

Transcript

The view from Nepal and Bangladesh

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

POSHENDRA SATYAL: I think the 40 years of experience of community forestry, we can learn a lot from Nepal. My name is Poshendra Satyal. I'm originally from Nepal. I have been living in the UK for the last 21 years, studying and working. At the moment, I work with Birdlife International in its policy team.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So, I was born and grew up in the Eastern Himalayas region in a place called Sankhuwasabha District. The place was near Mount Makalu, the fifth highest peak in the world. And obviously, you interact with nature every day. And many of the people in local communities depend on the natural resources.

Much of the geography of Nepal is dominated by higher mountains. 15% of the area, Nepal's mountains are one of the hottest spots of climate change because you can see the ice melting in the Himalayas. And also there is a risk and disaster happening because many of the glacier lakes are melting. And besides that, because of the changing weather patterns, more floods are happening. Soil erosion, landslides, there are also instances of the droughts, mainly in Western Nepal.

So that's put Nepal in a vulnerable position due to climate change. From my early childhood memories, I was interested on the disproportionate impact that the local communities of different kinds face natural disasters, as well as climate change impacts certain people and communities who are more isolated. Then that got me into the question of environmental social justice.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So Khasur is a remote place in the Western Nepal, where I was conducting research. It's about 1,500 to 2,000 meters high from the sea level. We had to walk up to four hours to get to the village. The area is dominated by one of the Indigenous groups called Ghale and Gurungs. They have been preserving the local forest and also doing some restoration and plantation in the village.

The village also has a number of other ecotourism facilities as well, which has been promoted by the community forest user group there. The reason they are quite close to the forest is they depend on the natural resources. And many of the Indigenous people, it's part of their cultural traditions.

Like for example, many of the Gurung communities, they have their burial grounds inside the forest. They are dedicated areas. And also there are some of the sacred trees and animals as well. For example, one of the tree species, ficus religiosa, is worshiped as a sacred tree. And also there are certain birds. The crow is a messenger that is worshiped during the time of Diwali. So, their viewpoint and then their culture is quite associated with the nature.

Community forest program started in late '70s because of the population pressure, the degradation of the hills, and soil erosion, and so on. And that also has impacted flooding in the southern plains in Nepal. So, there was a drive to fund community forest. And by 1990s, it was quite successful in terms of bringing the degraded hills into regeneration, greening of the hills.

And then after that, slowly, it also was able to cater the needs of the local population in terms of their dependence on fuelwood, and firewood, and timber. And they have the advantages in terms of the other income generational opportunities as well through ecotourism, cash crop production. So, there are various types of the tangible and intangible benefits that the local users can have.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

More than 22,000 forest user groups across Nepal, conserving and restoring more than 2.23 million hectares of forests. And about one third of the population is connected to community forest user group. So about 2.3 million households.

Forests provide what we call the nature-based solution in terms of the environmental benefits. Community forestry is good for purification of water. It's also regulates water cycles and also in terms of providing habitats for the different biodiversity. And also there are advantages of forests and trees because they absorb carbon dioxide. So, in recent years, forests have been highlighted in terms of giving the climate mitigation. In terms of addressing the impacts of climate change, we can learn a lot at the global level from Nepal.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SALEEMUL HUQ: So, at the global level, my country Bangladesh has understood the problem of climate change well over a decade ago. And we haven't been sitting idle. We figured out how we are going to be affected, where we are going to be affected, who's going to be affected, and what we need to do to adapt ourselves, to make ourselves more resilient.

And we used to call ourselves the most vulnerable country. We now are on the path to calling ourselves the most resilient country. Because Bangladesh has been facing almost all the different impacts of climate change, which include floods, droughts, heatwaves, cyclones, and storms in different parts of the country for a long time. And we have found ways to deal with them, to adapt to them, to prepare ourselves for them, and to minimise those impacts. They still happen. They still cause a lot of damage, but a minimal amount of damage in real terms, particularly human lives lost. We have brought that down very, very considerably.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Bangladesh has been susceptible to cyclones coming in from the Bay of Bengal in the south of the country. And every now and again, we have a super cyclone, which in times past, had caused deaths in the regions of well over 100,000 people dying in previous decades. We have had, over the last decade, a very, very effective program of cyclone warning, building shelters along the coast, and providing everybody with the warning to be able to take shelter.

And we now have, perhaps in my view, the best early warning cyclone program in the whole world. We have better satellites that can track the water flows and the cyclones forming in the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. Three million people living on the coastal zone of Bangladesh are able to get the cyclone warnings on their cell phones, by volunteers going around. And nowadays, when we have a

big cyclone, we are able to evacuate millions of people.

One of the things that we have done very successfully is a massive program of capacitating schoolchildren in schools in the flood prone areas and the cyclone prone areas on how to react when they get the warnings. And one of the things that all the schoolchildren are assigned to different houses, particularly houses of elderly women or disabled people. So that somebody goes to get them and bring them to the shelter. And we have practically 100% effective evacuation system for people on land.

We had a big super cyclone a couple of years ago called cyclone Amphan, which killed less than 100 people. And most of the deaths were fishermen who were out at sea and didn't get back to land in time. Even now, you can see in rich countries when they have floods, in Germany, for example, they lost more than 200 lives in 2021 when they had a flash flood. We have floods that are 10 times bigger than that, if not more. And we don't lose that many lives in Bangladesh. The Germans can learn from Bangladesh how to save lives.

The Global North can learn a lot from the Global South on how to adapt to the impacts of climate change because the Global South is suffering those impacts and finding ways to deal with them. The Global North will need that knowledge tomorrow.

PHILILE MBATHA: The thing that the Global North can learn from the Global South about the climate crisis is that the best way to deal with it is not to rely only on Western science because it doesn't have all the answers.

POSHENDRA SATYAL: We need natural sciences, but also different aspects of the knowledge system as well.

HUGO ROMERO: We can offer to the Global North in climatic terms is the knowledge of our Indigenous people.

STEVEN RATUVA: And knowledge of the environment, knowledge of the sea, knowledge of changing weather patterns. And all these things have been proven to be part of their lives over the years.

POSHENDRA SATYAL: The way Indigenous knowledge system works and also the different types of the worldviews that the Global South have utilised.

TRACEY BUNDA: We may not be able to sustain our worlds in the way in which we do now. But we will be able to have a quality of life if we take up a different set of values.

MICHAEL MEADOWS: So, I think the Global North really needs to accept that they bear the brunt of the responsibility. I would say that the North needs to be humble, more humble about this.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: I want to be really blunt here. They can learn how not to fuck it up, pretty much. Like, we have been saying for generations now, this is the bad thing. Here's how to do the good thing. Here is what is needed to do that. Stop just like stuffing around, making excuses, and front up because we don't have the time to waste anymore.

SALEEMUL HUQ: And my faith now lies much more with the younger generation. These young people have energy. They have drive. They have the willingness to change things and not accept the way things are. And I believe that they will change the world.