



Improving Forest Management In Nepal

Since the early 1990's, Nepal's community forestry program to pass on forest management and use rights to local groups has expanded dramatically. In 2000, a 46-hectare forest in Mid-Western Nepal was transferred to the Chauridanda community forestry user group (CFUG) to improve local management, protection, and use.

This CFUG consists of almost 1,000 people from various castes and ethnic groups including fifty Dalit households, also known as untouchables of which five are blacksmiths. These blacksmiths rely on charcoal to produce and repair agricultural tools. Initially, the Chauridanda CFUG management committee set a fee on charcoal production that the Dalit blacksmiths could not afford.

The Dalit blacksmiths stopped collecting wood from the community forest area and risked producing charcoal illegally in national forests instead. However, they still could not make enough charcoal to meet customer demand. Through local nongovernmental organizations, these blacksmiths learned about a training program sponsored by USAID that assists forest users to examine issues of equity and participation in resource management.



Photo: USAID/Nepal

Empowered community forestry users negotiate more equitable and mutually-beneficial forest use rights

USAID is promoting good forest management within these groups by concentrating on issues of equity, participation, accountability, and technical management. Following the USAID training, Dalit members communicated effectively their need for a more equitable distribution of forest products through informal meetings with committee members and at a Chauridanda CFUG assembly. They highlighted mutual concerns for charcoal and the crafting of agricultural tools.

Together the user group identified solutions such as reducing the fee for charcoal by over 60%, and establishing more acceptable methods of payment. The inclusion and accommodation of Dalit concerns increased their participation in community forest management and use. Training to empower marginalized groups, such as Dalits, have paid off for all.

“With this success, Dalits are happy and feel honored. Their participation in the meetings has increased. They take interest in the community forest activities and volunteer for work. They communicate with other fellow users frequently. Above all, their trust and confidence on the executive committee has increased.”

- Karna Bahadur B.K., Blacksmith and Member Secretary, Chauridanda CFUG

USAID-supported training has helped community forestry user groups negotiate resource management dilemmas by establishing more equitable norms and increasing the participation of disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups. The program has supported the formation of 1,700 user groups that manage 163,000 hectares. The Nepal forestry program now benefits eight million people – or about 13,000 community-based groups - who collectively manage 1.6 million hectares of forest area across the country. The deforestation rate in Nepal has declined from 3.7% to 5% per year.

