Appendix 1. Context

Socio-political landscape
Nepal is highly diverse, with 125 social groups based on caste and ethnicity and 123 languages (CBS 2012). Political and economic power was consolidated historically in Nepal through the integration of the Hindu caste system into all aspects of society (World Bank and DFID 2006). Within this multi-layered system, members of *Dalit* groups (previously so-called "low caste" or "untouchable" people), such as *Biswokarma* and *Damai*, are perceived as holding the lowest positions and thus least symbolic and political power. There is a continuing correlation between caste and poverty and access to resources, despite the fact that caste-based discrimination was legally abolished in 1963 (World Bank and DFID 2006). In practice, social hierarchy in Nepal is multi-dimensional, shaped also by gender and ethnicity, as well as geopolitics, language and religion. In this context, people who are poor, female and/or *Dalit* or from some indigenous groups face considerable and overlapping socio-political barriers.

Community forestry and livelihoods context
Over 60% of Nepalis rely on integrated forest and agriculture systems for their livelihoods (CBS 2002). As well as providing slope stabilization, forests are a fundamental component of rural livelihood systems, for instance, providing food and bedding materials for livestock, wood for agricultural implements, and fuelwood. They are also a source of income generation for some households, through the sale of fuelwood, charcoal, wooden pots, and non-timber forest products.

Nepal has a large and well-established community forestry program. The program was catalyzed in the 1990s by international environmental concerns; over time it has evolved towards formal acknowledgement of livelihoods and equity. Today, over 17,000 Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs) hold legal management and use rights to a total of 1,652,654 hectares of forest (Department of Forests [date unknown]). Community Forestry has emerged as a dynamic sphere in which a multitude of actors overtly and tacitly negotiate. The main actors include the CFUGs and their socio-ethnically diverse membership, district forest offices (and their subsidiary area forest offices and rangeposts), nongovernmental organizations, bilateral organizations, and participants in sectoral and multi-sectoral forums and networks. Moreover, the socio-political features of the community forestry landscape are in continual flux. CFUGs thus face an ongoing need to meet the changing demands of diverse actors, as well as to deal with uncertainties in knowledge, and adapt to evolving forest ecologies, environments, socio-political contexts, and markets (McDougall et al. 2008).

Maoist insurgency and civil movement
Nepal was home to a violent and widespread armed conflict between Maoist rebels and the government from the late 1990s to 2006. The services provided to CFUGs by the district forest offices—and, in some cases, by nongovernmental or bilateral agencies—came to a halt or were

disrupted as offices were closed or even destroyed. In some cases CFUGs had to pay for "approval" (permission) from the Maoists' parallel administration. CFUG members were "requested", with varying degrees of pressure, to make donations to the Maoists and/or to listen to, sometimes multi-hour, "educational" speeches. CFUG members, as with rural Nepalis in general, were directly or indirectly affected by the violence, including being harmed or killed either intentionally or caught in the crossfire. Members of some CFUGs were judged by the rebels or their supporters to be elite, and thus threatened, harmed, or even killed; some relocated in fear. Fear and mistrust became widespread. Some CFUGs limited or stopped the harvesting of forest products for fear of encountering Maoists or army. Despite these disruptions, and at a time that various other levels of governance had all but ceased operating, many CFUGs did manage to continue to function at least at a low level—underscoring the significance of community forestry as one of Nepal's most resilient local democratic institutions (Pokharel and Paudel 2005).

A widespread civil pro-democracy movement grew in parallel with the Maoist insurrection. Its widely-supported protests played a key role in the monarchy's relinquishing of powers, the reinstatement of parliament, and subsequent democratic elections for a new constituent assembly, which reflected public demands for greater equity, transparency and accountability.