4

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The principal objective of the case studies in the program "The Organization and Management of Rural Development" is to carry out an examination of resource management systems within the context of the development process and the dynamics of change. In this particular study the objective was seen as a way to achieve insights into ways in which forest development can utilise and learn from existing institutions. There are a number of important conclusions.

o Indigenous forest management is quite common within Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok, particularly in patches of natural forest.

o Indigenous systems have generally developed relatively recently, especially in the last thirty years. They appear to have developed in response to a shortage of forest products and due to a lack of effective forest management institutions at the national level.

o Although some systems have formal organisational features (such as committees) the essential features of effective local forest management are mutually recognised use-rights and institutionalised rules. The absence of formal structure is not evidence that there is no local management.

o Sponsored forest management organisations often exist without the institutional substratum necessary to ensure success. They frequently fail to adequately identify existing use-rights when establishing plantations.

We will now turn to a discussion of some implications of the study to future forestry development activities in Nepal.

Getting it Right at the Beginning

The failure of forest development activities has often been associated with inadequate understanding of local conditions. Plantation has taken place on disputed land and existing and viable management systems (often because their existence has not been recognised) have been ignored. Before any activities occur, informal (but thorough) survey of needs and problems should be carried out. No nursery should be established (or maintained) without broad local support and no plantation should occur without thorough examination of land tenure. Formal consultation with elected officials is necessary, but it is not sufficient.

The difficulties experienced in the case of Thulo-Siru-Bari in changing effective protection systems to management and utilisation systems provide an object lesson here. Had agreements been established with user groups and had transfer of control to user groups taken place before plantation took place, the problems faced in trying to establish a viable organisational structure ten years later may have been avoided. Ten years after plantation establishment, a valuable resource exists without an effective sense of ownership or clearly established use-rights.

31

This is not proposed as a facile solution. Claims to use-rights on bare land used as pasture are unlikely to be the same as claims on reforested land, because the users of pasture and the potential users of a forest will almost certainly not be an identical group of people. Further claims for use-rights are likely to develop with the value of a resource (Dani, pers. comm.). Use-rights evolve and are part of a dynamic process of claim, counter-claim and recognition of claims. Nevertheless, the time to start negotiations about rights is before forest development activities are initiated.

Minimum Intervention Strategy

The clearest finding of this study has been a confirmation of the emerging view that there is a lot more going on in forest management and development in villages than development agencies usually recognise. External interventions in community forestry have tended to ignore existing structures and institutions. This is usually inefficient because something which is working is destroyed and replaced by something which is not. The implication of these observations is that there is a need for a flexible strategy which recognises, utilises and builds on existing indigenous rights and institutions. We would like to propose such a "minimum intervention" strategy.

A major constraint in facilitating local-level management of forest resources is the excessive concern with management plans. Villagers are able to manage forests effectively in many cases, particularly in terms of protection. The need for a formal management plan is a need of the outside agency, not necessarily a need of villagers themselves. In cases where reasonably effective indigenous management systems exist, external intervention is often counterproductive at worst and irrelevant at best. Even the appointment of externally-funded forest watchers may lead to the breakdown of a system. For this reason negotiating an agreement which has no relevance to the users is likely to be destructive. A minimum intervention strategy is advisable here. Such a strategy would acknowledge the existence of a system and then, effectively, leave it alone. In the current legislative context some form of signed agreement may be necessary, but removal of the need for a formal agreement before forests can be used would be a preferable long-term solution. Perhaps a simple certification by the DFO that a local system exists and that he judges it to be effective could be adequate.

The concept of minimum intervention also applies at the level of flexibility when sponsoring new, or endorsing old, structures. Because indigenous systems tend to be short-term and to change form readily, a great deal of flexibility is needed, both in formalising existing systems and creating new ones. Specifying committee membership (either in terms of ex- officio membership, sex ratios, or total membership), regularity of meetings, or the need to keep minutes, is not likely to enhance the probability of a long-term viable system. In fact, even when committees exist, fluctuating membership and irregularity of meetings are common. These features do not necessarily lead to unsuccessful forest management. A minimum intervention strategy implies a step by step approach to forest management.

Step 1. Recognise existing systems and leave them alone if they are effective.

Step 2. Strengthen existing systems when they are inadequate, perhaps by attending to problems relating to legal tenure or by providing financial support.

Step 3. Assist in establishing new institutions where necessary, but, in doing so, pay close attention to existing use-rights.

One of the dangers in labelling any strategy or approach is that it will be quickly converted to an acronym and applied simplistically and mechanistically. The idea of "minimum intervention" is likely to be seen as an easy solution. This is not the intention. Except in the case of recognising existing systems and leaving them alone, a **minimum intervention strategy does not imply minimum activity. Minimum intervention refers to the need to avoid unnecessary changes.** The level of activity required in the case of Steps 2 and 3 will probably be very high as lengthy negotiations are likely to be required. The underlying principle is to recognise what exists and to use it to the extent that it helps to achieve efficient and equitable forest management.

Conclusions

Although this study has been an attempt to carry out a thorough analysis of indigenous and externally-sponsored local forest management systems in Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok, there are questions which have not been examined in great detail. There is a need for further study of the following issues:

1. This report has referred to the need to begin negotiations about use-rights and management before establishing plantations. In fact, it seems that complex negotiations often take place at the local level before plantation begins (see Ingles, 1988), without reference to the project or the DFO, but this processes need to be explored more fully.

2. The report has examined externally-sponsored attempts to manage plantation forests, but it has not considered indigenous management of such forests, as no relevant systems were identified in the study area. However, there are apparently some places where indigenous mangement of plantation forest occurs and study of such cases would be very useful.

3. The analysis presented here suggests that indigenous forest management systems tend to be predominantly protection-oriented. It would be useful to see whether this pattern is common throughout the hills of Nepal and, if not, what differences in local conditions lead to a differing pattern.

This report has explored the nature of village level forest resource management in the NAFP project area and discussed some of the processes involved in external intervention. It has proposed some ways in which project activity can be modified to build on existing institutions.

The underlying lesson is that there is a position somewhere between the ignorant villagers view held by some development agents and the view of the noble all-wise villager held by others. Village systems have their strengths and limitations. The role of development agencies is to recognise and build on the strengths and to help to find ways around the limitations.