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Concluding Session

Anupam Bhatia opened the concluding session. He said that many important issues related to mountain development, forests, and local institutions had emerged during the workshop. A small group had synthesised the main concerns and responses that were identified by the workshop participants. It was suggested that we should attempt to build consensus on these issues by releasing 'A Common Statement on Governance and Community Forestry Management'. The draft preamble of this statement was shared with the participants for their comments and acceptance with the understanding that a draft of the complete Common Statement would be sent to the participants for their approval. The Draft Statement follows.

A Common Statement on Governance and Community Forestry Management in The Hindu Kush-Himalayas

Preamble
Natural resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, in particular forests, cannot be managed sustainably without appropriate local governance systems based on social and gender equity. Decentralization and democratisation of decision-making processes contribute to a high degree of participation by

Dr Mahesh Banskota, Deputy Director General, ICIMOD, chairs the Concluding Session

stakeholders. Local community participation, involving the delegation of power and responsibilities, is emerging as an effective way to promote sustainable development. As the impetus towards community-based natural resource management has grown over the years and informal village-level institutions have demonstrated their ability to manage forest resources, we see today increasing engagement with elected village and district-level institutions. This trend has accelerated with the emergence of new laws, rules, and regulations related to decentralization and devolution of powers and responsibilities to elected institutions.

In some countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, decentralization has been initiated as a precondition to participatory development. Yet, the participation is often merely passive because the decentralization process fails to consider the ecological, social, and cultural specificities of mountain areas. Moreover, inadequate attention is paid to gender and equity concerns in articulating local development and environmental management aspirations. Mutual lack of trust and faith between locally elected institutions and community forest management user groups results in conflicts, duplication of efforts, and avoidable wastage of resources.

Experience dictates that new forms of governance must search for synergies within existing common property management regimes. New institutional arrangements between elected institutions and informal community-based institutions need to be evolved.

We, the workshop participants, have identified the following major areas of concern.

- Lack of complementarity, coordination, and consistency between policies, laws, rules, and regulations related to decentralization and the governance of the forestry sector
- Low degree of participation of women in politics and community forestry management
- Lack of accountability and transparency of locally elected institutions, state forest administration, development organizations, and community forest management institutions
- Non-existent or low levels of involvement of community forest management institutions in planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring of development programmes undertaken by locally elected institutions and other development agencies
- Escalating conflicts and mutual distrust between locally elected institutions and community forestry institutions, especially in implementing various programmes, schemes, and plans
- Low degree of empowerment of community institutions, preventing them from fulfilling their responsibilities
- Duplication of efforts between elected institutions and community forestry user groups
- Low allocation of resources by locally elected institutions for community-based forest management
- A need to influence locally elected institutions so that they can advocate on behalf of community forestry institutions and vice-versa
- The need to strengthen community institutions at various levels, so that the political system can be influenced
- Neglect of issues relating to forest tenure and ownership
- The Preferred Situation

We, the workshop participants, feel these issues must be addressed with a sense of urgency. The changes that we advocate stem from the recogni-

tion that local people are the best managers of natural resources, because their lives depend on them.

Recognising this truth implies that, throughout the HKH region, local communities, through community institutions, should be given ownership and control over local natural resources, including forests. The first charge on forest resources should be to meet the needs of local people as a matter of right and not as a concession given by the government. If there is to be trade in forest products, it should be on terms and conditions determined locally.

- Evolution of laws and policies that are complementary and assist in the creation of an enabling environment which allows constructive engagement between locally elected institutions and community forestry management groups
- Emergence of legislation granting reservations and guarantees to enhance equal participation of women in politics and in community forestry management groups at all levels of decision-making
- Presence of mechanisms at all levels that ensure transparency amongst all individuals, locally elected institutions, and community forestry management groups
- Introduction of laws that ensure the representation and participation of marginalised socioeconomic groups in institutions at all levels
- Presence of direct democracy at the village level, including the right to recall elected and/or selected representatives at all levels
- Change in property and inheritance laws to treat women and men equally
- Formation of village assemblies, through consensus of all stakeholders, which can under-

take integrated management of mountain natural resources
- Transfer of all common property natural resources to village assemblies and provision of laws and policies that provide first charge to people dependent on natural resources for their survival

Strategies for the Attainment of These Goals

Achieving these objectives will require political will and high levels of individual and institutional commitment. The strategies to be adopted will include research, education, and campaigns at the local and the regional levels. Advocacy will form an important part of the strategy to inform and influence the emergence of appropriate legislation. Communities and policy-makers will need to be educated on issues of gender equity and the principle of equality for all.

We, the participants of the workshop, recommend that work on these objectives begins without delay. We call on all individuals and institutions in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas to take note of our concerns and to take steps towards ushering in transparent governance and sustainable mountain development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas on the principles of Some, For All, Forever.

At the conclusion of the session, the song 'We Shall Overcome' was sung in three languages by all participants, who also offered a vote of thanks to ICIMOD for organizing the workshop. Finally, each participant was requested to sign the Preamble to the Common Statement and to receive a beautiful hand-made paper box filled with soil from the Hindu Kush-Himalayas as a symbol of their joint efforts for sustainable mountain development.

A performance by the *Hariyali Sangeet Samuha*, Nepal, on environmental issues (top and middle),

Participants from Nepal and India join the cultural programme

**Framework of the Common Statement
on Governance and Community Forestry Management
in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas**

Present	Desired	Strategies
Lack of complementarity between policy, law, rules, and regulations	• Evolution of laws and policies that are complementary and assist in the creation of an enabling environment that allows constructive engagement between locally elected institutions and community forestry management groups	• Campaigning, lobbying, mobilising at all levels, from the local to the regional, for changes in legal framework • Drafting alternative laws and regulations based on research into both traditional and modern laws (and inluding people's opinions). • Influencing legislators through popular pressure to change the present regimes
Gender and Social Inequity	• Emergence of legislation that grants reservations and guarantees to enhance equal participation of women in politics and in community forestry management groups at all levels of decision-making • Introduction of laws that ensure the representation and participation of marginalised socioeconomic groups in institutions at all levels	• Insistence on legislative reservations for women and marginalised socio-economic groups in all institutions at all levels • Educating communities on gender and socioeconomic issues in preparation for a campaign to assert the principle of equality • Compulsory education for all, focussing on the girl child
• Inadequate empowerment of community institutions, especially informal ones	• Creation of community institutions, based on principles of equity, which are formed by the people themselves and not imposed from above • Self-reliance as the ideal form of governance in mountain areas	• Work with legislators and other sections of civil society to enhance their work with the people • Capacity building and local institutional development
Lack of accountability and transparency	• Presence of mechanisms at all levels which ensure transparency amongst all individuals, locally elected institutions and community forestry management groups • Transparency to become a part of day to day life	• Educate people to insist on transparency from all institutions with which they work • Highlight that all elected/selected representative institutions are accountable to the people
Inequity in property rights	• Change in property and inheritance laws to treat women and men equally	• Advocacy at different levels • Information and awareness campaigns

Non-involvement of CFM groups in development activities	• Forest and natural resource management and all development activities to be entrusted to the village assembly or any other body the village assembly may choose	• Form robust village assemblies able to carry out necessary work related to local-level natural resource management and development
Conflicts between CFM groups and elected representative bodies on development issues	• Presence of direct democracy at the village level, including the right to recall elected and/or selected representatives at all levels • The village assembly be entrusted with the role of natural resource management and development • The elected representatives act on behalf of the groups, and not a political party	• Campaign for direct democracy at the village level, including the right to recall elected and/or selected representatives at all levels • Begin informing representatives they will not be voted back in unless they honestly represent the people and their rights
Neglect of tenure and ownership issues	• Policies that guarantee clear rights to benefits	• Campaign for changes in laws and rules at all levels