

**ESTABLISHING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS
WITH VILLAGERS
FOR COMMUNITY FORESTRY**

by
Madhu Neupane

RESUMEN

Hasta hace poco, no existía un diálogo entre las poblaciones rurales y el Departamento de Forestería sobre el manejo de bosques en Nepal. Actualmente la situación ha cambiado, y se acepta que la forestería comunitaria es la forma más eficaz de manejar los bosques locales. El autor deriva de sus experiencias en forestería comunitaria una serie de recomendaciones sobre el tipo apropiado, e inapropiado, de actitud para establecer una buena relación de trabajo con los pobladores rurales.

RESUME

Il n'y a eu, par le passé, aucun dialogue véritable entre les villageois et le Service des Forêts en ce qui concerne la gestion des forêts au Népal. Cette situation a évolué, et l'on accepte maintenant que la foresterie communautaire, impliquant la participation des communautés dans la gestion forestière, représente la façon la plus efficace de gérer les forêts locales. Dans ce document, l'auteur se sert de ses expériences de travail en foresterie communautaire pour produire une série de recommandations sur les comportements adéquats ou inadéquats à l'établissement de bonnes relations de travail entre les villageois.

BACKGROUND

In the past there was a deeply rooted belief amongst Nepali villagers that the forest belonged to the government and that therefore all activities relating to the forest were the government's responsibility.¹ In order to break down such attitudes, special emphasis has been given to establishing proper rapport with the villagers. This is needed to conduct forest development activities and to gather necessary information for the proper management of the forest. It is essential for the Field Worker to develop good relationships with the villagers by mixing with them through frequent visits, and making tours of the villages and forests in question.

Frequent visits will naturally foster good relationships with the villagers. Conversations relating to family and social matters help to develop a feeling of trust, understanding and cooperation in a gradual manner. The development of such rapport depends largely on the way of talking, sociability and cooperation of the Field Worker. It is difficult to prescribe a particular methodology in this regard. However, in the author's experience the following procedures have helped to develop a good relationship with villagers from the outset of discussions.

Appropriate Behaviour

- 1 The author meets and introduces himself to the people, social workers, political leaders and distinguished persons in the village concerned. During the course of such meetings the reason for visiting the village is explained, and the people informed about the community forestry programme.
- 2 Uncomplicated language is used whilst speaking with villagers. If there are people of various ethnic groups speaking different languages, interest in learning their language can be shown in a gesture or joke, at which they are often delighted and take greater interest in what one is saying.
- 3 An effort is made to chat with villagers in places where they might be met in the course of walking around the village, such as a tea stall, rest spot, field, garden, etc. In starting the conversation, it is necessary to know something about the local situation so that one can try to steer the discussion to a point at which the subject on which information is required can be introduced.
- 4 Facts which the villagers put forth in the course of talks, meetings and discussions are listened to with interest. It is important to talk and listen about any matter, including family and personal ones, and to try to answer (as far as possible) any questions posed, whatever the subject matter.
- 5 Any social, religious or entertainment functions to which an invitation is made are

¹ **Editorial Note:** In 1957 Nepal's forests were nationalized, so from then onwards this was a correct belief on the part of villagers. However, the extent to which the legal situation was known varied in different parts of Nepal. From 1977 onwards, the government of Nepal has actively encouraged the handing over of forest management to local people.

attended as far as possible. If for some reason attendance is not possible, apologies are made, giving the reasons, to those concerned. Likewise, any food or drink offered by the villagers is accepted with due respect and thanks. If the food or drink thus offered happens to be inedible, the villager is informed politely that one cannot accept for health or other reasons. (When an entertainment programme is attended, due opportunity is taken to mix with the villagers by performing a dance, singing a song or the like).

- 6 Conversations are held with villagers even outside the office or working area, such as in market places etc. If some help is sought by them with regard to office matters, all possible help is extended to them. If it is not possible to comply with their request, they are told the reasons for this. Likewise, as the opportunity arises people are asked about their health, their news, and regards and greetings are sent to others.

Inappropriate Behaviour

In the course of establishing good relationships with villagers, it is advisable to avoid certain attitudes or situations. Those which the author tries to avoid in particular are listed below.

- 1 Any show of pride with regard to the office or position held.
- 2 The discussion of any matters which are disliked by villagers or which are likely to leave a bad impression upon them.
- 3 Disturbing anyone if he/she is too busy, when making home visits. In such a case, the self-introduction is made brief, and the person left with the promise to return sometime later.
- 4 Talking too much about oneself. In other words, care is taken to give villagers as much chance as possible to talk or express their own views.
- 5 Breaking promises, such as forgetting to see someone at an agreed date or time. If it becomes impossible to go as promised, a message is sent, stating the reasons. If this is not possible, a visit is made at some early date to explain what happened.
- 6 Visiting households during busy work periods (such as harvesting time). It is better to make visits at times when villagers are usually fairly free. Likewise, official visits are avoided when someone in the family or group has recently died; during such times, people will not be in a mood for forestry conversations.
- 7 Always visiting rich or distinguished persons. Visits are also made to villagers of low status; indeed, priority is given to them.
- 8 Addressing villagers too directly.² Villagers are addressed politely, as appropriate. If

² **Editorial Note:** The correct way to address people of course varies between cultures. It is important to know what is appropriate in the given cultural context.

their names are not known, they might be addressed as, for example, '*Daju*', '*Bhai*', '*Didi*', '*Bahini*', '*Sathi*' (elder/younger brother, elder/younger sister, friend etc.).

- 9 Disrupting the flow of conversation. However, if the discussion is veering away from the topic in question, attempts are made to bring it back to the point.
- 10 Making visits or holding talks with a large group of people at one time. As far as possible, conversations are held with groups of only 4-5 persons at a time.
- 11 Confining meetings or discussions to households in one place only. Instead, meetings are held at a variety of appropriate places such as tea stalls, rest spots, water taps and gardens, or simply in course of walking about the village.

Establishing a good rapport with villagers takes time and experience, but it is an essential part of community forestry development.

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