



Opening
Sessions

Registration, Orientation, Poster Sessions

The participants began arriving on the morning of Sunday, May 21. On registering, each participant received a locally-crafted cushion and cloth bag for use during the workshop and to take home as a memento. Maps and information about the Budhanilkantha School campus were available in three languages.

The participants prepared posters on community forestry issues and activities specific to their region. These posters were displayed in the main foyer of the building where the sessions were held, and they served as effective means of communication.

Following a sightseeing tour of Kathmandu Valley, a plenary session was held to provide participants with information on the logistics. The participants also made fairly detailed introductions, and the session concluded late at night.

Opening Plenary Session

The first formal plenary session began on Monday afternoon. This session consisted of introductions by the participants and identification of workshop objectives by the organisers. Recognising that communities had played an important role in asserting their rights to forest resources, a key objective of the workshop was to bring together individual women and men who had been in the forefront of community-based natural resource management and to provide a forum for sharing experiences and to devise strategies for the future. Although forest officers and members of different NGOs participate in regional forums, village-level user group members rarely get an opportunity to attend a regional seminar. The main thrust of the workshop, therefore, was to prove that rural communities could take responsibility for resource management. Another goal was to consider and explore the possibilities of forming a regional alliance of user groups. It was clearly stated in this workshop that the participants themselves were to take the lead in defining their expectations and the process that should take place.

Cross-country Working Groups

The participants were then divided into four cross-country working groups to begin the first actual workshop task: the discussion and definition of what participants should aim to accomplish during the workshop. Three items were identified for each group's agenda.

- Introductions
- Share expectations from the workshop
- Identify group resources and contributions that could be shared

The groups were constituted to provide maximum diversity. Each group, therefore, was a good mix of participants from different countries, with a gender balance, and including both user group members and community organisers.

Day One

May 21, 1995
Sunday

Day Two

May 22, 1995
Monday

Originally, this process was expected to take a couple of hours, but the groups worked until the informal inaugural ceremony and reconvened after dinner. Independent of one another, each group began with a detailed process of introduction during which group members discussed their groups or organisations, as well as the differences in the rules and guidelines under which they worked. Some groups worked late into the night to prepare their presentations for the following morning.

Informal Inauguration

An informal inauguration of the workshop, exclusively for participants, was held in the evening at the Saraswati (Goddess of Learning) Temple on the Budhanilkantha School Campus. The temple and surroundings were lit in the traditional Nepali style with candles and adorned with flowers. To invoke the spirit of education and learning and to create an atmosphere of harmony and collective effort, all the participants were invited to light a lamp and offer flowers for the success of the workshop. The participants were pleased to be part of this ancient and beautiful custom. The temple itself was located in a grove of trees, with various brightly-coloured flowers planted all around. This opening ceremony created a positive mood for the workshop.

Day Three

May 23, 1995
Tuesday

Formal Inauguration

The formal inauguration began with the arrival of the Honourable Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation of Nepal, **Mr. Salim Miya Ansari**, and several other high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation and Department of Forests. Mr. Semai Chaudhari from Sunsari, who had received national recognition for his personal contribution and commitment to reforestation in Nepal, was the Chairperson of the inaugural ceremony.

Welcome Address by Mr. Egbert Pelinck, Director General, ICIMOD

Mr. Egbert Pelinck, Director General of ICIMOD, in his welcome address, stressed the unique nature of the workshop. He noted that, although Nepal had for many years been internationally recognised for its progressive community forestry policy and legislation, the challenge of bringing policies into practice still existed. Mr. Pelinck extended a hearty welcome to the workshop participants who, he said, through their own practices, had demonstrated that community-based forestry was effective and could succeed in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

Mr. Pelinck said that the participants were in the forefront of a new age in forest management and, therefore, their participation made the workshop special. On this occasion, he said, it was not the residents of villages in remote areas that were the subject of deliberations but the main actors at the workshop. The participants had given hope, Mr. Pelinck added, for the future of the forests of the Himalayas, and ICIMOD was looking forward to receiving guidance on the expansion of strategies and approaches throughout the mountains.

Commenting on ICIMOD's dual mandate of environmental conservation and poverty alleviation, Mr. Pelinck stated that by linking environmental issues and economic aspirations, ICIMOD aimed to assist in the attainment of sustainable

development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Bringing countries of the region together was ICIMOD's main mandate, and the presence of participants from different countries of the region was evidence of the regional focus and perspective ICIMOD was able to provide to national issues. Noting that linkages also existed with other institutions, he welcomed the participation of delegates from Thailand and The Philippines.

Mr. Pelinck said that, although each of the Himalayan countries had successful policies to promote people's participation in forest management, more attention needed to be given to sustainable use of forests and to equity in the sharing of benefits of protection and management. User-oriented strategies to implement policies and create appropriate institutions at the local level were now needed, and Mr. Pelinck noted that the best way to design such strategies was in close consultation and collaboration with forest user groups. This being the workshop objective, the meeting was viewed as the beginning of a process, and he hoped that it would elicit practical strategies for future follow-up.

Mr. Pelinck noted that the participants' recommendations would be of interest and would contribute not only to ICIMOD's member countries, but also to the ongoing consultations on Chapter 13 of UNCED's Agenda 21, which focussed on issues related to the development of mountain areas around the world.

Mr. Pelinck also thanked the Honourable Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation, adding that his participation demonstrated the continuing commitment of HMG to people-oriented forestry in Nepal. He also thanked the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, for the continuing support to ICIMOD which had made the workshop possible. He thanked the Swiss Development Cooperation, Nepal, for its financial contribution to the workshop. He then thanked the Board of Governors, the Principal, and the staff of Budhanilkantha School for making their campus facilities available for the forum. He also thanked FTTP/WATCH (Women Acting Together for Change) for collaborating with ICIMOD in planning and organising the workshop.

Inaugural Speech by the Honourable Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, Mr. Salim Miya Ansari

The Honourable Minister officially opened the workshop by thanking the workshop organisers for giving him the opportunity to address the participants of the First Regional Community Forestry Users' Group Workshop. He stated that Nepal's recent experiences in forest management had shown that peoples' participation was essential for the sustainable use of forest resources. Nepal's forest management programme included the formation and mobilisation of users' groups, the preparation of an operational plan, and the handing over of forest areas. Most of the Nepali population depended on forest resources, and over 75 per cent depended on forests for their daily fuel requirements. The growing population had increased the pressure on forest resources, and, without adequate local support and people's participation, the efforts of the government and NGOs would fail. Due to the socioeconomic conditions of Nepal, women and the poor were the ones most directly dependent on forest resources. Since forest patches managed by women users appeared to be relatively better managed and productive, future programmes planned to involve more women.

The Minister noted that Nepal's forest programme had been proceeding rapidly since the restoration of democracy. A new Forest Act and byelaws had been implemented to institutionalise the programme. This Act legally recognised users' groups and their legal rights over forest products and stated that the income from community forestry would be used for village and community development.

Minister Ansari said that the community forestry programme had also helped in environmental protection, since, given the fragile geographic situation in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, even minor human activities could effect the entire population. For that reason, forest management and its development should be primary considerations.

The Minister hoped that the workshop would help exchange ideas and experiences and, therefore, strengthen future policies. He thanked ICIMOD, FTFP/WATCH, and the organisers and wished the workshop a grand success.

Representatives from the participating countries were then invited to address the gathering.

Kalawati Devi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Recognising that countries such as Nepal, Pakistan, and India were facing serious environmental problems, Ms. Kalawati Devi said that protecting and developing forest products was an important issue. Forests were the direct concern of women, and scarcity of forest products had increased their workload. Women should, therefore, be involved in the plantation, protection, and utilisation of forest products. Women played a major role in forest development. It was essential that both men and women should work together for forest protection. However, she lamented, the domestic workload limited women's participation in these programmes.

Ali Gohar, Pakistan

Thanking the organisers for inviting participants from Pakistan, Mr. Gohar said he believed the workshop would be very beneficial. He felt that it was a good opportunity to gather knowledge from people living within and around the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Despite many differences in culture, ethnicity, and language, there were many common issues and problems to be discussed during the workshop. Mr. Gohar congratulated HMG/N for promoting community forestry and said the participants were ready to learn from Nepal's policy and experiences. He said that learning would help Pakistan and other countries to develop effective strategies for natural resource management.

George Paglinawan, The Philippines

Mr. Paglinawan began by commenting that although The Philippines was not part of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, the country, nevertheless, had common problems with regard to forestry and mountain conservation issues. He said that the delegates from The Philippines were very grateful to have been invited to participate in the meeting.

Mr. Paglinawan noted that The Philippines also had upland areas inhabited by tribal communities, and his purpose for coming to the workshop was to see how the forests were conserved and managed in the Himalayas. He said that, despite the different languages spoken at the workshop, the forest communicated in its one language, i.e., the language of life, and this was the common bond.

Din Singto, Thailand

Mr. Singto began by expressing his appreciation to all the friends from Nepal, South Asia, and South East Asia who had come together to discuss the problems of the forest environment and the people. He said that he represented fishermen from southern Thailand where forests played a significant role in the lives of the fishing community. He had been attempting to develop and implement community forestry in southern Thailand. His efforts had succeeded in a small way and had drawn the attention of the government to the problems faced by poor fishermen.

Laxmi Devi Khatiwada, Nepal

Ms. Khatiwada related the experiences of her forest users' group. Following a flood that had washed away their crops, she and some other women had worked together and planted trees. They had planted saplings for grass and trees according to their needs. The women did all the work themselves, including building a fence by pooling their resources. They also opened a milk collection and marketing depot. The income generated from this depot was used in establishing a school. So far, the group had not received any assistance from the government. Ms. Khatiwada concluded by saying that since women were most dependent on forest resources, their participation in forest management decision-making needed to be improved.

Pitambar Bhandari, Nepal

Mr. Bhandari thanked ICIMOD for inviting the participants to the first South Asian Community Forestry workshop, and expressed his thoughts on the importance of forests through a Nepali poem. The following is a translation.

*The forest is the life of a human being, giving peace in our isolation.
In forest gardens, cuckoo and other lonely birds sing freely.
Wherever mountains are, there is peace.
Wolf, panther and jackal wander without fear.
Beneath the forest, pure cold water is found; within are fruits & vegetables.
Song pervades the forest.
Woodcutters and villagers roam fearlessly; everyone is happy and full
of life.
Before, only the government protected the forest.
Deceived by users, forests everywhere were destroyed.
Forest guards took no care; the government failed.
Now, user groups together manage the forest, growing and cutting
themselves.
Let us look after this forest; let us have greenery throughout.
Thus will our environment thrive and the community forest develop.*

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Thus will our environment thrive and the community forest develop.

*'Til now we must purchase timber, but cannot meet our needs.
Grass and fodder we are also without, so we must plant more than
timber.
Not only juicy fruit but also medicinal herbs.
We must spread greenery all over our land.*

Chairperson Semai Chaudhari, Sunsari, Nepal

Noting his pleasure at the attendance of various dignitaries and other friends from different countries, Chairperson Chaudhari stated that he hoped greenery would spread throughout Nepal and other countries.