

The Jalbire Women's Community Forest Group

The Jalbire women's community forest is situated near Khaireni *Bazaar* of Gorkha district. Its boundaries are the Khaireni-Gorkha road in the east and west with the north and south surrounded by agricultural lands. The forest area handed over to the women's group is 3.93ha and is divided into two blocks. Block No 1 has been afforested with species such as *Sissoo* (*Dalbergia sissoo*), *Kapur* (*Cinnamomum camphora*), and *Khair* (*Acacia catechu*). There are naturally regenerated species also in this block. The southern part of Block No 2 is affected by grazing. The block has some poles and shoots and tree species such as mango, *Siris* (*Albizia procera*), *Khair* (*Acacia catechu*), *Chilaune* (*Schima wallichii*), *Saj* (*Terminalia alata*), and *Mahuwa* (*Madhuca latifolia*). The natural regeneration of *Sal* in this block will be hampered if grazing continues uncontrolled.

Twenty-five years ago the forest was dense, but it began to diminish rapidly after the opening of a highway. As previously it had been an open access public forest, the local people did not care to protect it. Timber was extracted not only for building houses in Khaireni *Bazaar* but also for smuggling. The villagers did not dare to confront the smugglers.

Save the Children Fund (SCF), an international NGO, started an adult education programme in this area. SCF generated awareness among the women of the

importance of forests, motivating them to develop conservation strategies. In 1989, a women's forest users' group, the Jalbire Women's Community Forest Group (JWCFG), was formed from among the households adjoining the forest for forest protection and development. The JWCFG started collecting five rupees per month from each member household and activities commenced in the community forest with the support of SCF. The first plantation was carried out in 1990 and the next in 1991. At this time (1990-91), the Department of Forests (DOF) of His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/Nepal) started implementing its community forestry programme in Gorkha by handing over public forests to community groups. The District Forest Office (DFO) of Gorkha was contacted by SCF with whose coordination an Operational Plan (OP) for managing the forest area was prepared. The OP was approved by the DFO and the Western Regional Forestry Directorate (WRFD) on April 4th, 1992, and June 16th, 1992, respectively.

In 1991, the JWCFG included 44 households with 258 people and 179 livestock. The members of all the households around the forest were involved. By 1994 only 31 households remained as members of the group and one household only had been recently added. Although migration to other areas for livelihood reduced the overall membership in terms of households, the number of users remained the same as it had been with the original 44 households. The JWCFG functions as a cooperative. The majority of users are *Magar(s)*, *Gurung(s)* and *Chhetri(s)*. All of them are women and most are illiterate.