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Community-Driven Development Country Profile

NEPAL

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This country brief is a product of a desk review of the Nepal experience in community-based development (CBD) and community-driven development (CDD).¹ Section A and B review the context and institutional/policy environment for CDD. Section C examines the CBD and CDD experience of donors and development institutions, except ADB. Section D reviews ADB's CBD experience from 2000 until the present. The last section looks at the prospects of using CDD in Nepal and identifies issues most likely to affect the application or scaling up of CDD.

CDD is defined as “an approach that gives control over planning decisions and investment resources over local development projects to community groups.”² It gives communities control over decisions and resources in designing, procuring, and implementing small community subprojects. A common element of CDD and CBD is the focus of their operations in communities. CDD approaches, however, generally provide communities more roles and responsibilities. In this review, focus is given to projects that provide bigger roles to communities, such as participation in selection and prioritization of subprojects, resource and fund management, execution or implementation and procurement for subprojects, and oversight or monitoring of subproject implementation.

In determining whether projects are CDD, the review uses its defining elements³ as enumerated in a previous ADB study.⁴

A. Country Context

Nepal is the poorest country in South Asia, with an annual per capita gross domestic product of \$290 in 2006⁵ and poverty incidence of 31% in 2006.⁶ Rural poverty is worse (35%) than urban (10%).⁷ However, between 1996 and 2004, the country achieved significant progress in reducing poverty, with its incidence declining from 42% to 31%. This decline, however, was uneven, magnifying gender, ethnic, and geographic inequalities—factors that have been continually cited as having perpetrated the decade-long armed conflict. Poverty and underdevelopment in Nepal are largely due to poor economic growth, exacerbated by this conflict.

In November 2006, a peace agreement was forged between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M).⁸ The agreement ended the decade-long conflict that devastated Nepal's development by causing damage to development infrastructures, low private investment, development expenditure slowdown, weakened

¹ This review's coverage is limited to available literature from Internet searches and some interviews with in-country development workers. It does not present a comprehensive picture of CDD, CBD, or associated participation in Nepal.

² World Bank. 2008. *Community Driven Development*. Available: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTCDD/0..menuPK:430167~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:430161,00.html>

³ These defining elements are: community focus, community participation in planning and decision-making, community control of resources, community participation in the implementation of subprojects, and participatory monitoring and evaluation.

⁴ Asian Development Bank. 2006. *A Review of Community-Driven Development and Its Application to the Asian Development Bank*. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Participation/Review-CDD-Application-ADB.pdf

⁵ United Nations Statistics Division. 2008. *Social Indicators*. Available: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/inc-eco.htm>

⁶ World Bank. 2008. *Nepal at a Glance*. Available: http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/npl_aag.pdf

⁷ Central Bureau of Statistics. 2005. *Poverty Trends in Nepal (1995–1996 and 2003–2004)*. Available: [www.worldbank.org/html/prdph/lsm/country/nepal2/docs/Nepal%20Poverty%20Trends%20\(for%20Poverty%20Assessment\).pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/html/prdph/lsm/country/nepal2/docs/Nepal%20Poverty%20Trends%20(for%20Poverty%20Assessment).pdf)

⁸ A mass uprising throughout the country—led by the SPA and backed by the CPN-M—compelled the monarchy to relinquish state powers and restore the lower house of Parliament in early 2006.

grassroots service delivery, trade disruption, increased migration, and higher demand for services in urban and semi-urban areas.

Despite the peace agreement, the challenges facing Nepal remain formidable. Progress will largely depend on sustained peace and political stability. Supporting the transition to peace and addressing the conflict's root causes will be urgent. In addition, flexibility and adaptability to changing situations will be essential.

B. The Policy and Institutional Environment for CDD

Nepal's Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007) is also its poverty reduction strategy paper.⁹ Four strategic pillars are highlighted under the plan: (i) broad-based and sustainable economic growth; (ii) improvement in access and quality of infrastructure and social and economic services in the rural areas; (iii) targeted programs for social and economic inclusion of the poor and marginalized communities, emphasizing the need for inclusive development and provision of safety measures for excluded and vulnerable groups (e.g., women, *Dalits*,¹⁰ *Janajatis*,¹¹ children, and senior citizens); and (iv) good governance to improve service delivery, efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

Decentralization. The plan recognizes the role of local bodies, community-based organizations, and nongovernment organizations in development. The fourth pillar focuses on effective program implementation and service delivery through governance reforms and decentralization.

Nepal has made major strides toward decentralization since the enactment of the Local Self-Governance Act. The decentralization policy supports bottom-up participatory planning and decision-making. Responsibilities for developing infrastructure and socioeconomic plans have been largely delegated to districts and villages, and block grants are transferred to districts and villages to support these plans.

Other initiatives have been taken to improve local governance. Citizens' charters were introduced in 75 districts, public hearings are being held for policies and projects, and measures to address complaints have been established. However, decentralization has slowed since 2002 when the tenures of elected local bodies ended. Their tenures have yet to be renewed, and elections have not yet been held.

Partner Institutions. Institutional responsibility for CDD operations is spread over different line ministries as outlined following. Three ministries have the most significant experience (in terms of length of time and number of projects handled) in implementing CBD and CDD projects. These three ministries are currently headed by representatives of the CPN-M from the current coalition government.

- (i) **Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation.** This ministry has been involved in various developments in the forestry sector. Community forestry, which began in the 1970s, is under its supervision.

⁹ Available: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/NepalPRSPJun2006.pdf>

¹⁰ Nepal's National Dalit Commission defines Dalits as communities that, by virtue of caste-based discrimination, are most backward in social, economic, educational, political, and religious spheres. Known familiarly as "untouchables", they are also deprived of human dignity and social justice.

¹¹ The *Janajati* are indigenous people who face social exclusion in Nepal on the basis of religion, language, and culture.

- (ii) **Ministry of Physical Planning and Works.** This ministry is the lead agency in at least three projects with CBD and CDD elements.¹² It is also the line ministry responsible for formulating policies and plans for the water supply sector in which community participation is common.
- (iii) **Ministry of Local Development.** Institutional responsibility for rural infrastructure lies with the Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agricultural Roads (DOLIDAR) under this ministry. DOLIDAR has accumulated significant experience in planning and implementing projects affecting different sectors. DOLIDAR is the partner executing agency in the four projects reviewed.¹³ This ministry is the logical partner for implementing projects that involve local governments due to its oversight role over district and village development councils.

Local Governments. In most cases, local governments take the lead in the implementation of CBD and CDD projects. There are 75 districts; 58 municipalities; 3,913 villages; and more than 35,000 wards in Nepal. The process of local planning under the Local Self-Governance Act is spearheaded by the district development councils in consultation with the village development councils. Village development councils consult ward committees for their inputs to the plans. Nepal's local governments, however, have weak planning and technical capacities, owing to the conflict and the lack of mandate brought about by the tenure expiration of elected local representatives.

Parallel Mechanisms. Two semiautonomous funds have been created by the Government to focus on CDD: (i) the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), a fund board directly under the Prime Minister that undertakes community-level livelihood and community infrastructure projects; and (ii) the Water Fund, a board under the leadership of the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works that provides resources to community-based water supply and sanitation projects.

Both projects have been very successful in meeting their objectives. The PAF has been able to disburse funds ahead of schedule and has recently been extended. It has also been institutionalized into a law.¹⁴ There are also plans to legislate the formal existence of the Water Fund.

C. CBD and CDD in Nepal

Community-based projects have been among the most resilient and successful interventions in Nepal even during the conflict. There is no scarcity of experience with the use of community participation in Nepal. Community involvement has taken on different forms such as information sharing, consultation, collaboration, and community empowerment, which the following examples detail.

Community Forestry Projects. The 1990s ushered in significant development of community participation in forest management.¹⁵ Forest policies and practices that emerged were widely

¹² ADB's Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Project and Road Network Development Project. The World Bank's Water Fund is under this ministry as well.

¹³ The Finnish International Development Agency's Water Supply Management Project, United Nations Development Programme's Decentralized Financing and Development Project, the Asian Development Bank's Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project, and World Bank's Rural Access Improvement and Decentralization Project.

¹⁴ PAF Act 2060.

¹⁵ The Eighth Five-Year Plan of Nepal introduced peoples' participation in community forestry through forest users' groups.

recognized as good practices of community empowerment and participation. Community forest management was entrusted to community users' groups that were empowered to plan and make decisions on the management and utilization of resources. These groups mobilized their own resources, and the Government provided a small subsidy for them to undertake almost all community forest development activities. It is estimated that there are close to 1.3 million households involved in community forestry programs in Nepal, which accounts for 35% of rural and 29% of all households.¹⁶ The World Bank, as well as several other bilateral aid agencies provides support to the Government in community forestry through various projects.

Water Supply Projects. Various donors, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Government of Finland have been financing community-based approaches in rural water supply and sanitation. A key design feature of most of these projects is the use of community users' groups as agents of development by empowering them to make decisions on and to implement small water supply and sanitation projects. These projects normally promote the active participation of communities in all stages of planning and decision-making, including construction, management, and monitoring of subprojects. In several projects reviewed, funds are directly channeled to these groups so they can manage and be directly involved in the procurement and disbursement of funds.

Multisectoral Projects. Community-based approaches have also been used in multisectoral, open menu projects financed by development agencies. Currently in its second phase is the PAF funded by the World Bank. The Decentralized Financing and Development Project funded by the Government of Norway and UNDP is also using community planning to identify and construct subprojects in some of Nepal's the poorest areas. ADB, with the participation of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, is currently implementing the Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project that provides a supplementary grant allowing communities to plan and prioritize subprojects that best meet their needs through a participatory planning approach. In many of these projects, community groups are provided technical and direct financial support to implement their chosen subprojects.

World Bank's CDD Projects. The World Bank is among the donors that have the greatest support for CDD and CBD. Its projects include the Rural Access Improvement and Decentralization Project, a transport sector project that allows communities to plan and design community infrastructure projects; the Community School Support Project, an education sector project that provides block grants to support communities in taking over the management of government-funded schools; and the Nepal Irrigation Sector Project, providing support to the strengthening of a water users' association for farmer-managed irrigation systems. These projects have also shown remarkable success despite the political and armed conflict.

Among the World Bank's successful CDD operations in Nepal is the PAF. The PAF II has recently been approved due to PAF I's success in meeting its objectives and disbursing project funds 2 years ahead of schedule. Under the PAF, communities procure and manage resources after proposing subprojects that they deem most necessary. Subprojects enjoy a greater degree of ownership among project beneficiaries.

The PAF focuses on providing income generation and small infrastructure subprojects to communities. Studies have shown an increase in household incomes by 10–12% for income-

¹⁶ Wagley, M. and H. Ojha. 2002. Analysing Participatory Trends in Nepal's Community Forestry. *Policy Trend Report 2002*: 122–142.

generating subprojects and rates of return reaching up to 70% for small infrastructure subprojects.¹⁷

The PAF also reaches out to traditionally excluded peoples. Project records show a high level of involvement of Dalits and Janajatis benefiting from the subprojects. Women account for one third of those occupying leadership positions in community organizations established under the project.

Additionally, the World Bank's Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project focuses on community-managed water and sanitation projects and gives communities control over decisions on subprojects and resources. Communities are empowered to make decisions about their own water and sanitation schemes, a key difference from traditional water supply and sanitation projects. Its subprojects have higher sustainability compared to non-CDD water supply and sanitation projects. The higher sustainability is attributed to strong community ownership and community operation and maintenance of the subprojects after construction. The project is being run by a fund board, a semi-independent entity under the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works.

Table 1 illustrates the major design features of these two World Bank projects.

Table 1: CDD Features of World Bank Projects in Nepal

Project Name	Amount (million \$)	Remarks	CDD Features				Monitoring and Evaluation
			Community Focus	Planning and Decision Making	Resource Control	Implementation	
Poverty Alleviation Fund I and II	40.00	Communities identify their needs and organize themselves for project implementation. Fund is directly channeled to community accounts. Projects are screened according to their feasibility by the PAF Board.	Yes	Decision making is with PAF Board	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project I and II	43.60	Communities make informed decisions about the schemes and operate them. A sanitation revolving fund is set up for households' access. Community accounts are used for subproject expenses.	Yes	Decision making is with Water Fund	Yes	Yes	Yes

D. ADB and CDD in Nepal

A review of ADB's portfolio from 2001–2006 shows that it has provided support to several loan projects with CBD or CDD features. The projects, worth more than \$100 million, are across several sectors such as water and sanitation, agriculture and rural development, rural infrastructure, and livelihood. All these projects have a community focus and allow communities to propose and partly design their subprojects. Decision-making and control of resources, however, remain with district-level governments. In one project (Decentralized Rural

¹⁷ PAF. Preliminary Results of the Study on Rates of Return and Impact of PAF on Incomes.

Infrastructure and Livelihood Project), community audits are used to monitor and evaluate project progress.

Community Livestock Development Project. This project provides support to the financing of livestock enterprises using participatory planning processes. Communities are mobilized to access support from the funds provided by the loan. The project provides a menu of possible interventions from which the communities may choose. Training is provided to support the activities chosen by communities. However, decisions on the approval of the projects chosen, as well as fund control and management, belong to the project management office and the local governments.

Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project. This project's infrastructure component provides for two financing windows—one for district-level infrastructure and another for community-level infrastructure. Community infrastructure projects are chosen and proposed by communities using participatory approaches. The project uses an open menu and introduces community audits as means of monitoring project progress.

Community Managed Irrigated Agriculture Sector Project. This project provides financing for irrigation and associated infrastructure based on subproject implementation plans and designs prepared by water users' associations. These associations participate actively in monitoring implementation of the plans. Decision-making belongs to the district government, with technical advice of project consultants.

Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Project. This project provides communities with a menu of subprojects from which they can choose. Water users' operating accounts are established for subproject financing and for operation and maintenance costs. Subproject schemes are subject to a district development committee list of priorities and approval.

Road Network Development Project. This project seeks to improve and maintain roads and provide better access to rural communities through community-identified subprojects. Building groups are organized from community members. The choice of subprojects is dependent on the approval of the district government.

Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Project. This project provides support for the empowerment of women's groups through participatory selection of investments in microenterprise, training, and community infrastructure. A community infrastructure fund is established under the management of the district project office.

Secondary Education Support. This project aims to improve the quality of secondary education in Nepal by upgrading the physical infrastructure of schools and enhancing teacher capabilities through training, improved curriculum, and development of effective instruction materials. Block grants are provided to school management committees composed of parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Table 2: CDD Features of ADB Nepal Projects

Approval	Project Name	Amount (million \$)	Remarks	CDD Features				
				Community Focus	Planning and Decision Making	Resource Control	Implementation	Monitoring and Evaluation
November 2001	Road Network Development Project	46.00	Communities identify needs and organize building groups to participate in construction.	Yes	Decision-making is with project management unit and local government.	No	Yes	No
September 2002	Secondary Education Support Project	30.00	Communities and parents are part of school management committees that submit school improvement plans and manage block grants.	Yes	Involving the parents and community in management and planning of education is a cornerstone of the project design.	Yes	No	No
December 2003	Community Livestock Development Project	20.00	Financing of livestock projects identified through participatory planning. Decisions on the approval of the projects and fund control belong to the project management office and local governments.	Yes	Decision-making is with project management unit and local government.	No	Yes	No
September 2003	Community Based Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project	24.00	Water users' committees lead subproject selection, design, and implementation. Water committees operating account used.	Yes	Decision-making is with district government.	Water users' account	Yes	No
November 2004	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Project	10.00	Provides for participation in selection of types of subprojects. Community fund established to finance	Yes	Decision-making rests with district government and project manage-	No	Yes	Yes

Approval	Project Name	Amount (million \$)	Remarks	Community Focus	CDD Features			
					Planning and Decision Making	Resource Control	Implementation	Monitoring and Evaluation
October 2004	Community Managed Irrigated Agriculture Sector Project	20.00	investments. Involvement of women's groups in monitoring and evaluation. Water users' association leads planning and designing subprojects with technical help from nongovernment organizations. District government approves subprojects. Community monitoring and evaluation used.	Yes	ment office Decision-making rests with district government.	No	Yes	Yes
September 2004	Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project	40.00	Community participation in subproject selection and preparation. Local government approves subprojects based on its priorities. Community audits used.	Yes	Decision making rests with project management unit and district government.	No, but uses district development fund to channel funds from national to local governments.	Yes	Yes

Project Design Features. All the reviewed projects are sector loans. Four of the six are in the agriculture and natural resources sector while the rest are in water supply and sanitation and transport. Three themes are common among the six projects: (i) gender and development (four projects), (ii) inclusive social development (two projects), (iii) and economic growth (four projects). Five of the six allow community participation in procurement, in addition to local competitive bidding and international shopping. Packages under the community procurement arrangement range from \$10,000 to \$30,000. In three of the six projects, a fund is created from which expenditures for community infrastructure may be charged. In three of the six projects, imprest subaccounts at the district level are created to move funds faster to districts and users' groups.

E. CDD Prospects in Nepal

Community-based approaches in Nepal have been resilient even during the conflict and have shown successful results in achieving poverty reduction and development. Success stories on how communities managed to address development problems and poverty abound (e.g.,

forestry user groups, women's groups, water users' groups, builders' groups, and community management of schools). Community approaches offer Nepal great potential in the following ways.

- (i) **Providing quick and visible gains from peace.** The peace dividend expected by many has not yet materialized. Even without massive destruction, the conflict's damage to infrastructure will strain the already-stretched government budget. Village development committee offices, post offices, bridges, roads, and schools suffered damage or neglect during the conflict and must be rebuilt. Livelihood support for combatants staying in cantonments is also a major need. CDD is a quick disbursing and effective mechanism in post-conflict settings.
- (ii) **Ensuring inclusion and fair representation of marginalized groups.** Lack of inclusion and say are among commonly cited causes of the conflict. A major hallmark of the CDD approach is differentiated levels of facilitation that encourage participation in decision-making bodies, especially that of the traditionally and historically excluded. This also helps to address the root causes of the conflict.
- (iii) **Reestablishing the Government's presence.** Especially in remote districts, among the Government's priority agenda is the reestablishment of district and village development and ward committees to relink the Government and the people. A CDD approach can also help to stimulate decentralization by reviving local planning at the lowest level of the wards and settlements, which, in turn, can feed into village- and district-level plan development. It will also build on what has been successful in the past and strengthen accountability mechanisms that the Government has started to put in place.
- (iv) **Integrating greater transparency and social accountability.** The perception of corruption in government projects is widespread. Building transparency and accountability measures will help build authorities' credibility. These measures can take various forms such as community monitoring, community audits, public reporting, and community billboards on project progress.

Among the areas that can also be explored as possible CDD activities are:

- (i) **Project-level donor information and resource sharing.** Despite efforts at donor harmonization and coordination, cooperation is still weak in Nepal. The experience of donor coordination in CDD and CBD in countries with numerous bilateral and multilateral donors, each implementing CDD and CBD projects with different institutional arrangements and procedures, tends to contribute to this weakness. At present, donor cooperation seems limited to individual project cofinancing arrangements, e.g., ADB's Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project. While limited, project-level cooperation will be a good starting point in sharing CDD and CBD experiences, approaches, and resources. Several ongoing CDD and CBD projects are cofinanced by the World Bank, ADB, the Swiss Agency Development Cooperation, the DFID, and the Finnish International Development Agency. There is a huge potential for these donors in forming a core group on community participation, decentralization, and CBD—even at the project level—to share experiences.
- (ii) **National-level donor coordination for decentralization.** The overall forum for aid coordination in Nepal is the Nepal Development Forum (NDF). The NDF brings together the Government and its partners to discuss and exchange views on development priorities, modalities, and future assistance. Among its

objectives is to improve the effectiveness of development assistance efforts and to encourage greater harmonization of programs and policies. The last NDF meeting was held in 2004. Multilateral and bilateral development agencies have organized into thematic groups that meet regularly to exchange information and lessons learned. A working group on CDD and CBD and decentralization, looking into replication of the success of past CDD and CBD operations, may be a future option.

- (iii) **A new decentralization act.** Among the areas expected to be addressed by the new constitution and subsequent legislation are further amendments to strengthen the Local Self-Governance Act. The current law provides sufficient opening for CDD operations and is used by most associated projects as a guide to participatory, bottom-up planning. Reforms in the law should consider not eroding these openings, further strengthening the devolution toward greater transparency, and allowing greater community control of resources.
- (iv) **ADB opportunities.** Nepal recently entered into a challenging period with the overthrow of the monarchy and the signing of the peace agreement. This breakthrough is reflected in ADB's *Nepal Country Operations Business Plan (2007–2009)*. The plan recognizes the need to support the Government during the period of transition and to make adjustments in ADB's lending and nonlending programs. Several identified future projects have strong CDD potential, and three pipeline projects build on three projects already using CDD features as outlined in Table 2.¹⁸

The review of CDD and CBD projects in Nepal shows strength in the area of community focus and participation in subproject construction and implementation. Other areas in which CDD operations can be designed in upcoming projects include:

- (i) **Community-based monitoring and evaluation and grievance mechanisms.** Three of the projects reviewed use participatory mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation and as feedback mechanisms for project design improvements. Building on this area would likely be a good entry point for CDD piloting.
- (ii) **Community decision-making.** Common in all projects reviewed is the lack of power in communities to make decisions. Communities are allowed to provide inputs and recommendations in the selection and design of subprojects. However, local governments or the project management office must clear these recommendations and virtually hold all authority over selection of subprojects.
- (iii) **Direct control of resources.** Three of the projects reviewed introduce some community fund or users' fund. In all but one, however, the funds are not under the control of community groups but of project or district personnel.

In addition, possible knowledge product development can be provided through documentation of the CDD elements in the six projects identified and a review of ways to institutional bottom-up planning and CDD within the Local Self-Government Act and its proposed amendments.

F. Issues

Community Control of Funds. A major distinguishing feature of CDD projects is the control of funds by communities. Of all projects reviewed, only the PAF and UNDP's Decentralized

¹⁸ Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project II, Rural Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Sector Development Program, and Decentralized Rural Infrastructure and Livelihood Project II.

Financing Development Project transfer funds directly to community accounts. The PAF is covered by its own rules on community fund control, and the Decentralized Financing Development Project operates under DOLIDAR. More studies need to be conducted on how community control of resources can become a feature of community projects in Nepal, including the possibility of reviewing government accounting and resource transfer guidelines.

Champions. A strong sponsor within national leadership is an important condition for scaling up CDD. CDD will likely be seen as a new way of doing things for the Government and sectors of the donor community. There will always be a tendency to brush CDD aside because of perceived risks and the relative comfort of the old approach. CDD can also be perceived as a threat and as contrary to the interests of sectoral agencies that support top-down sectoral approaches, or even local leadership who wish to retain greater control over the flow of funds and decision-making processes. A national figure who acts as champion can make a big difference. Fortunately, leadership of key ministries seem very open to community approaches.

Conflict Sensitivity. An area that needs more study is how conflict sensitivity can be incorporated into community-based processes to support peace building. While CDD approaches have been proven to be effective in addressing conflict, country contexts and community dynamics will come into play when designing activities supportive of peace building.