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## Social and cultural determinants of collective management of community forest in Nepal

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### Abstract

The main goal of the study is to determine which socio-economic factors affect level of participation in the community forest management of “Ludhi-Damgade” of Gorkha district in Nepal. The empirical evidence for level of participation as a function of social status is obtained by using an ordered probit and two-stage least-squares model. The model also estimates the marginal effects of socio-economic factors on different levels of participation suggesting how per unit change in such socio-economic characters affects the level of participation. Empirical results from the model also verify that participation in forest management determines the quantity and type of benefits received from the community forest. The research findings of the study suggest that participation in community forest management is based on the socio-economic profile of an individual and the level of participation is determined by the benefits obtained from the common forest resources. Lack of participation in community forest management excludes the disadvantaged groups from decision-making in product distribution. Consequently, the disadvantaged groups get less benefit from the community forest. The empirical results are expected to aid policy makers in empowering people of lower socio-economic status to understand the importance of participation in

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community forest management in order to have equal distribution of benefits accrued by community forest.

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## Introduction

In rural Nepal, forests play a vital role in the daily life of all farm-based households. There is a heavy dependence on forests for basic household needs such as fodder, fuelwood and construction timber. Due to heavy dependency on forests for various purposes, forests have been under threat of depletion throughout the country.

Community forestry has become the most important program to conserve, manage and utilize forest resources in Nepal (Sharma, 2002). The program was implemented in response government failure to manage forests after nationalization in 1957. In 1970, the focus of community forestry was reforestation of degraded lands, but recently the emphasis is on participatory management and rural development (Baral, 1993).

Community forestry approaches often devolve decision-making rights and the benefits of participation to rural populations, along with the responsibilities for forest management. Decentralization is justified based upon increased effective efficiency of local resource management over centralized. This efficiency stems from the local indigenous knowledge, lower transaction costs due to the proximity to the forest, and better decision-making due to the internalization of social and ecological costs. Transferring control of the forest benefits to local user groups mobilizes local labor into forest management, which secures the benefit from forest products to the user groups (Ribot, 1995). Forest user groups (FUGs) are legally recognized community members who have the right to manage and utilize the forest (Rejal and Petheram, 2001).

Participation in management, extraction and decision-making within the user group is one key to successful collective management. However, participation is dependent upon many socio-economic factors as Nepal's social structure is still based on a caste system, where gender, age and wealth are effective discrimination tools. The main goal of this study is to identify the determinants of participation in community forest management and secondly to determine if these factors affect the accrual of benefits. More specifically, the objectives are: (1) to determine whether different levels of participation in the community forest management is a function of the socio-economic factors; and (2) to identify whether benefits from the forest are the function of participation.

It has been observed that individuals with greater landholdings have a higher level of participation in community forest; men participate more than women in

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