

Banko Janakari

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Celebrating International Year of Forests 2011

Approximately, one-third of the total land surface of the earth is covered with forests offering a wide range of ecosystem services including those of provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural. Forests provide a multitude of economic, environmental and social services, all of which are invaluable for supporting human development. Forests directly support the livelihood of almost three billion people in the world who are directly dependent on agriculture. They have been one of the major sources of revenue in many countries, both developed and developing. They contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation as half of the terrestrial species are found in forests. In recent years, forest as an effective means of climate change mitigation has been accepted by the world community.

In view of these contributions of forests to the world population, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) recognized in its resolution adopted in 2006 that forests can contribute significantly to sustainable development, poverty eradication and the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Emphasizing the need for sustainable management of all forests, including the fragile forest ecosystems, the UN declared 2011 as the '**International Year of Forests**' with the aim of raising awareness at all levels to strengthen sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests for the benefit of present and future generations.

The UN has called upon governments, relevant non-government organizations and major groups to mark the Year 2011 through voluntary contributions and linking their activities to the Year. Thus, various government and non-government organizations throughout the world are celebrating 2011 under the theme 'Celebrating Forests for People'. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said during the ninth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) "by declaring 2011 as the International Year of Forests, the UN General Assembly has created an important platform to educate the global community about the great value of forests – and the extreme social, economic and environmental costs of losing them".

Nepal has diverse physiographic zones, climatic contrasts, and altitudinal variations which have created a rich and diverse forest resource base. Forests are of immense importance in Nepal considering their crucial role in maintaining ecological stability, socio-economic well-being, and biodiversity conservation.

In the context of Nepal, forestry is well integrated with the farming systems, and provides many inputs. People depend on forest to meet their requirements of food, firewood, fodder, timber and green manure. About 80% of the total population depends on forests for fuelwood. Similarly, forest products contribute about 42% of the total digestible nutrients of cattle in Nepal. Apart from their contributions to agriculture, forests are also indelibly linked to two other important sectors of the Nepalese economy viz. water resources and tourism.

The Government of Nepal has enacted several policies and legislations for the protection of environment and conservation of forests. Over 23% of the country's land area is conserved under protected area system, and forest conservation through participatory forest management regimes like community forestry and leasehold forestry is promising. The Forest Resource Assessment Nepal (FRA-Nepal) Project, implemented by the Department of Forest Research and Survey (DFRS), through the support of the Government of Finland, is working on the comprehensive assessment of the country's forest resources. Furthermore, the Government of Nepal is joining hands with local, national and international organizations for the conservation of valuable forest resource of Nepal.

Recognizing that the forests provide multiple economic, social and environmental benefits and there is no substitute for the goods and services provided by forests, increased efforts should be made, from all sides at all levels, for sustainable forest management which contributes significantly to sustainable development and poverty reduction. This calls for scientific forest management, private forestry development, protection of forests against fire and encroachment, and promotion of greenery on degraded/unused public lands.

The Government of Nepal aims to maintain the country's forest cover at 40% which is also reflected in the 2010 Draft Concept Paper of the Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal. The debates and consensus on forest resource governance models in the federal system is another topical and crucial issue.

An obvious task is that there is no alternative than to conserve forest for prosperous Nepal and well-being of the Nepalese people. In 2011, we all should join hands for educating people on the need and importance of sustainable management of forest ecosystem and conservation of all types of forests in Nepal.