

Banko Janakari

A journal of forestry information for Nepal

Towards sustainable mountain development

Mountains occupy 20 percent of the earth's total land area. They provide direct life support to the one-tenth of the people, and goods and services to nearly half of the world's population. One might find rich cultural heritage of diverse ethnic people in mountains. Holding the genetic pool of nearly 50 percent of the crop plants of the world, the mountains are the repositories of rich biodiversity as well. Above all, the mountains serve as the water tower of the earth. The 1,000 km stretch of the Central Himalayas in Nepal is one of the contributing parts of the world's such mountain resources. Realizing such importance of mountain and need for its overall development, the UN General Assembly of 1998, following the Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, declared 2002 the International Year of Mountains (IYM). The aim of declaration was to create public awareness and exhibit State's political, institutional and financial commitment towards sustainable mountain development. Being one of the 172 participating countries of the Rio Convention, it is obligatory for Nepal to implement the Agenda 21. It is therefore, the country is celebrating with various programmes, the International Year of Mountains on the auspices of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation.



Development of mountains is a challenging task. Majority of the poor populace of the society who dwell in mountains have continued to degrade the mountain ecosystem through excessive exploitation of its natural resources. Such phenomenon is especially pronounced in the country like Nepal where 86% of area is mountainous. The fragility of mountains have made the task of conducting developmental activities extremely difficult, so as providing goods and services. Nonetheless, since the inception of Five Year Developmental Plans in 1956/57, Nepal has adopted the policy of developing health, education, agriculture, livestock, drinking water and rural access as the priority sectors of mountain development followed by irrigation, communication, and hydroelectricity. Establishment of a Remote Area Development Committee in 1965, and

reactivation of the local government through the Decentralization Act 1997 and Local Self Governance Act 1999 show the State's commitment towards mountain development.

However, the expected results are yet to be achieved. The State's various governing systems need to be conducive towards sustainable mountain development as it requires:

- political system encouraging citizens' participation;
- economical system help generate required technological knowledge;
- social system that minimizes social conflicts;
- technological system supporting problem solving research;
- production system not transgressing the nature's carrying capacity;
- international system fostering bi-and multilateral cooperation and balanced trade;
- administrative system having flexibility and accountability.

As evident, developing mountain needs a holistic approach, the related authorities should come forward to join hand-in hand in the pursuit of excellence. In this connection, while there is a need to sincerely implement the 10-point Kathmandu declaration of the International Seminar on Mountain (6-8 March 2002), a list of pertinent programmes should be launched in the years to come. The current activities of the IYM Secretariat are an eye opener.

Uday R. Sharma, PhD
Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation