
Summary Preview

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) hosted a four-day seminar on Himalayan community forestry in the sylvan setting of Hattiban ("elephant forest") overlooking the Kathmandu Valley from June 1-4, 1992.

The meeting broke traditional seminar constraints in order to respond to the inspiring innovations taking place in community forestry in the region. Participants from Nepal, India, and donor nations gathered to exchange ideas rather than papers. Forest officials, NGO representatives, educators, social scientists, planners, and silviculturalists sat, talked, ate, sang, and walked together to exchange ideas and assess successful strategies from their respective perspectives.

The process was inspiring. Long-standing assumptions were questioned. Practical future approaches were identified. The exchange between Nepalese and Indian approaches was particularly fruitful. The liberal approach of Nepal in turning over 100 per cent of forestry benefits to local communities amazed Indian participants. The Indian experience in dealing with commercialised forest products through revenue-sharing arrangements with village committees opened up new modes of thinking to Nepalese participants. User groups were juxtaposed to Forest Protection Committees and Hill Resources' Management Societies; the roles of NGOs, forest officers, and donors were debated. The need for new specific technologies, legislation, institutional arrangements, and processes for empowering communities to manage their forests was the focus of intense working group discussions.

Some suggestions were radical: *"All foresters should wear saris"*; *"There is no need for outside money"*; *"All forests should be privatised"*. Other comments predicted drastic change: *"Current NGOs will be the future DFOs"*; *"Current DFOs will be the future NGOs"*. However, the overwhelming consensus from the diverse gathering was that there are powerful cooperative roles to be played by forestry officials, NGOs, educators, researchers, and donors in supporting local communities to revitalise their management of local forests in productive, sustainable, and equitable ways. A number of successful strategies were identified.

Specific means for establishing communications' linkages between the Joint Forestry Management network in India and community forestry practitioners in Nepal were established. Topics of intense common interest, from operational/micro-planning to research and curriculum, were identified for future attention.

This report highlights some of the insights, conclusions, and varied viewpoints that emerged from this process within an overview of the current state of community forestry in India and Nepal. It is not a consensus report: it combines participants' comments and deliberations with a synthesis from the editors' perspective. Not everyone will agree with everything, but hopefully everyone will identify with something and find inspiration for the future.