

Banko Janakari

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Initiating forest certification in Nepal

Forests, the renewable natural resources provide us with three major benefits: i) environmental benefits, ii) subsistence need to the rural people, and iii) revenue. Of these benefits, the former two could only be extrapolated, whereas the latter is accurately figured out. Its official figure for the last fiscal year is about NRs 360 Million, which is considered far below its potential.

According to some estimates the production forests of the Terai, which is less than 30% of the country's forests, could add as high as NRs 13 billion (US\$ 176 million) to the national treasury. This could still be greatly increased should our forest products find international markets provided that such products are certified by independent and competent forest certifying bodies such as Forest Stewardship Council, Pan-European Forest Certification System, International Tropical Timber Organisations. Nepal could also make its own system. In any case, the only basis for these bodies to certify forest products is to ascertain that the forests are managed in a sustainable way, ie. the rate of harvesting does not exceed the rate of production.

With about 13,000 Forest User Groups managing 1.45million ha of forests in Nepal at present, the only aim of these communities is to increase forest production for subsistence need as well as for income. All those, governmental as well as non-governmental organisations working in this field are supporting them to achieve the goal. The same concept holds good for the government-managed forests, leasehold forests and private forests. In this predicament, it has already become late for Nepal to initiate a national standard for sustainable forest management and the system of forest certification, which would not only entice the owners for sustainable forest production but also give their forest products way to international market.

The international buyers and environmental activists need nothing than to believe that the products they buy are labeled with the seal of approval and produced from environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economically viable forestry sources of this beautiful Himalayan Kingdom.