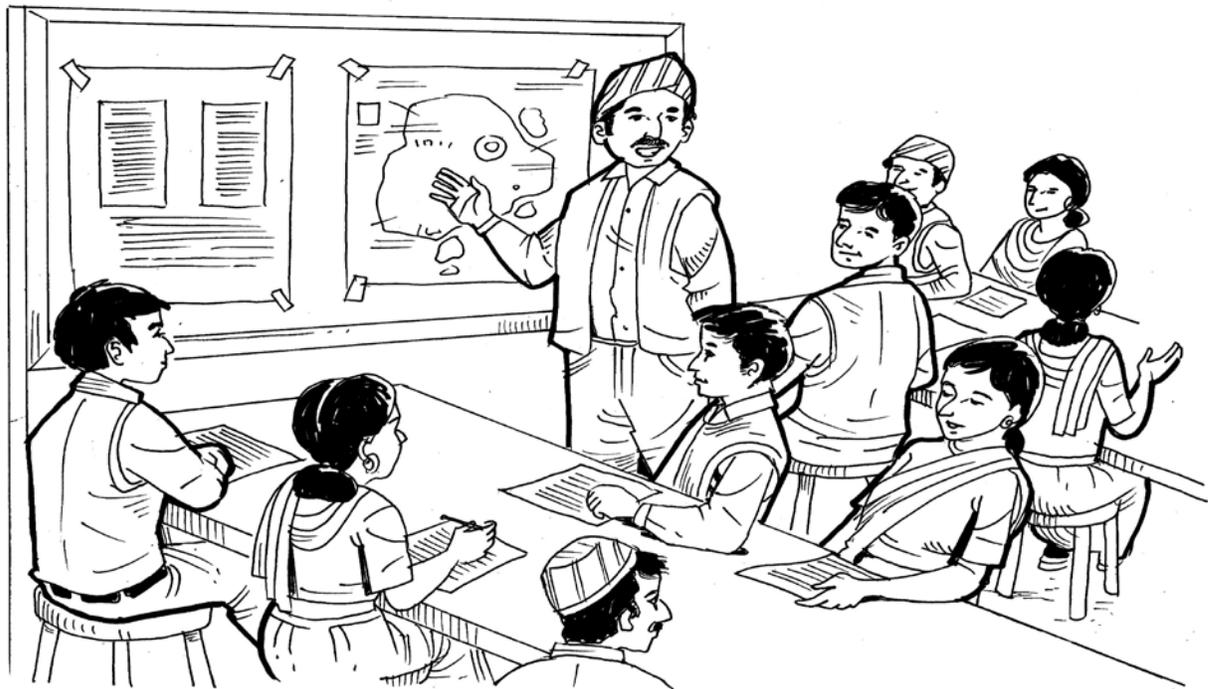


# Creating a Common Platform for Integrated Management of Natural Resources in Nepal



**T**his article is based on the analysis of results from the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) project on Resources Management of Sustainable Livelihoods. This action research followed the integrated natural resource management (INRM) principle of creating a common platform for the integrated management of natural resources.

The institutional settings for natural resource management in Nepal cannot be analyzed independently of recent changes in the national political situation and administrative organizational structure. The country was declared a democratic republic on 28 May 2008 when the monarchy system of the country that reigned for more than 200

## **Integrated natural resource management (INRM) defined**

INRM is an approach that integrates research on different types of natural resources into stakeholder-driven processes of adaptive management and innovation to improve livelihoods, agro-ecosystem resilience, agricultural productivity and environmental services at community, eco-regional, and global scales of intervention and impact (CGIAR Task Force on INRM 2001). The Task Force suggests that the strongly and rapidly evolving community-based natural resource management organizations contribute to positive policy reform—including governance and restructuring of the country—build synergy, and enhance the capacities of local organizations.

years was overthrown. Present-day discussion and debate has been revolving around what is meant by a federal system for the country.

Against that political and institutional background, this article analyzes the experience and results of the 'project process,' which led to the evolutionary formation of a common platform for INRM. The 'process of the project' offers simple and practical ideas for the management of natural resources for the country. Expediting institutional coordination for INRM at local levels can provide a timely and valuable contribution to the natural resource policies in the country.

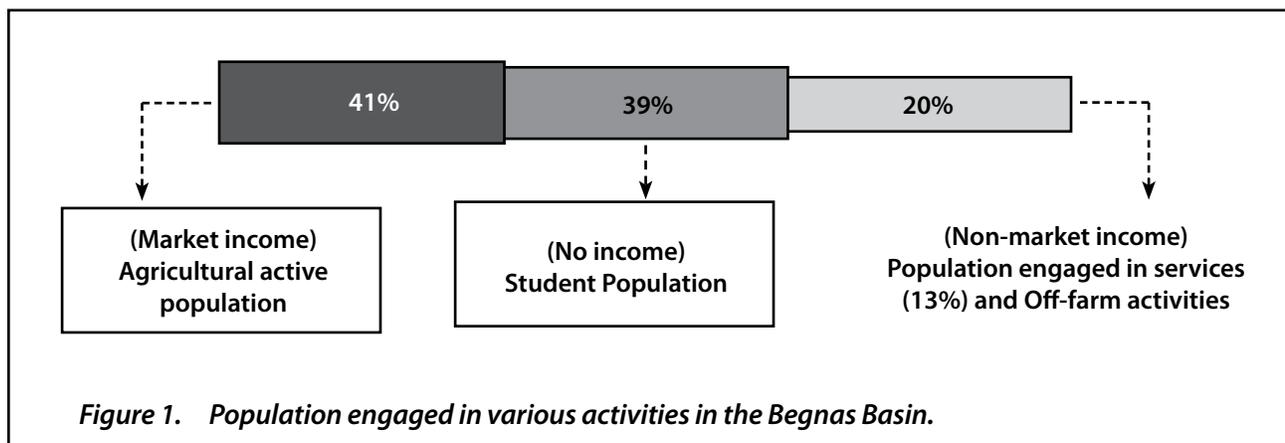
The Begnas Basin is a typical example of a basin where rapid land-use changes are driven by the emerging market pressures in the region, which were accompanied by the construction of irrigation systems, urbanization and delineation of community forest areas in the basin. The basin is located in Gandaki River, one of Nepal's major river systems. The basin area is about 3406 hectares, of which 1838.5 hectares is mountainous upper watershed, and the remaining 1567.5 hectares form the downstream valley floor. The goal of the action research in this basin was to create a common platform for integrated management of natural resources. The project process constituted four steps.

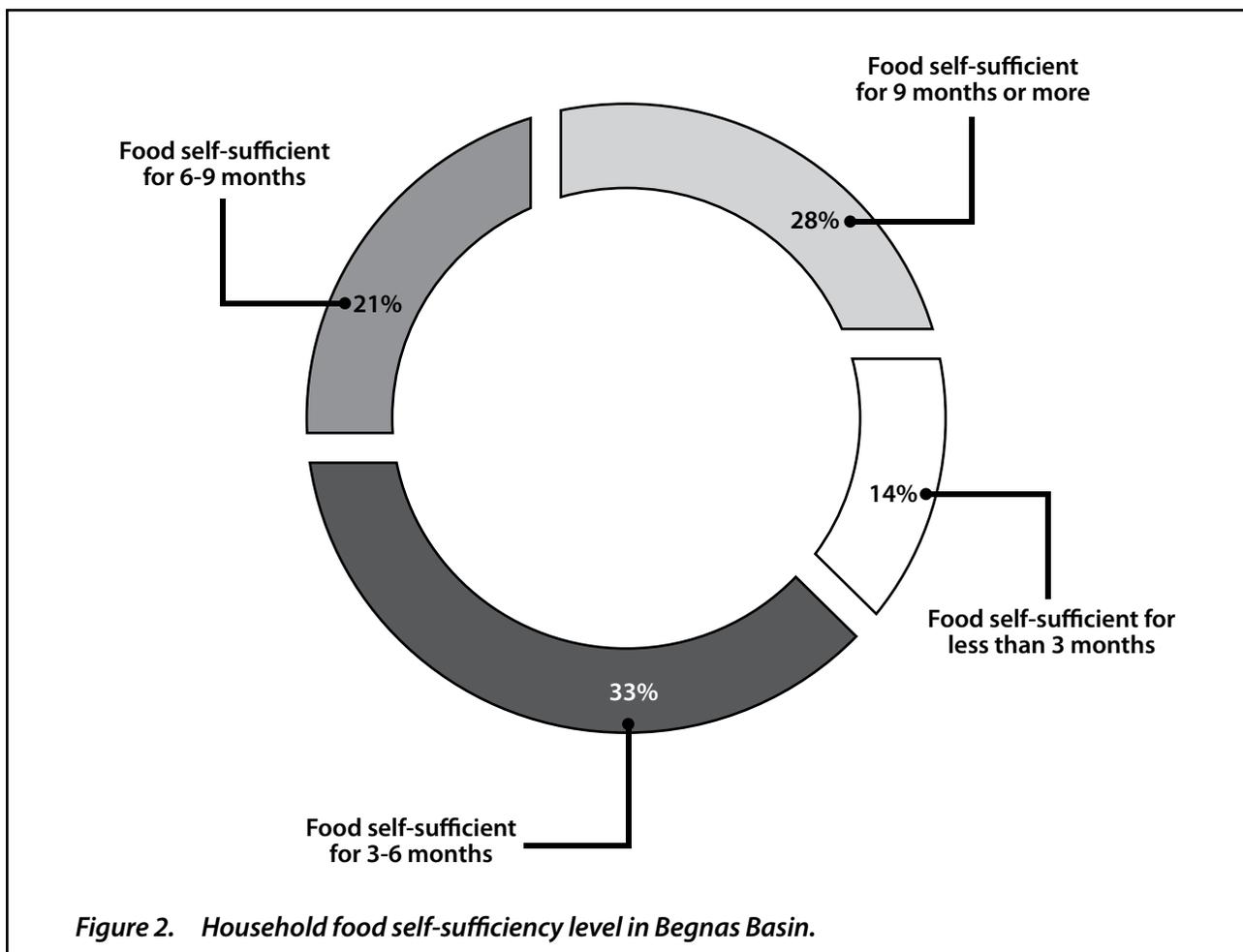
## 1. Resource and livelihood assessment

The Begnas Basin exhibits diversity—in resources and people. The basin is ethnically heterogeneous and socio-economic conditions are differentiated within the communities. Given such diversity, the project emphasized that all stakeholders must be represented and must participate from the beginning.

An analysis of livelihood activities was done based on broadly defined household incomes. It was found that cash, subsistence and nonmarket incomes form an essential component of livelihoods. Cash incomes for wealthier households, predominantly large land owners, come from the local sale of surplus agricultural and livestock products. Small landholders or poor farmers get cash income by working as wage laborers on neighboring farms, through contract farming or sharecropping and off-farm seasonal labor. Off-farm activities are also an alternative means of livelihood for poor farmers and are a coping strategy during times of crisis. Figure 1 shows the percentage of population in the Begnan basin with various income sources.

From a food security perspective, only 28% of the households have sufficient food for more than 9 months. The majority suffer from food insecurity for most of the year. These households either rent nearby farm lands or work as farm laborers to earn a living. (Figure 2)





## 2. Stakeholder and network analysis

A situational analysis of natural resources (forests and water), combined with stakeholder analysis and livelihood assessment, was done for the scoping phase of the project. It helped build rapport with community organizations in Begnas Basin and make residents aware of the INRM process at an early stage. Discussions among key individuals and community organization representatives and brainstorming of the external facilitator groups with government officials were important steps in the identification of locally relevant stakeholder groups for INRM.

## 3. Consensus building among community-based NRM organizations and relevant stakeholder groups

Sharing of research results with local stakeholder groups through participatory workshops at site, district, and national levels formed the heart of the process. It resulted in substantive consensus building and understanding among stakeholder groups for the creation of a common platform. Throughout the various analyses, different reactions were elicited from local communities, government bodies and relevant local user groups such as forest and water user groups. Although many stakeholders in the forest and water user groups could not grasp the concept of INRM or the need for it, people did come

<b>Table 1. Stakeholders' opinions on benefits from integration/ linkage between forest user groups (FUGs) and water users associations (WUAs)</b>		
<b>S.N.</b>	<b>Benefits of integration/linkage between FUGs and WUAs</b>	<b>Emphasis level</b>
1	Will increase cooperation between FUG and WUA	****
2	Will raise awareness among users from both institutions	**
3	Will help resolve conflicts	*****
4	Will mobilize new resources for mutual benefit	***
5	Will improve working relation with line agencies and government departments	**
6	Will create opportunities to learn from each other's experience	****

Larger number of asterisk is indicative of higher values.

together to develop a common understanding of their problems and potential solutions. Stakeholders generally valued the efforts to link up forest and water user groups (see Table 1).

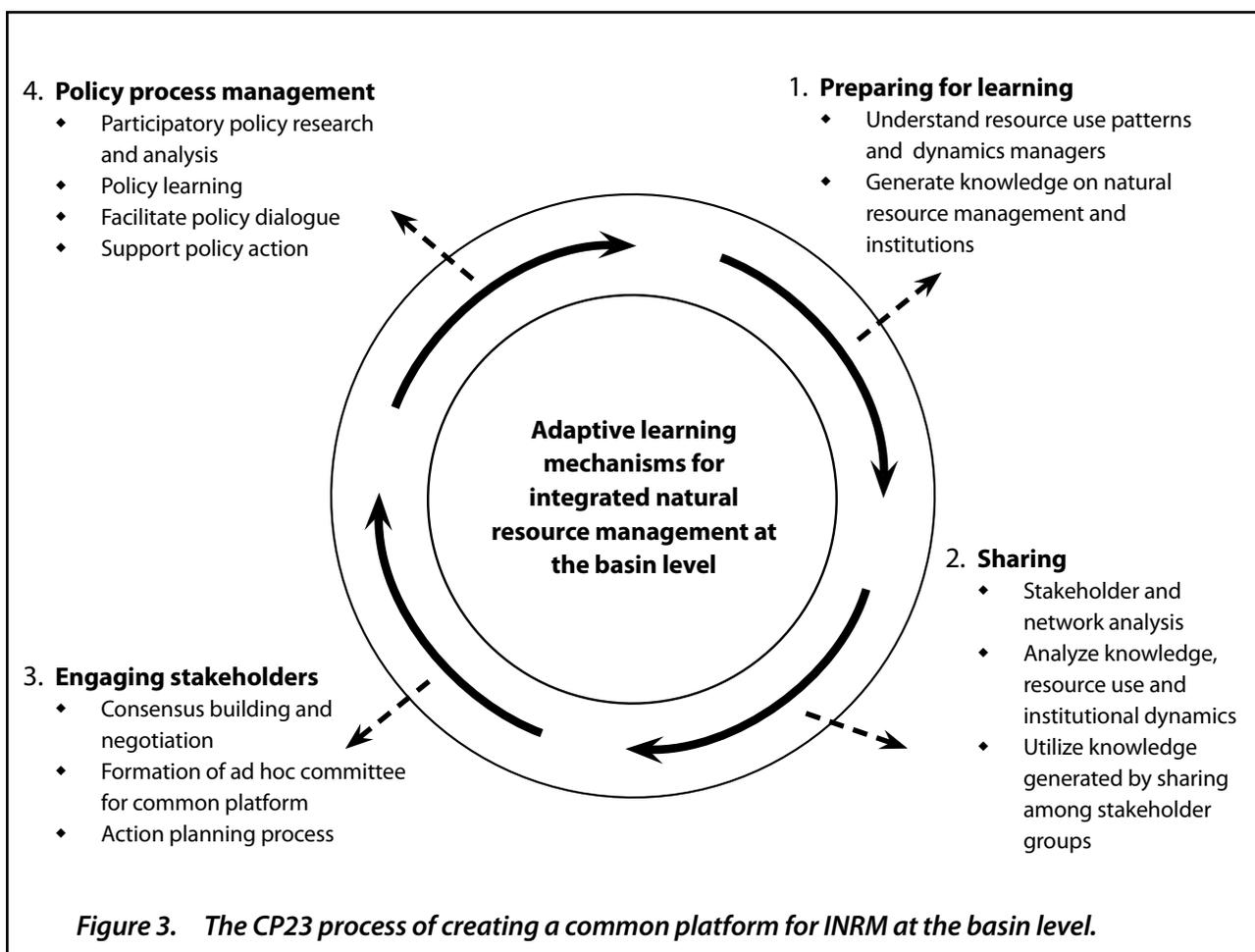
#### 4. Formation of a basin-level common platform

A common platform committee was formed, consisting of representatives of community organizations, including forest, water, fishery, and agriculture user groups using a systematic and organized process (refer to Figure 3). The members of the committee devised an action plan for the management of natural resources (water and forest) in their basin. These efforts demonstrated interest and willingness on the part of local communities to engage in INRM. The platform, registered as a local NGO, obtained recognition through registration with the local administration body.

Following the negotiation and consensus-building process, the representatives of various community institutions, including community forest user groups (FUGs) and water user associations (WUAs), discussed plans in a forum. This was attended by a wide variety of stakeholder groups, such as district government agencies, local councils, local project implementers, civil society groups and community-level organizations. The communities created an ad hoc committee, consisting of 13 members who devise an action plan for the management of the Begnas Basin.

## Results and discussion

Community livelihoods in Nepal are highly dependent on the management of their natural resources, which are often shared between communities, villages or districts. Forests and water are two important natural resources that people have used for livelihood enhancement.



**Conditions that could warrant the setting up of INRM platforms:**

- ♦ Reluctance of the head enders to cooperate in water management affairs with a view to losing their water rights, control and power against the tail enders
- ♦ Inherent notion among many different water users and stakeholders that integration and cooperation, instead of working in isolation, will ensure a win-win situation and result in improvement
- ♦ Ownership and management of common property resources (CPRs) are not clearly defined and there is unequal access to benefits
- ♦ Low income generation from agriculture, lack of alternate income, lack of technical support and lack of resources for improving irrigation infrastructure
- ♦ Lack of access to government funds due to informal nature of user organizations
- ♦ Tail enders are being unduly affected owing to lack of irrigation water
- ♦ Systems to collect irrigation fees break down
- ♦ Ownership issues with regard to land and other resources are present
- ♦ Stakeholders do not contribute their due shares while still benefiting from the lake
- ♦ General lack of coordination and cooperation in the management of the system

Community FUGs and WUAs have increasingly evolved into local democratic institutions. Community organizations are in a better position to contribute to constructive local dialogues on new governance structures in the country. Integrated natural resource management is all about the process of adaptive learning. This process can give useful insights into how and what form of governance models would be suitable for a country where diverse community institutions and socio-economic systems are present.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Community-based organizations, such as FUGs and WUAs, have evolved through time and developed tested and proven approaches for dealing with a

diversity of situations, problems, ethnic groups, and benefit-sharing mechanisms. The common platform for basin management builds on such organizations. The platform democratizes and promotes INRM by giving a voice to all stakeholders.

From a socio-democratic perspective, including the poor, disadvantaged and diverse stakeholders at the basin level, the common platform is premised on the redistribution and sharing of power and resources. This empowers stakeholders to participate meaningfully in making decisions that affect their natural resource base and to take action to resolve conflicts. This could shape the federal structuring process in the country, which needs to be an inclusive process, wherein negotiations are based on redistribution of resources and power-sharing mechanisms.



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