



RECOFTC

Community forestry models in Asia–Pacific

Community forests in Nepal

Infosheet

In Nepal, there are five types of community forestry models: buffer zone community forests, community forests, community-based conservation areas, partnership forests and pro-poor leasehold forests. The community forest model is the oldest of Nepal's distinct types of community-based forestry, having been pioneered in the 1970s. It accounts for around 90 percent of all formal community-managed forest areas in the country. It allows communities to develop, conserve, manage and use forest areas and to sell forest products. The model's legal basis is laid out in Forest Act, 2019 (originally Forest Act, 1993), Forest Regulation, 2022 and the Community Forestry Development Guidelines (revised in 2015). Community forests are under the supervision of the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

Key requirements

Who is eligible?

Persons who would like to conserve, develop and manage a forest for their collective interest must form a community forest users' group and then register such a group at the relevant Division Forest Office.

Allocation process

1. Once a community forest users' group is created, members develop a constitution and set up a community forest users' committee. The community forest users' group registers with the Division Forest Office and receives a group registration certificate.
2. The registered forest users apply to the Division Forest Office for the handover of the forest area to them to manage as a community forest. They also submit a workplan, also known as the community forest operational plan. The Division Forest Office may provide technical assistance to prepare the workplan.
3. An officer with the Division Forest Office conducts the necessary investigations, reviews the workplan and suggests modifications. This assessment must take into consideration the distance between the forest and the village, the interest of the users in managing the forest and their capacity to do so. The Division Forest Office then hands over the forest area to the users' group as a community forest and issues a certificate to formalize their status.
4. If a forest area that is to be handed over as a community forest lies within two or more districts, the Division Forest Office of the district where the application has been submitted may hand over the area with the consent of the Division Forest Office of the other districts.
5. The Division Forest Office of the primary district monitors and evaluates the management of the community forest.
6. The community forest users' group can reserve any area of its community forest for people living below the poverty line to use for the purpose of development, conservation, management and/or income-generation. This is done through the formation of separate groups, as per Forest Regulation, 2022.

Main elements



Duration of tenure

- There is no time limit to the management of a community forest. Communities can continue managing a community forest with a valid workplan, which is reviewed every five to ten years.



Type and condition of forest

- Community forests can be established in national forests that are outside protected areas.
- The condition of forest to be handed over to communities is not specified.
- Community forests can be allocated across more than one village, town or district.



Type and duration of management plan

- The community forest workplan has a duration of up to 10 years.



Internal governance

- A community must set up a community forest users' group to participate in community forestry. Each group is regulated according to its own constitution, which includes the group's duties, functions and powers.
- Each group acts based on consensus during the development of its constitution and the process of applying to obtain a community forest.
- Each users' group also sets up an executive committee that is responsible for the overall leadership, coordination and management of the group's funds in a bank account. The bank account is operated with the joint signature of the chairperson and treasurer. The accounts of income and expenditure are to be audited every year.
- The executive committee carries out the audit of the group's accounts every year.
- The users' group has a legal personality; it can acquire goods and sue or be sued.



Gender and social inclusion

- The community forest users' group membership must include male and female household heads, both of whom must take part in the group's decision-making.
- Women should have at least half of the positions in a community forest users' executive committee, including as chairperson or secretary.
- Community forest users' groups are accountable for organizing programs to improve livelihoods and economically empower marginalized people, Indigenous Peoples and women and/or distribute non-timber forest products to these groups free of charge or at a reasonable cost.
- Community forest users' groups determine the financial and technical support to be provided to marginalized households in an

annual plan, as agreed with them in writing. It can include providing a certain area of forest to marginalized households for their use to improve their livelihoods. The users' group can ask for help from the District Forest Office and others if needed.

- Community forest users' groups should monitor and evaluate support from the livelihood improvement program to marginalized households, Indigenous Peoples and women. Users' groups should include these details within their annual reports to the Division Forest Office and other supporting partners.



Community-based enterprises

- Community forest users' groups can set up forest-based enterprises alone, collectively with other groups or in partnership with a private sector entity, according to the workplan.



Benefit-sharing mechanism

- Between the community and the government, all income goes to the community, unless forest products are traded, in which case the community pays around 35 percent in taxes.
- Within a community forest users' group, at least 25 percent of its annual income should be spent on the development, conservation and management of the forest. The users' group should spend at least 50 percent of the remaining money on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment or enterprise development, in coordination with the local government. Any funds remaining can be used for the interest of the community forest users' group.



External support

- The Division Forest Office provides technical and other cooperation that a users' group needs to prepare a workplan.
- To implement community forest activities, the Division Forest Office and the users' groups can receive assistance from national and international government and non-government agencies.



Conflict-resolution mechanism

- A users' group determines the process and rules for dealing with forest crimes and sanctions and specifies both in its constitution.
- If a users' group is not able to operate according to its approved workplan, the Division Forest Office will send a team to inspect the situation. The process may result in a decision to cancel the registration of the users' group and take back the community forest. The users' group has up to 15 days to clarify the situation in writing and has a right to appeal the decision within 35 days to the director of the Provincial Forest Office.



Rights and responsibilities of community members

Members have rights to:

- harvest and use timber and non-timber forest products, without exceeding annual allowable amounts prescribed in the approved workplan.
- freely determine the price of forest products sold within the community.
- sell surplus forest products to outsiders through an auction, after meeting demand from within the community forest users' group.
- operate forest-based enterprises, such as ecotourism.
- grant a part of the community forest, by developing an agreement, to members of the users' group who are living below the poverty line so they can implement income-generating activities while conserving the forest.
- obtain loans from financial institutions and use forest products of the community forest as collateral.

Members must:

- develop, conserve, use and manage the forest by implementing their workplan.
- ask permission from the Division Forest Office, through its subordinate Area Forest Office, when transporting forest products sold outside the group.
- apply the community forest users' group's seal to timber sold outside the group.

- after collecting timber, firewood and other forest products, arrange for the reforestation or rehabilitation of the area as soon as possible.
- through the executive committee, report to the Subdivision Forest Office and the Division Forest Office on finances and activities in the forest within three months of the end of each fiscal year.

Members cannot:

- transfer rights over the forest to other parties.
- clear forest areas for agriculture purposes.
- build huts or houses, except those needed for security reasons and with the approval of the District Forest Office.
- take any action that can cause soil erosion.
- capture or kill wildlife in contravention of the law.
- extract or transport soil, rocks, sand and so on.

Links with climate change policies and targets

- There is no legal requirement for leasehold forest users' groups to integrate climate vulnerability, adaptation or mitigation activities into their workplan.
- Nepal's National Adaptation Programme of Action 2010 recognizes community-based forest users' groups as stakeholders managing community adaptation funds and identifying and implementing adaptation programs at the community level. Its priority actions include supporting the implementation of adaptation priorities of the forest users' groups.
- The National Climate Change Policy 2019 recognizes the past contributions of community forestry to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It aims to mobilize community organizations to manage climate-induced disasters and enhance the capacity of these organizations to mainstream climate resilience into development programs. However, the policy does not refer to the community forestry program specifically.
- Nepal's National Adaptation Plan 2021–2050 notes that forests under community-based management made up 42.7 percent of the forest areas in 2019, which indicates that these groups have an important role in mainstreaming climate adaptation into forest management plans.
- Nepal's second Nationally Determined Contribution (2020) under the Paris Agreement on climate change states, under the mitigation component, that forests with community-based management will comprise at least 60 percent of forest area by 2030 and that women will make up 50 percent of management committees, along with proportional representation of Dalits and Indigenous Peoples in key posts.

Read more

- RECOFTC, *Special Report: How community forests boosted pandemic resilience across Asia-Pacific*, www.recoftc.org/special-report/community-forestry-boosted-pandemic-resilience
- Find out more about RECOFTC's work in Nepal at www.recoftc.org/nepal



We believe in a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods and foster gender equity. We are the only non-profit organization of our kind in Asia and the Pacific. We have more than 30 years of experience working with people and forests, and have built trusting relationships at all levels. Our influence and partnerships extend from multilateral institutions to governments, private sector and local communities. Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

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