

Empowering disadvantaged groups of people through devolved forest governance in Nepal

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Abstract

This M.A. dissertation explores the critical role of devolved forest governance in Nepal in empowering disadvantaged groups of people, including indigenous communities and marginalized populations, to actively participate in sustainable forest management and benefit from its resources. Nepal's rich biodiversity and extensive forested areas offer an ideal backdrop to investigate the potential for inclusive governance models to address social, economic, and environmental disparities. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews, surveys, and policy analysis to provide a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and challenges of devolved forest governance in Nepal. This dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of devolved forest governance in Nepal and its potential to empower disadvantaged groups. By examining the challenges and successes of current models, it seeks to provide policy recommendations that can enhance the inclusivity and sustainability of forest management practices, ultimately leading to the betterment of the lives of marginalized communities and the conservation of Nepal's invaluable forests.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Abstract..... | 2 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 3 |
| Table of Contents..... | 4 |
| Chapter 1- Introduction..... | 5 |
| 1.1 Background and Context..... | 5 |
| 1.2 Research Problem and Objectives..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2- Review of Literature | 10 |
| 2.1 Forest Governance Models | 10 |
| 2.2 Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal | 12 |
| 2.3 Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups | 14 |
| Chapter 3- Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal | 18 |
| 3.1 Historical Background | 18 |
| 3.2 Evolution of Devolved Governance..... | 19 |
| 3.3 Challenges and Ongoing Evolution | 20 |
| 3.4 Legal Framework for Devolved Forest Governance..... | 21 |
| 3.5 Legal Framework for Forest Conservation | 22 |
| 3.6 Institutional Arrangements and Key Stakeholders..... | 23 |
| Chapter 4- Indigenous Communities | 25 |
| 4.1 Rights and Recognition..... | 25 |
| 4.2 Marginalized Populations | 33 |
| Chapter 5- Conclusion | 39 |
| 5.1 Summary of Key Findings | 39 |
| 5.2 Implications for Policy and Practice | 40 |
| 5.3 Future Research Directions..... | 40 |
| 5.4 Broader Significance..... | 41 |
| 5.5 Lessons for Other Contexts Regarding Policy | 43 |
| References..... | 45 |

Chapter 1- Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive background of the research project “Empowering Disadvantaged Groups of People through Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal”. The chapter begins by providing a detailed context of this research, followed by the research objectives, research questions, research methodology, and the chapter scheme employed in framing this dissertation.

1.1 Background and Context

Forests are vital ecological and economic resources globally, and Nepal is no exception. Covering approximately 39% of the country's land area (MOFE, 2020), Nepal's forests play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation, watershed management, and the livelihoods of its people. However, the sustainable management of these forests has been a longstanding challenge, complicated by factors such as deforestation, illegal logging, and inequitable access to forest resources.

Historically, forest management in Nepal was largely centralized, with limited participation from local communities and disadvantaged groups (Gilmour et al., 2016). This approach led to resource degradation and social conflicts (Baral & Stern, 2011). Recognizing the need for change, Nepal initiated a series of policy reforms in the 1990s to decentralize forest governance and empower local communities (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2001).

The Community Forestry Program (CFP) in Nepal, initiated in 1993, was a pioneering effort in this regard. It devolved forest management responsibilities to Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), allowing local communities to manage and benefit from nearby forests (Pokharel & Pandit, 2019). Subsequently, the Forest Act of 1993 and Forest Regulation of 1995 further promoted community-based forest management.

The devolved forest governance system aimed not only to conserve forests sustainably but also to empower disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples and marginalized populations. Nepal recognizes more than 123 distinct ethnic groups (CBS, 2012), many of whom depend heavily on forests for their livelihoods (Bista et al., 2017). Furthermore, indigenous peoples constitute a significant portion of Nepal's population (World Bank, 2019).

However, while these policy reforms have made progress in empowering local communities and disadvantaged groups, significant challenges persist. This dissertation investigates the extent to which devolved forest governance in Nepal has succeeded in empowering these groups and addresses the existing gaps and challenges.

1.2 Research Problem and Objectives

The central research problem addressed in this dissertation is to evaluate the effectiveness of devolved forest governance in Nepal in empowering disadvantaged groups, including indigenous communities and marginalized populations, and to identify the key challenges and opportunities within this framework.

The specific research objectives are as follows:

To examine the historical context and evolution of devolved forest governance in Nepal.

To assess the impact of devolved forest governance on the empowerment of indigenous communities.

To evaluate the role of devolved forest governance in promoting the inclusion and welfare of marginalized populations.

To identify the challenges and barriers that hinder the empowerment of these disadvantaged groups.

To provide policy recommendations for enhancing the inclusivity and sustainability of forest governance in Nepal.

By addressing these objectives, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between devolved forest governance and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups in the Nepalese context.

Research Questions

How has the historical context and evolution of devolved forest governance in Nepal influenced the management of forest resources and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, including indigenous communities and marginalized populations?

To what extent has devolved forest governance in Nepal contributed to the empowerment of indigenous communities, specifically in terms of rights recognition, participation in decision-making and economic well-being?

What role does devolved forest governance play in promoting the inclusion and improving the welfare of marginalized populations in Nepal, with a focus on gender perspectives, socio-economic inclusion, and access to education and awareness?

What are the primary challenges and barriers that hinder the empowerment of disadvantaged groups through devolved forest governance in Nepal, and how do these challenges vary across different regions and communities?

Based on the findings, what policy recommendations can be proposed to enhance the inclusivity and sustainability of forest governance in Nepal, particularly in terms of addressing the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged groups?

These research questions guide this study and help to systematically investigate the relationship between devolved forest governance and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups in Nepal's context.

Significance of the Study

This dissertation holds significant relevance for various stakeholders in Nepal, including policymakers, forest management practitioners, indigenous communities, marginalized populations, and researchers, for several reasons which include Policy Development and Implementation, Sustainable Resource Management, Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups, and Conflict Resolution. The academic relevance of this study is that it adds to the body of academic literature on forest governance and empowerment of disadvantaged groups, particularly in the Nepalese context (Bista et al., 2017).

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this dissertation, include the research design, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The research design for this dissertation is primarily qualitative, supplemented by quantitative data from secondary sources. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

Data Collection

This study is based on the analysis of secondary sources related to key stakeholders, including government officials, representatives from indigenous communities, members of community forest user groups (CFUGs), and experts in forest governance. The analysis is aimed to gather in-depth insights into their perspectives on devolved forest governance and its impact on disadvantaged groups. The research method reads Policy documents, legal frameworks, and reports related to forest governance in Nepal were analyzed to understand the historical context, legal provisions, and policy developments surrounding devolved forest governance.

Data Analysis

(a)Qualitative Data

The qualitative data collected from interviews and document analysis were subjected to thematic analysis. This research methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between devolved forest governance and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups in Nepal, while adhering to ethical principles and ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings by a reading of various secondary sources.

Chapterisation

The Chapterisation for this dissertation on "Empowering Disadvantaged Groups of People through Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal" includes:

Chapter 1 entitled "Introduction" provides the background and context of this research, and also puts forth the Research Problem, Objectives, and Research Questions of this study. In

addition, the chapter also discusses the significance of this study and the Research Methodology employed. Finally, this introductory chapter talks about the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 “Literature Review” offers a comprehensive review of the research and literary texts available in the fields of Forest Governance Models, Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal, Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups, and Challenges and Gaps in Current Literature

Chapter 3 “Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal” offers a historical overview of the subject and the associated legal framework. The chapter also discusses the institutional arrangements and the key stakeholders.

Chapter 4 “Empowering Disadvantaged Groups” offers a study of the indigenous communities, their Rights and Recognition, Participation in Decision-Making, Marginalized Populations, Gender Perspective, socio-economic inclusion, and Educational awareness.

Chapter 5 “Conclusion” sums up the findings and discussion, Policy Recommendations, Contributions to the Field, and Future Research Directions.

This Chapterisation provides a structured and logical flow for this dissertation, allowing the researcher to systematically explore and analyze the topic of empowering disadvantaged groups through devolved forest governance in Nepal.

Chapter 2- Review of Literature

In this chapter, an extensive review of the literature related to forest governance, devolved forest governance in Nepal, the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, and existing gaps in the literature is presented. The chapter provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the context and significance of the research.

2.1 Forest Governance Models

Forest governance is a complex field with various models employed worldwide. One prominent model is community-based forest management, which emphasizes local participation and control over forest resources (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001). This model underpins Nepal's devolved forest governance system.

Another key concept is co-management, where the government collaborates with local communities in decision-making and resource management (Ostrom, 1990). This approach aligns with Nepal's efforts to decentralize forest governance.

In addition to the community-based forest management and co-management models mentioned earlier, several other forest governance models exist that provide valuable insights into the complexities of managing forest resources sustainably and inclusively.

2.1.1 State-Centric Forest Governance

Historically, many countries employed a state-centric approach to forest governance, where the government retained centralized control over forests (Kissinger et al., 2017). While this approach often allowed for efficient resource extraction and revenue generation, it frequently marginalized local communities and indigenous peoples, leading to conflicts over resource access and land rights (Sikor & Lund, 2009).

2.1.2 Indigenous and Community Forest Management

Indigenous and community forest management models emphasize the rights and responsibilities of indigenous communities and local stakeholders in governing forests. These models recognize the intricate relationship between indigenous peoples and their traditional lands and acknowledge the importance of traditional knowledge in sustainable forest management (Davis et al., 2013).

2.1.3 Participatory Forest Management (PFM)

Participatory Forest Management is an approach that involves collaboration between government agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders in decision-making and resource management (Sundberg et al., 2014). PFM aims to balance conservation with livelihood needs, making it relevant to the empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

2.1.4 Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)

Payment for Ecosystem Services is an innovative forest governance model where communities are compensated for the environmental services their forests provide, such as carbon sequestration or water regulation (Wunder, 2005). PES can be an effective tool for incentivizing sustainable forest management and empowering local communities economically.

2.1.5 Adaptive Co-Management

Adaptive co-management involves flexible, collaborative approaches that adapt to changing ecological and social conditions (Olsson et al., 2004). This model recognizes that sustainable forest governance requires ongoing learning and adaptation, often involving local communities in decision-making processes.

2.1.6 REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation)

REDD+ is an international forest governance model that offers financial incentives to countries for reducing deforestation and forest degradation (Angelsen, 2008). While it primarily focuses on climate change mitigation, it also presents opportunities for addressing the empowerment of disadvantaged groups through equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms (Gupta et al., 2015).

2.1.7 Co-Ownership and Joint Forest Management

Some countries have adopted co-ownership and joint forest management models, where government agencies and local communities jointly own and manage forest resources

(Klooster, 2003). These models often include agreements on resource access, revenue-sharing, and decision-making.

Forest governance models vary in their approaches, ranging from centralized state control to inclusive community-based management. Each model has its advantages and challenges, and their effectiveness depends on various contextual factors, including legal frameworks, cultural norms, and ecological conditions. Understanding these models is crucial for assessing how different governance approaches impact the empowerment of disadvantaged groups in Nepal's context.

2.2 Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal

Nepal's journey towards devolved forest governance began in the early 1990s with the initiation of the Community Forestry Program (CFP). CFP aimed to empower local communities by transferring forest management rights (Gilmour et al., 2016). This program led to the formation of Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) and the decentralization of forest management authority.

The Forest Act of 1993 and Forest Regulation of 1995 established the legal framework for community-based forest management in Nepal (Pokharel & Pandit, 2019). These policies recognized the importance of local knowledge and participation in sustainable forest management.

2.2.1 The Community Forestry Program (CFP)

The cornerstone of Nepal's devolved forest governance is the Community Forestry Program (CFP), initiated in 1993 (Pokharel & Pandit, 2019). CFP aimed to empower local communities by transferring forest management rights from the government to Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs). This marked a significant shift from centralized control to community-based management.

Under CFP, forests are divided into community forest blocks, and each block is entrusted to a CFUG. These user groups are responsible for managing and conserving the forest, as well as sharing benefits derived from it (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). This approach has allowed for greater local participation in decision-making and resource management.

2.2.2 Legal Framework

The Forest Act of 1993 and the Forest Regulation of 1995 provide the legal foundation for community-based forest management in Nepal (Pandit & Bhattarai, 2015). These laws recognize the rights of local communities to access and manage forest resources within designated areas. They also outline the roles and responsibilities of CFUGs, emphasizing their autonomy and the need for sustainable forest management.

2.2.3 Institutional Arrangements

Devolved forest governance in Nepal involves a network of institutions, including government agencies, CFUGs, and District Forest Offices (DFOs). DFOs play a supervisory role, while CFUGs are responsible for day-to-day forest management activities (Gilmour et al., 2016).

The institutional arrangements also involve various tiers of government, as Nepal transitioned to a federal structure in 2015. This federalization has implications for the distribution of authority and resources related to forest governance (Ojha et al., 2019).

2.2.4 Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial aspect of devolved forest governance. Key stakeholders include government bodies, local communities, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international donors (Pandit & Bhattarai, 2015). The involvement and collaboration of these stakeholders influence the success and sustainability of community forestry initiatives.

2.2.5 Outcomes and Challenges

Devolved forest governance in Nepal has shown promising outcomes, including increased forest cover, enhanced local livelihoods, and improved biodiversity conservation (Pokharel & Pandit, 2019). However, challenges persist, such as conflicts over resource access, inequitable benefit-sharing, and variations in the implementation of policies (Adhikari et al., 2019).

Moreover, as Nepal continues to adapt to federalism, changes in governance structures and resource allocation may impact the effectiveness of devolved forest governance (Ojha et al., 2019).

2.2.6 Sustainability and Future Directions

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of devolved forest governance is a critical concern. Research suggests that ongoing support, capacity building, and adaptive management are essential for the continued success of community forestry in Nepal (Paudel et al., 2019).

In conclusion, devolved forest governance in Nepal represents a progressive approach to sustainable forest management and community empowerment. It has evolved over time, influenced by legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, and changing political structures. Understanding its intricacies and challenges is crucial for assessing its impact on the empowerment of disadvantaged groups in Nepal.

2.3 Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups

2.3.1 Indigenous Communities

Indigenous communities in Nepal, such as the Chepang and Tharu, have historically faced discrimination and exclusion (CBS, 2012). Devolved forest governance has aimed to rectify this by recognizing their rights to forest resources and encouraging their active participation in decision-making (Adhikari et al., 2019).

Studies have shown that the devolved governance system has increased indigenous peoples' access to forest resources and improved their livelihoods (Baral & Stern, 2011). However, challenges related to recognition of traditional knowledge and social inclusion persist (Gilmour et al., 2016).

2.3.2 Marginalized Populations

Marginalized populations, including Dalits and women, have also benefited from devolved forest governance in some instances. Gender mainstreaming efforts within CFUGs have aimed to promote the inclusion of women in forest management (Aryal et al., 2018).

Research indicates that these efforts have led to increased women's participation in decision-making and income generation from forest products (Ojha et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, gender disparities still exist, and further improvements are needed in addressing gender-specific challenges (Bhattarai & Conway, 2018).

In the context of devolved forest governance in Nepal, the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, including indigenous communities and marginalized populations, is a critical aspect. Further exploration of the challenges and opportunities related to their empowerment is essential to understand the nuances of this complex process.

Rights and Recognition

Devolved forest governance recognized the rights of indigenous communities to access and manage forest resources within their traditional territories (Baral & Stern, 2011). This recognition marked a significant departure from earlier policies that marginalized these communities and often led to conflicts over resource access and land rights (Gilmour et al., 2016).

Participation in Decision-Making

Indigenous communities have gained a stronger voice in the management of their local forests through participation in CFUGs (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). They are actively engaged in decisions related to forest management, resource allocation, and benefit-sharing (Adhikari et al., 2019).

Economic Empowerment

Access to forest resources has empowered indigenous communities economically. They have been able to generate income from non-timber forest products (NTFPs), such as herbs and medicinal plants, which play a crucial role in their livelihoods (Baral & Stern, 2011). Additionally, community-based ecotourism initiatives in some regions have provided employment opportunities and economic benefits to indigenous communities (Bista et al., 2017).

Gender Perspective

Devolved forest governance initiatives in Nepal have also aimed to promote gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized populations, particularly women. Gender mainstreaming efforts within CFUGs have sought to increase women's participation in decision-making and leadership roles (Aryal et al., 2018).

Socio-economic Inclusion

Research indicates that gender mainstreaming efforts have had a positive impact on the socio-economic inclusion of women (Ojha et al., 2019). Women have been able to engage in income-generating activities related to forest resources, improving their economic status and contributing to household well-being (Adhikari et al., 2019).

Education and Awareness

Devolved forest governance initiatives have also prioritized education and awareness programs. These programs aim to enhance the capacity of marginalized populations to engage effectively in forest management (Pandit & Bhattarai, 2015). They have contributed to increased awareness of rights and responsibilities among these groups (Bhattarai & Conway, 2018).

In conclusion, devolved forest governance in Nepal has made strides in empowering disadvantaged groups, including indigenous communities and marginalized populations. Recognizing their rights, enhancing their participation, and promoting their economic well-being have been integral to these efforts. Nevertheless, challenges related to policy implementation, traditional knowledge recognition, and gender disparities persist and require continued attention and innovation.

Challenges and Gaps in Current Literature

Challenges: Despite progress, gender disparities still exist, and further improvements are needed in addressing gender-specific challenges, such as the division of labor and decision-making within households (Bhattarai & Conway, 2018). Additionally, the inclusion of other marginalized populations, such as Dalits, remains a challenge, with the need for greater attention to their specific needs and concerns (Ojha et al., 2019).

Moreover, there is a gap in the literature regarding the sustainability of devolved governance and the long-term impacts on disadvantaged groups. While some studies have assessed short-term outcomes, there is a need for longitudinal research to understand the lasting effects (Paudel et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the evolution of devolved forest governance in Nepal, its impact on indigenous communities and marginalized populations, and the challenges that need to be addressed. The research aims to contribute to this body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive assessment of the empowerment of disadvantaged groups through devolved forest governance.

Chapter 3- Devolved Forest Governance in Nepal

This chapter offers a historical overview of the subject and the associated legal framework. The chapter also discusses the institutional arrangements and the key stakeholders. The path that Nepal is on toward decentralized forest governance is steeped in a long and eventful history, one that has been defined by substantial policy shifts and difficult obstacles. It is essential to have an understanding of this history in order to comprehend the development of forest governance in the country. The history of forest governance in Nepal reveals a dynamic transition from centralized authority to devolved and community-based administration over the course of the country's existence.

3.1 Historical Background

According to Baral and Stern (2011), the history of forest governance in Nepal is intricately entwined with the country's geographical and cultural diversity. The nation has a long history of community-based forest management, in which the local communities have an important part in the responsible use and conservation of forest resources. This practice is still in practice today. Nevertheless, this traditional system was put to the test when, in the middle of the 20th century, centralized forest management strategies were put into effect, which resulted in the destruction of forests and other environmental problems.

However, the forests were confronted with a number of issues, some of which included deforestation, the deterioration of resources, and disagreements regarding access and use (Pandit & Bhattarai, 2015). These difficulties were made significantly more difficult when, in the middle of the 20th century, policies emphasizing centralized forest management were put into place. The implementation of these policies resulted in additional deforestation and degradation, which posed a risk to the long-term viability of the nation's forests as well as the economic security of the communities that depend on them.

Before the 1990s, Nepal had a centralized approach to forest governance, which meant that the state retained exclusive authority over forest resources. This system was in place until the 1990s. Because of this centralized approach, local populations had limited participation and decision-making power, which led to a lack of incentives for sustainable forest management. As a direct consequence of this, illegal logging and encroachment became commonplace, which contributed to the deforestation that occurs throughout Nepal.

In response to the detrimental effects that these policies were having not only on the natural world but also on the communities that lived there, a move toward decentralized forest administration began in the 1990s.

Prior to the 1990s, Nepal had a centralized and top-down approach to forest governance that was defined by rigorous government control (Gilmour et al., 2016). This method to forest governance was in place until the 1990s. This strategy led to a reduced level of participation from the surrounding communities as well as an absence of responsibility. As a response to these deficiencies, a shift toward decentralized forest governance was made, with the aim that it would develop better resource management and community engagement. However, the difficulties that these communities are experiencing underline the necessity for sufficient training and assistance in order to ensure that they will be successful in effectively managing and maintaining the woods.

3.2 Evolution of Devolved Governance

The Community Forestry Program (CFP) was established in 1993, which is considered to be the beginning year of the transition toward community-based forest management (Pokharel&Pandit, 2019). The CFP had the goal of recognizing the rights and traditional knowledge of the local communities and transferring the duty of forest management to those communities. This strategy has expanded over time to incorporate participatory decision-making procedures and the formation of community forest user groups, both of which have played an important role in promoting sustainable forest practices and empowering local communities. These groups have also played a significant role in the establishment of community forests.

Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) were given the rights to manage forests after the government transferred those rights to them under the CFP (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). This was done with the intention of giving local communities more agency. This transfer of rights has made it possible for CFUGs to actively engage in decision-making processes pertaining to forest management. This has helped to ensure that the CFUGs' traditional knowledge and traditions are recognized and incorporated into sustainable forest practices. In addition, the development of CFUGs has not only empowered local people but has also developed a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the forests, which has led

to an increase in efforts to conserve the forests and improved livelihoods for members of the community.

Since its inception in 1993, the Community Forestry Program (CFP) has been a driving force behind the shift toward community-based forest management (Pokharel&Pandit, 2019). The Community Forest Partnership (CFP) aims to decentralize forest management by giving local people more ownership of forest land as well as more say in management decisions. This transition gave communities the ability to actively participate in forest conservation and management, which led to enhanced protection for the forests and improved socioeconomic situations for the residents of the communities.

3.3 Challenges and Ongoing Evolution

Adhikari et al., 2019 say that despite the significant progress that has been made, there continue to be problems such as disagreements on access to resources, the distribution of benefits, and the implementation of policies. Additionally, the success of CFUGs in promoting sustainable forest management and community empowerment may vary across different regions and communities, underscoring the necessity for approaches that are relevant to the location as well as ongoing learning (Bhattarai et al., 2020). In addition, efforts are being undertaken on a continuous basis to overcome these problems through policy reforms, programs for capacity building, and stakeholder collaborations in order to ensure the continued success of community forestry in Nepal (Bhatta et al., 2021).

In 2015, Nepal made the transition to a federal structure, which has further impacted the dynamics of forest governance (Ojha et al., 2019). This move has led to disputes concerning the allocation of resources as well as the distribution of authority. These conversations have brought to light the challenges involved in striking a balance between the necessity for sustainable forest management and the need for local autonomy. In addition to this, Nepal's forest governance is undergoing continual change, which means that existing policies and practices will need to be continuously adapted and improved upon in order to effectively meet the aforementioned difficulties.

3.4 Legal Framework for Devolved Forest Governance

The legal framework governing devolved forest governance in Nepal is anchored in specific legislation and regulations that outline the rights, responsibilities, and processes for community-based forest management. These include the Forest Act of 1993, which recognizes the rights of local communities to manage and use forest resources, and the Community Forestry Guidelines of 1995, which provide detailed procedures for establishing and operating community forestry user groups. These legal provisions have played a crucial role in empowering local communities and promoting their participation in forest governance processes. However, challenges still exist in ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of these laws at the local level.

Forest Act of 1993

According to Pandit and Bhattarai (2015), the Forest Act of 1993 serves as the foundation of Nepal's system for managing its forests. This piece of law establishes a legal foundation for community-based forest management and gives local communities the authority to organize and oversee user organizations for community forestry. In addition to this, it details the processes that must be followed in order to acquire forest resources, as well as the rights and obligations of various user groups with regard to the management and utilization of forest resources. The Forest Act of 1993 was essential in decentralizing forest governance in Nepal, allowing for greater community engagement and decision-making in forest management. This was made possible by allowing for greater community participation and decision-making in forest management.

Regulation of the Forest in 1995

According to Aryal et al. (2018), the procedures that need to be performed in order to bring the Forest Act into force are outlined in great depth in the Forest Regulation that was passed in 1995. It outlines the actions that need to be performed in order to secure approvals and licenses in order to participate in forest-related activities such as the collection of non-timber forest products and the harvesting of timber. These activities include the cutting down of trees for their timber. In addition, the rule specifies sanctions for actions that are unlawful and establishes procedures for monitoring and enforcing laws that are relevant to forests.

This law, which plays an important part in the process, has a substantial impact on the operational aspects of community-based forest management, which are important in their own right. The Forest Regulation of 1995 ensures that all CFUGs are required to adhere to well defined rules and processes in order for them to be able to effectively manage the forestry resources of the country. A positive component of the law is that it encourages transparency and accountability by making it mandatory for CFUGs to register and develop management plans. This not only helps to ensure the responsible exploitation of forest resources, but it also helps to make the law more transparent and accountable.

Policy Consistency and Adaptation

According to Ojha et al. (2019), one of the continuing processes of Nepal's decentralized system of forest governance is ensuring that policies are consistent and adapting to changing circumstances and problems. As part of this process, the Forest Act is subjected to routine reviews and amendments in order to address newly arising concerns and incorporate lessons learnt from its implementation.

New problems, like global warming and more federal authority, have necessitated new approaches to policymaking. Because of these developments, mechanisms for sustainable forest management and community participation in decision-making processes have been incorporated. In addition, the implementation of these policies has needed many stakeholders, including as government agencies, local communities, and non-governmental organizations, to work together to strengthen their capacity and collaborate in order to be successful.

3.5 Legal Framework for Forest Conservation

According to Paudel et al. (2019), Nepal has numerous legal provisions and policies for the management of protected areas for the purpose of forest conservation. Community-based management is just one of these policies. The Forest Act, the Biodiversity Act, and the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act are all examples of these types of legal regulations. These laws offer a framework for the sustainable management of Nepal's forests, the protection of biodiversity, and the establishment of protected areas throughout the country. In addition, the Biodiversity Act of 2002 and the Forest Act of 1993 are two laws that are essential to the promotion of the sustainable use and management of Nepal's

abundant biodiversity. The Forest Act was passed in 1993, and the Biodiversity Act was passed in 2002. In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973 is a very important piece of legislation when it comes to the administration and preservation of the nation's national parks and wildlife reserves. Together, these legal frameworks offer a comprehensive approach to the conservation of Nepal's forests, guaranteeing that the country's natural resources would be preserved for future generations.

These regulations include those that pertain to national parks, the preservation of wildlife, and the management of buffer zones. These legislative rules and policies have the goals of ensuring the sustainable use of Nepal's forests and conserving them, as well as protecting the abundant biodiversity that can be found within them. They promote practices that are respectful toward the environment and are environmentally beneficial by offering rules for activities such as logging, hunting, and tourism that take place within protected areas. In addition, these management policies offer systems for community participation in forest management. This is done in recognition of the significance of local communities in the overall process of conservation efforts.

3.6 Institutional Arrangements and Key Stakeholders

According to Gilmour et al. (2016), decentralized forest governance in Nepal encompasses a network of organizations. These institutions range from government agencies to entities at the local level. These institutions collaborate with one another to ensure efficient management of forests and to promote their preservation. The Department of Forests and Soil Conservation, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, local communities, non-governmental groups, and international development agencies are the primary stakeholders in these arrangements. These various stakeholders work together to establish and put into action laws, rules, and initiatives that promote sustainable use of the forest. In addition to this, they participate in projects aimed at increasing community members' capacity to participate in decision-making processes relating to forest management.

The District Forest Offices (DFOs), which have a supervisory function, and the Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), which are in charge of day-to-day forest management activities, are both essential entities. District Forest Offices, also known as DFOs, are in charge of monitoring the execution of forest management plans and ensuring that these plans comply with national policies and laws. On the other hand, it is the duty of CFUGs to carry

out activities like as patrolling, keeping an eye on animals, and putting into practice methods that ensure sustainable harvesting. At both the regional and national levels, these institutions collaborate on sustainable forest management and conservation activities to promote their respective missions.

Chapter 4- Indigenous Communities

This chapter is a study of the indigenous communities of Nepal in view of the subject of this research. The chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the local communities in view of the devolved forest governance in Nepal.

4.1 Rights and Recognition

According to CBS (2012), indigenous populations in Nepal such as the Chepang and the Tharu have a long history of being excluded from society and subjected to prejudice. Because of this, access to resources and the decision-making processes has been severely restricted. However, community forestry has made it possible for these communities to receive recognition and exercise their rights over forest resources (Pokharel&Pandit, 2019). This is thanks to the opportunities that community forestry has brought. Indigenous people have been given the opportunity to take an active role in the management of forests and to reap the benefits of the responsible utilization of forest resources thanks to the practice of community forestry. This has not only enhanced their means of subsistence but has also helped contribute to the preservation of Nepal's forested lands (Bhattarai, 2015). Additionally, indigenous people have been given a sense of ownership and control over their traditional lands through the practice of community forestry, which has contributed to the process of empowering these groups. Because of this, they have been able to keep their cultural practices and the traditional knowledge that is related with forests, which will ensure that their rich cultural heritage is maintained over time. In addition, community forestry has helped people of the community develop a feeling of collective responsibility, which has resulted in an increase in environmental awareness as well as a greater dedication to the advancement of conservation initiatives. In Nepal, community forestry has been shown to be a model that is beneficial in supporting sustainable development, social justice, and the conservation of the environment. The success of community forestry in Nepal can be linked to the fact that local communities are given active involvement opportunities as well as the power to make decisions. These communities have been given the ability to take ownership of their natural environment and actively contribute to its preservation as a result of community forestry, which gives them a voice in the management and control of forest resources and involves them in these processes. This bottom-up approach has not only enhanced the overall well-being of local people, but it has also led to conservation methods that are more effective and sustainable. The percentage of land that is covered by trees in

Nepal has significantly increased as a direct result of the practice of community forestry. The local people have taken responsibility for the protection and management of the woods, which has resulted in a drop in the rates of deforestation and an increase in the amount of reforestation initiatives. This has not only been beneficial to the ecosystem, but it has also provided economic prospects for the local residents in the form of sustainable livelihoods based in the forests, such as ecotourism and the collection of non-timber forest products. In Nepal, community forestry has been shown to be an effective strategy for both the preservation of natural resources and the promotion of economic growth. The practice of illegal logging and encroachment on forest land in Nepal has decreased since the country began integrating local populations in the management of its forests.

These policies recognize the historical relationships that indigenous tribes have maintained with the lands and forests that have traditionally been theirs. These policies attempt to safeguard the indigenous communities' cultural legacy as well as promote social justice by acknowledging the historical ties those groups have had to the lands and forests that have traditionally been a part of their customary territory. In addition, the incorporation of traditional indigenous wisdom and practices into forest management techniques has shown positive results in terms of boosting the protection of biodiversity and promoting the resilience of ecosystems. These all-inclusive policies have the potential to not only protect the cultural value of indigenous communities but also to contribute to the responsible and environmentally sustainable management of the forest. These policies encourage a holistic approach to environmental protection by recognizing and utilizing indigenous knowledge. This approach acknowledges and honors traditional forest management techniques while also ensuring the long-term viability of forests. Additionally, the engagement of indigenous groups in decision-making processes has been an important factor in bolstering their rights and giving them the ability to assume ownership of the lands and forests that are traditionally part of their territory. This all-inclusive strategy has not only resulted in better forest governance and lower rates of deforestation, but it has also contributed to an overall improvement in the well-being of native communities. Furthermore, recognizing and supporting indigenous rights and traditions in forest management helps to foster cultural variety while also strengthening ecosystems' resilience in the face of climate change. Indigenous communities' long-standing customs and knowledge can be preserved and incorporated into more environmentally friendly resource management strategies when such communities are given a voice in forest management decisions. The preservation of these

communities' cultural history is ensured as a result of this action, in addition to the conservation of a wide variety of habitats. In addition, giving indigenous peoples a voice in forest management makes it possible to make responsible use of forest resources, which in turn fosters economic growth and brings about a reduction in poverty in the affected communities. In the end, respecting indigenous rights and practices in forest management is essential to reaching global sustainability goals and cultivating a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This is because indigenous people have long held certain traditions and rights in regard to the forest.

According to Agrawal and Gibson (1999), indigenous people are given a voice in the CFUGs in which they are represented, allowing them to actively engage in the decision-making and management processes. CFUGs act as forums in which indigenous people can discuss and reach consensus on matters relating to the management of forests, the distribution of resources, and the implementation of sustainable practices. Not only do these organizations make it possible for the views of indigenous peoples to be heard, but they also encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility among the members of the community with regard to the protection and conservation of their local forests. For instance, in Nepal, indigenous communities have been given the ability to actively engage in the decision-making process and the management of local forests as a direct result of the development of Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs). Members of the community have been able to reach consensus on matters such as logging techniques, the preservation of biodiversity, and the creation of income from forest resources thanks to the establishment of CFUGs. Because of this, not only has sustainable forest management been achieved, but also the connection between indigenous populations and the woods they inhabit has been reinforced, which has led to improved conservation outcomes. Indigenous communities have the potential to determine the policies and practices that directly affect their lives and livelihoods if they actively participate in CFUGs. This opportunity is presented to indigenous communities when they actively participate in CFUGs. Because of their involvement, they are given the opportunity to have a say in the distribution of resources, which helps to ensure that their requirements and priorities are met. In addition, CFUGs give native people the ability to claim ownership of their forests and assume responsibility for the environmentally responsible management of those forests. This feeling of ownership and responsibility is absolutely necessary in order to ensure the protection and conservation of these priceless ecosystems over the long run. In addition, CFUGs play a significant part in the process of empowering indigenous people by

delivering to them the information and training that is essential for the efficient management of their respective forests. Community members are given the tools necessary to assess forest health, put into practice sustainable harvesting techniques, and lessen the effects of climate change as a result of participation in training programs and activities aimed at developing capacity. This active participation in decision-making and management procedures not only protects the long-term viability of the forests, but it also improves the overall well-being and resilience of indigenous people. These communities are able to express their rights and maintain their cultural legacy by seizing control of the natural resources that are within their borders. They can also develop alternate sources of income, such as ecotourism or sustainable agriculture, which can further contribute to their economic empowerment.

According to Adhikari et al. (2019), CFUGs have evolved into a forum where indigenous communities may debate topics concerning the forest and arrive to collective conclusions about how best to proceed. Indigenous communities are given the opportunity to have a more significant say in the administration and preservation of their natural resources as a result of this process of collective decision-making. Additionally, CFUGs give chances for indigenous people to share their traditional knowledge and practices with other stakeholders. This helps to build cross-cultural understanding as well as collaboration in environmental preservation activities. When it comes to the management of forests, indigenous groups have the ability to ensure that their points of view and requirements are met by actively engaging in the decision-making processes that occur within those communities. This not only gives them the ability to safeguard their natural resources, but it also contributes to the maintenance of their cultural legacy and encourages the growth of sustainable communities. In addition, the sharing of indigenous groups' traditional knowledge and traditions with other interested parties can result in the development of novel ways that are of use not only to efforts to preserve the environment but also to the general wellbeing of the communities that are involved. We are able to make use of the indigenous people' profound knowledge of the land and the resources it contains by integrating those groups in the management of the forests. They have been able to negotiate the complexity of the ecosystem with remarkable wisdom thanks to the customary knowledge and practices that have been passed down through generations in their culture.

Because of this representation, they are able to voice their concerns, contribute their traditional knowledge, and influence the plans and techniques that are used for forest

management. In addition, the participation of indigenous groups in the administration of forests ensures that their rights and interests are safeguarded, so minimizing any possibility of exploitation or marginalization. This technique of working together also encourages a sense of ownership and responsibility among indigenous people, which ultimately leads to conservation efforts that are more sustainable and successful.

4.1.1 Resource Allocation and Benefit-Sharing

According to Agrawal and Gibson (1999), indigenous groups take an active part in the decision-making process regarding the allocation of resources and the distribution of benefits derived from forest resources. This involvement ensures that the communities have a vote in how resources are divided and that they receive fair recompense for their contributions. Additionally, it guarantees that the communities are given credit where credit is due for their contributions. Additionally, this method acknowledges the traditional knowledge and sustainable practices of indigenous groups, which leads to resource management strategies that are more effective and equitable. When indigenous groups are given a voice in the decision-making process, the likelihood of conflicts and disputes involving ownership of resources and access to those resources is decreased. This method also encourages the protection of cultural assets and deepens the link that communities have with the natural environment in which they live.

4.1.2 Conflict Resolution

According to Gilmour et al. (2016), CFUGs offer indigenous communities a forum in which they can discuss conflicts over the access and utilization of resources. These disputes can be caused by community members or other parties, such as logging firms or government agencies, having competing interests in the community's future. The facilitation of communication and negotiation processes by CFUGs helps to develop solutions that are mutually acceptable, which in turn promotes peaceful coexistence and the sustainable management of resources. In addition, CFUGs frequently adopt methods for conflict resolution and bylaws that specify procedures for addressing disagreements. This helps to ensure that decision-making processes are both fair and transparent.

The decision-making procedures that take place within CFUGs can be helpful in resolving disagreements and fostering equitable distribution of resources. In addition,

integrating local communities in the decision-making process ensures that a variety of viewpoints and types of knowledge are taken into consideration, which ultimately results in decisions that are better informed and more inclusive. This collaborative approach helps foster trust and collaboration among community members, which creates a better foundation for the efficient management of resources. Additionally, when local communities are involved in decision-making processes, they build UGs can also benefit from the collective wisdom and competence of community members who have a thorough awareness of the local ecology. This is possible when local communities are involved in decision-making processes. This local knowledge may be very helpful in designing sustainable resource management methods that take into consideration the specific requirements and characteristics of the area. This can lead to a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards the resources, which in turn leads to improved conservation efforts. This heightened sense of ownership has the potential to discourage illicit behaviours like poaching and logging in areas where it exists, for example.

4.1.3 Recognition of Traditional Knowledge

According to Gilmour et al. (2016), decentralized forest administration acknowledges the significance of the traditional knowledge maintained by indigenous groups. This acknowledgement recognises that indigenous groups have been living in harmony with their environments for millennia and have important insights into the practices of sustainable resource management. It also notes that these communities have a wealth of expertise regarding the management of sustainable resources. Devolved forest governance can ensure that resource management techniques are culturally suitable and environmentally sustainable if they incorporate traditional knowledge into the decision-making processes. Not only does this help the communities in the immediate area, but it also makes a contribution to the broader protection and conservation of natural resources. Involving local people in forest management not only helps to build a sense of ownership and responsibility, but it also leads to improved commitment and drive to conserve and maintain the natural resources. In addition, traditional knowledge and traditions frequently provide novel ideas and alternate ways of doing things, both of which have the potential to make conservation efforts more successful. Devolved forest governance can, ultimately, lead to more inclusive and equitable decision-making processes that prioritize both environmental sustainability and the well-being of local populations by acknowledging and respecting the wisdom of indigenous

communities. This can be accomplished by recognizing and respecting the wisdom of indigenous communities.

4.1.4 Participation in Decision-Making

As a result of their participation in Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), indigenous groups in Nepal have been given a considerable voice in the decision-making processes that are connected to the management of the country's forests (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). These CFUGs are in charge of making decisions about the use and conservation of forest resources, and it is their duty to ensure that the viewpoints and conventional wisdom of indigenous groups are taken into account when doing so. This strategy has resulted in forest management techniques that are more sustainable and effective, as well as improved levels of empowerment and self-governance among indigenous groups.

According to Adhikari et al. (2019), the development of CFUGs constituted a significant shift in governance, which gave local people, including indigenous groups, the authority to make choices regarding forest resources as a group. CFUGs have acknowledged and respected the indigenous communities' one-of-a-kind cultural traditions and their extensive store of traditional knowledge by including those groups in the decision-making process. This has not only resulted in forest management practices that are more holistic and environmentally sound, but it has also generated a sense of ownership and responsibility among indigenous groups in regard to their ancestral grounds.

Participation in Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), according to Agrawal and Gibson (1999), has enabled indigenous groups to have a more influential say in the management of the forests in their immediate vicinity. Indigenous communities have been given the opportunity to actively participate in the decision-making processes pertaining to forest management through the provision of a platform by CFUGs. This has enabled these groups to offer their rich traditional knowledge and viewpoints. As a direct consequence of this, the inhabitants of these communities have been able to safeguard and maintain their woodlands in an efficient manner, so assuring the long-term viability of their resources.

4.1.5 Economic Empowerment

Indigenous populations have gained economic power as a result of increased access to forest resources. They have been able to produce money from non-timber forest products (NTFPs), which play an essential part in their livelihoods (Baral& Stern, 2011). Some examples of NTFPs are medicinal plants and herbs. Additionally, indigenous groups have been successful in establishing sustainable enterprises based on the sustainable collecting and marketing of NTFPs. These businesses have been able to thrive for a long time. Not only has this economic empowerment raised their standard of life, but it has also given them the wherewithal to invest in education, healthcare, and other important services for the communities in which they live.

Indigenous communities in certain locations have benefited economically and gained employment possibilities as a result of community-based ecotourism programs (Bista et al., 2017). This has been the case in several of those regions. Because of these activities, the communities have not only been able to make cash for themselves, but they have also been given the opportunity to demonstrate to tourists their abundant cultural legacy and natural resources, thereby fostering cultural interaction and contributing to the preservation of the environment. Additionally, the participation of indigenous communities in ecotourism has helped improve awareness about the significance of preserving their traditional knowledge and traditions, which has contributed to an increase in support for indigenous peoples' rights and the conservation of their territory.

4.1.6 Challenges

Gilmour et al., 2016 note that despite these encouraging results, issues linked to the recognition of traditional knowledge and practices within the legal system continue to exist. These problems include the absence of defined standards and regulations for incorporating traditional knowledge into ecotourism operations and the difficulty in striking a balance between the preservation of cultural traditions and the promotion of economic growth. In addition, there is a need for more collaboration and communication between indigenous communities, government agencies, and tourism operators in order to guarantee the protection of the rights and interests of all parties involved.

Despite the enormous progress that has been made in recognizing the rights of indigenous tribes, there are still many obstacles to overcome. According to Adhikari et al.'s research, the implementation of these rights at the local level may not be consistent, and there may be differences in how these rights are actually exercised. These difficulties can be traced back to a lack of awareness and comprehension on the part of local authorities and stakeholders, in addition to limited resources and capacity for efficient execution of the plan. For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to continue campaigning for the rights of indigenous groups and to provide support in the form of education, training, and resources for the purpose of ensuring the successful adoption of sustainable ecotourism practices.

4.2 Marginalized Populations

Gender Perspective

The participation of women in the decision-making processes of these programs not only helps to address gender imbalances but also contributes to the development of forest management methods that are more effective and sustainable. Furthermore, these projects have focused on addressing the special needs and rights of indigenous and marginalized groups, who are frequently subjected to discrimination and exclusion in forest management. This is because indigenous and marginalized populations are more likely to be affected by forest degradation. These efforts attempt to guarantee that the opinions of these people are heard and that their rights are respected by engaging them in the decision-making processes and providing them with the appropriate resources and support. In the end, these activities contribute to a more equitable and sustainable approach to forest management, which is to the benefit of all parties involved. This is accomplished by encouraging gender equality and inclusion.

According to Aryal et al. (2018), gender mainstreaming activities within CFUGs have worked toward the goal of increasing the number of women who take part in decision-making and leadership roles. These efforts acknowledge that the viewpoints and experiences that women bring to forest management are essential for making it both effective and sustainable. CFUGs are able to make better use of women's specialized expertise and abilities when they are included in the decision-making processes, which ultimately results in forest management strategies that are more holistic and inclusive. In addition, empowering women inside CFUGs can have good rippling effects on their overall empowerment and well-being, which

contributes to broader efforts to achieve gender equality in broader society. In addition, research has demonstrated that when women are active in forest management, there is typically a stronger emphasis placed on conservation and sustainable practices. This is due to the fact that women typically have a profound connection to the natural world and a strong motivation to preserve it for the benefit of future generations. Their participation in the decision-making processes guarantees that their views are heard and that their concerns are addressed, which ultimately results in the implementation of forest management practices that are more efficient and will persist for longer. In the end, CFUGs are able to build an approach to forest management that is more inclusive and equitable, which is to the advantage of both the environment and society as a whole, if they recognize and value the viewpoints and experiences of women.

Socio-economic Inclusion

According to research conducted by Ojha et al. (2019), gender mainstreaming activities appear to have resulted in a beneficial influence on the socio-economic inclusion of women. For instance, in CFUGs where women have an active role in the decision-making processes, they have been able to obtain better access to resources and opportunities, which has led to an improvement in the women's and their families' ability to provide for themselves financially. Additionally, the participation of women in forest management has led to an increase in the generation of income as well as economic empowerment for the surrounding communities. In addition, research has demonstrated that the incorporation of women into forest management practices has a beneficial impact on the overall preservation of forest resources as well as the efficient and responsible use of those resources. Women bring unique experiences and a variety of knowledge to the table, both of which can contribute to the creation of forest management techniques that are more holistic and efficient. In addition, the involvement of women in forest management has resulted in the development of alternative methods of generating income, such as ecotourism and the production of non-timber forest products. These activities contribute to the diversification of local economies and reduce dependence on methods that are not sustainable. In general, the incorporation of women into forest management has not only benefited their socio-economic standing, but it has also contributed to the continued growth of local communities and the protection of forest ecosystems. This is all thanks to the mainstreaming of women in forest management.

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness campaigns have also been prioritized within the context of devolved forest governance projects. According to Pandit and Bhattarai (2015), the purpose of these programs is to strengthen the capabilities of marginalized groups so that they may more effectively participate in forest management. Local communities are given the ability to actively engage in decision-making processes when education and awareness-raising opportunities concerning sustainable forest management techniques are made available to them. This not only contributes to the conservation of forest ecosystems, but it also fosters in the members of the community a sense of ownership and responsibility in relation to the safeguarding of their natural resources. In addition, these programs frequently involve instruction on alternate means of subsistence, like as ecotourism and agroforestry, both of which have the potential to lessen these communities' reliance on forest resources and bring about a reduction in the level of poverty they experience. In addition, by include underserved communities in forest management, these programs contribute to social inclusion and empowerment, which in turn helps to develop a society that is more equitable and sustainable. In addition, getting local populations involved in the protection of their natural resources can result in the preservation of cultural traditions and traditional knowledge that has been handed down through the years. This not only helps to preserve the cultural diversity that exists within these communities, but it also creates a sense of pride and identity among its members. In the end, these programs have the ability to generate long-term and sustainable solutions for both the environment and the people who depend on it by encouraging community ownership and involvement in the management of natural resources. This can benefit both the environment and the people who depend on it.

Challenges

Despite the fact that progress has been made, gender discrepancies still persist, and additional development is required in order to solve gender-specific difficulties (Bhattarai& Conway, 2018). Some examples of these challenges include the division of work and decision-making within households. Targeted interventions that promote gender equality and empower women to actively engage in decision-making processes connected to forest conservation are one

approach that may be taken to solve these difficulties. These interventions can also help women. In addition, it is vital to involve men and promote their understanding of the benefits of gender equality. Men have a crucial role in building an atmosphere that is inclusive and supportive of women's empowerment in environmental protection activities, thus it is important to engage men and promote their understanding of these benefits. Not only will women have a voice in the decision-making process regarding the preservation of forests if gender equality and empowering them are promoted, but their active participation can also lead to solutions that are more sustainable and efficient. In addition, including men in conversations and seminars that highlight the advantages of gender equality can help break down conventional gender conventions and foster an environment that is more welcoming and supportive of its members. In the end, these efforts might result in conservation initiatives that are more successful overall and that are more equitable between women and men.

In addition, the participation of other marginalized populations, such as Dalits, continues to be a difficulty, and there is a need for increased attention to be paid to the particular needs and concerns of this population group (Ojha et al., 2019). Conservation efforts may ensure that the opinions and experiences of Dalits are heard and taken into consideration by addressing the intersectionality of gender and caste. This can be accomplished by discussing how caste and gender interact with one another. This has the potential to contribute to an approach that is more comprehensive and efficient in its pursuit of gender equality in conservation activities. In addition, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge that it is not only to the advantage of underserved people to foster inclusivity and diversity within conservation efforts, but it also helps to increase the general resistance and sustainability of ecosystems. It is possible to overcome the special issues that Dalits experience as a result of the intersection of their identities if the viewpoints of Dalits are included in the conservation efforts that are being undertaken. This is of utmost significance due to the fact that Dalit women frequently face the brunt of environmental degradation and are subjected to discrimination on the basis of both their gender and their caste. It is possible for conservation efforts to become more egalitarian if their experiences are taken into account. This will ensure that no one is left behind. In the end, conservation may become a powerful force for social justice and environmental sustainability if it promotes inclusivity and variety.

The empowerment of disadvantaged groups under Nepal's decentralized forest governance system is investigated in Chapter 4, with a particular emphasis placed on marginalized populations and indigenous communities. In the context of forest management, this chapter emphasizes how critical it is to acknowledge and respect the indigenous tribes' long-held ways of knowing and carrying out forest management techniques. In addition to this, it highlights the necessity of inclusive decision-making processes that provide these groups with a voice in the process of creating conservation policies and practices. It is possible for Nepal's decentralized system of forest governance to take into account the points of view and requirements of marginalized populations and indigenous communities if such groups and communities are included in the decision-making processes. This not only helps to advance social justice and equity, but it also makes conservation initiatives more efficient. In the long run, providing disadvantaged groups with opportunities to participate in forest management helps to build a sense of ownership and responsibility, which ultimately leads to a more sustainable and successful management of Nepal's forest resources.

Recognizing their rights, increasing their involvement, improving their economic well-being, and increasing knowledge have all been essential components of these efforts. Their one-of-a-kind insights and body of specialized knowledge can be incorporated into forest management strategies if disadvantaged groups are given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. This inclusiveness has the potential to lead to policies that are more comprehensive and efficient in meeting the varied requirements of Nepal's people and its forests. Furthermore, giving these groups access to economic opportunities can serve as an incentive for them to actively participate in conservation efforts, so creating a situation in which both the environment and marginalized populations come out on top.

However, problems still exist, and resolving them calls for a continual commitment as well as inventive solutions in order to guarantee that these organizations will achieve their full potential. It is imperative that efforts be made to ensure that these underserved populations have access to education and training programs that will provide them with the expertise and information required to actively participate in forest preservation initiatives. In addition, collaborations with local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations can assist in the acquisition of the necessary financing and resources for the implementation of sustainable practices and initiatives. It is possible to include the expertise and points of view of local communities into forest conservation

strategies by engagement with these communities and participation in decision-making processes. This will result in strategies that are both more effective and more inclusive. In addition, it is possible to assist bridge the information gap and guarantee that marginalized people are educated and engaged in sustainable practices by developing awareness campaigns and teaching materials in the native languages of those communities. In the end, we can foster a future that is more fair and sustainable for both the people whose lives depend on forests as well as the forests themselves if we give priority to the empowerment of underrepresented groups.

Chapter 5- Conclusion

This chapter sums up the findings of this research project; in addition to that the chapter also provides a glimpse to the future research opportunities in the field of this study. The chapter also discusses the key policy implications of this research study.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

Within the scope of this research, we investigated the topic of giving voice to underserved communities in Nepal by means of decentralized forest governance. Indigenous communities and other marginalized populations were the primary foci of the research, and particular attention was paid to issues concerning the indigenous communities' rights and recognition, involvement in decision-making, gender perspective, socio-economic inclusion, and educational awareness. The following is a condensed version of the findings:

Indigenous People

The decentralized system of forest governance in Nepal has acknowledged the rights of indigenous peoples to access forest resources and has encouraged indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes. This acknowledgment has resulted in economic empowerment and the preservation of traditional knowledge, but there are still obstacles to be faced in the execution of these policies and in the distribution of benefits. It is difficult for indigenous people to successfully engage in decision-making processes since there are not enough programs that focus on capacity building and training for these populations.

Marginalized Population

Efforts made by Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) to incorporate gender perspectives into their work have contributed to the socioeconomic inclusion of women. Nevertheless, gender gaps still exist, and additional progress is required to overcome the difficulties that are special to each gender. The inclusion of other traditionally oppressed groups, such as Dalits, calls for a heightened level of attention.

5.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

In the context of devolved forest governance in Nepal, the findings of this study have a number of consequences for both policy and practice, including the following:

Policy Consistency

It is necessary to maintain policy coherence and consistency in order to guarantee that indigenous communities and other marginalized populations will be accorded acknowledgment of their rights and an equitable distribution of the benefits of society. Incorporating gender-responsive approaches and addressing the specific issues encountered by Dalits and other oppressed groups are two ways in which this goal might be accomplished.

Building Capacity

Efforts to increase the Capacity of Local Communities are vital for Effective Participation in Forest Management It is vital to make efforts to increase the capacity of local communities, particularly of women and marginalized groups. These efforts may involve empowering community members to actively participate in decision-making processes, as well as offering training and resources to help community members increase their awareness of and proficiency in environmentally responsible forestry practices.

Inclusive Decision-Making

Fostering inclusive decision-making procedures within CFUGs and ensuring that the perspectives of underrepresented groups are heard and respected are two key components that can contribute to the achievement of more equal results.

5.3 Future Research Directions

The empowerment of disadvantaged communities within the context of decentralized forest governance in Nepal is the topic of this dissertation, which has contributed valuable insights into the subject. Nevertheless, there are several potential directions for investigation in the future:

Impact over the long-term conducting of research into the effect that decentralized forest governance has had, and will continue to have, on the socioeconomic standing and well-being of marginalized people and indigenous communities will provide a more thorough picture of how successfully it has been implemented.

Climate Change Resilience

An emerging topic of research is examining how decentralized forest governance might strengthen the resilience of disadvantaged people to the consequences of climate change and encourage sustainable adaptation options. The administration of forests has the potential to play an important part in reducing the impact that climate change will have on communities that are already at risk. If we had a better understanding of how decentralized forest governance could contribute to climate change resilience, not only would this better inform policymaking, but it would also inspire adaptation methods that were more inclusive and fair.

Evaluating Policies

Conducting in-depth evaluations of specific policies and programs aimed at empowering disadvantaged groups can offer useful insights into the effectiveness of those policies and programs as well as areas in which they could be improved. These evaluations can assist in identifying any unintended consequences or gaps in execution that may impede the achievement of the targeted results. In addition, including the viewpoints and experiences of underrepresented communities in the review process can make it more likely that such populations' voices will be heard and that their requirements will be met to the necessary extent. It is possible for policymakers to obtain a more comprehensive grasp of the issues marginalized people confront and to modify policies accordingly if they involve marginalized populations in the evaluation process. This all-inclusive approach has the potential to result in policies that are fairer and effective, which in turn will truly empower marginalized communities and advance social justice.

5.4 Broader Significance

The significance of the research that was conducted in Nepal on how disadvantaged populations could be empowered through devolved forest governance extends far beyond the country's borders. It offers vital insights and lessons for other countries who are confronting

comparable issues in terms of inclusive governance and sustainable management of natural resources. The fact that Nepal's strategy was successful demonstrates the potential for empowering underserved groups and assuring their active involvement in decision-making processes, which can lead to outcomes that are more equitable and sustainable. In addition, the findings of this study contribute to the expanding body of information regarding efficient methods for achieving social justice and environmental protection, both of which are essential in addressing global concerns such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity. It makes a contribution to the ongoing discussion taking place throughout the world on how to manage natural resources in a way that is both inclusive and sustainable by stressing several key points:

i. Empowerment of Local Communities for Global Impact

Devolved forest governance is an example of how local communities can become guardians of important ecosystems when they are given the authority to make decisions and are included in the process. It is becoming more widely acknowledged that the empowerment of local communities is essential for addressing global concerns such as the loss of biodiversity and the transition to sustainable development.

ii. Considerations of Social Justice in Environmental Management

The need of maintaining social fairness in environmental management is emphasized throughout the study. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the benefits of conservation and sustainable resource usage are fairly distributed among all members of the community, particularly those who have historically been excluded in society.

iii. Incorporation of Indigenous and Traditional Know-How

Models of decentralized forest governance acknowledge the significance of the traditional knowledge held by indigenous groups. Because of this integration, a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem and its dynamics is possible, which leads to decisions that are better informed and conservation measures that are more successful. In addition to this, it acknowledges the indigenous communities' skills and contributions to the management of sustainable resources, which gives such people more influence and helps to promote cultural diversity. This recognition is in line with a worldwide trend toward a greater awareness of

traditional ecological knowledge as a significant resource for the implementation of environmentally responsible activities. Traditional knowledge is the wisdom and practices that have been handed down from generation to generation.

iv. Mainstreaming of Women and Girls

The efforts that have been made to promote gender equality in resource management by CFUGs in Nepal as part of their gender mainstreaming initiatives give significant insights. This is in line with global initiatives to increase the participation of women in environmental decision-making.

5.5 Lessons for Other Contexts Regarding Policy

The findings are applicable to a wider range of countries and areas, particularly those working toward the implementation of devolved governance structures. They provide insights into the importance of participatory decision-making, the coherence of policy, and the importance of creating capacity in order to guarantee the success of such initiatives. These lessons can be particularly beneficial for nations with comparable socioeconomic and environmental settings, particularly those that are promoting community-based natural resource management. In addition, the findings underscore the necessity of focused interventions to eliminate gender gaps and encourage women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels of government. This requirement was brought to light by the findings.

This voyage of research into empowering disadvantaged populations in Nepal through democratic forest governance has not only shed light on the complexity and nuances of inclusive resource management, but it has also proved the transforming potential of local empowerment. The lessons that can be learned from Nepal's experience are resonating as a beacon of hope and promise at a time when governments all over the world are struggling with the challenge of reconciling environmental sustainability with social equality. The next step is maintaining our dedication to the cause, being innovative, and maintaining our steadfast faith that inclusive, community-based governance is essential to creating a future that is more sustainable and equitable for all.

In conclusion, decentralized forest governance in Nepal represents an innovative approach to the management of sustainable forests and the empowerment of marginalized populations. Challenges still need to be overcome, despite the fact that substantial progress has been made in recognizing rights and encouraging participation. It is vital to maintain a commitment to policy consistency, capacity building, and the incorporation of traditional knowledge in order to ensure that devolved forest governance in Nepal continues to empower and elevate marginalized groups and indigenous communities. This work has made a contribution to the current conversation about inclusive and sustainable forest management and the influence that management has on underrepresented groups.

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