introduction to the workshop

Background

More productive and sustainable use of sloping land and community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) are increasingly recognised as major options in a range of natural resource sectors in Asia, as well as in cross-cutting strategies such as poverty reduction, environmental management, and rural development strategies. Community-based forest management has often been lauded as a highly successful scheme for reversing the degradation of forests and for enhancing the income and livelihoods of impoverished communities in Nepal.

With over two decades of experience in community forestry, Nepal has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and expertise in adopting the approach as well as valuable lessons that could help improve the policy and institutional frameworks for scaling up community forestry in the region and for applying it to other forms of land use. Other countries such as Bhutan have just embarked upon ambitious social forestry plans embracing much the same community forestry approach as in Nepal. However, the scheme has yet to take off on a significant scale, due largely to lack of experience and confidence among decision-makers and implementers in transferring the rights to communities.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) are supporting a number of natural resource management (NRM) projects in South and Southeast Asia. Besides direct bilateral support to the countries in the region, SDC and GTZ are also supporting regional and international research and development centres like the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) through both core and project funding for natural resource management programmes.

The Workshop on Interaction between Forest Policies and Land Use Patterns

ICIMOD, SDC, RECOFTC, and GTZ jointly organised a workshop on 'Capitalisation and Sharing Experiences on the Interaction between Forest Policies and Land Use Patterns in Asia' in Kathmandu, Nepal. There were 67 participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Mongolia, Nepal, and Pakistan, representing different natural resource management projects, and representatives from regional and international organisations such as SDC, ICIMOD, the Centre for International Forest Research (CIFOR), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and RECOFTC. The workshop was intended to bring together policy makers, project implementers,

representatives of local communities, the two donors – SDC and GTZ – and the two international organisations – ICIMOD and RECOFTC – to share the lessons learned from community forestry in Nepal and to explore opportunities for applying them in other countries and to other forms of land use.

The specific objectives of the workshop were:

i) to analyse the interactions between Forest Policies and Land Use Patterns and identify constraints, opportunities, effective approaches, processes, and tools for contributions to enabling policy development;

ii) to enhance participants' knowledge and understanding of interactions between land use patterns and forest policies for more effective contributions to enabling policy development and 'regional sharing and capitalisation'; and

iii) to enhance participants' confidence in and capacity to influence policies and replicate success stories in community forestry and other CBNRM systems in their own countries

Overview of the Proceedings

The workshop included opening and closing sessions, five plenary sessions, and two working group sessions. The Chief Guest at the Opening Session – Mr. Badri Prasad Mandal, the Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation of His Majesty's Government of Nepal – delivered the keynote address. Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell, Director General of ICIMOD, Mr. Paul Egger, Head of East Asia Division, SDC, and Mr. Anant Raj Pandey, Secretary, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, welcomed the guests and participants on behalf of their respective organisations.

In his inaugural speech, the Hon'ble Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation reiterated Nepal's strong commitment to community-based forest management. Drawing evidence from over several decades, Mr. Paul Egger showed how community forestry (CF) has changed landscapes in Nepal over the years. Dr. Campbell said that CF has not only changed the physical landscape but also changed our mental landscape and removed scepticism about people's ability to manage forests. Appreciating the ingenuity of local people, he drew the participants' attention to how community-based management has been advancing in the region.

In the First and Second Plenary Sessions, seven papers were presented on different issues in community forestry. Three discussion groups were formed at the end of the second session, and their findings presented in the Third Plenary Session. In the Fourth Plenary Session, five papers were presented on case studies on CBNRM from other countries in the region, followed by discussions in four groups. The group findings were presented in the Fifth Plenary Session, together with two papers dealing with experiences from Mongolia and China. On the third and last day, groups were again formed to draw up recommendations and follow-up action plans.

The group findings on recommendations and follow-up action were presented in the Closing Session followed by the rapporteur's report from Dr. Golam Rasul, Policy Specialist, ICIMOD. Finally, Dr. Renate Braun, Assistant Country Director, SDC, Nepal; Dr. Gabriel Campbell, Director General, ICIMOD; and Mr. Mike Nurse, RECOFTC delivered the closing remarks.

Presentations and Discussions

The First Plenary Session chaired by Dr. Keshav Raj Kanel, Deputy Director General, Department of Forests, HMG, Nepal, was devoted to taking stock of advances made in community-based management of natural resources in the region. Three papers described different aspects of the advancement of community-based natural resource management and highlighted the advances in community forestry in different countries of the region as well as in different sectors in natural resource management, viz., forests, rangelands, shifting cultivation, biodiversity, and landscape conservation in the greater Himalayan region. Attention was drawn to the fact that although community forestry has been advancing in many countries, the poorest of the poor are not benefiting equally with others.

During the discussions, important questions were raised from the floor. They highlighted the fact that community is not a homogenous entity. While some of the participants emphasised the need for defining the terms 'community' and 'community forestry' more clearly; others were of the view that community is a dynamic concept and may vary from country to country. The concept of community management may also vary with changing contexts. Suggestions provided by participants include the identification of areas where the three organisations, ICIMOD, RECOFTC, and CIFOR, could work more closely to produce synergistic efforts towards participatory forest management.

The Second Plenary Session, chaired by Professor T. B.S. Mahat, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, was on learning lessons from community forestry in Nepal. Four papers highlighted Nepal's experiences from different perspectives: government, forest user groups, projects, and donors. These were presented and discussed. The papers described the context of community forestry in Nepal and how it had evolved and developed over the last three decades, as well as the challenges faced and strategies adopted to address those challenges. It was also highlighted that CF had gradually evolved as a social institution and a multisectoral development platform that not only served to manage forest resources but also to manage community development as a whole, including for poverty reduction, social mobilisation, women's empowerment, advocacy, and overall social development. It was also mentioned that CF is much more egalitarian than any other institution and many user groups have members of marginalised groups as office bearers.

Questions from the floor included whether CF had helped to reduce poverty and whether the benefits of CF exceed the costs, and which actors and factors contributed to the development of CF in Nepal. The response was that through generating higher incomes and providing support to livelihoods, CF had been helping to reduce poverty. Benefits from CF are also greater than the costs. Recognised benefits would be even greater if intangible benefits, such as watershed protection, carbon sequestration, and benefits of downstream areas were considered. Several actors and factors contributed to the development of CF. Most important among them were the champions of community forestry within the government, non-government organisations (NGOs), civil societies, local government organisations, donor communities, research organisations, and not least the local people themselves.

After lessons from Nepal, participants were divided into three groups to discuss what specific lessons could be learned from CF in Nepal in terms of policy, institutions, and user groups/beneficiaries. The groups presented their findings in the plenary session presided over by Dr. Gabriel Campbell.

The first group, which was on policy and legislation, highlighted the fact that one of the primary reasons for success was that the actual practice and experiences from the field led to the formulation of policies. CF started in the late 1970s, but the law legitimising it was promulgated only in 1993. The group, however, recognised that supportive policies, rules, and regulations legitimising community forest user groups (CFUGs) as an autonomous entity have provided them with enough flexibility to develop their own rules and regulations; and also that management plans played a significant role in gaining momentum in CF. The second group, which was on institutions and support services, mentioned that effective community-based institutions; clear rules and regulations; strong linkages between national, district, and community actors; and an effective user group federation played important roles in promotion of CF. The third group, which was on user groups and beneficiaries, considered that in the democratic process in CFUGs, appropriate mechanisms for benefit-sharing, conflict resolution, and financial incentives were the important motivating factors for adopting CF in Nepal.

Several questions came from the floor during the discussions. The most important of these were about how to facilitate the move from subsistence to commercial use of timber and non-timber forest products and how to improve silvicultural practices to increase productivity. It was noted that several formal and informal taxes on timber and non-timber forest products from CF, complicated rules and regulations for marketing non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and other factors are posing serious challenges to the development of community forestry from subsistence-based activities to commercial enterprises.

In the Fourth Plenary Session, attention was given to learning from other community-based natural resource management approaches practised in the region. The session was chaired by Mr. Paul Egger. Five case studies from different countries in the region highlighted the evolution, process, and legal basis of different participatory forest management systems such as social forestry in Bhutan, Guzara forest management in Pakistan, leasehold forestry and buffer zone management in Nepal, and tenurial arrangements and forest management in India. The papers emphasised the active involvement of local people for better management of the commons and for improving people's lives. All the papers illustrated how tenurial arrangements affect the condition of natural resources and their use to improve peoples' livelihoods. Several questions were raised on procedural mechanisms, rights and access, laws and policies, and the tenurial arrangements of different approaches, and the speakers clarified these points.

After sharing the experiences of different CBNRM approaches, the next session was devoted to examining the cross learning between Nepal's CF experience and the experiences from other countries and other forms of natural resource management. The participants were divided into four groups: Leasehold Forestry (Nepal), Wetlands and Rangelands (China, Mongolia), Joint Forestry and Guzara Forestry (India and Pakistan), and Social Forestry (Bhutan). The findings from the various groups were presented in the Fifth Plenary Session, chaired by Dr. Jochen Statz, GTZ Team Leader, Churia Hill Forestry Development Project, Nepal.

Although different groups referred to different aspects of CF based on their respective approaches, the common issues shared by most of the groups were those of supportive policies, laws, and regulations; empowering communities to prepare their own rules and regulations; giving management responsibility to the user; a decentralised management process; a participatory process for group formation; and allowing CFUGs to work independently of political affiliations.

Observations and Lessons Learned

The important observations and lessons from the workshop can be summarised as follows.

1. Despite hurdles and difficulties, CF has been advancing well in Nepal.
2. CF is not only advancing in terms of area coverage and involvement of people, but also in terms of refined concepts, role, and philosophy.
3. CF has gone beyond being just an approach or a model of forest management; it has become an institution, a development approach, and a process of social mobilisation and people's empowerment.
4. CF is no more only a means of better management and regeneration of degraded forest, but in itself has become an end of development activities as people's participation and empowerment are the main development goals of any democratic society.
5. There is no unique model for participatory or community-based natural resource management. Different approaches such as social forestry, joint forest management, leasehold forestry, and buffer-zone management have evolved in different countries in different social and political contexts and have their own strengths, weaknesses, and specialities.
6. The strength of CF is that it is more democratic, inclusive, and broad in terms of process, access, and rights compared to other approaches.
7. Although there are some differences between CF and other management approaches, the broad philosophy of CF could be used in many other approaches with slight modifications.
8. CF offers useful insights and lessons for conservation, development, and effective management of other natural resource sectors such as pastures, rangelands, water, biodiversity, and landscape.
9. It should be recognised that community forestry is not a panacea for all problems. Several problems still exist. More attention needs to be given to social equity, poverty alleviation, and gradual development of subsistence-based activities to commercial enterprises. Policy support needs to be continued and enhanced to address these second generation problems. Silvicultural aspects also need to be considered to increase productivity.
10. Although different countries have adopted different approaches to resource management, a broad consensus was that primary users should be actively involved in management.
11. Finally, it was recognised that community-based management is a learning process. We are learning by doing. In Dr. Kanel's words, "We are de-learning, learning, and re-learning. We are de-learning classical centralised forest management, learning community-based management from people, and re-learning from different approaches to participatory management from different countries."

The following chapters provide a brief summary of the papers presented. The full texts of the papers, unless otherwise stated, are published in Volume II.

Workshop Participants on Capitalisation and Sharing of Experiences on the Interaction between Forest Policies and Land Use Patterns in Asia, Kathmandu