



Book Review

Conservation and Prosperity in New Federal Nepal: Opportunities and Challenges

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The study outlined in this report is the first to examine how the edicts of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal are affecting Nepalese conservation and protected area management systems. Although the research was undertaken before the effects of new governance models were fully implemented (or even understood), analysis undertaken during periods of change is warranted. Regulatory changes by nature mandate courses of action, the outcomes of which can rarely be predicted with certainty. On this basis, studies such as this serve to both forecast and forewarn, and the lessons they contain are applicable to international as well as local contexts.

The report begins with a history of conservation in Nepal and the contributions conservation has made to national and local prosperity, the value of which is emphasised throughout. A description of the methodology follows, detailing sources which included documents, interviews/field consultations with over one hundred stakeholders (from private, public, and political, organisations and the community), and a national level workshop was conducted to present findings and get feedback from over fifty five key policy makers. In addition, eight experts were identified and recruited to review the policy document. The range and breadth of sources consulted is impressive, and it speaks to the value of such research that three international funding streams supported the research (the

Australian Government, The Asia Foundation, and the Snow Leopard Conservancy).

The authors go on to provide a detailed summary of the new legal framework and the ways in which devolution of power may affect conservation work at different levels. This aspect of the document makes it an ideal source for those wishing to gain an overview of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal in relation to conservation.

The remainder of the document outlines challenges and opportunities; in particular, the authors extol the accomplishments that community-based organisations have thus far achieved in biodiversity and natural resource management. They point out that while Nepal's new constitution aims to retain participatory and democratic natural resource management, there are reservations about how changes to power structures will affect the ability of community groups to effectively manage natural resources in ways that will meet the needs of both development and conservation. The authors emphasise the value of natural resources to both economic prosperity and for conservation.

The authors conclude that successful natural resource management can occur within the new legal framework with the proviso that collaboration occurs between government bodies and community-based organisations. They note that this will require investment in training and capacity building. A useful feature of the report is that key points

in each section are highlighted in bold, allowing easy access to those not reading the document in its entirety as well as for quick reference.

The report succeeds in its goal to highlight the opportunities and challenges faced by the Nepalese conservation sector in the wake of new legislative changes, and is timely in that laws must be amended and enacted before 4th March 2019 in order to fully implement constitutional provisions. The authors' main argument is to caution that measures taken to devolve power to provincial and local levels under the new regulatory framework may in effect undermine valuable participatory structures already in existence. They make several recommendations to safeguard the community-based organisations¹ viewed as crucial for the sustainable management of natural resources in conservation and protected areas.

The question remains how programmes will be implemented to best support natural resources to allow both (economic) development and conservation to take place. However, the seven recommendations at the end of the report provide a succinct summary of key points which offer a road map for future conservation efforts amidst the changing regulatory framework.

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¹ Community based organisations include community forest user groups, buffer zone management groups, and conservation area management groups.