



# The origin and early development of community forestry in Nepal: A webinar with pioneers and early advocates

Event date: 14th March 2022

## **Detailed transcriptions**

# Summary

Nepal's community forestry has become globally acknowledged as a successful community-based natural resources management approach. Over the past four decades, Nepal's community forestry has evolved through gradual and transformational improvements, and has become a popular resource governance approach that involves over 22,000 community groups in the management of forests. Many changes have taken place in the institutional and policy arrangements since its inception in the 80s. After forty years of successful practice, community forestry in Nepal is at the crossroads of socio-economic changes.

While the new generation of resource managers are embracing the changes across diverse sectors, yet untold stories of the emergence, struggles of individuals in establishing and expanding community forestry would provide insights to reflect upon in the new context. With this aim, EnLiFT2 (Enhancing livelihood from improved forest management) project in collaboration with the Nepalese Association of Agriculture, Forestry and Environment in Australia organized a webinar inviting speakers with experiential insights from the time of the advent of community forestry in Nepal.

This panel brought together four of the early proponents /advocates of community forestry in Nepal with a view to foster intergenerational learning on the history and evolution of community forestry in Nepal. The speakers shared their reflections around questions of setting visionary policy direction and how that direction can be pursued through necessary adaptation and learning in the changing context. The experiential insights of the four pioneers and early advocates shed light on the historical context of community forestry that was expected to have inspired contemporary researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to advance and adopt community-based natural resources management approach in the rapidly changing socio-economic and political contexts. This note provides a transcription of the webinar held on 14 March 2022.

## The origin and early development of community forestry in Nepal: A webinar with pioneers and early advocates



Speaker  
**TBS Mahat**  
(Senior forester/former dean)



Speaker  
**Stephen Midgley**  
(Senior forester/  
development specialist)



Speaker  
**Narayan Kaji Shrestha**  
(Senior activist/  
action researcher)



Speaker  
**Don Gilmour**  
(Senior forestry expert)

Moderated by: **Hemant Ojha** (Associate Professor, University of Canberra)

**14** Nepal time  
**10 to 11:30 AM**  
MARCH Sydney/Canberra time  
2022 **3:15 to 4:45 PM**



**REGISTRATION**  
<https://tinyurl.com/enliftwebinar>



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In collaboration with



## Naya Sharma Paudel

Namaskar! Good morning, good afternoon or good evening, wherever you are in different parts of the world. At ForestAction in Kathmandu, this is morning for me. So, a very warm welcome to all of you. I think it's been almost 40 years, over roughly a four decades have passed since many of you started thinking about community forestry, community-based forestry, participatory forestry, decentralize forestry whatever we name it, as against the top-down centralized bureaucratic management of forest in those days. And in these years, at least in Nepal, we are increasingly facing a number of challenges around community forestry and community-based forestry. Not only from changing socio-economic context and changing forest-people relations but also from policy context, policy debate and in its relation with the market on its key objective or institutional forms. And then there has often been an increasing tension between communities and the state. So, we thought it is good to learn from some of the early experiences, early insights and struggles of those days and that would enlighten us. Even during this time, exploring and sharing our future of community forest is most relevant. Actually, we need much more innovation, experimentation, piloting and we are sure in those early days many of you have gone through those difficult times to establish these ideas, institutions and practices. Many of us, particularly in academic institutions who are familiar with the books and papers written in those days. And it would be a good opportunity for many of us to directly interact with some of you who actually started those initiatives in the late 70s or early 80s.

This event is jointly organized by the ACIAR supported EnLiFT project (many of us are associated with that project here) in collaboration with the Association of Nepalese Agriculture, Forestry and Environment in Australia. I am very glad to see a wide range of people here including TBS Mahat, Stephen and Kaji Dai, and to the very young and who are still studying community forestry in universities and colleges here in Nepal and elsewhere. With this, I would like to pass the floor over for the first introduction of the detail program and the speakers, to my colleague Dr. Hemant Ojha who is currently working as an Associate Professor at the University of Canberra and is also part of the EnLiFT project. So may be Hemant Jee, you would like to take on.

## Hemant Ojha

Thank you Naya jee. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, everyone where ever you are. Most of you I guess are based in Nepal, so a very good afternoon. Naya already highlighted the broad idea of this program. I am immensely proud to be a part of organizing this event given that we have such a distinguished, highly experienced, internationally and nationally respected, and they are our seniors, mentors, in different stages of our own work.

So, today we have four speakers with us talking about the history and early origins and early push, through which today's community forestry evolved. We all know and we are part of this program in different ways, as researchers, as practitioners, as policy makers. Nepal's community forestry has come a long way, 40–50 years as former history if we start counting from when it became a formal part of the practice. But then recently, may be in the past 10-15 years, we have also seen a lot of change in the context of livelihood, economy, politics, governance in Nepal all impacting community forestry. But still it is emerging, it has proven its resilience. There are some challenges, somewhat similar challenges. May be compared to what we had 30 years ago, especially around the relationship between communities and government. So, there are some similarity and continuities as well but then a lot of new challenges has also emerged. So, we thought it would be really interesting and inspiring to have this kind of webinar with our living memories, with our living experts in Nepal as well as outside. So, we thought it would be good idea to host this webinar.

We have four speakers; TBS Mahat, Stephen Midgley from Australia and Dr Narayan Kaji Shrestha now from Nepal itself, and Don Gilmour from Australia. So, all of these figures of course are well-known to us. But I will highlight what we could actually expect from their brief presentation, talks from each of them. So, after these four presentations, which will be around 12 minutes of initial talks, will be followed by questions and answer session. We are not actually inviting commentators to present live using video but we request every participant and commentators to put their comments in the chat box and Dr. Naya Sharma and myself, we will try to bring those questions in front of the speakers. So that way we will have an interactive session as well. And then towards the end we have two especially invited commentator's one Dr. Srijana Baral to actually share her reflection and responses listening to our speakers and also in view of the discussion that we will follow. Similarly, we have another distinguished commentator Dr Sindu Dhungana, who is the joint secretary at the Ministry of Forests and Environment. So, we will also invite him to offer some comments and reflections on this webinar towards the end. That way we will proceed to the end and our colleague Dr Ian Nuberg who is an Associate Professor at the University of Adelaide and currently active in research in Nepal. He will offer some closing observations.

So, that is the program structure. So, without taking further time, I would now like to invite our first speaker Dr. TBS Mahat. He is a well-known figure in the field of community forestry and environmental management in Nepal and outside. He was a District Forest Officer (DFO) in the 70s, at the time when community forestry was just beginning to emerge. He is of course one of the leading pioneers of community forestry of Nepal, working from within the government system. He did his Ph.D from the Australian National University and he also has a number of scholarly publications. He is probably the first senior forest officials from Nepal who had so many and such a high-quality research publication as well. While working in practice in the district level in Nepal and in the later stages of his career, because of his strong academic and research credibility perhaps, he was invited as a professor within Tribhuvan University Institute of Forestry where he also became the Dean. I think he retired some years back from that position and his work has been acknowledged by highest, prestigious governmental awards, for example 'Life Time Conservation Award' by the President of Nepal.

So, we are very delighted to have such a senior and distinguish presenter talking about the early origins and history of community forestry. So, Professor Mahat, you know we have very simple questions for you to reflect on. How you became to involve in that kind of deviation from the standard practice? Because that time we know from what we have heard from you and others that it was really a top-down centralized forest governance system. But then you brought the alternative ideas, different ideas, you raised the point about engaging communities as part of the forest management system. As I was looking at your CV, in 1978, you wrote a paper about 'An Approach to Community Forestry Development in Chautara'. It was in 1978 when you were writing about community forestry approach at that time. So, could you share your reflections, your memories whatever you want to actually say. You know we don't have any prescriptions, just share your insides, your memories to inspire emerging professionals working in community forestry both in Nepal and outside.

# TBS Mahat



First of all, Namaste to everyone. Thank you very much, ForestAction Nepal for bringing us together with my very old mates, Stephen Midgley and others. Namaste to all, and I would like to welcome all to this on online platform. I hope you can make a visit to Nepal as soon as possible. So, you know definitely, some from Nepal of course, and some have so much contributed to Nepal and lived here. So, we always have good memories as well as the contribution that you have made to greening Nepal. So, with that I would like to express my gratitude to ForestAction Nepal for bringing us together this morning. Now we don't know when we start.

*[Hemant Ojha]: You can share us about during that time period how you have started this community forestry practice, what motivated you, what were the challenges for you during that time period, how you have overcome those challenges and moved ahead. So, you can share about these things. You can share in 10 minutes and we shall have discussion later on.*

*[TBS Mahat]: Shall I speak in Nepali or English?*

*[Hemant Ojha]: You can start with whatever language will be comfortable for you. You can speak both mixing Nepali and English as well.*

Thank you. So, I will start and try to speak in English. To start, let me say, of course I have got the person with whom we got started in the very earliest stage I should say. We don't have with us this morning Tuning Fon, of course there were earlier other Australians who worked in Nepal and contributed in the field of forestry, re-forestation as well, and I have read about them, I have met with some of them in the past. I think it was in 60s, mid-60s or something like that. It was Anthony Fansite, who came to Nepal, with whom I met in Nepal and that was in early 1974 perhaps.

He was the leader of Nepal-Australia Forestry Project at that time. That time we have like very tangential touch with the Australian forestry because the focal organization they were working with was forestation division of Forest Department of His Majesty's Government of Nepal. So that was how we started and they were spread across Nepal right from the east to the west. From Mechi to Mahakali I may say. They had specialists working on as I remember, particular they were working on species trials. Forest trees species trials. And much of it was, I should like to mention that it was local trees and they

were trying to see if it worked here. So, from then on, when we got Tony, we just happened to meet in one of the parties that he had come for, along with foresters and other people. People were also involved in other development agencies. So, I was based in Chautara but I think perhaps couple of more times, I was invited. So, that was the sort of I would say beginning of direct association with the Australians in person I will say. With Tony FRANSILE.... As I said it was in 1974, it was. Then again, we were talking about various things, and of course about forestry. I think I still have his first report that he wrote for his organization. He was writing for the Australian Association Development Bureau. He sent me a copy of that as well and then he said..., I remember that pair of sentences where he said that we hear that there are some new things coming up being done in the Forestry Division. Chautara Forestry Division you know these are the two congruent districts of Nepal, what we called Kathmandu, east of Kathmandu, Sindhupalchowk and Kavrepalanchowk. And that became the point for all those starting from somewhere there. First informally, then formally. Informally we got started in 1974 as I said, and then formally, I would not say the largest in terms of the area, but we were the first project in community forestry that came to Nepal with an external assistance, bilateral assistance from the Australian government. So, the project MOU got signed in 1979 September. But before that Tony got started in 1974 or so. Stephen... fortunately I am really pleased to be with him, this morning with him again, with all the others but definitely with him. So, he was here in Nepal at that time.

In the initial stage of that program, we were formally working with the people. We know that Stephan is a really good man, keeps everybody laughing and people really liked and loved him, I remember. Shashidhar Timilshina if you remember, now Shashidhar he is no longer with us, but his son and daughter they are teachers and they remember and I am in touch with them as well. And they keep remembering those good old days working with you and Nepal-Australian Forestry project.

So, this is how in 1974, informally we got started, up until mid-1979 and then the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with his Majesty's Government of Nepal, back then. Then the Australian Government signed it in September 1979. Now that is one of the longest bilateral projects. Multilateral projects are any way short term and maximum 5 years and they may continue in some cases but bilateral projects continue much longer in several cases. Nepal-Australian Forestry Project with the assistance of the Australian Government to Nepal. It continued for 30 long years. Started in 1979 formally and we went as far as 29 years and few months. With the Maoist insurgency, the project got stopped, we could not continue it. It was not really possible to execute the development activities in the field with the Maoist insurgency, everybody was impacted, we were all of course. In Nepal, we were scared and we didn't want to get killed and so going to the field was limited and very hard, so that was the situation. But by that time, I had left the project area, Sindupalchowk and Kavrepalanchowk were the administrative districts of Nepal. And this was all the operational area of Nepal-Australian Forestry project. With the field headquarters, the Division Forest Office was there. The DFO or the Division Forest Office was based in Chautara. So that was my headquarter or it was our headquarter in the HMG's site for that area. And his Majesty's Government Forest Department, Chautara Forest Division, was the headquarter for both the administration district, but DFO office was based there as well. That was also the operational area. That also became the operational area formally when the MOU was signed between the His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Australian Government. That also became the field headquarters I would say for the Australian project and the operational area was those two districts. So that was the first Nepal Australia Forestry project.

*[Hemant Ojha]: Mahat sir, can I ask permission for a small pause here because our allocated time is going to finish soon. So, for rest 2/3 minutes I would like to request Mahat sir to wrap up...*

So, that's how we have started. We have people, the earliest people that I have worked with Stephen Midgley is with us. And we have other people also who I have known, who I got introduced to later though but I have known them much well like I will see here, Dr. Don Gilmour. And another person when the project got signed, it was Dr. Rob Cambell, when the project formally got signed, he was the project manager. Of course, he was a very much responsible person. He and I worked together, we locked ourselves in my living room. We used to lock ourselves for 2 or 3 hours together and talk, talk... He was the one in writing. So, the formulation stage of that project was done like that. And when the project got signed, I represented His Majesty's Government of Nepal as the project manager and Rob Cambell was the team leader of the Nepal-Australian Forestry project. Professor Griffin, my guru who was my PhD supervisor ....

*[Hemant Ojha]: Mahat sir shall we pause for a while here. In the second round of discussion, we will come with you and in that round, participants will be asking questions to you that you have shared quite well about the history. So, one question that is coming to you is what sort of problem or challenges you experienced while you were working as the DFO at the time. And how you began. So, I would like to request you to think answers over this question and then I will invite you in the second round*

I would like to share one thing with you that you might have got this book, in this book I have shared my experience on this book. I have written the book titled the 'Initial Days of Community Forestry in Nepal'. In this book I have tried to write my experiences of the initial days.

### Hemant Ojha:

Ok, thank you very much. You have shared one round of experience in the presentation. We will come back to you in the second round of discussion. And now your book also became a part of your presentation, which is very good. So, I would like to thank you so much for the first round of conversation and presentation.

I would now like to invite Stephen Midgley, who actually came to Nepal in 1976 and worked for five years. Dr. Mahat also referred to him. He collaborated with him on these different projects. So that was his Nepal experience long back at the time when community forestry discussion was happening. He is now a senior fellow at the University of Melbourne. He has over 40 years of experience in international forestry development as well as overall rural development. He has also worked in Australia as a senior forestry specialist. He has been a long-time expert panel member with FAO on different aspects of forestry. His work experience actually covers East-Asia, Africa, Australia and of course South Asia. So, with this introduction I would now like to invite you Stephen for your reflections and memory of your time in Nepal when you working with TBS Mahat and of course others and local communities in Nepal. So over to you. You will have around 12 minutes for your initial reflections and we will come back again for any questions.

# Stephen Midgley



Thank You Hemant for the very generous introduction. Namaste everyone from Australia. I had very happy times in Nepal and I have very happy memories of the place which I find professionally and personally very rewarding. I arrived to Nepal in 1976 from Laos and soon became acquainted with this very outspoken, articulate and inspirational Divisional Forester Tej Bahadur Singh Mahat. Namaste Mahat ji. At that time Mahat was very frustrated because nearly all of his reforestation budget for the entire Chautara Forest Division was spent on..... (*not clear 32:28*) which had to be imported from India at credit expenses. And not only that, nearly all of his operational expenditure for forest guards had to be spent to make sure that the community did not steal. So, in fact the forest continued to disappear and we were in fact paying India to try to protect their forest from people stealing the wood. And Mahat showed a great lack of logic in this. And I came face to face with the similar lack of logic. I recalled in late 1976, I was measuring some plots up in Daman and the forestry officer who was accompanying me spent nearly all of his time in chasing and apprehending poor villagers who were collecting firewood at that time. And you all know; it is very cold in daman and you need lot of firewood. So, the fostering institutional change takes a longtime. Stably, bits and pieces of the rationale for the community forest began to fall in place. We were lucky because Mahat ji and the family lived in Chautara. He was not Kathmandu based DFO. He was a great trekker and great walker and he wanted to listen to the stories of the communities had to share.

And after time, his arguments began to find some early support in Babarmahal and he found a very willing audience like, friend and colleague and rest of the Australian team at the Nepal-Australia Forestry project. But I think it's also useful to remember what was happening regionally at that time because making the study initial progress towards Community Forestry. At that time in 1976, regional conference in Manila, the FAO called upon member states to initiate and promote forestry for community development in the region. In 1977, we had FAO host the Asia Pacific forestry commission in Kathmandu and it was the first time CF was on a specific agenda. Then in 1978, we had world forestry conference in Jakarta where the theme was 'Forestry for people'. So, Nepal was there at the forefront, where other people were talking about the conference but Nepal was trying to do it, trying to start it. I was just reading the other day a paper by one of our old colleagues Kesar Man Bajracharya, who wrote a National Forestry Plan and in 1977, he wrote 'fragmented woodlots' who we met directly managed by the people themselves, individual or organized political social bodies. The Nepal Nature Conservation

Society at that time had on the aversion from the afforestation section on the back which said we help and appreciate everyone who wants to give a hand on greening Nepal, plant more trees and make the country evergreen. And we had a saying in the newspaper and the things '*Hariyo ban Nepal ko dhan*'.

The point I wanted to leave with you is that there are lot of that early work was happening and it takes a lot time to make these changes. And one day, interestingly one of the early advocates for CF in Nepal, one of the converts Mahat has been taking was an American Forester called Merge Steve, and Merge left Nepal and went to Bangkok to establish RECOFTC at the campus of Kasetsart University and he took all that experience which began to evolve in Nepal with him. And even myself in 1984, I went to Sri Lanka as a team leader in community forestry project and I took all that experience that I have learnt in Nepal, I took it with me. So, I guess Nepal taught us a lot.

There were many willing communities in Sindhupalchowk at least really deserve to be mentioned. In the Panchayats of Tokapa where Nyuh Prasad Bhandari offered strong support and he in 1978 created a women's committee to help look after remnant forest. And in Banskarkha panchayat, Laxman Dong Tamang, a lovely bud and a man with great vision, he offered similar support. Progress was slow. Communities did not trust government officers and Mahat's role was more diplomatic than a traditional DFO. Project if it lifted ahead was through the support Mahat sought from Dr. Rob Campbell who was a great visionary and the project support team from the Australian National University, Mahat mentioned friendship with David. They were all willing to listen and contribute to develop a conceptual framework for many more years of support of community forestry in Nepal. Those were the very exciting times.

And Hemant, you asked me what do I think of the key drivers to facilitate the shift away from top down to community in forest management and I think it's a combination of cost, logic and common sense. It was impossible to maintain a command-and-control system for the management of forest in the foothills of Nepal. The range and big forest offices, they are few and far between and communities very really engaged with them. The problem is too large and the official resource too small. Intellectual logic for engagement with communities became obvious. We had sessions in Baskharka, Thokarpa, these places gave us confidence that the communities could be trusted to look after there on forests. Operationally, we found there are village nurseries with an associated water supply was a very useful focus for a community forestry dialogue. People were very pleased to drop in have a rest, have a drink of water and chat about trees and forests and began an understanding forester were not the enemy. The sympathy has emerged within the government and to modify practices, policies and the changes in the policy from 1977 with National Forest Plan. And we have to develop a regulatory framework that would facilitate this community development.

So, in this period of mid 1970s was a lot going on and it laid foundation for the good things which were to come. So, that's a summary of my five years in Nepal, Hemant ji. I could keep you going through many more else.

### Hemant Ojha:

Thank you so much Stephen Midgley. That's very interesting, very inspiring to hear your reflection. I think without any further delay I would now like to invite Dr. Don Gilmour, our third distinguished speaker. Don Gilmour is currently Associate Professor with the University of Sunshine Coast. He has extensive experience of community-based forestry, community-based natural resource management

In Asia, Pacific, Africa and even Latin America. He came to Nepal in 80's perhaps soon after Stephen Midgley or I don't know what sort of overlap you had at that time. And Don is one of the founders and subsequently the chair of RECOFT based in Bangkok, The Center for People and Forest, many of us know. And Don's work is very famous in Nepal and internationally on community forestry. Gilmour and Fisher 1991 is a classic book on the community forestry philosophy and practice. And Don's work has actually pushed initial ideas of community forestry which Dr. Mahat and Dr. Midgley mentioned to a new level through action research, policy linkages and institutional development. And he remains active in different ways with Nepali Research community till date. Over to you Don to connect us back to your old days and of course to the contemporary as far as time allows. We have 12 minutes roughly for this.

# Don Gilmour



Thank you, Hemant. Namaste everyone. Its lovely to be here. Thank you very much ForestAction for organizing this event and for inviting me to participate. I will frame my comments around the questions that Hemant suggested for us. Allow me to share the screen and put few talking points and then speak to them.

Before talking about the points that Hemant gave me, I think it is important to look at the context from which we were operating. I went to Nepal in 1981, after Stephan left. The context I think is really critical. First of all, we need to remember that it was widespread acceptance that the whole Himalayas were in the midst of massive environmental crisis and the notion of this became as the theory of Himalayan environmental degradation, and that dominated almost everyone's thinking and policy sets. There is a perception that major problems in Himalayas was deforestation caused by ignorant peasants who cut down all the trees. So, the solution was seen to be reforestation and teaching people to protect forest. That was the almost driving, dominating perception of the times and it dominated a lot of thoughts and actions.

Prior to 1980s, most attempts to establish plantations had pretty much failed as I think Stephan indicated very clearly with his talk. But Tej Mahat demonstrated 'forest without fences' were possible in a couple places in Sindhupalchowk centric to substantial engagement in dialogue and discussion with the local community leaders. This could be done, forest could be established without fences, conditional on certain things being taken. And the other part of context is number of leaders in Sindhupalchowk, in particular Stephan mentioned them Nyuh Prasad Bhandari in Thokarpa and Laxman Tamang in Baskharka, they were very vocal and articulate people and had good political influence and well known by the local politicians. So, the focus for the first few years of work in nearly 80s as the new phase of project started to crank up was on restoration of forests using nurseries and plantations accompanied by extensive engagement with community leaders. It was the specific context within which the next decade or next half decade was played out.

Hemant also asked me what were the challenges around forest governance at that time in early to mid-1980s. The mandate of the forest department at that time was policing and licensing organization and that's what foresters were taught about in their studies. This made it very difficult or impossible to engage with communities in a collaborative sense. There was little trust. Basically, there was no trust.

But it had started to become a policy opening and Stephan talked about some of the major events taking place regionally and globally as well as the Forest Plan, Forest Policy of 1976. In 1978, Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest Rules and Regulations, and this really was landmark shift in the thinking of policy makers of the time. But it also constrained attempts to trial anything outside of this framework of the panchayat system. So, the activities had to be only administrative, political units of the time around the Panchayat. So, it was a positive move in some aspect but also it was constraining movement in other aspect.

The other thing that starts to become apparent really clearly and even though nurseries and plantations were demonstrating successful. We can make this work as time and on. And the scale ramped up quite lot with planting alternatively several thousand hectares of new plantations and 75% of which survived and you can see the remnants of that plantations around the few districts now. It also became pretty clear that this would not be sustainable in a long term. It's okay with a good input of technical and financial resources from outside but really could not be sustained internally within Nepal. So, this raised a question about what else is needed. Something else needs to happen if it is to be sustained and carried forward.

Hemant, you asked what motivation was and I think it's probably not wrong to say that the engagement for most of us in Nepal was more than, always more than just a job. It was much more than a job. It was an advocacy. And I think also, there was early recognition that we were on an intellectual and practical journey of discovery and that, if this was successful, it could lead to a whole new way of conceiving forest management. This was pretty exciting prospect to engage in. And I think most people who handle the project over a several decades really from mid-70s to mid-90s and beyond. It was a cohort of people who really bought into this notion that we were really on a fantastic journey. It could transform our hills. I think as time has shown that these factors have taken place or beat many problems along the way.

Now the factors behind the early evolution of formal Community forestry

So, moving from the ideas, the early conceptualization from 1970s to late 1980s over the ten-year period, CF evolved from a fairly vague idea to the something far more concrete and have more substance. And the number of factors behind this, you can write book on this of course but I am trying to highlight half a dozen or ten of the most important factors. First of all, it was a highly motivated team of expatriates and Nepalese including many of the DFOs who were prepared to take risks and spend a lot of time in field talking with the villagers. I think this really is fundamental. A lot of people come into power and spend most of the time in Kathmandu enjoying the cocktail parties and the social errands and not much time in the field talking to the villagers. And I think that ability, willingness of people along with the DFOs to be in the field, talk with villagers is really quite critical and of course set the early stage for that in early years.

Also, recognition related to this before this recognition that the demonstrably successful nursery and plantation program was only going to get part way towards developing a successful CF modality. This is surely important, certainly very on track, people were very happy with it, government was very happy with it that something is happening on the ground but those who thought about it little bit critically realized that this just was not sufficient. Now the point is that there are always some people in bureaucracy who were very supportive finding a better way of managing the forest in the hills. Not everyone wanted to be in this but there were enough people in bureaucracy from junior levels to very

senior levels who were prepared to have a go and to let us try all sort of interesting things. I think we were extremely fortunate in the project. We had a project management structure and project senior managers, they allowed us to have a great deal of flexibility in implementation. We had ability to change course quickly when new information came to light. A lot of many projects do not allow that in the present day and that time we were bit lucky that the things were not managerially professional. So, we say there was a lot of flexibility and we could do things and have a go and we were not frightened to make mistakes and to learn from that mistake.

We also recognized that we only had vague idea of where we were going. There were lot of grey and not much black and white. This led us to conceptualization of what became known by the late 80s as 'action research'. We show this as a valid *modus operandi*. We were prepared to recognize, we didn't know all the answers and like many people like to do these days, we were paid to articulate a plan, try it out, learn from the experiences and re-dig the plan. So, action research, participatory action research etc. We articulate this by mid to late 1980s. I think it is also really important because it permeated the whole of thinking and actions within the project team.

By the mid-80s we realized that the technical solutions with demonstration would work quite well on the ground but these were not sufficient in themselves to resolve the big picture problems and indeed the nature of the problem itself was evolving over time, the initial problem being to develop technical approaches to forest restoration that moved into the problem of empowering communities to take control of their forest resources and manage them sustainably. So, not only were we changing the solutions of the problem, indeed we were questioning the nature of the problem itself? And I think this is pretty important way to think about the project management.

This led us to recognition pretty quickly that we need to move from a forest centered approach to the people centered approach. So, rather than thinking about what we need to do to improve the forest rather what we need to build people's ability to manage the forest. This required us to engage with social scientist, which we had not done before. And this is really a totally new paradigm of forest development. I think a breakthrough on this journey was the work done by Bob Fisher and ICIMOD colleagues where they did a characterization of indigenous natural resource management, institutions and systems particularly in our case indigenous forest management systems and the patterning of CFUGs on these systems. This really was a quite significant breakthrough. It completely changed the way we thought about, fostering the development of CFUGs and interfacing between local and government interest. So, the process of identifying user groups and interest groups linking them to their forest is essentially trying to rebuild or in many cases strengthen existing but often unseen indigenous regiment and independent of the current administrative political boundaries. This was critical, again this is really important aspects of modern, distinct from what happens in many other countries.

The panchayat boundaries, administrative political boundaries were no longer the boundaries of CFUGs. I think it is one of the main reasons why CFUGs have proven to be so resilient in the price of many political and social transitions in many decades' and even with the revolution in 1990, the Maoist insurgency of ten years 1995 to 2005 I think, CFUGs remained and make that even strengthened because they became real locus of community power and institution action.

This then led us to conceptualization of modality for CF and this enabled the key elements to be easily conveyed and used for training sand developing training materials. A lot of really good things were happening within the project but I was still trying to understand what CF looks like, so we eventually

had to try to articulate a concept of CF which could be easily conveyed, discussed and debated and bought into the policy arena. I think the project team showed a desire and even a willingness to engage in the policy process in an attempt to bring field reality and conceptual rigor to inform the policy process through providing critical input into the 1983 Act or the MPFS 1993 Act and the subsequent CF rules and regulations. So, that was critical in forming those important policy documents.

Also, another fact that is often forgotten, I think is an openness not always but quite often within the senior parts of bureaucracy for field experiments that had the potential to fundamentally alter the status quo. And this really challenged the bureaucrats anywhere in the world. I could recollect one particular secretary of the ministry said that we had a mandate in a project to go wider and further than others to explore the possibilities of making the CF work for people and for us. And that the importance of the champions, key parts of bureaucracy, I think is a really critical aspect. Finally, most people at the project team had the willingness to write about on published or revolving ideas and the experiences and to the global scrutiny. This forced task to be rigorous in their own argument and in their own positions and to put it out to the world.

Thank you, Hemant!

### Hemant Ojha:

Thank you so much Don for the fantastic re-capitulation of how community forest evolved in 1980s and 1990s. And your own motivation as action researcher engaged not just in the job but challenge of intellectual discovery. So, it's great to hear from you and I am sure many of the participants now over 60, may have questions and comments for Don and all the previous speakers. Please come forward and add your comment's/questions on the chat. This will be recorded and would be a guide for learning for others who couldn't make it to the webinar today.

So, with this now I would like to invite fourth and very important speakers Dr Narayan Kaji Shrestha. Who is a very familiar name in Nepal and internationally in the area of community-based resource management and also you know right based development in general. He has done tremendously important action research, participatory action research in the area of community forestry and natural resource management. He has a formal degree on education from Michigan State University which he did in 1987, long back for many of us who are in mid-career or still emerging stage.

So, with those academic background another important intervention he has made in Nepal's community forestry development is to design innovative curriculum for what he called reorientation of professionals from previous paradigm to new community-based forestry governance paradigm. I have closely observed his work and I have had the opportunity to work under his leadership and guidance in some occasions. So, I have found those research training, advocacy kind of work. Really, really influential in the development of community forestry and also more generally in participatory development where he has been the founder of several Civil Society networks. Including the key advisor and founding supporter of FECOFUN, HIMAWANTI, you know this kind of grassroot community networks who have emerged as key champions of community forestry. And Kaji Shrestha is also I think credited for taking community forestry from earlier stages of government initiations and bilateral project support to the new stage of civil society engagement and involvement. So that's a huge contribution and we want to hear your reflection, Dr Kaji Shrestha.

# Narayan Kaji Shrestha



Thank you, Hemant ji. The question put to me was how did I get involved in community forestry. Before I go to that I would like to remind all of the audience that in Nepal there are two kinds of community forestry. One is the Panchayat based community forestry, which is known as the Panchyat forestry and Panchyat protected forest. In a way they have died now. And then another is the user's-based community forestry. So, I will be much more talking about the user's- based community forestry. I am not a forester. I am from an education background. And I have been involved in many NGOs, civil society organizations.

My belief is unless and until you have the participation of the people you work with, no development moves ahead. Top-down development approach don't bring the impact because there is no support from the beneficiary. I think it was 1984. I came back from Michigan State University to collect data for my Ph.D thesis. Somehow, I think to bring me into the community forestry I have to acknowledge Dr. Gilmour's support because at that time, for my survival, I was teaching Nepali language to the Australian experts in which we used to talk about what they were doing, what is happening in the project also? In many ways I was sort of a little but critical that Nepal-Australia forestry project is very successful forestry project. But there is no community in their community forest. Probably Dr. Gilmour got that message and around that time one lady came to Nepal to study community forestry process and somehow Dr. Gilmour asked me to guide her. She was a good colleague for me. And I came to know a lot about community forest.

One day Dr. Gilmour came to me and said you are critical of our approach; can you do something to find ways so that we can have the right approach for the community forest. And I said I am not a forester. I have seen the forest but I am not a forester. So how can I do that? But I can start the process. That process is if you're DFO, Ranger, assistant DFO and the forest experts come together and discuss. Let's have a sort of workshop, three days' workshop and try to find out the ways. It's very difficult to always realize the weakness and mistake. But Dr. Gilmour was very willing. So, we came there with the DFO, Ranger and also the forestry experts. And we started the discussing, we started defining actually; What is community? What is community forest? What is users' group? What is participation? All these kinds of things. And then we also tried to figure out the characteristics of those things. Then I asked participants to please rate. Please evaluate yourself whether the project which have been doing

participatory forestry, was actually participatory or not? So, some weakness and all these things came out and then we started discussing how to make it participatory. So, we developed the guideline, very detail guideline. But later on, Dr. Gilmour again said to me you develop the guideline but we have not field tested it. Can you do the field testing? So, we went to Pandey Gaun of Kavarepalanchowk which has a 17 hectare of forest and myself and Ghanendra Kafle and Netra Tumbahamfey, three of us and also some Rangers and assistant DFOs, including DFO also some advisors were there, then we started the process.

There was a difference in perceptions, it was clear. Because while we are walking to that area, we saw in one place there was a nice tree that was lying down on the ground, probably by the house owner. It was near by the house. And the DFO asked me, you say that without people we can't manage the forest. People will participant in the forest? Did you see that this good tree was fallen by that person? And I said but please look at yourself. Your policies, if he has not cut down that tree you would have given the license for someone else to cut it. But this person has protected that forest for long time, so what is wrong with it? So, we also went around the forest so that some ideas can be gained. And we saw many old kinds of tree still there in the forest. But small twigs and other small tress are being cut. And then again, they asked me the question, so your users, your people are so clever. The growing tree are cut, but the old and drying trees are still there. And I said again look at your policies. If they cut those old trees, dying trees, they will have to use the axes, it makes noise. But if they cut the small trees and twigs, they can cut by using the khukuri easily and they don't make noise. If they make noise then your forester will come and prosecute them, so what is wrong with it? You look at the policies, difficulties created by the policies and then decide. So that was the kind of the discussion I used to challenge them. Somehow, we spent about two weeks going to each household and talking about and trying to implement our guidelines. Guideline had to be changed. In the guideline initially, there was no interest group. But later on, we realized that the interest group is needed. Specially to bring to the consensus because if we don't utilize all the needs and interest of the users then they will again destroy the forest. So, for that reason they had to come to a consensus.

So, the idea of consensus also came after that. So, somehow two documents, it was realized that two documents were needed. One document was how to manage the forest, so we came to address it as the operational management of the forest. And then there is a structure to oversee that operation. So that became the charter of the users group. There were 59 households. All the 59 households said we would like to be in the board. Because we believed in consensus and the participant of the users. If the users think that all the 59 want to be in the executive committee, then why should we disturb it. Somehow, Dr. Gilmour knows what was the story after that. So, we developed the process and concept with Nepal-Australia forestry project. Then to further the process and the concept we needed to communicate with the people. So that opportunity was given to me by the IHDP, Gen Grono. She came to me one day, you know IHDP hired her as a consultant to develop the extension materials for the community forest.

She had brought extension methods developed by the community forestry division, and she showed me all. It was all about how the forest are being cut down. What is the repercussion of cutting down and all these things, and how to develop the forest. Then I asked, do you think that the people don't know about this? She said, probably they know. So why are you telling them about these things? She said but it was developed by the government so I don't know. So why are you telling them, it's better if you find it from them on what is happening, what their problems are? and what are they facing now

because of what is happening? You can learn from them but also find out what they don't know. Do you know what they don't know? She said, probably I don't know. And I said probably they don't know about the policies and procedure and all those things, government policies but let's not assume, let's have another kind of workshop with the forestry officials, ranger, and everybody, because I never wanted to work myself, because I am not a forester. I don't know.

*[Hemant Ojha]: Kaji dai could you just wrap up in the next couple of minutes. We also wanted to hear your engagement around FECOFUN, Civil society as well that part in the next decades perhaps.*

Ok, I'm almost finished. So, they had three different workshops and developed the extension materials which for the community forestry process was a car riding. Do you know, that is still being used as an extension material? Ok, it has all the process which we had outlined in the Australian project. But there are three owners of the forest, one is the government, in that time another was the Panchyat, third owner was the users. If all these three owners don't come together and come to consensus there is no possibility of managing the forest. So, we felt there was a need for re-orienting the forest officials. So, then we started three days orientations, it didn't work. Then we had seven days, and we had 15 days. At the last minute, we had 42 days of orientations. That orientation was not for the forest officials, because we came to realize forest officials had limitations, and there is a lot of forests to be managed, a lot of forest to be developed. So, we started training the local facilitators to actually facilitate the process of community forest, which took 42 days. Probably, Hemant jee was also involved. Later on, we developed the same process in Terai where we said handover is not possible from the forest official, so we should start the takeover. So, we also initiated the process of takeover, that's how community forest moved on. And actually, there was Nepal-Australia project for the process development. IHDP, SWISS for the extension material development and then three of the British projects for the re-orientation, networking and others things.

Should I move to the next question?

*[Hemant Ojha]: Just couple of minutes, after 1993 lets listen to your engagement towards civil society specially FECOFUN, HEWAMANTI, those areas very quickly so that participants can ask questions in the discussion.*

I think Dr. Gilmour did the higher-level kind of things but that was after the Master Plan was approved, there was a process to actually develop the legislation, and I don't remember the names of some Australians. And he started framing legislation and he used to send all those, he had developed to further comment to the projects and we used to provide the comment or feedbacks but somehow that process stopped. Then in 1993, I stopped working with the community forestry project in 1991. Then started working with the NGOs and 1993 we heard that the Forest Act is being framed but we were not allowed to actually participate. Somehow with some influence of the forest minister I was allowed to go inside and I had to fight a lot to make that Forestry Act user oriented. Somehow the Forestry Act came out as the users oriented.

In 1995 legislation was being framed, but we were not allowed. No civil society, no users group, nobody was allowed. Somehow it came out but we put some pressure from outside. Anyhow, you know I started feeling that we will not be allowed to participate in the government process and it's all right because we are not users. So, they had the rights to question why do you advocate because you are not a user.

We knew that. So that's why the process of networking with the users started. In 1995, FECOFUN was established so that that they can advocate for themselves and rights of the users. But somehow others, women users started raising issues that our voices are not heard. So that's why they started to raise the voices of women users. Now FECOFUN says that, you know, we have 50% of women in our committee but no they had said during that time that there are no women actually to represent the users. Being a member, I had to say that how many women you want, we will bring. So that's how that 50% was started.

You know then HIWAMANTI also started but later on actually community forestry movement went so fast. There was no possibility of just by the forestry officials to actually fulfill those demands. So that's why we started training the outsiders as facilitator to facilitate the community forestry process. That's why this COFSUN started. Community Forestry Supporter's Network, so that they can lobby for themselves. They can push forward the ideas. Hemant jee was also involved, we also had the Terai Community forestry Action team where we developed a lot of facilitators so that they can push the community forestry process in the Terai. But forest officials didn't buzz, even they went to the court. That's why we started the process of taking over not handing over. Ok..,

### Hemant Ojha:

Thank you so much Kaji dai. Yes, very interesting and inspiring story. I am sure our participants will pick up or comment and for the question. So, we don't have much time. This is I think now the end of our four speaker's first round of presentation. All very inspiring, very diverse, covering all those from 1970s to of course 2000. We have not yet entered the contemporary discussion. That was of course not the purpose. The purpose was to hear the stories and reflections of early pioneers, advocates. So, with this I would now like to invite Naya jee, to moderate the discussion based on the comments we have received from the chat. Keeping our time limit in mind as well. Over to you Naya jee.

### Naya Sharma Paudel:

Thank you Hemant jee and thank you all four speakers for your insightful sharing of your long experience in a very short time. And initially we had plan for one and half hours, but we passed that and I request all of you to go for another 30 minutes or slightly less. So that you know we can finish in next 25 plus minutes and as we said earlier, we don't have time to interact bilaterally with all speakers so some of the question there are already in there in the chat box and others are continuing.

So, just trying to bring some of the question, may be not all, and as Hemant was saying earlier, the primary purpose of this talk is not to debate on these contemporary issues around community forestry right now but to learn based from our history, from our explores, from our inventors, which can be useful. For the current situation and also for shaping the future of community forestry. And I can see some of the questions from the chat box.

For example; The idea of crisis or the rationalization of the restoration. So, how that crisis came into a public discourse or who brought that? And how did that help to actually mobilise communities and state agencies. So, probably Stephan, you would like to shed some lights on the regional context and that was helpful or encouraging people to find some alternative way?

## Stephen Midgley

Thanks Naya. It was very important that these things cannot happen without money and it was important for us to wait just people might offer support to CF which at that time was really an unproven quantity, people did not know about that and they did not understand how good it was. I was just reflecting on Dr. Shrestha's comment about being an outsider from the forestry community coming in to comment on CF and I recalled the impact that the team from New Era, I don't know if anyone remembers New Era but that was a small consulting company in those days in 1980s and made a very interesting report on community approaches towards forestry. It was a first time when people actually gone out and spoke to people about forest and ask them about what they wanted from forest. That was in 1980, and at that time, it was considered little bit revolutionary and some people even questioned whether or not it was wise spending money but I can tell you that New Era survey in 1980 did a lot to change the perception. And those perceptions went wider than Nepal. We received many questions throughout the projects, asking us about the Community Forestry business, what mistakes you were making (*laughs*).

*[Naya Sharma Paudel]: And there are also some questions around like you know even we are facing state-community kind of conflict (these days and certainly that was much more then when you know during the 1970s-1980s and so even those difficult tensions between state and community people and several of you talked about lack of trust or almost no trust or little trust and so in those difficult times and one of the challenges was how to bring these different in the way of contesting actor together. And who would like to respond here, someone else apart of Stephen.*

## Narayan Kaji Shrestha:

As I said there are three types of owners in the forest, somehow forest department or ministry has snatched the forest from the communities. So, they have become the owner. But originally people were the users, the owners, and somehow, we introduced another layer which is the local government. There are three owners right now. If the three owners don't come together and come to consensus then the community forestry wouldn't work. So, we make it clear that we can't handover the forest. Government official would have to handover the forest. So would government officials, ranger, DFOs would have to come together. So, we started the re-orientation. But we thought the local government will be with the communities because they are the voters of the local government. But one way or the other, that didn't happen. Because my thesis is of the three owners whichever two owners are together, they will manage the forest. So, users have become outliers for now. In fact, the users are losing interest in community forestry management which will have a detrimental effect in the community forestry of Nepal. Until now they have not started but it would have detrimental effect if the local government and the government, forest department and forest ministry don't realize it.

*[Naya Sharma Paudel]: May be, Tej Bahadur Mahat sir, I would like to come back to you once very shortly on the question around the lack of trust, or little trust between state agencies and local communities. Maybe some of your thoughts or some of your everyday experience in those days, how did you tackle with those situations then.*

### Tej Bahadur Mahat:

Thank you very much. Before, I go to Dr Narayan Kaji' queries, questions and observation and presentation. I would like to give an observation and that makes me think time and again, when more than once said that the community owned the forest, owning the forest that's what he said but I would say that not only reservation that would not be a correct statement because the forest is still owned by the government, it is the state that owns the forest of Nepal. And communities we have more than 22000 community users', local communities involved in managing Nepal's forest, they are managing Nepal's forest, the user's rights and they have managed it. They have got whatever you call it work plan and alike, and they use the product. They are authorized to use the products but they are not given the ownership, that is a too far expectation. I want to make you clear that the community have not been given ownership of the forest of Nepal but they have given user's right, managing them, using them and benefiting from them. This is what I think, I would like to make that correction on Dr Narayan Kaji Shrestha. Thank You.

*[Naya Sharma Paudel]: We are approaching around 11:43 now. So, we don't have much time. So, 1 or 2 minute maximum. So, one of the common interests seems to be your observation in contemporary community forestry in Nepal and any lesson from your past from those days to the current situation. May be for half a minute, anyone can say. So, Mahat sir do you have any point here?*

### Tej Bahadur Mahat:

As far as community forestry is concerned, I was involved only in those days in Nepal. I was talking in the field about the forest and soil and forest and climate etc. After that I have all my association which has been more on what you call papers and I have been in academic sides or research side, that sorts of things. But both on desk and in forest. So, I would not be able to tell you exactly for this forest. The ownership what I can say that the earliest thing that we presented and that we started with that the basic tenants still remains that the forest is still owned by the state. The government, the state is the owner of it and the local communities are managing them with the user's rights. They used it and what we call perhaps in forestry is MAC whatever we call it. We get additional products they can use it, but they don't have the rights or they are not the owners of it. Still the state or the government remains the owner of the forest and not the community. They are the users and managers.

### Response by Stephen

Thanks Naya. I would like to remind everyone that this is an evolutionary process. I see on the comments that people were saying how old-fashioned it was back in the old days. Of course, it was old-fashioned but community's thoughts and principles evolved. And we are on an evolutionary process. So, a lot of those people who did all those wonderful things forty years ago, were trained in classical forestry but they made a change. So, I don't think it's necessary to blame what happened in the past. We were evolving.

Thanks!

## Don Gilmore

Thanks, Nayaji. I think there are particular challenges at the moment. The contemporary situation in Nepal in CF, I think the challenges which are really quite new. From the outsider observation perspective, I don't see that CF has moved much in the last 30 years in terms of it's over all modality and its approach. But the social-political, demographic political, administrative situation changed dramatically over last decade. I don't think CF has adapted adequately to meet the current context. The context is important as I have also stated in first part of it in the former presentation. It is a new context now and I think the challenge is to look at what happened in the past and why did it happen. Why we were able to do pretty good things in a very constraining administrative policy environment and can we adapt those approaches in the contemporary situation with the new challenges. I have debated for some time with colleagues that we really need to rethink the modality for CF. And the modality we have now is the modality that evolved in late 1980s which was implemented in 1990s. Is that modality relevant to the current situation? I am not sure that it is. So, really, we need to learn from the past and action research and appropriate approach to explore. It's still relevant but the challenges are new and different as Steve said CF is evolving or should evolve. I don't think it evolved much for last 20 years but the context has changed dramatically. So, I think we need perhaps indeed talk about CF to fit in for the current era.

Thank You!

*[Naya Sarma Paudel]: Kaji dai do you have any last point.*

## Narayan Kaji Shrestha:

Yes, I agree with Dr Don Gilmore. Because the context has changed, according to that, things, processes have to change, I agree with that. But I still have different of perception between Dr. Mahat and myself. Dr. Mahat thinks that the government came early I don't think that. People and forest were earlier than the government. So, the owner of the forest were the people not the government. And also, now in the context of Nepal, people are sovereign. People can make the decisions. Government can be made by people so we have to change our mentality.

Also, I like to highlight two sentences here. I was in the community. I saw a truck going from nearby, full of the forestry product and I am talking with the small lady nearby and the small lady says look at the community forest. Contractors and foresters, they are cutting all our trees and taking away somewhere. My small goats can't go inside the forest. I am prosecuted. Sometime ago, I went to Rahautat, and community forestry chief came to me and said you invited us to manage the community forest. But we are not given any rights to use the forest because they had made so many issues in the operation plan all these things... Now I am actually ready to handover the forest to the government. That is the situation. Please look at this situation and I am pleading for the consensus of everybody, not one person imposing rules to the others. Let's be democratic, let's be participatory. Let's be consensus oriented. That's my argument.

Thank you!

*[Naya Sharma Paudel]: Thanks' to all four speakers and we are not able to actually revisit all the questions and queries unfortunately but many of the responses are ongoing in the chat itself. So, I am going towards the end and now invite observer with few reflections, first Dr. Sirjana Baral, forest expert, and you have three to five minutes.*

### **Srijana Baral:**

Thank you, Naya sir, for this opportunity. It's very nice and I am very proud and very overwhelmed to hear pioneers of community forestry and sharing about the past days initially while they were starting the conservation models, different participatory conservation model in the context. It's very nice and very interesting and a very proud moment, that I feel personally. And I also think many of us, the second-generation foresters, feel about today's events it's a very fruitful program to all of us. And it's a matter of pride that we have demonstrated a different participatory conversation model to the world that participation is key to conservation and key to success to the conservation. And those were very overwhelming initial good days. This story that I heard today from all of the four speakers on the initial days the stories to the struggle first to conserve because people were blamed for not conserving and the stories of achievements of the different institutional changes that occurred from the command and control to the partnership approaches. Those were the interesting stories that we heard.

And how Dr. TBS Mahat demonstrated the forest without expenses is possible that the people the local communities, they are not the enemies of the forest. They are not the enemies of conservation that was what was realized. And eventually introducing the social components into the technical domain, but mainly the social and technical domain what I heard from Narayan Kaji Shrestha were very interesting paradigm today. And Dr. Don Gilmour, I am always with you and it is very nice to hear. As you have highlighted in the second part of your conversation that the situation is changing. There were so many good things that happened, there was so many good things that would have realized but also there is a need to realize that there are different sets of grey not black and white. And we need to adopt to those changes and based on my studies and my research in a last almost a decade, I had come to realize that community forest is like it's not been able to change itself with the changing social context. The society is changing, there is a changing relationship and linkages. There is a need to shift between a conservation era to conservation cum utilization and then economic era. We need to benefit from what we are doing.

Once I went to the field then I heard that there are generations who are participating in conservation of the forest but then what benefits these communities have got? It's time that we need to reap, we need to harvest what we have planted, we need to reap our efforts in conservation. And it's 40 years, we are talking about 40 years of conservation. And it's time we reap the benefits. We give the benefits to the people and we praise the people for their contributions to conservations. So, I think like greening Nepal was not the only objective of community forest. Conserving forest resources was not only the objectives. It has to change; it has to be dynamic and it is an evolutionary process as Stephen said. So, we need to evolve the rationale for what we are bringing in community forestry. It's time for that and we need to ask ourselves. We need to rethink and reframe on our approaches to community forestry. We are the pioneer and we need to prove it again and again that we are still at the top of the conservation model. So, let's think, let's rethink from the participation itself. Because participation cannot always be a voluntary process. There needs to be some opportunities that forest conservation

will provide to them. There is always a question what have we achieved? And let's get together to achieve, get something, let's get the economic benefits from the forest. So, there are several observations that we can see in the field. For example, it's very difficult to get timber out of the forest in the current situation. They are having struggling to get the timber out of the forest. We have been struggling to get the real participation of the people because there is nothing that they are getting.

Like, we just heard from Narayan Kaji Sir that people are even ready to return back the community forest back to the government. So, it's time to think. It's time to think and rethink that we need to have a better conservation model, we need to think differently on the participation and the benefits sharing mechanism. We need to think in different ways and terms how to engage women in conservation. And how to engage them in the benefits sharing and in the timber business as well. So, I think there are several ambiguities that are coming up in the current situations especially focusing on reaping the benefits, the benefits of conservation and getting the timber out of the forest. There are several cumbersome processes and tax provisions that different tiers of government is imposing in the community forest.

So, I think we need to rethink all of these. There should be some way forward on how communities should be engaged, and how they should be getting benefits, for their conservation efforts for this long four decades period. And that's all.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

*[Naya Sharma Paudel]: Thank you Dr. Srijana. Now I will invite Dr. Sindhu Dhungana, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Forest and Environment, also a scholar on community forestry. But also, an advocate from within. Sindhu sir...*

### Sindu Dhungana:

Thank you Naya sir!

Actually, this is a very important webinar we have organized. Just in five minutes what I can say is all the four panelist or speakers actually tried to distinguish community forestry from other forms of forestry. And to me it was one of the key point, that all of them highlighted, was the people actually. People are community, so that makes community forestry different from another forms of forestry or traditional forms of forestry. For that, people you know... [inaudible]

*[Naya Sharma: Sindhu sir your internet is not....]*

..... As Gilmour said they have to use in data, you know its unfortunate power is us at the moment... that was very interesting. ... you hear me now?

*Naya replying, yes we can go ahead... ]*

And Dr. Don Gilmour said they have to move from forest centric to people centric. And finally, Dr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha said instead of learning from the department, we asked the extension of the department and try to implement and try to make the extension work in the village. He rightly asked her to learn from the people and make the extension work. So, that way all of them, they distinguished community forestry from other forms of forestry keeping the people in mind. The people first. As Dr. Narayan Kaji also said instead of talking about handing over forest, we need to move from handing over forest to taking over forest by the people. So, [... 1:53:23 inaudible]

Having said that, probably this webinar from what people tried to, you know, how they worked in the beginning of the community forestry, had they not initiated the things they told today probably we would not have community forestry at this stage. So, community forestry has come a long way, now we are about to 39-40% forest under community forestry regime. You know about 23000 groups are working together. And having said that I would like to raise few points today.

First, when we talk about community forestry obviously, you know which was also raised by Dr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha. You know control to community autonomy through a number of initiatives. I mean because there are different perspectives... [1:54:42 inaudible]

So, initiatives in the name of conservation narratives or technical inputs, or development needs or recently the federalization process. The province is also claiming over community forest. The local governments are also claiming over community forest. We foresters are also claiming community forest in the name of technical inputs. So, that way you know the control has still strengthened. So, there is time to debate around how the autonomy of CF would be strengthened.

The second one is, there is overall indifference of local people to forest management at the moment. Probably because their needs are not met or their needs have been changed. For example, most people do not use firewood, most people do not use fodder, some people might be using fodder. So, the needs of the people have shifted and the people seems little bit indifferent. I don't know probably we should go back to the people. Instead of talking to ourselves, we can ask people why they have been in different. Some people are more active, for example, contractors and you know people who benefit more from forest.

And another point I should raise now is the issues of indigenous people and local communities emerging at the moment in community forest. As Dr. Kaji said a girl said she cannot have fodder from the forest. She cannot graze her goats but timbers are coming. So, that's the need of the local communities. And also, the indigenous people are raising voices. For example, they are not been able to graze their yaks or cattle and all those things and some traditional skills and knowledge being vanished. That is also a case at the moment.

And also, the global phenomenon's such as climate change, markets also impact on CF. We should also be considering those important points.

And obviously as we said the community forestry is the only program that has 50% women leadership in community forestry user group, at the moment unlike in the very early stage. But we still need to capacitate the people, I mean women. The de-facto leadership of women is needed.

And finally, I would like to reconcile between Prof. Mahat and Dr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha that you know who owns the forest is a big issue. So, probably we need to think beyond the box. Outside the box thinking while not to debate about who should be owning the forest. Rather than you know just fixing that it is owned by the people or it is owned by the government. Probably that debate needs to be put, both the perspective needs to be debated. So that you know the community forestry, the center of the people has more rights and forest benefits and the governance is improved. Those things are the main points instead of you know claiming who owns the forest. I think we should move little bit away from that debate to instead of claiming this authority owns the forest. So probably who should own the forest would be a new debate.

Thank you very much!

*[Naya Sharma Paudel]: Thank you, Sindhu sir and Srijana Madam. Now we have already crossed 12:00, so its 2 plus hours. I would like to go towards the closing of the webinar. And now I will invite Dr. Ian... Associate Professor at the University of Adelaide. Also, the leader of our EnLiFT2 project here in Nepal. So Ian, you may like to thank all the speakers and others and close the meetings with some of your reflections of the webinar.*

## **Ian Nuberg**

Thank you very much for the opportunity and setting of this webinar. It's a wonderful format of communication. I mean its plenty being written and it's too ... about written the history of community forestry in Nepal. That I get the opportunity to meet some of the people who were instrumental in its history is a great privilege. And I am so happy to see so many people turned up to this webinar. And of course, we will put it on to our websites.

So, it's not really for me to wax on about the importance of the Himalayan Forest. Not just for the local people, people who live in the forest. They are also you know for the prosperity of Nepal and also for the livelihood of all the people who are living in the watershed of the Himalayan. Forest, this is a very important issue. And it will remind me a very important issue for a long period of time. And that why it's really important that people if you come to work in this field, of course Nepalese but all of the internationals, have a thorough understanding of the history, sort of the situation we have known. When I first came into work on this project in 2012 for that workshop in Kathmandu and later on project started in 2013. I must confess as a biophysical scientist; I was at first confused and then bewildered and then disparted at the complexity of the situation. And if it wasn't for the patience, intelligence and the good will of people like Naya and Hemant. They have taught me to understand this very complex socio-ecological and political system, then I probably wouldn't have been here. I wouldn't have lasted for that project. I witness the important take away from all of this is that, ok it is complex and it's not just an ecological system. It's not just a socio-ecological system. It's a political system. And we can say the fact that even in this webinar we had political discourse going on and lively debate which is good. And so should be. So just to round it off I really want to thank our speakers, TBS Mahat, Narayan Kaji Shrestha...; Sindhu Dhungana...; for your reflections as well.

It's a great honor to be part of this. I started this project with play out of the confusions but now I am just fascinated by how this is evolving. And also have a great respect of people who works in forestry in Nepal. Not only for their patience and intellect but also a capacity to be able to work in the uncertainty and complexity of this situation and work with good will. From the people in advocacy, from the people in research, from the people in government and from the last not the least people in the field in community forest. So, it's a field of crucial work not just for Nepal but for region. And I thank you all for attending and for those who are listening to this webinar later on. I encourage you to may be contact ForestAction for further information on what literature we have which might help you grow in your understanding of this complex situation.

So, with that I would like to close. Or Naya unless you have the closing words...

Naya: You are the closing...

**[Audio ends at: 2:05:18]**

