

Dependency of poor and marginalized (Dalit communities) on forests in Nepal: What are the challenges at the local level?

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Structure of Presentation

This presentation is based on a study carried out in 5 Districts of Nepal with high inputs from Dalit communities.

It will focus on:

- Who are the Dalit community in Nepal and where are they located?
- Location of Study
- What is the nature of the problem for Dalits and forestry?
- What are the critical policy challenges?
- How do Dalit communities depend on the forest?



Who are Dalits in Nepal ?

- Dalit means untouchable.
- Dalit is the modern name for a Scheduled Caste also known as Harijan.
- Dalit communities are found in Hindu communities in India, Nepal and other South Asian countries.
Dalits are seen as low caste and the term may also be applied to any person outside the caste system
- Dalit in India is 200 million out of 1.39 billion.
- Dalit in Nepal 4.5 million out of population of 24 million(20%)

Occupations of Dalit in Nepal (rural and urban)

- Forest Workers
- Iron Smiths
- Farmers
- Laborers
- Waste workers



Study Areas in Nepal

- The study was pursued in five districts, namely Dailekh, Kailali, Bara, Saptari and Sunsari.
- These districts are selected purposively on the basis of highest Dalit population in the districts and (National Dalit Commission – Dalits in Nepal 2001)
- Comparatively high Dalit/Forest workers issues raised districts, Dalit issues in water and forest issues and the districts possess similar socio-cultural characteristics.





What are the main issues?

- ☑ Though Dalits are forest dwellers/workers, Dalit communities continues to face organizational, structural, and societal challenges linked to inequity and exclusion that reduces their ability to gain access to and control over Forest resources where they live,
- ☑ Community forest user groups (CFUGs) are dominated by wealthier and upper caste groups in both decision making and benefit distribution. therefore, the opportunity for socially marginalized people to be involved in management and benefit distribution is often limited;
- ☑ Due to inequitable distribution of benefits-sharing, combined with unequal social structure and uneven sense of ownership, the livelihoods of the poor have not improved as expected.
- ☑ Good forest governance aims at equitable distribution of resources, make sure that the voice of different groups of people particularly the poor and excluded are heard and enhance the economic and social welfare of the people through management of forest resources.
- ☑ Poor and Marginalized community have higher dependency on forest resources for their livelihoods which has caused deforestations.

Nepal Forest Policy (1 of 2)

- Forest policy in Nepal remains inconsistent and poorly applied. With federalism the roles and responsibilities of Federal, Provincial and Local government remains unclear;
- Forest cover has been increasing in Nepal but quality and management remain poor – especially in relation to use of forests to support local development of poorer households;
- Forest fire remains a challenge – and one that will increase as a result of climate change;
- REDD financing to Federal level with complex arrangements for local access to financing (see next slide);
- Land conversion to other uses – especially near urban areas or infrastructure development areas e.g roads, airports



No Rights no REDD of forest workers Demo



National Forest Policy (2 of 2)

- For local and indigenous peoples the existing legal framework of the forestry sector and protected areas does not adequately recognize the customary rights of Indigenous Peoples (and Dalits) over forest resources. There is no national inventory of customary practices.
- The Forest Policy 2015 and the Forestry Sector Strategy 2016 emphasize the role of the private sector in forestry (including households and communities). However, the regulatory and implementation instruments have not been developed. The approach also needs to recognize the REDD+ strategy and implementation



Who currently has forest rights in Nepal?

- Forestland in Nepal are owned either by the state (national forests and protected areas) or by individual landholders (private forests).
- National forests are managed under different tenure regimes, which include government-managed forests, protection forests, community forests, collaborative forests, leasehold forests and religious forests.
- Protected areas are categorized into different management regimes, which include national parks, reserves, conservation areas and buffer zones.
- The national REDD+ Strategy regimes and governance frameworks are defined by a wide range of forest policies at Federal, Provincial and Local Government level.
- The Department of Forests and Soil Conservation and Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation have their own defined forest territories under their direct management, regulation or oversight. They are also responsible for regulating private forests under their jurisdiction.
- The relationship between Ministry (Department) and Provincial / Local government remains a 'work in progress' due to the recent implementation of Federalism (2017) in Nepal.



Impacts of deforestation and poor forest land management

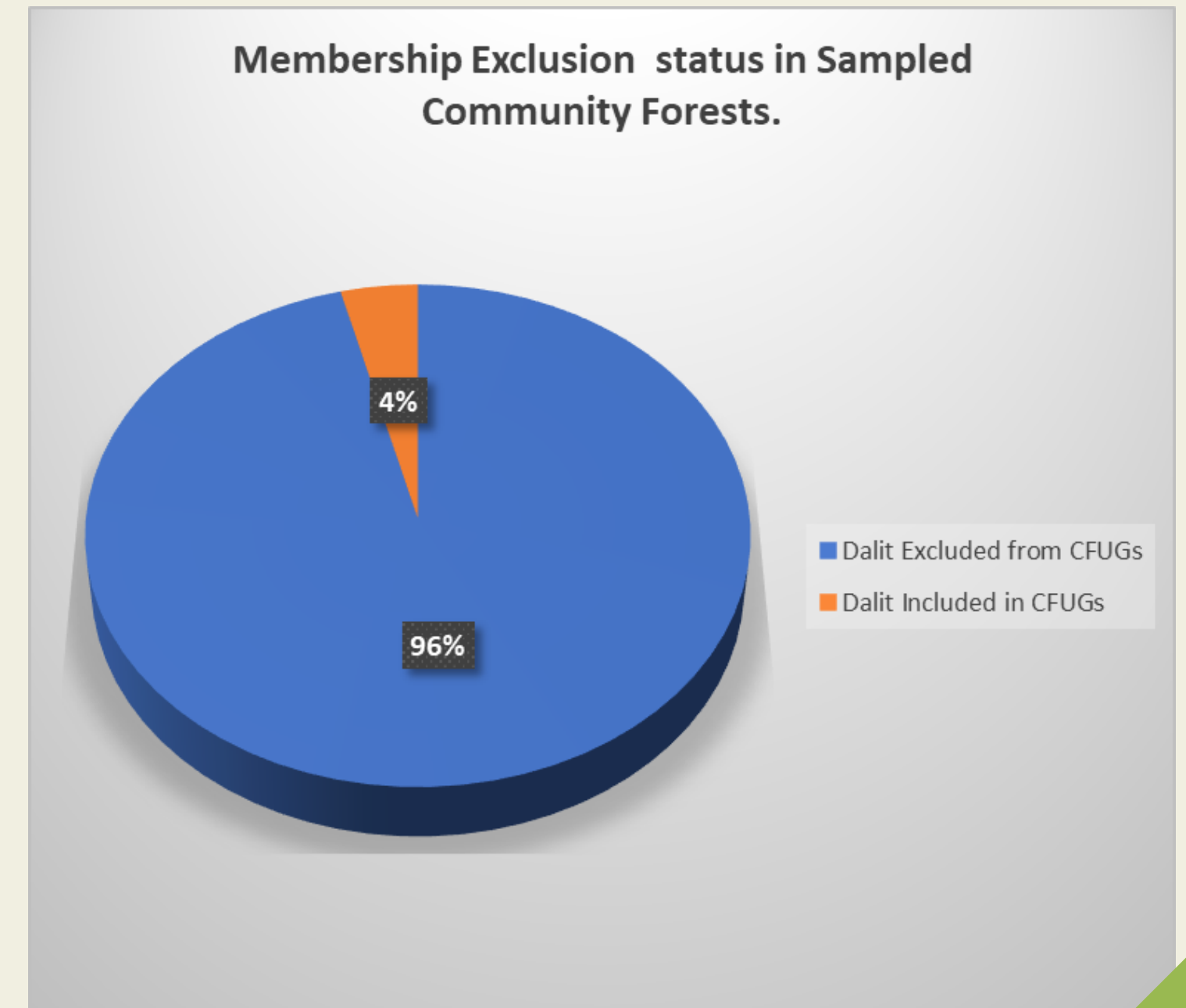
- **The unpredicted erosion, landslide, and lowland flooding, due to deforestation, are major concerns in Nepal as well as in downstream countries. Several attempts have been made so far to control the deforestation and mixed success has been achieved.**
- **Slash and burn allows people to farm in places where it usually is not possible because of dense vegetation, soil infertility, low soil nutrient content, uncontrollable pests, or other reasons.**
- **Contributors to poor forest land management:**
 - **Poor land use planning**
 - **Illegal logging and slash / burn agriculture – including by poor people trying to survive**
 - **Illegal mining / sand collection**
 - **Policy implementation mixed**
 - **Corruption**
 - **Lack of capacity and clear accountability frameworks between different government agencies**

Study findings on Dalits, inclusion and Community Forest User Groups



Dalit Excluded in community forest

- Review of the 25 community forests in the districts, it is found that most of the Dalit community found excluded
- During the FGD with 25 sampled Community Forest and Dalit household it was found that only one of them were the members of community forests i.e. 4% included where 96% seems to be excluded
- Dalit participants said there are three community forests near their territory but they do not have access to such forest
- Dalits are forced to leave their land for community forest and excluded from their own community forest



Key exclusionary practices

Exclusion Issues in Membership:

CFUG membership fees high,
Caste discrimination,
gender discrimination,
geographical issues (Dalits may live further away from forest)

Participatory Exclusion after being member:

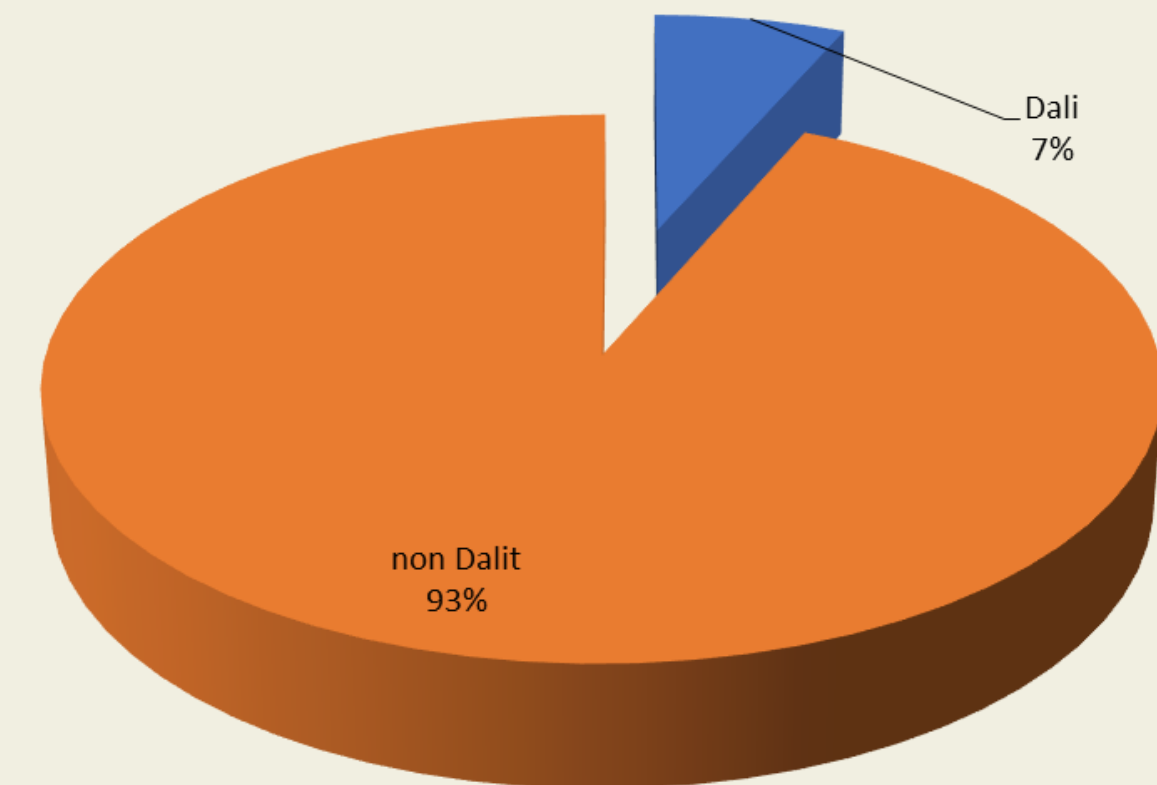
Decision making restricted
Lack of opportunity to participate in key positions on the CFUG committee.
Benefit sharing issues
Many Dalits (male and female) have limited literacy



Dalit Representation on the Community Forest User Group

Even if Dalits are members of the CFUG they are rarely represented on the committee. In the study only 7% of the 25 CFUGs had Dalits as members of the CFUG Committee and 96% were excluded. This has a major effect on issues such as Benefit Sharing, local understanding of rights and responsibilities and engagement of women (especially when many men have migrated for work).

Dalit Representation in committee of 25 CFUGs of 5 sampled Districts



CFUG Benefit Sharing – 3 examples?

Example 1: Policy requirement - Allocation of 35% of total income of CFUGs to poor and ultra poor.

However: this policy is not clear in its application in relation to Dalit and Women.

Requirements for CFUG to allocate 35% of the total income to poor group for starting income generation but study found that funds are often spent for other purposes.

Example 2: Timber distribution policy.

The poor and Dalit community are excluded from purchasing timber at the local level.

The timber is sold at the district level. It should provide benefit to the CFUG. However, the study found that these funds are managed by higher caste and the Dalit community do not get any benefit from the funds from the sale of timber.

Example 3: Charcoal collection for Dalit livelihoods

Given the low access to modern energy services (electricity) in Nepal poor and marginalized households are highly dependent on the use of charcoal for energy and for business purposes. The current policy contradictions lead to a banning of harvesting of wood for charcoal collection.

Costs of charcoal are expensive and it can be scarce.

Few community forests are positive to use timber for the production of charcoal (see next slide)

The consequences are that:

Forest workers are obliged to steal forest resources at the community level to produce charcoal or to use fuelwood for cooking / heating.

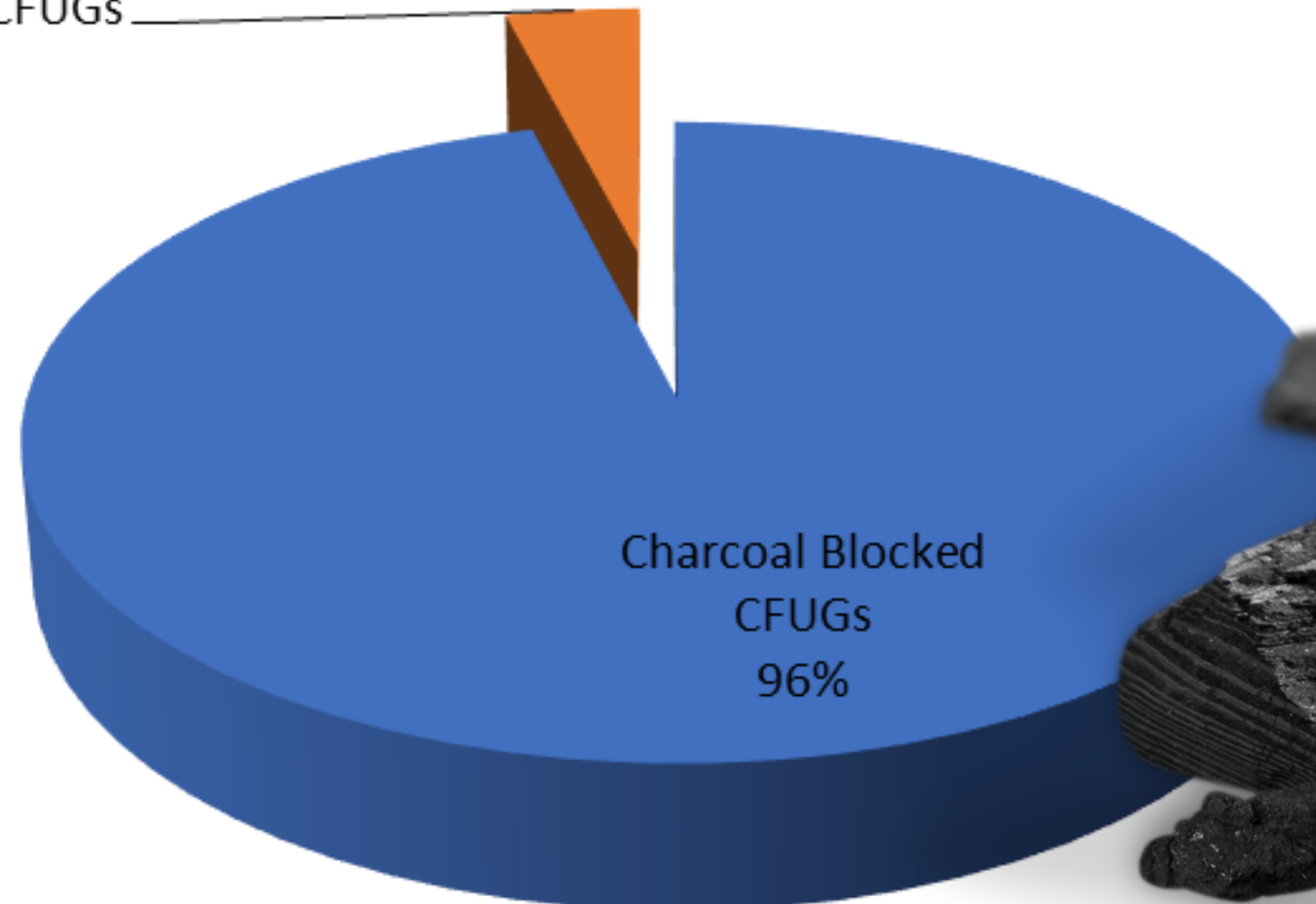
Psychological pressure to Forest workers /Dalit by wider community rather than consider legal ways of using a community resource in a sustainable manner

Threats on their livelihood (and their lives)

Charcoal Production and CFUGs

Charcoal distribution system within 25 CFUGs in 5 sampled districts

Charcoal collection
provision CFUGs
4%



Impacts of Exclusion and ignoring the voices of Dalit/Forest Workers.

1. Forest Governance issues
2. Corruption
3. Deforestation of forest for livelihoods
4. Poor use of a critical resource for local people
5. Illegal logging
6. Dalit Women's exclusion.
7. Lack of attention to implications of climate change for forest management, soil stabilization and effective climate finance management for local development



Policy Recommendations

Implementation of existing and appropriate policies to address Dalit inclusion in community forest, 50% benefit of the total amount from forest revenues (timber and non-timber products).

Rationalise the constitutions and operational plan for community forests and CFUGs to enable sustainable use and effective forest protection;

Dalit forest workers's needs to be identified clearly – including production of charcoal, non-timber forest products and other benefits to be secured.

Dalit and women inclusion explicitly in all aspects of CFUG / Forest land management (vital given out-migration of men from rural areas).





Thank you – any questions please ?

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