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# Community managed forests dominate the catchment sediment cascade in the mid-hills of Nepal: A compound-specific stable isotope analysis.

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1 Title

2 Community managed forests dominate the catchment  
3 sediment cascade in the mid-hills of Nepal: a  
4 compound-specific stable isotope analysis

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## 26 **Abstract**

27 Soil erosion by water is critical for soil, lake and reservoir degradation in the mid-hills of  
28 Nepal. Identification of the nature and relative contribution of sediment sources in rivers is  
29 important to mitigate water erosion within catchments and siltation problems in lakes and  
30 reservoirs. We estimated the relative contribution of land uses (i.e. sources) to suspended and  
31 streambed sediments in the Chitlang catchment using stable carbon isotope signature ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) of  
32 long-chain fatty acids as a tracer input for MixSIAR, a Bayesian mixing model used to  
33 apportion sediment sources. Our findings reveal that the relative contribution of land uses  
34 varied between suspended and streambed sediment, but did not change over the monsoon  
35 period. Significant over- or under-prediction of source contributions could occur due to  
36 overlapping source tracer values, if source groups are classified on a catchment-wide basis.  
37 Therefore, we applied a novel deconvolutional framework of MixSIAR (D-MixSIAR) to  
38 improve source apportionment of suspended sediment collected at tributary confluences (i.e.  
39 sub-catchment level) and at the outlet of the entire catchment. The results indicated that the  
40 mixed forest was the dominant ( $41 \pm 13\%$ ) contributor of sediment followed by broadleaf  
41 forest ( $15 \pm 8\%$ ) at the catchment outlet during the pre-wet season, suggesting that forest  
42 disturbance as well as high rainfall and steep slopes interact for high sediment generation  
43 within the study catchment. Unpaved rural road tracks located on flat and steep slopes ( $11 \pm 8$   
44 and  $9 \pm 7\%$  respectively) almost equally contributed to the sediment. Importantly, agricultural  
45 terraces (upland and lowland) had minimal contribution (each  $<7\%$ ) confirming that proper  
46 terrace management and traditional irrigation systems played an important role in mitigating  
47 sediment generation and delivery. Source contributions had a small temporal, but large spatial,  
48 variation in the sediment cascade of Chitlang stream. D-MixSIAR provided significant  
49 improvement regarding spatially explicit sediment source apportionment within the entire  
50 catchment system. This information is essential to prioritize implementation measures to  
51 control erosion in community managed forests to reduce sediment loadings to Kulekhani

52 hydropower reservoir. In conclusion, using compound-specific stable isotope (CSSI) tracers  
53 for sediment fingerprinting in combination with a deconvolutional Bayesian mixing model  
54 offers a versatile approach to deal with the large tracer variability within catchment land uses  
55 and thus to successfully apportion multiple sediment sources.

56

57 **Keywords**

58 fatty acids, compound-specific stable isotope (CSSI) analysis, isotope mixing model,  
59 deconvolutional approach, MixSIAR

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76 **1 Introduction**

77 Soil erosion by water is of paramount importance for Nepal because of its adverse  
78 impacts on soil quality (Acharya et al., 2008; Gardner and Gerrard, 2003), aquatic life in lakes  
79 and rivers, and reservoir capacity (GoN/EbA/UNDP, 2015). Degradation of soils through  
80 water erosion is one of the key issues affecting agriculture in the mid-hills of Nepal (Acharya  
81 et al., 2008; von Westarp et al., 2004). Therefore, it is also considered a major threat to food  
82 security and potentially puts rural mountain communities, which rely on the economy of local  
83 agriculture and subsistence farming, at risk. Moreover, river, lake and reservoir siltation  
84 represent a major challenge and its effect can be environmentally and economically  
85 detrimental in terms of water and energy security of the region (GoN/EbA/UNDP, 2015).  
86 Human activity, combined with natural factors such as steep slopes, fragile geology and  
87 intensive monsoon rains, provides conditions for extensive soil loss and is intrinsically linked  
88 with catchment degradation. Given the complex interaction with human activities and  
89 environment, the nature and extent of soil erosion is highly variable in space and time.  
90 Upstream erosion control such as improvements in terracing, low-till agriculture and  
91 reforestation have been the focus to mitigate erosional losses (Tiwari et al., 2009) and to  
92 reduce sedimentation of reservoirs and lakes in the mid-hills of Nepal. However, questions  
93 remain about the extent to which specific land-use types prevent or exacerbate erosion and  
94 land degradation in the context of current and future projected agricultural intensification  
95 (Bahadur, 2012) as well as changing rainfall patterns in the mid-hills of Nepal (Bookhagen,  
96 2010). Answering these questions is critical to developing a strategy for preventing soil loss  
97 and reducing siltation of lakes and reservoirs.

98 Information on land use-based sediment sources can considerably enhance our  
99 understanding of sediment origin. Sediment source fingerprinting by compound-specific  
100 stable isotope (CSSI) analyses of fatty acids (FA) has been used as a reliable method to

101 investigate land use-based sediment sources at the catchment scale (Gibbs, 2008; Upadhayay  
102 et al., 2017). The premise of the CSSI sediment source fingerprinting approach is that soil  
103 from different land uses can be distinguished based on isotopic composition ( $^{13}\text{C}$ ) of FAs  
104 bound to soil particles (Gibbs, 2008; Upadhayay et al., 2017). Fatty acids are biosynthesized  
105 by higher plants, delivered to soils and thereby labelling the soil with FAs having a specific  
106  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  signature ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs). Fatty acids associated with soil particles, get mixed during  
107 downstream sediment transport. Isotope mixing models using  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA values of sources and  
108 sediment sinks offer the possibility of estimating the relative contribution of sources to the  
109 sediment (Upadhayay et al., 2017). These estimates can be used to identify differences in  
110 sediment sources on spatial (e.g. sub-catchments) and temporal (e.g. seasons) scales and to  
111 suggest catchment remediation measures (Mukundan et al., 2012).

112 Sediment fingerprinting has been successfully applied as a tool to gain insights into  
113 sediment dynamics at a river basin scale in catchments all over the world since the 1970s  
114 (Mukundan et al., 2012; Walling, 2013). Spatio-temporal variation of sediment source  
115 apportionment has received increasing attention (Cooper et al., 2015; Vale et al., 2016;  
116 Vercruyssen et al., 2017), because primary sediment sources are site-specific and vary within a  
117 catchment (Koiter et al., 2013a; Stewart et al., 2015). In essence, changes in rainfall pattern  
118 and intensity, and land cover change in both natural (e.g. loss of leaf cover in a deciduous  
119 forest during winter) and agricultural systems (e.g. bare soil due to changing cropping patterns)  
120 cause marked temporal variations in sediment sources and dynamics (Merz, 2004). Often the  
121 fingerprinting signature of different land uses (sources) is only weakly expressed by the  
122 applied tracer techniques (Pulley et al., 2017). A possible solution lies in alternative sampling  
123 approaches, such as (1) ‘compositional evolution’ (Hardy et al., 2010), whereby sources, as  
124 well as sediment, are sampled along the river, or (2) ‘confluence-based sediment  
125 fingerprinting’ (Vale et al., 2016), whereby upstream sediment samples are taken as a proxy

126 for sub-catchment sediment signature in order to evaluate relative source contributions for  
127 larger catchments. The former approach does not account accurately for sub-catchment  
128 contributions as well as local variability of tracers, while the latter approach lacks the ability  
129 to provide information on the specific sediment sources within sub-catchments (Vale et al.,  
130 2016). Very limited work has been done to identify land use-based sediment sources and to  
131 estimate their relative contributions as a function of land use within sub-catchments using  
132 CSSI tracers. In this study, we applied the CSSI sediment source fingerprinting approach  
133 within a representative catchment and its sub-catchments in the mid-hills of Nepal. The  
134 objectives were (a) to determine the relative contributions of generic sediment sources (i.e.  
135 catchment-wide source groups) to sediment loads and (b) to evaluate how source  
136 contributions to the catchment sediment cascade change on a spatio-temporal basis.

137

## 138 **2 Material and methods**

### 139 **2.1 Catchment description**

140 The study was conducted in the Chitlang catchment (23 km<sup>2</sup>), which drains into the  
141 Kulekhani Hydropower Reservoir (also known as Inra Sarobar), located in the mid-hills of  
142 Nepal (Fig. 1). This catchment is mainly dominated by forests (>70%), which can be  
143 categorized into broadleaf forest (25%), mixed forest (40%) and pine forest (6%) (Table A.1).  
144 The agricultural systems consist of (a) lowland terraces (6%): bunded irrigated levelled  
145 terraces called “Khet” and (b) upland terraces (23%): unbunded rain-fed levelled terraces  
146 called “Bari”. Rice is predominantly grown in lowland terraces during the peak monsoon  
147 season (July to September). Wheat and other commercial vegetables are dominant during the  
148 winter season in the lowland terraces. Similarly, in the upland terraces, maize may be grown  
149 as a monoculture or intercropped with finger millet and other vegetables (potato, cabbage,  
150 cauliflower, legumes). Most cropland is either privately owned or rented and receives

151 inorganic fertilizer and farmyard manure, while forests are owned and managed by  
152 community forest user groups (CFUs).

153         The catchment has a rugged terrain with an elevation ranging from 1515 to 2555 m and  
154 an average slope gradient of 44% (Fig. 1b and Fig. 2a). Less than 27% of the area has a slope  
155 <30%. Land use is closely related to the slope gradient of the catchment (Fig 1). Slopes <25%  
156 are dominated by agriculture, while lowland terraces are found particularly at the bottom of  
157 the hills on relatively flat land (<15% slope gradient) near stream banks (Fig. 1b). Forests  
158 dominate on steeper slopes (>25%). The catchment is characterized by monsoon climate, with  
159 two distinct seasons: summer monsoon and dry winter (Fig. 3). Annual average precipitation  
160 is ~1750 mm (maximum 2386 mm and minimum 1182 mm according to data from 1980 to  
161 2015). Most precipitation (circa 77%) occurs during the peak monsoon season between June  
162 and September (Markhu Gaun station (index no 0915), Department of Hydrology and  
163 Meteorology (DHM), Government of Nepal). Additionally, 16% of precipitation occurs in  
164 early (April and May) and late monsoon (October and November) and 7% during the dry  
165 winter period (between December and March).

166         The soils in the catchment are classified as Cambisol (Dijkshorn and Huting, 2009)  
167 developed on Phulchoki sub-group which consists of Chitlang (dominant in the headwaters),  
168 Chandragiri, Sopyang and Tistung formation (Dhital, 2015). Surface soil has a silt-loamy  
169 texture with significantly higher soil erodibility (K) on cropland compared to forest land  
170 (Upadhyay et al., 2014). However, average surface soil loss from cropland with gentle slopes  
171 of 14-20% is estimated to be below  $2.5 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  (Sthapit and Balla, 1998). Water erosion  
172 supplies sediment to the 9.7 km long Chitlang stream (drainage density:  $\sim 4.1 \text{ km km}^{-2}$ ) and to  
173 the Kulekhani reservoir (Fig 1a). This reservoir is of national importance as it is the only  
174 functional seasonal reservoir of Nepal and provides 25-30% of the national electricity demand



175 during the dry season (NEA, 2016). The Kulekhani reservoir lost circa 40% of its water  
176 storage capacity in 30 years of operation due to siltation (Shrestha, 2012).

177

## 178 **2.2 Source soil and sediment sampling**

179 Potential sediment sources and sediment sampling locations were identified via a land  
180 use map digitized from *Google Earth* and a topographical map obtained from the Department  
181 of Survey, Government of Nepal as well as a reconnaissance survey in 2013. Identified land-  
182 uses were divided into five generic potential sediment source (primary) groups: broadleaf  
183 forest (BLF), mixed forest (MF), pine forest (PF), upland terraces (UP) and lowland terraces  
184 (LL) (Fig. 1a, Table A.1). Unpaved road tracks (RT) were considered as secondary sediment  
185 source since RT do not generate carbon isotopic signature, but rather integrate the signatures  
186 of the adjacent land uses. The sampling strategy was designed to take the distribution of land  
187 uses, especially the patchy agricultural practices (i.e. smallholder farmers with great  
188 variability in crop choice, agronomic practices and inputs) across the catchment, topographic  
189 locations and sub-catchments into account. Multiple composite soil samples from different  
190 spatial locations belonging to each land use were obtained according to natural and  
191 management factors, and accessibility. Each composite soil sample was composed out of a  
192 pool of 15 random subsamples (2 cm top soil obtained using a stainless steel corer with 7.5  
193 cm internal diameter). The composite samples included loose soil in the exposed area as well  
194 as fresh deposits at the base of each land use clearly showing recent movement of soil due to  
195 overland flow. In case of RT, source samples were taken from their surface and in road-side  
196 channels. Stream-banks were not sampled as a separate source because of high gravel and  
197 boulder content dominating the substrate as well as a high vegetation cover along the Chitlang  
198 stream and its tributaries (Fig. A.1). Landslides were not observed in the catchment  
199 throughout the study period (2013-2015).

200 Two different types of sediment samples were collected between 2013 to 2015 and  
201 2014 to 2015, i.e. (1) deposited streambed sediment (Fig 2b) and (2) suspended sediment (Fig.  
202 2c), respectively. Both types of sediment samples were retrieved during the early wet (EW;  
203 March-May), mid wet (MW; June-August) and late wet (LW; September-October) periods to  
204 capture the range of flow conditions that occur over the years and to understand the spatio-  
205 temporal variation of sediment sources (Fig. 3). Early wet season is the critical time for soil  
206 loss from cropland in the mid-hills of Nepal. Each streambed sediment sample comprised 10-  
207 15 subsamples (grabs/scrapings) collected from the floodplain, gabion dam and interstices  
208 between larger clasts using a flat trowel over approximately 250 m distance at the outlet (M6)  
209 of the catchment (Table 1, Fig. 1a). Suspended sediment was sampled with time-integrated  
210 mass-flux samplers (TIMS) (Fig. 2c) that were deployed at specific locations as shown in Fig.  
211 1a. These sediment traps were constructed from PVC pipes (1 m length, 110 mm diameter,  
212 following the design of Phillips et al.,(2000). Two replicated sediment traps were installed at  
213 each sampling location (except for the outlet, M6, of the Chitlang stream where six replicated  
214 TIMS were installed) (Fig.1a). Moreover, suspended sediment was collected up- and  
215 downstream of stream confluences to investigate sediment inputs from individual sub-  
216 catchments (Fig. 1a, Table 1). Upstream samples were collected very close to (~10 m) the  
217 confluence point while downstream samples were collected approximately 200 to 250 m  
218 downstream of the confluence.

219 Additionally, during the rising and falling stages of a large runoff event on 14 to 15  
220 August 2014 (116 mm of rain fell over a period of 24 hours), suspended sediment was  
221 sampled from bulk water samples into 150 L Nalgene containers at the terminus of the  
222 Chitlang stream (M6, Fig. 1a). Sediment was separated by decantation following a settling  
223 period in a dark cool room (2-3 days). Additionally, suspended sediment samples were  
224 retrieved from TIMS at the outlet of the Chitlang stream covering a duration of 35 days (25

225 April to 30 May) over a period of 30 aftershocks of local magnitude higher than 5.0 M  
226 following the Gorkha earthquake (7.8 M) on 25 April 2015. During this period, the total  
227 rainfall was 68 mm with one event having 34 mm rain during less than 24 hours. All soil and  
228 sediment samples were air-dried, crushed with a steel roller on a steel tray (Gibbs, 2013) and  
229 sieved at 2 mm prior to further analyses.

230

### 231 **2.3 Total organic carbon (stable isotope) analysis**

232 Bulk organic carbon contents and stable carbon isotope composition ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) of source  
233 soils and sediment samples were measured using an elemental analyser (ANCA-SL, SerCon,  
234 Crew, UK) coupled to an isotope ratio mass spectrometer (20-20, SerCon, Crew, UK). A mass  
235 of 10 to 15 mg grinded sample was transferred into tin capsules and loaded into an auto-  
236 sampler. Wheat flour ( $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -27.21 \pm 0.13\%$ ) calibrated against the IAEA-CH-6 standard  
237 was used as laboratory standard and stable carbon isotope values were expressed as  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$   
238 values relative to the Vienna Pee Dee Belemnite (VPDB) international reference standard.

239

### 240 **2.4 Fatty acid extraction and carbon isotope measurement**

241 Lipids were extracted from source soils and sediment samples with accelerated solvent  
242 extraction (ASE 350 Dionex) using dichloromethane:methanol (9:1, v/v) at 100°C and  
243  $1.3 \times 10^7$  Pa for 5 min in 3 cycles (30 mL cells, 60 % flush volume). The volume of total lipid  
244 extract was reduced by evaporation at reduced pressure and neutral and acidic compounds  
245 were separated using solid phase extraction on aminopropyl-bonded silica gel columns  
246 according to Blake et al. (2012). The acid fraction was methylated with methanolic HCl  
247 (Ichihara and Fukubayashi, 2010) of known carbon isotopic composition ( $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -40.78 \pm$   
248  $0.33\%$ ) and an internal standard ( $\text{C}_{17}$  FA, heptadecanoic acid) for FA quantification was  
249 added to each sample prior to analysis. Fatty acid methyl esters (FAME) were subsequently  
250 analysed by capillary gas chromatography-combustion-isotope ratio mass spectrometry (GC-

251 C-IRMS; Trace GC Ultra interfaced via a GC/C III to DeltaPLUS XP, Thermo Scientific,  
252 Bremen, Germany). FAMES were identified based on the retention time, while peak purity  
253 and confirmation of identity was done using a parallel GC-MS measurement. An in-house  
254 prepared FAME mixture (C<sub>20</sub> - C<sub>30</sub> FAs), traceable to IAEA-CH6 (cumulative uncertainty on  
255 the VPDB scale was < 0.2‰), was injected every six sample injections as a reference for <sup>13</sup>C  
256 isotope ratio measurement of FAMES. Sample analyses were run in duplicate or triplicate  
257 with a standard deviation lower than 0.4‰. Isotope ratios are expressed as δ<sup>13</sup>C values in per  
258 mill relative to the VPDB standard. The contribution of the δ<sup>13</sup>C values of the added methyl  
259 group was subtracted from the δ<sup>13</sup>C value of the analysed FAME to determine the δ<sup>13</sup>C values  
260 of the FAs in the source and sediment samples (see equation in Griepentrog et al., 2015).  
261 Cumulative uncertainty on VPDB scale for the FA was < 0.6‰. Long-chain even carbon  
262 numbered fatty acids (C<sub>22</sub> - C<sub>32</sub>) were used for further analysis.

263

## 264 **2.5 Data processing and deconvolutional-MixSIAR formulation**

265 Two tracer sets were defined to evaluate their capacity in discriminating between the  
266 potential generic sediment sources (land uses). The first set comprised the δ<sup>13</sup>C values of  
267 long-chain saturated fatty acids (C<sub>22</sub>-C<sub>32</sub>); in the second set, the bulk soil δ<sup>13</sup>C value was  
268 included together with the δ<sup>13</sup>C-FA (C<sub>22</sub>-C<sub>32</sub>) values. Discriminant analysis (DA) is a  
269 supervised statistical algorithm that derives an optimal separation between sources established  
270 a priori by maximizing between-source variances while minimizing within-source variance  
271 (Huberty and Olejnik, 2006). A prediction matrix was used to assess the performance of DA.  
272 A plot of individual scores was used to visualize how the first two discriminant functions (e.g.  
273 LD1 and LD2) accounted for separation among land uses. The Mahalanobis distance, a  
274 measure of distance between two points in the space defined by two or more correlated

275 variables, was also used as auxiliary information to evaluate the capacity of tracer sets to  
276 discriminate between the land uses.

277 First, the apportionment of land use sources contributing to sediment was estimated  
278 using FA tracers from catchment-wide pooled source groups as input for a concentration-  
279 dependent mixing model (pooled-MixSIAR). MixSIAR is a Bayesian isotope mixing model  
280 (Stock and Semmens, 2013) for estimating the contribution of end-members (i.e. sources)  
281 using the tracer content of sources and sediment with model error (residual and process error)  
282 (Parnell et al., 2010; Upadhayay et al., 2017). Before starting the un-mixing process with  
283 MixSIAR, conservativeness of the tracers was tested using the point-in-ellipsoid approach  
284 (Jackson, 2016). Briefly, a 95% prediction ellipse is made from source tracer data (i.e. 95% of  
285 the source data are included in the ellipse) and transformed into a perfect circle, centred  
286 around the origin using the covariance matrix. Such transformation was also applied to  
287 sediment tracer data points in order to determine whether or not sediment samples are within  
288 the radius of the source data circle and are hence conservative. This was done considering all  
289 tracers i.e. dimensions in a hyperspace. Subsequently, concentration-dependent MixSIAR was  
290 formulated with selected FAs, using a residual error term, with the season (sediment sampling  
291 periods) as a fixed effect, and no prior information. A concentration-dependent mixing model  
292 is essential for accurate quantification of sediment source contributions (Upadhayay et al.,  
293 2018). Residual error accounts for unknown sources of variability in the sediment  
294 (Upadhayay et al., 2017). The Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) parameters in MixSIAR  
295 were set as follows: number of chains = 3, chain length = 3,000,000, burn = 1,500,000, thin  
296 =500. Convergence of mixing models was evaluated using the Gelman-Rubin diagnostic,  
297 rejecting the model output if any variable was above 1.0, in which case the chain length was  
298 increased. Furthermore, a diagnostic matrix plot of posterior source contribution was used to  
299 evaluate the quality of source discrimination. Mean proportional contributions are reported

300 along with uncertainty and 90% credible interval (CI). A CI (Bayesian form of confidence  
301 intervals) is an interval in the domain of the posterior density function (PDF) used to  
302 determine uncertainty, i.e., the probability that the true source contribution lies within the  
303 interval.

304         Second, a novel “deconvolutional MixSIAR” (D-MixSIAR) framework was used to  
305 apply land use-based source fingerprinting within the catchment stream network structure. In  
306 this approach, sub-catchment-specific sources were first unmixed against sediment from  
307 individual tributaries (e.g. M1 and M2, Fig. 1a), and then tributaries were unmixed against  
308 sediment after a confluence of both tributaries (e.g. M3, Fig. 1a). Posterior proportional  
309 contributions of each basin-wide source were then deconvoluted. This approach allows  
310 estimation of the weighted distribution of land use contributions to nested downstream  
311 sediment sampling locations. D-MixSIAR requires data input to estimate land use source  
312 contributions to stream sediment within each sub-catchment, and the sub-catchment  
313 contributions to sediment collected downstream of the confluence of streams draining the sub-  
314 catchments. Sediment source apportionment per sub-catchment was done by considering  
315 source samples within the contributing sub-catchments, upstream of the suspended sediment  
316 collection site. Based on field observations and variability of the CSSI signature, it was  
317 decided to subdivide the RT samples from the Dandakharka sub-catchment (Fig. 1a) into sub-  
318 groups, namely RT-1 (RT samples from relatively steep areas inside BLF) and RT (RT  
319 samples from the flatter part of the catchment), while UP samples comprised sub-group UP  
320 and UP-E (= upland agriculture encroached into BLF). All statistical analyses and unmixing  
321 modelling were done using R software (version 3.3.1, R Core team, 2016) with SIBER  
322 (Jackson, 2016), MASS (Venables and Ripley, 2002), HDMD (McFerrin, 2013) and  
323 MixSIAR (Stock and Semmens, 2013) packages in the library.

324

## 325 **3 Results**

### 326 **3.1 Discrimination of generic sediment sources**

327 Exploratory statistical analysis to assess the potential discriminative power of applied  
328 isotopic tracers is important. Discriminant analysis (DA) based on  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA shows that the  
329 two dimensions accounted for >90% of the variance (LD1 = 57.6%, LD2 = 33.6%) as shown  
330 in Fig. 4. Group centroids show multivariate mean values, visualising the separation of source  
331 groups relative to the functions. All land use pair-wise Mahalanobis distances from the  
332 centroid were highly significant except for the pairs BLF-MF, LL-RT and UP-RT (Table 2).  
333 Results showed that BLF-MF was most similar in terms of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA values. The discriminant  
334 analysis further showed that RT is positioned centrally to all other sediment sources (Fig. 4)  
335 with a high spread (Fig. A.2) reflecting the presence of road tracks across different land uses.  
336 The classification based on DA allowed for 65% total correct classification with some source  
337 groups displaying clear discrimination (e.g. PF), while others with greater similarity in  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -  
338 FA values proved more difficult to discriminate. The main misclassification is related to the  
339 RT, BLF and MF with the lowest correct classification of 11, 45 and 47%, respectively (Table  
340 A.2). The inclusion of bulk  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  into the tracer set did not change the classification accuracy  
341 of the sources significantly (data not shown).

342

### 343 **3.2 Proportional contributions of different land uses to catchment-wide** 344 **sediment during monsoon season**

345 Different land use contributions to sediment at the outlet of the Chitlang stream (M6,  
346 Fig.1a) were estimated from catchment-wide pooled source groups using MixSIAR (pooled-  
347 MixSIAR). Point-in-ellipsoid analysis of isotopic tracers demonstrated that the majority of  
348 sediment samples (96 and 94% of suspended and streambed sediment, respectively) fell  
349 within the source tracer mixing polygon and hence can be considered as conservative.  
350 However, we did not remove any sediment sample that failed the point-in-polygon test in

351 further modelling, since MixSIAR can handle to some extent unknown variations in sediment  
352  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs via the residual error term (Semmens et al., 2009; Upadhayay et al., 2017). Mixing  
353 modelling results demonstrated the substantial variability and uncertainty in the estimated  
354 source contribution to sediment (Fig. A.3) with strong negative correlations in posterior  
355 source contribution (Fig. A.4) due to the overlap of tracer values between land uses (Fig. 4,  
356 Fig. A.2 a-f) while considering catchment-wide (generic) sediment sources. For example, a  
357 very strong negative correlation (-0.97) between the posterior probability of BLF and MF  
358 contributions was observed in suspended sediment, while, in the case of streambed sediment,  
359 posterior probability distributions of BLF were negatively correlated with MF (-0.57) and RT  
360 (-0.54). A negative correlation between posterior probabilities of two sources indicates  
361 collinearity and thus a low ability of tracers to discriminate between sources. Furthermore,  
362 credible intervals of functionally related sources were wide and overlapping. Therefore,  
363 probabilities associated with source contributions were aggregated posteriori, i.e. deciduous  
364 forest (DF) was formed from BLF and MF while LL and UP were aggregated to form  
365 agriculture (AG), to estimate the proportional contribution of meaningful functional source  
366 groups to the different types of sediment i.e. suspended, streambed and events.

367 Figure 5 summarizes the source apportionment results (after aggregating posterior  
368 probability of source) of sediment samples that were collected at the outlet (M6) of the  
369 Chitlang stream. The estimated mean relative contribution of each source to the suspended  
370 sediment indicated that DF was the dominant source during the early, mid and late wet season,  
371 with a 90% CI ranging between 90 and 99%, followed by AG ranging between 0.3 and 4%.  
372 Similar to the suspended sediment, results for streambed sediment in the Chitlang stream  
373 indicated that it was predominantly derived from DF (average contribution of 62, 79 and 68%  
374 in early, mid and late wet season, respectively), followed by AG (18, 9 and 15%) and RT (14,  
375 5 and 8%) which indicates that surface erosion from agricultural terraces is a minor source



376 (Fig. 5). For streambed sediment, seasonality was observed for DF with a significantly higher  
377 contribution in the mid wet compared to early and late wet-periods (79% versus 62 and 68%,  
378 respectively). Source apportionment results did not substantially change in both sediment  
379 types i.e. suspended and streambed between the cases where bulk  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  was included ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  -  
380 FA (C<sub>22</sub>-C<sub>32</sub>) +  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -bulk) and the cases where bulk  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  was not included ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  -FA (C<sub>22</sub>-  
381 C<sub>32</sub>)) as tracer (Fig. A.3). Hence further discussion and conclusions are based on the results of  
382  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA tracer set.

383 Additionally, identification and apportionment of sediment sources during intense  
384 rainfall events provide the basis for a detailed assessment of critical land uses that contribute  
385 substantial amounts of sediment at the catchment scale. Table 3 presents information on the  
386 overall mean relative contribution of sources to suspended sediment samples collected at the  
387 outlet of the Chitlang catchment during a high rainfall event (14-15 August 2014) and the  
388 geodynamically active period (after 7.8 M Gorkha earthquake in 2015). For the rainfall event,  
389 DF contributed an average ( $\pm$  standard deviation) of  $76 \pm 10\%$ , while AG and RT contributed  
390 equally with an average contribution of  $10 \pm 6\%$  and  $9 \pm 8\%$  respectively. Furthermore,  
391 posterior probability distributions of sediment sources during the period of frequent  
392 aftershocks (25 April - 30 May 2015) showed that the majority of sediment also originated  
393 from DF ( $74 \pm 11\%$ ), followed by AG ( $11 \pm 7\%$ ) and RT ( $10 \pm 9\%$ ).

394

### 395 **3.3 Sediment contribution by sub-catchments using deconvolutional** 396 **MixSIAR**

397 The variability of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs and organic carbon for sediment sources and sediments of  
398 individual sub-catchments (Table 1) indicated that potential sediment sources have unique  
399  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs values (Fig. A.5 and Fig. A.6). Sediment source contributions for different  
400 tributaries of the Chitlang stream were estimated (Fig. 6) with source samples from the

401 respective tributary's sub-catchments. Source contributions were found to vary by sub-  
402 catchment temporally. Sediment from the Dandakharka sub-catchment (M1, Fig. 1a)  
403 originated from BLF (average contribution of 43, 31 and 25% in the early, mid and late wet  
404 season, respectively), followed by RT-1 (27, 33, 33% in the early, mid and late wet season),  
405 UP-E (10, 13, 14% in the early, mid and late wet season), MF (8, 11, 15 % in the early, mid  
406 and late wet season), while other sources showed only minor contributions (<5%) (Fig. 6).  
407 Sediment from the sub-catchment Kharka (M2, Fig. 1a) was dominated by MF 74, 87 and  
408 75% during early, mid and late wet season, respectively. Mixing model estimation suggested  
409 that sediment samples collected after the confluence of M1 and M2 i.e. M3 comprised overall  
410 mean ( $\pm$  standard deviation) contributions of  $74 \pm 18$ ,  $78 \pm 20$  to  $83 \pm 17\%$  during early, mid  
411 and late wet-periods, respectively, from Dandakharka (M1) and  $26 \pm 18$ ,  $22 \pm 17$  to  $17 \pm 17\%$   
412 during early, mid and late wet season, respectively, from Kharka (M2) (Table 4). Similar to  
413 M2, Chhabugaun tributary sediment (M4, Fig. 1a) predominantly originated from MF  
414 (average contribution 87, 95 and 87% during early, mid and late wet season, respectively).  
415 The average contributions from the Upper-Chitlang (= M1 + M2) sub-catchments to sediment  
416 samples collected after the Kapu confluence (M5, Fig. 1a) were 71, 64, to 74% during early,  
417 mid and late wet seasons, respectively. Tributary sub-catchment contributions are generally in  
418 agreement with catchment size, steepness and level of disturbance.

419       Combination of these sub-catchment estimates with the source contribution estimates for  
420 each sub-catchment provides the basis for determining weighted sediment contributions for  
421 M3, M5 and M6 within the D-MixSIAR framework. Three sources namely BLF, MF and RT-  
422 1 almost equally contributed to M3 sediment: BLF contributed  $32 \pm 17$ ,  $24 \pm 15$  and  $21 \pm 13\%$   
423 followed by MF by  $25 \pm 14$ ,  $27 \pm 18$  and  $25 \pm 16\%$  and RT-1 by  $20 \pm 17$ ,  $26 \pm 23$  and  $27 \pm$   
424  $24\%$  during early, mid and late wet season, respectively. In contrast, for M5 sediment, MF  
425 contributed to almost half of the sediment ( $43 \pm 15$ ,  $52 \pm 18$ ,  $41 \pm 18\%$  for early, mid and late

426 wet season, respectively), followed by an almost equal contribution from BLF ( $23 \pm 12$ ,  $15 \pm$   
427  $11$ ,  $15 \pm 11\%$  for early, mid and late wet seasons, respectively) and RT-1 ( $14 \pm 13$ ,  $17 \pm 16$ ,  
428  $20 \pm 14\%$  for early, mid and late wet season, respectively). In the case of the whole Chitlang  
429 catchment (M6), the majority of sediment originated from MF ( $41 \pm 12$ ,  $47 \pm 18$ ,  $38 \pm 14\%$   
430 for early, mid and late wet season, respectively) with almost equal contributions from BLF  
431 ( $15 \pm 8$ ,  $10 \pm 7$ ,  $9 \pm 7\%$  for early, mid and late wet season, respectively), RT ( $11 \pm 8$ ,  $7 \pm 6$ ,  $10$   
432  $\pm 8\%$  for early, mid and late wet season, respectively) and RT-1 ( $9 \pm 8$ ,  $11 \pm 10$ ,  $13 \pm 12\%$  for  
433 early, mid and late wet season, respectively), while LL, UP, PF and UP-E contributed the  
434 lowest amounts of sediment (Fig. 6, Fig. A.7). RT-1 was highest contributor in the upstream  
435 during mid and late-wet season and their contribution also gradually decreases downstream  
436 (Fig. A.7). The combined contributions from RT and RT-1 showed that unpaved road tracks  
437 were responsible for the second-largest proportion of M6 sediment after DF (BLF and MF).  
438 MF contributions gradually increased from upstream to downstream, while sediment  
439 contribution of BLF gradually decreased in the same direction (Fig. A.7). In most sediment,  
440 the 90% CI of source contributions showed wide ranges (this was especially true for RT-1,  
441 MF, BLF and UP-E), whereas the 90% CI of LL, RT, UP and PF were narrower (Fig. 6).

442

## 443 **4 Discussion**

### 444 **4.1 Sediment source discrimination**

445 Establishment of robust discrimination between  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs values of sediment sources is  
446 a key requirement for accurate source apportionment (Davis et al., 2015). An overlap was  
447 observed to some extent as well as source groups with large within-group variability (e.g. MF  
448 and RT, Fig. 4). This explains why mixing modelling yielded a high negative correlation  
449 between the contributions of these sources, irrespective of sediment types (Fig. A.4) and  
450 tracer sets. This was most notable between BLF and MF, and also between MF and RT. The

451 large negative correlation in posterior source contribution indicates that these sources are  
452 similar to each other in terms of tracer isotope values, which indicates that only one of both  
453 sources can actually contribute to the sediment mixture at a specific time (Stewart et al., 2015).  
454 Similar  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA values were expected in BLF and MF, since MF is dominated by broadleaf  
455 and pine trees are relatively sparse in MF and thus less likely influence  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA values. Soils  
456 under BLF and MF were characterised by  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA values for C3 plants (Diefendorf et al.,  
457 2015). The LL and UP terraces are characterised by intense cultivation of varying crop types  
458 (i.e. cereal-legume/vegetable rotation) and soil management practices (tillage and farm yard  
459 manure (FYM) application), which may have caused high variation in  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA values (Fig.  
460 A.2), especially due to mixing of C3 (rice, wheat, potato, beans) and C4 (maize, millet) plants.  
461 Removal of above ground biomass from agriculture fields is a common practice in the  
462 catchment. Instead of crop biomass, application of highly variable amounts of FYM, which is  
463 produced from crop biomass, leaf litter and pine needles, may introduce the isotopic signature  
464 of forest-derived FAs into agriculture fields and thereby lead to an increase in source  
465 variability (Jandl et al., 2007; Jandl et al., 2005). Additionally, LL receives sediment during  
466 flooding (Brown et al., 1999), which might also redistribute FA isotopic signatures from UP  
467 to LL. This is partially responsible for similar variation and overlapping source  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs  
468 values (Fig. A.2), despite the cultivation of plants with different photosynthetic pathways as  
469 major crops. Overlap and large within-source variability of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FAs values of sources are  
470 considered important challenges in the application of isotope mixing models (Parnell et al.,  
471 2010). They are expected to result in an increased uncertainty in the estimated source  
472 contributions (Phillips and Gregg, 2001; Upadhayay et al., 2017). The a priori combination of  
473 sources (BLF and MF) as 'deciduous forest' gave similar results as the sum of the  
474 contributions of BLF and MF in the original analysis, i.e. posteriori aggregation of sources

475 (data not shown). This suggests that although the tracers are not able to discriminate between  
476 two functional sources, they can estimate their collective contribution to the sediment.

477 For both sediment types (suspended and streambed), the sediment source contributions  
478 did not change significantly when bulk  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  was added as an additional tracer (Fig. A.3).  
479 Despite the abundant use of soil and sediment bulk  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  in sediment tracing research (Collins  
480 et al., 2013; Fox and Ford, 2016; Fox and Martin, 2015; Fox and Papanicolaou, 2007; Lacey  
481 et al., 2015), there is no strong evidence that bulk soil  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  behaves conservatively (Collins et  
482 al., 2014; McCarney-Castle et al., 2017). The non-conservative behavior of bulk sediment C  
483 isotopes is possibly due to fractionation during organic matter decomposition (Benner et al.,  
484 1987; Fine and Carter, 2013). Furthermore, aquatic vegetation and freshwater autotrophs (e.g.  
485 algae) easily contaminate the sediment potentially altering the bulk isotope signature of the  
486 sediment, thereby confounding the interpretation of the source of eroded material. Despite  
487 these risks, several studies suggest the use of bulk isotopes as primary tracers in isotope  
488 mixing models during CSSI sediment source fingerprinting (Blake et al., 2012; Gibbs, 2008;  
489 Gibbs, 2013; Hancock and Reville, 2013). Our results suggest that bulk C isotopes should not  
490 be used in CSSI sediment source fingerprinting without evidence to support their conservative  
491 behavior.

492

## 493 **4.2 Source contributions for different types of sediment**

494 Both suspended and streambed sediment has been widely adopted in sediment source  
495 fingerprinting research (Collins et al., 2017; McCarney-Castle et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al.,  
496 2015). Bayesian modelling results supported the qualitative graphical analyses (Fig. 4) and  
497 also suggested DF (combined BLF and MF) as a primary source, with very small inter-  
498 seasonal variability in its relative contributions to suspended sediment compared to streambed  
499 sediment (Fig. 5). Differences in source composition between suspended and streambed

500 sediment have been reported in other studies (Koiter et al., 2013b; Lamba et al., 2015) that  
501 suggest both should be sampled to effectively understand sediment sources. However,  
502 variations in the estimated DF contribution to sediment types (Fig. 5) do not alter the broad  
503 conclusion that hillslope forest represents a primary sediment source within Chitlang  
504 catchment. Whilst this partial conclusion is based on the modelling of tracer data of generic  
505 (catchment-wide pooled) sediment sources and the plausible assumption that suspended  
506 sediment is dominated by newly delivered sediment from land surface sources (stream bed  
507 deposition and remobilisation of sediment is less likely in fast flowing mountain streams),  
508 sediment source apportionment within an individual sub-catchment should be considered to  
509 better understand the origin of sediment at a higher spatial resolution (section 4.3). Moreover,  
510 sediment core analysis from the reservoir could be used to predict the long-term variation of  
511 sediment source contributions, which is lacking in this study. Therefore, we concentrate on  
512 suspended sediments in the following section.

513         The sediment regime of the stream is not characterized by a constant sediment supply,  
514 but rather by the episodic occurrence of rainfall events and subsequent high stream flow.  
515 During high rainfall events, all catchment compartments may be actively connected to the  
516 mainstream (Bracken et al., 2015; Gomi et al., 2008). Given that sediment sources are well-  
517 connected to the stream, large events can transport sediment directly from eroded hillslopes  
518 and even flush previously deposited sediment (Le Gall et al., 2017). Hence, such event-based  
519 sediment samples provide robust information about sediment source hotspots at the catchment  
520 scale. Our estimations corroborated that DF is highly vulnerable to water erosion.  
521 Additionally, the 2015 Gorkha earthquake event might have damaged the steep hillslope  
522 surface of forested areas and subsequently triggered high sediment generation. The lack of  
523 landslides in the forest, the predominance of the bedrock dominated stream and relatively  
524 intact and dense vegetation cover during summer suggest that steep topography and high-

525 intensity rainfall might be major controlling physical factors for sediment generation and  
526 mobilization from the hillslope forested areas of this catchment.

527

### 528 **4.3 Controls on sediment sources: land management activities**

529 Despite the traditional view of a dominant sediment contribution from agricultural  
530 fields, Pooled-MixSIAR showed that agriculture contributed <5% to suspended sediments at  
531 the outlet of Chitlang stream (Fig. 5). Our results are in line with those of previous studies in  
532 the mid-hill catchments with terraced agriculture (Brown et al., 1999; Carver, 1997; Slaets et  
533 al., 2016). However, the Pooled-MixSIAR approach tends to average the variation of tracers  
534 of land uses located within different sub-catchments. Consequently, it provides source  
535 contribution results with high uncertainty. Furthermore, significant errors could be introduced  
536 if source groups are classified on the basis of catchment-wide generic sources alone in a  
537 catchment with heterogeneous vegetation and terrain (Pulley et al., 2017). In contrast, D-  
538 MixSIAR uses stratified source samples, which accounts for tracer variability of sources  
539 within individual sub-catchments and allows weighting of mixture proportions by sub-  
540 catchment contributions. The approach relies on the nested structure of the drainage network,  
541 therefore, reducing the complexity of tracer signatures of different sources within individual  
542 sub-catchments. As a result, within-source tracer variability decreased and discrimination of  
543 sources increased (Fig. A.8).

544 Combining total sub-catchment estimates with land use contributions computed for each  
545 tributary sub-catchment provides the basis for calculating weighted source contribution via D-  
546 MixSIAR along the catchment cascade (M3, M5, M6 sediment). We used D-MixSIAR to  
547 estimate land use contributions to suspended sediments. The contribution from BLF, RT-1  
548 and UP-E decreased downstream ( $M3 > M5 > M6$ ) as sediment transport distance from the  
549 location of the sources increases (Fig. A.7). The contribution of MF increased downstream

550 until M5 and remained stable towards the catchment outlet (M6). Based on D-MixSIAR, the  
551 majority of sediment originated from MF, followed by BLF and RT-1 at the outlet of  
552 catchment (Fig. 6, Fig.A.7), indicating that there is no *a priori* basis for assuming that  
553 forested areas have inherently low rates of sediment generation even if forest land was  
554 reported to have a low soil erodibility factor (Upadhayay et al., 2014). The increasing  
555 contribution of MF along the sediment cascade can be explained by disturbed MF soil surface  
556 on the steep slopes due to the impact of livestock grazing and collection of leaf litter using  
557 hoe. D-MixSIAR results were consistent with the conceptual understanding of the catchment  
558 (distribution of land use with slope gradient) and could be justified by the qualitative data. In  
559 a survey of 150 households from an upstream village within the larger Kulekhani catchment  
560 in 2013 (Panta et al., 2014), a majority (64%) of the farmers perceived that deforestation was  
561 the main reason for soil erosion followed by road construction (28%), while only a minority  
562 (2%) noted both unmanaged cropping pattern and stream bank erosion as major contributors  
563 of sediments to the Kulekhani reservoirs.

564         Agriculture is predicted to be a minor source of sediment (mean contribution 15 - 20%)  
565 input to the Chitlang stream network. The low contribution of agricultural terraces to the  
566 sediment can probably be attributed to proper terrace maintenance and traditional irrigation  
567 systems (Brown et al., 1999; Carver, 1997). Local farmers use back-sloping bench terraces for  
568 upland agriculture with ditches around the terraces to direct the surface runoff out of the  
569 upland terraces, thereby decreasing rill and ephemeral gully formation on agricultural fields.  
570 In addition, most of the eroded soil from upland terraces is finally transferred to irrigated  
571 lowland terraces through run-on as well as through irrigation water and deposited on the  
572 irrigated terraces as well as the canal bed. Carver (1997) estimated an accumulation of 6.6  
573 mm year<sup>-1</sup> of eroded material on the irrigated terraces in the mid-hills of Nepal. The authors  
574 observed that deposited sediment was frequently cleaned from irrigation canals. Thus,



575 irrigation canals and terracing slow down sediment transfer and result in upstream  
576 accumulation of sediment on the valley floor and lowland terrace, forming local net sediment  
577 sink zones modifying the sediment dynamics at the catchment scale (Brown et al., 1999;  
578 Carver, 1997).

579 D-MixSIAR results showed that forests (BLF and MF) were the primary sediment source  
580 during all seasons while unpaved road tracks represented a major secondary sediment source  
581 within the Chitlang catchment. Soil erosion in the forest might be exacerbated by the  
582 combination of surface disturbance (e.g. leaf litter collection activities), high rainfall intensity,  
583 seasonally dry periods, forest fires and naturally dynamic landscapes. The short-duration,  
584 high-intensity monsoon storms that are common in the catchment provide the required rainfall  
585 erosivity to initiate surface erosion on steeper slopes (Bookhagen, 2010; Karki et al., 2017).  
586 Farmers collect leaf litter using hand racking, harvest timber and graze livestock (cows and  
587 goats) in the forest, which makes the forest floor bare or disturbed. Gardner and Gerrard  
588 (2002) suggested that ground cover is more important than canopy cover in reducing runoff  
589 and water erosion in the mid-hill forest. The average rate of soil loss and the contribution to  
590 total soil loss from steeper slopes are tremendously high compared with that from gentle  
591 slopes (Bahadur, 2012; Garcia-Ruiz et al., 2015; Su et al., 2016). Moreover, unfortified dirt  
592 roads located inside the broadleaf forest are highly vulnerable to erosion due to rutted surfaces.  
593 Most of the rural roads in the mid-hills are unpaved and poorly maintained without roadside  
594 drainage systems, leading to concentrated flow, resulting in soil erosion (Merz et al., 2006; Su  
595 et al., 2016). Additional tracers such as fallout radionuclides may provide further insight into  
596 the major erosion processes generating sediment from different land uses, which is lacking in  
597 this study. Notwithstanding, the continued supply of sediment from forests will result in rapid  
598 siltation of the reservoir and loss of ecosystem services that consequently result in shortened  
599 economic returns from the reservoir. Thus, in order to protect the catchment from degradation,

600 forests should be better managed. However, since decisions to protect the forests are enforced  
601 by the community forest user groups (CFUs), the planning of effective measures for soil  
602 conservation in the forests should target a ‘bottom-up’ approach. This should ideally involve  
603 the integration of CFUs in a framework of paying for ecosystem services, performance-based  
604 disbursement of electricity revenue to local communities, and effective monitoring of forest  
605 and other developmental activities (e.g. road construction) across the catchment.

606

## 607 **5 Conclusions**

608 The stable carbon isotopic composition of long-chain saturated FAs ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ -FA) associated  
609 with soil of various land uses and different types of stream sediment (bed, suspended, event)  
610 were used as input for a Bayesian mixing model to estimate the spatio-temporal variation in  
611 land use-specific sediment source contributions to the Chitlang stream located in the mid-hills  
612 of Nepal. We showed that applying catchment-wide (generic) sources cannot explain the  
613 sediment transport within the catchment because sediment delivery from the different sources  
614 is sub-catchment specific due to localized changes in gradient, ground cover, vegetation and  
615 microtopography in the mountaneous catchments. Application of a deconvolutional  
616 framework to MixSIAR (D-MixSIAR) strongly enhanced our understanding of the relatively  
617 complex patterns of sediment contributions to different tributaries representing sub-  
618 catchments along the mainstream. This study showed that the largest sources of sediment in  
619 Chitlang catchment were mixed forest (MF) ( $41 \pm 13\%$ ) and broadleaf forest (BLF) ( $15 \pm 8\%$ )  
620 followed by unpaved rural road tracks on flat ( $11 \pm 8\%$ ) and steep lands ( $9 \pm 7\%$ ) during early  
621 wet season (the time of highest risk for soil erosion by water in the mid-hills of Nepal). The  
622 effect of temporal hydrological variability on the land use contributions was not significant.  
623 Clearly, sediment sources showed high spatial variation along the Chitlang stream sediment

624 cascade because of spatial changes in topography and land use management. Prediction of  
625 source contributions was improved by a categorization of sources for each sub-catchment and  
626 estimation of a total, weighted source contribution using sub-catchment contributions.

627 Overall this study showed that community managed forest is the major primary, and road  
628 tracks are dominant secondary sources of sediments at the different locations of Chitlang  
629 stream. The estimates of agricultural terraces contribution are significantly lower compared  
630 to forest throughout the year. It is acknowledged that D-MixSIAR is still a black-box model  
631 that provides no information on the internal processes, or secondary sediment sources and  
632 sinks within the catchment. Therefore, without spatially explicit sediment loading data,  
633 proportions must still be compared with some caution. Nevertheless, management of forests  
634 and unpaved roads in the Chitlang catchment should be an essential component of the  
635 strategies to control sediment inputs to Kulekhani reservoir. Hence, there is a need for better  
636 coordination among community forest user groups and provision of hydroelectricity revenue  
637 in return for forest conservation measures.

638

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646

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## 864 Tables

865 Table 1 Characteristics of sediment sampling locations (see Fig. 1) and potential sediment  
866 sources (broad leaf forest (BLF), mixed forest (MF), pine forest (PF), encroached upland  
867 terraces into BLF (UP-E), upland terraces (UP), lowland terraces (LL)), unpaved road tracks  
868 on slopes inside BLF (RT-1) and unpaved road tracks on flatter areas (RT)).

869 Table 2 Mahalanobis distances between group centroids (see Fig. 4) and reliability of source  
870 discrimination analysis using  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of long-chain saturated fatty acids ( $\text{C}_{22}\text{-C}_{32}$ ). Significant  
871 effects are in bold. Sources: broad leaf forest (BLF), mixed forest (MF), pine forest (PF),  
872 upland terraces (UP), lowland terraces (LL), unpaved road tracks (RT).

873 Table 3 Sediment source apportionment after a high rainfall event (14 to 15 August, 2014) and  
874 aftershocks following the Gorkha earthquake (7.8 M) on 25 April 2015. Abbreviations:  
875 deciduous forest (DF), broad leaf forest (BLF), mixed forest (MF), combined agriculture  
876 terraces (AG), lowland terraces (LL), upland terraces (UP), pine forest (PF), unpaved road  
877 tracks (RT).

878 Table 4 Estimated relative contribution of each tributary sub-catchments (M1 = Dandakharka,  
879 M2 = Kharka, M3 = Upper-Chitlang and M4 = Chhabugaun) to the confluence-sediment (M3,  
880 M5) for early, mid and late wet season. For details see Figures 1 and 6. Mean  $\pm$  standard  
881 deviation with 90% credible intervals in parenthesis.

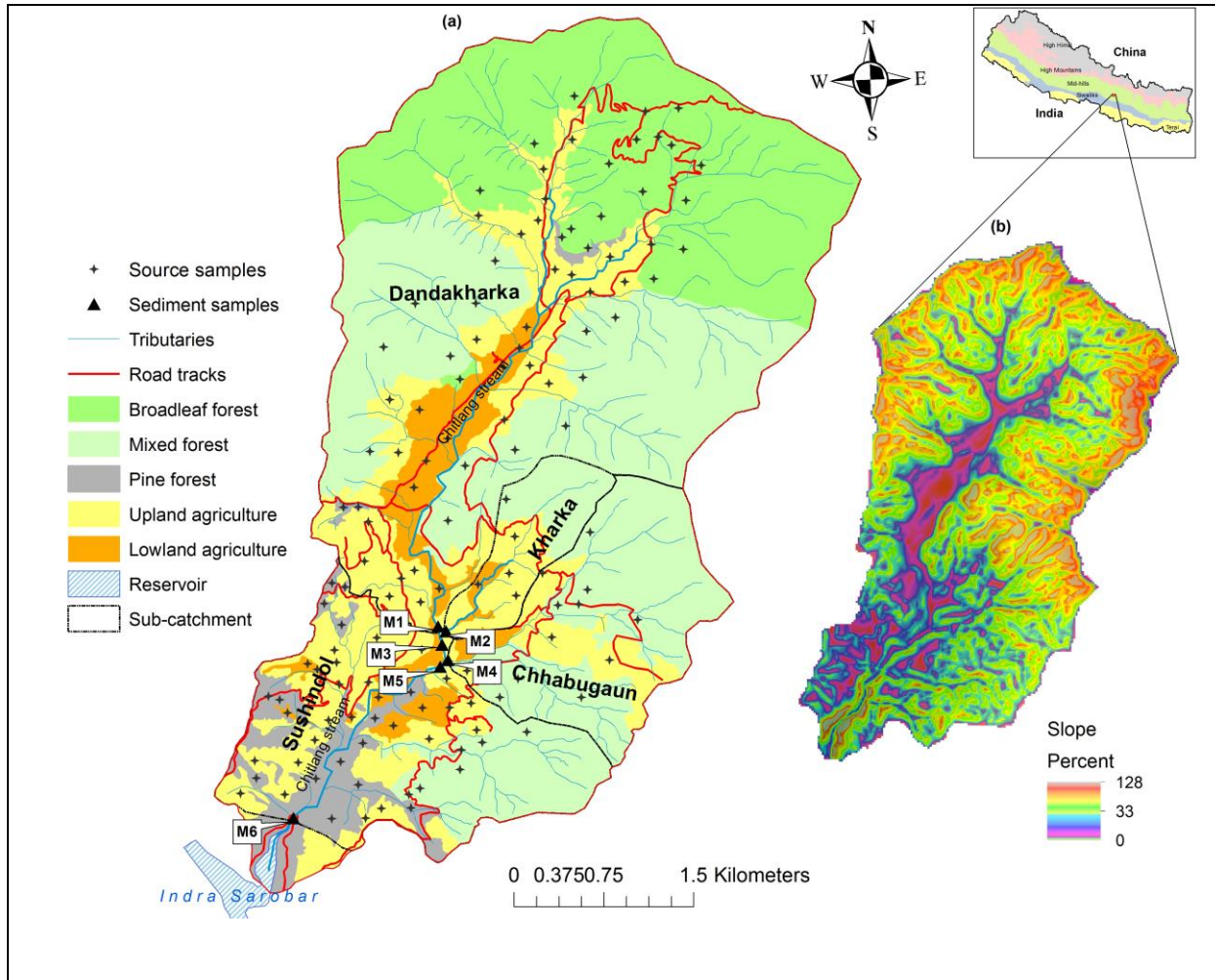
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886 Figures



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888 Fig. 1 Chitlang catchment in the mid-hills of Nepal (upper-right inset) (a) sub-catchments,  
889 land use and land cover distributions (digitized from **Google Earth**) with source and sediment  
890 (M1, M2, M3, M4, M5 and M6) sampling locations, and (b) slope map of the study area  
891 obtained from digitized map layers of topographic map published by the Department of  
892 Survey, Government of Nepal (1996).

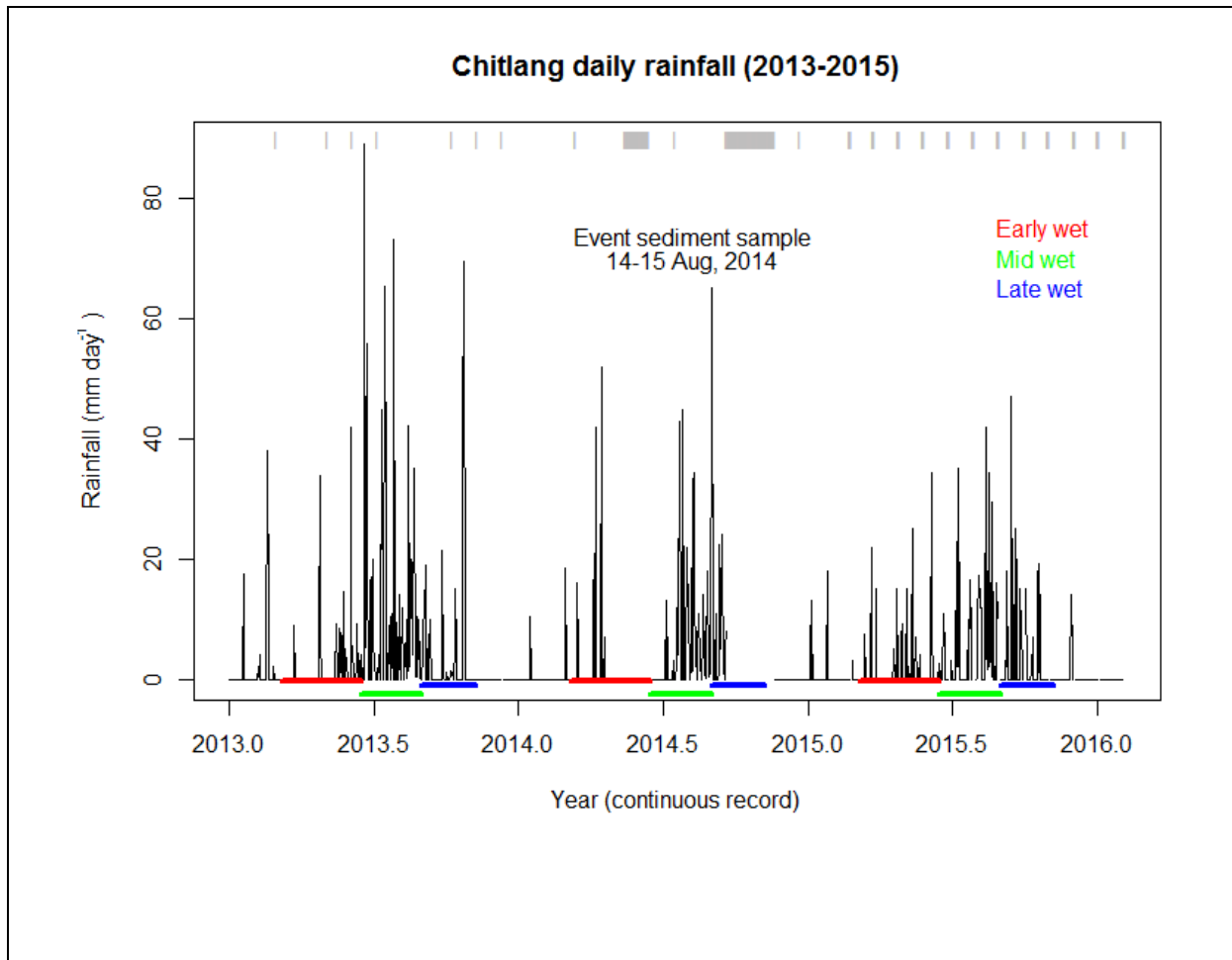
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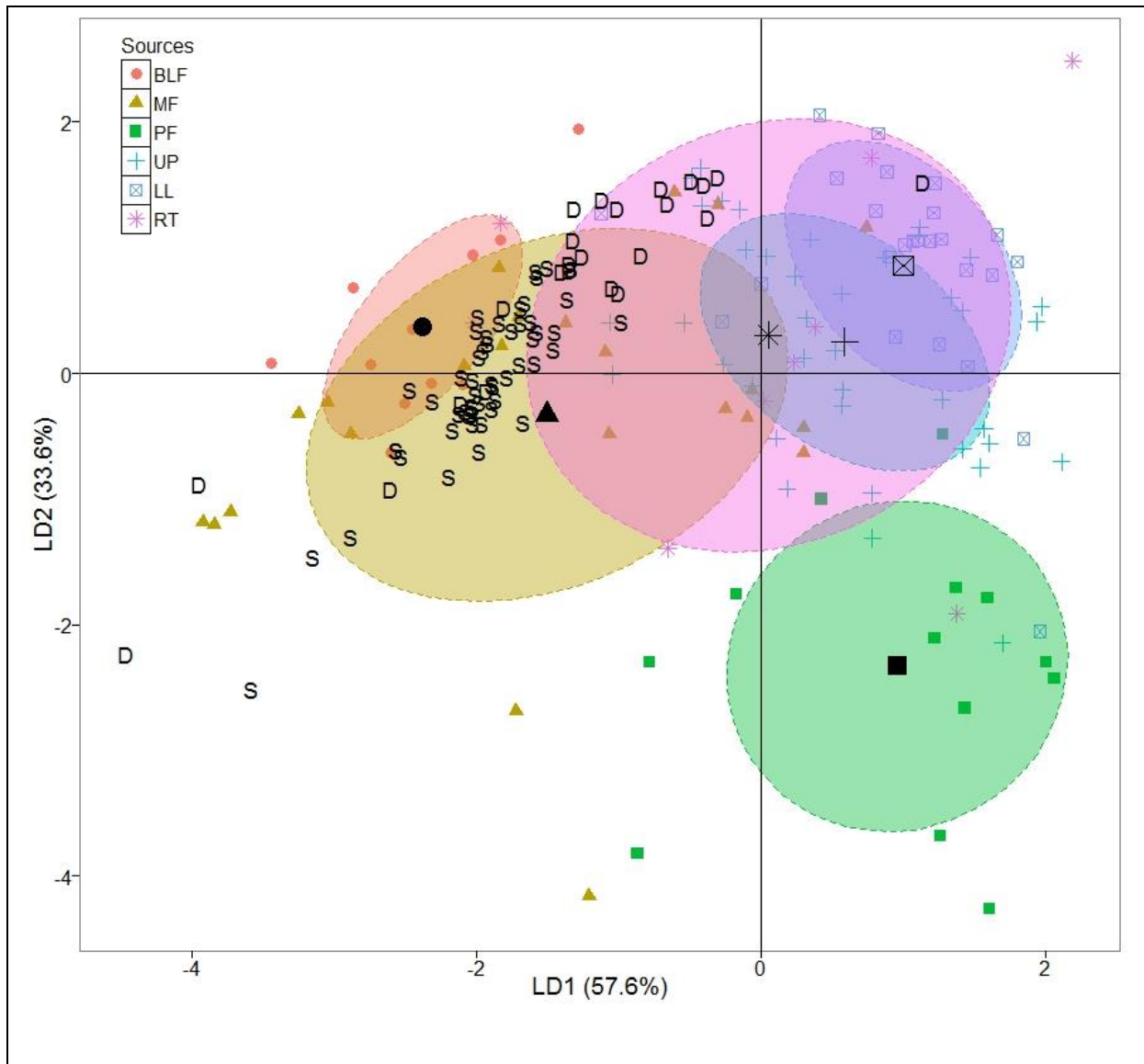
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896 Fig. 2 Source soil and sediment sampling in the Chitlang catchment, (a) mixed rain-fed and  
897 irrigated farming on terraces (middle) and mixed forest on steep slopes (left and right), (b)  
898 stream bed sediment sampling with flat trowel and (c) installed time-integrated mass-flux  
899 sampler (TIMS) at the outlet of the Chitlang stream.



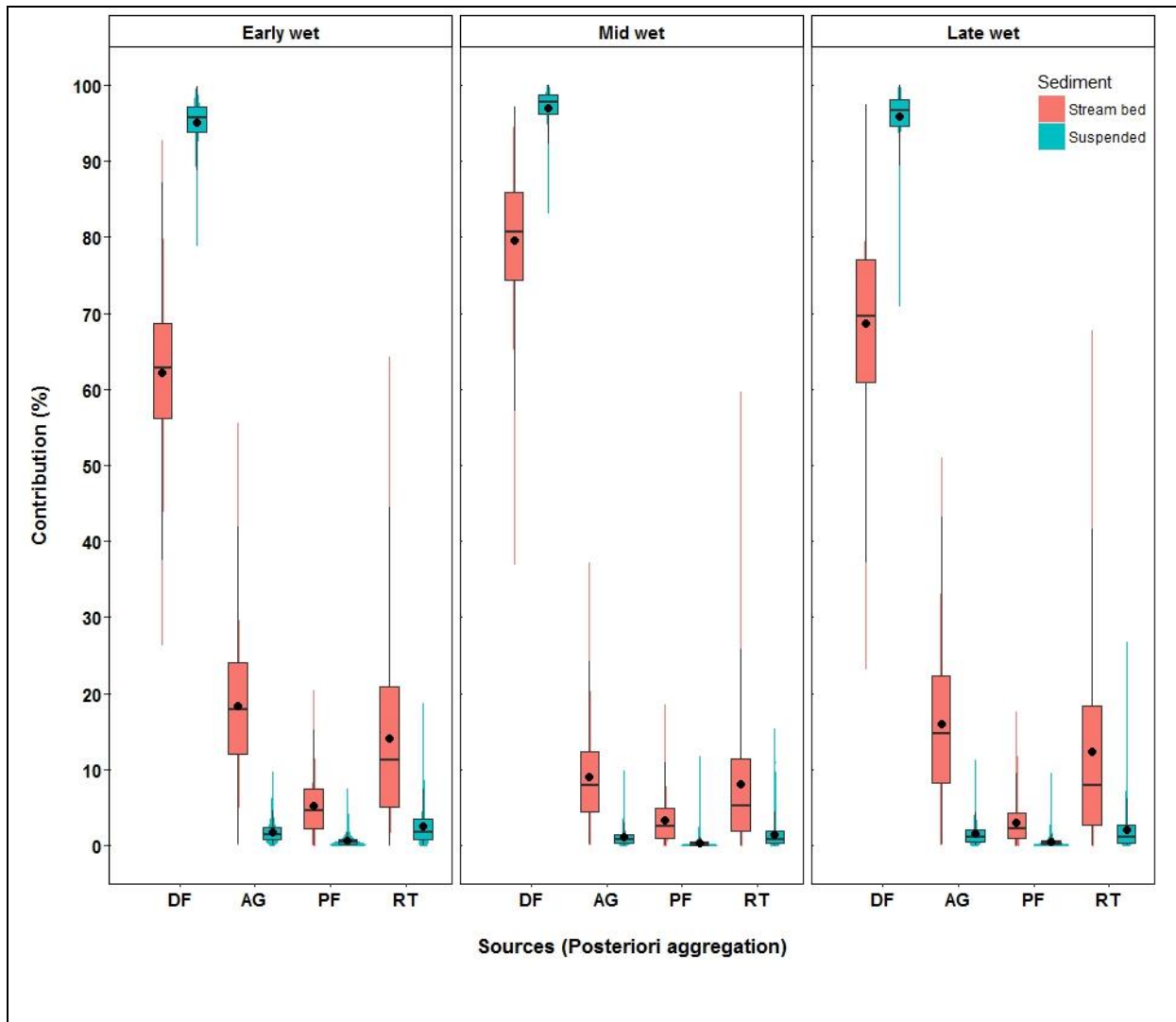
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901 Fig. 3 Rainfall distribution in Markhu station (Index no. 0915, Department of Hydrology and  
 902 Meteorology, Government of Nepal) at the outlet of Chitlang catchment. Horizontal gray bars  
 903 on top represent missing rainfall data while bottom horizontal bars represent sediment  
 904 sampling periods (red = early wet, green = mid wet and blue = late wet periods).



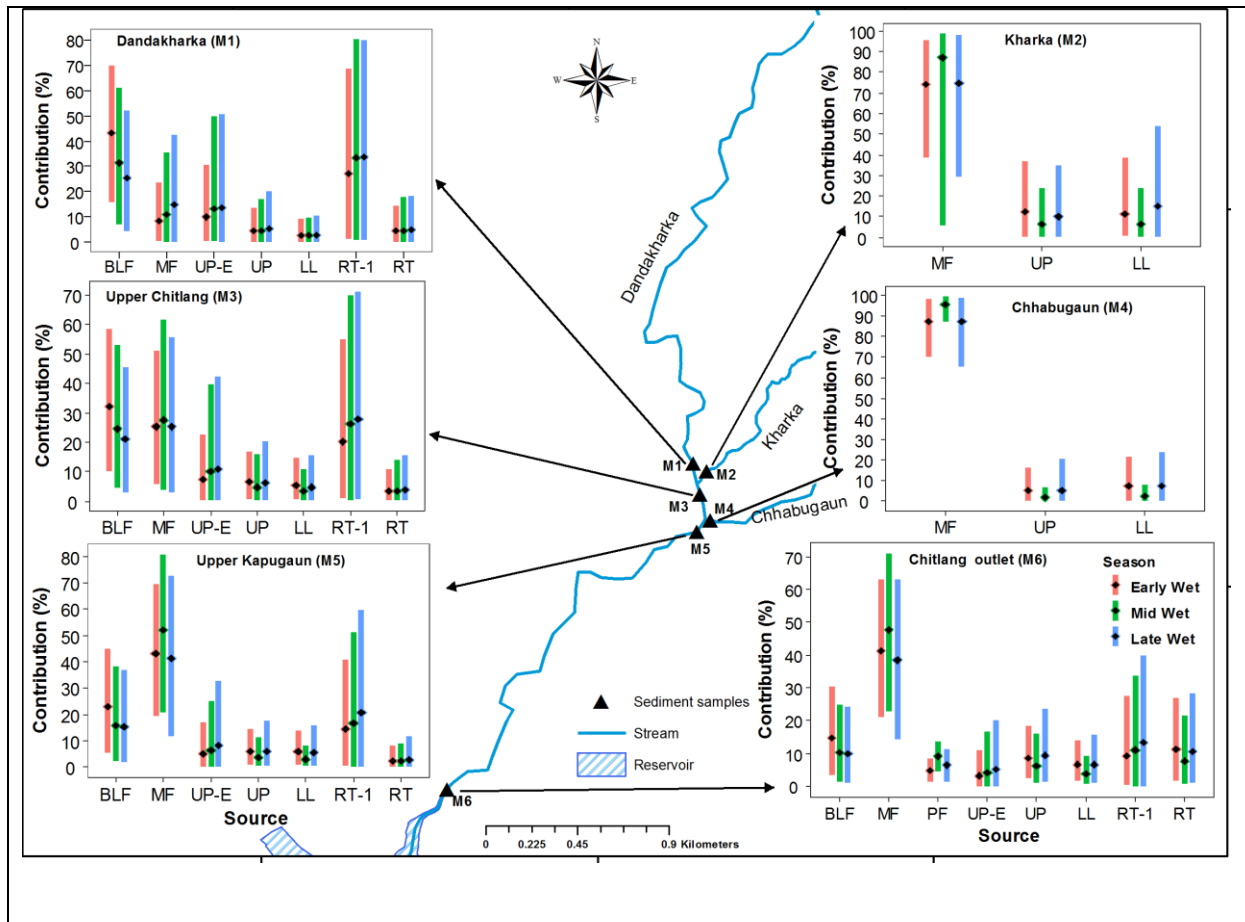
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906 Fig. 4 Discriminant analysis (DA) of generic sediment sources using  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of saturated long-  
 907 chain fatty acids ( $\text{C}_{22}\text{-C}_{32}$ ) with projection of sediment samples (S = suspended and D =  
 908 stream bed) on the LDA scatter plot. Shaded ellipsoids encompass 50% of group variability.  
 909 Sources: broad leaf forest (BLF), mixed forest (MF), pine forest (PF), upland terraces (UP),  
 910 lowland terraces (LL), unpaved road tracks (RT).



911

912 Fig. 5 Source contributions to streambed and suspended sediments at the catchment outlet  
 913 estimated based on  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  FA tracers ( $\text{C}_{22}$  -  $\text{C}_{32}$ ) using concentration-dependent pooled-  
 914 MixSIAR model. Box plots with solid circle representing the average contribution. Sources:  
 915 deciduous forest (DF), agricultural terraces (AG), pine forest (PF) and unpaved road tracks  
 916 (RT).



917

918 Fig. 6 Mean relative contribution (%) of sediment sources estimated with deconvolutional  
 919 MixSIAR using confluence-based suspended sediment collected before and after confluences  
 920 at different tributaries of Chitlang stream. Vertical bars represent 90% credible intervals and  
 921 the middle point (black diamond) represents the average contribution, while seasons are given  
 922 in different colours. Sources: broadleaf forest (BLF), mixed forest (MF), pine forest (PF),  
 923 encroached upland terraces into BLF (UP-E), upland terraces (UP), lowland terraces (LL),  
 924 unpaved road tracks on slope inside BLF (RT-1) and unpaved road tracks on flat terrain (RT).

925