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*Local communities in the management of ecosystem services to foster rural livelihoods in Nepal*

This paper analyzes the role of Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) as managers and enhancers of ecosystem services that foster multiple livelihood opportunities for the community. It looks at changes in quality and quantity of four major ecosystem services: carbon stock, biodiversity conservation, watershed management, and aesthetic value of forest ecosystems. I study how these services are managed by CFUGs and contribute to local livelihoods. This research is based on experience working with 8000 local community forest users group in three different ecological zones, covering 23 districts of Nepal. The study covers 3000 CFUGs between 2013 and 2015.

Preliminary results reveal that large parts of local forest dependent communities have achieved change in forest cover from degraded to climax forest ecosystem, sales and profits from ecosystem services. Community perceptions of forest cover change and enhancement of ecosystem services were also supported by the piloting scientific study covering some of these study districts, which also revealed that there is an increment of forest area and enhancement of ecosystem services.