

# C concurrent Sessions

---

organisation in the so-called 'tribal areas' where people were increasingly becoming marginalised. It had been involved in mobilising local communities on a large scale to bring about changes in government policies. The experience of the *Eklavya Sangathan* had been that, for advocacy, power structures needed to be challenged. Information alone was not sufficient but it could be used to mobilise mass support. The combination of mass support, use of information and media, and the legal system could bring about policy changes. In the opinion of the organisers, whenever confrontation had occurred between the poor and the rich, the poor had gained more than lost. Campaigning to give land to tribal people, the *Eklavya Sangathan* had worked with other NGOs and lobbied political parties, the media, and others by distributing leaflets in 1993. Political parties had seen that the votes of the poor masses could be very important to their political futures, and they were more willing to consider the issues that were important to the poor, such as land rights. Publicity and public pressure had brought about the delineation of some land for tribal people and, in November 1984, 80 farmers were given land certificates. However, no progress was made and, sensing a good vote-catching issue, a political party had made handing over land part of its manifesto. With the victory of this party, it now appeared likely that the promised land transfer would take place.

**M.D. Mistri**, from Development Initiatives for Social and Human Action (DISHA), shared his experiences on the campaign to increase the minimum wage for women picking 'tenda' leaves which were purchased by the government. DISHA had asked for the government's labour department to put pressure on the forest department and a court case had been filed. In 1992, almost 10,000 tribal people had marched into Ahmedabad to demand higher wages for *tenda* leaf pickers and had petitioned the Chief Minister. Bowing to the pressure, the minister had constituted a committee to look into the issue, and the wages had been raised.

**Rajeev Ahal** shared his experience of networking among NGOs in Himachal Pradesh where over 200 NGOs were involved in natural resource management issues. The groups were not specifically working on forest management issues and had had little opportunity to share experiences and concerns until a three-day state-wide NGO meeting was called in July 1994 on JICIMOD's initiative. At this meeting, agreement had been reached on the importance of forest-related issues as well as water management. The need to have a long-term perspective on natural resource management issues had also been emphasised. A nine member coordinating committee had been formed, and all participating NGOs had become members of the networking group. Meetings were held each month, with member NGOs usually offering their facilities for such meetings.

The group's work had brought about a better understanding of the function and structure of the Forest Department and especially of JFM. The policy document on JFM, previously only available in English, had been translated into Hindi, giving exposure to a larger number of people on the issues and rights. The translation was still being used by the forest department. A critique of JFM had also been produced and distributed among all organisations, including the forest department.

A large meeting in October 1994 had brought together 70 people from environmental organisations and NGOs, universities, and government agencies. The group now planned to produce a 'Himachal Version' for a national policy-

## Challenges for the Future

The afternoon of Friday, May 26, was devoted to discussions on 'Challenges for the Future'. The participants were divided into four concurrent working groups, each to discuss one of the following issues.

1. Strategies for Advocacy and Networking
2. Strategies for Enhancing Women's Role in Decision-making
3. Strategies for Strengthening Local Institutions: Institution-building, Capacity-building, and Training
4. Strategies for Enabling Policy, Laws, Rules, and Regulations

The details and outcomes of these discussions were to be used during the preparation of country action plans.

### Working Group on Advocacy and Networking

Each participant shared their experiences on advocacy and networking.

In Darjeeling, the networking had begun after many rural communities had introduced forest protection activities themselves and were working in isolation. Many people felt a networking organisation was needed to raise awareness in the communities about their rights under joint forest management and to provide various kinds of support to the local groups, including action research and mediation between government agencies and local communities. Thus, in 1989, the *Paryatouran Sangrakshak Parishangh* evolved out of the existing Darjeeling citizen's welfare society and was officially registered in 1992. Members of the network were environmental protection committees or forest protection committees who paid a small fee. The organisation arranged training for members and provided legal advice. It published a magazine which was received by each member unit. Both regular community meetings and meetings of all member units were organised. To counteract malpractices among some forestry division personnel, the organisation had also been involved in advocacy and 'policing' and had compiled a confidential report on the corrupt practices of a range officer which was submitted to the department. Other national government agencies, such as the National Wastelands' Development Board, had now approached the organisation to promote environmental protection and to start to plant nurseries.

In northern Gujarat, the *Eklavya Sangathan* was established as a membership-based

### Participants

1. Ghanendra Kafle, Nepal UK Community Forestry Project
2. D.S. Rasaily, Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection, Darjeeling, West Bengal
3. G. Raju, VIKSAT, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
4. M.D. Mistry, DISHA, Sabarkantha, Gujarat
5. Bhim Lal Subedi, Syangja, Nepal
6. Yam Bahadur Ale, Tanahu, Nepal
7. Rajeev Ahal, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh
8. Bhim Prasad Shrestha, Ram Bazaar Users' Group, Okhaldunga, Nepal
9. Dinesh Pokhrel, Gulmi, Nepal
10. Hari Prasad Neupane, Bhojpur, Nepal

organisation in the so-called 'tribal areas' where people were increasingly becoming marginalised. It had been involved in mobilising local communities on a large scale to bring about changes in government policies. The experience of the *Eklavya Sangathan* had been that, for advocacy, power structures needed to be challenged. Information alone was not sufficient but it could be used to mobilise mass support. The combination of mass support, use of information and media, and the legal system could bring about policy changes. In the opinion of the organisers, whenever confrontation had occurred between the poor and the rich, the poor had gained more than lost. Campaigning to give land to tribal people, the *Eklavya Sangathan* had worked with other NGOs and lobbied political parties, the media, and others by distributing leaflets in 1993. Political parties had seen that the votes of the poor masses could be very important to their political futures, and they were more willing to consider the issues that were important to the poor, such as land rights. Publicity and public pressure had brought about the delineation of some land for tribal people and, in November 1984, 80 farmers were given land certificates. However, no progress was made and, sensing a good vote-catching issue, a political party had made handing over land part of its manifesto. With the victory of this party, it now appeared likely that the promised land transfer would take place.

M.D. Mistri, from Development Initiatives for Social and Human Action (DISHA), shared his experiences on the campaign to increase the minimum wage for women picking 'tenda' leaves which were purchased by the government. DISHA had asked for the government's labour department to put pressure on the forest department and a court case had been filed. In 1992 almost 10,000 tribal people had marched into Ahmedabad to demand higher wages for *tenda* leaf pickers and had petitioned the Chief Minister. Bowing to the pressure, the minister had constituted a committee to look into the issue, and the wages had been raised.

Rajeev Ahal shared his experience of networking among NGOs in Himachal Pradesh where over 200 NGOs were involved in natural resource management issues. The groups were not specifically working on forest management issues and had had little opportunity to share experiences and concerns until a three-day state-wide NGO meeting was called in July 1994 on ICIMOD's initiative. At this meeting, agreement had been reached on the importance of forest-related issues as well as water management. The need to have a long-term perspective on natural resource management issues had also been emphasised. A nine member coordinating committee had been formed, and all participating NGOs had become members of the networking group. Meetings were held each month, with member NGOs usually offering their facilities for such meetings.

The group's work had brought about a better understanding of the function and structure of the Forest Department and especially of JFM. The policy document on JFM, previously only available in English, had been translated into Hindi, giving exposure to a larger number of people on the issues and rights. The translation was still being used by the forest department. A critique of JFM had also been produced and distributed among all organisations, including the forest department.

A large meeting in October 1994 had brought together 70 people from environmental organisations and NGOs, universities, and government agencies. The group now planned to produce a 'Himachal Version' for a national policy-

level meeting on natural resource management issues and to hold training on Participatory Rural Appraisal methodology. The coordinating committee had been reconstituted in October and a coordinator chosen. Certain issues had been identified as being important for action. However, questions remained about whether the group should be formalised into an organisation and how these NGOs could make a federation.

In Tanahu District, Nepal, representatives of 71 forest user groups had recently gathered together to form a district-level networking forum. An interim committee had been formed to draft a constitution. Yam Bahadur Ale stated that it was felt that such an organisation would enable the groups to learn from each other and help them deal with the District Forest Office on issues of common concern and also help them deal with 'middle men' and 'contractors' of forestry products. The impetus for the forum had initially been provided by the District Forest Office, and the committee had already played a role in conflict resolution with the District Forest Office. Certain important issues remained unresolved, e.g., charging a membership fee and representation of the group in the district coordinating committee.

Similarly, in Okhaldhunga, a group of people who had formed a community forestry users' group felt they could play a wider role in promoting community forestry in Nepal. With the support of FTTP and WATCH, the group organised a meeting of FUGs' representatives and communities that had made requests to the district forest office to hand over forests. Over 90 people, representing 42 FUGs, had recently attended a meeting. During the meeting, various issues had emerged from different parts of the district. Concluding that a network of FUGs was required, an *ad hoc* committee had been formed and charged with drafting a constitution within six months.

Forest users in Gulmi District had also expressed the wish for a networking group during a meeting held by the district forest office on nursery management, but the DFO had discouraged this by stating that current community forestry regulations made no provisions for such a body.

Likewise, in Bhojpur, where forest patches were rapidly handed over, 40 FUGs had met a few years ago to create a district-level coordinating committee. However, due to the absence of a legal provision, this did not happen. Nevertheless, in one of the areas under a range post in the district, 30 out of the 48 FUGs had organised themselves, and, inviting the DFO and legal experts, they had formed an NGO called "*Samudayik Ban Bikash and Gramin Bikash Mandi*" (Community Forestry Development and Rural Development Forum) and registered it at the district headquarters. The organisation had provisions in its mandate to include all FUGs in the district as members. Each FUG sent one representative, not necessarily the chairperson, to the organisation. Each member FUG paid Rs 100 per year. A committee had been constituted from the elected representatives. The organisation saw its role as being in advocacy from the local to central levels and in conflict resolution. So far, the organisation had printed posters warning against forest fires and was making proposals for other work.

There was consensus among the group that effective advocacy could only happen if strong collective institutions were built. This was seen as a common challenge for the future.

- Radha Shrestha, Ramechhap, Nepal
- Krishna Subedi, Syangja, Nepal
- Anil Bhattarai, Chitwan, Nepal
- Devi Adhikari, Sindhupalchok, Nepal
- Meena Khadka, Kaski, Nepal
- Subhadra Adhikari, Kaski, Nepal
- Laxmi Devi Khatiwada, Saptari, Nepal
- Urmilaben Tabiyar, Sabarkantha, Gujarat
- Kinkri Devi, Sirmoor, Himachal Pradesh
- Nimu Devi, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh
- Bhagawati Gautam, Kabhre, Nepal
- Hema Kala, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh
- Dilshad Begum, Gilgit, Pakistan
- Dur-E-Marjan, Gilgit, Pakistan
- Subhash Mendhupurkar, Jubber, HP, India
- Kiran Bhatia, Kathmandu, Nepal
- Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Chamoli, Uttar Pradesh
- Sharmila Katwal, Okhaldhunga, Nepal
- Gyan Kumari Bhujel, Okhaldhunga, Nepal
- Shrimati Kalawati, Chamoli, Uttar Pradesh
- Kamali Devi Sharma, Baglung, Nepal

## Strategies for Enhancing Women's Role in Decision-making

Before organisational presentations, the participants brainstormed to arrive at a list of words associated with the women's movement.

- Women's power
- Freedom
- Job-oriented education and skill development for women
- Employment
- Equal participation
- Inside and outside the house
- Cottage industry
- Cultural heritage of women
- Women's organisation
- Mass experience
- Women's empowerment

**Subhash Mendhupurkar**, from Social Uplift Through Rural Action (SUTRA), described the history of the women's movement in Himachal Pradesh. Alcohol consumption had been a growing problem which the women wanted to combat. In 1985, a large group of women decided to march to the state capital to draw attention to their protest against alcohol and drugs. The state government had tried to stop the march by instructing the men to prevent their women from participating and by threatening to curtail all development work and aid if the march took place. Defying the threats, 185 women marched for three days and reached the capital at Simla, thereby making the protest successful. Although the protest did not put much pressure on the government, it had encouraged the women's movement and had led to the development of women's leadership.

Four hundred women were now involved in SUTRA, which was working to develop women's leadership capacities. The programme was designed to free women from the fear of the police, courts, and government administration; to teach them about existing laws; and to raise their awareness by introducing them to the lives of great Hindu women such as Devi, Chandi, Sita, and Brikuti. SUTRA also gathered groups of unmarried women, aged 16-19, and instructed them on their legal and personal rights, including knowledge of their bodies and what acts could be considered crimes. The girls were taught to be alert to social, governmental, and physical violations such as teasing, beating, rape, opening bars, refusing to sell goods at government retail shops, and so on. The organisation also built up awareness about protests, provided information about slogans, mass protests, and the like. All of these activities had aided the empowerment of women. Women were becoming able to expose the sufferings they experienced inside their homes. The main subject was empowerment. In evaluating programmes, and discussing and making policies, one had to study how much women could benefit, what rights they would get, and how many women were going to be involved in them.

**Chandi Prasad Bhatt** noted that the *Chipko* movement in Uttar Pradesh, associated with forests and the environment, had been started by a woman leader, *Gauri Devi*. The movement began by women gathering at the sound of a whistle to prevent the cutting of trees. Women had taken strong and unpopular stands, uniting together and refusing to give in to pressure from the men of their communities or from government officials. The *Chipko* movement was not against the government but was against certain policies and acts, and it had caused the forest department to change its approach. In addition to preventing tree cutting in the forests, the women had organised tree planting on barren land without obtaining permission from the government, bringing greenery to their surroundings.

**Krishna Kumari Subedi** of Syangja, Nepal, spoke of the opposition her women's users' group first encountered from men in the community. The women had made a plantation on three hectares of land, watching the site themselves, and collecting Rs 400 monthly that the forest department had decided to give to a watcher. Their work was opposed by the men of the community who accused the women of planting trees on their grazing land and making money out of it. The District Forest Officer (DFO) supported the women and locked up the cattle. The forest officers had held discussions with the men which had resulted in changing their attitudes. Tree plantation had now been undertaken on another four hectares of land. The women had now started a movement against alcohol and gambling.

**Meena Poudyal** described the WATCH programmes that were designed to empower women by going to villages and distributing medicines, vegetable seeds, etc. Although, at first, the community men had discouraged the organisers from talking to the women, saying they were illiterate, knew nothing, and could not even speak Nepali, the WATCH workers had gone to the fields and kitchens to talk to the women. After several months of continuous meetings, the organisers learned about their daily problems and their culture. Their major problems were illiteracy, the six to seven hours required to collect fuelwood and fodder, and their lack of even one spare hour. Deciding to begin with the immediate problem of fuelwood and fodder, which prevented them from having spare time for anything else, they had started planting saplings. A women's nursery group was formed to run a nursery. The saplings had been bought by the forest department for Rs 9,000 and returned to the women for plantation. The men had opposed the women's group until they had seen the money coming into their fund. There were now five groups, including both men's and women's groups, all started by women.

Work in the *terai* had begun with people who had migrated from hill regions. Since there was no community forestry programme, WATCH had started by giving women informal education, which then went on to practical subjects like fertilizers. When they learned about fertilizers, they started to make their own compost fertilizer and stopped using chemical fertilizers. They were also made aware of their rights, injustice, freedom, tyranny, and so on. Later, out of nine informal education groups, a women's freedom group was formed. That group had undertaken several tasks and had succeeded in bringing drinking water to the village. The women had also taken action against a man involved in trafficking women. The man had filed a court case against 11 women which was still in court. The women's freedom group had now started a fund with a contribution from WATCH to establish a candle factory.

Meena said that, in her opinion, two things were needed to empower women: social awareness and a means of income generation. The movements and issues in Nepal and India were similar, and this advantage needed to be exploited. Only empowerment strategies would enhance women's role in decision-making, not just for community forestry but also for human resource development.

## Strategies for Strengthening Local Institutions: Institution-building, Capacity-building and Training

On being reminded that the session was to share experiences about local institutional strengthening for recommendations that would feed into the country working groups the next day, the group started with a description of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP).

The AKRSP worked on three basic principles: 1) organisation, 2) savings, and 3) capacity-building. It had developed solid infrastructures at the village and cluster levels. Separate organisations had been created for men and women from different villages. In women's organisations, men could be members only if there were no literate women. The initial dialogue with community members was to facilitate creation of an organisation, bringing certain benefits. Members selected a president and a secretary and began holding regular meetings. Members made their own rules about group formation and took part in work programmes, for which they received increased savings.

The first activity was the saving scheme. Members saved at every meeting, according to their capacity. There could be more than one member per household, and a village accountant deposited the money in the bank after each meeting. The programme had an organised accounting scheme. Hunters who had a

hunting permit must pay an amount of between Rs 7,500 and 25,000 or US\$ 3,000 to the government which then gave 75 per cent back to the AKRSP.

All communities might not have sufficient funds for saving, therefore, AKRSP had five other packages: agriculture, marketing, forestry, accounting, and livestock, all of which benefitted the community. Each section had a specialist who went to the village-level institutions for training and technical support. Training was included in each package and, aided by these packages, the saving capacities of the communities were increased.

Krishna Devi next introduced the *Mahila Mangal Dal* from Uttar Pradesh. In the 'Chipko movement' area, the group had been involved primarily in forest protection. It was ten years old, but still informal. The groups were specific to each small village. Some fruits were being collected, bringing in some

## Participants

1. Sosan Qurban, Gilgit, Pakistan
2. Ali Shah, Gilgit, Pakistan
3. George Paglinawan, Philippines
4. Dennis Desmond, Bhutan
5. Bumpen Keowan, Thailand
6. Murari Lal, Chamoli, Uttar Pradesh
7. Krishna Devi, Chamoli, Uttar Pradesh
8. Nimu Devi, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh
9. G. Raju, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
10. Kulbushan Upmanyu, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Kuldeep Verma, Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh
12. Narayan Kazi Shrestha, Kathmandu
13. Nand Lal Madji, Sunsari, Nepal
14. Semai Chaudhari, Sunsari, Nepal

revenue. Management was required for the employment centres established by women. All the work in the employment centres had to be skill-based.

Regarding capacity building, **Murari Lal** from *Sarvodaya* said that, twice a year, training was given on agriculture, forestry, beekeeping, and wool making. New technology was introduced by the institution. Village women who were somewhat literate were selected for training. Because the role of women was considered to be so important, strategies were designed for their development. These women returned and trained others. The groups also ran a nursery that supplied seedlings during the planting season and helped in marketing local products. What had begun as a tree-saving movement had now become an organisation to train and develop women.

George Paglinawan noted that in his groups' experience in The Philippines, people would not respond unless their basic needs were touched upon. His NGO had prioritised need identification as a first step to organisation. For the achievement of different organisational objectives, different committees were formed.

*"Various people are selected and given training for the different committees. Sometimes the group begins with the political aspect, especially with women and the poorer households. We may politicise the community in the sense of asking who is deciding for whom? How am I participating in community decisions? Social investigation is also taking place, who is who? Everything must be discussed in the village.*

*First we must identify who talks a lot and who is mostly silent but talks sense. The community must be made subtly conscious about different types of people. Regarding institution building, as people start coming together, before selection of their possible leader, community members must know who to choose. Committee formation is based on needs' identification. Training starts from there. The first question is who is to be trained? We begin with basic broad-based education. From the broad information, the community specifies its needs and people move on to more specific subjects and intensive training.*

*After some initial training is completed, the community must become the group that does nearly everything: the logistics of the training, what is required to begin a nursery, etc. As much as possible, training is done in the community. The NGO gives technical support for whatever cannot be found at the local level. We have in-house expertise in all areas. In every training course practical application of what is learned is very important and must be actually done, correctly. We also stress flexibility regarding rules and regulations. Monitoring and evaluation, and the openness of members to accept criticism, are also important."*

**Khulbhushan Upmanyu** said that his community in Himachal Pradesh had one NGO and one community organisation which dealt in different ways with capacity-building. He said they had been thinking about the conservation of natural resources, and so had created a state-level working group through which to work on environmental issues. The community organisation emphasised the emotional element regarding community feeling and natural resources. Until it began working with the community organisation, the NGO had not had a real grasp of community needs. Now a working group had emerged in which NGOs and NGO workers were trained in natural resources' issues and on how to take

issues to the people. The basic strategy of the training was to make it work like a community movement. Training followed the issues and was used to take them forward. The effort now was on trying to build a network of NGOs and community-based organisations. The network fed itself on natural resource-related issues: water, land, forestry.

**Kazi Shrestha** discussed the evolution of user groups as an institution in Nepal. Nationalisation had destroyed indigenous forest management systems. When panchayat protected forests had been handed over to local authorities, they had abused this power and destroyed rather than protected the forest. Subsequent reflection on how to manage forests had led to some communities being given the authority, and they had succeeded. Also it appeared that, wherever the forest department had not been, the forest was good, the traditional systems were working. People living near and actually using the forest would protect it. Giving authority to the powerful led to destruction because they wanted to earn money.

Between 1978 and 1984, 413 users' committees were formed, but most members were from the educated elite who never went to the forest. Community forestry was started in Nepal by donors who had wanted the operational plan to be in English. In this situation, the forest committees often did not know what to do, and, therefore, they did not work. The focus was on protection and plantation. A lot of money was spent and went into the pockets of *panchayat* officials. A new initiative and a new process were required. Generally no one knew about the forest rules and regulations, even the forest staff were unaware of them. So the government and forestry projects had decided to begin by reorienting the forest department to work with local people. Two initial training programmes had revealed that no DFO wanted to participate in this training process. Nevertheless, only the forest officials had the authority to hand over the forest to the community.

In the process of handing over a forest, a socioeconomic analysis of the village was done. The village was divided into focussed interest groups of 8-10 people, who were encouraged to make their own rules on how to manage the forest. This was in an effort to prevent powerful people from dominating in large meetings. Groups in conflict were brought together for discussion and a large assembly was convened to decide on the final version. The rules decided whether or not an executive committee was needed. If a committee was established, it had to also follow the rules. Once the forest department approved the rules, the forest could be handed over.

**G. Raju** from Gujarat talked about raising the capacity of village-level cooperatives. For capacity building there were different federations in different districts of Gujarat. Training was also given. They organised amongst themselves for information exchange.

**Dennis Desmond** talked about the situation in Bhutan. He said there was a great need to re-orient forestry staff, meaning attitudinal changes as well as training. Concerning knowledge and skills for implementing community forestry programmes, one possible action would be the promotion of more foreign study tours at both the senior level, where major attitudinal changes were needed, as well as at the social forestry and extension level.

**Bumpen Keowan** said that in Thailand elected village committees decided what products were needed from the community forests. Until now all the products from the forest had been distributed among the committee members and had not been sold. Any income went to the fund of the village development committee, not to the fund of the forest users' group. Regarding the 'community sea', every fisherman was automatically a member.

## **Strategies for Enabling Policy, Rules, and Regulations**

In this group, participants discussed the situations in their different countries.

### **India**

In Gujarat, the government and politicians legislated on the forests and people were not always happy with the results. The government made more profit than the people. The community was not involved in policy-making and government policy always failed. Since the policies would only work when the community benefited, government should consider people's demands and needs.

### **Nepal**

Politics was the main obstacle. Rules and regulations were manipulated by people with authority. For example, a land survey had not been carried out for 30 years so the government was providing ownership on the basis of who claimed what. Many people were being deprived of their land rights. The policy should be clear; ambiguity should not be permitted. The Forest Act and Laws were published but were yet to be implemented. Moreover, the Act and Policy should be changed according to changing needs. In addition, the allocation of financial assistance from the forestry department should be in accordance with different conditions in different areas. In general, agroforestry must be strengthened and the existing natural forests also had to be handed over.

### **The Philippines**

NGOs urged the community to plant trees on barren lands in The Philippines, but the benefits were not shared. Only the labour and wages were given to the community. When an administration changed, the policy also changed.

### **Thailand**

The government had no community forestry policy; only traditional management existed. The government emphasised commercial value, which changed according to the needs. As a result of repeated requests, the government had come up with a policy, but there was still some disagreement which was in the process of being resolved.

## **Participants**

1. Ali Gohar, Gilgit, Pakistan
2. Pearmsak Makarabhirom, Thailand
3. Felicisima Piala, The Philippines
4. Khagendra Sikdel, Ramechhap, Nepal
5. Jhalabhai Rathvi, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
6. Ganesh Bahadur Karki, Dolakha, Nepal
7. Bumpen Keowan, Thailand
8. Din Singto, Thailand
9. M.D. Mistry, Sabarkanta, Gujarat

AKRSP training facilities. The trained cadres had improved the farmers' technical capacities. AKRSP also posted village representatives to other projects and countries to learn new strategies.

## **Bhutan**

Dennis Desmond presented his individual Action Plan, as a UN volunteer.

*"I am on a two-year assignment with my main responsibility being to assist in strengthening Bhutan's community forestry programme. Since I cannot talk about an action plan for the whole of Bhutan, I have prepared an individual action plan for myself. I have broken it up into the categories according to the expectations for this workshop.*

### **Policy, Rules and Regulations**

*Policy and legislation is decided through the National Assembly in Bhutan. Although there is some people's participation, when it gets down to the rules and regulations, the Forestry Services' Division makes the decisions. Possible action would involve discussion about modification of the social forestry rules. If that happens and discussion begins, I would suggest that not only the Forestry Services' Division but also the District Administration should become involved in discussions and modifications of the rules. This would be a kind of first step in moving it down to the people's level.*

### **Gender and Equity Issues**

*One of the main issues is the scarcity of women professionals in the Forestry Services' Division. This is not something I could influence but I wanted to mention it. Secondly, there is a lack of consideration for women as well as other interest groups in the community forestry guidelines which are being formulated. As this is part of my responsibility and the guidelines are not finished, I am going to suggest changes with regard to identification of the forestry user groups during the formation process as well as in management plan preparation. Advocacy, networking, and coordination among user groups is not really an issue right now, primarily because there is no users' group forum.*

### **Training/Capacity-building and Sharing Experiences**

*I will be working in training and capacity building; strongly linked to that, for me, is experience sharing. There is a substantial need for re-orientation of forestry staff, more in terms of attitudinal change as well as training. Concerning knowledge and skills for implementation of community forestry programmes, some possible actions include the promotion of more foreign study tours, especially to neighbouring countries. This would include senior forestry officials for whom a major attitude change is needed as well as my fellow counterparts in the Social Forestry and Extension Section and some of the educators. Bhutan has two forestry institutions, one for training forestry guards and the other for forestry training which is class 10 plus 3 years of training. This is for district rangers who are actually implementing community forestry in the districts. Hopefully, in the future, we could actually get some of the forestry users' group members on study tours and workshops like this.*

*Another area is to develop extension material. Our section produces a newsletter on the latest happenings in forestry in Bhutan. I would like to try and broaden its focus to share experiences about what is happening in other countries in community forestry and to publish notices about training and workshops found in other countries. I would like to publish the rules in the guidelines I mentioned and make it like a primer so that more people can understand it at the village level. They are too technical the way they are written now. I would also like to promote better co-ordination among donors in Bhutan in order to implement some of these activities."*

Although the participants from Thailand and The Philippines had to leave before this session, they had prepared an action plan to be presented to the plenary session.

## **Thailand**

### ***Village Level and Community Level***

- Organise workshops and seminars to collect information and to set goals and objectives for community forestry in the 14 provinces
- Organise seminars on operational planning for community development
- Implement reforestation activities in the villages
- Undertake participatory action and operational research in new areas for development of community forestry
- Promote community forestry group activities at the village level

### ***Sub-Regional Level***

- Support sub-regional and regional networks
- Hold a regional seminar
- Review and develop guidelines for implementation of community forestry
- Cooperate with national institutions in formulating bottom-up policies on natural management and community forestry in particular

### ***National Level***

- Strengthen the network for community forestry at the national level  
Stimulate more dialogue on community forestry
- Draft guidelines for the implementation of community forestry in Thailand
- Persuade the government to issue a community forestry act

- Information should be distributed and disseminated to all levels in the community.
- Since the user groups can be registered under the Department of Forests, the CDO office also has to recognise the user groups. The user groups should be given the status of NGOs.

### ***Issues Regarding Women's Participation***

- Names of both men and women should be included in the users' group name lists.
- A certain number of women participants should be required to make up a quorum for the meeting.
- It should be compulsory to include women's groups when strengthening the community forestry programme by going to each household for small group discussion.
- A special quota should be allocated to women for training programmes and seminars, and they should be made more active in the programme.
- Women should be involved, along with men, in the issue of women's participation in their training programmes and in information sharing.
- A certain amount of income generated from the community forest programme should be spent on women's development programmes and to help make them financially self-sufficient.
- Seminars, training programmes, and publication of material and policies should be directed at women and poorer households to make them more aware.
- Regional, national, and international seminars in which women can share their views and experiences should be organised.

### ***National Community Forestry Users' Group Federation, Nepal***

A major decision was taken to establish a national community forestry users' group federation in Nepal. An *ad hoc* committee of 13 persons was formed to give concrete shape to this institutional process.

### ***Regional Women's Community Forestry Users' Group Network***

Just before the conclusion of the workshop, a serious issue was raised by women participants. Many felt that they were becoming voiceless even in this forum and that their voices had not been heard properly. They decided to take this occasion to form a regional-level women's network. The workshop organisers welcomed this proposal and encouraged the women to hold a discussion immediately.

About 20 women from Nepal, India, and Pakistan participated in the discussion. Various issues were raised, primarily about the apprehension that women's concerns had not been given due importance and that women had not had a chance to put forward their ideas. One woman noted that, even during the discussion about women and decision-making, the great stories of the women's movement had been told by men. Another woman added that the women participants had been deprived of good opportunities for interaction, for sharing their experiences, and for exchanging knowledge and ideas. Regarding the field trip, the Indian women had been interested in learning the real situation of Nepali village women. For this, there had been insufficient time.

Discussion turned towards establishing a regional mechanism for women and to setting a date for a wider discussion or workshop. This workshop would bring together women user group members and would aim at broad-based discussions on some of the issues that had emerged during the workshop. A regional committee was selected to take up the responsibility of establishing the network.

### Nepal

- Padma Sangraula
- Radha Shrestha
- Devi Adhikari
- Maya Khanal
- Bishnu Dhakal
- Kamala Sharma
- Rukmini Karki

### India

- Hema Kali
- Kamala ben Bhagora
- Kalawati Devi

### Pakistan

- Sosan Qurban

Some of the decisions made are enlisted below.

- The workshop would be held in Nepal and immediate responsibility for the organisation and management of the workshop was given to women members from Nepal.
- The agenda for discussion would be related to women's problems, environment, and forests.
- Members from Nepal would correspond within one month regarding the points for discussion among village women.

- The responses to letters and points of discussion about women's concerns in every village should be sent to Nepal to provide the guidelines for the workshop.
- Women from user groups, concerned NGOs, and individuals committed to social welfare activities would be invited to the workshop.

## ICIMOD to Introduce Regional Newsletter for Community Forestry Users' Groups

Impressed by the demands for sharing knowledge, strategies, technology, and approaches, ICIMOD's Participatory Natural Resources' Management Programme announced the decision to start a regional newsletter aimed at community forestry user groups. Although workshops provided a good opportunity for sharing and dissemination, it was important to design an instrument that could share issues and information with a larger number of persons on a regular basis across the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

In this context, a multi-language quarterly newsletter would be launched. ICIMOD hoped to introduce the process by a commitment to produce four issues over a 12-month period, after which the response and viability would be assessed. The theme of the first issue would be the Budhanilkantha workshop issues, strategies, and action plans. The participants welcomed this announcement and committed themselves to supporting and contributing to the newsletter.

## Closing Plenary

After dinner, the final evening of the workshop began with songs by the folk-singer Manjul and a Tharu dance troupe from the *terai*. Participants from all countries joined in.

The closing plenary session began at 11:00 pm.

Narayan Kazi Shrestha began with some announcements about departure for the following morning. He also requested all participants to return their workshop evaluation forms. He then invited participants to say a few words about the workshop.

### Bhim Lal Subedi

*"We would like to thank the organisers for organising this large workshop. The opportunity for discussion and exchange of ideas have helped us all. Sharing ideas with international institutions has inspired us to return to our work with additional impetus to make our FUGs more people oriented. I again thank the organisers for the opportunity to share our common problems with other user groups."*

### D.S. Rasaily

*"I would like to thank all participants from different countries, states, and districts of Nepal. Also, a big thankyou to ICIMOD. I had not expected to learn so much from the*

workshop. We would like to request ICIMOD to include Sikkim and Darjeeling in future programmes as it would benefit us greatly."

### **Aman Ali Shah**

*"I greet all participants and thank everyone, including the organisers. When I first came I was a little wary, everyone sat and behaved differently, but in the last few days I feel we have become part of one family. I speak from the heart. Tomorrow's separation will be painful. When I heard everyone's problems, I felt depressed and thought how long will these problems last? But when we went to the temple and sang the group song, my heart and mind felt lighter. I would like to see a big day when all people are united, a day in which all the world's humanity and people will be one. Language and other barriers should fall away and we should all take a step towards the evolution of humanity. I say farewell on this note."*

### **H. P. Neupane**

*"I would like to thank ICIMOD, FTTP, and WATCH for this unique workshop. I will always remember my interaction with brothers and sisters from Bhutan, India, The Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan. The problems of other FUGs and how they overcome them is invaluable knowledge for us. This interaction was stimulating. I bid a painful farewell to all participants. I request the organising committee to have a follow-up workshop so that we can meet and develop our ideas further."*

*The main achievement of the workshop will be when ideas generated here will be followed up by individual user groups in their villages. The FUGs of the suppressed people have long been voiceless. We have to bring them forward. That is the commitment of the people here and we should drop our egos in the process. The exploited need a little support which we will give. We should support them to enhance their capacities. Those who oppose programmes empowering the people should be boycotted. Empowerment of the people is the great thing. First, we should prepare ourselves, then we can empower the people. We should work together for people's rights. Again, I would like to thank all the participants."*

### **Anupam Bhatia**

*"I want to say something about reporting. All the reports presented here and notes made by participants will be collected within one month. Then we will send you a small summary report. After a few months when we complete all the reports and rapporteurs' notes, those will also be sent to you. The main report will be in three languages: Hindi, English, and Nepali. We will send a letter with the summary report. If there are any mistakes and shortcomings, please correct them and send them to us to be incorporated into the main report. Our friends are preparing a video film as well. We have been concerned about communication, dissemination, and exchange of ideas among the countries from the beginning of the workshop. On behalf of ICIMOD I would like to thank every participant for their contribution to the workshop. We must remember that the end of this workshop is also the beginning of our collective goal of people-oriented development. I propose we end with the same song we sang when the workshop opened."*

The workshop ended with a chorus of "We Shall Overcome" in a three-language relay, and the First Regional Community Forestry Users' Group Workshop was then formally declared closed.