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A Review of Recent Developments and Problems in the Forestry Sector of Nepal

The Department of Forests (DoF) has recently celebrated Golden Jubilee on its 50 years of establishment. During this period, the DoF has transformed from its conservative forest management practices (policing forest for its protection against human encroachment and illicit felling of trees) to the people-centred approach. The growing realisation among foresters during 1970's that the active participation of local communities in the forest management is necessary for its conservation, led to formation of Master Plan for the Forestry Sector Nepal in 1988 and the formulation of legislation and legal base of the Forest Act 1993 that promotes community forestry development programmes in Nepal. Until now, the Department has handed over 850,000 ha of national forest to about 11000 forest user groups. It has also been replicated in other disciplines and has become a model for sustainable development of natural resources all over the world. Similarly, leasehold forestry programme, which was started initially in 2 districts in 1992, has now been expanded to the 26 districts of Nepal. Around 11,200 families benefited from the leasehold forestry programme due to which their incomes have increased through its implementation. Both these programmes have been found effective in sustaining rural livelihoods of many people below the poverty line and help reduce poverty in many places. At the same time, as many studies suggest, these approaches have helped combat deforestation in many parts of hills and mountains.

However, there are many shortcomings in the forestry sector. Even though, there is a slow

down in the degradation of forest resources in the hills and mountains, and infact increased tree cover in many hill districts, the process of forest degradation is still higher in the Terai regions of Nepal. The management plans prepared for national forests for the Terai districts are still not executed. The commitments required to go according the Master Plan are not fulfilled due to financial constraints, bureaucratic hurdles and lack of political commitments. The research and survey sector which is the core for any successful development, lacks funds for its research activities.

The growing urbanization in Nepal, and movement of many people from rural areas to urban centres have made many urban centres crowded, and have brought many unwanted urban related problems, such as air and sound pollution in Kathmandu valley and other major urban centres. The plan for increased greenery along with landscaping is required for many urban centres. The existing Master Plan for the Forestry Sector does not include outlines for the urban forestry. Therefore, it calls for the revision of the existing policies related with the forestry sector of Nepal. The forestry professionals need to be trained to carry out the jobs related to development of urban forestry and landscaping in Nepal. Besides that, programmes for promotion and development of private forestry have not gained momentum as the community forestry programme. The community and leasehold forestry programmes alone will not meet all the wood requirements of the rural people and at least for those people in many southern most part of the Terai, hills, and mountains,

where there are very little state-owned forest or no forest left.

After the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, increasing focus has been given on the biodiversity conservation of genetic resources and to combat deforestation. It is now increasingly realized that the value of the forested land whether it is state-owned natural forests or the private forested land have more values if all its environmental and socio-economic benefits are also included. Recently, Nepal Biodiversity Action Plan has been prepared to formulate policies for gene conservation and to conserve the biodiversity within the natural forests and that on the farmlands. The 53rd Assembly of the United Nations in November 1998 declared year 2002 as the International Year of Mountains. The objective is to raise international awareness and promote the conservation and sustainable development of mountain region and ensure the better livelihood opportunities for the local communities living in mountains and in the

lowlands. It has a greater significance for mountainous countries like Nepal. In this context, the conservation and development of forest resources seems necessary to combat erosion and to maintain fragile ecosystems for sustaining rural livelihoods.

There is growing realizations that whatever the plans are formulated, sound forestry management plans are prepared, it is not worth until they are enacted through financial support and political commitment. The recent political unrest in the country has further aggravated the development works in the forestry sector as well. The condition is not very different in other sectors as well. Let us hope that there will be a better scenario for the forestry sector in 2002.

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Editor