

OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN FOREST MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE HILLS OF NEPAL



G.B. Applegate and D.A. Gilmour

ICIMOD OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 6

Kathmandu, Nepal
January, 1987

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**Published by
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development**

Kathmandu, Nepal

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Cover photograph : Community participation in the production of seedlings.

Published by

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development,

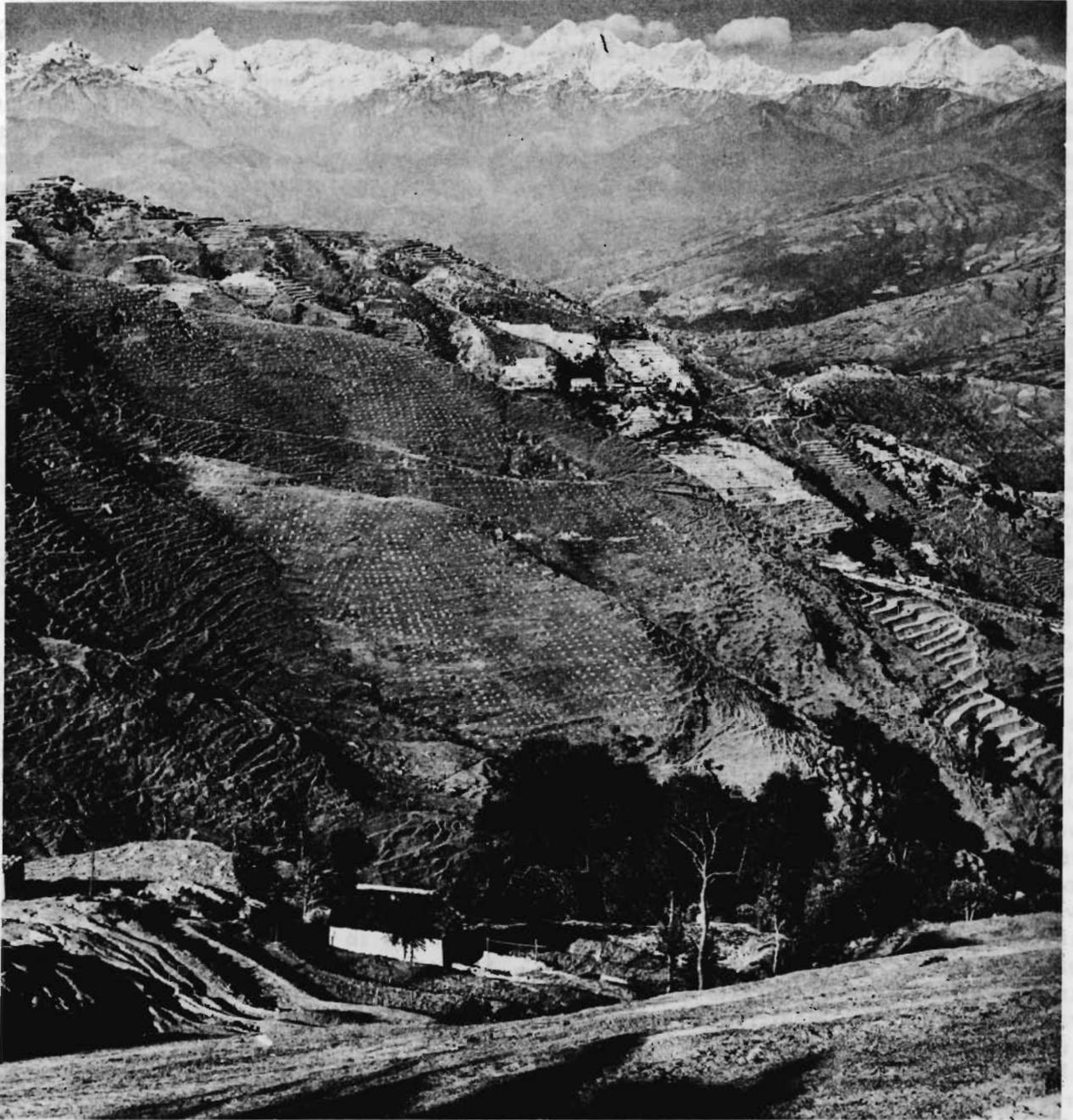
G.P.O. Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal

ISBN 9971 - 84 - 757 - 4

Printed in Singapore at Kefford Press

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Published by
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
Kathmandu, Nepal



"Protection, maintenance and development of forests scattered all over the Kingdom is neither possible nor even practical through government efforts alone".

Ministry of Forest 1978

Nepal's Community Forestry Programme has proved to be a very encouraging endeavour in the development of a constructive partnership in forestry between hill farmers and government. The origin in Nepal of this imaginative and much more promising approach to effective forest management in highly vulnerable mountain environments can be traced back to a single experimental farm and nursery established by an unusually perceptive Divisional Forest Officer (Dr. T.B.S. Mahat, now a member of the professional staff of ICIMOD) in Chautara Forest Division in the early 1970s. Confronted with the severe degradation of the forests of the two districts of the Chautara Forest Division, Sindhupalchok and Kabhre, and the related demoralisation of local communities heavily dependent on local forest resources, Dr. Mahat recognised that technical forestry practice alone could not reverse this situation of accelerating decline. What was needed was the active participation of the local village communities in systematic forest conservation and management.

From this fundamental insight (perhaps an unexpected enlightenment for traditionally trained forest officers used to a more confrontational relationship with the hill farmer) has developed one of the central themes of all rural development programmes in Nepal. With these tentative and experimental beginnings in the panchayat communities of Chautara Forest Division the 'theory and practice' of Community Forestry in Nepal has developed rapidly. In the mid 1970s, the concepts of community management of forests were incorporated in Nepal's National Forestry Plan and its related Forest Legislation. In 1978, with Dr. Mahat's participation, the Nepal-Australia Forestry Project began a sophisticated but highly practical programme of action-research in the same two districts of Chautara Division, Sindhupalchok and Kabhre. And by 1981, the World Bank and FAO/UNDP had joined HMG Nepal in the implementation of a major Community Forestry Development and Training Programme covering village panchayats in 29 Hill Districts - involving the establishment of 12,000 hectares of Panchayat Forests, the management of 40,000 ha. of Panchayat Protected Forests and the distribution to hill

farmers of 900,000 tree seedlings for private planting.

The rapid expansion of the 'community forestry idea' has, however, left many questions unanswered with regard to this new approach to effective forest management in mountain watersheds - and, indeed, to the most constructive development of the necessary practical cooperation between farmer and forester. Given the obvious importance to integrated mountain development of a better understanding of this mutual learning process in this critical field of mountain forest management, we at ICIMOD are particularly pleased to publish in our Occasional Paper Series this important 'working report' by two very experienced foresters from the Nepal-Australia Forestry project. They describe the lessons of field practice in Community Forestry sensitively and scientifically developed over some eight years of intensive concentration on the panchayats of these two Districts in the 'Middle Hills' of Nepal.

It may be useful to add that we see this particular Occasional Paper as closely linked to two others in this Occasional Paper Series (designed for the dissemination throughout the Hindu Kush-Himalaya Region of practical knowledge on various aspects of integrated mountain development and mountain environmental management):

"Sustaining Upland Resources: People's participation in Watershed Management" by Anis Dani and Gabriel Campbell (ICIMOD Paper No. 3).

"Forestry-Farming Linkages in the Mountains" by T.B.S. Mahat (Paper No. 7).

ICIMOD owes special thanks to Grahame Applegate and Don Gilmour for this significant contribution to the exchange of knowledge in these mountains, and to HMG Nepal Department of Forests and the Nepal-Australia Project (and most particularly to Professor David Griffin, the Project Director) for facilitating this publication which will doubtless attract much interest among all concerned with the practical issues of mountain development.

Colin Rosser
Director
ICIMOD.

PREFACE

Australian development assistance to the forestry sector in Nepal commenced over 20 years ago, but the first phase, to 1978, was small scale and geographically diffuse. Little tangible evidence of these early efforts can now be found. Since 1978, however, phases 2 and 3 of the Nepal-Australia Forestry Project (the latter began in 1986) have had a precise geographical focus and a clear purpose. The project, a bilateral enterprise of the Forest Department of His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Australian Development Assistance Bureau, has operated in Sindhupalchok and Kabhre Palanchok districts. Here, its purpose has been to develop and implement a methodology for forestation for local community benefit in the Middle Hills of Nepal. The Project has had a pilot role, by agreement of both funding agencies, and such a role can be fulfilled only if its experiences are made widely available. Publications have been slow to appear, however, because methodologies need to be proven by successful implementation before they are worth reporting. Furthermore, many views of the Nepalese forestry situation developed by the Project staff and associated

research workers were at considerable variance with widely held beliefs. Again, such views take time for validation. Sufficient experience has now been gained, albeit within only two districts, to warrant publication in forms easily available to an international readership and a considerable number of diverse articles are now in the process of publication or preparation.

As Project Director since 1975, my main roles have been in determining the underlying philosophy of the Project, in guiding its policy, and in some strategic planning. Project staff in Nepal (Nepalese and Australian) have carried the main responsibility for tactical planning and operations and have been partners in the determination of many strategic matters. In this paper, two Project staff members, variously Project Forest Officer, Acting Project Manager, and Project Manager/Team Leader during periods from 1981 to the present, set out with appropriate background, important aspects of the Project's methodology and operations as they have existed in these last few years. I believe they will be found of interest by a wide readership within and beyond Nepal.

D.M. Griffin
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National University and Project Director,
Nepal-Australia Forestry Project.

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