



RECOFTC

Community forestry models in Asia–Pacific

Buffer zone community forests in Nepal



Infosheet

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In Nepal, there are five types of community forestry models: buffer zone community forests, community-based conservation areas, community forests, partnership forests and pro-poor leasehold forests. Buffer zone community forests aim at the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, along with community development, in the buffer zone areas of national parks and wildlife reserves. The main legal instruments covering this model of community-based forest management are the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1972, the Buffer Zone Management Regulation, 1995 and the Conservation Area Management Regulation, 1996.

Key requirements

Who is eligible?

People living around protected areas (national parks and wildlife reserves) can request a buffer zone community forest.

Allocation process

1. The chief warden of a protected area can help communities form a buffer zone users' group to support the proper use of forest products and community development.
2. Each users' group elects a management committee with at least five members, as well as a treasurer, a chairperson, a deputy chairperson and a secretary.
3. The committee submits an application to the managing authority of the protected area. The application must include the name of the users' group, the boundary of the buffer zone forest, an estimate of the area of the buffer zone forest, the number of households and total population in the community and the names and signatures of the applicants.
4. The chief warden makes the necessary inquiries, such as verifying if the people cited on the application are residents of the municipality and whether they are willing to commit to the responsibilities of the buffer zone community forest. The chief warden then provides a certificate of registration to the buffer zone community forest users' group. If two or more users' groups want to register a buffer zone forest in their name, the chief warden provides the certification to only one of the groups after reaching a consensus among them.

Main elements



Duration of tenure

- Tenure of a users' group is for five years and is renewable.



Type and condition of forest

- Community forests can be established in Forests in the buffer zones of national parks and wildlife reserves are eligible for community forest management.
- Decisions about where to locate buffer zone community forests must consider the following:
 - Whether the forest areas are likely to be affected by wildlife moving there from the national parks and wildlife reserves
 - The presence of natural boundaries
 - Whether the buffer zone management specified by the protected area authority will be easy to implement



Type and duration of management plan

- The management plan is for five years and can be amended if necessary.
- The users' group committee also prepares a workplan that covers:
 - The area of the buffer zone occupied by the municipality
 - Processes for collecting non-timber forest products
 - Thinning and lopping of trees and other forest-maintenance practices
 - Forest restoration practices
 - Distribution of forest products among the community and the sale of such products
 - Policies for land-use management



Internal governance

- Members of the users' group committee serve five-year terms.
- Decision-making is by majority vote and requires the participation of at least half of the committee members.
- The committee can manage its funds by opening a bank account in the group's name. In remote areas that lack banking services, a person selected by the committee can keep up to 10,000 Nepali rupees that belong to the group as a kind of bank account.
- Use of the bank account requires the signature of two members of the users' group committee, who must be selected by consensus.



Gender and social inclusion

- There are no legal provisions relating to gender and social inclusion in the management of buffer zone community forests.



Community-based enterprises

- Communities can set up a community-based enterprise, such as for ecotourism activities.
- Such an enterprise must be mentioned in the management plan and approved by the protected area authority.



Benefit-sharing mechanism

- The authority responsible for the protected area manages the revenue generated from the sale of forest products included in the workplan, the sale of hunting permits, donations and other financial support from external organizations and other permitted sources of income.
- The users' group committee can access the portion of the protected area authority's funds that is dedicated to local development, as long as it is in line with the approved activities in the management plan.
- A committee decides the allocation of funds to different community development programs. The committee consists of the chairpersons of the different users' group committees in the buffer zone, a representative from the municipality and a member secretary. The committee is chaired by an individual selected by the group of chairpersons.



External support

- The chief warden provides support or facilitates external support to the users' groups.
- After a users' group submits its application, the chief warden can help appoint a technical forester to help the community prepare their workplan.



Conflict-resolution mechanism

- Disputes within communities are resolved by consensus with help from the users' group committee. The chief warden also helps to resolve other types of disputes.
- The users' group committee is held accountable if it is found not following the workplan. The users' group committee has up to 15 days to provide a reason for not following the plan.
- The chief warden will take over management of the buffer zone forest if dissatisfied with the provisional reports submitted by the users' group committee.
- The users' group committee can object to this decision by reporting to the director general of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation within 35 days of the chief warden's decision. In such cases, the director general's decision is final. Until the final decision is made, the chief warden manages the buffer zone forest.



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Rights and responsibilities of community members

Members have rights to:

- perform activities permitted in the workplan
- organize tree-planting activities
- organize programs to combat the impacts of flooding, landslides and soil erosion
- form subcommittees to better implement the workplan
- manage the funds of the buffer zone community forest users' group
- undertake other activities that the users' group deems necessary

Members must:

- implement the workplan in an organized way
- organize regular meetings to update the committee and users on income and expenses
- submit financial statements as requested by associated agencies
- make payments to the committee to repair and maintain communal property
- pay a fee for the use of forest products, which is set by the users' group committee based on product type, amount, area of harvest, method of harvesting and time of harvest

- decide on the areas that individuals or families can use for animal grazing, as well as the numbers and types of livestock and the fees for grazing
- take responsibility for development projects handed over to them by the protected area authority

Members cannot:

- occupy any area that does not belong to them
- cut, deforest or convert the forest area
- cause a fire or do anything that harms forest products
- remove stones, soil, sand and minerals or establish mines that have negative environmental impacts
- use poisons or explosives in rivers, streams and other water resources
- hunt without permission or harm wildlife
- damage public roads, bridges, fences, sign posts, signals and other public property

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.
- The Protected Area Management Strategy 2022–2030 mentions that the protected area authority will generate information on climatic variables, climate change impacts, risks and vulnerabilities for integration into the management of protected areas. In particular, it will:
 - Collaborate with academic and research institutions and conservation partners
 - Develop climate-smart species conservation action plans
 - Conduct periodic carbon inventory and designate carbon-neutral protected areas

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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