

Draft Report

Nepal visit by Barry Ostrand and Bharat Adhikari, May/June, 2009

Objectives:

The purpose of the visit was to further assess and develop a joint proposal for an international partnership between Vancouver Island University and the Institute of Forestry (IOF), Pokhara, Nepal. The primary intent was to explore how the four objectives outlined in the signed Memorandum of Agreement between the two schools could develop into projects which could be implemented over the ensuing years. The six areas of collaboration suggested by Dr. Keshab Awasthi (10/10/08 E-mail), provided a foundation to develop and prioritize a needs assessment, the primary goal of the visit. This could then provide a foundation to explore avenues for capacity building for these and other areas of interest. Meetings with IOF faculty, government officials and NGOs were scheduled to move these objectives forward and develop strategies to eventually procure funding for program development and implementation.

Meeting Schedule:

The meetings attended by Mr. Adhikari and myself, and the list of participants is as follows:

May 26: Informal meeting with Dr. Keshab Awasthi, Dean, IOF, Pokhara, and Mr. Bishwva Babu Tiwari, District Forest Officer (DFO), Pokhara Region.

May 27: Formal meeting with IOF faculty and administration.

May 28: Second formal meeting with IOF faculty and administration.

May 30: Informal meeting with the DFO, Chitwan Region.

June 2: Kathmandu, meeting with Dr. Krishna Chandra Paudel, Director General, Department of Forests, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation.

June 4: Dhading, meeting with Rishi Bastakoti, Executive Director, and staff of Resource Identification and Management Society (RIMS), as well as informal talks with local dignitaries and Mr. Bhumi Raman, the "small man with a big mission".

Subsequent to my departure from Nepal, Mr. Adhikari met with the Principal and Academic Coordinator, Kathmandu Forestry College, the Canadian Cooperation Mission, Canadian Consulate, and Dr. Udaya Raj Sharma and Dr. A.N. Das of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (see Bharat's July 2 E-mail).

Needs Assessment:

Although no ranked list of needs resulted, several important recurring priorities emerged during the various meetings. Most, if not all of these priorities could be addressed through the capacity building of the IOF and partners. Indeed, capacity building emerged as a major theme itself.

Following is a list of important perceived needs and some observations:

1. Fire Management and Protection. It is believed that climate change has exacerbated wildfire hazard and risk significantly. Thus fire management is emerging as a national priority. Unfortunately, Nepal is lacking in fire suppression resources, as well as education regarding fire behavior and management, and fire suppression training. Both the IOF and the Department of Forests stressed the need for an enhanced fire management curriculum and training of teachers and community personnel in fire suppression techniques.
2. Biodiversity and non-timber forest products (NTFP). Again, considered in the light of climate change, comprehensive inventory data is required for a better understanding of the extent and impact of forest insect and disease problems. Also needed is a scientific evaluation of forest and soil carbon, possibly for carbon trading credits. Significant economic opportunities could be missed without better information about the extent and distribution of NTFPs, for example, wild ginseng. Better understanding of biodiversity and NTFP was also cited as a national priority.
3. Continuing Education and Extension. Continuing Education for school teachers, community leaders, community forest users, etc. is required to help ensure environmental sustainability. For instance, training of rural school teachers and community leaders in fire suppression techniques could combat the environmental degradation associated with wildfires.
4. University Forest. Many forestry schools throughout the world own or have permanent access to tracts of forest land for purposes of education, training, extension, research and revenue generation. IOF desires such a facility for all these reasons plus for fostering cooperation with the local community forest through such things as an Agroforestry model. A tree nursery for afforestation could also be part of the mix.
5. Capacity building. All the needs which came under discussion can be addressed, at least in part, through capacity building of the IOF or Nepalese NGOs. As well as much needed infrastructure improvements, IOF personnel pointed out the need to enhance and update curriculum. and their own teaching and research capacity. Curriculum upgrading could lead to improved international credit transfer and education. Teaching and research capacity also needs improvement. An incomplete list of needs includes faculty training in computer skills, English skills, GIS training and hardware and software upgrading, audio/visual resources, extension activity involvement. The development of a centre of excellence and faculty exchanges were mentioned

as other means to these ends. Various faculty capacity building programs were also seen as means to leverage funds for needed infrastructure improvements.

Partners:

This list by no means exhausts the needs discussed in Nepal, but should be viewed as a framework that can be used to focus future efforts to establish a program of cooperation between VIU and the IOF. This was the main thrust of the visit to Nepal, but there is no intent to preclude other partners. Indeed, their participation is seen a vital for any partnership.

The Nepal Department of Forests is very supportive of such a program and expressed a desire for the ministry and the research branch to become partners, particularly with regard to any effort to improve wildfire education and suppression training. Other possible partners include RIMS, community forests and the Dhading Forest and Environment Protection Society.

In Canada, possible partners include the B.C. Ministry of Forests Protection Branch, for fire training expertise, the University of Alberta and university of Northern B.C. for expertise in fire management education, the B.C. Community Forest Association and the B.C. Ministry of Forests Community Forest Program, and the Canadian Institute of Forestry's Forests without Borders Program.

Future Directions:

One of the primary objectives of this proposed travel experience is to contribute to international efforts at VIU by building relationships and developing mutually beneficial joint projects and exchanges. It is hoped that this will form the basis of a grant proposal, possibly through the next incarnation of the ACCC Canadian College Partnership Program or the AUCC University Partnership in Cooperation and Development Program

I would also like to add that the knowledge and experience gained from this visit will be shared with the broader institutional and local community through enhanced internationalization throughout the forestry curriculum and dissemination of knowledge of Nepal's forestry practices and education. I look forward to a meeting in the near future to further refine these goals.