

Conclusions

Community Forestry in Nepal and JFM in India represent emerging forest management paradigms. Both countries have different forms of community involvement in forest management operating simultaneously. Indigenous forest protection and management groups are still functioning in many parts of the hills of Nepal and in the tribal regions of Central India. Many of these have very little formal interaction with forest departments. Formally-recognised community forest management groups also differ, by project in Nepal and by state in India. An additional variation in India occurs in which NGO groups are involved as third partners. Both countries need to think more creatively about how to incorporate indigenous management systems into their programmes with flexibility. The formally-recognised programmes in both countries share a number of similarities. These may be considered as fundamental principles or the least common denominators for community forest management. They include:

- careful identification of forest users (primary and secondary);
- the importance of users' involvement in design and implementation of management practices;
- formalisation of local people's rights of access, coupled with the responsibility and authority to protect resources;
- social and technical skill development of forestry field staff to enable them to advise users on multiple objective management systems;
- development of resilient local organisations and forest management skills;
- decentralisation of decision-making authority, through operational plans, micro-plans, and action plans; and
- creation of extension capabilities to support user group formation and development.

However, the differences between the two programmes provide the best opportunities for learning, as they show the strengths of diversity and point to opportunities for improvement and fine-tuning in both programmes. The historical development of forest law and management, and the degree to which power over forests was vested in the department, may still influence the degree to which that power and control has been handed over to local communities in the two countries. In the hill forests of Nepal, 100 per cent of the forest benefits are handed over to local communities, and the management control is exercised by the community with the department personnel as advisors. Perhaps JFM is in a transitional stage towards this ultimate scenario. On the other hand, as long as foresters have an incentive, however small it may be, to remain engaged with the community, they may be more inclined to provide both the veneer of authority and technical guidance. This incentive is missing in Nepal. Finally, JFM allows for a mechanism to meet the demands of distant users out of the department's share of forest produce.

Another noticeable difference between these two programmes is the focus, in Nepal, on user groups at a sub-village level, unrestricted by administrative boundaries, as the functional institution for implementing community forestry. In India, a variety of forms

prevails. However, the tendency is to try and link village forest committees to revenue village boundaries, and *gram panchayat(s)* and, therefore, to favour larger, more aggregate community organisations. In a number of states, community institutions are registered as societies or cooperatives, thus giving them a distinctive legal status and some measure of independence from *panchayat(s)* and forest departments. Clearly, in evolving community forestry systems, flexibility and diversity in the institutional forms should be seen as a strength.

At the implementation level, both country programmes are working on developing participatory planning tools, operational plans, micro-plans, and action plans and could benefit greatly by exchanging ideas and experience in this area. While Nepal is beginning to address issues regarding commercial use and benefit sharing, India has years of experience in leasing MFPs, harvesting forests for revenue, and marketing different products which may provide interesting lessons for Nepal. The way these activities are being tailored to a JFM differs from state to state. In many cases, community groups continue to function as employees, collectors, and recipients of 'benefits' than as controlling managerial partners. Furthermore, the experience of including NGOs in JFM in India, and the experiences of state-level working groups to document and monitor implementation and get continuous feedback from the field, could also be instructive for the Nepal programme. More detailed sharing of information and experiences with training and orientation programmes could also be very fruitful as different projects in Nepal and different states in India have built up considerable experience in this area. Finally, the critical issues of gender, class, and caste equity, in terms of who participates in decision-making, management, and benefit-sharing within community groups and households, are rather poorly documented in both countries.

The sharing of experiences between India and Nepal can only strengthen the future of community forestry and JFM. Some significant beginnings have been made. A workshop held in June 1992 in Nepal, brought a number of foresters, NGOs, and donor representatives from India and Nepal together for the first time (Campbell and Denholm 1992). Since then, visits have been made by foresters from Himachal to Nepal and from several Nepalese projects to different Indian states. The Participatory Natural Resource Management Programme at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development will be sponsoring a number of interactive workshops and meetings in the future. Hopefully, this paper will serve to whet the appetite of other researchers, NGO workers, forest managers, and community members to visit, study, and exchange information between the two countries.

