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Widening Horizons

Role of Local, Elected Institutions in Community Forestry Management in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas



A film by ICIMOD

Produced by NEFEJ

2001

Languages: English, Nepali, or Hindi

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It is becoming increasingly clear to all concerned that the natural resources in the mountains can only be properly managed in the long-term if the actual users, local people at the grass roots, are involved in development and implementation of strategies for use and protection – and this is particularly true for forests. All over the HKH, there is a move towards participatory forest management in one form or another. But how will local government and community-based FUGs, formal and informal, work together? And how local government with policy-making institutions at the central level?

In March 1998, women and men from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Nepal elected to village institutions at village and district levels met together with members of community forestry groups and networks and NGOs for an intensive workshop on the role of elected institutions in community management to debate issues and evolve strategies. The results were filmed, and are presented here in an innovative attempt to capture the essence of the problem, and the way people can work together to create solutions. The scene is set with real life cameos of life in the region, an earth ceremony symbolises the unity of purpose that brings the participants together, key issues are identified, topics are highlighted through excerpts from speeches – and more movingly in wide-ranging series of interviews with individual participants held during the workshop. A cultural dance programme brings people closer, songs are used to highlight environmental issues, a field trip shows the interaction between elected local government officials and FUG members – and an earlier conflict in the same village is presented as a piece of street theatre, to everyone's immense enjoyment. The workshop closes with an extensive common statement on governance and community forestry, listing the present situation, desired outcome and strategies for achieving it, for different issues of concern.

Although filmed some time ago, the topicality of this issue has not faded. This lively way of looking at the whole field of interaction between governance and community forestry, between elected local government officials and forest user groups, will inform many and contribute to discussion and solutions. All the major issues are touched on in one way or another – a veritable goldmine of information on attitudes, desires, perceived problems and needs, and a wonderful example of how a disparate group of people with a common interest can work together creatively to develop new strategies and approaches.

About the Authors

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