

# the conference proceedings

## The e-Conference Plan

Table 3.1 gives the plan outline for the e-conference: four weeks with one week for each topic.

As already mentioned there were 126 subscribers, of which 80 were registered. Annexes 1-4 give details of the participants who registered.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Guest Moderator</b>
1	Conceptual Issues	Don Messerschmidt
2	Challenges and Responses	Deep Narayan Pandey
3	Ethics	Masi Lutianara
4	Which Way Ahead	Nandita Jain

### Week 1: Conceptual Issues

During the first week participants were invited to define how mountain culture can be integrated into natural resource management. Don Messerschmidt, the guest moderator, is an anthropologist with nearly four decades of experience in the Himalayas. His published work includes research on the Gurungs and Thakalis, as well as other ethnic groups and on religious pilgrimage, natural resource management, and indigenous knowledge. Dr. Messerschmidt lives and works in Kathmandu as a consultant and writer. He worked previously for a brief period as a programme development consultant at ICIMOD.

### Week 2: Challenges and Responses

During the second week, the challenges faced by mountain communities and responses to these challenges were discussed. The guest moderator was Deep Narayan Pandey, Coordinator of the International Network on Ethnoforestry (INEF). INEF currently has 325 members from 100 countries. Deep Narayan Pandey is also an Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, India.

### Week 3: Ethics

The third week was committed to discussions on building a base on the rights and wrongs of policies/programmes, namely, ethics. Masi Laatianara, the guest moderator, is an architect who moved from the private to the public sector a couple of years ago. Masi has become involved in protected area management, specifically the effects that the built environment has on the natural environment and the human cultures that inhabit it.

### Week 4: Which Way Forward?

The fourth week was dedicated to finding ways to move forward. After adequate discussion on the first three themes, the purpose of week four was to determine the

best course to take. Nandita Jain, the guest moderator, had lived and worked in Kathmandu with The Mountain Institute. Her personal and professional background reflects a variety of cultures – east and west (an Indian who grew up in London and became a Briton of Indian origin), science, and arts.

## **Week 1: Conceptual Issues**

At the beginning of week one, it was clearly important to settle any doubts and to lay down grounds for a common understanding of ‘Conceptual Issues’ before serious discussion could begin. Some important issues were settled through silent submission, whereas other issues were highly debated. The following important points have been selected from issues discussed during the first week.

### **Culture Is Not Static, but Dynamic**

Don Messerschmidt’s, observations on Ken Croes’ paper ‘Integrating Culture into Natural Resource Management’<sup>1</sup>, held that culture should be treated as dynamic and not static. Although often viewed as conservative and rigid, it could be seen, upon closer scrutiny, that culture is open to change and cultures have changed with time to keep pace with the trends of modernisation. It is the implications of the dynamic nature found in culture that gave room for discussions such as this e-conference on Integrating Mountain Culture into Natural Resource Management.

Cultures have for long been influenced by factors such as religion, encounters with other cultures or ethnic groups, globalisation, commercialisation, and so on. Mountain cultures are no different and external factors such as the forces of globalisation, exposure to modernisation, exposure to commercialisation, and the like do influence them. In realising that culture is dynamic, we come to understand that the external influences that constantly shape/change cultures have had both useful and harmful impacts. The challenge is then thrust upon the educated to exploit the dynamic nature of culture and harness positive outcomes. It should also be realised that we cannot totally take it upon ourselves to shape culture in the right direction. While determining which aspects of an existing culture are to be preserved or modified, the participation of local people, who will be affected by such decisions, is essential.

*“Culture (and, by extension ‘tradition’) is not static, but is dynamic and open to ‘contestation, selection, negotiation and compromise’ — thus, it is open to ‘change’. Generally the term culture is misguided by defining culture as (necessarily) conservative. ‘Culture’ and ‘tradition’ are dynamic concepts, and cultures typically include traditions that, in fact, help them accept, adapt to, and/or cope with change.”*

*Don Messerschmidt (1.02)*

In this context, two components of culture, community and tradition, were identified in the e-conference, and how the nature of these two components makes culture dynamic was well described by Chetan Singh.

*“Community in actual practice is a social entity that expands, contracts, and refigures itself according to the situation confronting it. Its most general linking factors appear to be a ‘sense of belonging’ to a group. ‘Tradition’ is imagined to be something ‘old’ that needs constant*

<sup>1</sup> Visit [http://www.icimod.org.sg/iym2002/culture/web/reference/integrating\\_culture/main.htm](http://www.icimod.org.sg/iym2002/culture/web/reference/integrating_culture/main.htm) to read Kenneth D. Croes’ full paper on ‘Integrating Culture into Natural Resource Management’



## Tradition and change in the Himalayas

Camel trains seem timeless, but even now the desert is changing (from the film *'Impact of War on Afghanistan's Environment'*).



Corrugated iron roofs replace more traditional materials, a village in Lachung, northern Sikkim, (from the film *'Dzumsa'*).



An old man thinks about the changes his children will see, (from the film *'Dzumsa'*)

*renewal and re-invention. New practices disguised as 'old' keep a 'tradition' alive. Traditions that fail to renew themselves in this manner are no longer traditions — they become history.”*  
Chetan Singh (1.09)

## **Developer Culture or Agency Culture**

An issue that received a lot of attention was the influence of outsiders – developers, agencies, and political motives that shape the nature of culture-based natural resource management (NRM) in communities. It was argued that communities often have to display dynamism in their traditional culture to suit the needs of outsiders.

Local NRM systems are not without culture nor do they need to be connected. Local groups have already integrated culture and NRM as have outsiders who bring new NRM ideas to the locality. In some cases, the NRM system is tweaked at the edges to accommodate a ritual or a quaint practice, and sometimes to mobilise some culture-based power role or institution to legitimise or otherwise enforce a new practice.

Project developers, government officials, and technical specialists — along with other outsiders — also have their heads in NRM systems that are integrated with culture. Each has a culturally based (and biased) view of NRM.

Thus, the encounter of outsiders with locals over NRM is not about 'their' culture and how it can be fitted into 'improved' resource management — rather, the encounter is about two culturally-based systems of NRM, a local system and an external one.

The developer culture is dominant, especially in areas where cultures have been in contact and under severe pressure from external forces such as markets, globalisation, and colonial experiences. Jay Singh pointed out that:

*“Research by authors such as Escobar, Neumann, etc. have shown that ‘traditional communities’ are at risk of being obliterated along with their cultures.”*

*Jay Singh (1.04)*

Don Messerschmidt also cited a recent case, in this context, of a large hydropower project in Nepal. The dam was designed in such a way that the fisheries were blocked. The local fisher folk (called Bote\*, pronounced 'Botay'), a local 'community' of people whose culture revolves around river fishing and fish marketing, were cut off from their 'traditional' livelihood and their houses destroyed. The developer got around this by compensating the Bote for the loss of their huts and a schoolhouse, instead of the land on which the original huts and schoolhouse stood. In the end, the hydropower developer saw the need to act to reinstate, in some manner, the 'culture' of the fisher folk (influenced, in part, by a huge outcry from the wider local community). To this end, they are developing a fish hatchery operation and a programme to restock the river above and below the dam. They are also apparently training the fisher folk in fish hatchery operations so that they will retain a socio-economic and a cultural base similar to, but not the same as, the one before.

\* The generic name for fisher folk is Majhi – Bote is used to refer to mountain ethnic groups, in general, and mountain ethnic groups use it usually to refer to Tibetans. It has a slightly derogatory connotation.



**Developer culture  
Interventions can disturb  
centuries-old patterns of  
natural resource  
management**

Developers can have a distant and culturally-biased view of development. *(ICIMOD archive)*



Mountain rivers are important for power generation, but dams often ignore the needs of the local population. *(Juerg Merz)*



For thousands of years Tibetan nomads have managed to live on harsh rangelands but now they must adapt to recent property fencing regulations introduced by the central government *(from the film 'A Man Called Nomad')*.

It was also interesting that the Bote were almost totally uninvolved in any of the discussions at the time the dam was being planned and the environmental and social impact assessments were underway. Through this example, Don Messerschmidt raised the following questions.

- Is it possible to integrate a culture into a management or development plan without the involvement of the principal peoples/cultures/societies?
- How to ensure involvement?
- How to ensure that the people's voice is heard in decision-making?
- How to 'empower' local people, women and men, poor and rich, to become involved?

The following statement made by Nogendra Sapkota, defending the decisions, made before the hydropower project was taken up, further heightened the plight of developer culture influencing regional culture and NRM.

*"International 'experts' were primarily involved in this process. Finally, the following decisions were made by the international experts and donors."*

*Nogendra Sapkota(1.07)*

It was indeed ironical that foreign experts were brought in to assess the viability of the hydropower project. Why were country experts who had an idea of mountain culture not included when the decisions were made?

Contributors also noted that most of the funds for development come from abroad. Unfortunately, a large part of these funds are donated for development and apparent results are demanded. Given the short period of time for project completion and keeping in mind the targets set by donors, culture is exposed to developer influence. Without deep understanding of the local culture, decisions are made. Terence Hey-Edie confesses:

*"The influence of developer culture over traditional culture is particularly strong when funding that comes from the developers depends on targets being met."*

*"...Long-term funding for longitudinal research by committed institutions and individuals will be of far more use to understanding the relationship between culture and sustainability, I contend, than any more checklists of cultural best practices (of which I personally profess guilt). Let the donors call me naive."*

*Terence Hey-Edie (1.08)*

Mervin Stevens gives his own experience to highlight the issue.

*"As to the length of a donor (developer) funded project and its influence on community/communities' culture. I was manager of the Nepal Resource Conservation Utilisation Project (RCUP) funded by USAID. I successfully argued for a 20-year project outlook segmented into 5-year building block development (or accomplishment) segments. Each segment was designed to stand alone in the overall development objective. As the planning process was taking place it became evident that 'developers' from different disciplines had differing notions of what interventions were best for the communities the project was to operate in such as fish management, energy development, livestock improvement, community forestry,*

education, etc. It also became evident that if a 'developers' pet theme was not considered in the project, the positive aspects of the project would be in jeopardy. Therefore, I adopted the approach and built into the agenda the flexible potential to drop any intervention not working. I felt that the culture sensitivity within and among the communities where the project was to operate would eventually surface and override the outsider (developer) idea of what natural resource management should be. Activities like education and community forestry became priority and sensitive activities like livestock improvement and fish management were not followed through with."

(Mervin Stevens, 1.14)

So strong is the developer culture that sometimes even the community views itself in terms of the developer. Culture is difficult to define, especially when the not very educated, local mountain communities are asked to define their culture. It is the outsiders who then define communities and powerful outsiders have in fact actually created them. So much so that the 'community' even sees itself in terms of the outsider who has defined it! The 'defining' is being done by an identifiable person, political institution, construction firm, or NGO, and the act of defining is apparent. It can be seen, accepted, or opposed by people as they wish. Of much greater significance is the definition that seems to emerge from within the community, but which might in reality be the result of extended, impersonal, and complex processes that originate outside the community and over which it has no control.

The e-conference opinions were not all against the developer culture, but the point raised here is whether mountain people should not be included in decision-making that involves their culture and NRM pertaining to their communities. It appears that the culture of the developers/outside is shaping the course of the mountain people. Bishnu Upreti captured these details in her contribution.

*"For example, most of the time that I worked in donor-funded development projects, tentative actions to be accomplished by rural committees were mostly decided according to the interests of project chiefs and managers. And those actions had to be delivered to the mountain communities by extension workers in the tightly and skilfully sealed packages of participation, bottom-up planning, active involvement of local people, partnership, and so on and so forth. Several of this e-conference's participants, I believe, are donors, managers, planners, administrators, and researchers. Can any one say that cultures of local people are fully respected while implementing any research/development activities or funding projects? The criteria for the decisions are determined by the power centre (people who have authority), not by the community. Whether conserving ecology and environment is the local people's need/priority or not is decided by someone else."*

*"The earlier discussion in this forum about negative effects of development to the Bote community, or the example of Gabriel Campbell of wildlife conservation, are clear indications of how decisions are made. I am not arguing that we should leave everything to be decided by mountain people according to their cultural values and customary practices. What I am emphasising is that we, as outsiders, are directly and/or indirectly forcing sociocultural changes in mountain communities and blatantly arguing that it is an indispensable dynamic process that all have to acknowledge. International and multinational economic and commercial organisations in their headquarters determine the criteria for what is wrong and what is right and that has to be accepted by poor and powerless countries/mountain communities. On several occasions, these criteria are not interests of the recipient countries/communities. I apologise about raising these questions, but they are in my opinion crucial. If*

*professionals working in NRM really want to integrate mountain natural resource management with mountain culture, we have to change the present ways of pseudo-simplification of complex mountain realities.”*

*Bishnu Upreti (1.13)*

While we talked about the developers’ or outside influence, on culture, what was interesting to note is that change is not always appreciated. Sometimes traditions and rituals are kept alive at the cost of development. This is seen in areas, especially mountain areas, that are exposed to tourism. Tourists flock to destinations that symbolise traditions and the main occupation of such destinations has become tourism. Therefore, in order to earn a living, people are forced to maintain their traditional ways of living. If the traditional touch goes, these destinations will no longer attract tourists. It is for the tourists that these communities live and dress up to ensure that they earn their daily bread. Real issues are not addressed by the organisations working here and ideas on NRM are imposed. Agha Iqrar Haroon, in his example of the Chitral Valley, captured these details and depicted how the locals are undermined and how their voice is unheard when decisions are made.

*“The Chitral Valley has not only a fragile ecosystem but also a fragile cultural heritage that is in danger. The people of the Kalash Valley (wearers of black robes) have roots that go back to Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who crossed this land from 326–325 BC. They have Greek blood in their veins and follow the same culture and religion till today.*

*They have been the target of European tourists for the last 30 years because of their background and now they are becoming ‘living museums’ and they act and stage their lives as desired by the tourists in order to earn money. When I have opportunities to sit with them and ask them why they act as their ancestors did centuries ago, they answer ‘people want to see us in these old style of clothes and old style of living’. Their cultural development has halted. The second issue is brain drain. They do not have many opportunities to earn and their youngsters are leaving for big cities, causing the total collapse of agriculture; their land will not wait for someone to come and give it life. When youngsters are leaving for cities, there is nobody to look after the agriculture.”*

*“NGOs with big names have been working there for a long time, but things are becoming serious day by day because the real issues are not being addressed. One old man, while talking to me last year, said: ‘People come here from cities and inform us how to manage our lands. How to act with and love Nature? How to do this and how to do that? We know everything we live with. These people do not ask us what we need! They talk about only their issues and programmes and projects. Why don’t they ask us if they want to help us? We need ‘roti’ (bread) and we need basic facilities like good transportation, health care etc’ He is right. NGOs and foreign groups have their written strategies, agenda, goals, and of course, project plans. They follow their plans to satisfy donor requirements. Who would come and ask these people what they require?”*

*Agha Iqrar Haroon (1.16)*

## **Defining Culture**

One of the major issues discussed during the e-conference was the need to define community. Questions were raised regarding identification with a geographical location, societal systems, the definers, and the length and type of residency. There was fear that definitions are biased when defined by outsiders. It was agreed that community and culture were difficult to define and could have various meanings for various





**Maintaining traditions to please tourists**

Children from a Kalash Valley in Chitral  
*(U. Sherchan/ICIMOD)*



Traditional approaches to NRM can be positive, but not if cultural development is altered to suit the expectations of tourists  
*(U. Sherchan/ICIMOD).*

stakeholders. For instance, community may actually have a locational connotation; however, it is equally true that developers define communities in a manner that fulfils their institutional objectives.

Community is context-specific. The meaning is rooted in history, physical contexts, societal systems, and cognition, and it varies from different perspectives. However, a religious community may define community in a different way from a resource user. Then, does defining a community give power to the definer, especially when the local involvement of the indigenous people involved is not sought?

Again, there was fear of professional terminology creeping into definitions. An anthropological approach to defining community may vary entirely from a scientific approach. Therefore, even when outsiders do the defining, views are biased because they are based on the motives and background of the definer. Walt Coward presented his views on these lines.

*“Ask any villager in the mountains what the ‘community’ is and she’ll tell you; but try to define it generically, and you’ll run into trouble. Ultimately, if defining it is important, we are faced with a contextual compromise at best, dilemma at worst. And, in making any definition, we (outsiders, developers, anthropologists, policy-makers, etc) cannot do it without the full and complete involvement of the people involved... And, are they all likely to agree on a single definition among themselves? Therein is the dilemma.*

Walt Coward (1.05)

Edwin Bernbaum expressed fear that we may be asserting the supremacy of the definer’s culture and reducing other cultures to that of the definer. Hence, he suggested that we seek definitions that can relate to the meaning of sites on a more personal, human level and get a feel for the views of other cultures and stakeholders. The inspirational, emotional, and other meanings of places should have an important role to play in formulating and implementing policies that will engage all stakeholders and be sustainable over the long term.

The e-conference discussions did not come up with any concrete results on defining culture and community. But the discussions centred around defining ‘indigenous people’. Arend van Riessen came up with the Agricultural Development Bank’s definition of indigenous people

*“Indigenous peoples should be regarded as those with a social or cultural identity distinct from the dominant or mainstream society, which makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the processes of development”*

Arend van Riessen (1.15)

Augusta Molnar quoted the World Bank’s Operational Directives’ (OD 4.20) draft policy on the definition of indigenous peoples<sup>2</sup>.

The terms ‘indigenous peoples’, ‘indigenous ethnic minorities’, ‘tribal groups’, and ‘scheduled tribes’ describe social groups with a social and cultural identity that is distinct from the dominant groups in society and that makes them vulnerable to being

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://inweb18.worldbank.org/essd/essd.nsf/IndigenousPeoples/CoverNote>, for background and other details.

disadvantaged in the development process. Many such groups have a social and economic status that limits their capacity to defend their interests in and rights to land and other productive resources, or that restricts their ability to participate in and benefit from development:

- a. close attachment to ancestral territories and the natural resources in them;
- b. presence of customary social and political institutions;
- c. economic systems primarily oriented to subsistence production;
- d. an indigenous language, often different from the predominant language; and
- e. self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group.

## Language

Language had an interesting focus in the e-conference. We were not talking of language as something that is geographically determined like a local language or English language. We were talking of language as a means of communication. Even while defining communities, it was felt that a language that is specific to economists or anthropologists et al. is used. What we were discussing was a language that forms a base for common understanding for all: the locals, the developers, the anthropologists, the researchers, and so on. We need a language that bridges all gaps between the locals and the developers.

Not surprisingly, the language used until now to communicate development strategies is that of the developers. What has happened as a consequence is that economists are talking to economists, social scientists are talking to social scientists, and agencies are talking to agencies. But who is communicating? Where is the interaction across sectors? Where is the voice of the locals in these definitions and decisions? These are questions that should be addressed. The stakeholders for any level of decision should be identified and a language acceptable to all stakeholders should be employed to communicate and not just talk. The gist is that all stakeholders should understand everything in the same sense and that things should not have different meanings for different stakeholders. Don Messerschmidt contributed some ideas in this respect

*“What I was saying is that I often find, in discussions like these, that a few people (usually social scientists – I am one, so I can criticise my own tribe) often end up talking to themselves. If we really want to get the message about integrating culture into NRM and development, we must begin to more earnestly engage the power-house decision-makers of development, which are as often as not the development economists. Not exclusively, but enough to draw them into the conversation. This requires that we recognise ‘their’ cultures and speak, to some degree at least, in ‘their’ language(s).”*

*“Those of us who are serious about the study of sacred ecologies, for example, must be able to discuss the issues and raise the critical points, in order to make the developers aware. That is, to bring awareness to those who may be about to impose some project activity on a sacred place (that they may be totally unaware of). Thus, we must be prepared to speak ‘their language’ as well as our own, to deal with it, or expose it. Otherwise, as I have experienced, they won’t listen. So, yes, let’s talk to the development economists, and to the policy-makers, and the hydropower project folks, and the road-builders, and the decision-makers in the funding agencies, in ‘their’ language(s). I think we’ll get much further with our message. This fits tangentially with Walt Coward’s reminder that what we are dealing with here is not one culture, in the mountain village, but multiple cultures — including the agencies and all the disciplines involved, along with the local cultures and communities of our concern. Each of*



*these many cultures reflect different sets of values, beliefs, and assumptions to which we need to be able to converse. Further discussion is encouraged.”*

*Don Messerschmidt (1.11)*

### **Branding Developers**

Often, we find that the developers are branded as the enemy. That developer culture influences the local culture is true, but we should realise that developers come with the intention to develop a local community. They invest enormous amounts of funds in development. These should be taken as opportunities and be constructively pursued for the development of NRM. As discussed earlier, the real need is to find a voice for the locals in the decision-making process, and the need to identify real issues. Developers should not be bogged down with excellent ideas that have but little application for the real needs of the local communities. Such activities tend to brand them as enemies and their real intentions are undermined. Therefore, efforts to reduce the communication gap should be stressed and efforts to use funds in the right way should be made. Don Messerschmidt pointed out:

*“we must also avoid branding developers as, somehow, the ‘enemy’. Rather, development along with natural resource management are ‘opportunities’ to be constructively pursued.”*

*Don Messerschmidt(1.02)*

## Political Indifference

What are the real motives behind programmes designed for NRM? It is generally found that many governments and, by extension, many developers lack the political will (or the economic incentive) to mobilise all available resources — human, financial, cultural, and moral — to ensure integration of ecological and cultural principles with economic development. Development is often designed to strengthen the national coffers, and is often rife with vested interests. Sometimes, we find that the premises for development, especially if it is from private investments, are the profit motive. Don Messerschmidt pointed out:

*“...development is often designed to strengthen the national coffers, and is often rife with vested interests. We can add here that development, especially if it is privately invested[sic], is also premised on the profit motive (for example, in private sector hydropower development). Profit is one of the key values of development culture.”*

*Don Messerschmidt (1.02)*

## Positive and Negative Approaches

An issue that recurred in various forms was the approach adopted towards NRM policies and developers’ decision-making. As discussed earlier in ‘developer culture’ and ‘branding developers’, a very negative image of developers is portrayed. We tend to analyse decision-making in development critically according to the concept of risk — the risk of development to the environment, to community cohesion, to family economy and stability, to population displacement, and to environmental degradation: risk, that is, to various social, economic, cultural, physical, and biological integrities. Risks are generally discussed in terms of social and environmental ‘impacts’, usually as negative impacts. The other dimension is to view the same in the concept of opportunities. When we view risks we tend to look at the negative values attached to decision-making in development and, hence, our whole approach towards development becomes negative. We should realise that if decision-making in development is replete with risks, there are also cases that have succeeded. We should document these success stories and learn from them—learn the attributes or qualities that made them success stories. Only when we have a positive outlook will we be able to progress positively, in both discussion and decision-making. We should approach changes in NRM and development positively so that we have positive impacts. Don Messerschmidt commented along these lines

*“Wouldn’t we be further ahead if we turned this on its head and approached changes in resource management and development as ‘opportunities’, and sought the positives?”*

*Don Messerschmidt (1.02)*

A general belief held by developers and government agencies is that they can mitigate or compensate for the negative impacts of their decisions. This may be true in some cases, but recollecting what happened in the ‘Bote fishermen’ case, we may safely assume that the mitigation approach is not always beneficial to the indigenous or local people and compensation is not always justified. We should now seek ways to convert this notion into words that developers and government agents will understand and ‘buy into’.

## Gender and Marginalisation Issues

Speaking on gender issues, contributors observed that men and women in the mountains hold exclusive knowledge on NRM. Due to cultural practices that differentiate between gender roles, men and women hold different opinions and preferences about the environment and NRM.

There are strong dichotomies between men's work and women's work. In forestry, women tend to manage for diversity. Preferences for tree species are based on multiple utilities within the household, such as food, fodder, fuel, medicine, and income needs. Men's preferences are more often based on usefulness, for example timber to be used either for construction purposes or for sale.

Men have the most frequent interaction with government officials and extension workers and often have links to the monetised economy and external markets. In times of food deficiency or economic stress, men will frequently seek seasonal work outside their own community. Women, on the other hand, interact primarily with family and neighbours.<sup>3</sup>

What is it within the issues of gender that focuses expressly on culture and resource management? Is it the knowledge that women and men hold commonly of the environment? or that women, or men, hold exclusively? We should realise the inputs of both genders to NRM and ensure their participation in decision-making.

While discussing vulnerability, marginality was discussed on lines similar to those followed with the gender issue. Contributors observed that the lower classes and marginalised, indigenous and ethnic peoples are too often ignored or forgotten in development.

Mountain peoples generally have little or no voice in national affairs, even on issues that directly affect their own resources and communities. Access to external markets is often available only on unequal and unfavourable terms of trade. Worldwide, the relative and absolute poverty of mountain peoples is striking.<sup>4</sup> Typically expressed in terms of the relationship between highlands and lowland centres of power, communities rarely have a voice in policies affecting their livelihoods, the extraction of resources, and the terms of trade.<sup>5</sup>

## Alternative Mechanisms of Development

Conventional wisdom, which is inherent in culture, does not necessarily provide adequate methods for NRM. Sometimes, we need to question conventional wisdom in order to find new and alternative methods of development. While analysing conventional wisdom and viewing it in the light of modern knowledge, we may find some old practices that may be unsustainable or that hinder development. Without this process, development is not achievable in any field, NRM or others. Thus, contributors felt the need to look for alternative methods of development, whenever encountering hindrances to development. Jay Singh presented his view:

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Byers, 'Mountain Agenda: Environmentally Sustainable and Equitable Development Opportunities'. See [http://www.icimod.org.sg/iy2002/culture/web/reference/mountain\\_agenda/main.htm](http://www.icimod.org.sg/iy2002/culture/web/reference/mountain_agenda/main.htm), to read full paper.

<sup>4</sup> Dennisten, D., 'Sustaining Mountain Peoples and Environments, in State of the World 1994', Worldwatch Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Manjari Mehta, 'Cultural Diversity in the Mountains: Issues of Integration and Marginality in Sustainable Development'. Read full paper at [http://www.icimod.org.sg/iy2002/culture/web/reference/cultural\\_diversity\\_in\\_the\\_mountains/main.htm](http://www.icimod.org.sg/iy2002/culture/web/reference/cultural_diversity_in_the_mountains/main.htm)



Traditional women's roles include processing of products as well as daily household and farm work. Increasingly women are introducing activities for cash income.

Mountain woman from northern Sikkim helps augment her family's income through herb processing.



Recently trained woman beekeepers in Chitral, Northern Area, Pakistan (*U. Sherchan/ICIMOD*)



Tradition and change: a woman who has adopted beekeeping to meet the needs of her (modern) children (*U. Sherchan/ICIMOD*).

*“...essentially I am arguing that we need to question conventional wisdom regarding traditional communities and CBNRM in order to find new and alternative mechanisms of development.”*

*Jay Singh (1.04)*

## **Week 2: Challenges and Responses**

### **High Context and Low Context Societies**

#### **Language and Comprehension**

Language and comprehension were discussed as important aspects of culture and the need for some sort of documentation was advocated that would keep alive the cultures, traditions, and practices.

*“Mountain Communities have for a long time preserved their cultures, traditions, and practices through a fantastic oral history tradition — through songs, various practices, and costume weaving. I wonder if modern documentation procedures will ever be able to substitute other forms of learning that people[have] acquired.”*

*“I too look forward to new and innovative uses of documentation techniques – like the Oral History Documentation Project of Panos Institute, London, and its book and training manual, ‘Listening for a Change’ is a remarkable contribution in that direction.”*

*C.P. Jayalakshmi*

#### **Developer Culture**

A substantial amount of time in the e-conference discussions was taken up by discussions of the developer culture. Organisational culture, with the inherent culture of development professionals, and its influence on decision-making regarding programmes and resource exploitation were cited. Contributors felt that all development organisations, like any other organisation, committee, or community, are exposed to a different culture from those of mountain communities. It is highly probable that a certain amount of the organisational culture of the development organisation might have crept into decision-making related to programmes and resources intended for mountain communities. Thus, there is a need to identify the culture of the development organisation and its influence on decision-making.

Jeanette Gurung points out:

*“...Why don't we think of organisations in the same way we think of communities – groups of people of various ages, classes and castes, sexes, professions, nationalities, etc with various interests and contributions? Stakeholders, in short, some of whom dominate, while others are excluded. Conducting an organisational ‘stakeholder analysis’ would reveal the dominant interest groups, who are often the same as the elite of the larger society, as well as the minority groups. If the dominant groups are taking decisions that effectively maintain the status quo, as is usually the case, there is a definite negative affect on the marginalised groups within the community, and often within the organisation as well.”*

*Jeannette Gurung (2.08)*

Agreeing with these remarks, Frederique Apffel Marglin (2.12) commented that there is indeed a need to focus on the culture of the developer.

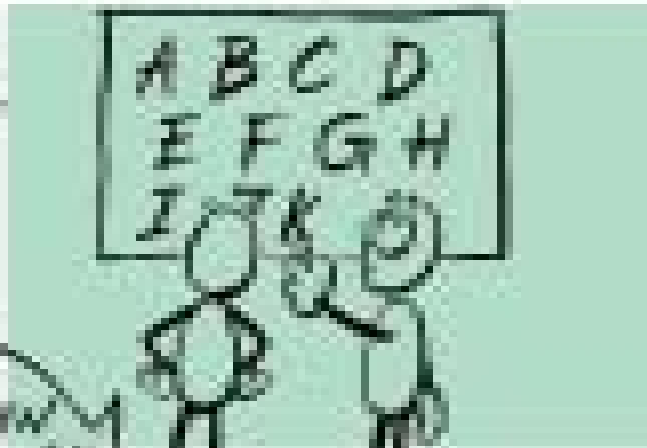




Information  
Transfer

problems with communication

Information is not accurate



Yes, I see  
what you said!

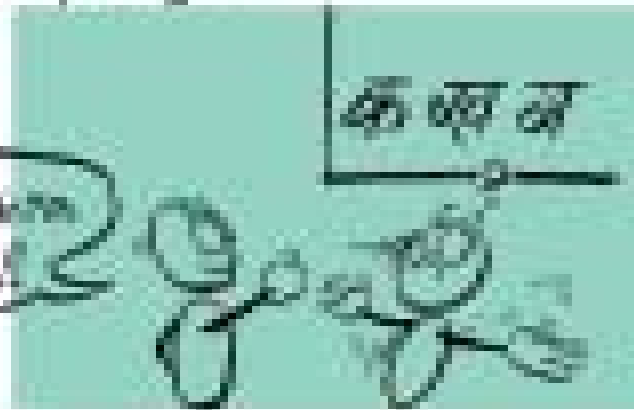
S. Madhani/ICIMOD file



Information  
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Can't be read (flipped)



Yes, I see, but you  
said backwards!

S. Madhani/ICIMOD file

## Gender and Ethnic Minority Groups

The discussion on organisational culture carved a slot for discussion on gender and ethnic minorities. Contributors observed that development organisations are generally male-dominated organisations and, thus, men approve most of the decisions. Within these development organisations, that are supposed to have highly qualified and educated staff, women face gender biases and this ingresses into decision-making that involves the programmes designed for mountain communities. A similar observation can be made with the social hierarchies within which these development organisations work. Development organisations, especially in the poor countries, are generally caste-dominated societies and a majority of the educated personnel involved in decision-making belong to the high castes. The influence of these social hierarchies sometimes penetrates into decision-making and social equity is sometimes at risk.

Jeannette Gurung, Ishara Mahat, and Arend Van Riessen contributed some of their experiences in this respect.

*“This topic of the gendered nature of development organisations is even more significant in relation to NRM. The professions of forestry, agriculture, and water management are heavily dominated by male members and a masculine culture. Women professionals in these fields face difficulties unknown to women working in more traditionally feminine professions. Despite the statistics showing the dominance of women in the NRM activities of mountain subsistence systems, NRM professionals often still see women as merely the helpers of men in the fields and forests. The fact that this erroneous notion has persisted so long is testimony to the strong resistance that is generated and reproduced within NRM organisations themselves, despite the plethora of gender and development agendas actively promoted and supported by donors, government bureaucracies and NGOs around the world, and the critical contributions of women to productive sectors.*

Jeannette Gurung (2.08)

*“How could we expect the outsiders (be they government, donors, or other international agencies) to be rational in balancing the culture and resources that belong to the local communities, while they themselves are affiliated with such culture where the minority groups are always undermined. Can we be smart enough to break up this culture? If so, why [are] the women especially from lower socioeconomic strata, or [why have] lower caste people been ignored knowing the fact that they have a greater role to perform in managing natural resources? The mountain communities, who have become victims of interventions for their enormous natural resources, are not to[be] accuse[d] for their strong affiliation with their culture.*

Ishara Mahat (2.09)

“...I would like to share with you my recent exchange with Tamang people during the institutional analysis I am doing for a project here in Nepal.”

*“One of the first villages I visited was Budhekhani VDC in South Kabhre, nearly one day’s drive and walk from the district headquarters in Dhulikhel. And one of the first community institutions I came across was a community hydropower scheme built under the Rural Energy Development Project (REDP, HMG/UNDP). The vast majority of people there belong to ethnic minorities —Tamang and Magar. The scheme had 146 member households of whom 110 were Tamang, 33 Magar, and just three Brahmins (Bahun). There had been more Bahuns, but the better-off and better-educated Bahuns had recently emigrated to the Terai. The hydropower users were split over nine hamlet groups of 15 households each, and all these*



In many traditional NRM systems decisions are taken by men, while the work is done by men and women (examples from the film 'Dzumsa')

Men meet to decide fines and punishments for those breaking the rules for NRM of a traditional local self-governing system known as the 'Dzumsa' at a village in Lachung in remote northern Sikkim in North East India (from the film 'Dzumsa').



Afforestation work decided by the Dzumsa



Men and women from Lachung wash tubers in the mountain stream. Extraction of natural resources in this region continues to be regulated quite effectively by the Dzumsa.

groups had Tamang or Magar group managers. Also, the powerhouse operator was a Magar, but I was surprised to learn that the overall chairperson and the overall manager were both Bahuns. What struck me even more was that these Bahuns were not better educated than the Tamang or Magar leaders, nor richer nor otherwise more powerful. Further none of the Tamang or Magar leaders had any problem with language. So I asked them why. 'Because the REDP Bahun officials in Dhulikhel and our Bahuns understand each other better', they said. They estimated that due to smoother cultural interaction, their Bahuns would get more things done in less time than they themselves. So the culture of a project office in far away Dhulikhel could decide who would be village leaders and who would get the exposure, the training: still, a very pragmatic and rational choice. Not unlike my highly respected former counterpart who would take me along to the Ministry of Finance when he had to defend our annual project budget, an affair that should remain among Nepali officials. He figured that due to the ministry's officials' cultural misunderstandings about foreigners, they would accept what I would say, whereas they would not accept the same words if my counterpart would say them. What seems to count more than ideals, is whether you get your budget passed or your hydropower."

Arend Van Riessen (2.09)

### **Agritourism: Looking at Things in a New Way**

Political influence and its negative effects on traditional methods of conservation came to light with Mervin Stevens' contribution that cited an article from a regional newspaper. Though the example does not relate to the Hindu Kush region, it conveys the message that issues of culture and natural resource management are universal. It reasons that new thinking, and hence new methods, should be devised as a response to the challenges posed to traditional cultures by factors such as political or any other outside intermediation. Agritourism: a relatively new concept for farming communities, was introduced as a response to the political influence interfering with a traditional occupation.

*"A front page story in last Sunday's regional newspaper was titled 'Farmers Fight for Their Future'. There was a side bar headline 'Staying Afloat May Require New Ways of Thinking.' Being reported on during this conference is coincidental, but emphasises that issues of culture and natural resource management are universal. The articles were about the plight of farmers worrying about how to stay in business. They discussed the whims of politics and its influence on keeping traditional farming alive. (In the US this means price support to keep what may be marginal businesses in business.) It is pointed out that if price support is not continued, the scenic landscape of the state of New Hampshire will be altered. Does this sound familiar?"*

*"Not only is there fear that the landscape will be changed, but so will the culture of agriculture. One solution being promoted is agritourism: the marketing of farming enterprises for recreational and educational value. It's a niche market, but farms have a central role in mountain cultural landscapes and can be of interest to touring families. The message is that new thinking is needed to preserve a region's heritage."*

Mervin Stevens (2.11)

Finally, Deep Narayan Pandey, the moderator, came up with some references on sustainable water management and how cultural resources, such as local knowledge, can come to society's rescue to meet this challenge.

*"...Over thousands of years societies have developed a diversity of local water harvesting and management regimes that still continue to survive; for example, in South Asia, Africa, and*

other parts of the world (Agarwal and Narain 1997). Such systems are often integrated into agroforestry (Wagachchi and Wiersum 1997) and local forest management practices (Pandey 1998). Recently it has been suggested that market mechanisms for sustainable water management, such as taxing users to pay commensurate costs of supply and distribution, and of integrated watershed management and charging polluters for effluent treatment can solve the problem (Johnson et al., 2001).”

“Such measures are essential, although I have argued recently elsewhere that they are insufficient and would need to draw on the local knowledge of rainwater harvesting across different cultures (Pandey 2001).”

“Revival of local practices of rainwater harvesting could provide substantial amounts of water. For example, a hectare of land in Barmer, one of India’s driest places with 100 millimetres of rainfall per year, could yield one million litres of water from harvesting rainwater. Even with a simple technology, for example ponds and earthen embankments called tanks, at least half a million litres a year can be harvested from rain falling over one hectare of land, as is being done in the Thar desert, making it the most densely-populated desert in the world. Indeed, there are 1.5 million village tanks in use and sustaining every day life in the 660,000 villages in India.”

“In the Negev Desert, decentralised harvesting through the collection of water in micro-catchments from rain falling over a one-hectare watershed yielded 95 cubic metres of water per hectare per year, whereas collection efforts from a single large unit, a 345-hectare watershed rather than a small micro-catchment, yielded only 24 cubic metres per hectare per year (Evenari et al. 1982). Thus, 75% of the collectible water was lost as a result of the longer distance of runoff in[the] larger watershed. Indeed, this is consistent with local knowledge distilled in Indian proverbs ‘capture rain where it rains’. This is also in consonance with water and civilisations with a promise of using history to reframe water policy debates and to build a new ecological realism (Priscoli 1998).”

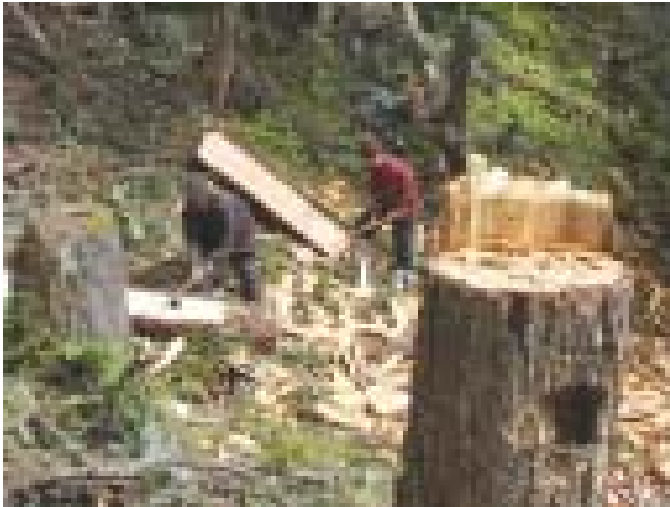
“There is an urgent need for policy innovations in rainwater harvesting that have been found useful by many studies (Boers and Ben-Asher 1982). In the cities, rainwater could be harvested from rooftops of residential buildings and any surplus could be channelled through bore wells to replenish the groundwater, avoiding loss to runoff. However, if tanks and other rain-harvesting technology are to be used to their full potential, policy innovations must include institutional changes so that such common-pool resources are managed effectively (Ostram et al. 1999; Pandey 2000).”

“In order to fully reward context-specific cultural resources, such as local knowledge, government subsidies need to be removed to allow market mechanisms to run their course and surplus revenue generated can be given to the communities who own systems such as tanks. Other users, such as[those] in the mega cities where water use is often profligate and careless, will develop irrigation sagacity (Solomon and Burt 1999) and will find it prudent not only to make efficient use of fully priced water, they would also have the incentive to collect the gift that Mother Nature has to offer in the form of rains.”

Deep Narayan Pandey (2.15)

## Week 3: Ethics

Masi Latianara, the moderator for Week 3, started off with an excellent introductory note on ethics, touching sensitive chords, that should have captured the attention of a



**Outside pressures can change a cultural approach of maintaining natural resources to one of rampant exploitation** (Scenes from the film *'Timber to Tibet'*).

Traditional values are lost as the keepers of the forest are forced to exploit and destroy it.



In a remote area of north Nepal, a community cut off from outside support and old trading practices, cuts down the last pristine forests to trade timber in the TAR, China, for basic commodities.



The forest remains are transported across the border to China.

significant number of participants. However, some participants may have been passive because this was the week that saw the kamikaze attacks on the twin towers of New York. Nevertheless, the e-conference drew some interesting observations on the issue of ethics.

C.P. Jayalakshmi brought a case study to the conference's attention that, interestingly, looked at a crop from the cultural point of view. While framing new policies, whether in the area of forest management or any other, the impacts of implementing the policy should be analysed ethically as well as looking at various other dimensions. The case study depicts the probable results of shifting from a bamboo culture to a timber culture. We present an abstract of the case study here. The reference to this study by Messerschmidt et. al (2001) can be found in the references for this volume.

### **Case: Bamboo in Mountain Cultures: An Abstract**

*“This case study from eastern Bhutan depicts clearly how policies that ignore traditional forest and species’ management systems that have evolved and worked well from generation to generation do so at the risk of the disappearance of not only sustainable, locally acceptable management and harvesting systems, but also at the risk of a species disappearing. Bamboo is comprised of a number of fast-growing species that are important resources for housing, tools, and containers. As a fast-growing renewable resource, it is a good alternative to timber. However, as the commercial demand grows, so does the pressure on the resource. Illustrated with sketches and photos, the study provides rich information about bamboo resources in Bhutan, the geophysical conditions, main species, use, and management, and highlights some of the factors affecting their sustainability and vulnerability. The field observations indicate that bamboo in the district studied is under some threat from factors related to commercial demand, forest management, certain seasonal conditions, timber harvesting, forest grazing, and open (increased and uncontrolled) access by road. Better overall management is needed. The importance of indigenous knowledge and of the traditional Ridam system of forest resource protection are described, along with recommendations for linking them with scientific management.”*

Masi further observed that there are many such examples of policies where some crops are pushed towards ‘unsustainability’ and perhaps to extinction when faced with competition from alternative crops that have better commercial value. Masi noted that the shift from the ‘poorer cousin’ to ‘richer cousin’ as wood is to bamboo in the case study may have devastating effects on culture (such as changes in usage of resources) and on natural resource management (such as a change in a traditional crop may change the habitats of various species) and wondered whether such a change is ethical or not.

### **Donors Funding Consultants**

The influence of ‘developmental organisations’ and of other outside agencies penetrating in programmes and policies designed for mountain communities has been discussed during both Weeks 1 and 2. This point was also re-examined in the context of ethics. Mervin Stevens made a fine point as he observed the following.

*“My sense is that donors are committed to preserving culture and promoting good stewardship of resources associated with a programmes / project they are funding. However, their sense and commitment are controlled by issues and forces in their country, dictating how they operate. In country politics, administrative organisation, budget allocation, scientific community, and world issues all play a role in what a donor will finance, how it will be*



**Bamboo is an important component in traditional life in many parts of the Himalayas** (photos from the book **Bamboo in the High Forest of Eastern Bhutan - A Study of Species Vulnerability** by D. Messerschmidt, K.J. Tempel, J. Davidson, and W.D. Incoll) Plates by C.M.A Stapleton).

Splitting culms by the roadside



Bamboo culm hauler in the high forest



Weaving a bamboo mat



*financed, for how long and who will be involved. These controls or objectives are 'coordinated with the recipient country needs, wants, and desires' through the development of a project that may eventually be approved after negotiations and re-written to become a contract. This is a broad simplification of the funder/recipient process. The contract process reflects how culture and resources will be addressed."*

*Mervin Stevens (3.05)*

The funding process does neglect the indigenous people for whom programmes and policies are developed. It appears that the donors fund organisations without adequate research into the purpose and utility of the funds. Perhaps donors should stress Prior Informed Consent (PIC) (discussed in a later paragraph) to direct their sense of commitment and to achieve coordination of the purpose of their funds with the recipients' actual needs.

### **About Prior Informed Consent (PIC)**

One of the most important principles for donors, developers, etc. in terms of efforts to integrate culture into NRM is PIC. Before local people can enter into partnerships with organisations and individuals from outside, they must be fully informed of the intentions and purposes of any programmes proposed, the possible benefits and risks, the means by which cultural information will be documented and stored, the ownership of that information, and the legal means to opt out. Although PIC is usually associated with agreements about genetic resources, it applies, in principle, to issues of culture, given that culture can be treated as a commodity and that the documentation of culture puts that information into the public domain and potentially alienates it from local people.<sup>6</sup>

### **What is Right? What is Wrong?**

Doubtlessly, ethics is a very subjective issue and each individual may have his/her own way of viewing ethics. Hence, any discussion about ethics is very sensitive and could lead to much debate. However, there is some room for gaining common ground where the parties that make policy and programme decisions and that are affected by these decisions come together and recognise what may be ethical and what not.

*"Perhaps the first point to remind ourselves is that ethics – ideas about the rightness and wrongness of various ideas and practices – are a product of culture. They are a particular component of a cultural system – sometimes vague, often debated and often in flux. Ethics usually confront the question of should (we do something) rather than can (we do something)."*

*"...Perhaps the bottom line is that outsiders need to act on the basis of an ethical principle that recognises the potential value of the ethical principles on which local communities base their NRM activities, while also recognising that, in some cases, these local NRM actions may now be out of sync with the natural world."*

*Walt Coward (3.06)*

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth D. Croes, 'Integrating Culture into Natural Resource Management: A Thematic Essay'. Read full paper at [http://www.icimod.org.sg/iym2002/culture/web/reference/integrating\\_culture/full.htm](http://www.icimod.org.sg/iym2002/culture/web/reference/integrating_culture/full.htm)



**War and strife can have a major impact on natural resources** (from the film *'Impact of War on Afghanistan's Environment'*).

Equipment left behind in a once fertile area of Afghanistan



Clearing mines – once fertile areas have become a death trap in many parts of the world.



Resources are needed for basic reconstruction - development must wait.

## Encounters between Local Groups and Outsiders

Walt Coward further observed that as a result of different individuals/groups having different notions about ethics, frequent encounters between local groups and outsiders are evident. Hence, some common ground should be developed through which the locals and outsiders both determine an agreeable set of ethics.

*“...So where does that leave us in trying to understand how to advance the thinking and practice of NRM? First, it seems highly likely that there are some universal, or near universal, ‘shoulds’ that are found in diverse ethical systems. The human mix of selfishness and altruism that seems prevalent everywhere may have resulted in parallel ethical rules intended to manage this combination. Good NRM managers have probably figured this out.”*

*“Second, I want to return to a point that I suggested earlier. We need to grapple with the situation that both cultural (including ethics) and biological processes are continuously changing phenomena –sometimes incrementally and sometimes catastrophically. It is something very special — and perhaps short lived — when cultural and ethical systems align with the biophysical world to produce good NRM. This is even more complex when two or more contrasting cultural and ethical systems are interacting with regard to managing the same natural resources.”*

Walt Coward (3.06)

## Week 4: Which Way Forward?

### Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action (APPA)

Nandita Jain, the moderator, started the Week 4 discussions by sharing her views of a planning methodology known as Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action, or APPA. APPA promotes Appreciative Inquiry, an approach based on the premise of ‘seeking out the best of what is to help us jointly imagine and do what could be done, and that poses the questions – what is working and why, what is valued and why, and how can we do more of this? APPA builds upon the practice of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). PLA tools help participants generate shared learning and thus develop strategies to manage the type of change they want. APPA has been used to develop community-based tourism, village conservation, and development plans, and to address conflicts among other issues.

Though APPA may not actually help in managing change, it certainly helps to answer the question what do we want to hold on to and why and it generates debate on what could be improved and how by focusing on what is commonly valued and considered as strengths. Therefore, Nandita Jain thought that APPA made it a lot easier to move on and consider what type of change is wanted and is acceptable. Since the e-conference was devoid of the operating process of APPA, we are presenting some of the basics of APPA.

### About APPA

APPA builds upon the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), combined with an Appreciative Inquiry framework, a four-phase planning and management process in which participatory learning empowers people through acquiring and affirming knowledge and through building ownership of jointly planned actions.



**Local people and their needs and visions must become the basis of development**

The entrepreneurial spirit - local people find their own way to exploit tourism: the trail to Namche, Nepal  
*(U. Sherchan/ICIMOD)*



Discovering people's needs and perceptions, APPA consultation with honey hunters in Kaski, Nepal  
*(ICIMOD Beekeeping Project)*



Development based on people's own perceptions of their needs, AKRSP Chitral  
*(U. Sherchan/ICIMOD)*

APPA operates on two basic, complementary premises.

- 1) What you look for in a community, organisation, or individual is what you find. If you seek problems, you will find problems, or conversely, if you seek success, you will find success.
- 2) What you believe is what matters most. If you have faith in your objectives and goals, and if these are believable, you can achieve substantial progress.

### **Do We Need a Universal Civilisation?**

Again, on the lines of developer culture, participants felt that the developed nations try and promote a universal culture. Terence Hay-Edie presented his views on these lines and cited the process of globalisation as being responsible for promoting a universal culture. The world's richest nations believe that people everywhere want to live as they do, and thus they impose their ideas of culture on other nations. What they fail to recognise is that various cultures find it difficult to adapt to their culture and as a result feelings of cultural resentment, social injustice, endangered cultural distinction arise.

Terence Hay-Edie presented an extract from an article 'Is Globalisation Doomed' published in 'The Economist' that held cultural resentment accountable for the recent bombings of the twin towers in New York.

John Gray, a professor at the London School of Economics and a much-quoted thinker on these matters, spoke for many last week when he declared that the era of globalisation is over.

*"The entire view of the world that supported the markets' faith in globalisation has melted down...Led by the United States, the world's richest states have acted on the assumption that people everywhere want to live as they do. As a result, they failed to recognise the deadly mixture of emotions—cultural resentment, the sense of injustice, and a genuine rejection of western modernity—that lies behind the attacks on New York and Washington...The ideal of a universal civilisation is a recipe for unending conflict, and it is time it was given up."*<sup>7</sup>

Thus, participants felt that cultures, though dynamic, are sensitive to imposition and, hence, a careful approach should be adopted by developers rather than imposing a universal culture.

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<sup>7</sup> Is globalisation doomed? Sept 27th 2001, The Economist.  
Read full story at [http://economist.com/library/focus/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=797603](http://economist.com/library/focus/displayStory.cfm?story_id=797603)



Kalash women from Chitral. The Kalash are a draw for tourists, as they claim to be descendants of the army of Alexander the Great. Should they adhere to the past to please tourists? (*U. Sherchan/ICIMOD*)