

Political Ecology of the Chure Region in Nepal

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Abstract: Conservation of Chure landscape is at the limelight of public policy debate given its geo-ecological and socio-economic prominence and its real and perceived environmental degradation. The dominant narrative of the Chure environmental crisis coupled with increasing pressures of some political constituencies prompted government's declaration of the Chure as Environmental Protected Area. This policy response of the state has engendered contestations and dissonance among different actors associated with the Chure. This paper is based on review of relevant literature, direct observation and participation in the national and regional policy dialogues and public debate. We identify two broad strands of contested actors: the ones who strongly favor the government policy decision and those who are opposing it. We argue that this can be attributed to the competing understandings of the problem and the proposed solutions to the Chure conservation. Actors' understandings of the Chure are based on their own identical political strands and do not necessarily reflect the underlying causes at the ground. The politics of scientific facts and evidences is also critical to this contestation. We identified three major strands of management approaches in the Chure discourse: state centric, community based and state-community collaborative. Deliberative scrutiny of current policies and attention to the political ecology of conservation could help arrive at negotiated understanding of the problem and sustainable approach to the Chure management.

Key words: Actors, Chure conservation, Chure Environmental Protected Area, discourse, politics

INTRODUCTION

Engagement of multiple stakeholders conceding their diversified knowledge and values is indispensable while developing policies to address dynamic and complex environmental problems (Reed 2008). Such engagements facilitate to enhance the quality of decision-making process and ownership, and hence facilitate effective implementation of policies (Quaghebeur *et al.* 2004). It could some time divide stakeholders in different strands while at times merge to offer potential solutions of particular environmental changes (Reed *et al.* 2009). In the context of the Chure, diversified knowledge and values of multiple actors, both government and non-government, often tend to interpret the environmental changes and problems in the region in favor of their own interest. As explored in this paper, the government's

decision to manage the Chure landscape, hereafter the Chure, as Environmental Protected Area (EPA) has fueled contestations among multiple actors that go beyond the conventional government and non-governmental actors.

The Chure region, covering about 12.8 per cent of the total land area, hosts about 14 per cent of the country's population (DFRS 2014). In recent years, considering its ecological fragility and geo-political significance, the government has initiated several policies and measures towards its conservation. The Chure is projected as highly vulnerable area mainly because of the mounting anthropogenic pressures such as illegal logging, unsustainable land use, uncontrolled commercial quarrying of sand and stones (DFRS 2014). The Chure degradation is considered to have direct

implication on ground water recharge and increasing siltation posing a serious threat to the downstream population in the low lying Terai. However, these initiatives may have direct negative impacts on millions of local people and their livelihoods who heavily rely on forest and land-based resources in the region (Pokharel 2013; CSRC 2007).

The government of Nepal declared the Chure region as EPA under the Environment Protection Act (1997) on July 14, 2014. It was followed by formation of a powerful 'President Chure-Terai Madesh Conservation Development committee' (hereafter the committee), an authority to govern the whole landscape. It was a response to the unfolding problems and pressures exerted from different sections of the society particularly Terai-Madesh based political actors and environmental experts along with officials of Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC).

This policy decision was met with mixed views. While some stakeholders applauded it wholeheartedly, others strongly opposed it (Bishwokarma *et al.* 2014). The proponents argue that there is a complete failure of current policies and institutions in the Chure conservation and therefore need for a bold policy decision to halt the ongoing degradation of the land. On the contrary, the opposing actors claim that the policies and programmes are protection oriented, developed without adequate consultation with relevant constituencies, and largely ignored the human dimensions, particularly the needs and the resource rights of the local communities in the region. Notwithstanding the different views and perceptions, all stakeholders realized that an immediate action was needed to address the detrimental environmental changes in the Chure region.

This paper is informed by the political ecology approach in the context of environmental conservation (Robbins 2004; Adams and Hutton 2007). It scrutinizes actors and their different understandings of degradation and contending solutions to the conservation of the Chure region. In doing so, we first discuss the emergence of recent policy responses on the Chure management and conservation; then unpack and analyze competing discourses of actors, interests, responses to government's decision and power dynamics. We then reflect on the future implications of the recent policy decisions and contestations among actors followed by potential options for democratic and sustainable management of the Chure. This paper is primarily based on our research involving review of relevant literature and policy documents, observation and participation in six national and regional dialogues held around the issues of Chure during 2014 and 2015.

GENESIS OF THE CHURE MANAGEMENT AND RECENT POLICY RESPONSE

The Chure conservation is embedded in the trajectory of national policies on forests management over the time. Forest management in the Chure has been emphasized in almost every forest policy document since the beginning of modern Nepal in 1950. The Rural Forestry Policy (1952) that focused reforestation on mid-hills, prioritized soil conservation in the Chure (Graner 1997). However, this draft policy was never enacted. Instead, the state induced logging and conversion of forests into farmland continued especially in Terai and the Chure. The Government later nationalized the private forests through Private Forest Nationalization Act (1957).

In contrary to its stated objective, it further contributed to the colossal deforestation and forest degradation (D&D) despite some successes of the government to pull the private land under its control (Hobley 1996; Bhattarai *et al.* 2002). The enforcement of Land Tax Act (1977) further catalyzed D&D in the Chure as it curtailed customary rights of local communities to access and manage their forests (Gilmour

and Fisher 1991; Hobley and Malla 1996). Conservation and management of the Chure received exclusive attention in the fourth five-year plan (1970-75) considering its geological and biophysical importance. Later, the National Conservation Strategy (1988) further complemented the idea of the Chure forests conservation considering its proneness to erosion (DFRS 2014).

Table 1: Major Policy Instruments Related to the Chure Forests Management over the Time

Policy instruments	Major Features
National Conservation Strategy (1988)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stressed on the importance of forests in the Chure hills and adjoining Bhawar region; • Recognized the Chure as highly susceptible to erosion; • Recommended forests to be strictly protected against encroachment, removal of biomass, and negative effects of grazing and fire.
Nepal Environmental Action Plan (1993)	Stipulated the Chure hills, being a fragile and sensitive region, should be conserved as Protection Forest.
Forest Act (1993), Forest Regulations (1995)	Provided rights to the government to declare any part of national forest as protected forest given its 'special environmental, or scientific and/or cultural importance.
Revised Forestry Policy (2000)	Stressed on the Chure forest conservation as protected forests to serve as water recharge zone for the Terai.
Land Use Policy (2002)	Considered the Chure hills as the fragile zone and stresses on the need of its conservation as 'protected forests'.
Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)	Spelled out 'integrated watershed management' for the Chure range.
Chure Area Program Strategy (CAPS) (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put more priority to strengthen local rights over forest and other ecosystem services (water, sand, boulders) to ensure their effective management; • Suggested to promote people-led biodiversity conservation involving rural households and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) linking conservation with sustainable livelihood.
President Chure Conservation Programme (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated management of natural resources for ecological balance; • Livelihood support for people through appropriate management of resources; • Social harmonization, strengthen, and involvement of local people strengthening upstream-downstream linkages; • Site-specific and off-site (including trans-boundary) management of environmental systems.

Chure as 'Environmental Protection Area' (EPA)	Declared the Chure as an EPA based on Environment Protection Act (1997) considering its geological fragility and sensitivity, watershed conservation, hotspot for endangered animals and richness in biodiversity.
Forest Policy (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustainably manage ecosystem of the Chure, Terai and Madhesh in integrated approach;• Conserve and manage the Chure, Terai and Madhesh land based on National Land Use Policy.

However, with the growing demand for sand, gravel and boulders both in Nepal and India, mining industry boomed focusing on the Chure region. The District Development Committees (DDCs) in Terai earned large part of their revenue through licensing extraction of these products from the Chure. Consequently, the Chure experienced heavy environmental degradation which was frequently reported in media pointing to illegal logging, unsustainable land use, and uncontrolled quarrying of sand, gravel and boulders (Bishwokarma *et al.* 2015). The widespread media coverage drew attention of environmentalists, opinion makers and senior politicians including the former President, Dr. Ram Baran Yadav. Consequently, the government, dedicating to the position of the President, initiated 'President Chure Conservation Programme' in 2010 as the top priority project of the government for integrated management of land, water, and forests for an ecological balance in the region (Giri *et al.* 2012).

Various actors including the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) had been advocating for the adoption of more participatory approach, thus meaningful engagement with local people, especially of the community forest user groups (CFUGs) in the Chure management. Despite the commitment

by the then Forest Minister to make the Chure management decision participatory and democratic during the national gathering of community forest (June 2014), the cabinet meeting that coincided on the same day declared the Chure as EPA as per the Environmental Protection Act (1997). Article 10.1 of the Act states:

Government of Nepal may, by a notification in the Nepal Gazette, maintain any place within Nepal containing natural heritage or aesthetic, rare wildlife, biological diversity, plant, and places of historical and cultural importance, which are considered extremely important from the view point of environment protection, as an Environment Protection Area (Environmental Protection Act 1997).

Likewise, the notice published by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment (MoSTE) in the gazette on 13 June 2014 also stresses:

"...as per the decision of the Nepal Government [cabinet] the Chure region covering about 12.78 per cent area of the country... has been declared as sensitive and vulnerable geographical region and declared as 'Environmental Protection Area'....." (MoSTE 2014)

CONTESTED POLICY

With the given policy context, we now attempt to unpack the policy contestations. The Forest Minister and high level government officials have repeatedly stressed the Government intent to collaborate with the local communities in the Chure program. For instance, the then chairperson of the President-Chure-Terai-Madhes Conservation Committee during a public debate asserted that:

"... [The Chure] conservation is not possible without [local] people. In fact, conservation is for people residing in and around the region. So, the Chure conservation programme will be implemented in collaboration with the local communities and other stakeholders ..." (Haka Haki 2014)

Despite this rhetoric, CFUGs and their national organization- FECOFUN are skeptical of the Government driven programme. The FECOFUN and several other civil society organizations (CSOs) have strongly contested the government's decision. The disagreement emanating from the local exclusion is evident in the claim of the FECOFUN chairperson during the press conference:

Over 4000 Community Forest User Groups have been conserving and managing forests in the Chure range. Unfortunately, the government declared Chure as an "Environmental Protection Area" without consulting with millions of people in Chure who directly depend on the forest resources. The decision does not acknowledge their effort to protect Chure forests; instead it curtails their rights. (Ganesh Karki, June 18, 2014)

Some members of parliament also criticized the decision, mainly for

inadequate consultation. A member of the Parliament's Environmental Committee revealed:

We were neither informed nor consulted on the government's decision to declare the Chure as an 'Environmental Protection Area' and formulation of the 'President Chure-Terai-Madhes Conservation Development Committee'. We doubt on the latent interest of the government on the Chure conservation. (Raja Ram Syangtan, November 3, 2014)

While there is a general consensus among the stakeholders on the need of a more environmentally benign management of Chure, there are disagreements on the very understanding and interpretations of the government's decision on the Chure EPA and its processes, thus triggering conflicts. In the next section, we attempt to map out actors in greater detail, analyze their responses, and unpack their potential interests.

ACTOR-NETWORKS, RESPONSES AND INTERESTS

Multiple actors have been engaged on issues of the Chure degradation, its management and policy debates since the last couple of decades. However, they have diverse interpretations over the values of Chure, and have their own understanding of the Chure degradation. We now depict and analyze these diverse actors, their responses, and interests over conservation and management of the Chure.

Actors Mapping on the Chure Crisis Management

Actors in the Chure conservation and management can be divided in two groups with respect to their perceptions and response to the government decision on

declaring the region as EPA. First, the network of actors who welcomed the government decision claims that it is the right move to curb the Chure degradation. The network was formed mainly under the leadership of the Association of Collaborative Forest Users Nepal (ACOFUN) supported by some forest officials and their political ideology based trade unions. The network also expressed solidarity to the government decision resorting to press releases and social media. It organized a couple of interaction programs though it was not active and aggressive as the agitating network. The Chairperson of the ACOFUN, during the Sixth National Community Forestry gathering on June, 2014 in Kathmandu supported and rationalized the government decision as:

“...People residing in Chure region are over exploiting the resources that has resulted in its degradation. Conservation intervention is badly needed since it is linked to the livelihood of Terai people. Government needed to take bold decision on Chure conservation. This [declaration of EPA] is a very timely decision and we welcome it...” (Ram Rup Kurmi, June 18, 2014)

Second, actors who believe that the recent decision has been exclusionary and curtailed local rights over forest resources. These actors have created and extended the network under the leadership of FECOFUN to oppose the decision. A civil society network consisting of about 20 different CSOs, those engaged in the natural resource sector, under the banner of ‘The Chure Conservation Joint Struggle Committee, Nepal’ led overall protest programs. The network through press releases, submission of memorandum, social media, and print and online media have been articulating their concerns to both government and citizens (Bishwokarma *et al.* 2014). The network has been proactive during several multi-stakeholders’ dialogues participated by parliamentarians, researchers, journalists, and forest bureaucrats. The protest also took the form of mass rallies and demonstrations, public assembly both at the regional and national level that mobilized thousands of CFUG members and CSOs.

Despite the two major categories of competing actors as explained above, multiple actors have been engaged in debates and actions around the Chure given their own interest, discourses and proposed solutions to the crisis (see Table 2).

Table 2: Actors, Interest, Discourse and Their Actions on the Chure Management

	Actors	Action	Discourse	Interest
1.	National Government	Declared 'EPA; formulated 'President Chure-Terai Madesh Conservation Development Board'; initiated ban on extraction of sand, gravel, and boulder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological crisis, • Degradation and over exploitation of the Chure, • Pressures from resource use of local communities, • The Chure conservation critical for the lowland Terai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase government's role and authority in the Chure management, • Control over exploitation of resources.
2.	Local Government (DDC)	Permits to quarry sand, gravel, and boulder; collection of tax as per the power vested by the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chure as a potential source for national revenue and local development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises control over resources as per the LSGA
3.	FECOFUN and its allies	Campaign against the government's decision by forming The Chure Conservation Joint Movement Committee, Nepal'; mobilization of CFUGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CF as the sole option for the Chure management; • Exclusionary policy and government authority curtails community rights to forest • The Chure crisis resulting from the Government's inefficiency to protect forest and commercial forces (crusher entrepreneurs among others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue and expand the constituent legacy on national forest policy process, • Ensure right of CFUGs in the Chure
4.	ACOFUN and its allies	Strongly supports and advocates the Government decision; opposes FECOFUN led campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local communities in the Chure caused D&D; • Need strong role and authority of the state in the Chure; • The Chure is critical to lowlands/beyond local population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish ACOFUN's role in forest policy; • Increase stake in the Chure management and conservation

5.	Local communities	Managing and utilizing local resources; maximizing livelihood benefits and forest conservation	Local communities (CFUGs) are the best custodians to manage and conserve the Chure rather than external agents and the state cannot manage it	Change the blame from 'destructors' to 'manager'; strong role and participation in the Chure management; continued access to resources
6.	Timber and crusher (sand, gravel, and boulder)business community	Trades timber; extracts sand, gravel, and boulders; lobby against any government decision to control their business	Government mistreats resource traders and imposes controlling rules; undermines contribution on national economy	Sustain business by commercial extraction and sale of resources and profit maximization
7.	Media	Constructs the Chure crisis; broadcasts news at local to central level	Degrading the Chure; government failed on law enforcement	Sale news and stories, and show relevancy.

The Government authorities and associated actors are the major powerful actors that shape the discourse, take policy decisions, and execute in the field. Policy decisions are influenced by the dominant discourse and scientific evidences pertaining to biophysical features of the Chure. The Government discourse often portrays local population as the main culprit for D&D of the Chure and thereby rationalize that their access and use should be either limited or regulated.

On the contrary, local governments especially the DDC provides extraction license for and collects tax from sand, gravel, and boulder. However, some conflict exists with District Forest Office (DFO) when the extraction is to be permitted in the national forests area. Similarly, the government formulated the high level development committee partly to control extraction of these

products. The government put a ban on the collection although the decision was short lived because of strong opposition of crusher operators, which often have powerful nexus with the political party leaders.

There are diverse interests of multiple actors and stakeholders associated with the Chure degradation. The government agencies clearly intend to increase and strengthen its resource control over forest and forest land by focusing on biophysical features of the Chure. It has privileged the livelihoods and interests of Terai population in contrast to the livelihoods of the Chure population. This can be attributed to the hidden interests of the Government in the Chure management so as to garner political and social support from people of the Terai-Madesh region and also from the CSOs who have stake in this area. However, some participants

of public dialogues on the Chure including one held on November, 2014 in Kathmandu indicated that such a divisive strategy is alarming as there is a high risk of triggering conflicts among ethnic groups of hill origin now predominant in the Chure region versus Madhesh ethnic groups who are predominant in the Terai.

The clear division exists even among the CSOs regarding long term solution to the Chure crisis, its conservation and management. The interest of the FECOFUN and its allies, by opposing the decision, is largely to continue influencing forest policy process and safeguard community management and governance of forests. The ACOFUN and its allies, by supporting the Government’s decision, aspire to expand its constituency, influence forestry sector and strengthen their relations with the Government authorities. Similarly, timber and sand, gravel, and bouldder traders are keen to advance their economic and business interests by sustaining unhindered access to resources of the Chure region. The interest of the media is to remain engaged

and influence the agenda of the Chure protection and management, act as a watch dog. The different understanding and proposed solution on the Chure resource management has also contributed to shape the public opinion on it and remains divided.

Discourses on Chure Degradation and its Management

Discourse on the Chure is based on diverse understandings of and proposed solutions to environmental problems. For instance, one group is heavily influenced by the biophysical science of the Chure; considers values of biophysically fragile landscape, its biodiversity, and watershed. Therefore, the group advocates strong Government control, sanctions to access the forest resources and proposes technological solutions such as bioengineering and plantation. Conversely, another group strongly advocates devolution of rights and community based resources management. They subscribe opposing views can broadly be grouped into three discursive strands (see Table 3).

Table 3: Public Discourse Mapping on the Chure Management

Discourse Strands	Problem Identification			Proposed Solution
	Descriptions	Drivers/Cause	Consequence	
State centric	Young and fragile landscape; hot spot of biodiversity; water source for Terai; vulnerable to climate change	Over quarrying of sand, gravel, and boulders; deforestation; over grazing; unscientific land use; huge population and the over use of biomass	Siltation; soil erosion; natural disasters; biodiversity loss	Environmental Conservation Area; ban to export sand, gravel, and boulders, bioengineering, plantation

Community based and participatory	About 4 million population; poor and marginalized; local people as the Chure manager rather than destructor	Centralized management; local exclusion or alienation, impunity to actual Chure destructors	Policies have undermined Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC); curtailed community right, threatened local livelihoods, undermined local conservation stewardship	Community based management; handover forests as community forests
State-community collaborative	Degrading the Chure but failure experience of the state controlled management	Agreed on above drivers/causes	Agreed on above consequences	Local community - state-public collaboration (win-win management)

First, is a state centric and techno-bureaucratic strand/discourse: some actors depict the Chure region as ecologically important zone and significant to the livelihoods of Terai population downstream. This view among other drivers (see Table 2) local resource use practices are considered as one of the drivers of the Chure degradation. They maintain that unsustainable use of Chure resources has resulted in flash flood, siltation, landslides, soil erosion, and associated impacts in Terai. Hence, improving-restoration and stabilizing biophysical features are prioritized in the Chure management.

Second, a populist and community centric discourse embodied by a major group of actors who strongly argue for community based management by taking into account the socio-ecological; economic and cultural importance of the Chure beyond its bio-physical reality. The government controlled centralized management of the

Chure; its inefficiency, local exclusion and commercial interests are attributed as main underlying causes of the Chure degradation. Hence, forests management under community forestry regime is considered as a better option to address the Chure problem in the long run.

The third discourse strand, despite being less heard, is the community-state partnership regime allowing more roles to local communities but having government as one of the actors in the management and governance of the Chure. This regime of co-management is argued as the best option to manage the Chure crisis and to produce a win-win situation. However, it needs a careful division of roles and authorities between state and local communities. Therefore, there should be devolution of rights to local communities with authorities to make decision by themselves. But the state can play positive and constructive role in capacity building and institutional

strengthening of local community groups so as to ensure that they are fully prepared and capable of undertaking the given roles.

IMPLICATIONS ON THE CHURE MANAGEMENT

Examination of Chure discourses and mapping of related actors show that actors have different understandings and explanations of the Chure degradation and conservation crisis. These actors have different interests and stakes in the conservation and management of the Chure, and accordingly advocate different solutions. The decision to declare the Chure EPA and formulation of the institutional structure are manifestation of centralized and techno-bureaucratic policy processes often critiqued by researchers in Nepal (Bampton *et al.* 2007). It has induced clear divisions and tensions among key actors; reinforced unequal power relations; intensified competing discourses; and even triggered resistance from CFUGs. We suspect these could be counterproductive to sustainable management of the Chure in a long run. Based on the analysis of discourse and actors around recent government policy initiatives on the Chure, we identify six major areas which needs rethinking if policies and programmes were to lead to sustainable management of the Chure landscape.

First, lessons of failures in the recent history of the techno-bureaucratic and centralized resource management on one hand and rich and successful experiences of community based conservation natural resource management on the other has not been adequately appreciated. The local communities have been protecting and managing forests as community forests to ensure their continued access to forest

resources. However, there are potential risks of alienating local communities from forest protection and custodianship if their right to use and manage forest resources is curtailed. Hence, imposing conservation-centric policies by ignoring local practices and participation could be counterproductive to both CFUGs and the Chure protection (Thing *et al.* 2015). Second, the analysis suggests that the understanding of the Chure crisis is heavily influenced by biophysical science with poor knowledge on theories of commons and practices of local communities, their economy, their interactions with land and forest and roles of local institutions including CFUGs (Thing *et al.* 2015; Bishwokarma *et al.* 2014).

Third, drivers of the Chure degradation are multiple and multi-scaler. Its management and governance is complex given its association with multiple sectors, engagement of multiple actors, and their manifold interests. However, the policy decisions to manage the Chure through forests protection have unremittingly undermined actual underlying causes, rather alleged local communities. It fails to address the factual origins of the Chure degradation and increased the risk of futility of investment. Fourth, the Chure region has become the major source of revenue especially to the local governments from the extraction of sand, gravel, and boulder. However, increasing number of crusher industries in the Chure region and uncontrolled quarrying has catalyzed the degree of degradation. The government was compelled to lift the decision to ban the extraction due to strong lobbying from crusher owners and entrepreneurs. It appears that the Government has been unable to address the major drivers of the Chure degradation while focusing on

rather weak actors –local communities. This would entail failure to ensure the Chure protection. Fifth, actors involving in the Chure conservation have multiple interests despite the general consensus on the need of its management. It has also added further complexities to design common approach in response to the crisis. In fact, the Government had an opportunity to devise amicable solutions by bringing diverse actors on a collective platform for dialogues, deliberations, and engagements. On the contrary, the top down and state controlled approach further divided actors on solutions and approaches to the Chure management.

CONCLUSION

The Chure D&D is associated with a complex, multiple set of underlying causes which are beyond the forest-people relations and the local socio-ecological systems. The complex factors are linked with broader issues of political governance, people's livelihoods, migration pattern, economic options, corruption, weak capacity of state agencies, illegal timber trade and weak tenure arrangement (UNREDD 2014; Paudel *et al.* 2013; CSRC 2007). However, the dominant discourse of the Chure is often informed by biophysical attributes and limited examinations of proximate drivers of environmental changes. Accordingly, the policy decisions and interventions are heavily influenced by biophysical and technocratic view of the Chure. There is a lack of robust analysis of the underlying causes of land use changes, complex socio-economic and demographic factors and more importantly limited appreciation of the local level collective actions on forest commons. Environmental changes in the Chure cannot be solely attributed to anthropogenic causes, let alone the local resource users. However, undue focus

on local resource management practices without looking at wider linkages and structural factors is both flawed to address the Chure problem and unjust to local communities and their conservation stewardship,

Contestations around the Chure EPA is rooted in the multiplicity of actors, interests, discourses and unequal relations of power. Diverse actors and concomitant discourses on the Chure crisis reveal differentiations in the understanding of the Chure degradation and solutions sought. Key actors have adopted a particular position largely drawn by their narrow individual and institutional interests. The government's position with respect to the Chure EPA is firm and unwilling to accommodate alternative voices and alternative approaches to state centric management. On the other hand, contending actors such as FECOFUN and other civil society groups strongly oppose the decision and advocate community centric and rights based approaches to the Chure management. The Government's policy responses continue to be top-down emanating from the narrow centralized domain rather than meaningful participation of the local resource users and managers. The Chure EPA is a case in hand that is powerfully shaped by a narrow, technical and scientific discourse and political interests. Legitimacy of the policy process is determined not only with what level of authority is given but with how the local actors are meaningfully engaged with appropriate roles in decision making and implementation. On these circumstances, the participation of local community in sustainably managing the Chure cannot be denied. Adequate attention to the political ecology of the Chure EPA and democratic governance are imperative towards sustainability of the Chure.

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