

## An update on FECOFON's Movement against Gaurishankar Conservation Area Declaration

Nepal Government, through a historic ministerial meeting near the Mt Everest base camp at Kalapathar plateau on Friday, 4 December 2009 just ahead of the Copenhagen Summit declared new Gaurishankar Conservation Area (GCA) which covers an area of 2,179 square km in 22 VDCs of three districts (Dolkha, Ramechhap and Sindhupalchok). It was decided without prior information and consultation with local communities residing in the areas.



A scene of Gaurishankar Himal

FECOFUN immediately expressed its disagreement against the decision through a press release nationally and internationally. Later on in January 2010, 22 VDCs of Ramechhap, Dolakha and Sindhupalchowk districts, FECOFUN and NRM Confederation and networks formed a National Struggle Committee of 4 members to launch a campaign against GCA declaration.

### List of the Struggle Committee against the GCA

SN	Name	Position	Representing Organization
1.	Ganesh Karki	Coordinator	FECOFUN
2.	Bhola Khatiwada	Secretary	COFSUN
3.	Pitambar Bhandari	Member	Sindhupalchok
4.	Mana Maya Jirel	Member	Dolkha



A rally of local people including forest campaigners against the GCA declaration

The committee with support from community forestry users declared about a month long protest program and organized various interactions with high level political leaders, stakeholder, government officials, local communities, 3 days long strike and signature campaign to withdraw the decision. FECOFUN organized a national level interaction questioning the government on the rational for declaring GCA in Kathmandu on 5 February 2010. Representative of all the departments under ministry of forestry, other stakeholders, civil society organization, media personnel, government officials and CFUG representative of Dolkha, Ramechhap and Sindhupalchok participated the program.

As a result of all the above activities, lobbying of FEOCUN and NRM Confederation, the government official and policy makers have realized that the sudden decision of the government was unwise and it was a mistake to decide without consulting the primary stakeholders. The forests users of the GCA affected area also became aware and understood GCA declaration is to curtail community rights so actively supported the campaign. Finally, the inauguration program of GCA contemporary Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal is cancelled.



Participants of the interaction program

Even though the inauguration program is cancelled, Madhav Kumar Nepal-led government had given the management responsibility of GCA to National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) in July 2010 as per the proposal of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC). Despite the FECOFUN's continuous

advocacy campaign and protest from locals, the government turned a deaf ear and its agency the NTNC has already established a office in Dolakha District and plans to develop the area along the model of Annapurna Conservation Area.

The Struggle Committee has decided to launch another awareness campaign and fact finding study in the area with a major objective of empowering the local people to scrap the so called GCA Management regulation. The team has comprised of FECOFUN, COFSUN, Columnist Journalist, 3 district representatives, NEFIN, Radio Journalists have visited the Gaurishankar Area from 20-27 April 2011. The visiting team has prepared the framework of campaign, organized district level press meet, interaction in 4 places in and district level interaction. The local FM and Radio stations have continuously broadcasted the campaign and its events and news.



Forest users participation in an interaction

The observation team has identified the local people's voice that they want to implement the previous decision made among political parties and CA Members, NTNC can manage the GCA except the Community Forest Area where there are about 100 community forests, the GCA must address the people's rights in GCA, there should be separate Gaurishankar Community Conservation Area (GCCA ) Management rule with consultation with all the stakeholders, the community forest management process should further strengthen.

After a vigorous discussion with NTNC and various protest program it was decided that a team comprising of Forest Minister, FECOFUN, NTNC, all 3 district CA Members, Political leaders and other direct stakeholders will draft a GCCA which will be more or less like Kanchanjanga Model. But later on defying the previous decisions NTNC copying all the provisions of National Park and Wild Life Act 1972 (BS 2029) has developed a draft and given to FECOFUN for comment but solely proceed its implementation without considering the FECOFUN suggestion and getting approval from cabinet.

The visiting team has also shared its observation experience and findings in a national level interaction in FECOFUN office on 28 April 2011. The sharing meeting has decided to prepare a separate GCCA management regulation considering positive points from the draft prepared by NTNC. The Struggle Committee is now preparing to go to court as the GCA declaration violates rules; it curtails the rights of communities on the forests and obstructs all NTNC work in the area.

The Struggle Committee has developed GCCA management regulation and it has announced in a wider stakeholders participated interaction in FECOFUN on 9 June 2011 where State Minister of MoFSC Ms Bhagawati Chaudhari, Juddha Bahadur Gurung, Member Secretary of NTNC, including other government officials, representative from 3 districts, CA Members, and political leaders of different parties and other stakeholders and journalist from various media were participated.



State Minister of MoFSC addressing a interaction on GCCA regulation

Majority of the participants including state minister Ms Chaudhari have appreciated the GCCA proposed by FECOFUN except NTNC secretary and government officials. There has been aggressive debate particularly between NTNC official FECOFUN and district representative. FECOFUN has mainly focused on community management model as Kanchanjanga but the NTNC not agreed on that and they want impose Annapurna Model where there is not involvement for community people in management. FECOFUN has also proposed to form a Council to manage the GCCA comprising representative from government, service provider institutions, and representatives of different GCCA Management Committee. Similarly the Management Committee of GCCA will comprise of Local government, local authorities, CFUGs, Water Users and other users which will be autonomous body.

NTNC disagree the idea as it wanted to take the sole responsibility for GCA management. NTNC had further called a meeting for next day for further discussion. The next day meeting also could not reach the decision as both parties (FECOFUN and NTNC) had taken their stance on their own agendas.

Actually, FECOFUN is not against the conservation itself but conservation should assure the community people rights and the community people should have the management responsibility not the NTNC. FECOFUN initially has demanded to scrap the decision GCA declaration but these days, as per suggestion from the Struggle Committee, if the conservation preserve the community rights and it clearly address the status of current community forests and if it goes as Kanchanjanga Model it will be acceptable. Therefore FECOFUN has taken initiation to draft the GCCA proactively. NTNC has some allergy on the word '**community**'. NTNC does not want to put the word '**community**' in the name of GCCA. NTNC want to be only GCA not GCCA. It seems the debate will go on and on and not reach in conclusion easily and it needs further discussion and lobbying.

If the government and NTNC agree on the FECOFUN proposed GCCA Management Regulation, FECOFUN is happy to implement GCCA as soon as possible. But it is not that easy. FECOFUN has plan further awareness program in GCCA area to strengthen local people to fight for their rights in addition to lobbying and advocacy with government officials, political parties and CA members.

State Secretary addressing a interaction on GCCA regulation



FECOFUN Chair Apsara addressing a interaction on GCCA regulation



A distance view of Gaurishankar Area