

Dechen Choden 2013: Assessing the Value of Community Forests in Improving the Rural Livelihood in Punakha District, Bhutan. Master of Science (Agricultural Economics), Major Field: Agricultural Economics, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. Thesis Advisor: Assistant Professor Penporn Janekarnkij, Ph.D. 66 pages.

The study investigates the participation of community forest management groups in conservation and community forest protection activities. This study also evaluates the contribution of participatory community forest management to livelihood improvement of rural households in the study area. Four community forests located in Punakha, western Bhutan were selected as the district has one of the oldest and second highest numbers of CFs approved. These include Waku Damchi, Lumsum, Yargay and Mangizingkha, all established in 2005. Data were collected from the total 180 member households of the community forests. Descriptive analysis using market price technique for valuation was employed. The community forest management groups were given rights to manage the community forest in their own areas. The benefits derived from the community forest were distributed among members both in-kind and cash, mainly for subsistence. There are strong supports from forest community members for forest conservation and protection activities. The contribution from forest resources for each household per annum was Nu.63,024 in Waku Damchi, Nu. 10,923 in Lumsum and Nu. 11,583 in Mangizinkha. Households in Yargay received no income from forest resource because it is still at the stage of plantation. On average, forest resources from the first three community forests contributed only 0.3% of the total household income, which is relatively low compared to that of neighboring countries. The study concludes that there is a policy challenge in terms of meeting both the goals of environmental sustainability and poverty reduction at the same time. The policymakers should improve the restriction on the use of forest resources and explore opportunities to capture more benefits from them, alongside the environmental sustainability outcome. The government should continue support for conservation and promote wider participation through higher education and awareness campaigns.

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Thesis Advisor's signature

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