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Conservation Governance and Management of Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park, Buffer Zone, and Buffer Zone Community Forest User Groups in Pharak, Nepal

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Abstract
The aim of this dissertation is to assess the political ecology of conservation governance and management of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) National Park (SNP), SNP Buffer Zone (BZ) and the Buffer Zone Community Forest User Groups (BZCFUG) in Pharak in northeastern Nepal. It evaluates their performance in two adjacent regions (Khumbu and Pharak) from multiple perspectives, including the views of the residents (indigenous Sherpa people and minority immigrant community members), and the standards of current international conservation and human rights policies. This research is important because it relates to global, regional, national and local level conservation policies and practices, which have

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direct impacts on biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, the livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities, and rights. The discussion of buffer zone community forest in the Pharak region follows my M.Sc. thesis completed at the University of Wales, UK in 2000.

This dissertation draws on my 2011 fieldwork and my long-time experience growing up in this region and working there for conservation and development organizations. I conducted qualitative research adopting field observation, semi-structured and focus group interviews and participating in BZ and BZCFUGs' meetings. I observe that implementation of CFUG, BZCFUG and buffer zone management programs (BZMP) in Pharak and BZMP in Khumbu have made significant progress towards achieving conservation of forests, habitats, wildlife species and sustainable production of forest products while reinstating forest and natural resource use and improving management and governance rights.

This suggests that community participation in forest commons and natural resource management and governance through devolution and decentralization of decision-making rights can achieve biodiversity conservation goals. By integrating indigenous peoples' and local communities' cultural and religious perspectives with scientific knowledge, a synergy can be achieved that benefits conservation. For this the free, prior and informed consent of the concerned indigenous peoples and local communities is prerequisite. Conservation goals need to consider the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and meet their aspirations and international conservation standards of self-determination and autonomy.

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