

Call to hand over forests to communities for conservation

Himalayan News Service
Kathmandu, November 29

Indigenous people from Rasuwa, Dadeldhura and Jhapa as well as experts today stressed on handing over forests to communities for conserving forests.

They made such comment at a national-level workshop to advocate the rights of indigenous and deprived communities through identifying and managing 'underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation in Nepal' organised by Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) supported by Global Forest Coalition.

ICA, an non-government organisation under ICA International, has been working with 30 other national ICAs globally.

A participants from Jhapa, Ratna Kumal said, "As indigenous people lack education and access to the modern technologies, they are solely dependent on the forest for their livelihood."

He further said that the government should provide facilities of road, electricity and education to make people generate income and preserve forests."

Another participants from Rasuwa, Sanam Chhering Tamang, said: "Various organisations working against deforestation

should pressurise the government to make the plans and policies that does not harm the culture of indigenous people."

According to Tamang, deforestation is rampant in his area where there are around 500 houses and locals cut down the same number of trees to erect *lingo* (Bamboo pole) during their festival every year. He said: "Neither we want to abandon our culture nor degrade environment," adding: "We want the concerned initiate programs that protect both our culture and environment."

Keshav Kandel, Director General at the Department of Forest, said political instability is the main underlying cause for deforestation.

He said: "If one wants to save forest, he should select an honest and loyal political leader".

Kandel said that 30 per cent of the national forest has been handed over to community. There are 14,000 community forest consumers' committees in Nepal.

He said that the idea of protecting forests by communities in Nepal has appreciated around the world.

He added: "We need to aware indigenous people about their rights and responsibilities before handing over forests to them."

Forest conservation measures suggested

By A Staff Reporter

Kathmandu, Dec. 11

The workshop on 'Revealing Underlying Causes of Forestry for Forest Conservation: The Role of Indigenous Communities in Nepal' has recommended 12 resolutions for the immediate attention of the government.

The workshop organised by Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) Nepal recently recommended the government for providing need based and skill oriented training for the economic upliftment of indigenous and ethnic communities.

The resolutions that have been forwarded include giving special care to the culture, skill and tradition of indigenous and local inhabitants since it is also the biological diversity in which they are dependent; and protecting the rights of indigenous and local communities on natural resources such as forest, wildlife, medicinal herbs, land, water resources.

Making education the rights of indigenous communities and guaranteeing up to higher level education for them to protect their rights and increase their access is

the next resolution.

Government should provide compensation to the indigenous communities and local tribes for any loss caused by wildlife such as crop damage, destruction of houses and human loss; guaranteeing the employment of indigenous and local communities as per their education and capacity.

Other recommendations: facilitating indigenous and ethnic communities to get optimum amount for their products and making them able to sell their products; guarantee free alternative energy for indigenous and ethnic communities residing near the forest for the protection and conservation of forest and environment; and the government should arrange facilities for cattle raising and grazing.

The recommendations will be presented to the National Planning Commission, Department of Forestry and other concerned organisations, said Tatwa Prasad Timsina executive director at ICA Nepal.

Timsina said that there were a number of direct and indirect causes of forest degradation in the country. Many of the direct causes are related to expansion of agriculture and cattle raising, forest fire, logging, plantation of exogenous

varieties, conflict and war, he said. However, underlying causes could be deep-rooted social structures resulting inequalities and discrimination against indigenous peoples, subsistence farmers and poor people.

Some of the major problems associated with forest destruction in the country are involvement of some forest officials and the mafia in destruction of forests, impractical operational forest management plan of the government and biodiversity/wildlife, forests and environment, he said.

Majority of the indigenous communities are directly related to forest as they receive their daily subsistence from forest. Because of the encroachment of the forest, their life has severely threatened all over Nepal including in Nepal.

Realising the closed relationship of indigenous communities and forest, Global Forest Coalition (GFC) has initiated revealing and tackling underlying root causes of forest destruction all over the world. GFC is a global network of organisations working in the field of safeguarding the rights of indigenous communities depending on forest.