



WIDENING HORIZONS

**Regional Workshop
on the Role of Local, Elected Institutions in
Community Forestry Management
in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas
16-21 March 1998**



Organized by
**International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
Kathmandu, Nepal**

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Supported by
**UNDP's Governance Resource Facility
Islamabad, Pakistan**

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Cover photo: clockwise

- i) Handing over the pot of earth from the HKH to the Director General of ICIMOD
- ii) Joint Inauguration by Rt. Honourable Ministers for Local Development and Forests and Soil Conservation
- iii) Chairperson, Dr. M.M. Sainju
- iv) A glimpse of the street play performed especially for the workshop participants

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Foreword

This workshop marks a new phase in ICIMOD's efforts in the area of governance, particularly decentralization and participation in the management of natural resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. The forum brought together women and men who had been elected to local institutions at village and district levels with members of village, district, or national community forestry groups and networks and non-government organizations.

Decentralization, local self governance, and participatory governance are emerging as major national concerns in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Local community participation and the delegation of power and roles and responsibilities have been recognised as an effective strategy for sustainable mountain development. In this way the ecological, social, and cultural diversities in mountain areas are respected, and local communities play a greater role in decision-making and planning. Questions of governance, such as who has the right to decide how local resources should be used and by whom, have become increasingly important. While in large parts of this region degradation of the natural environment is continuing, we can also see highly encouraging examples of reversal.

ICIMOD's mission is to help promote an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem for the 140 million people who live within the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. ICIMOD recognises that mountain people, who often live within marginalised and isolated environments, are particularly vulnerable to external influences that affect the integrity of their cultural heritage and tradition. They need to be provided with opportunities for equitable, social, and economic development that sustain livelihoods in harmony with the mountain environment.

In recent years, community-based and informal village-level institutions have demonstrated their ability to manage forest resources, and there is today increasing engagement with elected village and district-level institutions. New laws and rules and regulations related to decentralization and devolution of powers and responsibilities to elected institutions have accelerated this trend. We now recognise that forest resources cannot be managed sustainably in isolation from issues related to governance, decentralization, and devolution.

Several countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas have recently initiated decentralization as a precondition to participatory development. Locally elected institutions are facing new challenges and opportunities in trying to match economic development and poverty alleviation imperatives with the need to ensure the integrity of natural resources in mountain areas.

The terms of engagement, coordination, and complementarity between locally elected institutions and informal or formal community forestry institutions are new and evolving. Strategies are required to bring these two important stakeholders together and to evolve collaborative approaches to sustainable natural resource management in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. We want to work towards a set of best practices that will lead to democratic governance based on principles of equity, transparency, and accountability in managing community forestry resources and in sharing its benefits. Such strategies are best designed through close consultation, collaboration, and cooperation between locally elected leaders, such as members of village development committees or local *panchayat*(s), and office bearers and individuals from community forestry user groups, village forest development committees, and *mahila mandal*(s) or other informal bodies concerned with forest management.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Association of Chairpersons of District Development Committees, Nepal, and the Federation of Community Forestry Users' Groups, Nepal, for collaborating with us in this unique forum. I would also like to thank the UNDP for its financial support to the workshop and the UNDP, Nepal, for its collaboration and assistance. Without the continuing support of the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, to ICIMOD's Participatory Natural Resources' Management Programme, it would not have been possible to host this forum.

I am confident that the major objective of this workshop, viz., sharing experiences that will widen our horizons, will be met. This will lead to the emergence of development plans that could lead to self-sufficient, economically viable mountain communities whose desires and opinions are heard and respected and where natural resources are managed, protected, and preserved for our present and future generations.

Egbert Pelinck
Director General

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The design, planning, and execution of a six-day forum involving 80 women and men from different countries is always a challenge. More so in the case of this workshop where, for the first time, ICIMOD was proactively engaging a new constituency of elected representatives in its programme.

The workshop would not have been possible without the commitment and support of many individuals and institutions who gave freely of their time and resources. While it is difficult to mention everyone by name, the following deserve our special appreciation for their contributions.

- We would like to thank all the participants who travelled from their homes and institutions and made a major effort to be present at the workshop. They shared their concerns openly and made individual and institutional commitments.
- We would especially like to thank Madhav Poudel for agreeing to collaborate with us through the Association of District Development Committees of Nepal, Madhav Poudel was instrumental and gave substantial time during the planning of this workshop and deserves special mention. We hope he can convey our appreciation to his other colleagues at the ADDCN for their contributions to this workshop. On a similar note we would like to thank Hari Prasad Neupane, the Executive Committee, and the staff of the Federation of Community Forestry Users' Group Nepal for their collaboration with this forum.
- On behalf of ICIMOD and on behalf of the participants we would like to thank all the individuals who contributed papers to this workshop. These papers set the background context of issues and enriched the discussions and the outcomes.

- On behalf of ICIMOD and all the participants we would like to thank Dr. Mohan Man Sainju for agreeing to chair the opening plenary session. That he did so despite a pressing schedule, is indicative of his deep interest in local governance and natural resource management.
- We would also like to thank the *Sarwanam* group for taking up the challenge of creating the street play based on a true life story and in using their skills to bring home to us the importance of collaboration between elected institutions and community forestry management institutions.
- The contributions of Bhumi Raman Nepal, Akal Bahadur Basnet, and the members of the *Hariyali Sangeet Samuha* added to our understanding of using music and culture as an effective mode of communication. We would like to thank them for their inspiring performance and for sharing their original lyrics and songs with us.
- Music and dance has the ability to cut across linguistic barriers. For helping us do this and to provide a glimpse of Nepal's folk music, we would like to thank Manjul Nepal and his group.
- We would also like to thank Amar Bahadur Pahari, Shyam Ghimire and the women and men of Badikhel village for agreeing to host the field visit. This gave everyone an opportunity to see community forestry at work in Nepal and has been an inspiration for many of us.
- The film crew from NEFEJ have documented the complete workshop and we would like to thank them in anticipation of their producing an effective film. We hope that this film will capture some of the essence of this workshop and will become an effective tool for sharing the workshop findings with a wider audience.
- We would also like to thank the management and staff of Godavari Village Resort for providing efficient arrangements for the workshop.
- A forum of this scale requires the contribution of a team of people. We would especially like to thank the Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project for providing the professional services of Khagendra Siktel to this workshop. It has been a pleasure to work with Khagendra Siktel and we hope that there will be more such opportunities in future.
- We would also like to thank Judith Amtzis for her ability to provide a diverse range of valuable professional skills to the planning and organization of the workshop. She will continue to be involved with the challenging task of documenting this interesting workshop and in assisting with the production of a workshop report.
- The challenge of having different languages was adequately met by our team of interpreters and rapporteurs. They were the critical bridge in ensuring that language was not a barrier at this workshop. We would specially like to thank Nivedita Mishra, Tribhuvan Poudyal, Rajiv Singh, Mrinalini Rai, Binod Subedi, and Bishnu K C.

I would also like to thank all my colleagues at ICIMOD who have worked quietly and efficiently behind the scenes during the past few months for this workshop. More specifically I would like to thank Govind Shrestha, Reeta Rana, and Sarita Joshi from the Mountain Natural Resources' Division for their assistance with this forum.

Anupam Bhatia

ABSTRACT

The text covers the issues of decentralization and participatory and local self governance. The Workshop represents one of a series of concerted efforts to bring together the voices of people from across the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region and give them a forum in which to address questions of governance and rights over the use of local natural resources in a climate in which the natural environment is undergoing serious degradation.

This workshop marks a new phase in ICIMOD's efforts in the area of governance, particularly decentralization and participation in the management of natural resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. The forum brought together women and men who had been elected to local institutions at village and district levels with members of village, district, or national community forestry groups and networks and non-government organizations.

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