

The slippery slopes of forest governance in the Chure range

- A case study of an intervention of environmental development within local forest management in Nepal

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Abstract

Nepal has been portrayed as a leading country in implementing community forestry, a forest management method which puts the responsibility of forest management on local communities to mitigate forest degradation. The socioeconomically important and geologically fragile Chure range, where a third of forest is managed by community forest groups, has received special political attention the last few years and due to reported environmental degradation across the area. Nepal's government decided to intervene in order to curb these environmental problems. In 2010 the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program was initiated, which has since entailed a range of policy decisions aimed at protecting Chure from further degradation. The causes of degradation have been attributed to the local forest users and consequently the community forest users have been targeted within the intervention. New regulations have resulted in limited possibilities for the forest user groups to continue their management as before. As a result, organizations in favour of community forestry have opposed the Chure intervention. This thesis explores the Chure intervention and its effects through a theoretical framework based on theories of governmentality from three theorists. Research was conducted in a qualitative field study in Kathmandu and Chitwan. With the findings from the research and the theoretical framework, this thesis attempts to explain why the government has implemented the Chure intervention, how they justify it and what effects and response the intervention has generated in a local Chure community in Chitwan district. The result suggests a change in rationality and problematization of forest degradation within the government and a change in practices which justifies the shape of and chosen solution to the Chure intervention. The community forest users' representative organization is actively protesting and opposing the Chure intervention but on local level effects have yet to reach individual households. However, the effects of reduced communal funds are on the verge of reaching especially the poorest groups.

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1. Introduction

Nepal is a small former Hindu kingdom bordering to Tibet and China in the North and India in the South. It is known for its rich ecological and geographical diversity. In the northern region the rugged mountainous belt of the Himalayas stretches, which includes Mount Everest. In the South the tropical flatlands comprise of savannahs and lush forests, home to a wide diversity of flora and fauna. The majority of the population resides there and in the mid-hills, with the backdrop of the lower mountain ranges of Chure and Mahabarat. An abundance of different ethnic groups makes Nepal a culturally diverse country.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world according to the World Bank ranking (2010), where nearly a quarter of the population lives below the national poverty line (FAO & IFAD, 2015). A majority of the population resides in rural areas and 70% depends largely on subsistence farming on small landholdings. The households rarely possess more than one hectare (Ojha et al., 2009). More than half of the Nepalese farmers are landless, which means that they possess less than 0.5 ha land or do not legally own land, but nonetheless have acquired land which they inhabit. The problem of de jure landlessness and correlating lack of official citizenship is widespread, causing tenure insecurity for many Nepali (Pain et al., 2015). Furthermore, agricultural production rate is low, use of agricultural inputs is limited and agricultural extension services are scarce. A growing populations has put increasing pressure on existing cultivable land, as well as causing deforestation of forest areas, in order to obtain new agricultural land, specifically in the lowlands – the Terai (Paudel et al., 2013). As a result of the poor land conditions, there are strong linkages between agricultural farming and forest usage, where the forests play a vital role for the millions of farmers across Nepal. Apart from the valuable ecosystem services the forest provides, it is also a significant source of fodder for livestock-keepers and firewood for cooking. Additionally, many rural residents extract non-timber forest products, such as traditional medical plants and foods, which can help poor households make ends meet when harvest yields are low (FAO & IFAD, 2015). However, deforestation of Nepal's forests – at varying rates across time and geographic regions - has been a massive problem for decades (ibid). The government's introduction of community forestry as a management method in the early 1990's – encouraged by international donor agencies - has generated a strong political framework embedding a significant portion of Nepal's forests and its users, specifically in the mid-hills. This management method was partly developed and introduced to reduce deforestation rates and mitigate forest

degradation by conserving the forest and giving local people – who rely on its sustainability - the responsibility of forest management. Lack of incentive to sustainably manage forest among the local communities, and weak state control were deemed the underlying causes of significant degradation across Nepal's forests. Community forestry is a participatory governance method considered a success by research communities and NGOs. Today one fourth of Nepal's forests are managed by thousands of community forestry user groups, encompassing a third of the total population of the country (Ojha et al., 2009). The widespread prevalence of community forestry has attracted researchers who have sought to research its different aspects. The resulting research over the last few decades have reached divergent conclusions, which has both identified the successes of community forestry and concluded its problematic aspects. The success is mainly attributed to the recovery of forest land (Helvetas, 2015; Thoms, 2008) and the social inclusion it has created among generally disadvantaged groups (Thoms, 2008; Maharjan et al., 2009; Ojha et al., 2009). On the other hand, failures and weaknesses within the community forestry system have also been identified and are especially connected to elite capture and weak governance (Iversen et al., 2006; Paudel et al., 2013; ForestAction, 2014).

1.1 Research problem

The region of Chure, encompassing the Chure mountain range, has since long received special political attention and been targeted differently than other regions because of its biophysical fragility, ecological importance and economic viability (ForestAction, 2014). Only a third of forests here are managed by community forestry groups, while the remaining forest is administered by different state management regimes (Helvetas, 2015). Especially in the economically valuable Terai areas, community forest is rare due to the reluctance from the government to hand over management to the local communities (Ojha et al., 2009). There is thus a contestation in the community forest management regime witnessed especially in the Chure region: the praxis of handing over forests to local management is only of interest to the government in areas of less economic value.

In light of this contestation, the recent governmental decision to target Chure for a particular intervention becomes particularly interesting. In 2010 the Nepali government initiated the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program (RCCP) in order to mitigate the environmental degradation caused by anthropogenic pressure in the area. Unsustainable management of forests have been correlated to

ecological hazards such as landslides, floods and gully erosions among other things, which threatens the important agricultural production in the *Terai*. Consequently, the government has restricted timber harvests for the community forest users in the region. The Federation of Community Forestry Users and other NGOs has protested this restrictive policy decisions, claiming that it threatens the users' tenure security and does not pay enough respect to their economic and political rights (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). Presently, the government is implementing a conservation policy, which restricts community forest usage of forests – through reduced timber harvest allowance - in a large and socio-economic important area in order to attain the same goal community forestry has elsewhere: conservation and ecologically sustainable management of forest.

There is a prevalent global concern for climate change and for human's role in causing degradation of natural ecosystems. How these problems are to be thwarted remains a conundrum. It is especially difficult to make governance decisions on natural resources which adhere to international, national and local interests as well as considering the environment. This dilemma of weighing these multiple interests hovers over particularly politicians whose responsibility it is to make regulatory decisions on the appropriate way of governing natural resources. It is thus intriguing to study a case like the one in Nepal in order to explore the reasons behind, and the local impacts of, a political decision on the management of forests. The case study shows how precarious it is to weigh environmental problems in forests vis-à-vis the interests and involvement of local people.

1.1.1 Objective

This thesis has two correlating objectives. First, to explore how the Chure conservation policies and regulatory decisions within the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program has affected individual community forest users and groups in their day-to-day lives thus far, and how these forest users are responding to the policies and regulations. Secondly, this study aims to contribute to understanding some of the factors which has shaped these conservation policies and what justification the government is using to validate the intervention. To achieve these objectives empirical material was collected in a field study in Kathmandu and Chitwan district.

1.1.2 Research questions

- How has the Nepalese governments governing of local forest users changed and been justified in relation to the implementation of the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program?
- How has the community forest users responded to the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program?
- How has the policies within the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program affected the community forest users in Chitwan district?

1.2 Thesis outline

The outline of this thesis is as follows: First a methodology chapter which presents the research methods used for the field study, along with reflections on reflexivity and delimitations. The last section in chapter one contains the theoretical framework, which was used to analyze the findings in the field study. The first section of Chapter 2 discloses a background of Nepal forest politics and the community forestry regime. The second section will inform the reader about the area of Chure and the specific conditions there in relation to ecology, socio-economic context and community forestry. Chapter 3 informs about the findings of the field study, divided into three sections: a description of the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program (RCCP), an account of the effects of interventions in Chitwan and last a summary on the resistance movement towards the RCCP. The fourth chapter contains the discussion on the findings related to the background and theoretical framework. Here you will find the analysis which answers the research questions. The last chapter is the conclusion which will summarize the discussion and analysis and conclusively answer the research questions.

1.3 Methodology

To investigate the research problem a qualitative field study was conducted to attain empirical findings. These findings were linked to previous research on the Chure issue, additional literature on the history of forest politics in Nepal and in Chure along with other relevant information. The research was conducted in collaboration with Nepalese non-governmental organization and professional civil society organization ForestAction. In the field I was helped by two staff members from the organization and ForestAction also contributed with research material.

1.3.1 A field study

The field study was conducted in Kathmandu and Chitwan district and was designed to gain information from different spatial perspectives. Interviews in Kathmandu were conducted with national government officials and with one FECOFUN representative who could speak for a broader perspective. In Chitwan interviews were conducted with local government officials and local FECOFUN representatives. In the villages of Shaktikhor and Siddi VDC, community forestry user group (CFUG) committee members and CFUG households comprised the informants. Chitwan was chosen for its locality in Chure region and community forest is widespread in the district. Furthermore, the indigenous Chepang community resides in this district and they were of special interest due to their traditional ties to the forest. Lastly, ForestAction had previously conducted research in the area and thus had established contacts.

This thesis is a case study which explores how the Chure policies emerged and the responses to and impacts of these policies has had for the community forest users. The numbers of interviews included in the study are limited, considering the heterogenic and diverse environment in Chitwan and Chure. Nevertheless, I argue that the study contribute to an understanding of the complex and increasingly more tense situation around forest resources as it explores and depict the dependence on forest for livelihood sustenance and how the RCCP will affect and have affected the community forest users in Chitwan. A field study conducted elsewhere could have generated another result in relation to the response of people on the Chure policies; different conditions can conceivably give rise to diverse responses.

1.3.2 Data collection

The field study spanned over eight weeks, whereas three weeks were spent in Chitwan and in the village of Shaktikhor. In order to obtain a socially diverse sample of informants, so as to obtain a variety of perspectives on the research subject, the household interviews were conducted in three different CFUGs. These CFUGs were in close proximity to one another, but consisted of different size in household number, forest area and comprised of different socioeconomic and ethnic groups. One of the CFUGs was also more isolated in location, about one hour walk from the main village - in the adjacent Siddi VDC. Specific household and CFUG committee member informants in Shaktikhor were searched for based on a pre-determined set of variables to obtain certain heterogeneity in terms of backgrounds, ethnicities and gender. Exactly which households were selected was a random process, by using the so called “snowball effect”. This means that one

informant often generated the next one (Teorell & Svensson, 2007). After having conducted a few interviews, it became clear that the CFUG committee members could generate the most significant information relevant to the study and thus they became key informants. A few of them also provided vital help by arranging interviews with other CFUG members. Some of the informants were also chosen at complete random while walking around certain interesting areas in the village, like in the Dalit community area.

Position	Location	Amount
Government workers	Kathmandu	2
District Forest Officer, Assistant Forest Officer	Chitwan	1 1
Forest ranger	Nawalparasi	1
FECOFUN representatives	Kathmandu, Chitwan, Nawalparasi	4
CFUG committee members	Chitwan	8
Community forest user households	Chitwan	19

Figure 1. Informants in the field study

1.3.2.1 Interviews

The research methods had to reflect the context and research questions. In this case, I could conduct almost none of the interviews myself but had to rely completely on my partners from ForestAction to conduct and arrange the interviews for me. This implicated a need for a carefully prepared interview guide. The interview guide was prepared after having explored the field site through a few informal and non-structured test interviews. The idea was that the interview guide would ensure we didn't stray from the intended topic and kept the interview effective due to the limited possibilities for discussions during the interview. My partners knew what kind of information I wished to retrieve, what sort of questions I wanted to ask and could thus adapt and organize the interview accordingly. The conducted interviews were semi-structured (see appendix 2 for full interview guide).

The interviews with government and NGO officials were quite different from the household interviews. Thus, another interview guide was developed with the purpose of focusing more on the RCCP policy development and why it was implemented. These interviews were more similar to discussions in format,

interspersed with questions linked to the research subject. Furthermore, three of these interviews were conducted in English by me. All interviews (households and officials) and discussions ended with asking the informant to share whatever he or she felt inclined to. When the informant took this opportunity to express themselves freely, it provided an idea of what he or she felt was important to share about the Chure situation. Especially in the case of government and NGO officials, it provided interesting perspectives on their personal interests and opinions.

1.3.2.2 Observations

Observations became an important methodological tool for me to use, particularly because I do not speak Nepalese. Observations can enable “direct access to social interplay” (Teorell & Svensson, 2007: 87), because it provides information about your research field that has not been censored, altered or interpreted by the informants. Naturally, the cultural differences between me and my research field caused difficulties in interpreting some of the observations. Mostly, passive and unstructured observations were conducted continuously while in the field. The objective was both to collect complementary material to the interviews, and to gain better understanding of the field site. Observations provided important background knowledge imperative for analyzing and understanding the empirical material. Everything that appeared of interest to the study was noted, including the everyday flows of the informant’s lives, interactions between people, the conditions of informant’s fields and houses (determining economic status) and the forest condition.

1.3.3 Reflexivity

When conducting a field study in a cultural context, distinct from one’s own, the researcher is faced with an array of additional difficulties one might not have faced on more familiar territory. Thus it is important to discuss reflexivity and the cultural differences prevalent in a field study such as this.

Within different cultures or different languages there are varied internal structures of communication, thus I needed to be wary of the complexity of communication. Communications involves a wide range of expressions, from body language and ways of acting to the choice of words and combinations of these. It can vary between groups speaking the same language and living in the same country just like it naturally varies between people of different backgrounds (Ryen, 2004). I attempted to make observations of the non-verbal communication of the informant, such as their body language and tone of voice, noting when they were

more or less willing to share information and who were more at ease or who felt less comfortable in the interview situation. This, along with a multitude of other factors, will have affected the answers given during the interview. Despite the risk of misinterpretation from my part, observation was a necessary part of my method. Furthermore, I received much of the empirical information after the field study when reading the transcriptions. Such an interpretation of the material leaves out a lot of communication, thus the meaning could be distorted when not heard together with the non-verbal communication or without the right contextual cultural knowledge.

To bridge the disparity caused by the language barrier and cultural differences the continuous close collaboration with my partners from ForestAction was imperative. The research topic and the field site were selected in consultation with them and all the decisions were made in collaboration and discussion between staff members and me. My partners in the field became my interpreters both during the interview situation and subsequently in transcribing the interviews. We often discussed our interviews and the study topic in the field, and they provided me with insights and reflections continually. To avoid misinterpretation my observations were also sometimes discussed jointly. My partners also let me know when they had observed something interesting and noteworthy. The fault with this method is of course, the risk of that my partners misinterpret the interviews or that there occurs a misinterpretation between us, but it is nonetheless an important method to minimize the problems arising when studying a different cultural context.

1.3.4 Delimitation

This thesis grew out of the empirical material collected during a field study in Nepal and the subsequent other research material I have had access to. The material has been linked to a theoretical framework, which has helped to identify and highlight the most interesting and significant findings from the field study relevant to fulfill the research objective. A significant limitation to this work has been the time limit and the master thesis outline. An unfortunate large amount of interesting and intriguing material, which I have come across, has been left out of this thesis. It is not possible to acknowledge everything, which has been left out due to the intricate complexity surrounding the Chure issue. This thesis does not delve deeply into the multitude of internal, external and historical factors which has come to shape and affect Nepali forest politics and the policy decisions pertaining to the RCCP. This means that aspects such as general political challenges, the internal landscape of Nepali politics or previous political decisions on Chure are not

extensively considered in the analysis. Moreover, this thesis does not provide a full explanation and analysis of the contents of the RCCP policy decisions. The contents have become known to me in fragmented sources – rather than in actual policy documents - and thus I do not analyze the framework from a legal perspective. Furthermore, I am not attempting to paint the full picture explaining and understanding the various current and future potential consequences of the changed management strategy of Chure. The intervention is in its early process stage and it will require more time to pass - and more time to explore - before the Chure issue can be understood more completely. Thus this is an exploratory study which has identified certain patterns and brought to light interesting questions of concern. I implore future research initiatives which could continue the work. Additionally, it would be immensely interesting and useful to link this instance of a conservation initiative affecting local management, to other cases elsewhere.

1.4 Theoretical framework

Theories posed by three different researchers have been used to analyze the material for this thesis and to answer the research questions. These theories align with each other in several ways, and together they bring aspects of governmental conduct and its effects into light. The main inspiration is from the anthropologist Tania Murray Li, who use the processes of governmentality and assemblage to understand how policies are implemented in reality (2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2014). She also engages in a dialogue with James Scott – *Seeing Like a State*; trying to understand the unintended consequences of state development policies and how they are assembled and implemented (Murray Li, 2005). Additionally, Murray Li is inspired by Fergusson's (1994) notion of how political objectives and practice are transformed into technical aspects, the so "anti-politics machine". Primarily Fergusson explains the failures of interventions of development from NGOs.

1.4.1 Framing a problem and justifying an intervention

The theory of governmentality deals with understanding the "conduct of conduct", the process of governing which in this thesis will be explored through the regulatory decisions made by Nepal's government within the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program. Governmentality explains how governments, in their attempt of securing the welfare of its population, intend to affect and shape their behavior and actions through for example laws and regulations. Laws contribute to the creation of certain collective understandings of what is right and wrong, and

work through the practices and desires of the conducted population. In this way, the government can conduct people through so called interventions, directed towards the whole population or certain sub-groups, and adjust people's behavior and make them act as they 'ought to' while also acting out of their own interest. The community forestry regime as well as the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program (RCCP), can be explained as such interventions.

To govern people, governments require a rationality, a type of ideology - such as a bureaucratic or liberal rationality - which reflects its perspectives on the right way of conduct in order to achieve specified goals. Such rationalities, which dictate and shape the government's actions, tend to change over time. The government rationality also shapes what problems are identified and mobilizes particular interventions and regulation to amend these problems (Murray Li, 2007a).

1.4.2 Creating an appropriate intervention

In order to begin understanding why Nepal's government initiated the RCCP, one needs to analyze their rationality but also their practices of assemblage (Murray Li, 2007a). Certain practices of government are progressively required to maneuver the different actors (people) and multiple objectives into concrete programs of intervention (Murray Li, 2007c). This complicated and intertwined process is termed an assemblage by Murray Li (2007c). The assemblage process precedes and succeeds the implementation of an intervention. To explain these processes and governmental decisions, Murray Li's, Scott's and Ferguson's theories will be merged.

Murray Li (2007c) explains the process of *rendering technical* which refers to the act of rendering a complex reality into a technical and simplified arena which can be targeted for an intervention. Reality can be described to be "bureaucratically indigestible" and thus it needs to be rendered digestible – simplified. This simplification brings into focus a targetable and solvable problem for the government, who can then frame a problem which with the appropriate solution (the intervention) will solve it (Scott, 1998). Ferguson (1994) theorizes how the agent conducting and justifying an intervention of development, formulates the grounds for an intervention which neatly fits into the agent's targeted jurisdiction, and consequently eliminates the complexities of reality. Moreover, this approach to framing a problem can be merged with certain forms of scientific knowledge, which further requires a simplification of messy and complex realities (Scott, 1998). Thus, the government requires *authorized knowledge*, i.e. to specify the

necessary scientific knowledge to justify the intervention. Ferguson (1994) describes how by casting complex problems, i.e. highly political problems, as primarily technical ones, these problems logically can be targeted and solved through technical development interventions. By reducing political and structural problems to a matter of how people are not acting as they should, the conductor of an intervention can validate an intervention to amend people's behavior. Scott (1998) and Murray Li (2007a, 2007b, 2007c) together argue the tendency of a conducting agent – in this case the government – to posit themselves as the experts or the proprietor of expertise, who know the right way to solve a problem. Additionally, to present a problem in technical terms, this practice of *anti-politics* enables governments to depoliticize an intervention and close down debates about how and what to do about it (Murray Li, 2007c). Scott (1998) refers to the usage of certain vocabularies and discourses in order to override other interests and also eliminating other ways of explaining and managing problems. Finally, there is the practice of *reassembling* which is about reworking old politics for new purposes and changing the meaning of key terms to accommodate new goals and objectives (Murray Li, 2007c).

1.4.3 The consequences of an intervention

There are naturally multiple plausible effects of an intervention, not least due to the limits to a governments' capacity to actually achieve what is intended with an intervention. Firstly, everything encompassed within an intervention cannot be controlled and reconfigured (Murray Li, 2007b). Scott (1998) points to the "*the dangers of dismembering an exceptionally complex and poorly understood set of relations and processes in order to isolate a single element of instrumental value.*" (Scott, 1998:21). Ferguson (1994) argues similarly, there are unintended consequences when a simple solution hits a complex reality; how interventions of development fail to achieve its objective when reality isn't properly considered. The target of conduct, the population, is a complex group being driven by multiple processes constantly in motion, which cannot possibly all be considered within the simplification required to create an intervention. Moreover, the effects of an intervention can be contradictory – due to multiple goals within the conducting agent - and can thereby cause unpredicted consequences, particularly because the conductor is not necessarily operating as a unified entity with a single agenda. Thus it is important to explore the unintended consequences of an intervention; in this case identifying the effects of the RCCP on the forest users. Furthermore, previous interventions and the success or failure of these, also limits and shapes the

successive ones (Murray Li, 2007b).

The effects of a governmental intervention are “*proximate and indirect, planned and unplanned*” and can thus be studied at different spatial scales, in this case the study has been conducted at the very beginning of implementing a new intervention (Murray Li, 2007a: 280). Effects cannot be generalized, but needs to be examined empirically. The effects of and the response towards the Chure intervention from the community forestry users, also needs to be put in relation to outside forces which affect the configuration (ibid). One consequence of a program of intervention is the resistance it generates from the targeted population (Murray Li, 2005). Resistance pertains not only to abject rejection of an intervention, but to how a resistance movement assembles to create an alternative narrative, another perspective on the problem, in order to position themselves against the conducting agent. While Scott (1998) argues that the practice of the targeted people not necessarily conforms to an intervention, Murray Li (2005) contends that these people are nonetheless shaped and affected by it. Which begs the question; what do interventions of development actually do (Ferguson, 1994)?

2. Background

The Nepal state was formed in the 18th century and was ruled as a Hindu kingdom until 2006. Democratically and politically Nepal has been a challenged nation. The Nepali people didn't have democracy until the 1990s' - the first parliamentary election was held in 1991 - which was shortly followed by a Maoist rebellion and civil war which waged for ten years. In 2008 Nepal officially became a republic state, electing its first president. Since then the Nepali government has been facing difficulties in drafting a constitution (FAO & IFAD, 2015). In September 2015 a new constitution was finally promulgated (UNDP, 2016). However, the new constitution has led to internal turmoil due to dissatisfaction about its contents among certain groups. The Indian government and the ethnic Madhesis in southern Nepal imposed an unofficial blockade on the Indian border during the fall of 2015, thwarting the import of vital supplies such as fuel, medicines and food (Aljazeera, 2015). The implications of this blockade were still prevalent during the writing of this thesis.

Nepal is an ethnically diverse country, which together with a traditionally Hindu based caste system gives rise to a complex social hierarchy in Nepalese society. The hierarchy is divided into caste strata, first comes the pure brahman – chhetri group followed by the indigenous janajati groups. The last group is called Dalits which comprise of people considered impure and untouchable. Within these stratas there are both horizontal and vertical hierarchical differences creating finer gradations within the system which are also closely related to the three geographical regions of Nepal – mountains, mid-hills and terai. In total 103 social groups have been identified and 59 janajati groups recognized (Pain et al., 2015). The janajati groups together comprise roughly 40% of the total population and tharus is the largest group. Other janajati groups include the hill dwelling newars, thakali, magar, gurung, tamang and chepang. The official definition of a janajati group includes a range of characteristics out of some of which are a collective identity, a traditional culture and separate language (NIRS, 2006). This unique social structure is necessary to acknowledge because of the inequalities it generates between people from different social groups despite the official abolition of caste based discrimination in 1963. While poverty rates have generally declined in Nepal since the 1990s' (FAO & IFAD, 2015), among the lower castes the differences are not as noticeable. The inequalities are incontestable, statistics show that the socioeconomic status of janajatis and Dalits are below the national average. Especially the lowest caste groups, the Dalits, are highly marginalized (NIRS,

2006).

Due to poverty among rural households, people have had to resort to multiple strategies to attain sustenance. The strategy which has come to have the most success is the use of remittances. The last couple of decades have witnessed an increased occurrence of labor migration and subsequent remittances which ensures food security for households who cannot solely rely on agriculture for food security (UN & GoN, 2013). It is especially men from rural areas who migrate seasonally to Nepalese cities or for longer periods to foreign countries. Consequently - despite the prevalent widespread poverty among the Nepalese - since 1990 poverty rates have reportedly decreased rapidly. Remittance comprised 23% of the GDP in 2011 (FAO & IFAD, 2015).

2.1 The context of forest politics

The political framework embedding Nepalese forests and its' users is intricate and complex but it is of importance to present it briefly to create an understanding of what is to be discussed later in the thesis.

The vast majority of Nepalese forests are today state owned. The management arrangements of state owned forest are: government-managed, community forest, leasehold forest, religious forest and protected forest.

Pre 1950s', Nepal's forest was economically controlled by locally based feudal lords. At the time, the state encouraged conversion of forest land to agricultural land to increase production which led to serious deforestation. In the late 50s' the Nepali government attempted to curb this problem by implementing the Private Forest Nationalization Act. The act nationalized all forests and declared them as state property which required people to get permission to use the forests (Bishwokarma et al., 2014). However, despite bringing legal control to the state, de-forestation rates continued to increase and by 1964 the national forest cover had declined from 51% to 45,6% (FAO & IFAD, 2015). Despite subsequent implementation of forest regulations and policies to prevent further deforestation, there was no apparent decline in the deforestation rate. Forest cover continued to decrease also after the promulgation of the Land Tax Act 1977. The act claimed all forested land as belonging to the state and removed community customary usage rights from the people. Consequently, farmers chose to cut down the forested land they were using, so as to not lose the land to the government. For multiple reasons, the state eventually acknowledged the need of local involvement to protect forests in the mid-1970s'. Especially active in promoting and guiding this development

were international donors and organizations (ForestAction, 2014). During the following decade the community forestry approach was developed and put forward as a forest management alternative. In this process the Forest Master Plans (1989), the Forest Act 1993 and the subsequent Forest Regulations 1995 were the key policies that have come to encompass the main regulatory framework pertaining to Nepal's forest management (ibid). The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) is the institution responsible for Nepal's forest resources. The underlying Department of Forest (DoF) is the secondary instigator, mainly connected to regulate community and leasehold forest areas. The regional branch of the DoF is the District Forest Office (DFO), which is the implementer of national policy decisions and which is also in direct contact with local forest managers such as forest rangers and community forest user groups (FAO & IFAD, 2015).

2.1.1 Community forestry

Community forest covers approximately a fourth of all Nepalese forest and can mostly be found among the mid-hills, while in the *Terai* only 13% of forest has been handed over to the community. The community forests are owned by the government, but local community forest user groups (CFUGs) manage these forests and have user rights of the forest products. A third of Nepal's population are members of a CFUG, which may vary in member count and area of forest management. There are CFUGs managing as much as 4000 ha of forest while the average CFUG is responsible for about 79 ha (Ojha et al., 2009). The CFUGs are organized and assembled at local level but it registers with the District Forest Office and formulate a constitution. After the registration the group is recognized as a self-governed institution. An operational plan for the forest area is drafted with the assistance of the district forest office, generating an agreement between the office and the local group (ibid). The operational plan is set for 5-10 years and contains all rules and regulations pertaining to the group, e.g. when it is permitted to collect firewood, timber and other forest products, and how much of these products each household is allocated. Internally, the CFUGs are led by an executive committee with elected positions for treasurer, secretary and chairperson. The committee members serves 1-5 year terms and hold meetings monthly to make decisions regarding the CFUG's work and activities. Annually a general assembly is held with mandatory attendance for all CFUG members.

The purpose and role of the CFUG is to regulate forest management activities, ensure a sustainable use of forest products, and to serve as a local development institution. At least 25% of the forest income must be spent on

livelihood improvement and development activities, according to the legal regulatory forest framework. Such development activities could for examples include providing low interest loans for income-generating activities (e.g. buying livestock), scholarships to children of low-income families, building houses or giving economic subsidies on forest products (Ojha et al., 2009). Investments can also be made in local infrastructure, such as building irrigation canals, schools or roads. The forest products most commonly collected by individual users are fodder for livestock and firewood. The timber extracted is first sold to CFUG members, and if there is a surplus this can be sold on the regional market which then generate an income to the CFUG. Naturally, the timber income is substantially larger for those CFUGs that have beneficial conditions in regards to forest type and access to markets. The forest management activities carried out by the CFUGs include guarding forest area, clearing bushes, pruning and thinning, forest fire and water resource management and tree plantation.

The community forestry system in Nepal has been widely researched and the studies have arrived at diverging conclusions, especially in regards to what extent community forestry has helped to improve the livelihoods of its users. The community forestry model for participatory forest management has extensively been seen as a success for both the users and the forests in Nepal (Thoms, 2008). General studies on different forest tenure systems have shown that community based forest management is an appropriate method for reducing deforestation due to the incentives for collective action created by long term forest tenure security (Paudel et al., 2013; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2013). The benefits community forestry has brought to its users are most often attributed to the democratic nature of the CFUG and how it works as a strong local institution (Ridish, et al, 2012). Ojha et al. (2009) argues that community forestry has improved the welfare and livelihood security of its users, because it has directly given households access to forest products, i.e. natural capital. It has further indirectly contributed with positive impacts through contribution to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, livelihood diversification and local development (Ojha et al., 2009: 4). Such benefits have been difficult to measure, and thus no evidence has been put forward to suggest that community forestry has brought any direct improvements to the income of especially the poorest groups (ibid). At the same time, there are also studies (Thoms, 2008; Maharjan et al., 2009; Ojha et al., 2009) which suggest that community forestry has empowered generally disadvantaged groups through local democracy and encouraged inclusion of these groups – such as women and Dalits - in decision-making processes. Most CFUGs invest in income generating

activities for the poorest households. Ultimately, there are no straightforward or measureable effects of community forestry on its users, especially because impacts differ highly, depending on the characteristics of the group and its forest (Ojha et al., 2009; Maharjan et al., 2009).

While research has identified the benefits of community forestry, it has also found negative aspects. The media as well as the research community has reported elite capture, weak forest governance and instances of corruption (Iversen et al., 2006; Paudel et al., 2013; ForestAction, 2014). Elite capture occurs at local level where wealthier forest users of higher caste groups often dominate the CFUG committee, awarding them the opportunity to make self-serving decisions (Thoms, 2008). On national and regional level, the post of forest minister and other senior district positions has become covetable due to the potential private benefits such positions can bring in certain districts (Satyal, 2006 & Sinha, 2011 in Paudel et al., 2013). These forest officials and local leaders form advantageous relations with timber traders, generating private benefits (Paudel et al., 2013).

The ecological benefits of community forestry are however, to an extent, more measureable. Many studies show significant positive impacts on the forests under community management (Thoms, 2008; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2013; Helvetas, 2015).

2.1.1.1 FECOFUN

During the 1990s' as the creation of CFUGs increased, there appeared a growing need for organizing the CFUGs on a higher level, especially for networking and political purposes in order to advocate and strengthen the community forestry agenda. This resulted in the establishment of the *Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal* – FECOFUN – in 1995 (Ojha et al., 2007). Since, the federation has actively brought the voice of local forest users into government decisions making processes and FECOFUN has come to play an important role in Nepalese forest governance. Their political activism and lobbying has been effective and contributed towards forest policy decisions which have enhanced and improved the rights of community forest users. FECOFUN has been (and continue to be) a vital opposing force in resisting top-down decisions from the government, decisions which have threatened the rights of forest users and their autonomy and authority (ibid).

2.1.2 Leasehold forestry

Leasehold forestry is a forest management regime in the mid-hills district which has been implemented continually through projects since 1992. The reason behind the leasehold forest projects was the deemed failure of community forestry to include the poorest households. By 2012, 41 000 ha of national forest were leased by approximately 6 900 leasehold forestry groups (FAO & IFAD, 2015). The projects entailed the handover of, in most cases, relatively degraded forest areas to groups of extremely poor households for a 40-year lease periods. The leasehold forest user group helps to re-generate forest cover on barren lands by mainly planting fodder trees and forage grasses and may later benefit from harvest certain forest products from these areas. Leasehold forestry provides a significant source of land and forest products for its groups in the mid-hills (ibid).

2.2 Climate change politics in Nepal

The issue of climate change and saving the environment has become a much debated issue on the international political arena and Nepal has actively participated in this global concern. The active participation in both national and international climate change policy processes in the last few years – such as the UN led Climate Change Conferences - clearly shows the commitment to and interest in the climate issue from the government (Paudel et al., 2013).

The *Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries* or REDD+, is a UN led initiative aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions (Marquardt et al., 2016). With REDD+ and other programs of payment for carbon sequestrations, carbon is being introduced as a commodity on a global market which attracts both economic and political interests. The Nepalese government has declared the REDD+ program a national priority to mitigate climate change and poverty and is currently working on introducing the program and carbon rights into their forest governance framework and linking it to community forestry (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014). Nepal is currently in the process of adopting the REDD+ program, having had a REDD+ Readiness Plan approved. Subsequently, the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation has established a REDD+ Forestry and Climate Change Cell which coordinates the program and the government is responsible for promulgating strategies and policies relating to REDD+. Responsibility of implementation has been divided between different sectors with financial support given by numerous international donors

(Paudel et al., 2013). In 2009-2013 three REDD+ pilot projects were conducted in districts Dolakha, Gorkha and Chitwan (Shrestha et al. 2014 in Marquardt et al., 2016). The pilot project were established with the aim to teach local people about forest conservation and what benefits it brings and encourage them to adopt sustainable forest conservation activities through economic incentives. The involved community forest users groups were given funds for the carbon sequestration as well as according to certain social factors (ibid).

2.3 The Chure range

The Chure mountain range is a narrow region stretching across Nepal from east to west with the Mahabarat range to the north and the Terai plains to the south (see appendix 1, figure 2). The Chure area covers approx. 13% of Nepal's total land area and houses 3.6 million people living in 36 districts across the mid-hills and *Terai* (FRA/DFRS, 2014). Geologically, the Chure range are the youngest mountains in the Himalayan range which makes the area both erodible and fragile. The soils in the area are formations of sand, sand- and mudstone, boulders and pebbles on loose sedimentary rock (FRA/DFRS, 2014). About a fourth of Nepal's natural forest is found there consisting of sub-tropical deciduous forest. Several valuable hardwood trees grow in these forests, specifically in the lower *Terai* areas. Trees include Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Asna (*Terminalia elliptica*), Chir pines (*Pinus roxburghii*) and Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia sissoo*) (ForestAction, 2014). The climate conditions give the area tropical weather, with cold but dry and short winters and hot and humid summers. The monsoon brings 80% of the year's total rainfall from June to September. The fragile geology of Chure coupled with its climate – especially heavy rainfall - makes it prone to landslides and flash floods (Helvetas, 2015).

Socio-economically Chure is of great significance to Nepal in several ways. Chure provides essential ecosystem services to the low land region and host an abundance of valuable natural resources. All of Nepal's larger rivers flow through the region which makes it of great importance to the ground water recharge in southern *Terai* (Jha et al., 2012). In *Terai*, the plain and fertile lands comprise the grain basket of Nepal – agriculture provides 43% of Nepal's GDP (Subedi et al., 2007). The young mountains are filled with easily extracted and valuable sand, gravel and boulder (SGB) products and currently crusher industries mine these natural resources at a rapid rate. The crusher industry in the region is a large and profitable industry with an estimated annual production worth 60 billion

Npr (US \$55 million) out of which the government receives significant annual revenues (The Kathmandu Post, 2014a). The hardwood timbers are another valuable resource from the Chure mountains, which provide economic revenues to both timber-traders and the government. The existence of good roads and the proximity of the Indian market have further boosted both the crusher and timber industry (Dixit, 2014; Iversen et al., 2006). Research argues (FAO & IFAD, 2015; Iversen et al., 2006; ForestAction, 2014) that these revenue and other economic interests has made the Nepali government reluctant to hand over national forests to community forest in large parts of *Terai*.

The Chure region has often been included in development projects in all imaginable forms; conducted by international, national and transnational organizations and agencies funded by governments as well as NGOs. It has especially been targeted due to its fragility, unique ecology and socio-economic importance. Within Nepali forest politics it has received special attention since the 1980s' when the government first began to recognize the need to conserve and protect the area to mitigate environmental degradation. For the past 30 years Chure has received specific attention in the 8th (1992-97) and 9th (1997-2002) five-year plans, Chure Forest Development project, Nepal Environmental Policy and Action Plan (1993), Revised Forestry Policy 2000 and the Land Use Policy 2002 (ForestAction, 2014). Collectively, large numbers of projects and programs has worked with the objective of improving the lives of the local people and the environment. The activities have included capacity building, poverty alleviation, conflict management, livelihood improvement and diversification, good governance building, biodiversity conservation, environmental justice and various forms of sustainable development and management of natural resources and people in their relationship to nature (Giri et al., 2012). These interventions and the surrounding seminars, workshops, reports, research and countless other activities and sources of information have certainly contributed to generate a wide range of perspectives, narratives and discourses on Chure and its people. The Nepalese government ultimately decided to address the problems in Chure by developing and promulgating The Churia Area Programme Strategy (CAPS) in 2008 which was produced in collaboration with international development agencies and NGOs (GoN & MoFSC, 2008). This initiative laid the foundations for the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program (RCCP).

2.3.1 Community forestry in the Chure range

In Chure region, a third of total forest area is under community forestry management. The forest is divided between 2 837 CFUGs which consists of 13% of Chure area's total population (Helvetas 2015; FRA/DFRS, 2014). In Chitwan district (see appendix 1, figure 3), almost half of the total land area is protected and managed as Chitwan National Park and surrounding the park is a buffer-zone area. Excluding the National Park, 42% of Chitwan's forests are under community forest management. A substantial amount of forest area is under leasehold forest (Marquardt et al., 2016).

It is of importance to examine the social and ecological effects of community forestry in its context because of the heterogeneity between regions, specifically between the hills and the mid-hills and *Terai*. In the latter areas, the value of timber found in the forest is substantially higher, thus unsurprisingly, the economic benefits from CFUGs there are dramatically larger compared to the hills (Iversen et al, 2006). Potential yields of economic benefits have generated instances of elite capture (Maharjan et al., 2009; Thoms, 2008; Ojha et al., 2009). A case study conducted in two *Terai* districts in Chure (Iversen et al., 2006) found substantial evidence of unequal distribution of timber revenues between different users in CFUGs, which was explained by inadequate institutional control mechanisms due to monitoring difficulties, and lack of transparency within user groups. The case study showed asymmetric opportunities between rich and poor households to increase their economy – richer groups could invest in valuable timber at a subsidized cost and sell at higher prize on the market, while the poor did not have such opportunities (ibid).

In regards to the ecological effects, a recent study conducted specifically in the Chure hills produced and published by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (2014), concludes that community forestry is one of the main drivers behind reduced deforestation rate and increased forest cover over the last 20 years. Differences are measured between different districts, where there are significant improvements in some and less measureable improvements in others (ibid). This further supports conclusions from other studies which suggest that the effects, benefits and impacts of community forestry on both users and forests differ, depending on the characteristics of the site.

2.3.2 The Chepang Community

A difference between the villages of Shaktikhor and Siddi in Chitwan, Chure, is the ethnic belonging of its population. In Siddi almost 90% are Chepang and while

they still comprise a vast majority in Shaktikhor, other ethnic groups can also be found, including *cchetti*, *magar* and *gurun*. The Chepangs, or *praja* as they are also called, is a minority hill-dwelling janajati group mainly residing in Chitwan and Makwanpur district. The total population is only approximately 50 000 people, out of which 90% live below the poverty line and is classified as highly marginalized. Socioeconomically they are living under conditions far poorer than the average population (UN RCHC, 2012). Traditionally, the Chepangs were hunter-gatherers living in and off of the forest in a culture shaped by animist beliefs. Their religion entails the belief that different parts of nature, such as mountains and forest, inhibit holy spirits. Consequently, the Chepang have traditionally been considerate of nature and adhered to culturally generated rules on forest usage in order to maintain good relations with holy spirits. As the Chepang society become increasingly dependent on agricultural subsistence, social organization, culture and traditions slowly changed. The agricultural practice that has come to be used by the Chepangs is shifting cultivation, called *khoriya*. These shifting cultivation practices have changed over time. As forest politics have changed from the 1950's and onwards, forest tenure and customary usage rights have radically affected the Chepangs and other traditional ethnic groups. They have lost legal protection and been legally displaced from what was once their land (UN RCHC, 2012). Most of the Chepangs do not have citizenship certificates, which make it impossible to receive land certificates, consequently two thirds of Chepang are de jure landless. The influx of migrants settling in the mid-hills have instead obtained legal ownership in the plain and fertile areas, forcing the Chepang to move to steeper and more arid land, where the soils have lower fertility and possibilities to create irrigation systems are scarce. On such steep lands, the shifting cultivation practices cannot be conducted in the traditional ways (Rijal, 2010) and in Shaktikhor and Siddi many Chepang households have completely abandoned these traditional practices. However, when food is scarce the forest still provides for the poorest households (Marquardt et al., 2016)

Generally, education is extremely low among the Chepangs. The dropout rate of children from school is high, often the reason is poverty - children need to work to support the family or financially the family cannot afford schooling. Consequently, more than 75% of adult Chepangs are illiterate. Among women, only 1% can read and write (ibid).

3. Findings

3.1 An intervention - The Rastrapati Chure

Conservation Program

In the mid-late 2000's, there was an increased political interest for the Chure area, especially from the then president Ram Baran Yadav who grew up in the region. One of the triggers behind this interest was the widespread media debate which reported on the deforestation and degradation of Chure, depicting the failure of and lack of action from the government (ForestAction, 2014). The political attention eventually resulted in the initiation of a study which was conducted in seven Chure districts. The outcome of the study and the Chure Area Program Strategy of 2008 eventually resulted in the promulgation of the Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program (RCCP) in 2010. The program adopted a so called 'integrated and scientific approach', acknowledging the need to manage Chure as a system of forests, water and soils, with special attention given to the upstream-downstream linkages between the hills and the *Terai* (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). The degradation of Chure hills in the upstream area had been linked to cause landslides, siltation and increased riverbeds in the river system in downstream *Terai*. These are the problems which have raised concern among the politicians, especially because of the *Terai's* agricultural importance being "the grain basket of Nepal". Collectively, a significant amount of the government's statements and vocalized concerns regarding Chure, have focused on highlighting the geological and ecological problems. While recognizing the natural fragility of the Chure hills, anthropogenic pressure on the fragile region is nonetheless distinguished as the main cause. These anthropogenic pressures consists of "[...] *settlement through encroachment, clearing of forests for cultivation, over exploitation of timber and other forest products through illegal logging, uncontrolled grazing of livestock, excavation and extraction of sand and gravel [...]*" (Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program Coordination Unit, 2016 [online]).

3.1.1 Conducting the community forest users

The local forest users are getting a large portion of the blame because of their alleged unsustainable forest management. While informants from the government claimed to acknowledge and consider the needs of people, the concern they voiced was mostly directed to the environment. Furthermore, the government made a distinction between people in the hilly upstream part of Chure and the people living

in the lowland downstream area. The problems of raised riverbeds, flooding and land erosion are effects seen in the *Terai*, which plague and threaten the people there as well as the important agricultural land. This is attributed to people's mismanagement upstream.

The RCCP has been allocated billions of rupees in order to address Chure's problems. This includes conducting activities to mitigate the effects and thwart further environmental hazards, and to make political decisions to "[...] *manage the people and the landscape in a sustainable way.*" (G1, 2016). One of these activities is to spread "awareness" among community forest users by educating them in government held workshops and meetings (G3, 2016)

In order to mitigate the effects of the already existing environmental problems, efforts are being put into technical interventions. For example, to stop gully erosions in some of the hilly districts, check dams have been built to stabilize slope areas. This is to reduce water velocity in rainy season when the heavy rains bring vast amounts of soil with it downstream (PCTMCDB, 2015). Other activities have included attempting to restore degraded lands, re-plantation of forests (Giri et al., 2012), river bank protection, gully treatment, irrigation channel improvement and rainfall/runoff harvesting (Jha et al., 2012).

As deforestation has been pinpointed to be one of the main causes of Chure's problems (Jha et al., 2012), the RCCP made the impactful decision to limit continued timber harvests by targeting the CFUGs of Chure. This was explained to be necessary because, Chure's forest users are unaware about the damage they are causing. "[...] *the level of awareness about the environmental degradation and causal effect of the human induced and natural disasters is low among the local communities of the Churia region. Many people make livelihood from the Churia forest without noticeable attention towards its sustainability.*" (Rastrapati Chure Conservation Program Coordination Unit, 2016 [online]). The decision on limited timber harvests was imposed through the classification of Chure as a "limited use zone" in a circulation by the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation. This restricted local CFUGs to only harvest dead and dying trees – so called 2-D trees – for exclusively internal use, i.e. completely stopping commercial activities. Furthermore, the District Forest Offices were ordained to suspend the annual allowable cut (AAC) of timber products (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). Furthermore, CFUGs should provide photos and GPS points of each harvested tree. Naturally, this requires assistance from professionals working at the District Forest Office (ibid). Additionally, CFUGs have since the "limited use zone" declaration been obliged to change their current operational plans to conservation oriented

operational plans. Assisting with this conversion is the DFOs who have prioritized this responsibility above their other duties. Within the new operational plans CFUGs are required to classify their forests in different zones according to slope degree which dictates what sort of trees can and cannot be harvested. The current guideline is that forest on slope below 19° is normal, there both 2-D and 4-D trees can be harvested. 20°-31° slope is considered sensitive and consequently only 2-D trees can be harvested there. Any forest of slope above 31° is classified as highly sensitive, from these areas no forest products can be extracted at all (G2, 2016).

Four years into the program, in July 2014, came the controversial government decision to declare Chure as “Environmental Conservation Area” as defined by the Environment Protection Act of 1997. This was a decision followed by much critique being put forward on the failure of the RCCP, substantial amounts of money had been spent but had seemingly not yielded any results (Shahi, 2015b). The Environment Protection Act is under the Ministry of Environment and thus regulatory power of forest diverged from previous main body of Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation. Furthermore, a committee was formed in a Rastrapati Chure-Terai-Madesh Conservation Development Board (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). They were given the task of coordinating the RCCP through planning and developing Chure management policy documents, prepare Chure management plans and implementing these policies and plans through their partner departments, such as the Department of Forest. Their duty in relation to forest users is:

“To improve the capacity of local community for the protection of Chure area, or cause to improve such capacity and to mobilize, or cause to mobilize their support.” –President Chure-Terai Madesh Conservation Development Board (Formation) Order, paragraph 5E

The board is headed by a committee whose members are appointed, and can at any time be disposed of, by the government (President Chure-Terai Madesh Conservation Development Board Formation Order, 2071 B.S.). The committee resigned in late 2015 which have caused a delay in the development and promulgation of the Chure Master Plan. Reportedly the board resigned due to internal differences (Shahi, 2015b)

The strict rules which had been imposed on CFUGs through the RCCP, received substantial critique through the media and civil society statements and lobbying forces. Consequently, the rules on timber harvest were amended. From the end of 2014, CFUGs were allowed to also harvest dead, dying, diseased and

deformed trees – so called 4-D trees – to meet internal demands if they could not be met by harvesting 2-D trees. A few months later the rules changed again and CFUGs could again begin selling timber outside their CFUG through the District Level Forests Productions Supply Committee, but monitored by the Regional Director (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). However, the CFUGs are still restricted in their timber harvests.

3.1.2 An attempt at regulating the industries

A significant contributor to the degradation of Chure is the industries working in natural resource extraction, but the government has seemingly failed at regulating them. This failure has been met with critique from the Chure development committee and from the former president Yadav (The Kathmandu Post, 2015). The largest industry is the crusher industries. Many enterprises are working in the Chure range due to the geological state of Chure, which makes extraction easy and cheap (The Kathmandu Post, 2014a). The media has reported plenty on the legal and illegal extraction activities of the industries but the RCCP has not stopped neither legal nor illegal exploitation (My Republica, 2016b). The crusher industries in particular have actively resisted and protested against any policy decisions which have threatened them. The government's attempt at regulating the crusher industries have come in many forms. Legally a standard for the industries to meet were imposed. However, caving to the pressure of protests from the industry, the government continually postponed the deadline set for the enterprises to meet the standard (Shahi, 2015a). There was also a temporary ban on export to India. However, this attracted the attention of the finance minister who together with the enterprises protested against the decision (The Kathmandu Post, 2014a). Additionally, the government decided in 2014 to ban all extractions in Chure until an Environmental Impact Assessments had been conducted. Nevertheless the appointed District Development Committees failed to carry out the assessments and consequently extraction has continued. The provision regulating this requirement was eventually lifted in April 2016 (My Republica, 2016a).

3.2 Effects of the interventions in Chitwan

Implementation of the new rules and regulations pertaining to the RCCP were in progress in early 2016 when the field study was conducted. Assisting in conversions of CFUGs operational plans to conservation oriented operational plans had recently started in some village districts but had yet to begin in Shaktikhor or

Siddi villages. This naturally affected the results of the field study. The source of information on the RCCP that had been given to the CFUGs - which could be located - was a circulation letter sent out in April 2013. It is unknown whether any awareness campaign had been conducted in the participating villages.

The informants interviewed for this field study are members of three CFUGs – Janapragati, Jamuna and Nebuwatar - which represent the average CFUGs in Chitwan district in regards to forest area per person, approx. 0,5 ha per forest user (Chitwan DFO in Marquardt et al, 2016). Despite not having changed their operational plans (OP) to conservation oriented ones, they had all recently changed their OPs. Dates of establishments differed between the groups but their forest and community activities were similar. Members within all the groups use the forest as a vital provider of necessary household products such as firewood and fodder. Three or four times a year all CFUGs open the forest for a few days to collect firewood. Fodder leaves are free to collect continually, and to use timber, users need to apply for permission to the CFUG committee which then makes the decision on provision. The forest activities conducted represent what most CFUGs across Nepal are conducting as forest management. It includes planting trees and broom grass, clearing bushes and gardening the forest, prevent forest fire through fire lining and guarding forest from illegal activities. Activities conducted in regards to the community included: interest free money lending for investments in livestock or sending household members abroad, and investments in the community by building houses for the poor and irrigation canals.

3.2.1 The CFUG committee

All CFUGs involved in this case study had participated in the REDD+ pilot project 2009-2013, and had received payment for carbon sequestration in their forest areas, based on social composition in CFUGs and amount of sequestration. The payments were to be spent on forest management and to support poor and marginalized households. Informants from the CFUG committee expressed positive views and gratitude towards having participated in the REDD+ pilot project. According to them, the funds from the project had been invested in the community, especially in providing livestock for poor households. Many informants emphasized the importance of forest conservation, for both the climate and for themselves. It appeared that the REDD+ project had provided some understanding of the importance of forest conservation on a larger geographical scale. One of the informants expressed “ *[...] most of the forest users are aware that if they conserve forest, then they can get additional benefit. I think this change in people's concept*

is the biggest achievement.” (F1, 2015).

However, knowing that forest requires sustainable management was seemingly a well-established idea. The informants were asked about the changes in the forest and forest practices comparing between before the hand-over of forest and presently. They answered that illegal logging had been a huge problem in their forest before the community forest hand-over but that since many years now they had been able to conserve and improve the forest and had witnessed the changes in forest cover.

The committee informants were relatively knowledgeable about the RCCP and stated that they had changed their practices according to new rules disseminated by the DFO. Opinions on the new rules were however ambivalent. The positive attitudes were directed towards the ideas of forest conservation – there were clearly positive connotations with the term, that it is a good practice which would benefit all, both themselves and those affected by forest degradation in the

“Firstly, it is very good that this program has been implemented for the main motive of conservation and protection of the forest. We know that by destroying and (causing) deforestation (of) the forest, even if we have income, then that has no meaning”. – CFUG Chairman (C1, 2016)

“Yes, before we had the concept that we have income only by selling the timber. But now we have changed the concept and understand that if we cut trees randomly then we may suffer from the landslide, flood and soil erosion. The water, land, forest and agriculture are interrelated. So we, all of the user group members, feel ownership and understand that we should conserve the forest.” – CFUG Secretary (C2, 2016)

However, detailed knowledge about the new rules was diverging. Several of them had only a basic comprehension of what the RCCP entailed. Nonetheless, all of them had always something positive to express and one informant in particular was very hesitant towards stating anything negative.

“We are happy about the Chure conservation program, but the only things is that we are not fully aware what are in the rules and policy.” – General committee member, (C3, 2016)

While expressing these positive views on forest conservation, the negative aspects eventually emerged. One informant from Janapragati expressed incomprehension towards why Shaktikhor – being a part of Kayarkhola watershed and the Mahabarat

range – should be included in the Chure, because the degradation is happening in the eastern regions while there are no problems in the Kayarkhola area.

Furthermore, forest conservation is a management method already practiced by the group since before the RCCP was initiated. According to a Jamuna CFUG informant, the group was already accommodating quite strict rules on what types of trees to be felled before the RCCP, for example they were not felling green trees.

“[...] we haven't found much difference, because the user group members were also conserving the forest, and this program is also conserving forest. But I think in the future the Chure conservation program will do well for us. All of the user group members should understand the positive impacts. So if the user group member will own the conservation then this Chure program is good for the whole community, the CFUG and the Terai area.”
– CFUG vice- chairman and secretary (C4, 2016)

Additionally, concern was expressed regarding the new rules which impose a heavy restriction on timber harvest and has caused a substantial reduction of funds within the groups. Selling of timber is the main source of income for many CFUGs and thus if the rules weren't relaxed, this would become a problem. Comparing the reported income from a fiscal year before the change in rules compared to the most recent report, the reduction is clear – in one group the recent income had dropped from 2 million Npr (US \$18 500) to just over 120 thousand Npr (US \$1 100).

“Yesterday I participated at the general assembly of Pragati CFUG and they announced that their budget was only 7 lakh (US \$6 500). I also participated 2 years ago in the general assembly, and at that time their budget was 51 lakh (US \$47 400). [...] Why did this happen? It's because there is restriction in the cutting and selling of the timber. So in reality it is difficult to run the community forest in this context.” – FECOFUN representative, (F1, 2016)

Since the implementation of limited extraction and reduced annual allowable cut, Jamuna in particular had difficulty to fulfill the internal demand for timber and group members had expressed dissatisfaction with the low availability. Because of the illegal logging done in the past, they have few trees which falls under the allowed harvest category. A consequence of the reduced funds was that Jamuna could no longer pay a forest guard and now had to rotate the duty between the members. Another consequence of reduced funds, discussed by the informants, was how it will negatively affect community development activities.

“If we (strictly) follow the Chure rules and policy then we will not be able to run our CFUG management. Not only our CFUG but also other CFUG cannot run their operations if there will be strict policy enforced by the Chure program. Because that will directly impact in our income and we will not able to hire our staff and do the other forest management activities.” – CFUG Chairman, (F1, 2016)

3.2.2 Effects on the forest user households

In the field, it was discovered that regular CFUG members had no knowledge about the RCCP or even that there had been a change of rules regarding timber harvests. Because none of the informants knew anything about the RCCP, representatives from FECOFUN and the DFO – who had been in contact with many CFUGs - were asked to share their experience of local discussions on forest use. One of the FECOFUN representatives, who had participated in local general assemblies in Chitwan and could thus speak for many, shared that local users had expressed concern regarding their forest rights. They were worried their rights are taken away. Another informant, a forest ranger from the local government, made a quite contesting statement. According to him, local users had been skeptical towards the RCCP in the beginning, especially when the rules were stricter than today. However, now they had been convinced of the necessity to conserve Chure through government funded awareness programs. The informant said that there is a need to convince people that conservation is an intervention to the benefit of all. Those who still express dissatisfaction towards the rules are the active committee members who sell valuable timber outside the CFUG for commercial purposes. Notably, this informant was personally positive towards the RCCP.

One significant reason that the informants in Shaktikhor and Siddi didn't know about the RCCP was because the impacts had yet to reach them. Speaking to the committee members, they all emphasized that the user members are not yet facing any problems, setting aside the lack of timber within Jamuna. In none of the conducted interviews did any of the informants put forward a complaint towards timber availability. One can attribute this either to the fact that none who had complaints were interviewed or that people simply chose to exclude voicing such opinions. Nonetheless, generally their day-to-day lives had so far continued uninterrupted by the decreased CFUG funds e.g. firewood and fodder collection rules had not been changed. The forum mostly used to disseminate information relating to the CFUG is in the yearly general assembly. From what can be gathered, none of the CFUGs had informed much about the RCCP in the latest general assembly, and what had been informed had not made any substantial impression on

the users. A majority of informants had heard about the term “Chure”, but didn’t know any more than that. One of the informants from a committee shared that people are not always paying much attention to what is said, and also might have difficulty to remember specifics. Another committee member admitted failure in disseminating information about the Chure program and the new rules it has brought, and expressed that he wished they would improve on this. His CFUG would gather a general assembly shortly after our visit, conceivably the interviews would have turned out different had they been conducted a month later.

When discussions with local users about Chure were limited, the interviews were geared more towards their general opinions about forests, the CFUGs and the REDD+ projects. Among a large majority of the informants, a sense of pride was expressed towards their achievement of improving the forest through practices they called forest conservation. Everyone conveyed an awareness of the necessity to manage forest sustainably and to not overexploit the forest resources because it was bad for the climate and the local environment as well as for themselves. They had all witnessed how the forest has gradually become denser and greener since it was handed over to their management.

“Before there used to be naked hills, but now there are many green trees. And now our CFUG is looking greener.” – CFUG member, (H1, 2016)

“If this forest was not handover to the community forest then by this time it would be like the desert.” – CFUG member, (H2, 2016)

“Before in our forest there used to be huge illegal logging of timber. And we people formed the groups and started conserving and protecting the forest. We have done a lot of hard work to conserve this forest.” – General committee member, (C3, 2016)

Often expressed was a sense of ownership of the forest and the feeling that they are taking care of it for the future of their children. Collectively, they showed an understanding of the need to properly manage the forest. The local forest users in Shaktikhor depend heavily on the forest for their sustenance; it provides them with fuel for cooking and food for their animals among many other things. Informants expressed that to enjoy the benefits of the forest, it requires sustainable forest management. Nobody shared any dissatisfactory opinions on the current OP which regulated their collection of firewood and fodder. When asked whether they would change any rules if they could, they answered that they wouldn’t and additionally

that they weren't knowledgeable about such things.

There were significant socio-economic differences among the informant households; these included degree of forest dependence, affluence, education, ethnic belonging and background and geographical location. All the informants were forest dependent to a certain degree, but for some the forest was a substantial necessity to ensure their livelihood and sustenance. Many of the informants were not depending solely on the community forest to meet their needs, but had multiple sources of forest products. Almost half had access to leasehold forest where rules on collection are substantially less strict than in community forest. However, leasehold forestry membership of the informants did not have an effect on the opinions expressed on community forestry. Many households grew trees in and around their fields. The Chepang households had *khoriya* land which they used to grow fodder trees. Notably, none of the Chepang households interviewed used their *khoriya* land in the tradition of shifting cultivation. Additionally, most had recently completely abandoned most of the old traditions, those who appeared to maintain more of the old traditions were the Chepang in Siddi who lived in the distant hilly areas. Economically and education-wise there were vast differences between Chepang and Dalit households, compared to households of other casts. Among these almost none were literate, especially not the women. Even the young women had not had the opportunity to go to school, however they were adamant to ensure their children not be illiterate and uneducated like the adult generation. It was evident that the poorest people had very limited choices if they were to maintain sustenance. Their marginal fields – certified and uncertified - provided only 3-6 months' worth of food per year which mean that their general means of improving their living situation were minimal. A few families had resorted to lending money to send a household member abroad in the hope of remittance, but had yet to receive any. Others were lending money simply to be able to feed the family when their yields had been consumed. One informant admitted to illegally harvesting forest products when it was needed. It is feasible that other households also lacked a choice and at times had to resort to illegal activities to maintain sustenance. Some of these households had been helped by their CFUG which had provided them with a house or livestock.

3.3 The resistance - an alternative narrative

The actors opposing the RCCP and its political decisions have different origins and most are not included in this thesis. However, one noticeable actor in the debate is

FECOFUN, the strong and central social movement, driven by and for community forest users. Its active lobbying of community forest user rights has shaped Nepalese forest politics and the movement is currently working for modifications and changes in the RCCP. FECOFUN actively opposed the RCCP early on and has expressed skepticism towards its success. After Chure was declared as Environmental Conservation Area, their efforts to change Chure policy intensified. The Environmental Conservation declaration came without prior discussions with FECOFUN or forest users which sparked strong opposition. Together with 20 other forestry sector organizations, they mobilized The Chure Conservation Joint Struggle Committee to protest the government's Chure politics. FECOFUN and their allies collectively constitute an opposing force with a different narrative and an alternative perspective on the Chure issue, compared to the government. While they acknowledge the need to protect the Chure from environmental degradation, they argue that active participation of the community forestry users must be central in such an intervention in order to be successful.

“The farmer who is doing farming since long time is well experienced and more knowledgeable than the technician. Don't you agree? [...] While making policies, the government is not including related stakeholders, and organizations working in that field. The minister will make decisions and a new policy.” – FECOFUN representative (F1, 2016)

FECOFUN's argument is that the current Chure policy decisions are top-down and anti-participatory, and thereby curtail forest user rights and threaten the forest tenure rights that were given to forest users in the Forest Act 1993. Even more, the Chure conservation thwarts any further hand-over of forests to users in large parts of *Terai*, where most of the forest is currently government managed (The Kathmandu Post, 2014c; Bishwokarma et al., 2015).

While not actively opposing the RCCP, critique has nonetheless been put forward by ForestAction. ForestAction is a research based NGO with no political alignment, which uses research to validate their arguments. Some of the main arguments put forward by them, which are similar to FECOFUN's, are that the Chure intervention fails to address the socio-economic, cultural and policy-institutional factors and instead focuses only on the bio-physical features of the area.

“There is a lack of robust comprehensive analysis of the underlying causes of land use change and socio-economic factors and human settlement. Environmental changes in Chure cannot be solely attributed to anthropogenic causes, let alone the local resource users. The causes of deforestation and degradation in Chure are quite complex and are linked with broader issues [...]” (ForestAction, 2014: 31)

ForestAction argues that the intervention is too conservation oriented, ignoring the underlying causes of the degradation, such as weak governance, corruption, insecure land and forest tenure, poverty and high dependency on natural resources. They mean that sustainable management needs to address these issues and not only narrowly focusing on the environmental concerns. Moreover, they argue that the government is not adequately including local stakeholders or acknowledging the success of decentralized resource control with community forests. FECOFUN argues that the history of Nepal forest politics shows that centralized control tends to lead to further environmental degradation (ForestAction, 2014: Bishwokarma et al., 2015).

Several FECOFUN representatives were interviewed in this study and they provided several different reasons to their opposing actions, mainly criticizing the lack of inclusion of community forest users in decision making processes. One informant especially expressed mistrust towards the government and its intentions with the RCCP. Claiming to be knowledgeable about the exact content of the new rules, the informant said that legally forest users in Chure no longer have any rights to use forest because of the decision to classify Chure as an Environmental Protection Area. The informant stated that the government is slowly implementing the rules so as not to raise too much opposition and therefore FECOFUN has to continue to oppose the program to stop future violations of forest user rights. A local FECOFUN representative interviewed in Chitwan district mostly expressed disagreement towards the decision to appoint a central development board in Kathmandu instead of focusing on developing awareness among local forest users. She stated that there is a need to conserve Chure, but it should be in collaboration with CFUGs, not decided upon and controlled by Kathmandu politicians.

“If the Chure is not conserved then the people at downstream is at risk. We know that. But for the Chure conservation, until the local user group members are aware, the government or anyone else cannot conserve the Chure. [...] So giving awareness to the community people of the area, that if we do not conserve then we will be facing problems. We should make this type of policy. That is our point of view.” – FECOFUN representative (F2, 2016)

4. Discussion

The RCCP and its subsequent decisions on conduct is not the result of one single intention or will, conducted by one agent. It is an assemblage of disparate elements, practices and previous policies shaped by a multitude of underlying forces as described by Murray Li (2007a). Within the material for this thesis, it is not possible to trace and analyze the full complexity which has come to shape and affect the Chure intervention. There are vast amounts of ways to analyze the government's actions and infinite conclusions to draw. In this chapter I will provide but one theory on what potentially has come to affect the initiation and shape of the RCCP and analyze the change in and effect of the government's conduct. The theoretical framework, established in chapter 1.4, will be used as a tool to highlight and make visible Nepal's governments' practices of assemblage within the Chure intervention in order to provide a deeper understanding of the their actions and decisions. The last section of this chapter will discuss and analyze the local community forest user's response to the RCCP.

4.1 A change in conduct

Governmental *rationalities* generate particular *practices* and *assemblages of government*, which in turn shapes what problems are identified and how they are to be solved through interventions. Consequently, interventions change depending on a government's rationality (Murray Li, 2014). The conduct of the large heterogeneous group of Nepal's forest users has for the last few decades been shaped and framed by the idea that decentralized management of forest areas is the appropriate and best way of managing these resources and will ultimately lead to the objective of reduced deforestation. In the late 70s' and up until the mid-90s' when community forestry policies and interventions were in progress and developing, the Nepalese political body was influenced by international donors and agencies who also assisted in developing specific political strategies. Central ideas circulating at the time viewed decentralization as a democratic reform required to mitigate deforestation (ForestAction, 2014) and the Nepali government adopted these ideas considering the development of community forestry. The government's objective to stop deforestation presently remains, but the practices deemed required to achieve this objective in Chure, appear to have changed. The government has identified the deforestation rate as a deficiency in their management of the Chure region and the people who live there. Thus there is a need to improve this

management. Consequently, a new problematization must be formulated to address and frame the problems in Chure in order to validate a new intervention. The new intervention is outside of the community forestry management method. The RCCP is the outcome of a new kind of problematization, which claims that local forest users in Chure cannot adequately manage the forests, they are not acting as they ought according to the new environmental and forest policies. As a result, an already naturally fragile region is rapidly degrading which the government has found to be causing environmental problems especially in the lowland *Terai* areas.

The problematization of Chure and the subsequent promulgation of the RCCP is thus debatably either an effect or a sign of a change in the Nepali government's rationality. This study cannot establish what came first, the rationality, the practices or the problematization. Furthermore, what has caused a change cannot be identified or traced to one or even a few specific reasons, the reality behind interventions is far too complex to try and explain and comprehend fully. One theory which could explain why the government decided to change its practices and objectives with the forest policy has been put forward by ForestAction (2014) and environmental journalist Navin Singh Khadka (2015). They point to the climate change crisis narrative present within Nepalese politics. The observations and analysis in this study support and validates this claim. Nepal rely heavily on aid from national and international aid agencies, often tied to development projects, and are arguably susceptible to and shaped by the ideas on governance and development interventions from these agencies and countries. When they encouraged the Nepali government into decentralizing natural resource control and supported the development of community forestry, the government adhered (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). The last few years have witnessed an upsurge in attention towards the climate change problem and much of the debate is shaped by a collective sense of urgency. The providers of aid, such as the UN, have given considerable attention to the need to protect the environment and the Nepali government has abided. Nepal has actively participated in this global concern, as seen in their political activity within this arena. Not least this can be seen in their engagement in the REDD+ initiative where the central idea is to encourage forest management practices which increase carbon sequestration. Restricting CFUGs timber harvests is believed to increase forest cover and thus, conveniently carbon sequestration would be achieved. The government is currently grafting the framework of REDD+ on community forestry. They are thus reassembling, reworking the old politics of community forestry to fit new purposes to accommodate new goals and objectives (Murray Li, 2007a). The government has

also shifted decision making power to the Ministry of Environment from the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, which can be attributed to their reassembling of forest politics which aims to accommodate the environment as a whole in their new “integrated approach”. The new goals of strict forest conservation to mitigate environmental degradation and to increase forest cover, aligns the global ideas of protecting the environment from anthropogenic pressures, and an idea which are connected to aid and donor funding.

4.2 Creating and justifying an intervention

The previous section showed the complexity of explaining and trying to understand the forest policy intervention in Chure. There is most likely not a coherent chain of events but a number of disparate elements which has aligned to generate this change. However, it is possible to trace some of the practices in conducting Chure which has changed in relation to the RCCP and justified its implementation. These practices will be presented here, which in the subsequent chapter bring into light the failures of the intervention and potential underlying intentions.

As previously mentioned, the community forestry intervention vis-à-vis the Chure intervention has the same objective – stopping environmental degradation and deforestation – but the problem has been framed differently within the RCCP. Furthermore, the scientific research used to authorize the decisions within the interventions has radically changed which is reflected in the change of governmental rationality. Science and the ideology that justified implementing community forestry, emphasized the need of local management of natural resources to encourage collective action and mitigate open access scenarios, which was explained to cause deforestation. What can be traced in the case of Chure, is that the requisite body of knowledge used by the Nepali government to back up the Chure intervention is instead painting deforestation and degradation as a problem caused by local people, not stopped by them, and that solutions of more technical character, than the social innovations which surrounded community forestry, is required. Such phenomenon can be attributed to the practices of *rendering technical* and *authorizing knowledge*.

Rendering technical is about creating a framework for the intervention, a technical and simplified arena – disregarding complexities - which can be targeted for an intervention and solve the problem (Murray Li, 2007c; Scott, 1998). This also requires authorizing knowledge which refers to the process of identifying and defining the requisite body of knowledge to justify an intervention. Together, this

entails framing a problem - creating a problematization - which justifies the intervention. The Nepali government has created a problematization by making simplified connections between their chosen intervention (solution) and the framed problem. The problem is framed: anthropogenic pressure – caused by “*settlement through encroachment, clearing of forests for cultivation, over exploitation of timber and other forest products through illegal logging, uncontrolled grazing of livestock, excavation and extraction of sand and gravel*” - in upstream Chure which is triggering environmental degradation and hazards in downstream *Terai*. Who is attributed to this anthropogenic pressure, how they are framed and which solutions are identified justifies the re-centralizing aspects of the Chure intervention. Attributed to the problem are the CFUG members, the local people and forest users, who are framed to be unaware of their mismanagement and the hazards they are causing in *Terai*. By putting forward biophysical scientific explanations - focusing on the crisis of degradation and how people are causing this - of Chure degradation the government authorizes the requirement of an urgent intervention which changes forest management practices to “scientific forest management practices” and effectively posits themselves as the appropriate institution to conduct these practices, rather than the ‘unaware’ people who are not familiar with scientific technical solutions. Local people and forest users in Chure cannot decide upon forest management activities which accommodate scientific management – considering slope degree and classifications of trees etc. - and thus they cannot conduct forest conservation or sustainable management without the guidance of and awareness raising from the knowledgeable government. The activities of “raising awareness” conducted by the government, is ultimately about shaping the forest users conduct and their mentalities to make them act as they ought to. By working through the users desire to use and conserve their forest for the future, the government is attempting to regulate their behavior by changing the rules on forest management and claiming that the change is necessary to protect the forest from degradation. The government thus rationalizes their change of conduct and creates - simply put - a scenario where the users continue to act out of their own interest while also making them act as they ought to according to the government. Furthermore, treating forest users as one large unaware and homogenous group, who doesn’t possess the requisite scientific knowledge, justifies the intervention of moving decision making power of forest management to the Chure development board.

Another consequence of presenting the Chure problem in a science oriented way amendable with technical solutions is that one can then remove the

issue from the political arena. As it is not about politics, one closes down debate about how and what to do about the problem (Murray Li, 2007c; Scott, 1998; Ferguson, 1994), a practice that has been referred to as the ‘anti-politic machine’ (Fergusson 1994). One article in the Kathmandu Post perfectly captures the government’s scientific narrative in the headline “*Panel uses science to save Chure*” (The Kathmandu Post, 2014b). Chure degradation is thus not about politics or political failure; it’s about the geological fragility of the Chure hills and the locals’ activities, practices and forest management which causes increased degradation because they don’t know how to properly manage such fragile land. Again it becomes clear how the government is rendering Chure technical and making the problem manageable and solvable through a development intervention.

The Chure development committee board verbally acknowledges the need to include different stakeholders and have shown to include this in practice by arranging seminars and workshops pertaining to the Chure intervention. However, while this is a method to create open discussions and let the voices of many be heard, it has seemingly not been given much attention when political decisions have ultimately been taken – again depoliticizing. This is especially clear because the most controversial (and potentially most impactful) decision made within the RCCP to date was not preceded by any open discussions with stakeholders who could present an alternative solution, especially not the representatives of which the decision was targeted towards, namely FECOFUN (Bishwokarma et al., 2015). The decision referred to is the declaration of Chure as Environmental Conservation Area. Such strategy enabled minimal political discussions and the messy and lengthy business of reaching an agreement on how to solve the Chure problem, which potentially wouldn’t align with the government’s intentions and thus making the Chure intervention technical and apolitical aligned again with the government’s interests.

4.3 Alternative intentions and the failure of the RCCP

Murray Li argues that analyzing an intervention of development should not be excluded to finding hidden agendas or motives of the conducting agent (2007b), although in this case ‘the will to improve’ is arguably obscured by and made messy through diverging objectives within the governmental body; the government is not operating as one unified entity. Some of the objectives can be interpreted as hidden intentions, which have been alluded to in the previous two sections. There are certainly many well-meaning intentions within the Chure intervention, ‘the will to

improve' can be traced to the will of securing the welfare of the population (Murray Li, 2007b) and it appears that there are internal differences and contestations within the government considering recent resignation from committee members within the development board (Shahi, 2015b) . In this light, there are some issues which are interesting to bring forward, especially as these concerns can be connected to the potential failures of the RCCP. Specifically, the Nepali government's choice of solution to the problems in Chure is questionable. The problems identified could generate a number of different solutions – such as community forestry - which currently isn't reflected and cannot be found in the government's policy decisions. Its practice of rendering technical, authorizing knowledge and reassembling has made visible plausible hidden or contradictory intentions, which explains the government's practice of anti-politics which has eliminated discussions on other solutions.

The government appears to fail in addressing the multitude of underlying causes which generates the problems of Chure degradation in the current implementation of its intervention. Not all of these can be discussed here although those underlying causes addressed by the government are interesting to highlight (see p.31). Settlement through encroachment can be attributed to the widespread de jure landlessness of half of Nepal's farmers. The lack of citizenship among these people means that they cannot legally obtain land, and because Chure is over-populated and available cultivable land already taken, they resort to claiming land by clearing forests. Overgrazing can be linked to the livelihood diversification of many households which entails investing in livestock who needs to get their feed from somewhere. While investments in livestock remains a certain and viable source of economic income compared to other uncertain and non-existing opportunities, livestock keeping will continue at the expense of forests. Illegal logging among local forest users can be attributed to several structural problems. It can be ascribed to local forest users' lack of choice if they are to ensure sustenance i.e. the extreme level poverty found in the Nepalese rural areas. Another aspect of the problem is weak governance and local institutions reportedly permeated with corruption. Many governmental institutions, reported to be embedded in the illegal logging processes do not have an interest in adequately mitigating opportunists involved in illegal logging and timber trade and consequently don't effectively monitor or prevent those engaged in it. Instead it appears that government officials with economic interests in the timber trade seek to change the community forestry framework (in Chure) which has hitherto enabled CFUG loggers to trade with timber traders. The RCCP has now legally restricted timber harvests and thus

thwarted CFUG members who quasi-legally have obtained benefits from selling valuable timber by buying their timber at a lower price and sold it at a higher price on the market. Presently the selling of timber is conducted through the DFO which favorably puts them in a controlling position. While the RCCP doesn't legally enable the government to engage in logging activities, it does reverse decision making power over resources to the government and control over selling to the DFO. To control natural resources is arguably a benefit the government and government officials can make lucrative, especially considering the abundance of valuable natural resources in Chure. The fact that the government hasn't actually handed over much of forests in Chure to CF so far, in the Terai only 13% is CF, further validate this argument. The reluctance to hand over forest hasn't changed, but instead the government has legally authorized a decision to not hand over any more valuable forests.

The government has failed to interfere with and control the private industries interests in exploiting Chure's resources. This failure has long been present and the RCCP hasn't had any success regulating these activities as described in chapter 3.1.2. Government officials have publicly protested against decisions which would restrict the crusher industries which, again, points to the prevalence of contestations and contradictory intentions within the government: there are those who attempt to regulate the industries while others oppose it. This raises suspicions on what can be gained from such opposing protests, apart from the claimed explanation that stopping crusher industries would mitigate development works. Legal mining of sand, gravel and boulder products generate important revenue to the government and have a special economic and political importance due to exports to India. It is probably not rash to assume that the profits of illegal mining finds its way into the pockets of some politicians, just like the timber trade. Furthermore, while government officials pointed to the necessity of crusher industries to provide material for development activities, no statements from the government found in this research acknowledged what community forestry has done for the development of Nepal or for the forest cover change despite widespread research on the subject. The research which connects community forestry with forest cover increase, coupled with the eyewitnesses in Shaktikhor and Siddi who claim to have seen the changes, pegs the question whether deforestation and environmental degradation is a problem accurately connected to the community forestry areas. It could instead, potentially be a problem related to the majority of Chure's forests which is under state management, where community monitoring isn't mitigating untoward behaviors. Why target the forest

users in the minority community forest if there are no underlying intentions within the government, of wanting to control valuable natural resources?

Finally, aligning with and acting according to the climate change crisis narrative by implementing conservation initiatives could potentially attract attention from all kinds of aid distributors and donors who encourage such initiatives. The investments from these donors don't only benefit the people targeted in these projects, but can generate increased financial incomes to the government if they collaborate within these projects, such as the REDD+ initiative. Conceivably, this is another intention or goal which has shaped the Chure intervention.

Regardless whether there is any substantiation to these speculative hidden and contradictory intentions or not, the pattern which nonetheless can be validly argued is that the Chure intervention is currently only treating the symptoms of Chure degradation, not the underlying root causes. The structural problems of Chure degradation is dynamic; the exogenous and endogenous social and ecological causes affecting the area cannot easily be reduced to something amenable with one single intervention which doesn't properly address these complexities. Judging from the findings in the works of Scott (1998) and Ferguson (1994), one can thus assume that if the government continues to blatantly simplify the Chure problem, their solutions will not help them to reach their objective, and consequently, in all likelihood, the Chure intervention will fail.

4.4 Response to conduct

Irrespective of whether the RCCP will fail or not, it will certainly have implications on the group of people it aims to conduct. Like Murray Li (2005) argued, people will in all likelihood be affected by an intervention of development; however the effects might be unintended and/or unpredicted. The RCCP was initiated in 2010, but the intervention has been implemented gradually and is also progressively changing. Consequently, the effects of the policy decisions and changes in regulations have yet to fully reach the local forest users - those who are to be conducted. While the rate of implementation is slow and unevenly distributed across Chure, research on the implications remains substantially limited. However, it gives an interesting insight in how a process of intervention affects people in its early stages and there are possibilities to trace speculative conclusions.

What became evident during the field research is that those with the closest connection to a governmental institution are those who are the most informed, i.e.

the CFUG committee members. They have the responsibility of being in contact with the DFO, which explains why they had more knowledge on the new rules, albeit this knowledge was unevenly dispersed between the different committee members who were interviewed. Those who were most knowledgeable held higher positions within the committee, which could also point to a larger political interest and greater understanding of the complexity of policy processes. These committee members might have had a closer contact with FECOFUN and the DFO and therefore were generally more educated in regards to policy decisions and thus has a better ability to understand them. Furthermore, the technical and scientific language used to describe the Chure problems and the new complex rules could be difficult to grasp for committee members with less education or experience of such language. As mentioned in chapter 3.2.2, some informants expressed that they were not knowledgeable about several things they were asked about. It is worth noting that the educated committee members were of higher casts and had relatively good economic welfare in comparison to those who knew less about Chure. Expressing complex things in difficult terms effectively excludes a vast majority of forestry users who are uneducated and illiterate and who thus might be less likely to protest. These forestry users are however, knowledgeable and experienced forest managers who if they were included in the conversation, could provide alternative solutions or inputs on forest management as well as what the root causes of the problems might be. After all, they are part of the reality the government is simplifying. As one of the informants expressed: *“the farmer who is doing farming since long time is well experienced and more knowledgeable than the technician.”* (F1, 2016). Alas, as discussed in the previous section, the government appears uninterested in effectively including the people they wish to conduct in shaping the intervention, apart from educating them through “awareness raising”. Moreover, while there were committee members more knowledgeable, their opinions were just as ambivalent as those who weren’t familiar with the details of the RCCP. It is thus plausible that the opinions on the RCCP is not formed based solely on awareness of the contents of the RCCP, but is instead also shaped by other ideas and knowledge, which brings the next point argued in the following section.

Theoretically the ambivalent but generally positive attitudes expressed towards the RCCP could be traced to a number of different reasons. First, the decision to change regulations on Chure’s forest management might come from politicians the committee members align with. Furthermore, the source which has informed the committee members about the RCCP, the DFO, has been limited and it is uncertain to what extent they have gained additional knowledge elsewhere.

Thus they potentially haven't been given the opportunity to adequately form any well informed opinions. What these people do know well as community forestry users, is the necessity to sustainably manage forests which could, by them, be assumed to be the same as the forest conservation the government refers to. This brings the third reason, the knowledge on the importance of forest conservation can be traced to two sources, the government and the REDD+ pilot projects, and has thus potentially created a distorted picture of the correlation between community forestry and forest conservation, which also further explains the ambivalent opinions expressed by all the committee members. It is not possible to fully distinguish what ideas and opinions the REDD+ project vis-à-vis the circulation letter and rule changes from the DFO has brought. The discourse on forest conservation from the government has informed that conservation of Chure is necessary in order to save the *Terai* from environmental hazards, which conceivably appeals to the empathy of the committee members towards the people in *Terai*. The government might also create confusion as they are changing the meaning of the term forest conservation to meet their new goals, while the people still attribute the term to what they had already been doing within community forestry. This conceivably has created a connection rather than opposition between the two terms of forest conservation and community forestry. On the other end is the REDD+ pilot project which disseminated knowledge about the necessity to conserve forests for carbon sequestration and why this is important for local people as well as the planet etc. Furthermore, the REDD+ pilot project created a correlation between forest conservation and money – expressed by informants in many interviews. The pilot project gave funds to the CFUGs as a payment for the ecosystem service of carbon sequestration taking place in their community forest areas. Conclusively, it seems as the government is using a similar narrative as REDD+; as they also use terms such as forest conservation, climate change and environmental hazards and changing the meaning of the former word. There could be confusion about whether government interventions and REDD+ will work similarly or that community forestry will continue without complications. This conclusion is validated because one of the committee informants expressed that they hadn't found much difference which could be a general opinion he shares with others. The ambivalence is created when the committee members are shaped by different conductors while their experience and knowledge of community forestry management tells them that reduced funds within the CFUG will lead to negative consequences.

The concern, with possible negatives aspects of the RCCP which was

expressed directly by the committee members, was the correlation between reduced timber harvest and reduced CFUG funds. However, presently this negative aspect hadn't been experienced and might thus have caused committee members to partly disregard this correlation when expressing positive attitudes towards the RCCP. The impacts hadn't fully reached them and their positive connotation with the RCCP might have caused them to believe that the economic problems could be temporary, and will be fixed as the RCCP progresses. The concerns are however legitimate, because of the importance of forest resources for the CFUG which enables the users to carry out its duties in regards to both forest management and community development activities. This was expressed by one of the informants who additionally said that no CFUG will be able to continue running if the funds become too low. It is plausible to assume that this reduction in funds isn't temporary. Jamuna CFUG has already been forced to terminate the employment of a forest guard and instead put the burden of the duty on the households. With the reduced funds in all the participating CFUGs, it will conceivably affect both forests and people although it is so far unclear how such changes will look like and to what extent it will affect the CFUGs negatively. Perhaps the sense of ownership of the forest and the understanding of the importance of its conservation might overcome any economic difficulties. Arguably, the opposite might occur. Without forest guards monitoring the forest, some groups of people both within and outside CFUGs might be more inclined to retrieve products from the forest illegally or just not adhere to the rules to the same extent. Informants expressed that they are doing conservation activities because it benefits them and the future generations, but if they cannot receive any of the benefits directly, it will likely cause lost motivation. Lack of collective action incentives has previously led to deforestation in Nepal and elsewhere. Furthermore, the funds from the CFUG partly go to community development activities, if these are substantially reduced, the incentives to participate in forest management might decline. Thus, the sense of responsibility of the forest which users express presently might be extinguished or considerably reduced. Arguably, it is a threat to the community forest management regime if forest management becomes merely a duty that brings few tangible benefits to the group members.

The active resistance towards the RCCP could only be found among FECOFUN representatives in this study and chapter 3.3 describes why they oppose the intervention. This study has not been able to delve deeper into the nature of FECOFUN's resistance on local level because only one of the informants had been actively protesting with them. It is nonetheless important to mention that the

resistance has significantly affected the shape of the Chure intervention in the way that protests from them have pushed the government into changing the RCCP policies. Of interest here is to bring up Murray Li's theory on the intertwined relation between the exercise of power and resistance (Murray Li, 2005). FECOFUN is a strong organization advocating and working for the rights of community foresters and they have shouldered the responsibility of acting for local people who are unable to act themselves. They have effectively created an alternative narrative which opposes the government's rationality and technical intervention and through resistance and protests they have attempted to be included in decisions they have previously been excluded from. FECOFUN is thus trying to push themselves back into a political arena which the government is attempting to avoid through anti-political practices.

There are plausible connections between hidden intentions and why certain CFUGs have chosen to participate in the FECOFUN protests, even if such connections couldn't be traced in this research it doesn't refute the possibility of these connections elsewhere. Other research on CFUGs has found instances of elite capture (Maharjan et al., 2009; Thoms, 2008; Ojha et al., 2009) and connections between timber traders and local CFUGs (Iversen et al., 2004). When timber harvests are legally restricted it will target and affect any such instances and might thus generate opposition towards the rules which threatens the continuation of such activities.

4.5 Potential future impacts

The impacts of the RCCP for local forest users have yet to reach them. The CFUG funds have been affected presently and the subsequent consequences are on the verge of reaching the individual forest users. In Jamuna CFUG where they have terminated the forest guard, the subsequent necessity of putting the duty on the households could be a theft of valuable time for some households. What will potentially affect most of the CFUGs first is the reduced investment in development activities as a consequence of low funds. The CFUGs might not be able to continue the construction and maintenance of irrigation canals or assist in building houses for the poorest households. They might also have difficulties in giving out low-interest loans for households. This will particularly affect those who are dependent on taking loans to maintain food security for the whole year or families who wish to invest in livestock to improve their economy. Additionally, households who decide to send one family member abroad to attain remittances

might not be able to do so if they cannot lend money to invest in a ticket. There are thus a number of potential indirect impacts on local forest users as a consequence of the RCCP.

At present, forest users have not been limited in the extraction of their most vital forest product: fodder and firewood. How this will change or if it will at all, remains uncertain. It is also not known how the rules will affect leasehold forest users. If new rules were established, which limited extraction of these important forest products; it could arguably raise opposition from individual households as it would affect them deeply. The forest dependence is strong with local users and the problems induced by a legal restriction of forest usage could have substantial consequences.

Murray Li (2007a) argues that the effects of an intervention need to be put in relation to outside forces which affect the configuration. There are many to be found among the peoples of Chure, but one such central “force” that is found across the districts of Chure is the distinct caste-based division system in Nepal. This system categorizes groups of people in pre-determined positions in society based on caste and ethnicity and this will certainly ensure that different groups are affected in different ways by the RCCP. It has already shown to affect the extent of the knowledge about the RCCP since only high cast people, with relatively better education, inhabit the higher CFUG committee positions and has thus greater access to information. Generally, those households and groups of people who have increased their economy due to the selling of CF timber, might not maintain their improved economic welfare when the system which benefits them changes. Traditionally low-caste groups such as janajatis and dalits comprise the poorest and most marginalized households. The Chepang people, who are often landless, illiterate, and especially dependent on forests, due to small land-holdings, for sustenance are at high risk of facing substantial impacts from the reduced forest access and CFUG funds. Lack of land and education means having to resort to low-paid wage labour, which might not even be an option for geographically distant communities. Many of the informants in this study relied on loans either to make ends meet, to make investments in livestock or to finance sending a household member to do wage labour. If the CFUG cannot provide a low-interest lending service, it might become a lucrative business to lend money at high interest rates for profiteers, which will be a disadvantage to poor households. Moreover, if these poorest households no longer have access to any legal means of surviving, they might have to resort to illegal activities. Many families are already lacking few alternatives to maintain sustenance; some Chepang communities rely on forests for

collecting food when yields are low and might already engage in illegal extraction of forest products. Stricter rules on the CFUGs which economically affect them will not alleviate poverty among the poorest, but merely classify them as law-breakers if they cannot adhere to the rules.

Marginalized people are often living on less arable and more hazard prone lands and what the restrictions within the RCCP could bring to marginalized people is a reduced threat of ecological hazards, assuming that the intervention is successful in mitigating these hazards. If the RCCP succeeds in mitigating environmental problems such as landslides and floods, it will benefit those who previously have been affected by it. It is quite clear that the government believes, and conceivably it is so assuming they succeed, that this will bring improvement to the lives of people in Chure, specifically those in *Terai*. The problem is however, that the RCCP intervention fails to recognize the complexities within Chure, and for the people this means that intervention will affect different groups in different ways. In the *Terai*, where CF is uncommon, they could potentially be less affected by the intervention, since many are currently not CF users, than those who are dependent on CF in the mid-hills. The people of Shaktikhor and Siddi are not affected by the ecological hazards to the same extent as those in the *Terai*, but nonetheless they have to abstain from their benefits of CF in order to save the people in *Terai*. Presumably when this abstains becomes reality and is actually experienced by the CF users of upstream Chure; current opinions on the RCCP might not remain so ambivalent.

5. Conclusion

The creation and development of the Chure intervention is not the result of one single intention or the actions of one agent. It is rather a disparate assemblage of previous and current practices and policies put forward by a multitude of actors shaped by a variety of underlying forces. What could be traced in this thesis was the practices and stated objective of Nepal's government, which is currently shaping the RCCP. These practices, objectives, the rationality behind it and the problematization it has generated have changed in relation to previous decisions within forest politics. Although the objective has remained; to stop forest and environmental degradation, the practices deemed required to achieve it and the rationality which generates a problematization and solution has changed to accommodate the climate change crisis. Just like the community forestry regime was partly the result of conduct from a variety of aid and donor agencies, the climate change crisis narrative can also be traced to have come from these agencies – and naturally other sources as well - and it has affected the government's decisions, not least evident in their interest in the REDD+ incentive. The new problematization entails that local people are the cause of degradation and their unawareness of scientific forest management makes them unfit to appropriately manage forests and thus the knowledgeable state needs to intervene. Consequently, Nepal's government is amending their conduct in Chure by implementing an intervention which imposes strict rules on forest usage and which aims to protect forests from anthropogenic pressures.

The change in practices of rendering technical, authorizing knowledge, anti-politics and reassembling justifies the Chure intervention. The government is simplifying their framing of Chure and its 'unaware' population and rendering the problem technical, authorizing technical and scientific knowledge for the intervention and positioning themselves as the knowledgeable institution which must intervene with their expertise and awareness-raising activities. Furthermore, the government is engaged in anti-politics, removing political debate on the solution of the Chure problem to justify their chosen intervention. FECOFUN, who represent the target of the intervention, has been excluded from political decisions and debates and thus the government closes down the possibilities of letting alternative solutions come to light.

Within the government there also appears to be contestations and diverging objectives. The will to improve is thus obscured by and made messy through these contestations which give rise to suspicions of hidden or underlying intentions of

some agents within the government. Furthermore, the structural and underlying problems of Chure are dynamic and complex; this reality is simplified and not adequately addressed within the Chure intervention. Consequently, the intervention will in all likelihood not achieve its objective.

Research on the response from and implications on the CFUG users remains limited while the Chure intervention is in progress. Thus far the response from the CFUG committees, who are knowledgeable about the RCCP, is ambivalent. The positive attitudes can be traced to a number of different explanations, such as the possibility of confusion around the contents of the RCCP due to a similar narrative to the previous intervention of REDD+ which was deemed positive. Ambivalence arise within this uncertainty while their experience tells them that strict rules on timber harvests leads to reduced funds which will affect the CFUG negatively. FECOFUN has actively opposed the RCCP on the community foresters' behalf and thus endeavored to enter the political arena which the government is attempting to close down.

The current effect of the RCCP on local level is reduced CFUG funds as a result of the limited possibilities of harvesting and selling timber. Consequently, the CFUGs are on the brink of facing hardships in conducting their community development and forest management activities. Due to the class and caste based society in Nepal and the prevalent socioeconomic inequalities these hardships will affect different groups of forest users in different ways. The poorest and most marginalized households will be affected by indirect impacts through reduced investments in community development activities such as providing low-interest loans. These households will then have even fewer legal options of improving their livelihoods and sustaining food security.

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Informants

Informant	Date	Code
Board member of Chure Development Board	2016-01-26	G1
District Forest Officer	2016-02-05	G2
Forest Ranger	2016-02-03	G3
FECOFUN representative 1	2016-02-07 2015-04	F1
FECOFUN representative 2	2016-02-05	F2
CFUG committee member 1	2016-02-13	C1
CFUG committee member 2	2016-02-13	C2
CFUG committee member 3	2016-02-09	C3
CFUG committee member 4	2016-02-14	C4
CFUG Household 1	2016-02-13	H1
CFUG Household 2	2016-02-08	H2

Appendix 1. Maps

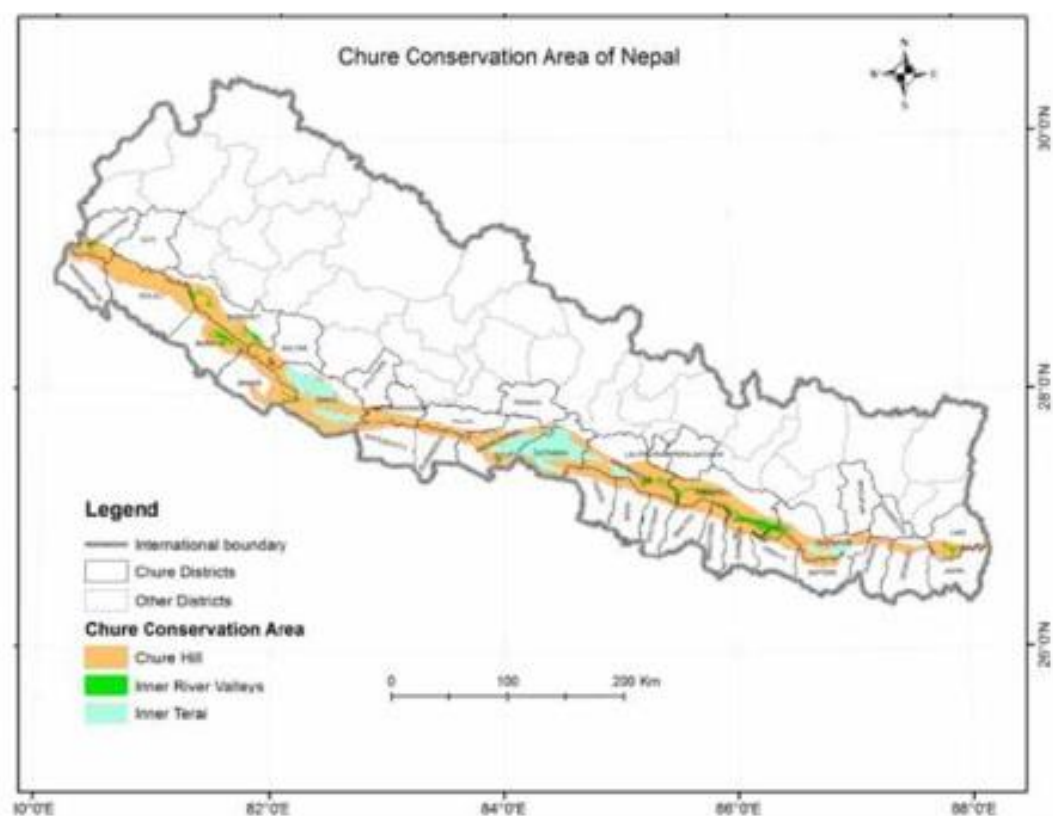


Figure 2. The Chure Range (MoFSC & GoN, 2014)



Figure 3. Chitwan's location in Nepal (Google Maps)

Appendix 2 Interview guide

Committee member/general households

1. Please begin with telling me about yourself
2. Can you tell me about the RCCP and/or REDD+
3. Tell me about a typical day in the forest. What activities do you engage in?
4. How has your activities changed since you joined the CFUG? //How has your activities changed since the OP changed? //What is different today compared to 10 years ago?
5. How do you think your activities will be different in the future?
6. How do you think your lives will be different in the future? // When your children grow up, what do you think their lives will be like?
7. What did the forest look like when you were a child? // What activities did your parents do in the forest?
8. Can you describe what a good CFUG group member is like? (*traits, behavior, relation to rules, forest practices etc.*)
9. Are you satisfied with your group and their work? // Are there any members who are less good at cooperating? → Why do you think that is?
10. Can you tell me about the Chepang community.
11. If you had the power to make changes to the OP (without district official involvement), would you change it? If yes, how?
12. Why do you think the government implemented the CCP?//Why do you think REDD is interesting in doing projects here?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me or add to this interview?
15. Do you have any questions for me?

Chepang households

1. Please tell me about yourself
2. Can you tell me about the RCCP or REDD+
3. Tell me about a typical day in the forest. What activities do you engage in?
4. How has your activities changed since you joined the CFUG? // What do you do differently in the forest today compared to 10 years ago?
5. How do you think your activities in the forest will be different in the future?
6. How do you think your lives will be different in the future? // When your children grow up, what do you think their lives will be like?
7. What did the forest look like when you were a child? // What activities did your

grandparents do in the forest?

8. What traditional Chepang forest and agricultural practices do you engage in today? Are there any practices that you have stopped doing and if so when did you stop?

9. If you were free to use the forest in any way you wanted, disregarding any current CFUG rules, would you do anything differently? → Are there any traditionally chepang practices that you would like to engage in but cannot do today (due to CFUG rules)?

10. Can you describe what a good CFUG group member is like? // Can you tell me about the other members in CFUGs

11. Are you satisfied with your group and their work? // Are there any members who are less good at cooperating? → Why do you think that is?

12. How do you think REDD/CCP has affected/will affect your lives?

13. Why do you think the government implemented the CCP? //Why do you think REDD is interesting in doing projects here?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me or add to this interview?

15. Do you have any questions for me?