



PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING ON

Traditional natural resource management in Limi Valley, Nepal

24 August 2021, Tuesday | Kathmandu, Nepal

SECTION 1

Background

The extent of the knowledge and practices of indigenous natural resource management in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region span across several centuries. These knowledge and customary practices are a blend of local ecology, sociocultural contexts, and institutions that have adapted and evolved based on local specificities. They have been lauded for their contribution to the conservation and management of natural resources for generations. In Nepal, many local communities, especially in the hill and high-mountain regions, continue to practise their Traditional Natural Resource Management Systems (TNRMS). These systems, which are several centuries old, are also sustainable and cost-effective measures for biodiversity conservation in the country.

For instance, the local community of Nepal's Limi Valley in Namkha Rural Municipality, Humla District, Karnali Province, manage their natural resources through a traditional system that combines the

issues of ecology, culture, religion, and livelihoods. This system governs aspects of natural resource distribution and harvesting, as well as farming and pastoralism in the valley. But like elsewhere, the Limi Valley is experiencing social, economic, and political changes that are weakening and threatening TNRMS. Besides, in the absence of formal recognition for TNRMS, the Limi Valley may experience irreversible changes that could result in severe biodiversity loss in this unique trans-Himalayan landscape of Nepal.

The recent political changes and the devolution of power and authority to federal, provincial, and local levels provide an opportunity to formulate necessary laws and mechanisms for ensuring the sustenance of traditional institutions. However, there is a need for clarity about the roles of these different levels of government and about the existing mechanisms that could institutionalize TNRMS under the current governance system of Nepal.

SECTION 2

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Inform federal, provincial, and local government officials and stakeholders about the Limi Valley's TNRMS
- Share the existing policy provisions and identify gaps so as to get this traditional system formally recognized by the three tiers of governments – local, provincial, and federal
- Discuss a way forward to realize biodiversity outcomes in the Limi Valley in consultation with the local community

SECTION 3

Highlights

- There were 24 participants at the meeting. They were from: the Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE) and its departments; the Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment (MoITFE), Karnali Province; the Divisional Forest Office, Humla; Namkha Rural Municipality; IUCN; WWF; RECAST; and ICIMOD.
- Among those who made presentations were Tanjin Norbu Lama, representing the Limi Valley, and Ishwari Bhattarai, Policy Analyst – Consultant at ICIMOD. Tanjin Lama focused on TNRMS, its features, and also on its significance for local livelihoods. Bhattarai presented the provisions in the Constitution and other legislations related to power-sharing among the three tiers of government in the area of natural resource management.
- There was a moderated round-table discussion facilitated by Binaya Pasakhala, Governance and Institutions Analyst, ICIMOD on the challenges and the possible management models for sustaining TNRMS in the Limi Valley.
- The participants laid stress on conserving the natural and cultural richness of the Limi Valley by following the appropriate legal framework.
- The discussions on the way forward attempted to identify a suitable management model that would not only ensure the sustainability of TNRMS but also conserve biodiversity and develop livelihoods.

SECTION 4

Opening session

Mohan Bishwakarma, Under Secretary, MoFE, welcomed and thanked all the participants for joining the event. **Janita Gurung**, Programme Coordinator, KSLCDI, ICIMOD, explained about the background

of the event, its objectives, and the opportunity it provided for devising measures to ensure the sustenance of TNRMS.

Presentations and discussions

Tanjin Lama presented an overview of TNRMS in the Limi Valley. He briefly described the natural and cultural richness of the Limi Valley and also explained about its traditional governance and management practices. He said that the valley's traditional governance and management practices have played a key role in retaining the area's uniqueness. He also said that transparency, social inclusion, accountability, and participatory decision-making were some of the intrinsic qualities of the system.

Ishwari Bhattarai made a presentation on the roles of the three tiers of government in institutionalizing TNRMS in the Limi Valley. He spelt out the manner in which executive and legislative power is distributed among the federal, provincial, and local governments regarding natural resources. Further, he highlighted the ambiguities and conflicts involved in power-sharing among these governmental tiers. He also pointed out that in the current federal structure, as per the schedules of the Constitution, there are enough avenues for the three tiers of government to enact laws that would accord recognition to TNRMS.

After the presentations, the participants shared their views and experiences about TNRMS. They were unanimous in their opinion that the natural and cultural wealth of the Limi Valley needs to be conserved by following an appropriate legal framework.

In his remarks, **Narendra Man Babu Pradhan**, Project Coordinator, IUCN, dwelt on documenting the traditional knowledge and practices of the high-mountain areas and its communities. He suggested that these areas could be piloted under the mechanism of Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

Shiv Raj Bhatta, Head of Conservation Programme, WWF Nepal, spoke about the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Limi Valley and sought concerted efforts to conserve this heritage. He also pointed to a WWF-supported study on the Limi Valley in 2013, which had proposed it to be declared either as a World Heritage Site, Conservation Area, Protected Forest, or as a Biosphere Reserve.

Ghanashyam Gurung, Country Representative, WWF, stated that traditional institutions are in a state of decay due to various drivers of change such as globalization, migration, and climate change. Given this context, he pointed out that traditional practices and systems alone would not be able to address the growing nature of such threats to conservation. He then went on to cite the case of the Tsum Valley inside the Manaslu Conservation Area (Gorkha

District) where certain areas are exclusively managed by traditional institutions; he said that this could be a model that the Limi Valley could follow with support from governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Dharma Raj Neupane, Chief Administration Officer, Namkha Rural Municipality, spoke about the crucial role of traditional institutions in managing natural resources and in conserving biodiversity. He underlined that the efforts of the local government were geared towards supporting the traditional institutions in the Limi Valley.

Renuka Neupane, Acting Divisional Forest Officer, Divisional Forest Office Humla, spoke about the conservation challenges in high-mountain areas and about the importance of local support and traditional institutions in conserving natural resources.

Bed Kumar Dhakal, Planning Officer, DNPWC, stated that community-based conservation areas such as the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area could serve as a model for the Limi Valley. However, he cautioned that establishing a conservation area by following a top-down approach would not be sustainable. He suggested the exploration of conservation approaches based on recent forest policy and by engaging the local communities – with technical support from federal and provincial governments.

Devesh Tripathi, Deputy Director General, Department of Forests and Soil Conservation, spoke about the importance of conserving the cultural and natural heritage of the high-mountain areas. He said that the traditional knowledge and practices of these areas ought to be documented. He also stated that the younger generation should be made aware of these knowledge and practices by including it in the educational curriculum across the HKH. He suggested that the community forestry model could be a better way to approach the theme of conservation in this valley.

Dhananjaya Poudel, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Forests and Environment, pointed to the different provisions in the Forest Act of 2019 for engaging the local communities in the conservation of natural resources. He stated that considering the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Limi Valley, it should be recommended to be cited as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; this, he said, would also contribute to promoting tourism in the area. He then emphasized on cooperation and coordination among the three tiers government for conservation activities in the area.

Closing session

Nakul Chhetri, Regional Programme Manager, Transboundary Landscapes Programme, ICIMOD, emphasized on the need to recognize the rights of indigenous communities in order to achieve local and global conservation goals. Towards this, he cited an example from Sikkim, India, where the government has recognized the Dzumsa system – a traditional natural resource management structure – in the Lachung Valley.

Bishnu Lama, Chairperson, Namkha Rural Municipality, described the challenges faced by “external agencies”, including governmental bodies, in delivering services in the Limi Valley due to its remoteness. He also highlighted the role and importance of traditional institutions in sustaining the natural resource management system of the valley. At the same time, he brought attention to the threats to local biodiversity due to conflicts between the local community and those from the neighbouring areas. In his final remarks, he urged for governmental support to ensure the sustenance of the traditional institutions in Limi.

Mohan Dev Joshi, Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, Karnali Province, stated that while traditional practices and knowledge were more relevant in the absence

of formal legislative and regulatory mechanisms, they are now being gradually replaced by formal governance mechanisms; but this, he stressed, should not come in the way of sustaining the practices of conserving a community’s natural and cultural heritage. He also laid particular emphasis on documenting traditional knowledge and practices. As far as understanding the policy gaps in power distribution among the three tiers of government, he recommended an examination and analysis of legislative documents such as the National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission Act and the Federation, Province and Local Level (Coordination and Interrelation) Act.

In his statement, **Shiva Wagle**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Forests and Environment, said that the government is committed towards implementing the Nagoya Protocol and sought the support of all the relevant stakeholders in this regard. He stressed on the need for the federal Parliament to pass the Access and Benefit Sharing Bill as that would define and pave the way towards an effective access and benefit-sharing strategy as well as an action plan. He also urged for the exploration of an appropriate governance and management modality for the Limi Valley within the existing legislative framework of the country.

Way forward

- Review the existing legislation and policies relating to forests, rangelands, and protected areas so as to recommend a governance modality for TNRM in the Limi Valley
- Document the Limi Valley’s TNRM and share it with the relevant stakeholders through various platforms
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and experience sharing between government officials and the Limi community through field visits and consultations

Organizers: Ministry of Forests and Environment, RECAST, ICIMOD

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