

SAWTEE

IYM 2002 SPECIAL ISSUE

A NEWSLETTER OF SOUTH ASIA WATCH ON TRADE, ECONOMICS & ENVIRONMENT

Reach beyond IYM 2002

The governments, NGOs and other UN organisations must not end their efforts towards mountain areas and communities after they celebrate IYM 2002.

Around 135 countries have mountains and hills. They cover about one-fifth of the earth, are a direct life-support base for about one-tenth of the world's population (five billion), and provide goods and services to over half the world's population. They are globally important as water towers of the earth, repositories of rich biological diversity, target areas for recreation, and as a hub of cultural integrity and heritage.

Mountains are fragile ecosystems. Owing to very fragile environments, they are subject to adverse and harsh climatic conditions (excessive rainfall, relatively low temperatures, aridity, high solar radiation), natural disasters (avalanches, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions), and poor and shallow soils prone to erosion because of steep slopes. Soil formation and vegetative growth are very slow in colder temperatures. Once damage to mountain soil or vegetation occurs, it may be irreversible, or reversible only over a very long period of time.

Besides these, since the mountain areas and communities, due to their specific conditions, are seriously handicapped in terms of capacities and preparedness to effectively participate in and fully benefit from the changing processes of liberalisation, globalisation and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the threats to them have been further buttressed. While open economies under these policies have brought new opportunities to spur economic growth and development in the world economy, they are not without negative aspects and undoubtedly pose serious threats to mountain areas and communities.

Not that the priority has not been given to resolve these problems. After the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, in 1992, gave a birth to the concept of International Year of Mountains (IYM) in its Agenda 21 (Chapter 13 entitled "Managing Fragile Ecosystems - Sustainable Mountain Development"), mountain communities and ecosystems gained importance in the global arena. In November 1998, the UN General Assembly declared 2002 as the IYM to draw the attention of the world leaders to the mountains, their importance and their problems. It provided a unique platform to reinforce the long-term process started at the UNCED in Brazil of

raising public awareness and ensuring adequate political, institutional and financial commitment to concrete action for sustainable mountain development. The process is expected to reach well beyond 2002, aiming primarily at helping poor and marginalised people living in mountain areas, drawing attention to their cultural heritage, and helping to conserve or foster the sustainable use of natural resources found in mountain areas. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has been assigned to play the lead agency role, in collaboration with governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other UN organisations. Since then different efforts from these organisations as well as other organisations in the world have been initiated.

Like others, SAWTEE itself has also been carrying out mountain specific programmes. The organisation has been implementing a Regional Programme to Secure Farmers' Rights to Livelihoods in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) Region in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal (*See the details on Page: 3*).

Similarly, the organisation recently organised four workshops (two in India and two in Nepal) with the objectives of celebrating the IYM 2002 in general and gaining better understanding of key issues related to mountain farming communities in particular (*See the details on Page: 2*).

The organisation feels that grave concerns and misgivings are present in relation to ecological impact, unregulated use and piracy of the rich biological diversity, indigenous knowledge and traditional practices of the mountain communities. The governments, NGOs and other UN organisations must not end their efforts after they celebrate IYM 2002. They should ceaselessly work for the upliftment of the mountain areas and communities. The forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa is one of the platforms where they can do a lot.

INSIDE

Need to define farmers' rights	02
Farmers' rights in the HKH region	03
SAWTEE, Secretariat for NAFOS	04

SAWTEE

Post Box No. 19366
Block No. 254, Sahayog Marg
Anamnagar, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 977-1-229759
Fax: 977-1-240491
E-mail: hqsawtee@wlink.com.np

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Need to define farmers' rights



SAWTEE organised four workshops, two in India and two in Nepal, in cooperation with its two network members - Consumer Unity & Trust Society, Calcutta (CUTSCAL), India and Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public), Nepal - under a project entitled: "Organisation of Workshops on Farmers' Rights in India and Nepal". The project is a part of the International Year of Mountains (IYM) 2002 activities that SAWTEE is conducting with the financial support from International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

The overall objectives of the workshops were to gain better understanding of key issues related to farmers' rights in the changing context of liberalisation, globalisation and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), establish contact with a diversity of institutions working in mountain areas, assess the level of awareness among farmers about their rights, and identify individuals/organisations who could form close partnership with SAWTEE in its effort to secure farmers' rights to livelihoods in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) region. The workshops were conducted in the national languages.

WORKSHOPS IN INDIA

During both the workshops in India entitled "The Farmers' Rights and Mountain Communities: Where We Stand?", participants realised the need of proper domestic policy measures to make the globalisation process less painful for mountain region and communities. Some of the recommendations made during the workshops are:

- Developmental policies in mountain region should not involve displacement of traditional habitats and should include conservation of regional bio resources.
- There is a need to fight for modifications in the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS). Documentation, monitoring and conservation of local biodiversity and indigenous knowledge must be given due priority while formulating national policies.
- Creating People Biodiversity Registrar (PBR) for maintaining a database of biodiversity and traditional knowledge is an imperative. The process should be initiated regionally by involving local young generation, farmers and Gram Panchayat offering them some training and orientation programmes at initial stage.
- Strong networking among non-governmental

organisations (NGOs), research institutions/other institutions and farmer bodies to create better upward and downward linkages should be encouraged. More participation from women must be ensured.

The farmers, concerned government authorities, regional NGOs working with local communities, scientists, journalists and academicians from Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur participated in these workshops. The first workshop was organised in Deharadun on 22-23 March 2002 and the second was in Shillong on 9-10 April 2002. Two local partners, namely Deharadun-based Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK) and Shillong-based Bosco Reach Out (BRO) were involved for the first and second workshops respectively.

WORKSHOPS IN NEPAL

Both the workshops in Nepal entitled "Economic Liberalisation, Farmers' Rights and Mountain Development Strategies" highlighted that the government policies are not targeted towards mountain farming communities. "Lack of knowledge of markets, lack of technology, inadequate accessibility, large presence of middlemen and above all lack of appropriate skills are some of the constraints that are making them handicapped in terms of capacities and preparedness to effectively participate in and fully benefit from the changing processes of liberalisation and globalisation. And the situation is going to be more severe after the country becomes the member of the WTO," opined the participants during the workshops. Some of the recommendations made are:

- There is a need to define farmers' rights and protect them through a separate Act, granting the farming community the rights to save, exchange and sell seeds.
- Comprehensive national policies for identification, registration, documentation, conservation and utilisation of bio-diversity, indigenous knowledge and traditional skills must be formulated.
- A comprehensive Act for registration of genetic resources and benefit sharing must be enacted.
- The existing industrial policies must be revised and clear-cut incentive packages for cooperatives and private investors to increase investments on agro-processing industries and marketing should be provided.
- Appropriate policies and programmes to raise the level of public awareness regarding the potential negative impacts of terminator seeds in agriculture should be designed and implemented.
- Mountain development strategies in the upcoming Tenth Five-Year Plan must be ensured.

Participated by farmers, concerned government authorities, academicians, researchers, NGOs, INGOs and media, the first workshop was held in Pokhara on 18-19 April 2002 and the second was held on 4-5 May 2002 in Dhulikhel. While the participants from Far-western, Mid-western and Western regions were invited to Pokhara, the participants from Central and Eastern regions were invited to Dhulikhel.

Farmers' rights in the HKH region

Since April 2001, SAWTEE has been implementing a three-year "Regional Programme to Secure Farmers' Rights to Livelihoods in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) Region" in five South Asian countries - Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal through its five network members in respective countries. The broad goal of the programme is to make strategic interventions, which will contribute to securing farmers' rights to livelihoods in the HKH region in the changing context of liberalisation, globalisation and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In the first year's diagnostic and research and development phase, the network members have selected the sites as the focus areas for their studies and researches in their countries.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Bangladesh has selected the Khagrachhari Hill District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as the project site. The initial field visits and establishment of contact with national think tanks, local leaders, agencies have already been undertaken. Three volunteers, all selected from the local area, are conducting the survey for collecting necessary information from the field to fill up the questionnaire (a 14 page Bengali questionnaire with 30 questions) developed for the preparation of the inventory. The survey is being conducted in three villages namely, Kabari, Kukichhara and Kumar Dhanpara of Khagrachhari Hill District. Some documents on history of the locality and on indigenous products, knowledge, technology and other related matters of the mountain communities have also been collected. The survey is focused on the biological resources, indigenous knowledge and technology and is expected to be completed by June 2002.

Consumer Unity & Trust Society, Calcutta (CUTSCAL), India has selected three sites - Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya in Eastern Himalaya and Uttaranchal in Central Himalaya for the project study. CUTSCAL conducted stakeholders' analysis and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) study in order to finalise the research topic. A preliminary database has already been developed with the information collected from the sites such as list of resource persons/pressure groups who are involved in the region, list of flora (agro biodiversity, crop bio diversity, orchid, medicinal plants etc, and identification of niche agricultural products of Eastern and Central Himalaya region. The research is expected to be completed by June 2002.

Sustainable Development Policy institute (SDPI), Pakistan has selected Gilgit and Sakardu as the focus areas for project intervention. The research is looking into possible impact of trade

liberalisation as well as the specific Agreements of the WTO such as Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) on life and livelihood of the mountain communities, with particular focus on farming communities.

Law and Trust Society (LST), Sri Lanka has selected villages around the Peak Wilderness and the Knuckles range as the sites for the project study. In the process of selecting the sites, literature survey was conducted with specific attention to gathering information required for site selection. Similarly, Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public), Nepal has been conducting a research entitled "Study on the Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Practices of Farmers in the Hills of Nepal". The research encompasses four districts of the hills - Panchthar, Kavre, Lamjung and Dandeldhura - respectively from Eastern, Central, Western and Far-western regions of the country. Pro Public has involved four Master Level Sociology/Anthropology students from Tri-chandra Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University to conduct the research in the sites of the districts. The study team has already visited the research sites of all four districts and site profiles are under preparation.

The Programme has been partially supported by the Ford Foundation.

SAWTEE has recently published three policy briefs for Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. The briefs are purposively designed and published to create a dialogue at the policy level in the respective countries

Policy briefs for Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal

SAWTEE has recently published three policy briefs for Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. The briefs are purposively designed and published to create a dialogue at the policy level in the respective countries. The briefs indicate the problems and constraints that the mountain communities, especially farmers, are facing in the changing context of liberalisation of economic activities, globalisation of the production and finance systems and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and ultimately provide policy recommendations to tackle the same. The brief for India is under preparation and will be soon published.

The briefs entitled: "Mountain Issues and Communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh", "WTO Agreements and Farmers' Rights in Mountain Areas of Pakistan" and "Farmers' Rights and Mountain Communities in Nepal" have been prepared by Mr. Mahafuz Ullah, Secretary General at Center for Sustainable Development (CSD) and Chair of the IUCN National Committee, Bangladesh; Mr. Shafqat Munir, President at Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR), Pakistan; and Dr. Hiramani Ghimire, Chief Advisor to Management Research and Training Academy, Nepal respectively.

SAWTEE would like to acknowledge the valuable inputs and comments from our partners at ICIMOD for these publications' initial concept and the last outcome.

OUR PUBLICATIONS

DISCUSSION PAPERS

- Anti Competitive Practices in Nepal.
- Agricultural Liberalisation and Its Impact on South Asia.
- Domestically Prohibited Goods, Trade in Toxic Waste and Technology Transfer: Issues and Developments.
- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures in SAARC Countries.

MONOGRAPHS

- Globalisation: South Asian Perspective.
- Integrating LDCs into the Multilateral Trading System: Rhetoric Galore.

BOOK

- Food Security in the Global Age: South Asian Dilemma.

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- Competition Policy in Small Economics.
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- Labor Standards & WTO: A New Form of Protectionism.
- Genetically Modified Organisms: Biosafety and Risk Assessment.
- Agricultural Liberalisation: Boon or Bane?.
- The Challenge of the WTO: Rethinking Strategies

POLICY BRIEFS

- Mountain Issues and Communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.
- WTO Agreements and Farmers' Rights in Mountain Areas of Pakistan.
- Farmers' Rights and Mountain Communities in Nepal.

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SAWTEE, Secretariat for NAFOS

SAWTEE has been assigned to work as a Secretariat for National Alliance for Food Security-Nepal (NAFOS) for the year 2002. The Alliance, on one hand, serves as a platform for raising the food security concerns at the local level and on the other, creates a dialogue at the policy level to overcome the hindrances facing the country in securing the food for its people through networking and capacity building, sensitisation, policy research and advocacy.

After the initiation of ActionAid Nepal in 1999, the Alliance was formed. It had been publishing a quarterly newsletter in Nepali language, specifically to inform, educate and sensitise the people at the grass root level since its establishment. For the year 2002, as a Secretariat for NAFOS, SAWTEE shall publish two six-monthly newsletters under its coordination.

The first newsletter is under preparation and will be published within a couple of days. The newsletter covers a wide range of food security concerns and is expected to be largely distributed throughout the country. SAWTEE shall also publish a special issue for the World Food Day, 16 October under its coordination for the NAFOS. The Alliance has been actively involving in the various programmes related to the World Food Summit.

NAFOS is a network of more than 30 organisations comprising international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other United Nations (UN) agencies including Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)-Nepal.

SAWTEE NETWORK

BANGLADESH

1. Associates for Development Initiatives (ADI), Dhaka
2. Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Dhaka

INDIA

1. Citizen Consumer & Civil Action Group (CAG), Chennai
2. Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), Jaipur
3. Development Research & Action Group (DRAG), New Delhi
4. Federation of Consumer Organisation of Tamilnadu & Pondichery (FEDCOT), Thanjavur

NEPAL

1. Society for Legal & Environmental Analysis & Development Research (LEADERS), Kathmandu
2. Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public), Kathmandu

PAKISTAN

1. Journalists for Democracy & Human Rights (JDHR), Islamabad
2. Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad

SRI LANKA

1. Law & Society Trust (LST), Colombo

SAWTEE

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), a network of social activists and media persons in the South Asia region, was launched in December 1994 by a group of NGOs from South Asia. Its objective is to create capacities in NGOs and media persons to enable citizens to "understand and cope with the processes of transition and equip them with information and the tools of advocacy to provide adequate safety nets for protection of the environment and consumers through enhanced regional and international cooperation." The programme is a part of the Consumer International's global watch on trade and economics. The Organisation also serves on the programme advisory board of Geneva based International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD).

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