Introduction to the Workshop

Over the last three years, through its Participatory Natural Resource Management Programme, ICIMOD has facilitated the emergence of new institutions to address issues related to natural resource management. The Programme has supported processes that have led to the emergence of several autonomous national and regional institutions and networks.

These innovations in institutional development focussed on the need to address the state of the art issues in participatory development through creating a national network institution called the Nepal Participatory Action Network; the Federation of Community Forestry User groups in Nepal; the Nepal *Madhyasthata Samuha*, which is a network devoted to conflict resolution mechanisms in natural resource management; and NAVRACHNA, a non-government and community-based network in Himachal Pradesh, India. In addition two regional networks are moving towards formalisation; namely, HIFCOM, the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Forum for Forest Conservation and Management, by senior forestry professionals from Bhutan, India, and Nepal, and Himalayan Grassroots' Women's Natural Resource Management Network (HIMAWANTI), the Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Network, involving women from Nepal, India, and Pakistan.

Today, some of these institutions are independent, receiving funding and membership support from many organizations, while others continue to receive intellectual and financial support from ICIMOD. A key focus of these institutions is lawful advocacy – enabling policy that will promote appropriate practices in community forestry. These institutions have also demonstrated their ability to provide a broad forum for debate on policies affecting the quality of life and to encourage discussion on issues' and strengthen the involvement of civic society in development interventions. One of their key contributions is promotion of best practices for good gov-

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ernance based on principles of dialogue with stakeholders, right to information, transparency in decision-making, and accountability.

An important lesson learned over the last three years is that forest resources cannot be sustainably managed in isolation from issues related to governance, decentralization, and democratisation. While the emphasis on community-based natural resources has been growing and informal village-level institutions have demonstrated their ability to manage forest resources, today there is an increasing engagement with elected village- and district-level institutions. This trend accelerated with the formulation of new laws and rules and regulations related to decentralization and devolution of powers and responsibilities to elected institutions.

Recent trends in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas have led to the promotion of decentralization as a precondition to participatory development. The concept of participatory development is based on self-reliant and self-sufficient development interventions that provide appropriate opportunities for people to articulate their concerns and needs through elected and formal or informal civic institutions.

While processes of decentralization and the emergence of civic institutions are appropriate forms of governance, they acquire a special dimension in the context of mountain specificities. Decentralization and delegation of power and roles and responsibilities are now well recognised as effective strategies for sustainable mountain development. These processes help to nurture respect for the ecological, social, and cultural diversity of mountain areas, and they augment the role of local communities in decision-making, planning, budg-

eting, and monitoring of development programmes.

Local, elected institutions face new challenges and opportunities in trying to match economic development and poverty alleviation imperatives with the need to ensure that the integrity of natural resources in mountain areas is maintained. It is evident that their new role can be supplemented by the experience, knowledge, and involvement of local communities.

Workshop Objectives

The workshop was designed with the following objectives.

- To provide a forum for representatives of local, elected institutions and community forestry institutions and networks to enhance appreciation of their roles in natural resource management with a focus on community forestry
- To improve understanding of policies, rules, and regulations related to decentralization laws and forestry laws and practices
- To improve understanding of decentralization processes and their linkages with community forestry management
- To identify potentials for mutuality between local, elected institutions and formal or informal community-based institutions
- To identify approaches and methodologies to mitigate present and potential conflicts between local, elected institutions and community-based institutions
- To identify best practices leading to sustainable governance systems based on principles of equity, transparency, and accountability to manage community forestry resources

Workshop Participants

Workshop participants came from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. In keeping with the workshop objectives they were selected on the basis of the following criteria.

- Elected representatives of self-governing institutions from village and district or equivalent administrative units from each country
- Office bearers of district or national community forestry networks or appropriate institutions depending on the circumstances in each participating country

Seventy-nine participants attended the workshop, 54 men and 25 women. Women's participation was actively encouraged and provisions were made for two women to come together rather than invite single women. Child care support was offered to ensure that women participants were not prevented from participating.

Dr. M.M. Khan from Bangladesh offering soil from Bangladesh in the Mato Milan (Earth Ceremony) at the workshop inauguration.

Participants handing over the pot with earth from different countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas to Mr. Egbert Pelinck, Director General, ICIMOD