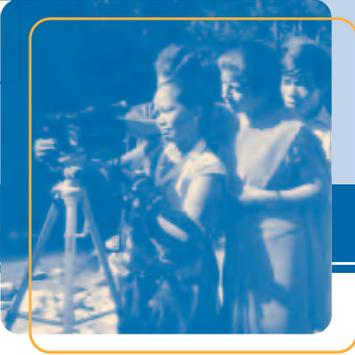


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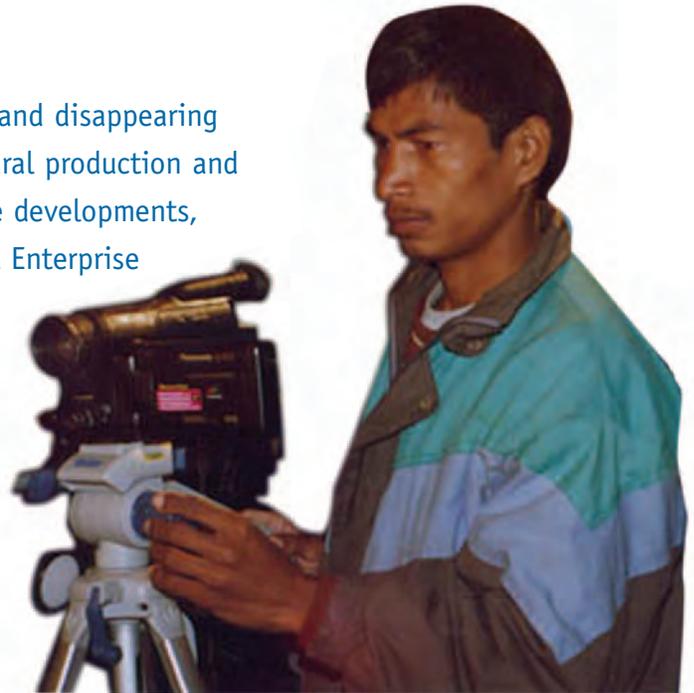
Using Video to Shape Environmental Policy



In 1996, population pressures, deforestation, and disappearing grasslands had caused a decline in Nepal's agricultural production and degradation of its environment. To counteract these developments, USAID/Nepal developed the Environment and Forest Enterprise Activity (EFEA) to improve livelihoods through sustainable agriculture, value-added processing of natural resources, and increased local control over natural resource management.

GreenCOM provided technical assistance in communication to EFEA from 1996 to 1998 to:

- Enhance community understanding of new forest policy and legislation and the role of local communities in implementation.
- Stimulate social discourse on opportunities created by new policies.
- Support the forestry and conservation extension work of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, and NGO partners.



Community Video Letter Production

One of GreenCOM's primary strategies was the creation of a community video letter (CVL) to foster "bottom-up" communications between rural forest communities and regional and national environmental policymakers. A CVL is a tool that helps people express themselves on video. In the context of development communication, the CVL has been an effective way for isolated rural communities to articulate their concerns about

various issues to government officials. Because CVLs involve oral communication, they may be used with illiterate populations.

In preparing a CVL, the community takes the lead role in selecting a subject and the treatment it will receive as well as operating the camera. Community members are trained to use video equipment and to edit the final product.

GreenCOM's role was limited to facilitation to ensure that all voices were heard in production of the CVL.

GreenCOM and EFEA chose to work in the western Nepali village of Uchanimbu in the Deokhuri Valley. The residents of Uchanimbu had experience with community forestry and had received significant technical assistance on conservation, income generation, and women's empowerment. Village representatives would thus be capable of articulating their needs and concerns about forest issues.

In 1991, Uchanimbu's local forest was registered as a community forest and local people were given rights to and responsibility for the forest. The members of the community forest users group were very committed to protecting their resources. Nevertheless, some matters were beyond their control and needed to be addressed in official environment and natural resource policy. The CVL allowed a variety of Uchanimbu residents—men and women of different occupations, socioeconomic strata, and ethnic groups—to form a consensus about what they needed and then share it with high-level government officials.

GreenCOM conducted formative research to determine the issues that were most important to villagers and to interpersonal/intergroup relationships in the village. Following a set CVL protocol, individuals were selected to participate in creating the video—both the content and the actual footage.

Uchanimbu's final CVL consisted of a short history of the local forest and the community's role in managing it. This was followed by a description of current problems, including a decline in irrigation water that forced residents to grow less profitable crops, soil erosion from flooding of a local river, forest boundary disputes with adjacent communities, forest overgrowth, and ambiguous and conflicting understanding of forest policies.

The CVL also proposed ways that government policymakers could help Uchanimbu residents, such as providing irrigation canal repair, official settlement and enforcement of forest boundaries, training in alternative income generation activities, and uniform education on forest policy in Uchanimbu and surrounding communities.



The video letter allowed Uchanimbu residents to share their needs with government officials.

Policymaker Response and Results

In early 1998, GreenCOM organized a community forest forum in Kathmandu. The forum was designed to encourage dialogue between high-level policymakers from the Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation and other government agencies and community forest groups from rural areas including the group from Uchanimbu.

The Uchanimbu CVL was broadcast at this meeting, with two members of the production team leading discussions with policymakers. The proceedings of the forum were captured in a written report that was distributed by EFEA to all district forest offices. The forum was also videotaped and a short documentary was created.

Participants agreed that the forum generated important dialogue between policymakers and rural community members. Several action plans were produced over the course of the meetings. Unfortunately, subsequent evaluation by GreenCOM indicated that the lines of communication established during the forum were not maintained over the long term. Despite all of the participants' good intentions, the policymakers had too many other concerns to address. A change of government shortly after the forum was held also contributed to a breakdown in communication.

At the end of its activities, GreenCOM recommended that more forestry forums be held to sustain the positive dialogue that occurred at the first meeting. Nevertheless, the project also noted that such meetings, although useful, are not alone sufficient to build civil society capacity to affect natural resource policy.



The community forest forum generated important dialogue between policymakers and rural communities.

Selected Publications and Products

Brooke, Pamela, and Kedar Sharma. *General Guidelines for Using Community Video in Community Forest User Group Social Mobilization*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Academy for Educational Development (AED), 1997.

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GreenCOM is funded and managed by the USAID Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau: Natural Resources Management Office. Technical services for GreenCOM (Contract no. LAG-I-00-01-00005-00) are provided by the Academy for Educational Development in partnership with Chemonics International.