

The Context: Fifteen Years of Social/Community Forestry

Starting in 1977/78, both Nepal and India launched major new initiatives in forestry. Referred to as "Social Forestry" in India and "Community Forestry" in Nepal, the new approaches undertaken under these programme titles transformed traditional government forestry activities -- and attitudes. While important precedents for a local people-centered forestry are available throughout the region, these initiatives were the first to bring foresters out of their forests and into the villages and farms of the people, who are the forests' primary users, on a large and sustained scale.

These new approaches grew out of the realisations that: a) traditional government forestry efforts are inadequate for halting the loss and degradation of the subcontinent's forest resources without the active participation of local people and b) much of the population -- and particularly the poor -- depend heavily upon forest resources for subsistence, energy, and maintenance of their farming systems. The number of project and programme activities developed to address these realisations has now reached every district and block and most *panchayats* and villages in the region. With large-scale government and donor support, total investments approached US\$ two billion over the last fifteen years, and over 100,000 forestry personnel are estimated to be directly engaged in carrying out field work.

The major activities have been:

- government-sponsored plantations on community-used grazing or "wastelands" with varying degrees of local participation (e.g., with local *panchayats*, village development committees, forest committees, user groups, societies, etc);
- plantations on other bare public lands under a variety of tenurial arrangements (e.g., roadsides, canal banks, degraded forest lands);
- promotion of farmer-tree planting through the establishment of nurseries and

Some Lessons from Social/Community Forestry

Although the debate continues, there is increasing agreement on the following general conclusions regarding the first ten years of social/community forestry.

- Community plantations/woodlots established through the *panchayats* have generally failed to elicit genuine participation or effective management -- although important exceptions can be found. The cost per biomass ton produced has been high.
- Private farmer-tree planting exceeded all expectations in many areas -- sometimes resulting in market saturation nearby. Although farmers planted primarily for the commercial pole and timber market in the plains and fodder production in the Himalayas, appropriate technologies and market support have frequently been inadequate.
- Farm households have shown little or no interest in planting to meet their own subsistence level fuelwood needs. Increased incomes from tree product sales or improved dairy production have proved to be the driving force behind tree planting. Fuelwood as an intermediate by-product has been welcome.
- Equal participation of women in either community or household forestry decisions is lacking and its programme promotion is totally inadequate.
- The promotion of natural regeneration through community management of existing forests has demonstrated potentially cost-effective results (see further this report).
- Currently used tree planting technologies and silvicultural management systems need radical changes to address social, economic, and soil and moisture conservation needs more effectively.
- Institutionalising the social/community forestry approach requires substantial long-term changes in policies, legislation, training, and institutional support. Conventional forestry attitudes can and have changed -- But with almost 100,000 government-paid forestry personnel employed in India and Nepal the numbers involved require a large-scale sustained effort.

The Editors

distribution of seedlings through a variety of arrangements (e.g., forest department nurseries, school nurseries, private contract nurseries; free distribution, subsidised sales, etc);

- environmental conservation education and dissemination of wood-saving technologies (e.g., improved fuelwood stoves and crematoria);

- handing over existing degraded forests to local user groups (Nepal) or establishing joint forest management arrangements with local societies, villages, or committees (India); and

- development of microplans (India) or operational plans (Nepal) for approved management of plantation and regeneration forests together with local communities.

Fifteen years of roughly parallel experience with community/social forestry have yielded many similarities and some surprising differences -- many instructive failures and many exciting successes. The number of studies and analyses of this experience continues to multiply. Informational networks have also been established both internationally (i.e., ODI Social Forestry Network, FAO Forest Trees and People Network, ICRAF Agroforestry Networks, USAID/Winrock's FFRED Research Network, etc) and nationally (SPWD Wasteland News Network, Joint Forest Management Groups in the Indian Forester's journal, etc in India and the *Banko Jankari* research network in Nepal). **Despite the commonalities of ecological conditions, programme approaches, and socioeconomic conditions, however, there has been surprisingly little interaction or inter-learning between India and Nepal -- let alone between other countries in the Region.**

This seminar set out to redress this gap -- to take advantage of bringing together a wide variety of professionals with solid field experience behind them. But the goal was to build on this experience by looking forward, by looking at what works, and what could work better. The purpose was to identify promising new directions in India and Nepal, and indirectly the Region as a whole, by bringing them together with fellow community foresters they had not met; people who had tried different solutions to common problems in similar situations.

"Nepal and India have much in common in terms of issues relevant to the implementation of community forestry/joint forestry management. The experiences are different, but they are mutually relevant because of the commonalities in biophysical and socioeconomic factors, and because the experiences are derived directly from field realities."

-- Michael Nurse

ICIMOD's regional mandate, its direct linkage to Nepal and India as well as other countries in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan Region, allows it to play a uniquely facilitative role in bringing together such a regional interplay of experience. In addition, its focus on integrating biophysical and socioeconomic factors -- the interaction and people and their environment in fragile mountain conditions -- provides a conceptual forum for struggling with solutions to overcome problems of land use, productivity, conservation, poverty, and development.

