

Banko Janakari

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Working together for Forestry and Agricultural Development

In Nepal, there is a close relationship between forests and agriculture. Forests are considered an integral part of the farming system. The role that forest is playing in agricultural development is recognised by almost every sector of the society.

Conserving forests while increasing agriculture productivity in Nepal is a challenging task. Whereas Nepal's agriculture land expands at the costs of forests, and, that forests have always been providing various resources for agricultural and livestock development, forests can not be seen in isolation from agriculture. Such is the message given by the Hon'ble Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation Mr. Ananda Prasad Dhungana to the International Conference on Environment and Agriculture. The Conference, probably the biggest one ever held in Nepal in the thematic issue, was recently organised in Kathmandu by Ecological Society (ECOS).

The Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture Mr Trilochan Sharma Dhakal, in his address as the chief guest of the closing ceremony of the Conference also highlighted the link between agriculture and forests. Above all the then officiating Prime Minister Ms Shailaja Acharya while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Conference was also of the opinion that the growth in rural income is to be brought through agriculture, community forestry, private forestry and leasehold forestry. These are expected to bring multifaceted impact such as increase in greenery, reduction in the cultivation of marginal slopes, improved food security in rural areas.

Such is the importance of agriculture and forestry in the country that the combination of the two sectors contribute nearly half of the country's GDP. The government is confident of garnering a significant yields to reduce poverty from the current level of forty five percent to less than fifteen percent within two decades especially

from the growth in agriculture. The highest priority is therefore, given to the development of agriculture sector - a declared policy of the government. Now, it is known to all of us that achieving this is extremely difficult without solving the problem of land use in Nepal. This is where the conflict between agriculture and forestry prevails. Our experiences have shown that formulation of separate policies for achieving sectoral targets have failed so far. The policy statement of agriculture emphasises strongly on production whereas the forest policy always deals with conservation of forests and soil, and plantation on marginal land. This has led to a situation of *agriculture vs. conservation* in a limited land of the country. It is clear that minimising such conflicts or resolving them is not possible through sectoral master plans.

Also, one should not forget that the stakeholder of each sectors are the same so as the target group for extension of technologies being delivered. This is the interface that these two sectors are making. Should there be a holistic approach on the part of forestry and agricultural technicians to deliver a package programme to their target audience, achieving the noble goal becomes relatively easy. They should therefore, join hand in hand for the development of these life supporting sectors of the country. Now it is up to the concerned authorities of both the sectors to take up the message delivered by the top level politicians.

Sushim Ranjan Baral, Ph.D.
Editor