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REDD in Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked country between China and India, with a diversity of ecological and physiographic landscapes including Himalayan mountainous and lowland terrain regions. Nepal is made up of three geographic regions, the low-lying Terai plains and Siwalik Hills, Middle Hills and the snow covered high Himalayas (LFP, 2008). The Himalayan Mountains cover 15% of the land area, with the Middle Hills and the Terai areas covering 68% and 17%, respectively (NEFIN, 2010). For a relatively small country, with a land area of just over 14 million hectares (FAO, 2011) there is a diversity of physiological landscapes, climatic contrasts and altitudinal variations (ICIMOD, 2007). Nepal has over 118 ecosystems and 35 forest types, and is habitat to biological species stemming from Indo-Malayan to Palaeoartic realms (ICIMOD, 2007). Nepal has 11 bio-climatic zones, including

agricultural land in the South, and forests that range from tropical to sub-tropical, temperate and alpine forests (ICIMOD, 2007).

According to the Asia Forestry Outlook Study 2020, forest coverage in Nepal has recently been reported at about 39.6%, declining from 42.7% in 1978 (FAO, n.d). Forestland coverage is most extensive in the Far West and Middle regions with 35.2% and 33.5% respectively, and the West and East with the lowest at 25% and 25.9% respectively. A Land Resource Mapping Project (1978/79) reported forest coverage of 42.8% that reduced to 29% by 1991 according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2011). Similarly, data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) shows that Nepal's forest area has decreased from 4.8 million hectares to 3.6 million hectares over twenty years from 1990 - 2010 (FAO, 2011). National deforestation rates are 1.3%, and at the subnational level particularly in the Terai region is 1.7% due to more fertile agricultural land, high commercial value of timber and easy access to markets. Figures from the FAO indicate forest loss at 2.1% per annum from 1990-2000, 1.4% per annum by 2000 - 2005 and a drop to zero by 2005 - 2010, however, this can be attributed to forest cover and deforestation rates varying significantly by region (FAO, 2011).

The drivers of deforestation and land degradation in Nepal are principally attributed to unsustainable harvesting practices, forest fire, encroachment, overgrazing, infrastructure development, resettlement and expansion of invasive species (MOFSC, 2010). A lack of cheap energy sources has also driven unsustainable fuel wood removal, which has been identified as a key driver of forest degradation in Nepal, as have fodder and leaf removal and the over-extraction of medicinal and aromatic species (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). A lack of forest resources in neighbouring countries and what is known as a 'leaky' border, facilitates cross border trade of illegal timber, particularly from the Northern regions with Tibet and the Southern open border with India (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). Governance issues have also been identified as escalating illegal logging, and other broader causes including unclear land tenure, land use rights, and policy and planning are also important contributors to deforestation and forest degradation in Nepal (MOFSC, 2010).

In Nepal, forests are significant contributors to national economic development. According to the National Planning Commission (2002) the agriculture and forestry sectors accounted for 39.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country, with forestry contributing 15% itself (MOFSC, 2010). However, the FAO estimates that this is closer to 3.4% (FAO, n.d).

Nepal's political background has significantly shaped the governance and institutional structures that are present in the country. Nepal has undergone significant political reform from a central Panchayat system, to a multiparty system with a constitutional monarchy (until 2006), and finally to the current inclusive and republican multiparty polity (IFPRI, 2009). Nepal is now considered to be in a post-conflict stage, identified as a transition from a largely centralised government system towards a democratic and decentralised government structure. Nepal enacted an Interim Constitution in 2007, as the Constitution of Nepal is in the process of being developed, including decisions regarding the federal structure of the country. The future development of forest management policies is uncertain and depends largely on the finalisation of the Constitution and federal mechanism. Following the transition towards democracy in the 1990s, the Government adopted the Forests Act (1993) which devolved rights to and empowered community-based forest management regimes to manage their own resources, whom now account for 25% of all forest land management. This is one of the more progressive reforms in the country relating to forests, empowering civil society to make decisions regarding natural resources and forests. Protected areas account for 24% of land and are governed by the National Park and Wildlife Reserve Act (1973).

Nepal's engagement with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) began in 2008, and is in the process of implementing its REDD+ package. The REDD Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) was

assessed in July 2010 and a revised R-PP was then submitted to the FCPF in October 2010. Nepal is currently developing its national strategies and is engaging in the implementation of strategies and investments through piloting REDD+ activities. Nepal is expecting to complete these stages to move onto results-based actions and enter the carbon market by 2013. Initial funding from the FCPF has been disbursed to support the REDD readiness preparation phase and related activities (FCPF, 2012).

Nepal does not have a National REDD+ Strategy to date, however it will be developed over the next few years following its commission by a USAID funded Hariyo Ban project and other relevant pilot projects on REDD+ at the sub-national scale. Studies and consultations will be conducted in order to evaluate the outcomes of activities, assess the drivers of deforestation, analyse the political economy and to undertake a valuation of the forest with the objective of informing the REDD policy process (FCPF, 2012). An expert committee will be formed with representatives from the Government and civil society to perform the strategic analysis for the REDD Strategy preparation. A nested approach will be adopted to implement the REDD implementation framework and scale covering the physiographic regions of the country. A Carbon Trust Fund will be established to centrally govern REDD+ financing.

Nepal has also joined the UN-REDD Programme as an observer country, making it one of only a handful of countries in Asia belonging to both the FCPF and UN-REDD global initiatives (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). In the context of REDD+, Nepal has engaged with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations since 2007. For REDD+ capacity building at the community level, civil society initiatives have been running since 2008, funded by the Norwegian government (the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, NORAD). Nepal has also been involved in the development of a national safeguards system for REDD+.

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Institutional arrangements

REDD is coordinated by a three-tiered structure, governed at the highest level by the Apex Body, the REDD Multi-sectoral, Multi-stakeholder Coordinating and Monitoring Committee, chaired by the Minister of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MFSC). The Apex Body is specifically tasked with REDD policy coordination and is comprised of top-level officials from nine Government ministries including the MFSC and other institutions including the Ministry of Environment, the National Planning Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative, the Ministry of Land Reform and Management and the Ministry of Finance, amongst others (FCPF, 2012).

The REDD Forestry and Climate Change Cell (REDD Cell), within the MFSC, is tasked with carrying out readiness activities in Nepal (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). The REDD Working Group is composed of the Secretary of the MFSC, civil society members including the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) and the Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN), four government ministries including Local Development, Environment and Agricultural Development ministries, representatives from three departments within the Ministry and one donor member. A REDD Stakeholder Forum is in place as a communication platform, established to bring together and engage with a wide range of stakeholders in the entire REDD process (MOFSC, 2010).

Last updated:
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Stakeholder engagement and participation

A Consultation and Participation Plan has been developed as part of the implementation of the Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP). The preparation of the R-PP included consultation and participation of stakeholders from the public and private sectors, NGOs, indigenous communities, and civil society organisations (FCPF, 2012). This process has led to mutual capacity building and enhanced information sharing at the national level for the partnership of NGOs and stakeholders that participated in the preparation of the R-PP (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). A REDD Stakeholders Forum serves as the principal outreach and communication platform established to bring together and engage with a wide range of stakeholders in the entire REDD process (FCPF, 2012). The REDD Cell Communication and Outreach Section is responsible for designing and disseminating REDD information including the outcomes from REDD-pilot projects (FCPF, 2012).

A national forum for consultation and participation does not exist outside the engagement of the R-PP, however there are sub-sectoral committees that exist under the Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation (MFSC) that develop strategies and programmes based on consultation with stakeholders such as the National Biodiversity Coordination Committee (LFP, 2011). A Forestry Sector Coordination Committee was formed in 1989 in preparation for the Forestry Sector Master Plan, which had representation across the forestry sector, however it is inactive since 2003 (LFP, 2011). At the subnational level, District Forest Coordination Committees (DFCC) for forest sector related activities are active, which consist of forest officials, political parties, community representatives, civil society and the private sector (LFP, 2011). While not necessarily roundtable forums for forest related dialogues per se, civil society does have an opportunity to raise concerns in the DFCCs and the decisions made within the Committees then become legally binding for the district (LFP, 2011).

At the sub-district level, Village Development Committee level Forestry Coordination Committees (VFCCs) are also active. They are formed by community groups, local government representatives and civil society organisations which are becoming increasingly active in planning, coordinating and implementing local-level forestry activities, although without a legally binding mandate (LFP, 2011). The Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN) and other NGOs have organised public hearings at the district and community levels for discussing forestry related issues, to which Government officials were also invited (LFP, 2011). According to Rule 7 of the Environmental Protection Rules (1997) stakeholders must be consulted prior to the allocation of logging permits, however this process has resulted in frequent conflicts of interest for permit seekers trying to influence the process (LFP, 2011).

REDD+ Civil Society Organisation's Alliance, Nepal (REDD+CSO Alliance) was formed in 2009 and

comprises more than 15 NGOs. It plays an active role in advocating for the development of a REDD+ strategy and national safeguard system of REDD+.

Updated date:
12/2012

Land tenure arrangements and carbon rights

Forest tenure and land rights are clearly allocated in terms of state ownership, community entitlement and private ownership, defined by the Forests Act (1993) and Forest Regulations (1995). In terms of ownership, the Government retains overall proprietorship, except over private lands. The Government grants access and management rights between public managed forests, protected areas, religious lands and community-based regimes. Community-based regimes are classified into community forestry, religious forestry, leasehold forestry, collaborative forest management and buffer-zone community forests (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). Access and use rights, governance and benefit sharing mechanisms relating to forest management vary substantially across the community-based regimes. Specifically, community forests are granted full autonomy for management and use of the forests, and all income generated from the forests goes to Community Based Forest User Groups (CFUGs). Whereas, under collaborative forest management, there are very limited management and use rights, and only 25% of the income remains at the local level, with 75% going to Government (Bushley & Khatri, 2011). Carbon rights and ownership are undefined within the legal framework or policies of Nepal, and are currently under revision by the Government and Constituent Assembly. Carbon rights and ownership will be considered in the development of the Forest Sector Strategy to be completed by 2013. Under current proposals, carbon rights will be assigned to the central Government (Bushley & Khatri, 2011).

According to Schedule 1 of the National Foundation for Uplift of Indigenous Peoples (Aadibasi/Janjati) Act (2002), Nepal recognises 59 tribal and indigenous groups. The rights of such groups are advanced by various organizations, including the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) which is an umbrella organization covering 71 District Coordination Committees of NEFIN and more than 2,100 Village Development Committees. Other organisations advocating for the rights of marginalised persons including women include the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF), Dalit Alliance of Natural Resources (DANAR), the Women Organising for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) and the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI).

At the international level, Nepal recognises the rights of indigenous peoples and marginalised groups through its ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No 169 on Indigenous and Tribal People's Rights and its adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), both in 2007.

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12/2012

Forest management

Forest tenure reform has resulted in a substantial increase in trees on private farmland and in community forests (FAO, 2011). The establishment of Community-Based Forest Management has incentivised the promotion of forest cover through the devolution of forest management to

communities. Studies are beginning to reveal that Community Forests are significantly improving Nepal's forest coverage and condition (FAO, n.d).

The nationalisation of the forest by the Government during the 1960s, specifically through the Private Forest Nationalization Act (1957), served as an incentive to convert forests into agricultural land in Nepal (NEFIN, 2010). The Agricultural Policy and the Forest Regulations (1987) also resulted in unintentionally incentivising deforestation, as farmers began to fell trees before permits to harvest and transport timbers were enforced (FAO, 2011). However, the effects were noticed and the Regulations were then removed, resulting in regrowth of some forest areas (FAO, 2011). Moreover, the Forest Sector Master Plan (1989) incentivised tree planting, and resulted in the widespread commercialisation of forest products and the increase in timber trade (LFP, 2011).

Generally, with regards to compliance, a report about transparency in Nepal's forestry sector claims that law enforcement and monitoring is considered the most important deficiency regarding forest sector transparency (LFP, 2011). Corruption in Nepal is the second highest in South Asia, according to Transparency International's Corruption Index (2011) and the World Bank Development Indicators (2011) frame Nepal's governance as poor.

Last updated:
12/2012

Reference levels

As part of its engagement with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Nepal is in the process of developing reference levels, which is a major component of the R-PP. Other programmes related to developing reference emissions levels include the work under the Finnish-funded Forest Resources Assessment, under which a historical analysis of emissions and removals for the period 1994-2012 is planned (LFP, 2011). Reference Scenarios and Reference Emissions Levels will be developed in late 2012 to assist in Nepal's efforts towards REDD Readiness, which will consider both historic emissions and removals. Nepal has proposed nested baselines for different sub-regions, where subnational outputs will inform national level baselines (LFP, 2008). WWF Nepal is completing a Forest Carbon Accounting Study to assess and quantify the emissions reduction potential of the forests across the Terai Arc Landscape to establish a baseline for REDD+, which will then inform the national baseline and feed into the REDD process. The study used remote sensing tools to analyse land use and land use change and to draw up deforestation scenarios, and also used a ground-based forest carbon inventory in order to ground truth the data (WWF, 2011).

Last updated:
12/2012

MRV

According to its REDD Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP), Nepal will develop an integrated Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) framework to integrate the national with the regional and district levels (FCPF, 2012). A Technical Committee has been formed and will conduct a study to support the collection, analysis and verification of national data on forest-related carbon emissions and sequestration (FCPF, 2012). Nepal proposes to develop a Tier II MRV approach and will then progress onto a Tier III at a later stage. Data collection will be based on a combined method using remote sensing and periodic ground inventory measurement across all forest types and coordinated

with the Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) programme funded by the Finnish Government. The FRA (2010 - 2014) will be instrumental in performing technical activities for the development of a national MRV system, including forest mapping and detailed carbon measurements for selected sites. WWF Nepal's Forest Carbon Accounting Project operates in two regions in Nepal and has managed to develop a subnational reference level and deforestation rate using LIDAR methods, the outcomes of which will inform the national MRV system (NFA, 2009).

Last updated:
12/2012

Safeguards

As part of Nepal's engagement with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Nepal is in the process of conducting a Social and Environmental Strategic Assessment (SESA) and developing an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), as part of R-PP implementation. The completion of the SESA will inform an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) and will provide principles and standards to ensure the ESMP is implemented effectively. Nepal is also involved in the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (REDD+ SES) development process. The REDD Working Group is the National Standard Committee for the development of REDD+ SES, which is in the process of developing Nepal specific national standards and indicators for REDD+ SES, in consultation with stakeholders.

Last updated:
5/2015

Gender Equality

Nepal has a history of strong women's networks. For example, the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF), Dalit Alliance of Natural Resources (DANAR), the Women Organising for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) and the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) all advocate for the rights of marginalised people including women. Women Leading for Change in Natural Resources is a platform that includes members of gender groups of environmental or development institutions. Research among women has shown that capacity and knowledge of REDD+ is generally large in Nepal in relation to other REDD+ countries (Queseda-Aguilar et al., 2013). However, in the national institutional structure of REDD+, women are underrepresented as representation ranges between 0 and 10% (WOCAN 2012).

Nepal's national laws recognise gender issues such as land rights, economic empowerment and participation in decision-making processes. Nepal's forest sector makes strong commitments for women. The Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) has been established by the Social Welfare Council to offer a platform to women from different communities to discuss the governance of natural resources (Ibid). Further, the Guidelines for Community Forestry Development Programme pledge to ensure that 50% of members of all management structures are women. These guidelines are being implemented in all community forests of Nepal.

However, despite the fact that Nepal's National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) presents gender as a cross cutting issue and plans to carry out studies on the effects of climate change on men and women, the Climate Change Policy of 2011 acknowledges that gender is otherwise not yet

mainstreamed into the climate change discourse. It states that, therefore, the participation of women at all levels must be ensured (Section 8.4.2).

The R-PP, 2010 has been criticized for its lack of emphasis on gender issues. Despite many mentions of issues relating to women, little substantive plans can be found to improve gender equality. Improvements to be made regarding access to resources and justice remain particularly unclear. Further, no mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes have been developed. (WOCAN 2012).

The ER-PIN, 2014 relies on HIMAWANTI in mobilising women and to build their capacity to support the REDD+ implementation process. It is acknowledged that an increasing number of women are in forest and community management positions. However, this seems not to be due to enhanced empowerment but emigration of men to India for work (Section 5.3.1). Furthermore, the demand for fuelwood is to be curbed. Women are the main collectors of fuelwood which is time and labour intensive. Expansion of alternative energy and more efficient cook stoves are intended to save time for women who may in turn engage in alternative livelihood opportunities (Section 5.3.2). In general, women are one of the main recipients of alternative livelihood interventions (Section 5.3.5) and enhanced benefit-sharing mechanisms (Section 15.1), especially of non-carbon benefits (Section 16.3).

In terms of projects on the ground, the Hariyo Ban Project in Nepal, which works to reduce threats to the country's vast physical and biological diversity, build resilience to climate change in communities and ecosystems, and improve the livelihoods of Nepal's most impoverished communities, aims to ensure meaningful engagement of women and socially excluded groups in REDD+ initiatives by increasing their knowledge, as well as increasing gender-responsive REDD+ policy design. In early project stages, gender-based violence (GBV) was revealed as a major obstacle to project goals, REDD+ goals and the overall wellbeing and safety of the local communities. Intricately tied to forest governance and other cultural norms, addressing and finding ways to overcome GBV became an important aspect of ensuring project success.

Furthermore, other REDD+ pilot projects have been working to address gender equality. Measures include workshops, distribution of credits for livelihood investments, day care centres, mothers' groups, opportunities for men to work on women-led programmes or gender-specific trainings (Queseda-Aguilar et al.).

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