

Book Review

Shrestha, Tirtha Bdr. (with colleagues) *Nepal Country Report on Biological Diversity* Kathmandu: The World Conservation Union (IUCN), 1999, pp. 133, figures, colour photographs, tables, ISBN: 92-9144-041-8, references, paper back (price not quoted).

Bio diversity encompasses all the lifeforms and their designated species, the genetic properties encoded within them and the ecosystem that provided their living space. The diversity of life (bacteria to giant trees and animal) forms in different landscape of the biosphere (land and water, cold and hot climate, desert-grassland and dense forest etc.) are numerous and only a few are known to man. Co-existence and balance of human and bio-diversity are the only way to maintain healthy environment at present and safeguard for the future generation. However, ever expanding human population and pressure of economic development have altered the balance alarming the rate of habitat destruction and reduction of species in numbers far beyond the natural process. Therefore, many nations of the world, including Nepal, recognised that the life support system of the planet must be safeguard for future generations and signed on (earth summit) Global Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held at Rio-de-Jenerio in 1992. Thereafter, a number of background studies, demonstration projects and new initiatives have been taken place to assist the government and public in identifying components of bio-diversity important for conservation and sustainable use. This publication is an attempt to address these issues in Nepalese context in brief but in lucid manner.

The book is organised into six thematic chapters. However, introduction appears separately before the beginning of the chapters. The introduction covers synopsis of five documents produced in the UN Conference on Environment and Development for five billion people to facilitate their journey into the 21st century. Nepal's signatory, ratification to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Government's strategies and plans to address conservation of nature and natural resources, and growing issues arisen between conservation and development of the community, the purpose and the coverage of the report has also been shaded in this section. Chapter first is set out to explore Nepal's environmental concerns, government policies and institutional performance, the convention on biological diversity and response with a focus on poverty, population, environment and major factors degrading the environmental condition of Nepal.

Chapter two on country description emphasizes on socio-economic consideration, demographic characteristics, biogeography and agro-ecosystem of the three ecological zones i.e. Tarai, Siwalik and mountains of Nepal. Photographs, figures and tables embodied in this chapter have efficaciously expounded the unique diversity and use of both natural and cultural resources of the country. The inclusion of analysis based on biogeography, bioclimate, phytogeography, zoogeography, habitat classification and agro-ecosystem has added geographic flavor to the report. Concise presentation of physical division and bioclimatic zonation of Nepal proposed by various authors and vegetation pattern in Nepal Himalaya in simple but scientific figures makes the report of the special interest to the geographers. However, their strength would be more geared up if braced with physical and socio-cultural maps of the country.

Current status, burning problems and the need for conservation and sustainable use of flora and fauna have been discussed in chapter three. The list of Nepal's threatened/endemic plants, animals, butterfly, fishes and herpetofauna along with rhododendron flowers and flowering periods, rare fishes in Himalayan water has made the chapter more informative. Examples of forest management techniques adopted in the country, which are presented, in the last section has made this chapter more interesting.

Chapter four on efforts to protect bio-diversity highlights international conservation tools with a focus on waterfowl habitat, protection of world and natural heritage, international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora and convention on biological diversity. Buffer zone management, the need and significance for the establishment of national parks and protected areas including current practices in Nepal are presented in the half way of the chapter. The succeeding section covers offsite conservation like zoo, botanical garden, development trust along with legal instrument related to bio-diversity conservation issues.

Provision of environmental impact assessment, its guidelines and requirements are outlined in chapter five. The last chapter entitled as looking ahead put forward a vision for Nepal and prospect for the future, including a short discussion on guiding principles of bio-diversity conservation. The issues raised in these chapters are admissible to the content of the preceding chapters. However, being very short these chapters have not been able to maintain balance among the chapters and through light as the readers expect from the titles. In this perspective this book is a study of breadth not in depth.

Despite limitations, I am sure that this volume as a country report has been able to convey the message about the geophysical environmental condition of the country and information on the bio-diversity of Nepal, the socio-economic factors affecting them, need of bio-diversity conservation, sustainable use and the current capacity to conserve them. Therefore, this book will be useful to those who are interested or involved in the conservation and sustainable use of Nepal's rich biological heritage.

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