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Plenary Session

The opening plenary session consisted of a panel discussion entitled: **WIDENING HORIZONS: CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATE LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND NATURAL RESOURCES' MANAGEMENT IN THE HINDU KUSH-HIMALAYAS.** The objective of this session was to provide an overview of issues related to local governance and natural resource management in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

The session was chaired by Dr Mohan Man Sainju, Executive Chairperson of the Institute of Integrated Development Studies, Kathmandu. Panelists had been chosen on the basis of the country they represented and their particular area of work and expertise. The following workshop participants served as panel members.

Chairperson : Dr Mohan Man Sainju
Bangladesh : Dr M. M. Khan
Pakistan : Mr Haidar Khan
Mr Shafa Ali

India	Mr Ramesh Sharma Dr B.P. Maithani Ms Radha Bhatt Mr Kulbushan Upamanyu Mr Chandi Pd. Bhatt
Nepal	Mr Hari Pd. Neupane Ms Maya Devi Khanal Mr Mahdav Poudel

The session began with Anupam Bhatia welcoming and introducing Dr Mohan Man Sainju, Executive

Chairperson
Dr. M.M. Sainju



Chairperson of the Institute of Integrated Development Studies, Kathmandu. Mr Bhatia said that, IIDS was one of Nepal's oldest and well-established research and development organizations. It carried out action research as well as implementation.

Dr Sainju had held a number of important national positions, including Rector of Tribhuvan University, Member and Vice Chairperson of the National Planning Commission, and Royal Nepalese Ambassador to the USA and Canada. In addition he had served in various leadership roles at several premier institutions in Nepal, including the National Council for Conservation of Natural Resources and the High Level Committee on Integrated Rural Development. Dr Sainju had been honoured with several national awards and decorations for his contributions to Nepal.

Before opening the discussion, Dr Sainju introduced each of the panelists, providing a brief description of their work and area of expertise. He said they had brought sincerity, dedication, and enormous experience to the workshop discussions.

BANGLADESH

Dr M.M. Khan, Professor of Public Administration, Dhaka University
Dr Khan is the author of Rural Development in Bangladesh, as well as many articles on issues of local governance and democracy.

Dr Khan opened the session by reminding the participants of the specific agenda for the discussion: how to integrate local government with community forestry initiatives. He identified the two prevailing prob-

lems as problems of locally elected bodies and problems related to community forestry management.

Dr Khan said that, historically, local government in British India was always seen as an adjunct of the central government and was used to garner support for the central government. Despite rhetoric about empowering local bodies, they suffered from four constraints:

- lack of autonomy;
- inadequate finances, inability to generate their own funds;
- shortage of skilled people - the central government placed civil servants, but they were not accountable locally; and
- elected local leaders were not always effective and might not be truly representative of the local population.

In the case of Community Forestry, the forest department mentality was still control oriented, leading to mistrust between forest department employees and local people. The whole structure of the forest department was hierarchical and top down. Forest officials were trained only in technical matters and not in behavioural sciences. Forest laws and rules were mostly outdated and lacked appropriate amendments. Forest policy was not specific or clear enough. There was a considerable amount of rhetoric, but little substance.

Dr Khan proposed the following solutions.

- Devolution of power and local autonomy - once people had power and responsibility, the local bodies must improve.
- Encouragement of community-based organizations - they arose

spontaneously, but had problems of finance and leadership, and their development needed to be supported.

- Promotion of linkages between the forest departments and local, elected institutions – this came down to a question of political will and wisdom on the part of national-level leadership to chart a new course of action. Behavioural reorientation of government officers was essential so they would learn to work with and not over local-level institutions.
- The ‘bossism’ of civil servants must be overcome. This was a prevalent problem in all South Asian countries.

PAKISTAN

Mr Haider Khan - Member, Northern Areas’ Council
Elected to the Local Council, Mr Khan was appointed Forest Advisor to the local government, with a status equal to that of a Provincial Minister. His role is policy formulation in forestry activities, and it includes advocacy, community mobilisation, and financial matters.

Pakistan had two kinds of forests: government protected forests and private forests. It was very difficult for the government alone to manage and control forest resources. In community forests, the community took care of protection, plantation, and cutting trees, illustrating that if the community had a feeling of ownership towards the forest and the confidence to manage it, the forest would benefit. If forest policy and community interests were to clash, violation and depletion of the forest would take place. The community’s feelings about the forest were therefore very important.

Political leaders and NGOs could play an important role in coordinating the activities of the government and the community. When NGOs came to work with the community, they coordinated both with the local, elected bodies and the government. Local, elected bodies should become involved in community forestry. Forest policies and rules should meet the wants and needs of the community.

Training provided by the Government for local people on how to manage forest areas was also inadequate. Governments should consider the problems and constraints of the community in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region.

Mr Shafa Ali - Community Mobiliser, Northern Areas, Pakistan
Mr Ali is active in community mobilisation with groups who successfully manage their forest areas.

In Mr Ali’s area of Pakistan, the forest was previously controlled and protected by the state. In 1972 the central government took control. Instead of improving, the condition of the forest deteriorated. The community members themselves then organized a group and with the approval of the government started managing the forest, banning the export and cutting of trees. Currently, there was a deadlock between the government and community because neither could cut trees. Without the approval of the community users’ group, the forest department could not cut trees and the community, lacking funds, was facing a problem of ensuring forest protection. This was where the community; local, elected bodies; and the government could begin to negotiate about their roles. There were legal barriers and NGOs could come forward to help coordinate the user groups;

local, elected bodies; and the central government.

INDIA

Mr Rakesh Sharma - Deputy Director, Uttar Pradesh Academy of Administration, Nainital, Uttar Pradesh

UPAA is responsible for improving the capabilities of civil servants in order to provide an efficient and sensitive administration to the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The basic issue of the workshop was how to create community forestry that would benefit grass roots' level people by linking with the administrative level. In the context of India, in Kumaon, district forest management was in the hands of the forest department and forest officials did not understand the relationship of the community to the forest. The forest officials kept village people isolated from the forest system. Since 1930, Kumaon and Garhwal had had a *Van Panchayat* system that had basically a community forest. Looking back at this system, it appeared very effective. It was a community-based forest management system in which the community got together and formed a committee to manage the forest. But this system had not been linked with the local system of governance. At that time 4,500 *Van Panchayat*(s) existed, incorporating 15,000 villages in Kumaon and Garhwal. The forest areas of the communities that had been able to manage them well were in very good condition, but not all of the groups had been able to manage the forests well. There was a World Bank project coming to the area and it was generating the idea of trying to link the system of the *Van Panchayat* with the local governing bodies.

There was a constitutional amendment in India that aimed to decentralize power to the *Panchayat*. The policy of community forestry differed from state to state in India. A system had to be devised whereby the village *Panchayat* could have direct links with the forest groups and work together for development. So there must be coordination. Another point was how to build the capacity of the people working in the community forest? Local people should be provided with the knowledge necessary to improve their capabilities. This was crucial for sustainability of the programme.

In mountain areas men did not collect wood from the forests; the women did because men considered this to be women's work. The system was completely gender biased, so community-based organizations and NGOs had to work on strengthening the capabilities of the community and on having a strong gender focus.

Local institutions and local, elected bodies were not coordinated. Attitudes had to be changed. The speaker felt that coordination, changed attitudes, and capacity building were three important issues for the future.

Dr B.P. Maithani - Director, National Institute of Rural Development, Gauhati, Assam

Dr Maithani is member/convenor of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology, an institution that promotes rural development through voluntary organizations and aims to establish close relationships between voluntary organizations and local government.

It was characteristic of the Eastern Himalayas of India that the community owned the forest and land resources. More than 200 tribes lived in the area, and they managed and

used the forest in their traditional way. Thus, the scenario of forest ownership differed there from that of the rest of India. Currently, 40 per cent of the forest land was under government control and 60 per cent was under public management. Every village had a traditional institution, for example, village chiefs and village councils, to manage the forest, and the villages had their own rules and regulations. Shifting agriculture was the main occupation and was linked to the forest. The reserve forest owned by the government in Arunachal Pradesh constituted 25 per cent of the total forest area, in Manipur it was three per cent, in Meghalaya four per cent, in Mizoram 56 per cent, and in Nagaland 12 per cent.

Forest management was carried out by the village council. The tribal chiefs were not greatly concerned about forest conservation because they did not make a living out of it, and they were not aware of its importance. Natural resources were facing degradation because control of the forest was in the hands of the village chiefs. Industries established in the region had also caused a lot of forest degradation. Petitioned by public interest litigation, the Supreme Court of India had now ordered all the forest-based industries to be removed from the area. The government had enacted legislation, recognising the traditional local bodies for forest management and that they had their own judicial, administrative, and management systems. The speaker felt that voluntary organizations with knowledge must also become involved and convince the community that the forests they were cutting down could help increase their incomes. The local chiefs felt they were the sole owners of the forests. Therefore, a democratic spirit also needed to be generated

amongst the local community to bring transparency to forest management decision-making and sharing of benefits.

Ms Radha Bhatt - Laxmi Ashram, Almora, Uttar Pradesh

Ms Bhatt has been a member of Laxmi Ashram, a Gandhian organization in Uttarkhand, since 1951. Her primary work is organizing communities at the local level, especially women, for the conservation and management of all types of natural resources — such as water, soil, and forests. She has been involved in the Chipko movement protests against felling green trees, organizing around plantation efforts, saving the soil from open mining, and preventing big dams in the Uttarkhand Himalayas.

In Ms Bhatt's opinion the mentality of the forest department was responsible for the degradation of forest resources in mountain areas. Government officials had a false impression that village people did not know anything as they were not educated. They always felt that the mountain men and women had to be taught and, as long as they maintained this feeling, the speaker did not think that self governance would ever occur. In the process of delegation of power and decentralization, there must be confidence in the local people. The first process was developing belief and faith in the local people. One should move according to the pace and desire of the people and only then might changes occur.

When talking about local communities, all the people should be included in decision-making processes. One should not talk about the majority, but should instead emphasise consensus. Even in the *Panchayati Raj* system the decision-making power was still in the government's hands.

The *Panchayati Raj* system provided many opportunities for the people to make decisions, but it was not complete. Finances were controlled by the revenue department, the forest department, or the district council, and the speaker felt that, unless the issue was resolved, the question of self governance would not move forward. In Almora, the revenue of the *Van Panchayat* was over Indian Rs 100 million, but it was controlled by the government. This kind of control could not bring self governance and forest and natural resources could not be conserved. So the concept and the working methodology had to be put into the hands of the local communities in the context of self governance; and this included monetary control, budgetting, planning, monitoring, and follow-up.

Unless the national forest policy took account of the issues raised about self governance nothing could be done. National forest policy still emphasised control over the forest. Mountain natural resources should be taken into consideration in a holistic way instead of fragmenting resources into different, individual parts such as forests, water, and soil. This was what national policy-makers should take into account when formulating mountain-specific plans and policies. To make changes one had to start from the grass roots' village level with the help of NGOs. If this happened then dramatic changes could occur.

Mr Kulbhushan Upamanyu - Navrachna, Himachal Pradesh
Mr Upamanyu is a founder member of Navrachna, a network of community-based organizations and NGOs in Himachal Pradesh working towards increasing people's control over natural resources. He is also an activist with the Himalaya Bachao Andolan. His interest is to promote

collaborative programmes between village community groups and government at all levels. The main aim is to achieve sustainable development based on the concept of self-reliant communities in mountain areas.

In mountainous areas, integrated and holistic planning for water, forests, land, and livestock was essential because people depended on all of these. The key issue was who controlled these natural resources in mountain areas.

As long as these resources were controlled by the elite through remote control, they would not be protected, because the elite did not depend directly on these resources for their survival. They were not familiar with the destruction of these resources and did not feel the pain of it. For example, mining and dam construction in mountain areas affected local people's lives, but the benefits of these interventions were enjoyed by people who were far away from the mountains. This contradiction could be seen equally at the community-level and in national-level planning. Although there was no true contradiction between the community and the nation, because the community was the nation. Elite classes that made the plans considered that the benefits of local communities were contrary to their own. This resulted in conflicts between the forest department and local communities, as well as between those who would construct dams and those affected by them. The main issue was how to understand these conflicts and move towards solutions.

The development model that had been put before them created a deficiency within the community because people came to believe that, if they agreed with the model, benefits would accrue to them, but this was a

false hope. The sustainable development of natural resources in the uplands was not sufficiently considered. When talking about development one thought of building a new room for the school, or widening roads rather than concentrating on survival issues such as problems of unemployment in villages.

In this context, decentralization needed to be reconsidered. Right now, decentralization really meant deconcentration of power. Decisions not taken at the centre were passed on to state and district levels, whereas the critical issue was giving real autonomy to local communities. Only when communities made decisions related to issues of their own survival would decentralization have a meaning. This community management must have a holistic approach, involving forest, land, water, and livestock, and must move towards real autonomy.

In Himachal Pradesh, after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was passed in India, they had been hopeful that true decentralization would result, but only cosmetic changes occurred. The *Panchayat(s)* were to work as agents of the government. In this role they could not properly manage and conserve forests and other natural resources because they would act according to government wishes rather than the wishes and needs of the community. The *Panchayat* or any other local institution must understand the needs and problems of the community.

In India, villages had no legal status. The *Panchayat* consisted of 10 or 12 villages, and they did not share common interests. One village could not solve the problems of another. Although some rights were devolved to the *Gram Sabha*, everyone did not come to the meetings, and so 10 or

20 members made decisions for 3,000 people; that was not good enough. If they wanted to have appropriate management the natural community would have to be legalised. This did not exist in HP or in Garhwal. There were revenue villages, but the government was concerned only with revenue, not with the problems of the village.

It should be stressed that the community should make the plans related to natural resources. The people who made the plans did not know the villagers' actual problems, and the people themselves did not participate in decision-making. In order to bring homogeneity to the villages, responsibility for management should be given to the community.

Today, one could not depend solely on traditional types of employment, so employment opportunities must be created based on resources, and these plans must be designed by the people ourselves. Throughout India one found no concentration on technical research related to village development. All the people in the speaker's village had livestock, but no attention was given to creating good livestock equipment such as ploughs, etc.

In Himachal Pradesh different management systems had been introduced to manage the forest, and thus there was confusion among the programmes. Coordination among elected bodies was needed and people should be given the right to choose which organization should manage the resources. In addition the attitude of the forest department should change to one that sought active participation at the level of control from the people. The same was true with autonomy in all areas.

Mr Chandi Prasad Bhatt - Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal, Gopeshwor, Uttar Pradesh
Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal is a Gandhian Sarvodaya organization committed to empowering local communities to take control over the management of natural resources crucial to their livelihoods and the survival of their traditional way of life. It is known as the cradle of the Chipko Movement which successfully challenged forest department policies of commercialisation of the forests of Uttarkhand, the mountainous districts of UP state.

These days people were assessing the problems of natural resource management not only at the local and national levels but also on a global scale. However the problems were being analysed at different levels according to individual needs and perceptions, which of course differed from one another. The *Chipko Andolan* was a direct challenge from the local people to the forest department on the issue of why certain trees should not be felled. *Van Panchayat(s)* were fighting with the authorities, but those who really struggled with the officials were the people whose livelihoods were connected with natural resources.

India's first national forest policy was formulated in 1952 and the second policy was formulated in 1988. Although ten years had passed, no laws or byelaws had been enacted to implement this policy. The joint forest management programme was operative in some areas of India only. The speaker said they were insisting that it should be a people's programme and the government's role should be one of a facilitator. The concept of the joint forest management programme was still vague and they were not satisfied with it. The speaker believed that decision-making power should

be given to the people who were directly linked to the forest. Women should have the majority in decision-making because they were directly linked to natural resources in mountain areas.

The speaker recommended that *Van Panchayat(s)* should work under the supervision of the *Gram Panchayat*. Every Himalayan village should have a *Gram Van* that should be managed by a *Van Panchayat*. Each *Gram Van* had nine heads. The speaker suggested that out of the nine, five should be women so they could play an important role in policy-making.

NEPAL

Mr Hari Prasad Neupane - Chairperson, Federation of Community Forest User Groups of Nepal (FECOFUN)

FECOFUN's mandate is to support community forest user groups at all stages of activities, from initial development through handing over of the forest and implementation. FECOFUN's main focus is on policy advocacy, networking, information sharing, and training. FECOFUN works with all levels of government, from the VDC and DDC up to the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, to promote community forestry management in Nepal.

Mr Neupane stated that they had crossed many stages to reach the present stage of community forestry. Community forests that had been handed over were doing well in some areas, but, on the other hand, the user groups did not always know how to manage and coordinate well. The problems community forestry was facing were duplication of laws, regulations, and legislation. There were also obstacles to full community participation, mainly regarding gender

equity, as this was directly related to tradition and culture. The other prevailing problem was the economic condition of the people who could not afford to give time to the programme. The actual user groups should organize meetings and activities to make people aware and interested. There was also a lack of coordination with outside agencies. Regarding local, elected institutions, relations and coordination should be fully assimilated. A continuous dialogue was required.

Certain conflicts existed in the provisions of the law pertaining to community forestry and other laws outlining the rights and duties of municipalities and district and village development committees. These should be rectified to establish the priority of the Forest Act which asserted the autonomy, right of ownership, transaction, and rights in forest areas handed over to user groups. Other conflicts in the functioning of user groups arose out of ignorance or lack of clarity about their rights and duties. Three main areas of conflict were in regard to authority, control, and coordination, and appropriate and effective conflict resolution measures were required. In general, however, the activities and performance of user groups had been exemplary and were being extended.

VDCs and DDCs needed to coordinate their activities in matters of forestry. There were instances of power conflicts among the UGs, local, elected bodies, and government agencies. This workshop should come up with ways to ensure coordination and a spirit of inter-dependence amongst UGs, VDCs, DDCs, government agencies, and the Federation, so that local farmers and the general public would not be deprived of the promises of community forestry. The stark reality was that the Act and related

regulations lacked coherence and were nullified by *ad hoc* circulars and directives from Ministries; telephone-imposed instructions prevailed over law. The speaker stated that he hoped the workshop would address those issues and would suggest modalities of equitable benefit sharing from forest resources and collaboration between elected bodies and forestry user groups.

Maya Devi Khanal - Chairperson, Himalayan Grassroots' Women's Natural Resource Management Network (HIMAWANTI)

HIMAWANTI works to support and empower grass roots' women working in natural resource management throughout the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. The current focus is on organization and training and formation of women's groups and linking them up with other women throughout the region.

Participation of women in decentralization was important. Through HIMAWANTI they were trying to encourage women to come out and feel free to participate in the struggle for survival and also to make them more independent.

Women in villages still covered their heads and hid their faces when they had to come before men or elders. They could not talk openly with men. When some women made efforts to undertake development and work for people's welfare or, in short, when women stepped out of the house, they were bound to be misunderstood. In villages people still believed that women could not make any decisions by themselves.

HIMAWANTI expressed gratitude to ICIMOD for inviting them to the workshop and encouraging them to go ahead. Sharing views with different stakeholders was helpful. This

would give them more power and would increase the involvement of women in the efforts towards decentralization. Women could do a lot together and could give each other support and encouragement. Nothing would be impossible in such circumstances.

Gaura Devi, the woman who had started the *Chipko Andolan*, had inspired them. Women should be given some authority. They should be made aware of the laws and their implementation. Although women had to face considerable difficulties in looking after the household, children, husband, etc, they should not lose heart and should keep working towards their goals. Slowly men too would change their attitudes and their support would help a lot. The speaker expressed the hope that, by the end of the workshop, they would come to some conclusions and solutions that would show them the way forward.

Chairperson's Remarks

Dr Sainju noted how much had been learned from the panelists' experiences.

Dr Sainju said that, while none of the problems should be isolated, it was necessary to focus and to reach conclusions pertinent to the basic objective. He identified the major issues related to the role of elected institutions in forestry management and problems of local level government, especially in the context of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan mountain region.

Each country had issues that related to democratisation, governance and decentralization, and the need for accountability on the part of elected officials. Local, elected bodies had a definite role to play in natural re-

source management, and we needed to see how they related to the various movements addressing different issues and how local institutions were responding to what was happening in the different Hindu Kush-Himalayan countries.

Increasing engagement and conflicts were being witnessed because of the new movements and expectations emerging; for example, conflicts between forest user groups and elected institutions, village development committees, and individuals. As changes in roles and expectations occurred, new conflicts emerged and these had to be solved. New legislation and rules had been developed, but they were not performing as well as expected. Despite positive policy measures, problems of conflicts and overlaps existed and needed to be addressed. The main point to keep in mind was how to bring improvements to people's lives.

Dr Sainju summarised the major issues raised in the panel discussion in the following points.

1. There was an urgency to bring our way of life and natural resource management into harmonious balance as part of our culture, so in this regard we were not talking about something imposed from outside. We honoured natural resources and refrained from destroying them because they were part of our life. Deterioration had taken place late in our history, only recently, and was therefore correctable; attitudes and behaviour could change. The problems were definitely soluble and could be solved if taken up one by one. We had to remind ourselves of our traditional values.
2. We had recognised that community forestry management could not be undertaken alone by com-

munity forestry groups. Coordination and linkages with elected institutions were very important and this had to become a major focus of future work.

3. Changes in attitude had to come not just from foresters, but from policy-makers, planners, and politicians also.
4. Participation of women in the political process at national and local levels was important. Women needed better representation and participation in decision-making in community forestry user groups.
5. Decentralization should mean devolving power to the people and to local, elected institutions. What did autonomy mean in this context? How was it to be defined? Autonomy had to be accompanied by decision-making power. What was required was equitable participation, not exploitation.
6. Linkages had to be developed between organizations working on forest conservation, local government institutions, and elected bodies. Better support and communication systems were required.
7. Both capacity building and trust for people's own knowledge and experience were needed. The introduction of new technology required new skills at the local level

to meet new challenges. This included training in management skills. Women's participation had to increase and that required increased awareness and education.

8. A holistic approach to common property management in mountain areas had to emerge.
9. Problems related to duplication and lack of clarity of rules, regulations, and legislation existed. Conflicting resolutions were found at different levels. Conflict resolution was required at different levels between individuals, and between groups and local institutions. Some problems could also be resolved through prevention if they were addressed early enough.

Dr Sainju said that we had to initiate processes that would empower the women and men of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas to participate in all aspects of decision-making that affected their lives. This had to become the overall goal of all stakeholders. He thanked the organizers for the opportunity to chair such an interesting and important discussion. Dr Sainju said that it had been a unique forum and was bound to lead to increased interaction in the area of governance and natural resource management.



A floral representation of the ICIMOD logo



A participant from Nepal planting a sapling at ICIMOD's Demonstration Site at Godawari, Lalitpur, Nepal