

Issues and Concerns of Indigenous Community Conserved Areas
(ICCA) in Kathmandu Valley
(30 September 2012, ForestAction Nepal)

Synthesis Report

An interactive workshop carried out under the project entitled
"Promoting and Advancing Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas
(ICCAs) in Nepal"

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Organized by:



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1. Introduction

Nepal has a significant area under formal conservation (almost 23.23% of the country's area has been declared and managed as protected area) followed by well developed policy and institutions. However, many of the valuable ecosystems are outside the formally designated protected areas. Many of them may be the territories and areas conserved by indigenous people and local communities (known as ICCAs). They may exist in different form and natures, like old and new, large and small, worse and better etc and they have been conserving critical ecosystems ranging from wetland and forest rangelands. In several cases, indigenous institutions are still functioning and are contributing to both conservation and livelihoods.

The geographical area of the Kathmandu valley is very important as it is rich in the historical monuments, archeology, and also diverse forms of conservation sites including religious. In this context, ForestAction Nepal organized an interaction in Kathmandu on 30 September 2012. The overall objective of the interaction was to discuss on the relevance of promoting and advancing ICCAs in Nepal and possible networking and collaboration among the communities from different parts. The interaction was also aimed to understand diverse perspectives to enrich national conservation policy debates. The specific objectives of the interaction were:

- To generate a common platform to introduce, discuss and dialogue between representatives of community groups in Kathmandu valley;
- Introduce and orient the concept "ICCA" among the community members so as to understand their response upon the relevance of recognition, promotion and advancement of this concept;
- To explore possible networking and collaboration in future conservation policy directions for the recognition and support of ICCAs in Nepal.

The total of 24 individuals, representing six different local communities (See annex 1 for details), were present in the interaction. In the program, a short presentation about the introduction of the concept and context of ICCA and its relevance in Nepal was made by Mr. Jailab Rai of ForestAction Nepal. Based on that the participants have shared their conservation experiences and initiatives in the local levels and lastly the open discussion was focused on the relevance and the future actions for promoting and advancing ICCAs in Nepal.

2. Presentation Session

2.1 *Presentation by Mr. Jailab Rai*

After the introduction of the program, a presentation highlighting on the general introduction of the concept and context of ICCA and its relevance in recognizing, promoting and advancing in Nepal by Jailab Rai of ForestAction Nepal was made (See annex 3 for presentation slides). The key points of the presentations were:

- The introduction of generally accepted definition of ICCA (territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities through their customary laws and practices which has three characteristics: local people's concerns; their decisive roles; contribution in the biodiversity conservation).

- Introduction of the international legal instruments (like ILO 169, UNDRIP), policies and decisions (through CBD COP, World Park Congress, World Conservation Congress) related with ICCAs.
- The roles of indigenous peoples and local communities (as true custodians to the biodiversity conservation, needs of the legal recognition of such practices, equal and equitable benefits of the biodiversity conservation, their full participation in the conservation activities, formulation of necessary laws, policies and legislations).
- Introduction and critiques about national policies, laws, acts and regulations related with biodiversity conservation in Nepal.
- Introduction about the possible ICCA sites in Nepal (territories and areas conserved by indigenous people and local communities in different parts/eco-regions of the country, including in the Kathmandu valley).
- Relevance of promoting and advancing ICCAs in Nepal (important for many reasons, such as for the legalization of their practices and status; for their security; for their diverse forms of recognitions [religious, cultural, social, political, economic]; to respect local conservation initiatives; to protect them from international and external threats; to respect and acknowledge their contribution; to strengthen and empower conservation initiatives of local communities etc).
- The way forward for promoting and advancing ICCAs in Nepal (form an multi-stakeholder's national apex body; identification and documentation of such sites to prepare national data base; continuous interactions and discussions; formulate necessary policies and legislations; raise national wide awareness building; and form national network to advance nationwide campaign, advocacy and capacity building).
- Introduction about international initiatives (studies, documentations, formation of global networks, lobby, advocacy, and capacity developments etc for ICCA members) and national level activities (constant interactions [national, regional, local], national gatherings, formation of national networks and recently initiatives is going on for the formation of a national ICCA federation).

2.2 Background Context of the ICCA by Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel

Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel, the executive co-coordinator of ForestAction Nepal, shared about the background context of how the concept 'ICCA' has been originated in the debate of biodiversity conservation and how it is relevant in the Nepal's context. Some of the highlights of his speech are as follow:

- Introduction about the inadequacy of formally designated protected areas (through the fencing of the specified territories or areas, emerged from west, namely from USA, its inadequacy to respect cultural diversity like worshiping nature as gods).
- Gradual shift of conservation paradigms (realization of the need and importance of recognition, respect and promotion of cultural diversity, huge expenses of state's investments in formally designated protected areas, biodiversity conservation outside of the formal protected areas [conservation outside of the 23.23% of the total territory of the country]).

- The feeling of ownership (e.g. indigenous peoples and local communities have natural relations with the nature outside of the formal protected areas. Such as the people go to the government departments with demands or demonstration when they get affected by the wildlife in and around the formal protected areas but not in the non-protected areas).
- Many of the biodiversity conservation sites have been conserved and managed by the local communities voluntarily and their legal recognition is a must. For example, the Sherpa peoples in the Khumbu areas have been conserving their territories voluntarily and their demand for the legal recognition was much debated and questionable for the government authority at the beginning. But it is becoming gradually acceptable for the government.
- This concept is new not only in Nepal but also for the global conservationists. And if their conservation practices are legally recognized, supported and promoted by the state, it is sure that it will support and contribute to the biodiversity conservation in the future.
- As a party to the different international conventions and decisions, the Nepal government has international commitments for recognizing, supporting and promoting these practices, but in practice the state is not ready to accept and promote this concept adequately.
- And hence it is sure that the network, collaboration and support of all such communities will bring concrete result for the promotion, and advancement of the concept.

3. Biodiversity Conservation in the Community Level

After the presentation, participants representing six local community groups shared and discussed about their conservation activities, experiences, opportunities and challenges. The brief of their opinions and remarks are as below:

3.1 Bajhrabarahi Religious Forest

Bajhrabarahi Religious Forest is situated in the South east of the Kathmandu valley and Lalitpur district. Badri Deshar (Treasurer of the committee) and other members of the community have shared about the conservation activities of the local communities in brief. Some of the key highlights of their sharing are as follow:

"This is one of the first religious forests in the history of our country. Its condition was very worse before we started to involve actively in its conservation and managements. When we have realized the need of the conservation of this area, we started to collect voluntary funds from the members of the communities. And then we demanded for the formal handover of the forest areas to the local communities as religious forest and we become able to do it.

In addition to our initiatives, the forest resources of this area have been conserved by the religious beliefs of the local communities. Such as the local community people have a religious believe: it is believed that one who uses the firewood or any of the forest resources from these areas will suffer from the unexpected misfortune and because of this belief we do not use any of the forest products for domestic purposes.

Traditionally, only one of the Newar (one of the indigenous peoples in Nepal) can use one plant species (green firewood) from this forest for cremation (burning of the dead body). Recently, the conservation committee members have convinced this community to use dry firewood for this instead of green. For this, the community volunteers collect the dry firewood and provide them in the time of needs.

Similarly, we are generating our own funds from two means: one is from Picnic sport and another from the vehicle parking charge outside of these areas. Before this we have fenced these forest areas with iron wire and cemented poles. The collected funds are used to manage and conserve the areas. Recently, the income of these means has been gradually gaining attentions to the political parties and leaders but formation of the national network of the ICCA will help to mitigate this problem."

3.2 Santaneswor Mahadevsthan Religious Areas

Santaneswor Mahadevsthan Religious Areas is situated in the South east of Kathmandu valley, in Lalitpur district. Binod Khadka (chair of the management committee) and other three representative members have shared about the conservation activities and experiences in the area. Some of the key highlights of their sharing are as follows:

"This is religious areas covered with rocky parts on its top and three community forests down to it. The conservation committee was established in 2047 with the aim of development well management of this historically known area. Recently, we have discussed to convert community forest areas into the religious forest but forest laws made us confused whether to convert it into religious forest or not. That means we heard that resources of the religious forest cannot be used for any income or other purposes. Similarly, we are also aware of the livelihoods of some households those who are dependent upon this area for their livelihoods from grazing their cattle.

Our community is now planning to make this area a most important religious pilgrimage but we are skeptic and afraid of if the government and political parties may intervene when it become famous and generate lots of resources/money different means. We are also planning and discussing about if there are possibilities of using this areas for producing natural flowers and fruits for pilgrims/visitors to offer in this temple.

We, the community members, are voluntarily working for the management and development of this area. We are committed and dedicated for the development of this area and because of our efforts and commitments unexpected voluntary funds have been collected. Now we feel insecure of our initiatives in the future and hope that ICCA network will be part of our support."

3.3 Godavarikunda Community and Religious Forest

Godavarikunda Community and Religious Forest is situated in Lalitpur district, which is in South East of Kathmandu valley. Hariom Prasad Ojha and other representative members have shared about the conservation activities and experiences of their area. Some of the highlights of sharing are as follows:

"This is partly a community forest and partly a religious forest. This is managed through the community forest management systems. It is handed to the local communities in 2052. It is 147 hectare in its area and 130 households as user households. The management and utilizations of the resources is done according to the management plan.

The condition of this forest area was very poor before it was handed over to the local communities. But once it was handed over to the local communities, the forest condition gradually improved and now it is dense in terms of its forest types and tree. The studies show that this forest area is important in the bird conservation. The community is generating about 2-3 lakhs of money from different resources of this area. The income is used in different purposes including the income generation for poor households, scholarship to the students from poor families.

The conservation of this forest area is partly done because of the religious beliefs and values. There is Godavarikunda just down to this forest area and forest above this temple is believed as the shelter of the god. So, we do not cut any trees above this temple. Similarly, we worship forest god (locally called Ban Devata) in this forest areas. The large trees in the forest areas are worshiped as shelter of the god. So, such of the beliefs are helping to conserve forest areas of this site."

3.4 Phulchouki Conservation Area

Phulchouki Conservation Area, situated in Lalitpur district, which is in South East of Kathmandu valley. Gopal Paudel and other representative members have shared about the conservation activities and experiences of their area. Some of the highlights of sharing are as follows:

"This is a historical place covered with forested areas in the hill. A temple lies in the top of the hill. We have thought of contributing in the conservation of this religious site. We are planning and looking for the help for developing this site as religious pilgrims. We are collecting voluntary funds from all to manage and develop this site. This area is formally a government forest and wanted to contribute in overall conservation and management of these forest areas and develop this site as religious pilgrims so as to contribute in the overall biodiversity of the area."

3.5 Nagdaham Wetland

Nagdaha is a small but beautiful pond situated in the South East of Kathmandu valley and Lalitpur district. Gokarna Adhikari and other members of the community have shared about the conservation practices and experiences of this pond. Some of the major point they shared are as follow:

"Nagdaha is a small but beautiful pond. Its proper conservation and managements was started by local communities and youths when its condition became worse. For its conservation and management, a formal committee was formed in 2062 BS. Some outside supports have also been received by this committee but its activities became not must effective because of the politics and power games.

We thought of its proper developments and managements as tourist site but could not do much because of the many reasons. Recently, the management committee of this pond is also inactive and dysfunctional. However, local communities have concerns and interest of doing some things for the conservation of this area.

This pond is worshiped as shelter of the god of serpent with the belief that worship of this god giver rain water to the villagers. The pond is so worshiped by the villagers who are directly benefiting with the irrigation for their farming. This means the water of this pond is used as sources of irrigation for the villagers. Recently, there is need of the outside supports for the management and conservation of this pond."

3.6 Taudaha Wetland

Taudaha is a small wetland/pond situated in the South-West of the Kathmandu valley and the Kathmandu district. Dil Bahadur KC and other members of the committee have shared about the conservation practices and experiences of this pond. The key highlights of their sharing are as follow:

"Taudaha is a small but beautiful pond situated in the west of Kathmandu valley. The active engagements of the local communities and youths on the formal conservation and management of this pond started from 2050 BS. Nagraja Nagrani conservation committee was then formed and then it started to take conservation initiatives. Before that, about 90 per cent was covered by water bushes and grasses. It was about to disappear. Looking at such situation, we thought of the importance of conservation and management of this beautiful pond for future of this village. And then, we planned to do something for this. We started to clean this pond continuously. Similarly, the open fishing in this pond was another problem. We started to voluntarily control this activity as well.

Now, we are constructing wall all side of this pond to control encroachments. We are regularly colleting entry fees from the visitors and these funds have been used in the conservation and management of this area. We are working for developing this site as religious place.

This pond has also a historical myths and beliefs. This pond is historically believed as the shelter of the king and queen of the serpent (Nagraja and Nagrani), which is believed as sources of water for the farming."

4. Open Discussion Session

In the open discussion session, the participants shared their individual opinions and remarks about the relevance of promoting and advancing ICCAs in Nepal and their suggestions for way forward. Some of the key highlights of the discussions are as below:

- The community conservation is diverse and scattered which are neither recognized by the state nor their contribution have been rewarded. Such meetings and interactions are important to open up lots of future possibilities of organized actions for the recognitions.
- Such meetings and interactions are important forum in strengthening community network and collaboration for either the policy advocacy or of the partnership in development works.
- Now, it is time to build a network and that can explore all possibilities of future actions. Even this network can take advocacy initiatives to influence the government for legal recognitions.
- There may be dozens of such organizations/communities contributing in the biodiversity conservation and it will be the task of this network to identify and bring them in the etworks. But should not be made it political.
- Beside advocacy and networking, further possibilities of promoting tourism package in our areas can be explored.
- There are great potentials of promoting religious pilgrimages in our areas and we can explore external supports and funding for future initiatives.

- Besides our joint work we can advertize and orient others towards our conservation potentials and other livelihood opportunities for local communities. The initiatives can be made public through our different means of communications; possibly we can develop our common websites.
- If we work jointly through our network our voices will be powerful even to create pressures to the government.

Finally, the six member ad hoc committee has been formed to initiate the future actions of the members.

5. Conclusion

All of the participants have agreed that local initiatives have neither recognized nor supported by the government and other agencies. Therefore the participants realized and agreed to be empowered through network and joint initiatives in future, including exploring the future potentials of promoting and advancing the community strengths.

It is interesting that the community members are ready to work voluntarily in their common issues and agenda. It has opened up the possibility of their proactive participation in ICCA advocacy and lobby in future.

The identification, promotion and advancement of the concept 'ICCA' is thought as relevant by all participants. However, they are still skeptic on its possibility of political tone in future once it becomes powerful. It can be concluded that constant dialogues, discussions and interactions in wider level among all levels of stakeholders will be a must and helpful.

Acknowledgement

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Annex

Annex 1: List of Participants

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|-----|---------------------|--|---------------------------|----------------|
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| 3. | Anita Deshar | Jyotidaya Sangh Jyoti bihar Chapagaon-Lalitpur | | |
| 4. | Hari Om Prasad Ojha | Godavarikunda CF | | 9843128674 |
| 5. | Dil Kumar K.C. | New Taudha Club | kedilipkumar9@yahoo.com | 9841275975 |
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| 8. | Gita Shiwal | Fulchauki Conservation Committee | | 9841182885 |
| 9. | Shova Puri | Godavarikunda CF | | 9841015614 |
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Annex 2: Some Selected Photos of the Program



Participants in the interaction



Jailab Rai, talking about ICCA



Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel talking about ICCA context