

# Continuing to Grow into the Future

## More Impressions

I was impressed by:

- (1) the fact that Wasteland News is distributed to 1,800 DFOs in India,
- (2) the Indian foresters' experience in shifting from traditional roles to new roles,
- (3) the roles and results of NGOs' work in India, and
- (4) the Nepalese forest department staff member's comment that donor's money is not really required -- or if required, then only in tiny amounts.

-- Ravi Pradhan, Hattiban

Community forestry has been, and will continue to be, a learning process for everyone involved -- from professional forester or NGO to the villager. This seminar has been part of that process. It focussed on differences and similarities: between the experiences of India and Nepal; between the perspectives of foresters and NGOs, planners and implementors, and social scientists and biological scientists.

Common ground was found in support for new initiatives for including local communities as partners in forest management. Learning was enhanced through listening to the differences in the approaches to these partnerships espoused by different participants. Assumptions were questioned. Enthusiasm was balanced by skepticism; radicalism by conservatism. One result is unquestionable: differences in policy and approach increase understanding. If a standardised approach had been taken throughout the region, both its forests and communities would be impoverished by the lessons not learned and the insights not gleaned.

As one more step in this learning process, this seminar and this report have not attempted to cover all the issues related to community forestry. Many more issues are important. And

the issues addressed need to be continually re-examined in different contextual iterations. But the discussion has provided inspirations -- and cautions -- for a future in which communities take greater charge of managing and benefiting from the forests that are a part of their heritage and their livelihoods.

Such inspirations impose obligations to share and deepen the learning. Participants agreed that the future learning process could be encouraged through a variety of means.

- Improved information exchange using the existing networks developed in India (i.e., JFM working groups, SPWD newsletter, and forestry journals and associations), Nepal (forestry journal), and elsewhere (ODI Social Forestry Network in London, Forests, Trees, and People Network of FAO and SIDA, etc); strengthening ICIMOD's regional role.

- Study tours and exchanges between communities, projects, and countries on a number of levels.

- Topic-specific workshops and training sessions (e.g., curriculum training and community forestry syllabus, role of NGOs, operational/micro-plans, technology options, extension

## Issues Needing More Attention

The issues listed below received much less attention than deserved.

- (1) Long-term perspectives -- when subsistence-oriented community forestry acquires a commercial orientation (i.e., its implications, preparatory steps, etc).

- (2) Community forestry - private forestry complementarities.

- (3) Community forestry as an integral part of overall farming systems or village-level biomass production/cycling system.

-- N.S. Jodha, Hattiban

methodologies, user group methodologies) and follow-up seminars.

- Case studies and applied research, particularly research that integrates socioeconomic approaches with forest management concerns.

- Short briefing seminars for decision-makers, donors, and the personnel of the Ministry of Finance.

It was also agreed that ICIMOD, as a regionally established centre, had an important role to play in maintaining and broadening the learning process to other countries in the region. The current lack of any other inter-country forum for accelerating mutual exchange of knowledge in community forestry places a special obligation on ICIMOD to increase its role in this respect.

This, rather familiar, list of follow-up activities comes with an admonition. The inspirations of already existing and growing

community forest management in the region leave little excuse for postponing their careful widespread expansion. Enough is known now to know that genuine partnerships between governments and local communities -- particularly with the assistance of able NGOs -- can and do work. While greater understanding will always await us, there is no excuse not to act in the meantime. We hope this seminar and report will contribute to that goal.

### **Hypothesis No. 20**

User group self-confidence and motivation is enhanced by the existence of quick incentives (in forest and forest-related products) derived from internal and external inputs

**Messerschmidt et al. Forest User Groups in Nepal: Perspectives on What Works and Why, 1992.**

