

ABSTRACT

Decentralization of forest management is considered as an effective forest management strategy in different parts of the world. Decentralization over the years has transformed the relationship between the forest communities, the forest department, and the forest resources. Participatory forest management has emerged as a successful decentralization model reaping huge successes globally earning many advocates for its implementation. This has happened through the strengthening of local's right over forests, power-sharing agreements with the state, increased legal access, and decentralization within national agencies (World Resources Institute 2005). In South Asia, large-scale experiments in decentralization - Joint Forest Management in India and Community Forestry in Nepal, in particular - have transformed the relationship between forests, the forest departments and rural households. In India the 1988 Forest Policy proved to be a harbinger for some notable changes from the top down management models that have been adopted for a long time. The study proposes to explore the impact of participatory management (with focus on JFM) on the forest resources in India. Towards fulfilling this objective the study analyses the following: 1) Assessing whether the increase in the JFM area coverage can be attributed to the increase in the forest cover ; 2) Analyzing some indicators(such as people's representation in JFMCS, tenure of the committees, powers of the committees) to assess the performance of the JFM in some sample states. The analysis suggests that open forest cover (OFC) increased rapidly during the initial years but as years rolled over other types were also brought into JFM framework, indicating that increase in OFC does lead to an increase in the area under JFM. With regard to the second objective, it is observed that almost all the states have progressed from initial conservation mandate to a livelihood, employment generation program.