

Plenary Sessions

Working Group Reports

The general plenary session reconvened after lunch for reports on the four working groups' deliberations. **Mr. Pearmsak Makarabhiron**, Division of Community Forestry, Royal Forest Department, Thailand, was the Chairperson for this session.

The presentations were made either with posters or with overheads. In addition, the Working Groups' concerns were consolidated and translated into Hindi and Nepali for distribution to the participants.

Working Group One

This group included 18 members, seven women and 12 men. Ten of them were from Nepal, six from India, and one each from Bhutan and The Philippines. All the participants introduced themselves and the user group or organisation they represented and stated their hopes and aspirations for the workshop.

Expectations from the Workshop

- To learn from others and share experiences

The general goal of most participants was to learn more about community forestry programmes in the region through the workshop. **Bhim Lal Subedi**, of Syangja District in Nepal, related how his user group was formed. He hoped to learn more about the experiences of other user groups in Nepal and other countries and share views with others. **Bhim Prasad Shrestha**, from the Ram Bazaar users' group in Okhaldhunga, Nepal, noted that his group had not received any assistance from donor agencies, and that he wanted to know more about the formation and management of other user groups.

Participants from other countries, such as **Dennis Desmond** of Bhutan and **George Paglinawan** of The Philippines, had similar aspirations. Mr. Paglinawan expected to take back experiences on common forestry. For instance, the term, users' group, was never used in The Philippines because the community had never used the forest and the forest had always been owned by somebody else.

- To work on formulating a clear policy on forest management

There was a felt need that existing government rules, regulations, and policies related to forest management in regard to the functioning of FUGs should be reviewed. Several participants commented that many policies were not formulated for the welfare of the people. The suggested policies ranged from agroforestry demonstrations, protection of natural herbs, and the training of rangers. Some specific suggestions were as follow.

- To ensure that user needs were incorporated while formulating forest workplans and during their implementation.

- Before constituting FUGs, the concerned villagers should be fully informed of the objectives and obligations of FUGs, and the managing body should be elected only with their full participation.
 - There was a need to remove hurdles and irritants and instill a spirit of goodwill and cooperation between forest staff and FUGs.
 - Once forest land had been handed over to FUGs, there should be no interference by the forest staff.
 - There was a need to ensure adequate representation from FUGs in decision- and policy-making forums.
 - A suitable mechanism to resolve disputes and conflicts was needed.
 - Forest laws and rules should be made flexible to suit the changing local needs and situations.
 - FUGs' tenure over forest land and users' rights and obligations should be clearly defined.
- To establish a national or regional organisation

Lack of communication linkages amongst FUGs regarding formation and linkages to exchange information and for training were serious concerns. Many participants recommended that a regional level organisation be established. **Mr. G. Raju** from Ahmedabad felt that, with such an organisation, the regional problems could be tackled collectively. Such an organisation could disseminate knowledge-, information-, and experience-sharing materials to FUGs and provide proper guidance on all relevant issues, and could also coordinate activities and communications between groups.

- To share the experiences of women forest users and ensure greater involvement of women

Kalawati Devi from Chamoli District, U.P., India, who had been chairperson of the local *Mahila Mandal* for 16 years, said: *"Since women have taken over, policies were reformulated and the management of forests improved. The women's group has now become quite powerful. I hope to learn what other women are doing from this seminar."*

Laxmi Devi Khatiwada from Saptari District, Nepal, also shared the experience of her users' group: *"The Malati women's group has opened a nursery and has already produced many saplings. We have not been able to put a fence around the forest so we look after it ourselves. If animals graze on the lands, we impose a fine on the owner ranging from Rs 5 to Rs 51. We collected Rs 10 from each household to open a primary school. I have received this opportunity to come and see what other women are doing around the country."*

Suggestions were also made for improving the functioning of user groups. These included:

- equitable sharing of rights and obligations amongst the members irrespective of their status;

- giving priority to poorer sections in income-generating opportunities; and
- providing training for members of FUGs to develop skills on all related issues.

Working Group Two

This group consisted of 21 participants, including nine from Nepal, seven from India, two each from Thailand and Pakistan, and one from The Philippines. There were seven women and 14 men. The group members began by introducing their organisations and then decided to explain the laws relating to community forestry in the different countries. **Chandi Prasad Bhatt**, from Uttar Pradesh, India, suggested that by listening to all the experiences the group could learn how to generate participation. The participants also discussed the problems facing their user groups.

Some of the main areas of concern included the following.

- How to keep the interest of members from flagging while governments and policies keep changing?
- Conflicts within the user group and struggles within user committees, as elaborated upon by **Sharmila Katwal**, Okhaldhunga, Nepal, who gave a typical example of conflict which had arisen within a successful user group because the chairman, a man, who she felt was dictatorial, wanted to cut down all the trees and plant new ones, while the women wanted to cut down old trees only.
- How to prevent the elite from taking over the forests?
- The need to train NGOs to work in community forestry as the NGO movement was weak in Nepal

Expectations from the Workshop

- To learn from the participants about their natural resources' management techniques and their present forest legislation and policy status. They felt the need to acquire information on the management of natural resources in other hill areas in the Himalayas and in the world. This included the legal and scientific status of the resources.
- To identify common problems of the hills and of the Himalayan people.
- To prioritise the problems to be solved and also see if the problems varied geographically.
- To learn about innovative and progressive forest activities in other countries and the success, failures, and hardships that they overcame during formulation and implementation.

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- To learn about innovative and progressive forest activities in other countries and the success, failures, and hardships that they overcame during formulation and implementation.

- To learn about people's need for natural resources' management. To decide what changes were needed in natural resource management and to see if a pilot user group could be set up with an integrated development scheme.
- To discuss ways to encourage women to participate in forest management activities and to increase their role in decision-making.

Participants also shared success stories and experiences on how their groups overcame various difficulties. Some examples are as follow.

- **Din Singto** from Thailand spoke about the successful efforts of the Federation of Local Fishermen in southern Thailand, which had been operational for only three years. Tin mining and big trawlers had depleted the forests and affected fishing. The association worked to solve the problems step-by-step by getting villagers together to first protect the mangroves and then to go on to replanting trees. Eighty villages in 11 provinces were involved; a total of about 10,000 persons. The group was a loosely-organised working group with no institutional framework or paperwork. It actually began in one village, with people sharing their problems.
- **Deepak Thapa** from Kabhre District, Nepal, talked about how his group had been able to return a forest, which had been planted 90 years previously by 28 families, to the community. After struggling with many committees, finally 220 families were protecting the area. Internal conflicts had also been resolved.
- **Feli Piala** of The Philippines was representing the Centre for Peasants' Concerns and Services which had been established in 1986. People were already organised against the government, but the organising strategies had changed to be more positive. At first, it had been a technical organisation to focus on new technology and training instead of discussions. Then, they had organised themselves to lobby for the Agrarian Reform Act. They also networked with other NGOs.
- **Chandi Prasad Bhatt** spoke at length about the *Chamoli Gram Sewa Mandal* which had played a lead role in the *Chipko* movement in India. For fifty years, forests had been depleted by the *gram panchayat(s)* in collusion with local forest officials. Due to deforestation, there had been a massive flood in the area and the organisation had first been set up as a flood relief organisation. Later, the women realised that, as the people responsible for managing the household, they would have to bear the burden of deforestation. Therefore, when the government decided to allow the felling of trees, they had organised themselves and had 'hugged' the trees to stop people from felling them. Since then they had made great strides in forest management and had become a worldwide example of community forestry. Now they replanted trees, protected forests, set up nurseries, provided adult education, and ran primary schools.

Finally, members of this group wanted to appeal to the Indian Government to negotiate with **Sundarlal Bahuguna** of the *Chipko Andolan* who was then fasting in protest against the construction of the Tehri Dam in the U.P. hills.

Working Group Three

This group consisted of 19 participants, 11 women, and eight men. Ten of them were from various parts of Nepal, six from India, two from Pakistan, and one from Thailand.

All the group members introduced themselves and their organisations. Some examples follow.

- **Hari Prasad Neupane** represented the Bokhim and Ahale community forestry users' group of Bhojpur, Nepal. Several years ago, degraded land was given to the FUG under a community forestry operational plan made by user group members. From each house, one man and one woman were members. Fifty per cent of the income went into the community forestry account and the rest was used for wages. The community forestry nursery had 20,000-25,000 plants. The district education committee had introduced adult education. The group wanted the Forestry Act to be clarified in terms of the relationship of the FUG to the district, assistance in seed distribution, and promotion of agroforestry.
- **Mina Khadka** represented the Dwartar Sairivi community forestry users' group in Kaski, Nepal. Under the Forest Act, degraded forest had come under their protection, and about seven people practised agroforestry on one hectare of land. Many types of plants were grown and timber was planted on the edges of these lands. Committee meetings were held twice a month and general meetings once every month. This organisation had provided a modern stove to each house to relieve pressure on firewood and had constructed common toilets.
- **Aman Ali Shah** represented an NGO which was part of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), in Gilgit, Northern Pakistan. It was established to make people aware of the need to protect forests. The forest area covered 20,000ha of land. The committee included both men and women participants. Each member had the duty to plant 200 plants. Banking and loan facilities were also made available to members.
- **Kuldeep Verma** represented an NGO called "People's Action for People in Need" (PAPN) in Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh. This organisation had been established 10 years ago. She said that the forest cover was not sufficient and that ownership was in the hands of the government. People could cut only one or two trees. This organisation included a women's committee called *Mahila Mandal* which worked with problems relating to women. Some useful training was provided to women through this committee.
- **Khagendra Sikdel**, from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), worked as a forestry advisor. SDC's work was to raise awareness and provide training to forest department staff. This organisation served as a link between the forest department and user groups. He expressed the need for a comparative study among different user groups and was eager to learn about the *Chipko* movement in India.

After discussions, this group arrived at the following consensus.

- In Nepal, the forestry user group situation was generally positive. The beneficiaries were the user groups, and women's participation in community forestry was improving at the rural level. In some places, forest user groups had generated substantial savings.
- In India, almost every state had different structures and problems with participatory forest management. In most states, forests were controlled by the government. Therefore, community forestry had not become popular as users did not own the land and did not receive sufficient benefit from the forest products. The participants from India wanted to know about the structure and situation of community forestry in Nepal.

Expectations from the Workshop

- To promote exchange of ideas, experiences, and problems between participants from different countries and districts. Education, seminars, and travel in and outside the country should be arranged to make user groups more active.
- To formulate new and practical policies under existing laws and rules to build district, regional, and central level institutions in order to facilitate understanding among user groups.
- To formulate a clear policy on the promotion of agroforestry in order to develop the sector.

Working Group Four

This group included 18 participants, ten were men and eight women. Eleven of them were from Nepal, five from India, and two from Pakistan. Group members identified their most significant common problem as the constant degradation of forest areas. The causes are listed below.

- Lack of knowledge and awareness about the environment
- Lack of proper coordination between the forest department and FUGs
- Political problems, including lack of coordination between political parties and the forest department.
- Lack of forest technology
- Problems of unemployment and poverty
- Male domination
- Social domination by elite groups
- Forest area boundary problems

- Misuse of medicinal plants
- Need for clear and community-oriented rules and regulations on wildlife as well

Expectations from the Workshop

Group members had certain areas of concern which they wanted to explore at the workshop. These included:

- environmental issues, such as protecting forests against fires, landslides, and degradation and the means to prevent them;
- successful tree plantation, agroforestry techniques;
- conflict resolution techniques, i.e., methods of resolving problems of encroachment on forest land and of managing disputes arising within the users' groups;
- learning about Nepal's successful community forestry programmes;
- formation of a network among the countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas which could provide coordination;
- community empowerment and strengthening;
- possible ways to generate funds; and
- simple and detailed programmes to bring awareness at the grass roots' level.

Some introductions from group members follow.

- **Yam Bahadur Ale**, chairperson of the Koidim Community Forest, Tanahu District, Nepal said that the community forestry users' group was started when the forest became depleted due to the *Khoriya Pratha*, meaning the tradition of cutting down the forest for farming. In Tanahu district, the sons were sent to the forest to cut down trees as a test of their strength. The trees that fell were burned and the barren land used for agriculture. This was a result of inadequate farm land and unemployment and led to a large number of trees being cut and burned. However, since the community forestry programme started two years ago, they had been selling vegetables and earning an income of NRs 1,100,000 (US \$ 2,000) annually. The income was used for community forestry development and construction work to improve agriculture, drinking water projects, bridges, and trails. They had not taken any aid from the government.
- **Subhadra Adhikari** from Kaski District, Nepal, a member of an all women's FUG which had planted trees on two hectares of land, said that this group had also received a prize in the district for conservation and that the

community's needs for grass and wood were being supplied from the forest. The user group had formed a mothers' group and was involved in a drinking water project, construction of a 250-metre footpath, as well as plantation and conservation of community forests.

- **Ashish Kumar Shah** from Tripura, India, was representing the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose *Briksha Mitra Sangha*, an NGO which had won the Best State Award for environmental protection. The group provided technical support and encouragement and had four types of forest programme: social forestry, farm forestry, agro-based forestry, and joint/participatory forestry.
- **Jhalabhai Rathvi** was a Vikram Sarabhai Centre for Development Interaction (VIKSAT) field officer from Gujarat where most of the forest areas had been cleared. Village cooperatives were formed to protect the natural forests and plantations established on wastelands. Some cooperatives had introduced leasehold forestry as a joint programme with the government and VIKSAT. VIKSAT had been functioning as a mediator between the government and village cooperatives.
- **Krishna Subedi** of Syangja, Nepal, related a true story showing how poor people were more dependent on forests than rich people.

"Mote Sarki, a very poor man, had to support his six daughters by cutting trees. A women's group was formed and started protecting the forest, but Mote Sarki did not change and still went around cutting trees. The women's group tried to catch him but failed. Nobody knew when he went into the forest to cut trees. With great effort, he was caught one day and the women's group took him to the police station to be locked up. Soon after Mote Sarki was caught and taken to the police, his wife contacted me and pleaded for help. She said that, since her husband was now behind bars, they had no one to support them. She asked for money or rice. She was given some rice and sent away. But then the group thought, 'Why not employ Mote Sarki to look after the forest? He will also stop cutting trees.' So they paid him Rs. 480 every month and, from that time onwards, he has been doing a good job of looking after the forest."

- **Mr. Pearmsak** summarised the plenary session by noting that the main concerns were about governments' laws and policies and about forest protection. An important recommendation was to work to improve the capabilities of user groups to work effectively and to create networks and other mechanisms with which to strengthen them.

Following the plenary session, participants were divided into country working groups. The groups were asked to prepare country presentations on the status of participatory forestry, including policy and legislation, problems, successes, and failures.

Sarwanam Street Theatre

In the evening, the well-known Nepali street theatre group, *Sarwanam*, presented a play which had been especially written for the workshop. It narrated the story

of a beautiful tree in a village which the community considered sacred. The tree came to the attention of a local politician visiting the village to seek votes by promising to bring development to the village. The politician, along with a big landowner from the area, tried to convince the people that the village would be better off if they cut down the tree. The local community was not convinced and started a campaign to save their tree.

The politician and landowner, thinking of the profit they could make by selling the wood from the large tree, enlisted the services of a local priest. Promising to build him a house in Kathmandu, they persuaded him to convince the community members that the tree was the home of an evil spirit who was bringing harm to their village. Although the community members could not believe that the tree, which had given their community restful shade for many generations, could be harbouring an evil spirit, the priest persisted. Finally, after much protest from the people in the community, the tree was saved.

Field Trips

Day four was devoted to field trips. Two sites had been selected for the participants to visit: a site in Kabhre that was under the supervision of the Nepal Australia Community Forestry Programme and a site in Dhading that was part of the Natural Resources' Management Programme of the United Mission to Nepal. Participants were free to choose one of the two sites.

In the late afternoon, Mr. Egbert Pelinck hosted a tea party for the participants at ICIMOD's experimental and demonstration station in Godavari.

Country Group Presentation

The Philippines

George Paglinawan made the Philippines' presentation. Overhead slides had been prepared in English, and these were translated directly into Nepali and Hindi in order to save time. Mr. Paglinawan first described the *Barangay Patrocenio* Community Forestry Project. This project had started in 1992 with the following objectives:

- to educate farmers about agricultural and forestry activities;
- to augment income from forest products; and
- to conserve biodiversity within forest areas.

The project included 55 households and covered 530ha, including over 100ha of timber forests. The available resources were limestone, second growth forests, and spring water which was the source of the community's water supply. The Project had established linkages with universities, other NGOs, and GOs.

Day Four

May 24, 1995
Wednesday

Day Five

May 25, 1995
Thursday

Plenary Session

One (11:00 am to 1 pm)

Chairpersons

Kamlaben Bhagora and
G. Raju

In Thailand, many criteria were used to identify whether a certain forest patch was a community-managed forest. Based on cultural practices, more than 10,000 forest patches were community managed. However, for official community management, the numbers for different regions of the country are as follow.

North	300 forests
NE	100 forests
South	65 forests
Central	50 forests

The current National Forest Policy sought to promote community forestry. The National Social and Economic Development Plan also recommended promoting community forestry and enacting a new Community Forestry Act. The government policy over the past two years had been to strongly support the empowerment of local organisations to manage natural resources and the environment. The government had been emphasising this as a major issue. Currently, two community forestry acts were being considered in Thailand: one, written by the government, and another, the 'Peoples' version, was drafted by communities and NGOs. Hopefully, a compromise between the two versions would result. Currently, community forests were being managed under the Forest Reserve Act and under traditional management systems.

Pearmsak then showed a drawing of the ecosystem revealing the problems faced by the fishermen. Degraded by mining and big trawlers, fish resources had decreased. The fishermen's dream was the restoration of the ecosystem and elimination of trawlers, with only local fishermen allowed.

Discussion

Q. *What are the differences between the two versions of the proposed forestry act, and why are there two?*

A. "The act proposed by the government gives all control to the government; the one proposed by the people gives all control to the user groups."

Q. *What is the difference between community forestry and the traditional system?*

A. "Community Forestry is undertaken on behalf of the government according to the laws and rules; 'government officials' include the local headman, and, therefore, it is not really an NGO. The government appoints the village chief to manage the forest and it also provides money to be used according to the chief's directions. The forest is managed and protected, but, in the traditional system, local people look after the forest together. Villagers now want a real community forestry system run by user groups."

Q. *How does community forestry now operate in Thailand?*

A. "First, the forest and its users are identified; second, forest products are collected; third, the community regulates itself, can impose fines and/or negotiate over problems, but remains within regulations. Forest products are not sold, and local people use the forests according to their needs. The

Plenary Session

TWO (2:00 pm to 4:30 pm)

Chairpersons

Kamlaben Bhagora and
G. Raju

elected village committee makes the rules regarding use of the community forest and distributes forest products among the users. The income collected from the forest products goes to the village development fund, not to the users' fund."

Q. *Who profits from community forestry products?*

A. "Profit is mostly on a self-sufficiency basis; for example, community woodlots provide wood for the whole community. The administration depends on the government but all benefits go to the village development fund."

Q. *What procedures exist to create consensus between the government and the people's ideas? Who is there to negotiate?*

A. "Last month, the Minister agreed to look at the people's proposed act which provides for a 'peoples forum', including community members, government officers, NGOs, academicians, and politicians, to review the act and to negotiate. Some time ago, a massive demonstration was organised in eastern Thailand and the Minister of Agriculture said that he would review the government's version of the act."

Q. *In my users' group in Nepal, women are very active in nurseries, etc, but we didn't see any women in your slides. Are women active in Thailand?*

A. "Yes, Thai women are very strong, but from behind; no decisions can be made without consulting women. In Thailand, women keep the money and men do the work."

Q. *What do you mean by community sea? Do only fisherman use it or the whole community?*

A. "Since all the people are fisherman, they all use it."

Bhutan

This presentation was made by Dennis Desmond, a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) working with the forest department in Bhutan. The following information was presented on an overhead slide with explanatory comments.

Bhutan's total area was 40,500 sq. km., and the population only 600,000. Forests covered 64 per cent and scrubland eight per cent of the country. The small population had ensured a large forest cover. Looking at the history of community forestry in Bhutan, the 1969 Forest Act, with a strong forest protection focus, provided for the nationalisation of all forests and trees, including trees on private lands. In 1979, a royal decree had declared the initiation of a social forestry programme which involved free distribution and planting of seedlings by students and encouraging people's participation. However, since all the trees in Bhutan belonged to the government, there was no incentive to protect them, which had created an inherent difference in the 1969 and 1979 Acts.

During the 1980s, the government established National Forest Management Units for forest protection and management. In 1987-88, there were pilot social

forestry trials involving work on policy and legislation. Rules were established on pilot sites with FAO assistance. The period between 1987 and 1992 saw the development of new laws on social forestry, and these focussed on people's participation. A new Forest Policy was approved in 1992, replacing the 1974 policy, clearing the way for regulations on participatory forest management.

Between 1990 and 1993, Interim Social Forestry Rules were approved, allowing private forestry, but the trees were still owned by the government. There was a provision for registration to transfer tree ownership which encouraged tree planting on private lands where a cadastral survey had been conducted.

Community forestry in Bhutan was similar to community forestry in Nepal, involving the transfer of protection and management of community-used forests to user groups. There were requirements for a users' committee and a management plan. Both degraded and plantation areas, as well as natural forest areas, were being handed over, primarily for subsistence. Although the forest products were mostly used for subsistence, 100 per cent of the income earned through community forestry goes to the community to be used, first, for forest management and, then, for community development.

At a forest officers' meeting in 1992, the existing regulations were recognised as restrictive and new guidelines were formulated. A Forest and Nature Conservation Act was drafted between 1993 and 1995, but it was yet to be passed, and the interim rules were still operational. Formal approval of the policy had not been granted, and guidelines were being fine tuned.

Guidelines and technical backstopping remained the responsibility of the Social Forestry and Extension Section (SFES) of the Ministry of Agriculture. Although manpower was inadequate, SFES was responsible for the following.

- Social Forestry: Private or Community
- Forestry Extension
- Afforestation
- Watershed Management

Implementation and regulatory functions had been transferred from 10 Territorial Forest Divisions to 20 District Forestry Extension Sectors (DFES), each with one range officer, one forester, and two forest guards. Four donor-funded projects, covering 12 of 20 districts, were operating in the DFES, each with one range officer, one forester, and two forest guards.

The following issues were identified for the future.

- Further revision of Social Forestry Rules
- Finalising and distributing guidelines
- Training and reorientation of staff

- Rural extension: rules and programme
- Implementation and technical backstopping.

Discussion

Q. *Bhutan's approach seems very top down. Is any traditional user group management being practised in Bhutan?*

A. "Bhutan considers itself small enough to manage on its own; but decentralisation is being considered. The guidelines are not mandatory; the districts can decide whether or not to follow them. The basis of the programme is community-managed forests, and research is needed for traditional systems. Because the forest cover is so large, the government is being careful about introducing social forestry."

Q. *Is the community forestry programme donor-driven?*

A. "Not really, donors provide the support, but the implementation is undertaken by the government."

Q. *Bhutan has 64 per cent land under forest cover, is there any need for forest protection?*

A. "The government is moving slowly because the need is not so great."

Pakistan

Ali Gohar made this presentation providing an overview of Pakistan. Forests covered little more than five per cent of Pakistan's total area, and five categories of forest were identified as follow.

- Government-protected forests
- Government-reserved forests
- *Guzara* Forests: a community forest managed by the government; the income generated belonged to the community but fees were charged
- Private/Commercial Forests: private forests were not individually owned, they may be community owned but operate under a specific management system

Social/Community Forestry was a new concept in Pakistan where a few projects funded by donor countries had recently been introduced by the Forest Department. Some were to generate income and others to regenerate the forests. The main objectives of the projects were:

- production of fuel and fodder,
- generation of income for the rural poor,
- overcoming unemployment, and
- environmental protection.

- To learn about people's need for natural resources' management. To decide what changes were needed in natural resource management and to see if a pilot user group could be set up with an integrated development scheme.
- To discuss ways to encourage women to participate in forest management activities and to increase their role in decision-making.

Participants also shared success stories and experiences on how their groups overcame various difficulties. Some examples are as follow.

- **Din Singto** from Thailand spoke about the successful efforts of the Federation of Local Fishermen in southern Thailand, which had been operational for only three years. Tin mining and big trawlers had depleted the forests and affected fishing. The association worked to solve the problems step-by-step by getting villagers together to first protect the mangroves and then to go on to replanting trees. Eighty villages in 11 provinces were involved; a total of about 10,000 persons. The group was a loosely-organised working group with no institutional framework or paperwork. It actually began in one village, with people sharing their problems.
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This group consisted of 19 participants, 11 women, and eight men. Ten of them were from various parts of Nepal, six from India, two from Pakistan, and one from Thailand.

All the group members introduced themselves and their organisations. Some examples follow.

- **Hari Prasad Neupane** represented the Bokhim and Ahale community forestry users' group of Bhojpur, Nepal. Several years ago, degraded land was given to the FUG under a community forestry operational plan made by user group members. From each house, one man and one woman were members. Fifty per cent of the income went into the community forestry account and the rest was used for wages. The community forestry nursery had 20,000-25,000 plants. The district education committee had introduced adult education. The group wanted the Forestry Act to be clarified in terms of the relationship of the FUG to the district, assistance in seed distribution, and promotion of agroforestry.
- **Mina Khadka** represented the Dwartar Sairivi community forestry users' group in Kaski, Nepal. Under the Forest Act, degraded forest had come under their protection, and about seven people practised agroforestry on one hectare of land. Many types of plants were grown and timber was planted on the edges of these lands. Committee meetings were held twice a month and general meetings once every month. This organisation had provided a modern stove to each house to relieve pressure on firewood and had constructed common toilets.
- **Aman Ali Shah** represented an NGO which was part of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), in Gilgit, Northern Pakistan. It was established to make people aware of the need to protect forests. The forest area covered 20,000ha of land. The committee included both men and women participants. Each member had the duty to plant 200 plants. Banking and loan facilities were also made available to members.
- **Kuldeep Verma** represented an NGO called "People's Action for People in Need" (PAPN) in Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh. This organisation had been established 10 years ago. She said that the forest cover was not sufficient and that ownership was in the hands of the government. People could cut only one or two trees. This organisation included a women's committee called *Mahila Mandal* which worked with problems relating to women. Some useful training was provided to women through this committee.
- **Khagendra Sikdel**, from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), worked as a forestry advisor. SDC's work was to raise awareness and provide training to forest department staff. This organisation served as a link between the forest department and user groups. He expressed the need for a comparative study among different user groups and was eager to learn about the *Chipko* movement in India.

After discussions, this group arrived at the following consensus.

- In Nepal, the forestry user group situation was generally positive. The beneficiaries were the user groups, and women's participation in community forestry was improving at the rural level. In some places, forest user groups had generated substantial savings.
- In India, almost every state had different structures and problems with participatory forest management. In most states, forests were controlled by the government. Therefore, community forestry had not become popular as users did not own the land and did not receive sufficient benefit from the forest products. The participants from India wanted to know about the structure and situation of community forestry in Nepal.

Expectations from the Workshop

- To promote exchange of ideas, experiences, and problems between participants from different countries and districts. Education, seminars, and travel in and outside the country should be arranged to make user groups more active.
- To formulate new and practical policies under existing laws and rules to build district, regional, and central level institutions in order to facilitate understanding among user groups.
- To formulate a clear policy on the promotion of agroforestry in order to develop the sector.

Working Group Four

This group included 18 participants, ten were men and eight women. Eleven of them were from Nepal, five from India, and two from Pakistan. Group members identified their most significant common problem as the constant degradation of forest areas. The causes are listed below.

- Lack of knowledge and awareness about the environment
- Lack of proper coordination between the forest department and FUGs
- Political problems, including lack of coordination between political parties and the forest department.
- Lack of forest technology
- Problems of unemployment and poverty
- Male domination
- Social domination by elite groups
- Forest area boundary problems

- Misuse of medicinal plants
- Need for clear and community-oriented rules and regulations on wildlife as well

Expectations from the Workshop

Group members had certain areas of concern which they wanted to explore at the workshop. These included:

- environmental issues, such as protecting forests against fires, landslides, and degradation and the means to prevent them;
- successful tree plantation, agroforestry techniques;
- conflict resolution techniques, i.e., methods of resolving problems of encroachment on forest land and of managing disputes arising within the users' groups;
- learning about Nepal's successful community forestry programmes;
- formation of a network among the countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas which could provide coordination;
- community empowerment and strengthening;
- possible ways to generate funds; and
- simple and detailed programmes to bring awareness at the grass roots' level.

Some introductions from group members follow.

- **Yam Bahadur Ale**, chairperson of the Koidim Community Forest, Tanahu District, Nepal said that the community forestry users' group was started when the forest became depleted due to the *Khoriya Pratha*, meaning the tradition of cutting down the forest for farming. In Tanahu district, the sons were sent to the forest to cut down trees as a test of their strength. The trees that fell were burned and the barren land used for agriculture. This was a result of inadequate farm land and unemployment and led to a large number of trees being cut and burned. However, since the community forestry programme started two years ago, they had been selling vegetables and earning an income of NRs 1,100,000 (US \$ 2,000) annually. The income was used for community forestry development and construction work to improve agriculture, drinking water projects, bridges, and trails. They had not taken any aid from the government.
- **Subhadra Adhikari** from Kaski District, Nepal, a member of an all women's FUG which had planted trees on two hectares of land, said that this group had also received a prize in the district for conservation and that the

community's needs for grass and wood were being supplied from the forest. The user group had formed a mothers' group and was involved in a drinking water project, construction of a 250-metre footpath, as well as plantation and conservation of community forests.

- **Ashish Kumar Shah** from Tripura, India, was representing the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose *Briksha Mitra Sangha*, an NGO which had won the Best State Award for environmental protection. The group provided technical support and encouragement and had four types of forest programme: social forestry, farm forestry, agro-based forestry, and joint/participatory forestry.
- **Jhalabhai Rathvi** was a Vikram Sarabhai Centre for Development Interaction (VIKSAT) field officer from Gujarat where most of the forest areas had been cleared. Village cooperatives were formed to protect the natural forests and plantations established on wastelands. Some cooperatives had introduced leasehold forestry as a joint programme with the government and VIKSAT. VIKSAT had been functioning as a mediator between the government and village cooperatives.
- **Krishna Subedi** of Syangja, Nepal, related a true story showing how poor people were more dependent on forests than rich people.

"Mote Sarki, a very poor man, had to support his six daughters by cutting trees. A women's group was formed and started protecting the forest, but Mote Sarki did not change and still went around cutting trees. The women's group tried to catch him but failed. Nobody knew when he went into the forest to cut trees. With great effort, he was caught one day and the women's group took him to the police station to be locked up. Soon after Mote Sarki was caught and taken to the police, his wife contacted me and pleaded for help. She said that, since her husband was now behind bars, they had no one to support them. She asked for money or rice. She was given some rice and sent away. But then the group thought, 'Why not employ Mote Sarki to look after the forest? He will also stop cutting trees.' So they paid him Rs. 480 every month and, from that time onwards, he has been doing a good job of looking after the forest."

- **Mr. Pearmsak** summarised the plenary session by noting that the main concerns were about governments' laws and policies and about forest protection. An important recommendation was to work to improve the capabilities of user groups to work effectively and to create networks and other mechanisms with which to strengthen them.

Following the plenary session, participants were divided into country working groups. The groups were asked to prepare country presentations on the status of participatory forestry, including policy and legislation, problems, successes, and failures.

Sarwanam Street Theatre

In the evening, the well-known Nepali street theatre group, *Sarwanam*, presented a play which had been especially written for the workshop. It narrated the story

of a beautiful tree in a village which the community considered sacred. The tree came to the attention of a local politician visiting the village to seek votes by promising to bring development to the village. The politician, along with a big landowner from the area, tried to convince the people that the village would be better off if they cut down the tree. The local community was not convinced and started a campaign to save their tree.

The politician and landowner, thinking of the profit they could make by selling the wood from the large tree, enlisted the services of a local priest. Promising to build him a house in Kathmandu, they persuaded him to convince the community members that the tree was the home of an evil spirit who was bringing harm to their village. Although the community members could not believe that the tree, which had given their community restful shade for many generations, could be harbouring an evil spirit, the priest persisted. Finally, after much protest from the people in the community, the tree was saved.

Field Trips

Day four was devoted to field trips. Two sites had been selected for the participants to visit: a site in Kabhre that was under the supervision of the Nepal Australia Community Forestry Programme and a site in Dhading that was part of the Natural Resources' Management Programme of the United Mission to Nepal. Participants were free to choose one of the two sites.

In the late afternoon, Mr. Egbert Pelinck hosted a tea party for the participants at ICIMOD's experimental and demonstration station in Godavari.

Country Group Presentation

The Philippines

George Paglinawan made the Philippines' presentation. Overhead slides had been prepared in English, and these were translated directly into Nepali and Hindi in order to save time. Mr. Paglinawan first described the *Barangay Patrocenio* Community Forestry Project. This project had started in 1992 with the following objectives:

- to educate farmers about agricultural and forestry activities;
- to augment income from forest products; and
- to conserve biodiversity within forest areas.

The project included 55 households and covered 530ha, including over 100ha of timber forests. The available resources were limestone, second growth forests, and spring water which was the source of the community's water supply. The Project had established linkages with universities, other NGOs, and GOs.

Day Four

May 24, 1995
Wednesday

Day Five

May 25, 1995
Thursday

Plenary Session

One (11:00 am to 1 pm)

Chairpersons
Kamlaben Bhagora and
G. Raju

Project Activities

- Organising farmers
- Committee formation with men, women, and youths
 - livestock distribution
 - low-impact farming of various types
 - nurseries for trees and fruit
 - forestry
- Seminars/training and practicals
- Exposure programmes
 - farmer-farmer
 - farmer-institutions
- Cooperative education
- Regular monthly meetings
- Monitoring

Project Strengths and Constraints

Strengths

- Support from the local government
- Linkages with universities, the forest department, NGOs, and church groups
- Interest shown by neighbouring areas in replicating the project
- Women's participation
- Harmonious relationship between Centre for Peasants' Concern and Services (CENPECS) and the community
- Community serving as a role model for other government departments, schools, NGOs, and church groups
- Self-sufficiency in gathering and procuring indigenous saplings of trees and fruit trees

Constraints

- Government bureaucracy
- Overlapping with other NGOs vis-à-vis expertise and areas
- Government departments' reluctance to work with NGOs
- Ongoing insurgency
- Land tenure issues

After the presentation on his project, Mr. Paglinawan described The Philippine Governments' Community Forest Programme Agreement. This is given below.

- **Preparation**
 - Area identification

- Consultation with users/occupants
- Selection of an NGO as partner with a defined contract
- **Activities**
 - Organising - leading to committee formation and policy formulation
 - Education
 - Seminars
 - Income-generating projects, pooling initial capital for cooperative ventures
 - Forestry activities
 - Seminar/training on agroforestry
 - Nursery establishment: tree and fruit planting
- **Phase-out**
 - NGO partner phases out after two years
 - Department of Natural Resources takes over
- **Benefits**
 - All agricultural/livestock income goes to the community
- **Financial Aspects**
 - During harvesting of permanent trees, the community has to give a small percentage of the income to the government
 - The community allocates the income

Discussion

Q: Why does the government take over after two years?

A: "Many NGOs ask that question and for that reason our project does not participate with the government in our area. The answer seems to be that NGOs are better than the government at initially organising communities. After the initial organisation, other projects can also be included."

Q: Do the communities want to keep the land or give it to the government?

A: "Actually, the government owns the land in the first place; the land is managed by the community. We felt we were being used by the government in preparing the community for the government to take over later."

Q: Are the nurseries made by people who own land or by the government?

A: "They are community nurseries, made by community members, but they also provide seedlings, etc to people who are not members."

Thailand

This presentation was made by Pearmsak Makarabhiron and Din Singto and began with a brief introduction to community forestry in Thailand, shown on an overhead slide. Thailand's total area was 500,000 sq. km., of which 40 per cent should be covered by forest. However, the existing forest area was only 26 per cent. An additional 14 per cent was required to meet the national objective.

In Thailand, many criteria were used to identify whether a certain forest patch was a community-managed forest. Based on cultural practices, more than 10,000 forest patches were community managed. However, for official community management, the numbers for different regions of the country are as follow.

North	300 forests
NE	100 forests
South	65 forests
Central	50 forests

The current National Forest Policy sought to promote community forestry. The National Social and Economic Development Plan also recommended promoting community forestry and enacting a new Community Forestry Act. The government policy over the past two years had been to strongly support the empowerment of local organisations to manage natural resources and the environment. The government had been emphasising this as a major issue. Currently, two community forestry acts were being considered in Thailand: one, written by the government, and another, the 'Peoples' version, was drafted by communities and NGOs. Hopefully, a compromise between the two versions would result. Currently, community forests were being managed under the Forest Reserve Act and under traditional management systems.

Pearmsak then showed a drawing of the ecosystem revealing the problems faced by the fishermen. Degraded by mining and big trawlers, fish resources had decreased. The fishermen's dream was the restoration of the ecosystem and elimination of trawlers, with only local fishermen allowed.

Plenary Session

TWO (2:00 pm to 4:30 pm)

Chairpersons
Kamlaben Bhagora and
G. Raju

Discussion

Q. *What are the differences between the two versions of the proposed forestry act, and why are there two?*

A: "The act proposed by the government gives all control to the government; the one proposed by the people gives all control to the user groups."

Q. *What is the difference between community forestry and the traditional system?*

A. "Community Forestry is undertaken on behalf of the government according to the laws and rules; 'government officials' include the local headman, and, therefore, it is not really an NGO. The government appoints the village chief to manage the forest and it also provides money to be used according to the chief's directions. The forest is managed and protected, but, in the traditional system, local people look after the forest together. Villagers now want a real community forestry system run by user groups."

Q. *How does community forestry now operate in Thailand?*

A. "First, the forest and its users are identified; second, forest products are collected; third, the community regulates itself, can impose fines and/or negotiate over problems, but remains within regulations. Forest products are not sold, and local people use the forests according to their needs. The

elected village committee makes the rules regarding use of the community forest and distributes forest products among the users. The income collected from the forest products goes to the village development fund, not to the users' fund."

Q. *Who profits from community forestry products?*

A. "Profit is mostly on a self-sufficiency basis; for example, community woodlots provide wood for the whole community. The administration depends on the government but all benefits go to the village development fund."

Q. *What procedures exist to create consensus between the government and the people's ideas? Who is there to negotiate?*

A. "Last month, the Minister agreed to look at the people's proposed act which provides for a 'peoples forum', including community members, government officers, NGOs, academicians, and politicians, to review the act and to negotiate. Some time ago, a massive demonstration was organised in eastern Thailand and the Minister of Agriculture said that he would review the government's version of the act."

Q. *In my users' group in Nepal, women are very active in nurseries, etc, but we didn't see any women in your slides. Are women active in Thailand?*

A. "Yes, Thai women are very strong, but from behind; no decisions can be made without consulting women. In Thailand, women keep the money and men do the work."

Q. *What do you mean by community sea? Do only fisherman use it or the whole community?*

A. "Since all the people are fisherman, they all use it."

Bhutan

This presentation was made by Dennis Desmond, a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) working with the forest department in Bhutan. The following information was presented on an overhead slide with explanatory comments.

Bhutan's total area was 40,500 sq. km., and the population only 600,000. Forests covered 64 per cent and scrubland eight per cent of the country. The small population had ensured a large forest cover. Looking at the history of community forestry in Bhutan, the 1969 Forest Act, with a strong forest protection focus, provided for the nationalisation of all forests and trees, including trees on private lands. In 1979, a royal decree had declared the initiation of a social forestry programme which involved free distribution and planting of seedlings by students and encouraging people's participation. However, since all the trees in Bhutan belonged to the government, there was no incentive to protect them, which had created an inherent difference in the 1969 and 1979 Acts.

During the 1980s, the government established National Forest Management Units for forest protection and management. In 1987-88, there were pilot social

Although all the social forestry projects were designed to involve user groups, they covered only a small part of Pakistan's natural forests, so there had been no major breakthrough. Some constraints restricting their development are listed below.

- Forest legislation and policy--a clear-cut policy was lacking and legislation from 1924, the British colonial period, was still in effect.
- Reluctance on the part of foresters to involve people
- Lack of trust in the forest department
- Financial constraints
- The committees had not been empowered.

The AKRSP forestry programmes were located in the mountainous areas of northern Pakistan, occupying the outer Himalayas, the Karakoram range, and part of the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs. A human population of about 0.8 million covering six districts was spread over a total land area of 74,200 sq. km. Five of these districts suffered from acute shortages of timber, firewood, and fodder, while the sixth district was rich in natural forests, primarily private commercial forests. Forests in the other districts were government-protected forests. The landscape ranged from high pastures (15-16,000 feet) through pine and lower forests to land cultivable with irrigation. Without irrigation, nothing could grow.

Mr. Gohar introduced the programme of the AKRSP as one that included three dialogues with village people. These were as follow.

- Discuss problems and explain the AKRSP approach
- Make a diagnostic appraisal and move to PRA methodology
- Discuss with the community and make participatory plans

Charts presented details on the work of women in forestry development projects, including nursery development and afforestation.

Discussion

Q. Only 0.8 per cent of Gilgit is forest. Is this due to deforestation or natural causes?

A: "Both reasons have contributed to this low forest cover."

Q. How is the firewood demand satisfied?

A: "People use dung and grasses. Some kerosene, available 900km away, is used. The climate is extreme, ranging from 45°C to -35°C."

Q. Was the degradation brought on by the government or the people?

A. "The government supports the AKRSP, and we support government programmes; degradation was due both to government policies and people's activities."

Q. *Why is there no stress on community control of natural forests, and why are people encouraged to start plantations?*

A: "AKRSP is interested in drawing up an integrated plan to incorporate forestry, agriculture, and all other natural resource management. We feel that, first, we have to start with private land."

This session concluded at 4:30 pm. The remaining country presentations, those from India and Nepal, were scheduled for the following morning. During the remainder of the afternoon, participants from India and Nepal held country working group discussions. The evening's entertainment included a programme of traditional Nepali music organised by well-known poet and folk singer, Manjul.

India

The India presentation was made by **Rajeev Ahal** and **G. Raju**, using overhead charts in both English and Hindi. The India country working group discussions had begun with participants from different Indian states presenting the structure and work of the joint forest management (JFM) systems in their respective states. JFM at the central level was also discussed. The presentation as a whole was a collective effort of information and experience sharing among the participants from the states of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Gujarat.

The presentation began with a song. It was also stated that the ancient texts and culture of India included many songs and proverbs about environmental protection. Having lost indigenous traditions regarding the importance of trees, awareness about the environment and the realisation that trees were essential had been on the rise since the 1970s. Community forestry came about due to these concerns, but, after a decade, people felt that it had not achieved what it was supposed to achieve.

Joint Forest Management began in West Bengal in 1973. As a result of its success, a government order went to all states in India encouraging them to start JFM in 1990.

Under JFM, control of the forest went to local communities; all non-timber forest products or profits went to the community. However, the profits from poles and timber were shared between the government and the forest protection committee. Fifteen states had started JFM, and the benefit sharing rules varied from state to state, mostly in a ratio of 25 per cent to the community and 75 per cent to the forest department.

National-level Issues in India

- The draft Natural Ecosystem Act was designed to replace the existing Forest Laws which had been enacted by the British in 1927.
- Lease of degraded forest land for industry was a matter of serious concern.
- Forest land was being used for agriculture by indigenous people who did not possess any land; a debate about whether traditional indigenous agriculture was good or bad for the forests had been going on.

Day Six

May 26, 1995

Friday

Plenary Session

Three (9:00 am)

Chairperson
Sosan Qurban

- The national JFM Policy might not be a step forward for genuine community management.
- The relationship between the *gram panchayat* and the village users' group had to be clarified.
 - User groups should be the key agents of forest management. *Panchayat* representation was also essential.
 - Acts/Rules should be revised to give *gram panchayat(s)* a specific role. Provision for funds to *gram panchayat(s)* for forestry activities should be made.
 - The *gram panchayat* could possibly have the role of dealing with inter-village issues.
 - The *gram panchayat*, as a political body, should be kept away from user groups.
 - The *gram panchayat* could encourage forest-based enterprises. This interaction between the *gram panchayat* and the users' group was complicated when more than one *gram panchayat* was involved, therefore, a federation was needed.
- Forest Land for Agriculture
 - Could users' group forestry provide livelihoods to the poor and landless?
 - Poor people did benefit from user group forestry; community forestry could reach those that land reform could not reach.
 - The issue was not of forest versus agriculture, but that of sustainable natural resource management.

The Concept of a Gram Van (Village Forest)

- Legal provisions should be formulated for ownership, management, and authority. The land still belonged to the government; the tenure rules must be changed.
- Application of rules/regulations should be flexible according to local situations.
- The constitution/framework should be prepared by *Dalit(s)*, women, and the underprivileged.
- JFM/*Van panchayat* should be extended to include all communities with good forest cover.
- The community should have full access and rights (100%) over the forest produce.
- Facilities for small-scale enterprises and marketing for forest produce should be established.
- Alliances of user groups at various levels should be formed.

Attitude of Foresters

The field staff must be motivated to support user groups because the 'policing' attitude of foresters kept people away.

Legal Recognition

- Supporting legal recognition/legislation was necessary for user group forest management. Forests were given not because of a belief in community forestry but because forestry staff were limited, and they could not carry out the protection work. Therefore, a federation of user groups was required.
- The government and the people should jointly formulate policies and procedures.

Women's Role

- The importance of women must be clearly recognised; at least 60 per cent representation for women on executive committees was required in order to give women a decisive role.
- **User group forestry** should be extended to include other lands within village boundaries.
- **Equity** in distribution of benefits and equal opportunities for all participants must be guaranteed.
- **Training** was required for both foresters/communities and NGOs.
- **Integrated development** should be sought by making forest development one component of an integrated development programme for communities.
- **Flexibility**, in accordance with the local situation, was necessary in implementing user group forestry.

Discussion

- Q. *We should clarify that in Nepal also forest land ownership rests with the government. Does the government conduct consultations before JFM is introduced?*
- A. "People who were tilling the land before 1980, even if they were doing so illegally, are entitled to the land. Consultation with the true local level people is inadequate. Many governments still consider they are implementing JFM when they are using the people as labourers."
- Q. *About leasing degraded forest lands to the industry--are these lands inhabited? Who leases this land?*
- A. "This is a government proposal which is being resisted. In fact, it is generally land that is being used by tribal communities. This proposal will create a conflict between the government and tribal communities which are supported by NGOs and sister organisations."
- Q. *What is your thinking about the village people who demand resources for subsistence and the urban people who demand resources for luxury?*

- A. "We are confident that an organised people's movement has great power and will influence the whole system. For example, *Chipko* was a small group with a genuine issue that influenced the U.P. government and changed the policy."

Chairperson Sosan Qurban made the following points at the conclusion of the presentation.

- Ownership and authority of forest areas should be in the hands of users' groups.
- The application of rules should be flexible according to the local situation.
- Women's role was important and should be improved.
- There should be equity in the distribution of benefits.
- Foresters should be cooperative with the local people.

Plenary Session

Four (10:00 am)

Chairperson

George Paglinawan

Nepal

The Nepal presentation was made by **Deepak Thapa**, **K.P. Adhikari**, **H.P. Neupane**, and **Y.B. Ale** with overhead charts in Nepali.

The presentation began with a description of the historical background of community forestry in Nepal. The history was divided into three phases—before the Rana regime, during the Rana regime, and after the dawn of democracy. Basically, during this time the forests were heavily encroached. After the nationalisation of forests, deforestation became more rampant than before. Different political events also contributed to deforestation. The evolution of the Forest Act, laws, and byelaws was also briefly discussed.

Historical Background of Community Forestry in Nepal

Before the Rana Regime. Before the Rana regime, Nepal's forest cover was good, and no special efforts were made for forest protection. In addition, under the provisions of *Jagir*, *Kipat*, and *Birta*, forests were given to army officers and high-ranking palace officials. These forest areas were used for their own interests, which increased encroachment.

During the Rana Regime. Encroachment on forests increased due to conflicts among the Rana brothers over power. Those defeated in the conflicts went to different areas of the country and cleared the forests to build settlements for their followers as well as for other uses. A great deal of timber was also exported to India for construction of railway lines.

After the Dawn of Democracy. During this period, different political movements caused deforestation, particularly the political change of BS 2007 (1950/51) and the political movements of BS 2036 (1979/80) and 2046 (1989/990). An estimated four per cent of the total forest land was cleared during 1979/80. Various government activities, forest laws, and byelaws also contributed to the deforestation.

The Forest Act of BS 2013 (1956/57) nationalised all forests and strictly prohibited people from entering the forest to collect grass, firewood, fodder, or timber. People then began to take forest products without due care or protection. The establishment of the Resettlement Company (BS 2016 - 1959/60) and the Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN) also accelerated the clearing of the forest areas of the *terai*.

In BS 2018 (1961/62), a new Forest Act was enacted, categorising all forests into national, community, religious, private, and leasehold forests. However, it failed to implement the concept of community forestry with people's participation.

A seminar on forest management was organised in BS 2034 (1977/78). People's participation and community forest management were the main subjects of discussion during the seminar.

The Forest Regulations of BS 2035 (1978/79) tried to incorporate the concept of community forestry, and this was adopted for *panchayat* and *panchayat*-protected forests. The regulation assigned the right and responsibility for forest protection to the local *panchayat*, but the *panchayat* leaders misused the right for their own benefit rather than for the common people. The Forest Products' Regulation of BS 2037 (1980/81) and the Private Forest Regulation of BS 2049 (1992/93) were enacted and the Private Forest Regulation was amended in BS 2044 (1987/88).

Over the past 40 years, different laws and byelaws related to the forest sector had been enacted and amended many times. However, the Forest Act of BS 2049 (1992/93) was the first which made clear provisions for community forestry according to the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector BS 2045 (1988/89). Furthermore, the Forest Regulation of BS 2051 (1994/95) clarified the provisions of the Forest Act of BS 2049 (1992/93). As a result of the continuous efforts of individual people, donor agencies, and the government, the community forestry programme was now underway and progressing in Nepal.

Mountain Development

The second topic concerned mountain development, which included various aspects of the life of the people, i.e., economic, cultural, educational, health, and physical infrastructure.

Introduction. Development meant not only an improvement in the standard of living, but also in the economic, moral, cultural, and educational well-being as well as the health and other physical conditions of the society and the community.

Existing Problems

The existing problems were defined as follow.

- Mountain areas remained inaccessible.
- Illiteracy was still high, contributing to a lack of human resources and technology.
- The population was increasing at a rapid rate.

- Government policies and concerns were inadequate.
- The mobilisation of natural and other resources was not systematic.

Consequences of these Problems

- Difficult living conditions
- Increasing natural disasters due to imbalances in the environment

Role of Community Forestry in Mountain Development

- People could internalise the role of organisation and social unity
- Creation of various other types of community institutions
- Upgrading of private forestry and agroforestry programmes
- Systematic livestock raising
- Increase in local income
- Control of soil erosion processes

Recommendations for Mountain Development

- Government, NGOs, donor agencies, and the people should commit themselves to mountain development
- Local people should be included in selecting, planning, and managing community forest projects/programmes
- Integrated development programmes should provide for the conservation and development of natural resources and wildlife
- Technical as well as material support should be provided to local communities by the government, NGOs, and other concerned agencies
- Small-scale, people-oriented projects without adverse environmental effects should be implemented

Results/Impacts of Mountain Development

- Assists in fulfilling people's basic needs and raising income, thus improving the standard of living
- Raises local community self-reliance
- Improves natural environment
- Develops local resources and skills

Community and Private Forestry Programmes in Nepal

In Nepal, over 3,300 community forestry user groups were legally registered and about 135,151 hectares of forest land had been handed over to them. More than 4,000 community forestry user groups were in the process of being handed over.

An overhead slide map of Nepal was presented with the related figures for community forestry.

<u>Region</u>	<u>Number of forest user groups</u>	<u>Area (ha)</u>
Hill	2987	112,189
Terai	320	22,962
Total	3307	135,151

Institutional Issues

Various stages of the community forestry process, as well as the positive and negative aspects of the programme, were then discussed.

Process for Handing Over Forests

- Identification of the users.
- Preparation of group constitution and forest operational plan with the participation of users.
- Certification and handing over of the forest
- Steps for handing over forests
 - disseminate the rules, regulations, and information about community forestry to the household level
 - organise small group discussions leading to preparation of the group constitution and forest operational plan
 - call a mass meeting for final approval of the constitution, operational plan, and users' committees
 - hold a committee meeting every month
 - hold a general assembly meeting once every two years

Positive Aspects/Strengths

- User groups were legally recognised.
- Changing attitudes of forest department personnel regarding community forestry programmes.
- Technical support was provided by the forest department.
- The provision of 100 per cent of the income from forest products to the users' fund and user rights over the fund had raised the people's interest and efforts.
- People's needs were taken into account in the operational plan.
- The forest department had a provision for preparing a yearly plan incorporating people's needs.

- The sole authority for handing over a community forest had been shifted from the Regional Director to the District Forest Officer.
- The development of community forestry and community forestry funds had encouraged people to formulate other development activities, i.e., education, skill development, provision of drinking water, and income-generating programmes.

Weaknesses/Negative Aspects

- Lack of uniformity in the handing-over process in all areas.
- Lack of trained and committed human resources to educate and encourage people to participate in community forestry management.
- Lack of equal participation among all community members in users' group activities.
- Insufficient participation of women in decision-making.
- Difficulties in mobilising users' groups where the forest area and number of users were very large.
- Forest areas handed over to users' groups were protected while other forest areas continued to be degraded.
- Direct contact of the forest personnel with elected village political leaders for identification had led to problems in identifying actual users due to political pressure and/or prejudice.
- Diverse interests of users regarding the use of forest products (commercial vs. self use).
- Some user groups were facing unnecessary legal problems from the forest department.
- Political boundaries considered as forest and user boundaries had created problems.
- The provision for signing bonds, put forward by the government after formulation of the operational plan, seemed to be unnecessary.
- In some areas, user committees seemed more powerful than user groups.
- Conflicts among groups had created problems.
- Forest field staff were inadequate.
- Political boundaries of districts were not scientifically created.
- Some forest staff were reckless and lacked adequate technical knowledge.
- The traditional mentality of forest staff members from centre to field-level needed to change.
- Users' group funds were not properly handled by some groups.

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Analysis of Policies, Rules and Regulations for Community Forestry

A detailed analysis of the recent Forest Act of BS 2049 (1992/93) and the Forest Regulations of BS 2051 (1994/95), highlighting the positive and negative aspects of both, was presented. Most provisions of the Act and the Regulation were considered positive because of their progressive nature which was suitable for the development of community forestry in Nepal. A few provisions were seen as obstacles to community forestry development.

The community approach to forest management had been one of the best achievements in this field and had brought about much that was positive for the environment and living standards of the people. Based on the Forestry Sector Master Plan, the conditions before and after handing over the forests were considered.

Before Handover

- All the rights over forests had rested with the government. People were restricted from use rights in forest areas.
- Forest policies and rules were not properly people oriented and did not reach people.
- The Forest Act and Regulations and Guidelines were contradictory.

After Handover

- Ownership had increased.
- Women's participation was enthusiastic.
- General consensus existed on the systematic distribution of forest products.
- There was a positive contribution to rural development activities.
- Employment opportunities were generated.
- There was active participation in developing a balanced environment, benefit-sharing, and decision-making processes.

Discussion

Q1. To what extent are forest user groups dependent on the government for resources and technical help? What would be the strategy to make the user groups self-reliant and reduce the dependence upon the government?

A1. "After educating and raising awareness among the people, both the people and government forest staff take the initiative in forming user groups, drafting constitutions, and preparing operational plans with people's participation. The government can only provide technical support and small-scale materials, i.e., pipes and seeds for nursery establishment. The self-reliance and sustainability of the group depends upon the group activities and efforts. Community feeling, general consensus among the users, and internalisation of the role of the organisation lead them to

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sustainability, from which new production activities can emerge such as income-generating activities and systematic livestock raising. Ultimately, user groups become self-reliant and less dependent on the government."

Q2. *I have heard that the forest department of Nepal wants to plant commercial plants in community forests. What is the actual situation?*

A2. "There is no special rule in community forestry giving preference to one particular species. This totally depends on the people's interest and must be appropriate to the location. No special criteria are set about planting commercial species. Moreover, the implementation of the community forestry policy passes through three phases.

- First of all, the forest patches are provided to the community on the preparation of an operational plan for five years or for another fixed time period on the basis of the people's demand and their management capacity.
- In the second phase, all the responsibility for management, protection, and utilisation will be handed over to the users' group.
- Lastly, the users' group will be empowered by provision of all the rights and responsibilities for using forest products according to their needs.

The provision of a five-year (fixed time) contract is not because the forest will be taken back, but to encourage better management. We can reorganise the operational plan for another five years, based on our experiences."

Q3. *I learned from the Nepal presentation that the community forestry programme was introduced and motivated by the government. The situation in India is rather different. In India, there is a vast gap between the forest department and the people. The forest department wants to restrict people from entering the forest. The forest department of Nepal seems more liberal and people-oriented. What is the budget allocated to community forestry?*

A3. "The concept of community forestry is more popular in the hills, because the government alone could not protect the forests and wanted to hand over the forests to the people. The situation in the terai, where the forests are commercial, is quite different. Another reason is that the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, prepared in BS 2045/46 (1988/89/1989/90), emphasised community forestry as do donors and other sources of resources. There are donors who are prepared to support community forestry implementation programmes. Therefore, if the government is not ready to implement community forestry, there will be no donors. About 47 per cent of the total budget of the Ministry of Forests is allocated to community forestry and private forestry."

Q4. *Community forestry management is better in Nepal and has been implemented for a long period of time, but only two per cent of the forests have been handed over. Why is this process so slow?*

A4. "Some feel it has been a very slow process and others think that the handing over process is going on at a reasonable pace. These ideas are contradictory. People think the process is slow because the government has a target to complete the handing over of all forests to the users by 2010 AD. However, the process of users' group formation, involving the people and making people aware of the rules and regulations, is quite complicated. The other

reason for the process being slow is that, to form one user group—from the stage of identifying of the users and the forest—takes several months if it goes very smoothly without any disturbance. Normally, there are 13 rangers in each hill district who are the grass-root level government forest officials and who are responsible for forming user groups. Out of 13, usually only eight to ten are in the district; the others are always off either on transfer or for other reasons.

Awareness about user groups is still at a very low level. One reason may be that the capacity of the government is limited at that level and another reason, perhaps, is the attitude of the forest staff who are still not enthusiastic about going to the people and saying that they are there to support users' group formation. There is a lot of pressure on the forest department from the community to hand over the forests. You might have seen that almost 4,000 communities have already met their demands from community forests. But all user groups might not be aware of their rights, rules and regulations, and policies of the government. So it takes time to organise them."

Q5. *Since 100 per cent of the income is used by the users' group, how much is generated in a given period of time and how is it utilised?*

A5. "We can give you an example from Tanahu District.

One community forest area of 235ha was handed over to 102 user households in BS 2060 (1993/94). The total amount of funds collected from forest products is Rs. 1,152,260 (US \$ 2,100). Sixty per cent of this amount goes to the users directly on the basis of their contributions, a provision approved by the general assembly. The remaining 40 per cent we invest in rural development activities such as suspension bridges, drinking water programmes, foot trails, and training programmes for skill development as well as income generation. We award prizes for compositions about the environment and economic development.

There are many other examples. Some user groups only fulfill their own needs for fodder and firewood, and there are other groups that are contributing their labour and efforts to reforest and still experience scarcity of fodder and firewood."

Q6. *Since laws and policies about community forestry are progressive, user groups have full authority over planning, managing, utilisation, choice of tree species, and utilisation of funds. What are the problems?*

A.6 "Forest policies, laws, byelaws, acts, and regulations are all good, but the problem is the commitment to implementation. For example, general consensus among the users is required to form the constitution and the operational plan, but these are prepared on the initiative of a few people. There is unnecessary domination from forest officials against the rules. The major problem is the transfer of authority. Government forest authorities are still not mentally prepared to give up their authority."

Concluding Remarks from the Chairperson

Community forestry was a new activity for communities and also for the government, and it might not happen in a hurry. Community forestry user

groups would not be evaluated on the money in the bank or the timber or other products they distributed, but probably on how they had given voice to the voiceless, how far they had been able to mobilise the people to fight for their rights, to struggle for their rights. Only if we achieved this, would community forestry be successful.