Hariyo Ban Program

Internal Governance Tool 3
Participatory Governance Assessment (PGA)

Strengthening the internal governance of natural resource management groups is a cross-cutting theme across the Hariyo Ban Program components. It is very important since many rural people in Nepal are highly dependent on forests for their livelihoods and wellbeing. This includes forest resources such as firewood, clean water, building materials, fodder for livestock, and medicinal plants, as well as ecosystem services such as protection from landslides and floods. Many rural poor may hence exert the highest pressures on forests because they have no alternatives. Yet they often have little say in how forests are managed and how the benefits from sustainable forest management are distributed.

Internal governance strengthening builds the capacity of Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups, community organizations, including those in leadership positions, and increase levels of meaningful participation by women and other marginalized groups. This in turn promotes the equitable sharing of resources and other benefits. Internal governance strengthening is achieved through the use of a number of different tools specified in the Community Forestry Development Guidelines of 2009. Hariyo Ban Program uses three such tools as identified in Community Forestry Development Guidelines of 2009. They are:

Tool 1: Public Hearing and Public Auditing (PHPA)
Tool 2: Participatory Well-Being Ranking (PWBR)
Tool 3: Participatory Governance Assessment (PGA)

In Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups, different users have different needs and interests. Their access to and control over forest resources also varies depending upon their socio-economic status. In order to ensure equitable benefit sharing and meeting the interests and needs, particularly those of most marginalized groups and women, there is a need to identify users with common needs and interests. NRM groups require sound internal governance to address such issues.

The Community Forestry Development Guidelines of 2009 explain that 'strengthened good governance of the user group helps to improve the transparency and accountability of other service providers'. The guidelines go on to state that 'indicators should be identified to strengthen good governance within the group. Based on these indicators, a good governance strengthening plan should be prepared after discussion at the general assembly. For this, the spider-web diagram can also be used as a plan preparation tool' (Chapter V, article 5.2, pages 17 and 18). In view of this, and based on learning and best practice from the SAGUN program, the Hariyo Ban Program has committed to using the Participatory Governance Assessment tool.

Good Governance in Natural Resource Management
Natural resource management in Nepal is characterized by varying degrees of community involvement. The community forestry sector has made a great deal of progress in this area. Government policy recognizes Forest User Groups as independent and self-governing local organizations. Through user groups, local people are given the opportunity to participate in democratic decision-making processes that yield sustainable results for equitable community forest management. In order for user group members to use this opportunity, it is important that good governance is an integral part of local management practices. Above all, this requires equitable power sharing systems that function in a fair, transparent and participatory manner. With the application of good governance, natural resources can effectively contribute to successful poverty reduction and social inclusion initiatives in local communities.

What is Participatory Governance Assessment?
The Participatory Governance Assessment tool is used to assess good governance practices in community groups. A group of selected

participants evaluates the extent to which the decision making and management practices in a community group comply with the four 'pillars' of good governance: transparency, participation, accountability and predictability. The assessment is guided by a set of sixteen governance indicators which participants rate as very good, good, moderate or poor. Responses are recorded on a matrix and later presented visually as a spider-web diagram. Finally, a Governance Improvement Plan is formulated. In addition to ensuring that monitoring and evaluation processes are participatory, use of this tool can help to improve the overall functioning of a community group and its ability to manage natural resources in an equitable and sustainable manner.

The Participatory Governance Assessment Process

i) Preparatory Phase

Program staff and local resource partners initiate preliminary discussions with Community Forest User Groups to identify who will take part in the assessment. A time and date for the assessment meeting are agreed; executive committee members from the user group send out invitations and prepare the necessary documentation. Ideally, at least 75% of user group members should take part. Different categories of forest user should be proportionally represented with a particular focus on women, marginalized groups, and disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups. External stakeholders such as District Forest Officers, Village Development Committee Secretaries, representatives from political parties, and members of other community groups are also invited to attend the event. Members of user groups in neighbouring localities could also be invited in order to build their capacity to run similar assessments.

ii) The Assessment Phase

The facilitator explains the purpose of the Participatory Governance Assessment and the contents of the matrix. The participants discuss their evaluation of the user group's performance based on the indicators mentioned above. The facilitator records responses on the matrix. Particular note is taken of the views of women, the poor and marginalized, and people from disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups. Final ratings for each indicator should be agreed by consensus. Results are then transferred to a spider-web diagram and displayed for all to see. Participants go on to identify what the group must do in order to improve performance against each indicator. Finally, agreed action is recorded in a Governance Improvement Plan.

iii) Follow Up

Following the assessment, the Community Forest User Group should produce a report and begin discussions about possible areas of governance improvement collaboration with relevant stakeholders. In the coming months, the Executive Committee should monitor implementation of the Governance Improvement Plan and ensure that regular interactions with general members take place to assess progress. A year after the assessment, a formal review is carried out. The review meeting is attended by all user group members.

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The Hariyo Ban Program is named after the famous Nepali saying 'Hariyo Ban Nepal ko Dhan' (Healthy green forests are the wealth of Nepal). It is a five-year initiative that aims to reduce the adverse impacts of climate change and threats to biodiversity in Nepal. This will be accomplished by working with the government, communities, civil society and private sector. In particular, the Hariyo Ban Program works to empower Nepal's local communities in safeguarding the country's living heritage and adapting to climate change through sound conservation and livelihood approaches. Thus the Program emphasizes the links between people and forests and is designed to benefit nature and people in Nepal. At the heart of Hariyo Ban lie three interwoven components – biodiversity conservation, payments for ecosystem services including REDD+ and climate change adaptation. These are supported by livelihoods, governance, and gender and social inclusion as cross-cutting themes.

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