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USER GROUP FORESTRY IN THE FAR-WESTERN REGION OF NEPAL

(Case Studies from Baitadi and Achham)

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Cover photograph: Chiuri: multipurpose tree grown by farmers near their houses.

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Foreword

One of the primary concerns of integrated mountain development is improvement in the management of available natural resources, particularly renewable resources such as land, forests, and water. Continued access to these resources is critical for people living in fragile ecosystems where alternative forms of employment and income generation are not readily available. Throughout the mountain areas, the strong impression being conveyed is that available resources are being over-exploited to such an extent that carrying capacities are no longer sustainable. Unless these processes are reversed, the carrying capacity will continue to decline even further. Improved technology could be of immense help but this will be of benefit only if the available resources are managed on a sustainable basis.

The role of forest resources in mountain areas has been immense. Most of the traditional farming systems have been sustained by inputs drawn from the available forest resources. A large part of the decline in agricultural productivity and household incomes can be directly traced to the rapid loss of forests. It is this critical role of forests in mountain ecosystems that has recently spurred interest in improved management of forest resources. One of the most interesting findings has been that, whereas forests in general have been receding, some communities have managed to protect, and even improve, their forest resources. Researchers are now beginning to systematically examine the underlying factors behind the existence and operation of such systems with the hope of identifying broader lessons for improving forestry management. These lessons have resulted in important policy changes from legislation to forestry development programmes.

This study has been organised by ICIMOD with the objective of providing further insights into community-managed forests, focussing on Far-western Nepal, for which there was very little documentation. Not surprisingly, many informal forestry user groups were identified that were actively engaged in the management of their forest resources. In spite of many differences regarding the conditions of the forests and management practices, a number of commonalities were also observed. The most obvious common factor, as the

authors point out, is the strong sense of ownership reflected in their statement "Our Forests". These forest belongs to a group of people in a particular area where there is a readiness to abide by the rules and procedures that have been established. Given their willingness to cooperate and, obviously, also benefit from these forest resources, institutional tools of management have varied from innovative sanctions such as "religious fencing" to regular payments for forest watchmen. Forestry development programmes have a lot to learn from insights gained through case studies such as this.

ICIMOD is publishing this report by Dr. Ram B. Chhetri and Mr. Tulsi R. Pandey as part of its Fellowship Monograph Series. I would like to thank the authors and their research teams for their work in preparing this document. I also hope it will be of some assistance in improving the forest policies and programmes directed towards improving the degraded conditions of critical forest resources in mountain areas of Nepal and beyond. I would also like to thank The Ford Foundation for providing the grant that made this study and its publication possible.

Dr. E.F. Tacke
Director General

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