

# Evaluating Governance in a Community Forest User Group

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Good governance as a key concept for the sustainable management of forest resources in Nepal

### Background

In Nepal forest provides a variety of subsistence products e.g. firewood, fodder, timber, bedding material etc. In community forestry, local forest users are given collective management responsibility (but not land ownership) to use the forest products. The community forestry program is based on the principle of devolution and aims to foster equitable participation and decision-making by all forest users. The success of community forestry depends on the extent of good governance practices (rules, rights and responsibilities) defined and implemented by a community forest user group.



### The study area

In this study the quality of the governance within the Community Forestry User Group in Shankarnagar (Rupandehi district of Nepal) was assessed.

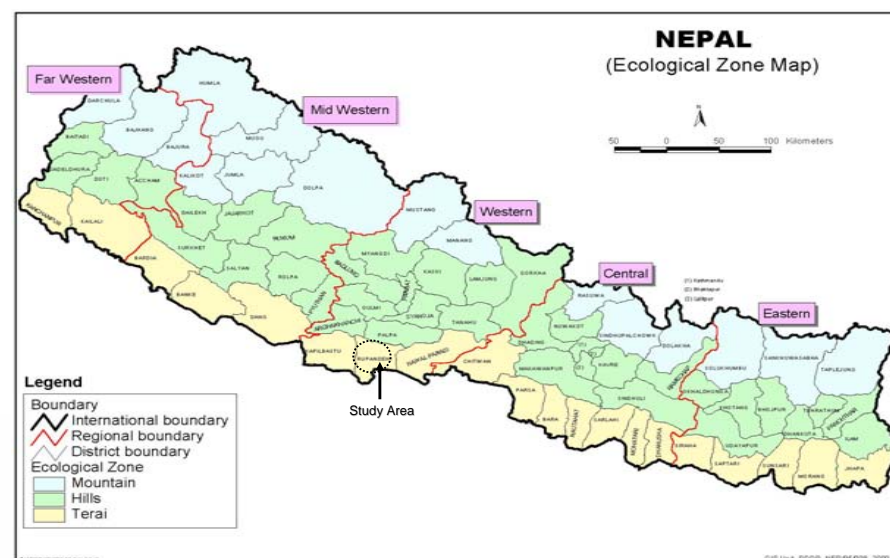


Figure 1: Map of Nepal indicating the study area

### Governance capacity assessment

The assessment is based on a matrix including the four basic attributes of governance: participation, transparency, accountability and equity. Each of these attributes is evaluated based on six indicators (see Tab. 1) which are graded in a 4-step scale. The evaluation is performed using a participatory self-assessment tool as well as personal interviews and focus group discussions.

Based on the grades of each indicator, the community forest user group members identify their relative position (score) in each attribute. The maximum possible value for each attribute is 24, which is the desired condition of forest governance by the users. The score sheet is then translated into a visual spider web diagram. The assessment thus identifies the current status of governance and the gap between the current and the ideal situation of governance.

Table 1: Matrix with governance attributes and indicators.

Attribute	Indicators
Participation	Actors that prepared the operational plan & constitution of community forest user groups. Democratic exercise in executive committee formation and leadership change. Attendance percentage of users in the last assembly/ meetings. Attendance of unrepresented groups in meetings and assemblies. Mode of decision-making during meetings and assemblies. Users' participation in tours and trainings conducted by community forest user groups.
Transparency	Knowledge of operational plan & constitution Information dissemination to users by executive committee. Sharing the inputs of human resource development activities Management of bills, receipts and other economic transactions. Status of public auditing of community forest user groups' fund. Decisions about community forest user group fund's income and expenditure
Accountability	Knowledge of roles, duties and responsibilities of operational plan & constitution by executive committee members. Knowledge of roles, duties and responsibilities of operational plan & Constitution by users. Performance of executive committee members. Performance of users. Successful completion of the different activities undertaken by community forest user groups. Existing practiced system of rewards/penalties.
Equity	Composition of FUGC and representation of all strata in it. Mechanism of access to forest resources and use. Existing system of benefit sharing mechanisms. Systems of recruiting forestry jobs. Supplementary programs to promote participation from disadvantaged groups. Supplementary programs to promote income generating activities for disadvantaged groups mainly of poor ones.

### Results

- Few users actively participate in decision-making. Most users were unaware of their legal rights and saw themselves as the followers of the decisions taken by the executive committee.
- To ensure trust and fairness (especially in the use of funds), a sub-committee that monitors the work of the executive committee is key.
- Despite their low level of participation, users were satisfied with the existing status of governance. This was mainly due to the fact that all strata of society received benefits from the community forest.

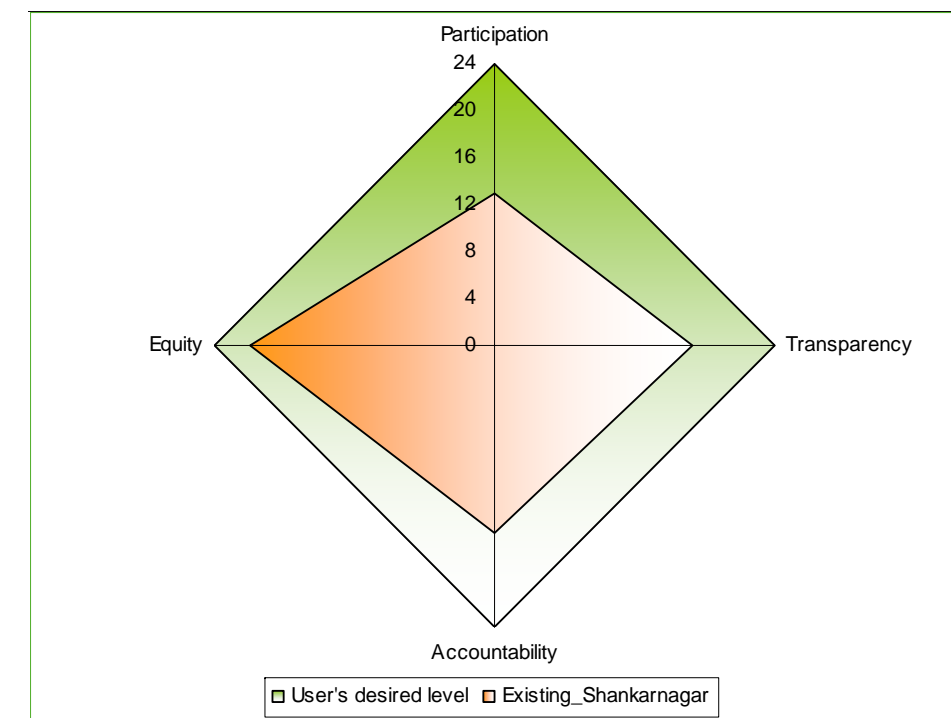


Figure 2: Spider web showing levels of good governance in Shankarnagar

### Governance challenges

- Hasty and improper initial planning and implementation can have significant adverse impacts on understanding and knowledge of forest users and thus on their participation levels.
- Due to this knowledge divide, power is hacked by a few members who are more knowledgeable, usually due to their class and political status.
- Despite power asymmetries, benefit sharing and transparent mechanisms can lead to efficient forest governance.
- Use of transparent mechanisms, as well as a system of checks and balances, ensures accountability and increases trust and reciprocity amidst forest users, thus strengthening the governance process.

#### Further information:

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Giri, K. (2005). Civic societies in community forest governance: Case studies from Rupandehi district of Nepal focusing in resource governance and levels of intricacy. MSc Thesis.