posed difficulties for poor users in accessing opportunities. The outcome was more serious in the Terai user groups with their high economic and social differentiation. The result is also relevant in context of work by other scholars that has shown how better-off and more powerful local groups tend to appropriate greater benefit from decentralized community-level groups (Weinberger and Jutting 2001, Nygren 2005). Use of the user group as a channel to enhance personal relationships and to develop social and political connections is not an illicit act as long as it is used to manage the resource. But as we uncovered in Chapter 5, a few non-poor high caste members of users groups used these networks and relations as a means of accumulation, exploitation and domination over poor and lower caste groups, and that is problematic from the view of distributional impact.

6.3.3 Gendered processes and outcomes

Contrary to the ecofeminist emphasis on women's role as environmental manager and the proposition that women have more interests and ability, this research found no significant difference between men and women in their interests and ability to protect and manage forests. Though a gender difference in their preferences for tree species is clearly observed, it was more related to the gender division of labour and varied between women across economic and caste groups.

The influence of gender relations on forest resource use also varied between locations. In the hills, women of all economic and social groups used firewood, fodder, grass and leaf litter, and were interested in management options that favoured the production of these subsistence forest products. Men were mostly interested in timber products, reflecting their preference for species for timber production. In contrast, in the Terai, women from non-poor households, who had access to alternative products to substitute for the use of firewood and fodder, were less interested in subsistence products than men and women of poor households with limited alternative options. This suggests that the preference for specific forest products, knowledge related to them and interest in management options varies even amongst women according to their level of dependence on forest products for gender specific tasks. The finding supports work of scholars who suggest using analysis of gender–environment relations only within the context of other social variables such as class, caste and ethnicity (Agarwal 1998, Lama and Buchy 2004).

The principal factors underlying gender differences in the sharing of burdens and benefits of community forestry were social norms governing the division of labour. Women's primary responsibility for firewood and fodder meant they had to bear the costs of curtailed access to these products. However, how acutely a woman was affected depended on the economic situation of the household she belonged to. In the hills, women, irrespective of their economic and social categories, faced this burden (though at different levels) as most of them used these products and they were gathered, not purchased. In the Terai, women from economically better-off households were able to supplement the use of products from the market and women from poor households who were not able to buy products from markets were the worst-off.

Access to benefits from user groups was linked to membership. Though women's lack of membership did not affect them much in terms of access to forest products as the product was used at household levels, it affected their ability to be represented in the samiti and to access economic and political benefits. In addition, the gender division of labour, lack of access to information, gendered norms and values and women's subordinated position in the household, separately and in combination affected their ability to access economic and political benefits derived from user groups. This influence of gender relations on access to cash income and personal development opportunities was evident in both locations. The finding is similar to that of literature which suggests that women's participation in user groups is not an easy and smooth process in rural contexts, where they are typically

assigned more burdensome chores in the household and as agricultural labour (Agarwal 2001, Agrawal and Chhatre 2006) and where gendered norms and values constrain their mobility and behaviour (Agarwal 2000).

In terms of influence over decisions in the samiti, however, the effect of gender relations varied between locations. While in the hills, the gender division of labour, norms and values constrained women of all economic and caste groups from participating effectively and shaping decisions in the samiti, the influence of these constraints was less in the Terai where women samiti members were relatively more educated and had more exposure to market and community spheres. Influence on decisions in the Terai varied significantly amongst women from different economic and social groups. Women who belonged to non-poor high caste groups enjoyed more influence on decision-making than women from poor lower caste groups. This suggests that, in communities with high economic and political differentiation, gender relations become less important when it comes to influence over the decisions.

This corresponds to the argument that, within any community, women as a social category are differentiated in terms of economic, political and caste positions that determine their interests and dependency on CPR and the impact of their curtailed access to forest products (Sarin 1998, Rai Paudyal and Buchy 2004). The research further suggests that in highly differentiated communities, the impact of economic relations outweighs the impact of gender relations when it comes to representing interests, influence over decisions and even access to benefits. The study thus argues that gender relations do not exist in isolation but within the context of class and caste relations. Any analysis of the influence of gender relations on outcomes should also be carried out in the context of class, caste and ethnicity analysis.

6.4 Determinants of Distributive Outcomes: Key Issues

Community forestry has focused on organising groups of individuals for management of forest resources. This managerial approach undermines a more politically nuanced approach based on an understanding relationships between individuals and their capabilities to be more effective within the groups. As Chapters 4 and 5 also demonstrate, community groups are far from inclusive and representative. Those who are excluded are the poorest, excluded on the basis of class, caste and gender. Even if they are not excluded physically (as in case of user groups in hill sample village), their ability to be effective as members in influencing decisions and actions is highly

circumscribed by their social relationships and the prevailing economic and cultural inequalities.

The thesis also provides evidence that these local-level structural inequalities are reproduced at district (operational) and national (policy) levels, and in many ways present even more difficult barriers to change. This affects the quality of policy processes and their implementation. In societies where political participation of the poor and women is extremely low due to unequal economic and gender relations, 'it is questionable whether participation and equitable outcomes through sectoral groups like FUGs can be effective or sustained without the attention to wider political participation and through attention to wider livelihood security issues and issues of dependence on patrons' (Hobley 2007: 29).

a) Constraints on distributive outcomes are structural

Much of what is written on community forestry in Nepal is embedded in the rhetoric of community participation in user groups and in somewhat simplistic notions of 'community'. This research has demonstrated that the communities in which user groups function are diverse and internally differentiated. The complexities of formal rules and mechanisms of user groups are guided by informal rules and mechanisms embedded in the way people relate to each other in differentiated communities. It is argued that economic and political structures and social institutions set the context for individual and group behaviour. How economic and social groups act and behave is shaped in large part by structures and institutions that are characterized by exploitation, exclusion and unequal access to resources, opportunities and voices. As Chapters 2 and 3 have demonstrated, unequal relations are created on the basis of class, caste, ethnicity and gender identity, maintained over time through institutions at various levels and have a determining impact on outcomes today.

The two cases demonstrate that powerful underlying structures operate in agrarian communities to benefit certain classes and groups. Structural forces uncovered in earlier chapters that enhance or inhibit the ability of users to participate and benefit from user groups can be broadly grouped into three: access to means of production; organization, voice and influence; and the policies and institutions.

Lack of access to productive assets and capabilities that channel scarce resources for subsistence undermine the interest and ability of the poor to claim membership, participate effectively and to access their share of products from user groups. Economic constraint is more clearly pronounced in the Terai which has higher degree of differentiation. As the study demon-

strated, community forestry in its current form has limited capacity to result in pro-poor outcomes. The major beneficial effects are (and will continue to be) felt by those who are already in positions of wealth and are able to take advantage of improved markets and exert influence in decision-making arenas.

Structural constraints, the barriers created by class and gender relations, affect not only the mixed groups and community forestry, but equally also so-called poor-only groups formed under the Leasehold Forestry Programme (LFP) and other similar community group initiatives. As mentioned earlier (Chapter 2), leasehold forestry is another community-based forest management modality practised in Nepal. The programme has an exclusive focus on poor households, facilitating the organization of the landless and landpoor households (with less than 0.5 ha land ownership) into groups and the leasing of patches of degraded forest land for 40-year periods in order to provide them with a more secure supply of fodder, firewood and other forest products. However, studies that examined effectiveness of the programme have demonstrated the occurrence of severe conflicts over the resource tenure, which result in the exclusion and further marginalization of poor people. The class conflicts over membership in leasehold groups force groups which are, according to policy, restricted only to the poor, to expand their membership to include non-poor households (Nagendra et al. 2005). Poor members of groups also lack sufficient resources such as money for investment, skills and technology and market linkages that are important in order to exploit the land productively (Bhattarai et al. 2004).

In addition to economic constraints, ideologies (particularly those formulated within Hindu caste system) and patriarchy create differences in access to membership, opportunities for self-development and constrain effective participation resulting in lack of voice and influence in decisions and benefits among Dalits and women respectively. For example, the Hindu caste-based hierarchy situates Dalits in a very disadvantaged position that constrains their ability to speak in front of high caste groups, influence decisions that affect their lives and to access products they require to continue their occupation, especially when they have a mixed group composition. Within the homogenous caste group composition however, class relations within Dalit communities constrain poorer Dalits to influence decisions made by non-poor Dalits even when the decisions are against their interests. Similarly, patriarchy constrains women's access to information, education, opportunities for self development and freedom of movement and prevents women from broadening their roles in forest management through access to new arrangements and opportunities. The finding is similar to that of lease-

hold forestry groups where women face similar gender constraints (Moffatt 1998).

Because of economic and social constraints, the poor and disadvantaged often lack organization, voice and influence. These structural forces shape, enable and limit the opportunities and constraints, and create a system of winners and losers where the former accumulate surplus at the cost of the latter who lose their access to resources that were vital for their livelihoods. Similarly, policies and institutions from community groups (e.g constitution and operational plans) to the macro level (Forest Act, policies and guidelines) do not recognize or address specific constraints that the poor and disadvantaged face, but rather strengthen them. These structural forces—unequal access to and control over means of production, lack of voice and influence and inequitable policies and institutions (which are often interrelated)—constrain the ability of the excluded to transform unequal relations, participate effectively and claim the benefits derived from the user groups. It is unlikely that forest user groups which are also the part of the system can be effective in dealing with inequality that arises out of structural faults.

As shown in Chapter 5 in the case of the Terai, conflict arises between winners and losers when the needs of the latter are unmet. People struggle against marginalization, powerlessness and exclusion, but unlike many CPR literature that see user groups as a platform for conflict resolution and negotiation of power, this research suggests that power relations are reproduced rather than negotiated. On the one hand, it provides little evidence of individual resistance (human agency) or collective efforts on the part of the disadvantaged. Disadvantaged and powerless users rarely resist when the cost of their action is likely to disadvantageously affect their livelihoods. Even when they do resist, it is highly unlikely that the conflicts are resolved. The formal and informal processes that take place in user groups and communities are designed to support existing institutions and structures, providing limited possibility of altering the status quo. The outcome is an uneven distribution of benefits and the reproduction of unequal relations of power.

b) 'Hidden incentives' are more important in shaping outcomes

A second issue brought up by the research is the difference between open (direct) and hidden (indirect) benefits derived from community forests. The area has not been explored appropriately in the CPR literature but concerns a wide range of incentives derived from user groups. CPR literature focuses more on environmental effectiveness and access to forest products which are considered the major incentive for users to participate in user groups. The study demonstrated that in addition to access to forest products, user

groups provide economic and political incentives that motivate users to participate actively in decision-making and to be involved throughout.

Attention to economic and political incentives derived from community forests become more important when it comes to understanding the reasons for the increasing interest of local elites in participating and becoming involved in the community forestry process, even when their dependence on common forest for their subsistence needs is far less than that of poor. The study demonstrated that economic and political gains outweigh the time and other resources a user spends in a user group. This is particularly important for non-poor members. This aspect of (non-forest) hidden incentives, related to economic benefit and present and future-oriented political positions is important in explaining the tremendous interest of the privileged to participate in user groups and surplus extraction through community forestry processes.

c) Institutional failure

The research identifies two major areas of institutional failures in community forestry. The first is related to the functioning of user groups. As shown in Chapter 4, though the forest is better protected than before, it is not managed productively and the resource is underutilized even where there is large gap between the need and supply of the products and there are limited initiatives on the part of user groups to maximize their production and utilization. In this sense, the existing capacity of the community for better forest management and optimum utilization is in question, especially in the hills. This is mainly related to the inadequate human and technical capacities of the user groups in question. Where user groups were proactive in seeking technical assistance, service providers do not provide an adequate level of technical assistance to the users. This failure to achieve productive management and optimum utilization has had a tremendous effect on the supply of forest products, creating scarcities in communities.

The second institutional failure relates to the user group's performance in securing an equitable distribution of benefits. There is no doubt that community forestry has resulted in an increase in the volume of forest products and has generated increased income and employment possibilities. While the former applies to both locations, the latter is more prevalent in the Terai. However, in both locations, user groups have failed to increase access of the poor to these benefits.

One can argue that the analysis of distributive outcomes from equity perspectives must be seen in the light of the resource value. Given the enormous difference in the value of resources under their control in the

hills and Terai (and even within a location between user groups), this argument is important. However, in comparing the two locations, it became clear that, though the equity potentials of groups (at least in terms of resource value) is greater in the Terai than in the hills, this institutional failure is also more serious in the Terai. Only a few selected households in the community generated substantial earnings from user groups; some generated them sporadically while a majority of poor and Dalits lost the access and income that they had before. This implies that the existence of resources and income does not guarantee that user groups will benefit the poor through increased access. The situation reiterates the significance of structure resulting in differential outcomes within and between communities. It is almost impossible in today's society to find a community without some levels of economic and social differentiation. However, the degree of differentiation varies. The study demonstrates that where the degree of economic and social differentiation is at minimum, there is more chance of less differentiated outcomes in access to incentives and vice versa.

d) Macro-level policies and institutions fail to address structural constraints

The study saw the relevance of historical analysis and the structure of policy and political actors to understand their action and contributions in the outcome. When policy and political actors were placed within the context of larger structures, they were found to be representing certain constituencies within the institutions and the larger society. As a result, the same local-level structural inequalities are reproduced at policy and implementation levels of community forestry. The study raised the question of responsiveness, downward accountability and a real commitment on the part of policy and political actors to change. Though equity and the redistributive role of community forestry are currently in debate in the country (see Allison et al. 2004, and GEWG 2004), neither the policy and the organizational structures, nor the political culture were prepared for this.

The guidelines and policies of the Department of Forests, defining 'community' and 'users' for user group forestry, were insensitive to local social structure including class, caste, gender and other community attributes. This confirms the view of scholars that state actors continue a role as custodians rather than supporters and facilitators of a participatory process with forest-dependent communities (Sundar 2000, ODG 2003). Their defined role as custodians provides little room for sensitivity towards differential outcomes. The few officials who attempt to address the issue lack the financial, technical and human resources to realize their intentions.

On occasion, policy actors and the state support apparatus become part of an alliance of accumulation that results in the lack of downward accountability. The existence of such alliances and its influence tend to be more evident in the community where there is a high value resource. This finding is particularly relevant in that other scholars on Asia, Africa and Latin America have cautioned that there is a danger that decentralization is hijacked by local elites, companies or government agencies (Alix-Garcia et al., Klooster 2000a, Sundar 2001, Wiggins et al. 2004).

Donors have a large (and determining) influence on forest sector policies, development and experimentation of approaches and modalities reflected throughout the development of the forestry sector in Nepal. But the study showed limited influence of donors on the user group dynamics at the local level, especially in the Terai. A large proportion of donor support is channelled through the government, especially through the Department of Forests, to strengthen the department's capacity to provide service to the groups and to ensure that pro-poor provisions are included in forest policies and guidelines. But enormous financial and technical support provided by donors do not ensure that appropriate political structures and mechanisms at local levels achieve an equitable distribution of benefits. Rather, the large amounts of money are being disbursed through community-based development initiatives outside normal political structures, leading to corruption in local institutions, where local leadership become increasingly accountable to donor agencies rather than to those they represent (Platteau and Gaspart 2003: 40). While there is growing recognition that discriminatory practices exist and there is a need to address specific needs of the poor and most disadvantaged to enable them to benefit from user groups, reluctance remains on the part of government and donors to become involved in political processes and radical political reform within and outside the sector, without which the distributional issues that have been uncovered in the study are unlikely to be addressed. As Sundar (2001) has argued, what matters for equitable outcomes from community forest management in differentiated agrarian structures is not the degree of interventions but the accountability for structural transformation through political reform. The study thus raises the question of the usefulness of highlighting the role of communities in achieving equitable distributive outcomes when wider sociopolitical structures do not encourage the transformation of unequal power relations in communities but rather prevent them from happening.

6.5 Implications of the Study

6.5.1 Implications on theory and methodology

The study has shown through the articulation between theory and empirical experience in the hills and the Terai communities that although the intent of community forestry is to help the poor and women, the long-existing class, caste and patriarchal structures limit their access to and control over benefits. Forest users are socially constructed by the universal categories of class, caste, ethnicity and gender. These categories shape the functioning of groups and result in differential and inequitable outcomes. The cases and common themes discussed above contribute to the enhancement of knowledge in CPRM studies in three ways. First, the CPRM literature focuses on access to forest as the most important incentive for people to participate in user groups and assumes that those who are most dependent on the forest for their livelihoods will participate most in user groups and will benefit. This study demonstrates that, in addition to forest products, CPRM organizations provide economic and political benefits that attract the non-poor who then control management. Economic and political incentives derived from participation in user groups outweigh the costs of participation. As a result, non-poor and politically influential people, who are less dependent on common forests for their livelihood, often participate more in forest management, using the forum for economic and political gain. Thus, in addition to forest products, the explanation of users' behaviour and outcomes should also take account of hidden economic and political benefits provided by the user groups in determining differential and (often unexpected) ways that user groups function and impact on the agrarian communities.

Second, the study suggests that CPR studies should focus on the complexities and variation in agrarian communities in terms of their internal differentiation when analysing the performance of CPRM organizations. Analysis must establish and improve understanding of the connection between agrarian structures and CPRM performance. Economic relations, social norms and behaviour (often informal) shape individual and group identities, behaviour and political culture which together shape, enable and limit the opportunities for different economic and social groups to benefit from CPRM organizations. Often, user groups support existing structures and institutions and thus perform badly in addressing inequality that is caused by these structures. These factors in the distributive outcomes of organizations must be recognized and analysed properly.

Third, the study recognizes the relevance of non-formal structures and institutions that often dominate the formal structures and institutions in an

agrarian economy. CPRM organizations are embedded in both formal and informal institutions. Focus on formal structures and institutional designs are thus insufficient to explain the wide gap between expectations and realities. More research and piloting are required to build a more nuanced understanding of various forms of poverty caused by formal and informal relations and institutions, forestry and livelihood linkages.

The analytical framework used to understand the determinants of distributive outcomes in this study included three major elements: community attributes, institutional attributes, and resource and physical characteristics. The study of community attributes included the history of the community, differential access to means of production between economic and social groups and social relations of power between them. While the history of the community proved helpful in understanding origin of the current differentiation and social relations, analysis of differential access to means of production revealed various sources of material and symbolic power by which people today control and to examine how people use these sources of power to maximize the space and access to benefits from interventions. The concept of social differentiation was helpful in understanding the nuances of communities that exist in completely different historical, social and physical settings. Similarly, exploring resource attributes proved helpful in particular in examining relations between the volume of resources and access to poor, in uncovering a range of incentives that could be derived from a user group, and in explaining variations in the functioning of user groups within and between locations.

Analysis of the interplay between formal and informal institutions proved to be the most challenging and also the most important component of the framework. Institutions for this study comprised all formal and informal structures, rules, norms and procedures. Literature on CPR put much emphasis on formal rules in analysis of outcomes. Similarly, mainstream literature on participation puts formal structures and procedures at the centre. However, analysis of the interplay between formal and non-formal institutions allowed us to examine how informal institutions dominate formal ones. This was particularly helpful in explaining the large gap between predicted and actual outcomes.

Another distinct element of the framework was that it allowed us to examine distributive bias in CPR in terms of process and in terms of outcomes. Understanding the process of exclusion covered four major areas: membership, participation, access to forest resource and access to non-forest benefits which, separately or in combination, produced exclusive (inclusive) outcomes. This framework could be applicable in studying the out-

comes of any decentralized local-level intervention that is based on membership, that generates local-level resources and involves sharing costs and benefits.

6.5.2 Policy implications

Despite the growing evidence and concerns on unequal distributive outcomes, the tendency to put forward community as the panacea to solving the problems of resource management and inequity continues. As Hobley (2007) argues, this is mainly because the ideas of community-based forest management strategies emerged more from a strong ecological agenda than from a pro-poor agenda. The study has demonstrated that there were serious pitfalls in the dominant conceptualization of the 'community' when designing the community forestry strategy of Nepal. Outcomes were envisaged without considering the socioeconomic characteristics of agrarian structures and variations in resource and community attributes between physiographic zones. It is argued that the assumptions of community forestry deny the unequal access to and control over forests determined by class, caste and gender; thus actions which follow these assumptions reinforce these determinant relationships. It is impossible to predict the outcome of user groups in the absence of knowledge (or recognition) of the local dynamics of power relations that constrain (or further) users behaviour and their ability to serve their interests through forest management. The widespread and apparently uncritical use of the concept 'community' and the assumption about homogeneity need to be replaced with greater recognition of differentiated people with different interests and power to meet those interests. Those working with communities thus need to recognize when community interventions become part of the process which ultimately supports existing unequal social relations leading to unequal outcomes. The forest organizations need to be well designed, regularized and monitored to prevent reinforcement of unequal relationships.

This fieldwork has demonstrated that the poor, women and Dalits, face specific constraints when it comes to participating and benefiting from community forestry, even where there are improved forest conditions and associated resources with user groups. As demonstrated earlier, economic and social relations are important in determining distributive outcomes. Social relations, like those of caste and gender, are culturally-based and perpetuated as such by policies and institutions at various levels. This implies that exclusion and unequal distributive outcomes cannot be addressed unless economic, cultural and institutional constraints for inclusion are rec-

ognized, and those excluded and the disadvantaged are empowered enough to remove those barriers.²

In order to help the poor and excluded to remove barriers to inclusion, it is important to change the rules of the game. Formulating specific pro-poor and inclusive forest management strategies with a political commitment for complete sector reform to ensure effective implementation and monitoring is an important point to start with. But as the study revealed providing opportunities for participation through policies, legislations and through emergence of local level institutions is not enough for the most poor and excluded to raise their voice and to claim the benefits if they are not able to use it. (Webster and Pedersen, 2002). The barriers to inclusion are structural and not easily addressed at the local levels no matter how robust the policy provisions and the local organisations are. High levels of livelihood insecurity make it difficult for poor to contest decisions of patrons and those who maintain access to livelihood resources. Same applies to women and Dalits. Thus, it is more important to provide security to poor people to exercise their voice and to increase the incentives for others to heed their voice. While the former requires developing other opportunities for poor people to strengthen their livelihood base and social security, the latter requires influencing others and making them politically accountable.

Forest sector policies and services thus require focusing not only on institutional design and the organizational strengthening of user groups for sustainable and productive forest management but, more importantly, on enhancing incentives for the poor and excluded to participate and benefit effectively. This would mean allocating efforts and resources to increase access to economic resources and livelihood opportunities for the poor through forest- or non-forest-based engagements; organizing and meaningfully engaging the socially excluded (especially women and Dalits) in user groups to influence the decisions and processes that affect the outcome; and more importantly, helping to remove attitudinal and behavioural constraints based on caste and gender ideology on a wider level. The forest sector, in isolation, cannot strengthen the livelihood bases, nor remove other cultural and social constraints which are linked to access to education, farm and off-farm employment opportunities, health services, social protection measures and so on. This further demands an integrated approach led by the political society at local levels through political decentralization of resources.

Notes

1. Though some studies (see HURDEC 2004) raise issue of exclusion based on caste identity and its severe outcomes in the hills, our case study did not provide

evidence of exclusion because of caste identity. However, most often, the economic condition and caste identity were positively associated i.e. the majority of lower caste groups also were the one who were most poor and the one who were excluded. Such exclusion was evident in Terai.

² Here, the term empowerment includes both livelihood and mobilization empowerment. Livelihood empowerment focuses on the enhancement of the livelihood opportunities while mobilization empowerment focuses on organizing and engaging the poor and disadvantaged men and women to influence the institutions in favour of their interests and priorities (Rai Paudyal et al. 2006).



Postscript

Nepal is now undergoing a period of political transition. This period presents both risks and opportunities. The Constituent Assembly (CA) held in April 2008 has officially abolished the 240-year-old monarchy and the country is now developing its constitution through the elected CA members. This is expected to pave the way for a complete socio-political transformation. The major political events—including the armed conflict led by Maoists for past 12 years (1996-2006); the people’s movement of 2006 that led to the abolition of the monarchy and the end of the armed conflict; and the Constituent Assembly election in 2008—provided a critical opening of debates on issues related to political decentralization through federal structures, pro-poor resource allocation, social and political inclusion, gender equality and social security for the extreme poor. The CA body is much more representative of Nepal’s diversity than any previous legislative body. Most notably, one-third of its members are women, which according to the United Nations, puts Nepal in 14th place in the league table of women’s representation in national elected bodies. As they work out a new constitution over two years, these newly represented groups are expected to help to enshrine their own rights as never before.

As the country is now developing its constitution, there is an opportunity to embed more pro-poor incentives in the political system. The process of constitution-building and rules-making also provide an opportunity to support the implementation of pro-poor incentives with the passing of new forestry laws, plans and policies. However, with the Maoists (former rebel group now in the ascendancy in the government) many questions remain about power structure in the new politics. The power struggle between the parties is likely to drag on in a muddled political process for many years to come, leaving the people where they are.

Annexures

Annex 1

Criteria used for well-being assessment of peasants in Terai village

Categories	Main characteristics	Associated characteristics
Landless labourers	Work as farm and non-farm labour; food deficit (need to buy or exchange grain)	Mostly illiterate with large family size, children not going to school
Small peasants (<i>sana kisan</i>)	Hold few land (less than 0.5 <i>bigha</i>), some have registered others have not registered, Food sufficient only up to six months, work as farm and off farm labour	Involve in share-cropping to supplement food or work as farm and off farm. Parents mostly uneducated, children attend local school but not regularly
Middle Peasants (<i>majhula kisan</i>)	Hold land more than small peasant. Food sufficient for one year, few also sell, hire labour during season but do not work as wage labour	Children educated, attend school up to Narayanghat (a nearby town). At least one member of family working outside and supplementing income is common.
Large peasants (<i>thulo kisan</i>)	Hold more land, rent out land, hire labour in wage (few have permanent labour), food surplus	Children in other cities for education, some families work outside. Also local moneylender.
Non farmer landholders	Own land but do not cultivate on their own. Food surplus, have off farm employment	Not much active in forest management activities

Source: Participatory discussion followed by wellbeing ranking among elected VDC representatives and Ward Chairpersons (*Wada Adhyachhya*), VDC Office, Rajhar (2002)

Annex 2
Caste and ethnic groupings of Nepal's population, 2001

Major Groups	Hierarchy within the group		Population share (%)
Caste group (Jat) (57.5 %)	High (32.8 %)	1) Hill Terai B/C	32.8
		1.1 Hill B/C	30.9
		1.2 Terai B/C	1.9
	Middle (12.9 %)	2) Terai Middle caste	12.9
	Low (11.8 %)	3) Dalits	11.8
		3.1 Hill Dalits	7.1
3.2 Terai Dalits		4.7	
Ethnic group (Janajati) (37.2 %)	Newar and Thakali (5.5 %)	4) Ethnic Groups	37.2
		4.1 Newar and Thakali	5.5
	Other hill Janajati (23 %)	4.2 Other hill Janajati	23.0
	Terai Janajati (8.7 %)	4.3 Terai Janajati	8.7
Religious minorities and others (5.3 %)	5) Religious minorities	4.3	
	6) Others	1.1	

Within each these broad headings include:

- Upper caste group (hill and Terai,): **Brahmin, Chhetri**, Thakuri, Sanyasi, Rajput, Kayastha, Baniya, Marwadi, Jaine, Nurang, Bangali
- Middle caste group (Terai): Yadav, Teli, Kalwar, Sudhi, Sunar, Lohar, Koiri, Kurmi, Kanu, Haluwai, Hajam/Thakur, Badhe, Bahae, Rajbhar, Kewat, Mallah, Nuniya, Kumhar, Kahar, Lodha, Bing/Banda, Bhediyar, Mali, Kamar, Dhunia
- Lower caste group (hill and Terai): **Kami, Sarki, Damai**, Gaine, Badi, Chamar, Musahar, Dhusadh/Paswan, Tatma, Khatway, Bantar, Dom, Chidimar, Dhobi, Halkhor, Dalit/unidentified *Dalits*
- Hill ethnic group (Hill Janajati): **Newar/Thakali, Magar, Tamang**, Rai, **Gurung**, Limbu, **Sherpa**, Bhote, walung, Byansi, Hyolmo, Gharti/Bhujel, **Kumal**, Sunuwar, Balamu, Pahari, Adivasi Janajati, Yakkha, Chhantal, Jirel, Darai, Dura, **Majhi, Danuwar**, Thami, Lepcha, Chepang, Bote, Raji, Hayu, Raute, Kuunda
- *Terai* ethnic group (Terai Janajati): **Tharu**, Dhanuk, Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya, Gangai, Dhimal, Meche, Kisan, Munda, Santhal/Satar, Dhangad/Jhangad, Koche, Pattarkatta/Kusbadiya
- Religious Minorities: Muslim, Churoute, Panjabi/Shikh

(Note: Bolded are caste and ethnic groups that exist in study locations and are used in the text)

Source: Adapted from DFID and World Bank (2006).

Annex 3

Gender division of labour in a middle peasant's household in off-agricultural season

Time	Husband	Wife
5:00 -6 AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still in bed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets up • Cleaning house • Fresh up • Fetching water
6:00- 7:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets up • Cleaning cow shed • Fresh up ® 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing tea and serving • Watering and feeding livestock
7:00 - 11:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goes out, mostly in tea shops where people meet and talk about the politics, or any other matter of common interests. But sometimes meet with people of interest for any households or other related matters. • Comes back to eat at 10:30 - 11:00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking (use gas since last two years!) • Fodder collection (from own orchard!) with the help of daughter • Serve to family members • Kitchen chores of cleaning utensils, fetching water.
11:00-2:00	Out again. This time mostly goes to community forest office to look after official matters, the office of biodiversity, banks, Village Development Committee office, or market place. In agricultural peak season, works in field or look after wage labourers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washing cloth (daughter helps) • Either takes livestock out (around own bari land) for grazing or prepares food and feed them at home • Works in kitchen garden or in farm (including harvesting/ processing)
2:00- 3:00	Still out	Preparing tea and snacks for family members
3:00 - 5:00	Still out	Continues earlier engagement
5:00 - 7:00	Gets back home Look after water, feeding of animals Clean animal shed (children help)	Cooking evening meal
7:00 - 8:00	Dinner	Serving dinner Eating and cleaning utensils
8:00 - 10: 00	Television	Television after completing household chores. While watching TV, she cuts vegetable for next day or bring some cloths for sewing
10:00 - 10:30	Going to bed	Going to bed

Source: Participant observation, house of Chairperson Phulbari CF (2002)



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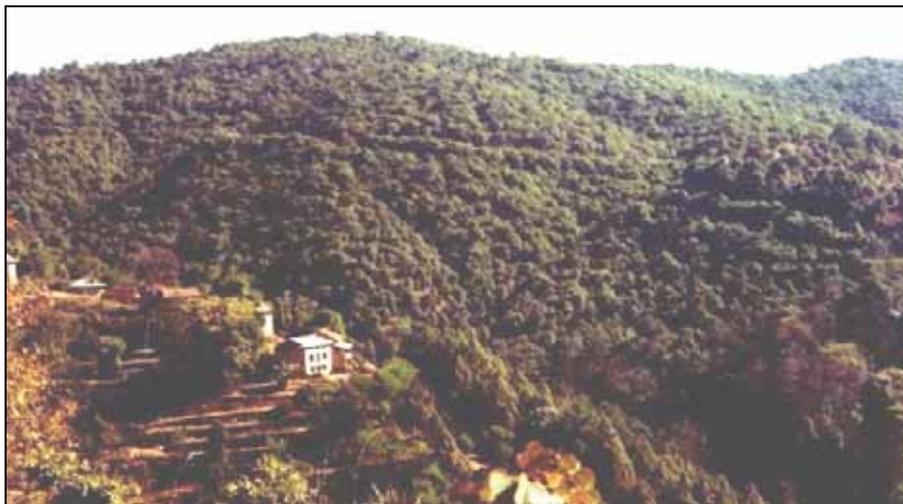
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Plates

1 Forest and forest resource use in Tukucha

1.1 *Community forests (Chhetri Ban and Newar Ban) in Tukucha*



1.2 *Use of pine leaves as animal bed in Tukucha. Farmers re-use the litter as compost.*



- 1.3 *A woman cutting grass from edge of private land and another carrying grass from public land (inset). Collecting grass and fodder is the primary responsibility of women irrespective of economic and social identities.*



- 1.4 *Fallen pole-sized trees in Tukucha. Except for Chhetri Ban that has matured trees, other two user groups have small pole-sized trees, which are not ready for harvest.*



2 Forest and forest resource use in Rajhar

- 2.1 *Improved vegetation in one of the community forests in Rajhar. Previous condition of the forest (before community forestry) is in inset.*



- 2.2 *Fodder inside community forest and a hired labourer carrying fodder for a land-rich household. Owners of 'personal plots' inside community forests have unrestricted access to fodder while others wait till the forest opens for fodder collection. The distribution of personal plots is biased towards land-rich.*



- 2.3 *Timber processing inside community forests. Each year, community forests generate significant amounts of FUG funds from timber sale in Terai.*



- 2.4 *A poor woman carrying timber from the forest to an FUG office. She gets wages equivalent to Rs. 10 per cft timber she carries.*



- 2.5 *A low caste woman collecting firewood for cooking. She lives near Kalika community forest in Rajhar but does not have membership in a FUG due to her inability to pay the entry fee. She makes her living from stone crushing.*



- 2.6 *House of Ram Kumal, a poor member in Kalika community forest. Kumal has been living in ailani land for the past 10 years but lacks money to buy timber for a door and furniture required for his house.*



- 2.7 *A child collecting water from the river to take home for drinking. Though a significant amount of FUG funds in Rajhar is spent on piped water connection, squatters are not covered and therefore depend on the river for water.*



- 2.8 *Displaced firewood sellers collecting small stones from local river. A significant number of households in Rajhar used to make a living from firewood selling which was completely banned after the start of community forestry. Those displaced now work as stone crushers and wage labourers.*



Bimala Rai Paudyal

Admitted to the PhD programme in 2001 on the basis of:

Master of Arts in Economic and Social Studies (Economics and Management of Rural Development), The University of Manchester, Manchester, The United Kingdom, 1996

This thesis has not been submitted to any university for a degree or any other award.