

NEPAL

The purpose of natural resource management in Nepal is to conserve land, forest, and water resources to maintain the ecological functions of these resources while intensifying agricultural and forestry production. Since 1980, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Nepal has invested approximately \$77 million in seven projects designed to address natural resource management issues, particularly in the hilly regions of Nepal where most poor farmers live. The projects support farm-level research and extension activities as well as institution-building and training programs. Multidonor Collaboration To Generate Host Country Support A central question likely to influence long-term efforts to reverse resource depletion is how host country governments can be encouraged to address policy and related institution-building issues that affect the natural resource base. USAID/Nepal found that when it acted alone, its efforts to influence policy decisions were ineffective. However, primarily through its long-term investments in the Rapti and RCU projects, and several years of collaboration with other donors in sponsoring the formulation of Nepal's Forestry Masterplan, the Mission was able to raise policy issues and advocate policy changes favoring local management and private enterprise in the forestry sector. To encourage the Government of Nepal to effect such changes, the Mission is contributing to a multidonor project to strengthen the Government's institutional capacity to implement the Forestry Masterplan.

Starting a Natural Resource Management Program:

The Rapti and RCU projects showed that when a large-scale project involves technologies that far exceed the host country's capabilities, its implementation can quickly turn into a management nightmare. More important, both projects demonstrated that technically sophisticated solutions are not always required. Rather, it is possible, and in some cases advisable, to initiate support for resource conservation activities by integrating research and extension activities into existing agricultural and rural development projects. Such activities could concentrate on developing low-cost, simple technologies that can be undertaken and sustained by farmers individually or on a communal basis to improve livestock management, replant forests, and curb soil erosion on hill slopes and in catchment areas. Equally important, to gain the support of farmers, such activities should increase production of livestock and tree products without compromising food crop production.

Devolving Forestry Management to Local Communities:

A key lesson from the Government of Nepal's decade-long program to devolve management of forestry resources to local authorities is that the process should not stop at the level of local government authorities. Rather, when planning reforestation activities, including the subsequent harvest and upkeep of restored forests, affected communities should be actively involved and their interests taken into account. The Government of Nepal is taking an important step in this direction by introducing legislation and economic incentives to encourage the formation of farmer groups with legal rights to restore and maintain public forests. A.I.D. and other donors are helping in this process by providing technical assistance to set up the legal and institutional framework for the formation of farmer groups that will undertake reforestation activities.

Abbreviations:

A.I.D. - U.S. Agency for International Development

Rapti - Rapti Area Development project

RCU - Resource Conservation and Utilization project