

2

Inaugural Session

Archana Karki of ICIMOD welcomed workshop participants and guests to the opening ceremony. The chairperson of the Inaugural Session was the Honourable Bhakta Bahadur Rokaya, State Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation. Ms Karki invited the other guests to their places on the stage: Mr. Egbert Pelinck, Director General of ICIMOD; Ms Kesang Chungyalpa, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP/Nepal; Madhav Poudel, Chairperson of the Association of District Development Committees of Nepal and Chairperson of the Lalitpur District Development Committee; and Hari Prasad Neupane, Chairperson of the Federation of Community Forest User Groups of Nepal.

Before inviting the guests to give their welcome addresses, Ms. Karki described the previous day's informal but symbolically important 'Earth Ceremony'. She pointed out the design on the clay pot which portrayed the mountains and the mountain life with men and women standing in a

circle with joined hands. The continuous circle symbolised the common problems facing mountain people and the commitment needed to solve them. *"The soil within the urn is of even greater significance as every participant has brought soil from their homes to be mixed together in this urn. This soil, or earth, is what our very lives are made of, a most important thing."*

Ms Karki requested each guest to place into the urn some soil from Lalitpur, which had been collected

Joint Inauguration by the Rt. Honourable Ministers for Local Development (left) and Forests and Soil Conservation (right)



earlier, and thus participate in the Earth Ceremony, as a token bonding with the workshop and as a token of belief that mountain earth from different parts of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas had one thing in common; that it provided life to millions of people and many other important natural resources. Proceeding with the inauguration, she requested Mr. Egbert Pelinck to deliver his welcome address.

Welcome address by Egbert Pelinck, Director General, ICIMOD

Mr. Pelinck said that the meeting brought together representatives of elected local institutions, members of community forestry groups and networks, and non-government organizations. It marked a new phase in ICIMOD's efforts in the area of governance, particularly decentralization, and local community participation in the management of natural resources and the environment. In recent years, the importance of local communities playing a greater role in decision-making and planning had been recognised and questions of governance, such as who had the right to decide how local resources should be used and by whom, had grown in importance.

Welcome address
by Egbert Pelinck,
Director General,
ICIMOD



Despite continuing degradation of the natural environment in some areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, there were also encouraging examples of reversal, and these rays of hope were the focus of the workshop. Mr. Pelinck noted that, in recent years, community-based and informal village-level institutions had demonstrated their ability to manage forest resources, and that engagement with elected village and district level-institutions was growing. Several countries in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas had introduced decentralization as a precondition to participatory development, attempting to provide people with appropriate opportunities to articulate their concerns and needs through elected and formal or informal civic institutions. The terms of engagement, coordination, and complementarity between local, elected institutions and informal or formal community forestry institutions were new and evolving; strategies must be developed to bring these two stakeholders together.

The best way to design strategies that would lead to democratic governance based on principles of equity, transparency, and accountability was through close consultation, collaboration, and cooperation between locally elected leaders and individuals from community forestry user groups, village forest development committees, *mahila mandal*, or other informal bodies concerned with forest management. The workshop was organized in order to bring about self-sufficient, economically viable mountain communities in an environment in which local opinions would be heard and respected and natural resources protected and preserved for future generations. Mr. Pelinck stated that, because of the importance of guaranteeing that local voices be heard, the proceedings would be conducted in Hindi, Nepali,

and Urdu rather than in English. He thanked the UNDP for its support to the meeting and the Association of District Development Committees of Nepal and the Federation of Community Forestry Users of Nepal for their collaboration in the planning and execution of the workshop. He also thanked the Ford Foundation, New Delhi, for its continual support to ICIMOD's Participatory Natural Resources' Management Programme which had organized the workshop.

Ms. Kesang Chungyalpa, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP/ Nepal

Ms. Chungyalpa began her remarks by requesting everyone gathered to reflect on the important issue of the linkage between local government institutions and natural resource management. She noted that lack of access to resources was the main reason for poverty, and that experience indicated that decentralized governance could lead to both increased access to resources by local communities and to better management by the communities themselves. Since self-governing community organizations flourished only where policies and institutions supported them, the relationships between community institutions and local government, and between local and central government were crucial. Policy-making must be based on local reality and therefore micro-level experience must be fed back to the centre. UNDP's programmes in Nepal had tried to develop linkages between community, local, district, and central level institutions. Ms. Chungyalpa concluded by expressing UNDP's pleasure at being associated with a workshop which brought to-

gether different experiences from the countries in the region. She said that she was confident that the interaction would result in new insights in the processes of decentralization and natural resource management in mountain areas.

Madhav Poudel, Chairperson, Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDCN), and Chairperson, Lalitpur District Development Committee

Mr. Poudel emphasised that the issue being discussed had great importance, not only for Nepal but for other countries in the region as well, and that during the workshop representatives from different countries would be expressing their views about how to take up the challenge of developing natural resources. He mentioned that the objectives of the District Development Committee Association were to help the country through the four Ds of Democracy, Decentralization, District Governance, and Development. DDCs in Nepal had been facing various legal obstacles, and he hoped that suggestions that had been made to Parliament would be considered and passed.

Turning to the important issue of forest resources, Mr. Poudel stated that, in Nepal, forests provided about 90 per cent of the people's fuel needs and 40 per cent of the fodder, in addition to sheltering wild animals and playing an important role in soil conservation.

"We must consider and take measures soon to repay the environment for its water and air. How can we preserve the earth and use the forest's natural resources in the most efficient way?"

* Horticulture in this context means market gardening.

Forests could also play a role in social development and community forestry had great potential for non-timber forest products and horticulture'. The role of local government in community forestry must be identified and clarified.

Mr. Poudel noted that some people doubted the role of local government, and he criticised the politicisation of elected representatives' involvement in community forestry. The proper role for elected representatives was to improve the implementation of the community forestry rules and regulations and to coordinate among different user groups.

Since the problems throughout the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region were similar, Mr. Poudel said that ADDCN was trying to organize a workshop in Mustang district to discuss the issues and problems of mountain development. In conclusion, he requested the Honourable Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation to assist in having ADDCN's proposed suggestions to the Decentralization Bill passed by Parliament in order to facilitate the role of local institutions.

Hari Prasad Neupane, Chairperson, Federation of Community Forestry User Groups of Nepal

Mr. Neupane began by stressing the important role that forest development could play in uplifting marginal communities. He said that large projects, small institutions, and even single individuals were working to restore the environment and forestry in Nepal. He thanked ICIMOD for organizing the workshop in which participants from different countries could come together to discuss common problems related to forestry and

local, elected institutions. Mr. Neupane commented on the progress made by community forestry in Nepal, saying that, since the new Forest Act had begun to support community forestry development, areas, in which previously not even a blade of grass had been growing, now had dense forests.

Using the example of a baby and saying that giving birth was not enough, but nurturance was also needed, Mr. Neupane said that there were still certain problems to be resolved regarding how to preserve our precious resources. The concept that the community destroyed the forest needed to be corrected, but merely handing over the forest was not sufficient. Capacity building of FUGs was important. As the proverb said, "*Cut your coat according to the cloth,*" the problems must be acknowledged in their particular context and practical solutions devised. Likewise, providing the key without the technique for opening the lock was also useless. Both forest technicians and forest users must work together to formulate a better Act, rules, and regulations and implement them properly.

Another problem was that politics had been serving the local communities badly, and communities were becoming mere tools of politicians without looking after their own particular interests. Natural resource management should not be politicised, said Mr. Neupane. Consensus and collective decision-making were important tools for natural resource management. Forests were community resources and should not be used for personal or individual benefit. The export of timber to foreign nations must be stopped. Mr. Neupane hoped that the distinguished Minister of Local Development would se-

riously consider the role and responsibility of local ,elected bodies and forest user groups (FUGs) in forest development and management and take steps to ensure better coordination.

Noting that legal awareness was generally weak in FUGs, Mr. Neupane estimated that, out of about 7,000 FUGs currently working, about 6,000 were functioning effectively and the remaining 1,000 were not effective. He urged the government to take strict measures to discipline ineffective institutions and, at the same time, to encourage the others. Whereas in some cases FUG funds were abused and the community was clearly disorganized and lacking in harmony, and some type of remedy or punishment must be devised, FUGs that were functioning properly must be recognised and supported by the government as they could play an important role in improving the living standards of the people of Nepal, both socially and economically.

Ms. Karki then invited the Honourable Minister of Local Development, HMG/Nepal, Gajendra Narayan Singh, and the Honourable Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, HMG/Nepal, Bhakta Bahadur Rokaya, to light the lamp jointly as a symbol of their collaborative efforts.

Keynote Address by the Honourable Gajendra Narayan Singh, Minister, Local Development, HMG/Nepal

Minister Singh said that, although deforestation was not a new phenomenon in Nepal, it had increased in a frightening way in recent years and had taken on the evil face of a potential disaster. "If it is not controlled soon, we cannot imagine the future scenario." Noting that serious work

in this area cannot be carried out by a single individual or organization or even single country, he praised the forest preservation and conservation efforts by the workshop participants. Such work must be done jointly, with all stakeholders encouraging, supporting, and advising each other. People's awareness about this issue must increase throughout the world. Minister Singh was delighted to see that the workshop was aimed at finding a regional solution to the denudation of forest areas. He said that participatory programmes had helped in the management of natural resources and, moreover, that programmes based on participation affected discussions and decisions related to policy and therefore the lives of local people.

Referring to Mr. Poudel's comment about parliamentary consideration of the new decentralization bill, he said he also hoped that it would be passed soon. Without increased self-governance one could not move forward in the direction of sustainable forest management. The new laws should answer certain questions about the role and responsibility of local, elected institutions and formal and informal social organizations and provide people with opportunities to express their views openly and independently. He mentioned that other countries in the region, such as India, were also working towards decentralization of power as a precondition for the implementation of programmes based on participation. He concluded by saying that the Government of Nepal was aware of the problems of people in the mountainous regions, who comprised the bulk of Nepal's population, and was interested in working for their development.

Minister Singh hoped that the workshop would offer specific recommendations on approaches that would

increase collaboration between elected bodies and community forest users in the HKH region.

Ms. Karki then invited representatives from the countries participating in the workshop to make a few remarks. One participant from each of the countries represented at the workshop was requested to address the audience.

Dr. M.M. Khan, Professor of Public Administration, Dhaka University, Bangladesh

Dr. Khan expressed his pleasure at being able to attend such an important workshop and said that the crucial issues had already been highlighted by the other speakers. He wanted to bring two key issues into focus. First, although elected local bodies did exist, the devolution of power to them had been insufficiently delegated. Moreover, they frequently lacked adequate finances and necessary skills and leadership could be a problem in some cases. Regarding community forestry, Dr. Khan said that many laws, regulations, and rules were vague and inadequate, or were formulated long ago. He felt that the linkages between Forest Departments, local, elected institutions, and community organizations were inadequate.

Radha Bhatt, Laxmi Ashram, Almora District, U.P. India

Radha Bhatt began by thanking ICIMOD for providing an opportunity for gathering together to think about the important issues facing mountain people in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. She urged her fellow participants to recognise the responsibility they would have after the workshop on return to their home coun-

tries and villages to implement the decisions and conclusions that would be reached. Agreeing that strict rules must be made to regulate usage of the mountains' important natural resources, she stated that, without encouraging autonomy at the village level, mere policy and regulations from the top would not be effective. Grass roots' level people had their own talents and expertise, their awareness and indigenous knowledge should be recognised and encouraged. This workshop had brought representatives from both government and village organizations together and should be the beginning of a historic process. As messengers from our communities, we should take an oath that we would make the workshop successful.

Ganesh Shrestha, Chairperson, Bokhim Village Development Committee, Bhojpur, Nepal

Mr. Shrestha welcomed the participants and said that everyone should work together to search for answers to the question of how to develop ourselves, our institutions, and our natural resources. Just as the Ministers of Local Development and Forests and Soil Conservation jointly lit the *panas* that officially opened the workshop, representatives from both types of institution represented at the workshop must work together. The issue was how to identify mechanisms for coordination between local, elected bodies and forest user groups and community-based organizations with regard to community forestry. Certain weaknesses had been identified such as problems with legislation, politics, and the lack of linkages between forest officials and grass roots' level people. We must work together to develop solutions that can correct these weaknesses. Community forestry was a

means for empowerment of local people and one important task was to define the role of local, elected institutions in the development of community forestry and empowerment. The Federation of Community Forest User Groups of Nepal (FECOFUN) was already involved in community forestry development, working on overcoming problems faced by FUGs and assisting in conflict resolution. We must consider how to further strengthen and activate FECOFUN. Most especially we needed to discuss the complementarities between the Village Development Committee (VDC) and District Development Committee (DDC) acts and the Forest Act. These laws had created problems of authority and responsibility. We needed to discover common solutions to the common problems facing people in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

Mohammad Iqbal, Divisional Forest Officer, Pakistan

Mr. Iqbal noted that the mountainous areas of Pakistan were facing the same problems that had been described by previous speakers. There also grass roots' level people were the genuine stakeholders of the forests, but trees were being cut down and natural resources were being mismanaged and improperly exploited. Precious resources were not being properly preserved. Now non-government organizations (NGOs), such as AKRSP, with practical approaches had come into being and participatory processes were beginning to emerge. He said that the participants from his country were looking forward to learning a great deal from the discussions and sharing of experiences that would be part of the workshop. They were also hoping that ICIMOD and UNDP would be able to support programmes that

could bring positive changes to the northern areas of Pakistan.

After these comments, Ms. Karki invited the Chairperson, the Honourable Bhakta Bahadur Rokaya, State Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, HMG/Nepal, to deliver his address.

Honourable Bhakta Bahadur Rokaya, State Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, HMG/Nepal

Minister Rokaya began by citing the historical, geographical, social, and cultural importance of Nepal's relationships with her neighbouring countries. He said that forest conservation was a relevant topic for consideration at such a regional workshop. He hoped that the workshop could develop ways of establishing a relationship between FUGs and local, elected institutions. Politicisation of forestry or forest-related institutions was a proven hindrance to forest development. In general, it had been seen in Nepal that political representatives were less liberal and practical when it came to community forest development and management, and therefore the Forestry Act had given responsibility to users, realising that, without involving users in development and management, conservation was impossible. However, local, elected leaders also had an essential role. Any conflict between the role of FUGs and local institutions should be cleared up, since these institutions were both directly involved once a forest was handed over to the community. User' groups and local, elected institutions should work hand in hand.

Community forests also had a great potential for various income-generating activities such as growing valu-

able trees, herbs, and other non-timber forest products. Local, elected bodies must provide essential assistance to FUGs in this area, ensuring that the relationship between local, elected institutions and FUGs would improve in the near future. The workshop could provide suggestions concerning what was lacking in the Decentralization Act amendments could be incorporated.

Since local people had become empowered and aware of the importance of forests, there had been a reduction in theft and smuggling of forest products. The previous year when the minister was a member of Parliament, a bill was presented to ensure that the income from forest resources should go only to VDCs and DDCs. At that time the minister had tabled an amendment stating that the income should go only to community forest user groups. Should that bill be presented again for consideration during the coming winter session, all groups with an interest in that bill should approach the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources and Environment with their suggestions. The Minister hoped the workshop would proceed to discuss policies that would

lead to better coordination among related institutions.

Thanking the Honourable Minister, Ms. Karki remarked that he had referred to the geographical, historical, social, and cultural importance of the workshop and had underlined the problems of forest development and decentralization, as well as the important role communities should play in natural resource management. Ms. Karki thanked all the speakers as well as everyone who had helped directly or indirectly to organize the workshop.

Ms. Karki said that communities form the basis of society and all communities together create the pillar of nations. Autonomous local institutions and the leaders working in them played a great role in mobilising community activities. When the endeavour was consistent, the foundations of community development and long-term national and regional development were laid. It was hoped that the gathering would contribute to the laying of such a foundation in community forestry management at national and regional levels in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.