

Fifty years of forest management in Nepal: a review of institutional transformation

B Acharya and S Pokharel

This paper reviews the institutional transformation in the history of forest management in Nepal. The review shows that in Nepal, changes in forestry institutions were guided by several factors and assumptions. Over the past 50 years, the devolution of forest management in Nepal took place from centralized government, through decentralized government, to local user groups. Before 1957, the Nepalese government's focus was on conversion of forestlands to agriculture for revenue generation. After the nationalization of 'private forest' in 1957, local people were blamed to be a part of the problem that caused deforestation. As a solution, legislation permitted central control over the local forest resources and the bureaucracy was expanded. A two-decade long unsuccessful experiment (1957–76) proved that without people's participation, forests cannot be managed effectively. Since 1978, community forestry has gradually evolved from protection forestry to organized and legitimized self-governing-user-group managed forestry. This was feasible because of the participatory actions, adaptive learning, refining, and legitimizing community forestry practices over time. Community forestry is a dynamic, adaptive, and evolving process. To move community forestry forward, 'second-generation issues' need to be addressed.