

Secondary Level Organisations and the Democratisation of Forest Governance: Case Studies from Nepal and Guatemala

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Abstract

This paper examines the emerging role of secondary level organisations in the democratisation of forest governance by analysing two cases of forest-based collective action in Nepal and Guatemala. It explores the conditions surrounding the emergence and growth of these secondary level organisations, and examines the nature of their organisational approaches, strategic actions, and the resulting outcomes in terms of democratising forest governance. The organisations discussed in this paper are products of broader decentralisation processes and represent organised and empowered forest people. They are capable of shifting the balance of power in favour of community level institutions, and can compel state agencies to become more accountable to the needs of forest-dependent citizens. As a result, by leading collective action beyond the community to a secondary level, these organisations have influenced forest governance by making it more democratic, equitable and productive.

Keywords: community forestry, collective action, governance, forest tenure, livelihoods, Nepal, Guatemala

INTRODUCTION

The wide array of institutional arrangements that have proliferated in many developing countries for managing the commons, particularly forest, pasture, and irrigation systems, have drawn the interest of academic and policy researchers (Ostrom 1990). At certain times, local level community organisations have united with similar organisations to form what we call secondary level organisations including federations, cooperatives, networks, associations, and alliances. In fact, scholars have used different terms for

such higher level organisations; secondary level grassroots organisations (Taylor 2010), second tier, second order, supracommunal or meso-level organisations (Carroll and Bebbington 2000). These secondary level organisations have sometimes undergone a process of formalisation and now play increasingly important roles in forest governance (Timsina 2003; Cronkleton et al. 2008; Paudel et al. 2008). This paper explores the emergence of secondary level organisations, their strategies of resistance and engagement with government, and the outcomes in terms of enhancing livelihood benefits, primarily through ‘democratising!’ forest governance.

While theories of collective action often focus on grassroots efforts at the community level (Baland and Platteau 1996; Ostrom 1999), the role played by secondary level organisations in forest governance has received less attention (Colchester et al. 2003; Paudel et al. 2008; Taylor 2010). With the emergence and growth of secondary level organisations around forest governance, several theoretical and practical questions have emerged. How are the secondary level organisations different from community level institutions? How have secondary

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level organisations contributed to the democratisation of forest governance? How has this process influenced forest tenure and benefit distribution? The first question is relatively straightforward. Generally community level institutions are directly engaged in the management of natural resources, while the formulation of policy and rules that govern natural resource use and management are beyond the community level—usually shaped by stakeholders with more economic and political power. As a result, communities, farmers, forest dwellers, and small producers are often marginalised in key decision-making processes. As will be described, an exception occurs when local stakeholders pool their interests across multiple communities or larger landscapes, which allows them to have greater influence on the formulation of public policies and institutions. Where powerful state and market actors influence forest policies and practices, local people can adopt strategies that give them recognition and voice in the decision-making processes and economies of scale in trade and enterprise development that offset their relative weakness as individuals. In the cases examined here, secondary level organisations were by-products of forest decentralisation, often further strengthening and deepening these processes through ongoing negotiation with the state and market agencies.

By drawing on specific cases, it is possible to illustrate how some secondary level organisations democratised forest governance and increased benefits for their constituent communities. Understanding how forest people developed this level of collective action to enable their success would allow greater understanding not only of how such organisational mechanisms work, but also what factors promote and constrain the outcomes they produce for their members. By focusing on two successful secondary level organisations that emerged in very distinct contexts, we explore how community level institutions and groups of concerned citizens effectively participate in such organisations and influence forest policy and management practice at different scales of governance. The two cases examined here are the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN), and the Association of Forest Communities of Petén, Guatemala (Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén; ACOFOP). Both of these secondary organisations are associations of community level organisations involved in forest management and related social and economic activities. These organisations took on political advocacy roles to defend the interests of members and to assure that their interests were considered by decision makers. The cases emphasise how these organisations engaged in policy advocacy to secure communities' rights to own or obtain concession contracts for forest property, to manage those forest resources proactively, and to benefit from them.

This paper draws on an extensive, multi-year research project that examined forest tenure reforms across 10 different countries (for more details, see Larson and Dahal This issue)². Among the sites analysed, the cases from Nepal and northern Guatemala stood out because secondary level organisations played important roles in shaping forest resource governance. While there are socio-economic, cultural, and geographic

differences between these two countries, both have recently undergone significant reforms that have transferred forest tenure rights to local people.

This article draws on primary data collected during interviews with key informants involved in the tenure reform processes in each country, including representatives from community, government, and development organisations. In addition, literature on tenure reform was reviewed to further explore the roles that secondary level organisations have played at local, national, and regional levels. It analyses topics such as how networks, social movements, and other forms of community organisation engage in deepening and institutionalising tenure reform processes.

The paper is organised into four parts. The second section provides a review of the current debate on collective action with reference to secondary organisations. The third presents two case studies from Nepal and Guatemala. The fourth section draws from the cases to identify some common patterns and show how collective action of secondary level organisations can contribute to democratising the forest sector. The final section draws some lessons from the dynamics of secondary organisations.

SECONDARY LEVEL ORGANISATIONS OF FOREST DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES: EMERGING DEBATES

The dynamics of local natural resource management institutions have been the focus of common property theory for decades (Ostrom 1990; Baland and Platteau 1996; Agrawal 2001; Agrawal and Ostrom 2001; Bromley 2004). These theories analyse the role of local institutions in governing the commons. Many of these studies emerged to dispute the inevitability of the 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin 1968)—a view that communal management systems produce downward cycles of resource degradation. In his article, Hardin treats common and open access resources without distinguishing between them in the development of his conclusions. Many of the later studies on the commons revealed that most of these resources were not open access, but rather were collectively managed through well-developed and culturally-rooted local institutions. Today, the focus has shifted to analysing how collective management systems operate at a higher level when community institutions are granted a role in managing local forests, pasture lands, and irrigation systems.

Although the dynamics of community level institutions have been well documented, collective action at a secondary level beyond community institutions has received less attention. Some studies have shown that community forestry-related networks at national, regional, and international levels have popularised community forestry discourses and drawn the interest of many national and international development agencies (Colchester et al. 2003; Wollenberg et al. 2005; Cronkleton et al. 2008; Taylor 2010). These studies have found that networks contributed to community forestry by encouraging information exchange, raising awareness,

supporting national groups, and providing spaces for such groups to assert their rights. They illustrate how these secondary level organisations experience constant change, requiring them to balance their advocacy capacity to pursue multiple purposes. However, reliance on donor support, internal governance crises, and top down approaches to grassroots institutions were identified as the major challenges of these networks. Wollenberg et al. (2005: 11) have also observed that networks provide a wide range of resources, exchanges, capabilities, strategies, and contacts to local actors in support of grassroots rights movements. Nevertheless, these studies tend to focus on international networks and alliances working on community forestry, and not on the direct representatives of community institutions. More recent work, such as Taylor (2010), points at the need to explore the links between actions at the community level and their response to external pressures while managing ongoing problems and issues of representation, equity, and legitimacy.

Responding to the increased interest in secondary organisations, scholars have focused on the emergence and dynamics of such organisations (Ojha et al. 2007; Cronkleton et al. 2008; Taylor 2010) and their general outcomes (Komarudin et al. 2008). In this paper our approach to secondary level organisations is largely through a social movement perspective. While other theoretical underpinnings employed in the analysis of secondary level organisations draw from the study of agrarian federations (Bebbington 1996, 1997; Taylor 2010), social movement theory places collective action at the centre of social change. Ordinarily, social movements emerge from resistance, reflecting grievances about perceived injustices, but they also respond to alternative agendas, such as improving local livelihoods.

The second level organisations of community networks emerge out of local level, collective action. Scaling up and scaling out of collective action into a relatively larger arena is identified as a social movement. The idea of conscious collective action aimed towards social change can also be called a social movement (Touraine 1985; Neidhardt and Rucht 1991). Through collective action, social movements are able to produce and reproduce new narratives in contexts where the movements themselves are constantly evolving to respond to changing conditions.

The cases of forest-based collective action studied here share several features. First, these forest-based social movements shifted away from state institutions and political parties, and now operate as civil society organisations creating “new spaces and new solidarities” (Cohen 1983: 106). Unlike conventional political movements, these movements are neither guided by grand ideological positions nor have any intent to rule the nation, though they seek more autonomy at sub-national or local levels. Instead, they largely accept the legitimacy of the political regime and seek to influence national policies on particular issues. Second, these movements do not constitute fundamental (economic) classes (Offe 1985: 831); instead they are aggregates of various social groups across economic class, caste/ethnicity, gender, etc. People from different social groups

may share common concerns and form alliances to promote their collective interests such as stronger tenure rights or fair prices in the market. Third, these movements are not led by trade unions or other political organisations, instead they are consolidated expressions of the collective voices of forest dwellers, small farmers, and ethnic minorities, and are targeted against ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2003). At this level, collective action is often aimed at resisting state control or privatisation of forests or other natural resources.

The pathway toward democratising forest governance through tenure reform processes is fraught with a high level of uncertainty (Ribot et al. 2006). By studying cases from six developing countries, Ribot et al. (2006) showed that central governments use a variety of strategies to retain central control by obstructing the democratic decentralisation of resource governance. One possible strategy to help counter-balance this centralising tendency and serve as a strong agent of democratic decentralisation is to form broad coalitions of diverse actors, including civic interests groups. This paper examines the potential role of secondary level organisations of forest communities in promoting democratic decentralisation of forest governance.

CASE STUDIES OF SECONDARY LEVEL ORGANISATIONS AND THE STRUGGLE TO SHAPE FOREST GOVERNANCE

Case 1: Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal

Nepal has become an exciting example of decentralised forest governance due to its well-known community forestry program. However, forest policies have always vacillated between top-down bureaucratic management by government and autonomous community management by local people (Bhattarai et al. 2002). In fact, rights that underlay Nepal’s dynamic community forestry sector would likely have been undermined without the emergence of an influential community federation that counter-balanced the centralising force of the state.

Nepal introduced community forestry in the late 1970s in response to high rates of deforestation and degradation, particularly in the middle hills. The program gained momentum after political changes that led to the establishment of a multi-party parliamentary system in the 1990s. Consequently, the new Parliament ratified the 1993 Forest Act, allowing district forest officers (DFOs) to hand over portions of the national forests to registered local organisations called community forest user groups (CFUGs) (HMG/MoLJ 1993). A CFUG is a collective entity that represents households living in proximity to a specific forest patch³, the community forest, with membership drawing on local household representatives. The 1993 Forest Act recognised the CFUGs as self-governing, independent, autonomous institutions to manage forest resources and related funds (HMG/MoLJ 1993: Article 43).

Initially, the CFUGs sought to learn and benefit from mutual exchange and sharing with other CFUGs who were

facing similar challenges. The emerging network provided critical technical support to its member CFUGs in preparing operational plans, keeping proper records, introducing improved forest management practices, and maintaining the overall standards of sustainable forest management according to local and global standards (such as those of Forest Stewardship Council).

The communities' response to the diverse challenges and opportunities during the early phase of the community forestry program gradually led to the emergence and growth of FECOFUN. When the community forestry program began to pick up during the late 1990s, the forests gradually regenerated and the potential for marketing various forest products increased. Along with this growing prospect of forest product sales, community forestry began to draw the interest of businessmen, influential local leaders, and forest officials. Consequently, some cases of over harvesting and mismanagement of funds were reported (ForestAction and SEACOW 2002). In response to this, the forest authorities overreacted and made a series of policy decisions that undermined the autonomy of the CFUGs. As Shrestha (2001) comments, there was a backlash against community forestry during this period as illustrated by major policy decisions that included backtracking on community rights—the Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN), a parastatal, was given a monopoly over the timber trade; the DFOs were empowered to take action on CFUGs; the handover of additional community forests in the Terai region was halted; and the special priority to community forestry over other forest management regimes given by the Forest Regulation 1995 was removed.

FECOFUN, The Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal, emerged out of the CFUGs during the early 1990s⁴. Today it has become the largest civil society organisation in the country, representing over 15,000 CFUGs involving over 10 million people. FECOFUN's organisational structure has four different tiers—village level, range post level, district level and national level. The CFUGs are the foundation of FECOFUN, and all levels of its subsidiary organisations build from there. The leadership at each level is democratically elected by members of the level immediately below. Although, FECOFUN at the national level develops its general policy and annual program during its General Assembly and other regular meetings and implements these through its networks, the lower levels are free to develop and implement their own programs based on local priorities.

Two major factors pushed the CFUGs to begin collaborating, a process that led to the formation of FECOFUN. First, though the government transferred a bundle of rights to the communities, it was difficult to comply with the terms and conditions, hence the CFUGs faced challenges in securing those rights. During the early years of community forestry, the CFUGs were poorly equipped to address many of the institutional and technical challenges, such as forming functional executive committees, preparing group constitutions and forest operational plans, and carrying out recommended forest management activities. Similarly, despite the strong

legal provision, the forest bureaucracy constantly attempted to undermine the spirit of the 1993 Forest Act by issuing restrictive guidelines, operational circulars, or using their discretionary power to thwart full implementation.

Second, the newly established parliamentary system and access to sympathetic support from national and international agencies provided an environment conducive to the growth of FECOFUN. The new multi-party political system promoted democratic discourse, norms and principles, and opened spaces for diverse forms of citizens' groups to flourish. Moreover, international development aid for community forestry, which had been focused on CFUGs and the government's capacity to support them, shifted to CFUG networking. Once established and strengthened, the resulting network grew into FECOFUN. The Ford Foundation and bilateral forestry projects of the Swiss, British, and Danish governments alone supported over 95 per cent of the costs of FECOFUN during its early phases (FECOFUN 1999). Other development partners such as International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Action Aid, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE)-Nepal among others have provided critical support for capacity building, institutional development, and network building. In addition, some professionals, with strong faith in community management provided critical intellectual/advisory input on the one hand and supported the expansion of networking at national and international level on the other. The supporters, apart from supporting networking, also induced the idea that networking was inherently a good thing to do. However, above all, the leaders of FECOFUN demonstrated good vision and a high level of political commitment, which is one of the key factors behind its success.

The government's policy decisions alarmed FECOFUN, which perceived a threat to community rights. In response, FECOFUN gradually consolidated its resistance movement against the government's decisions. The organisation took to the streets against those decisions, organised its constituent members, and led the political campaign to defend community rights. During this process, it also developed alliances with civil society and political activists who were sympathetic to the community rights agenda. The 1989 Forest Sector Master Plan and the 1993 Forest Act, which explicitly formalised community rights, became the main basis for FECOFUN's struggle towards this end. Apart from the resistance movement, FECOFUN increasingly began constructive engagement with policy forums, and pressured for a more inclusive policy processes. In fact, FECOFUN's intervention has made an important contribution to institutionalising multi-stakeholder processes in forest sector policy making. For example, FECOFUN is represented in the Forest Sector Coordination Committee (FSCC), the District Forest Coordination Committee (DFCC), and occasional working groups and task forces formed for revising specific policies. Consequently, the traditional unequal relation between forest authorities and FECOFUN is gradually being changed. During this period, forest policy processes have gradually become more

participatory and inclusive in several aspects, including multi-stakeholder process, expanded consultation in key policy issues, and diagnostic studies to provide policy feedback.

FECOFUN's active participation in the democratic movement that successfully toppled the century old monarchy and established a new republic Nepal raised the organisation's political profile. Consequently, the FECOFUN leaders have developed close relations with political leaders, have mobilised political parties for community causes, have accessed critical information for forest policy decisions, and have mobilised the media. As a result, they have changed the historically unequal state-community power relations in favour of forest communities and their networks. The government can no longer ignore the views of community level forest stakeholders, and recognises that they play significant roles in forest management—a result that would have been unlikely if individual CFUGs would have attempted to exert such influence.

As Table 1 shows, the FECOFUN-led movement has been successful in reverting some of the regressive decisions, though it has failed to influence others. For example, the decision to give TCN a monopoly over community forest products and the bank seizure of CFUGs were reverted, as there was strong public resentment against those decisions. However, the movement failed to influence the decision on the issue of DFO authority over CFUGs or on the tax issue, as the state took a very strong position on these issues and FECOFUN could not fully mobilise public support. However, apart from partial success in influencing some decisions, the movement also strengthened collective action of the CFUGs to achieve forest

management goals. For example, FECOFUN has encouraged an equity goal of reaching 50 per cent representation of women in leadership, and greater allocation of CFUG funds to pro-poor livelihood activities within community forestry. Apart from internal demands, FECOFUN's discourse of inclusive democracy, which emerged parallel to a Maoist movement and the influence of forest sector donors, promoted equity. Consequently, the government's recently issued Community Forestry Guidelines 2009 institutionalised the provision for 50 per cent representation of women. Similarly, the sheer mass of people in its nationwide network and its strong presence in national and international forums has helped FECOFUN in challenging the existing power imbalances between the forest bureaucracy and local communities.

Despite its successes, FECOFUN has faced a number of institutional and programmatic challenges. Contrary to its stated organisational values and objectives, the grooming of new leadership, especially through the involvement of women and marginalised groups, appears inadequate (Nightingale 2003; Pokhrel et al. 2007). In addition, the organisation often takes a defensive stance on many forest policy issues and supports or rejects the agenda or proposal based on its knee-jerk position that communities are always right (Ojha et al. 2008). One of the major threats is that, since many of the FECOFUN leaders are affiliated with one or the other political party, FECOFUN is sometimes blamed, as it could be co-opted by a party agenda at some point. Similarly, FECOFUN is often under pressure to meet increasing demands by CFUGs for various services such as institutional capacity building, preparing operational plans, or linking with markets.

Table 1
Major policy threats and FECOFUN's responses

Date	Major policy issues	FECOFUN activities	Achievements
Feb 1998	Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN), a parastatal, granted monopoly over timber trade	Organised street protest, press conference, informal lobbying with stakeholders	The government changed its decision, implying the TCN monopoly would not be applicable to forests managed by communities and local governments
Feb 1999	1st amendment to the 1993 Forest Act that sought to give more power to DFOs to take action against CFUG members, required 50% investment of CFUG funds in forest management	Encouraged CFUGs to disobey the provisions, raise awareness in CFUG about the impacts of the amendment	Partially successful; both DFOs and CFUG members can take action against the CFUG committee for any mismanagement, 25% funds would be invested in forest management
Apr 2000	Government circular to restrict community forestry in the Terai region	Mass meeting, press conference, submission of memorandum, lobbying with policy makers	The government has recently lifted the ban on community forestry handover in the Terai region
Aug 2002	Amendment brought to remove the provision of 'special priority' for community forestry	Rejection of the decision, arguing that it opens up forests for private companies' appropriation	Unsuccessful; the amendment allows government to handover part of national forest to private companies without prioritising community forest
July 2003	Financial ordinance for levying 40% tax on CFUG forest product sales	Nationwide campaigns against the provision, street protest, mass meeting, lobbying with decision makers, court case	Tax is reduced to 15% and limited to sale of only two species (<i>Shorea robusta</i> and <i>Dalbergia sissoo</i>) of timber
2005–2006	The government seized bank accounts of CFUGs	Organised rally in several districts	Government reversed seizure of bank accounts
2006–2007	About a dozen community forests used by the government for army barracks and Maoist rebels' cantonments	Submission of memorandum to the government with alternative options	Most community forests have been returned

Source: Adopted from FECOFUN (2002)

Financial sustainability has become another major challenge, particularly in the context of shrinking flexible institutional funding from international aid agencies. This may ultimately limit FECOFUN's ability to meet the enormous demand from its constituent CFUGs and respond to any unfolding national forest policy processes (Timsina 2003; Ojha et al. 2007). Meanwhile, balancing responses to CFUG demands for technical support while also addressing many national forest policy issues at the national level has become increasingly challenging. In addition, FECOFUN as an influential national network has induced CFUGs to emerge as powerful local organisations, thereby creating institutional plurality at the local level that tends to undermine local governments.

Case 2: Association of Forest Communities of the Petén, Guatemala

The Guatemalan Petén has become an illustrative example of how government efforts to implement conservation policies can provoke resistance from forest-dependent people leading to the formation of an influential secondary level organisation. One prominent policy decision that was part of this process was the creation of the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in 1990. The MBR covers roughly two million ha of lowland tropical broadleaf forest, and introduced specific land use policies to conserve the region's rich biological diversity. However, once created, the government faced major challenges administering the reserve and in reconciling its conservation goals with the livelihoods systems of community residents in and around the MBR. Initial plans attempted to install a strict protection regime that disregarded the long-term presence of communities and families living in, and dependent on, the area's forests, and required their eviction or severe restrictions on their livelihood activities. The intense reaction by affected communities threatened the government's biodiversity conservation objective for the MBR. In response to growing tension, conservation organisations proposed the establishment of community forest concessions in the buffer zone (called the multiple use zone or MUZ) around the MBR's core area, as a strategy to provide economic benefits for residents and ensure their active participation in sustainable management of forest around the reserve. In 1994, the government formally introduced a community concession system. This concession system recognised the settlement rights of pre-existing communities and at the same time potentially provided incentives for forest management and the biodiversity conservation agenda. The premise behind this decision was that the granting of these forested areas to communities would satisfy the competing interests of all parties—industry, conservation, and communities. However, local residents—dispersed and often isolated in rural communities—soon learned that additional collective action would be necessary if they were to fully benefit from the new opportunities.

The initial concession areas offered to communities in 1994 were small, undercutting their economic viability and failing to meet historic demands for rights over forests resources. In

addition, the system set up by the government and funders like United States Agency for International Development (USAID) placed significant authority and control in the hands of government agencies and NGOs rather than directly in the hands of participating community organisations. Because the population was dispersed in settlements throughout the forest, communication was limited and the heterogeneity of communities made it difficult for them to unite around common interests. For example, while some communities wanted to formalise their customary rights to reside in the forest and manage non-timber forest products (NTFPs), those living outside the MUZ were making claims to forest resources inside the buffer zone. Unrest by some rural people living in and around the MUZ increased as these limitations became known. However the communities lacked a common voice that could unify their demands for resources (Sundberg 1998). Eventually, community leaders mobilised to 'push back' as a united front against the centralised decisions, proposing instead an increase in concession size, greater levels of access, and more extensive control to be granted to communities. This prepared the foundation for the formation of the ACOFOP. ACOFOP is a secondary level organisation formed in 1997 to represent the common interests of communities and community organisations holding forest concessions.

ACOFOP represents 23 member communities and community organisations in and around the MBR. These communities are grouped into 12 ACOFOP member organisations holding concessions in the MUZ. ACOFOP is governed by a general assembly of members, a board of directors composed of concession representatives, and a three-member oversight committee (Taylor 2010). Originally ACOFOP was formed to lobby for increased resource access and management rights for the communities. ACOFOP leaders continued the struggle to increase the sizes of community concessions to an economically viable scale and helped the community organisations gain legal status. In addition, they negotiated a change in the framework to allow the allocation of concession rights to communities outside the MUZ. Although the first community concession granted was only 7,000 ha, later concession contracts ranged between 20,000 and 93,000 ha of forest. In total, the community concessions encompass approximately 375,000 ha of certified sustainable management forests benefiting more than 2,000 families belonging to community concession organisations (Monterroso and Barry 2009). Above all, ACOFOP was key to ensuring that community groups participated actively in the decision-making process around the establishment of a concession system. It subsequently assumed additional economic coordination roles, particularly in relation to timber production and, more recently, diversification to include the commercialisation of NTFPs and the provision of technical services (Taylor 2010).

ACOFOP has influenced the democratisation of forest tenure rights in the Guatemalan Petén in two ways. First, it challenged centralised decisions limiting local access and use rights, and pushed the interests of members to ensure the rights to concessions at an economically viable scale.

More recently, it has concentrated on political advocacy to ensure that local voices are heard, community concession rights are respected, and that external actors do not encroach on their lands in violation of their exclusion rights. Second, ACOFOP also provides technical assistance, and accompanies its member communities by strengthening organisational, technical, and productive skills. This second level organisation facilitates community self-management, favouring the ability of member organisations to participate in decision-making process (ACOFOP 2005). Currently, the association has a technical office that implements projects partly financed by donor projects. In addition, ACOFOP facilitates improved access to markets, reduces transaction costs associated with forest management activities, and facilitates access to credit for members.

Nevertheless, it is ACOFOP's political advocacy to protect the management rights and the exclusion rights of members against external interests that requires the greatest effort and investment of economic resources. Table 2 reviews ACOFOP's struggle to secure community rights over forest. For example, ACOFOP was able to remove a requirement that community management plans and activities be monitored and certified by designated NGOs.

Two major struggles against private investors and state agencies best illustrate the role that ACOFOP has played in protecting the interests of community concessionaires. In one case, ACOFOP fought to overturn a 1998 law that allowed the

expansion of petroleum exploration and extraction within the community concession area in the MUZ. This battle has been only partially successful because the 2009 Petroleum Law created new incentives and a legal framework for extending petroleum contracts within the MBR. Although no extraction activities have taken place within the MUZ, ACOFOP constituents are concerned because approximately 90 per cent of the national petroleum reserve is found in the Petén.

The other example relates to efforts by private investors in promoting cultural-archaeological tourism in a region north of the MBR, by expanding the existing national park (81 sq. km) to an area defined as the Mirador Basin Project, surpassing 2,000 sq. km. This expansion could annul six concession contracts, including five community concessions. The Mirador Basin Project was approved by the Presidential Decree in 2002 (129-2002). It took ACOFOP three years to revoke the legal authorisation for the national park expansion (Monterroso 2007; Taylor 2010). Nonetheless, in 2010 another proposal was being discussed in the National Congress to approve a law that renews the Mirador Basin Project. If successful, it would restrict existing concessionaire rights to make room for an initiative led by private investors.

ACOFOP's active engagement with external actors, for instance establishing relationships directly with donors and lobbying national government institutions as the representative of community concessions, has contributed to the development of alliances between conservation authorities, community

Table 2
Major ACOFOP actions and their outcomes

Date	Major policy issues	ACOFOP actions	Achievements
1998	Establishment of community concession system in the MBR	Led contract negotiation process Promoted formal legalisation of community organisations Capacitated member organisations through workshops and trainings Channelled technical, organisational and legal assistance to protect community interests during negotiations	Government allocated 12 community concessions about 375,000 ha
1998	Legal norms concerning NGO accompaniment and NTFP production	Challenged the provision that recognises NGOs as the legally designated technical assistance providers and required co-signees for valid contracts Strengthened the bargaining power of community organisations to determine which external organisations would assist them	Successful; the original norms (1994) that required NGOs for accompaniment was changed (1998) and the contracts allowed an integrated management approach for community concessions permitting them to extract NTFPs under a management plan
1998	Expansion of petroleum concessions	Conducted media advocacy to bring lessons of community organisations in Peten through press releases, TV, and radio spots	Partially successful; petroleum concessions were banned, but a recent law (2009) on petroleum creates new incentives
2005	Legal actions against concessionaires exclusion rights (expansion of Mirador Basin Project)	Established legal action against a presidential decree that supported the expansion of the Mirador Basin Project Mediated and supported community concession organisations in their negotiations with the project promoters Established strategic alliances with other actors including government officials, NGO representatives, and cooperatives	The expansion of the Mirador Basin Project was outlawed but further pressure from private investors is taking place at the community concession level
2005	Regional Development Plan for Peten (4 BALAM)	Represent communities in the multi-stakeholder table for the development of the Mirador Park Facilitated dialogue to secure benefits from the development project	Partially successful; while communities are active participants, their role in decision-making concerning the project is still weak

Source: Monterroso 2007

concessionaires, the timber industry, and the local government (Monterroso and Barry 2009). In fact, the success of the community concession experience has become a useful example for many other community initiatives in Guatemala and beyond. A variety of outcomes have been attributed to ACOFOP (Barry and Monterroso 2008; Monterroso and Barry 2009). ACOFOP secured usufruct and management rights over forest products for at least 25 years with the possibility of renewal. It improved local governance systems, based on an expanded set of rights of access, use, and decision-making over natural resources. The concession organisations significantly increased income-generating and employment opportunities for member communities. ACOFOP lobbied for the acceptance by local banks of annual timber management plans as collateral, allowing community concession organisations to apply for credit. Also, ACOFOP members have exercised greater control over illegal logging and fire to maintain forest cover. Finally, by integrating dispersed local organisations into a single representative body, it strengthened community voices and ensured the exclusive rights of these communities.

However, while ACOFOP has been successful in many respects, it is facing five major challenges. First, it is under intense pressure from member communities for technical support to comply with criteria and standards for contracts, such as certification standards, as well as assistance accessing suitable markets for forest products. Second, ACOFOP has to provide effective leadership to maintain community rights against competing claims, for example, increased demands for land from peasant communities. Third, they must counter the lack of political will of the government to fully support their rights by reaching out to other constituencies and building alliances. ACOFOP has had to act as a vigilant watchdog to protect and advance the tenure rights of its member organisations. Fourth, ACOFOP needs to maintain its legitimacy and credibility among its members by assuring democratic representation and increased accountability, which represent major institutional challenges (Monterroso and Barry 2009). Finally, ACOFOP must balance its political and economic roles, as these roles change constantly. ACOFOP also strives to manage issues of representation, equity and legitimacy (Taylor 2010).

SECONDARY LEVEL ORGANISATIONS AS EMERGING ACTORS IN DEMOCRATISING FOREST GOVERNANCE

The above cases focused on two important aspects of secondary level organisations—their emergence and growth, and their strategic actions to democratise forest governance. In this section we will synthesise these experiences to draw lessons and discuss the implications of how secondary level organisations contribute to forest governance.

Emergence and growth of secondary level organisations

The two cases discussed illustrate at least four factors that

supported the emergence and growth of secondary level organisations. First, they responded to perceived threats to existing access to valuable resources that acted as a catalyst and forced the community groups to unite and develop networks, federations and alliances. By uniting they increased their access to critical information, amplified the voices of members, and increased their bargaining power and their capacity to hold powerful authorities responsible. Forest communities in the Petén defended their rights when they saw their interests at risk due to the establishment of MBR. As they found their rights restricted and then learned that the size of the concessions was not adequate, they began networking and organising into an association of community organisations to defend and expand their tenure rights. Groups of communities launched these movements when they realised that they faced a common threat to their collective livelihood interests.

FECOFUN developed in response to the perception that CFUGs were being treated simply as passive recipients as the government and donors expanded community forestry across the country. They had almost no say in the way the program was being launched. This secondary level organisation emerged because collective action by grassroots community groups was inadequate, particularly due to complex socio-political dynamics caused by competing interests, complex negotiations, and rule-making processes beyond the capacity of local communities. Community groups sought to develop their networks to engage with powerful actors in distant state entities, markets, or international development agencies. In particular, Nepal's CFUGs sought to organise and consolidate their voices to influence the institutional practices of the government forest authority.

Second, in both cases political transitions towards more democratic, participatory, and accountable political governance provided spaces for the emergence of these secondary level organisations. In Guatemala, this period was marked by the end of the civil war, the return of displaced citizens, and the development of policies that allowed forest communities to establish, consolidate, and institutionalise ACOFOP. Similarly, in Nepal a new multiparty parliamentary political system provided an opening for the resurgence of grassroots organisations and civic actions that contributed to the establishment of FECOFUN. Previously in Nepal, forming such community organisations, particularly building national networks, would have been almost impossible in the autocratic political regime that existed before 1990. Moreover, alliances with other civic groups and media were possible only due to the newly established liberal polity in Nepal.

Third, the role of grassroots leaders remained crucial in the development of these organisations. These leaders emerged either from grassroots movements for stronger community rights over natural resources or from citizen's political movements for greater freedom. For example, many activists who fought for greater political freedom in Nepal later joined citizen's networks and provided leadership to FECOFUN. The leaders devoted their time, efforts, skill, social capital, and political connections to nurture, strengthen,

and expand the organisations. The leaders had been able to bring diverse community groups under a single umbrella. They strategically linked the forest rights movements to wider citizens' movements and kept a high profile in the power corridors of government ministries. The leaders acted as 'issue entrepreneurs' through effective articulation of grassroots interests with national interests. They identified and defined grievances, developed a group identity, devised strategies, and mobilised the masses, often taking advantage of political opportunities.

Fourth, sympathetic financial and technical support from aid agencies has been instrumental at key points. Such support helped the community organisations enhance their capacity; increase interaction among members; coordinate their actions; and expand their networks at the sub-national, national, and even international levels. For example, these organisations have developed functional collaborations with many international networks, including the Coordinating Association of Indigenous and Community Agroforestry (Asociación de Comunidades Indígenas y Campesinas de Centro América de Forestería Comunitaria; ACICAFOC) in Central America, the Global Alliance of Community Forestry (GACF), and the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

The two cases illustrate that the emergence of social movements largely depends on the political opportunities that may facilitate or inhibit collective action. As social movements, these secondary level organisations emerged out of political opportunities, which were then expanded by the movements themselves, creating further opportunities for new movements. These cases demonstrate that secondary level organisations flourish in a relatively liberal political regime where basic citizenry rights are respected and free media function. Similarly, these cases also confirm that the greater the spatial and functional decentralisation of a given political system the more effective will be the social movements (Zald and McCarthy 1987). For example, FECOFUN would not have existed without the Nepalese government's community forestry program. The decentralised forestry program allowed more spaces for community initiatives, leading to diverse local groups, and eventually secondary level organisations such as networks, cooperatives, and alliances emerged and prospered. These secondary level organisations emerged as forest-based social movements. For example, it has been observed that forest-based social movements frequently emerge in a situation with minimal state presence, where local communities develop a common understanding of the threat to their collective livelihoods interests (Cronkleton et al. 2008).

Strategic actions to democratise forest governance

The secondary level organisations adopt diverse strategies to advance their agenda of promoting community rights and democratising forest governance. FECOFUN and ACOFOP mobilised their constituent community groups' existing networks, social capital, and external support to exert substantive political pressure for recognising community

rights. We identify four major strategies—building institutional and technical capacity of constituent members; assuring that local interests influenced public discourse on forest and environmental management; challenging government decisions that did not respond to local interests through mass mobilisation; and constructively engaging with government agencies to assure that local rights were respected by forest policies and institutions.

After their formation, these secondary level organisations provide constituent groups training, institutional support, critical information, and linkages with government agencies and the market. FECOFUN and ACOFOP have launched massive training, exchange and peer learning, and other empowerment tools to build the capacity of their member organisations. Their strategies often blend technical 'know-how' and political empowerment. The technical aspects include assistance with learning silvicultural practices, enterprise development, and organisational management. The building of political capacity includes increasing policy and legal awareness, improving leadership skills, and organising campaigns and networking initiatives. Their capacity building also includes practicing more democratic and inclusive governance within the organisations themselves.

The secondary level organisations play an important role in influencing public discourse by inserting the views and needs of their constituents into the national debate related to the governance of natural resources. The secondary level organisations highlighted success stories of community management, exposed the weakness of state management, mobilised media to disseminate their messages, and capitalised on international civil society networks and rights movements in support of their campaign. Although these organisations have appeared under decentralised and participatory policies, they have led the struggle to translate newly gained rights over forest resources into everyday practice. This is particularly true where the state agencies have attempted to undermine the spirit of the original policies. The forest authorities in Nepal often interpret the community forestry program from an instrumental and functionalist viewpoint that it is about ensuring local participation in forest conservation. FECOFUN, however, has promoted a counter-interpretation, that community forestry is about recognising people's fundamental rights to their natural resource base and about promoting their autonomy in managing those resources. Similarly, ACOFOP has been able to argue that enhancing local livelihoods through community concessions can contribute to the broader conservation agenda in and around the MBR. Previously, conservation organisations conceived the conservation program narrowly and attempted to exclude local people. In this way the secondary level organisations were able to establish and promote new environmental discourses and policies that have gradually recognised community rights around forest management. Even the conservation organisations have now asserted that community-based management could also enhance biodiversity (Bray et al. 2008).

Resistance activities are one of the major strategies that secondary level organisations adopt when they perceive that

community rights are threatened or their voices are not heard. (see Table 1 and Table 2 for a list of political campaigns and actions adopted by FECOFUN and ACOFOP). In fact, the mass based political power of these organisations has often acted as a deterrent against any government decisions that would undermine community rights. The secondary level organisations provide leadership for the collective expression of a community agenda, usually by mobilising their cadres across large regions through demonstrations to defend their interests.

FECOFUN and ACOFOP have also mounted legal defence strategies if regulations protecting community rights are violated. They have gone to court to defend their cases, representing the interests of communities, and defending their rights by challenging transgressions by other actors including the state. FECOFUN, for example, has fought several court cases on behalf of CFUGs. Similarly, in Guatemala, ACOFOP challenged policy decisions that undermined communities' interests, and played a major role in channelling community concessionaires' demands. As the case study shows, ACOFOP was able to increase the size of the concessions and expand the bundle of rights allocated under the concession contracts through its persistent resistance and constructive engagement. Similarly, it has been able to remove the mandatory provision that management plans and other activities be monitored and certified by NGOs.

In these cases, the secondary level organisations (as compared to local community organisations) were able to interact with government and market actors at higher levels. They thus create new spaces of negotiation at the intermediate level, effectively becoming intermediaries. With these expanding arenas, the traditional unequal relations of power between authorities and communities are beginning to crumble and new configurations of power have emerged. For example, government officials and FECOFUN leaders now frequently sit together in international workshops and applaud community forestry, illustrating that their relation has taken on a different form despite the level of conflict at home. These encounters serve as alternative channels of communication and conflict resolution. Similarly, ACOFOP's growing relation with donor

agencies and international alliances has raised its status in the national policy process. Because secondary level organisations are effective in mobilising popular resistance and can draw on broad alliances, they have increased their influence to contend for power (Tilly 1978: 78).

Secondary level organisations bring another level of agency to the tenure reform process, promoting community perspectives and interests through constructive engagement in national policy making. Conventional, state-led, tenure-reform processes originate at the central level and are implemented through the state bureaucracy, largely as a top-down approach in which local communities are treated as passive recipients. In recent years, the secondary organisations have benefitted from the growing culture of multi-stakeholder policy processes. Government agencies and international aid agencies alike have begun to invite these secondary organisations as permanent stakeholders in formulating any major policy, plan, or program. Consequently, they have become key actors in policy forums concerning forests and natural resources governance—FECOFUN has become an active member of multi-stakeholder policy forums in Nepal, and ACOFOP has become a member of the National Council of Protected Areas in Guatemala.

Table 3 provides a summary of the different strategies and their impacts on democratising forest governance or strengthening community rights.

Despite the achievements, the secondary level organisations have been facing three major challenges. First, these networks have to transform themselves constantly to keep pace of the changing context, in order to adequately meet the expectations of their members and stakeholders. They are facing demands to provide technical and institutional support to member organisations, which are required to meet increasingly tough standards and criteria. Both FECOFUN and ACOFOP face major challenges to build the capacity of their member organisations to satisfy the market and meet government requirements.

Second, these organisations must find a delicate balance between the management and production related technical aspects such as standards, silviculture practices, enterprise organisation, market information, and negotiation skills on the

Table 3
Strategies and impacts of secondary level organisations

Major strategies	Associated activities	Governance outcomes
Building institutional and technical capacity of the constituent community groups	Help expand the groups, forest management and enterprise operation skills, legal awareness, leadership capacity, networking, and internal group governance	Enhance performance and effectiveness of community groups, institutional strength, and livelihood benefits
Influence environmental discourses that provide legitimacy and voice to community interests	Highlight community success as a powerful critique of government failure in resource management; produce and communicate counter-narrative to dominant views of community management and conservation	Public support towards greater community rights and decentralised, community-based management of forests
Challenge government decisions	Street protest, mass meeting, media campaign, lobby with political and bureaucratic leaders, public litigation, non-cooperation	Top down policies that undermine community rights are opposed, and are not promulgated in many cases, responsive and accountable decisions from the state and private agencies
Constructive engagement in policy process	Actively participate, provide critical inputs, and influence the multi-stakeholder bodies, national policy forums	Progressive, people-oriented policies are formulated and introduced

one hand, and ensuring community rights and autonomy on the other. There is internal conflict regarding priorities within the organisations. Focusing too much on technical production aspects would bring them close to being just ordinary NGOs and therefore make it difficult to rationalise the presence of the federation. At the other extreme, narrowly focusing on political advocacy may ignore the many pressing needs of the community institutions in their everyday operations.

Third, when the secondary level organisations get involved in wider issues of decentralisation, fair trade, and community autonomy at regional and global levels, they tend to ignore many important issues at home. Sometimes there are trade-offs between the global campaign and the local agenda. For example, when FECOFUN or ACOFOP leaders are involved in the negotiation of regional and global agendas regarding governance reform and community rights, not enough attention can be paid to local agendas of tenure security, livelihoods, equity, and internal democracy. This is particularly true in internally differentiated societies where such secondary organisations tend to be led by more privileged social groups. Although these organisations have made conscious efforts to address many of these internal governance issues, there are still large gaps between the organisational rhetoric and everyday institutional practice. Moreover, as argued by Ribot et al. (2008), the institutional plurality created at local levels by such influential networks has tended to undermine local government bodies, thus in some ways weakening grassroots democracy.

LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of these two forest secondary level organisations suggests that, in these processes, the secondary level organisations have played a key role in scaling up collective action, facilitating the exchange and flow of information, challenging existing inequality of power structures, and gaining political strength in defending their interests. Consequently, these secondary level organisations have become important forces in improving forest governance by deepening, sustaining, and institutionalising the local communities' role, and giving voice and power to locals in forest governance.

The secondary level organisations contribute to the advancement of community forestry by building the capacity of community organisations to influence external changes. Consolidating as secondary level organisations allowed the two groups studied to confront more powerful external interests that were attempting to take advantage of forest tenure reforms, as well as to defend their exclusion rights by building political alliances. This capacity is essential, if they are to enjoy tenure security over the long term. Additionally, these organisations play an important role in the process of acquiring and maintaining the legitimacy of tenure reform efforts (Barry and Monterroso This issue). ACOFOP creates new opportunities for advocacy for grassroots organisations at the regional and national level.

Secondary level organisations also assume the role of facilitating, coordinating, and promoting the interests of their

primary organisations, while the primary level organisations are directly involved in everyday management of their resources. The cases studied illustrate situations in which forest-dependent people have learned to collaborate beyond their home communities, and are no longer satisfied with being passive recipients of government programs for forest development. These collective actors have emerged as important forces promoting participatory and inclusive decision-making, and therefore in democratising forest governance.

The secondary level organisations also have been able to sustain, deepen, and institutionalise decentralisation policies and practices by challenging political power structures, influencing state policies, and actively engaging with market institutions. All these suggest that the secondary level organisations have become important actors in shaping forest policy process, particularly in enhancing tenure security and livelihood benefits for forest communities.

The cases discussed in this paper provided greater understanding not only of how such organisational mechanisms work, but also what results they produce for members. They illustrate that secondary organisations are able to interact with government and market actors at higher levels where local community organisations have little access.

Rural forest-dependent people form secondary level organisations when they perceive that community rights are threatened. However, they face major challenges. These networks have to transform themselves continuously to confront changing conditions so that they can adequately meet the expectations of their constituencies. Another important challenge is that these organisations must find a balance between the economic and production demands of members on one hand and political advocacy and negotiation on the other to ensure community rights and autonomy. Also, when the secondary organisations get involved in wider issues of decentralisation, fair trade, and community autonomy at regional and global levels, they may lose track of many important issues at home.

Notes

1. These movements have democratised forest governance because they have assured that the local communities around forest areas have been able to voice their interests and have influenced processes that determine their rights to, and control over, forest resources.
2. The research, undertaken by CIFOR, was carried out during 2006–2008 in Brazil, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cameroon, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Philippines, and India.
3. The average sizes of community forests in Nepal is 85 ha.
4. FECOFUN was formally registered as a non-governmental organisation in September 1995.

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