

FOREST POLICY SEMINAR SERIES

Presentation (6/2010)



By *Dr. Jagannath Adhikari*

11 October, 2010 from 3 pm onwards

Training Hall, Forest Complex, Babarmahal, Kathmandu

ALL INTERESTED ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

Please confirm your participation to forestaction@wlink.com.np

Redefining forest and forestry in the context of food crisis in Nepal

As the food crisis grows globally, forests and forestry are facing new and additional challenges. In Nepal, the scarcity of arable land, the growing population and high dependence of people on agriculture and forest for livelihoods exacerbate the food crisis. This will bring profound challenges to existing approaches to forest management that emphasize conservationist or commercial strategies, which ignore the food production functions and potentials of forest ecosystems. Clearly, there is a need to fundamentally revisit the basic conceptions of and approaches to managing forests so that both biodiversity and food production can go together.

These two conceptions provide ideological basis for forest management in Nepal. The first—conservationist school—maintains that human interference is to be avoided in the forest. Most of the protected areas are managed through this concept, and people are generally restricted in the use of resources within them. The second concept, or a group of ideas, can be called scientific-commercial school. This concept basically comes from the developed countries introduced in the post-industrial context and in colonial countries in order to bring the forestry under state (their) control so that the needs of the developed countries are met. Under this approach, forest is considered as land area covered by high density of trees and having more than 30 % canopy cover. In Nepal's forestry parlance, tree species for a forest should be other than the trees considered food crops or food trees. This is considered important for the conservation of bio-diversity. The institutional set-up for the management of forest in the conservationist and scientific-commercial systems has led to the formation of a large and centralized government forest bureaucracy often the reach of the people. Such centralized approach has also led to the supremacy of 'experts' and to the exclusion of real users and stewards of the forest and their experiences. There are slight changes in forest management as seen in community forestry and conservation areas. But still the two ideologies dominate in government-managed forest as well as in the so called participatory forestry like community forestry.

Drawing on the extensive research and policy analysis over the past two decades, this seminar opens up a new debate about transforming the ideologies of forest governance and management in the light of ensuing food crisis in Nepal. The new approach requires a radical shift in institutional set-up of forest bureaucracy. The forest should be re-conceptualized as a system of land use representing the continuum between farm and the close-canopy forest area. This is particularly important because biodiversity is often high in areas managed by people, rather than the government controlled forest areas. This could also be true with wildlife. Therefore, recognizing the food rights of hungry people in and around forests has the potential to enhance biodiversity (such as through conservation farming) in government forests that are being illicitly deforested under government control. If this is not allowed, there is a risk of widespread destruction of forest. After all, the world forest history clearly shows that forest management needs to be context-specific, and we should always seek design institutional modalities and operational processes to this end.

Dr. Jagannath Adhikari is involved in various policy researches in areas like natural resources management, agriculture, land management and reform, food security, and other aspects of livelihood like migration. He had also carried a research project on environmental justice particularly access to forest in Nepal. The focus of his PhD research was on agrarian change and resource management. He has published more than a dozen books and research articles in the above mentioned themes.

The Forest Policy Seminar Series is the joint initiative of ForestAction Nepal (www.forestaction.org), Nepal Foresters Association (www.nfa.org.np), Institute of Forestry (www.iof.edu.np), College of Development Studies (www.cds.edu.np), Kathmandu Forestry College (www.kafcol.edu.np) and National Policy Research Network (www.nepalpolicy.net). The purpose is to facilitate scholarly debate and reflections on forest policy and governance in Nepal. If you have any interesting research findings that are relevant to contemporary forest policy debate, please send a 250-300 words abstract to Dr. Hemant R. Ojha, the Seminar Coordinator, at ojhahemant1@gmail.com. Currently we plan to organise monthly presentations, but if there is more demand, we can go up to two presentations every month.