



*Association
des Populations
des Montagnes
du Monde*

TRIPURADEVI, UTTARANCHAL, INDIA
World Mountain Peoples Association, India chapter
Proceedings of the consultations held
on April 9th, 10th and 11th, 2005 at Avani

Background of the Indian WMPA

WMPA was created on 10 April 2001 in Paris, at the initiative of two associations of European elected members (ANEM and UNCEM) and by representatives of mountain territories of about 50 countries and by NGOs and researchers.

I – The three missions of WMPA are:

1. To raise awareness amongst local communities, conservation and development organisations and government bodies and public opinion of the global economic, social, environmental and cultural challenges experienced by the mountain areas.
2. To promote an equitable and sustainable development of the mountain areas allowing their populations to have life standards and conditions similar to other areas, in order to enable them to fulfil their economic, social environment and cultural role and to go forward without breaking down with their history, their tradition, their identity.
3. To open a new international space of cooperation between mountain local authorities and communities, so that they may better benefit from means, knowledge, know-how and development experiences.
4. To promote at the global level the fact that mountain people do face specific conditions and that they are entitled to a specific consideration of their specific conditions of life, cultures and traditions.

WMPA has been constituted on an enlarged basis in order to mobilise mountain local authorities and communities, bring cooperation among the organisations and develop scientific and technical competences.

The formation of such organisations in different countries could take this initiative forward at regional and national levels.

The first Asia level meeting of the WMPA was held at Yuksam, West Sikkim in April '02. Dr Shekhar Pathak of Pahar, Nainital, was chosen as the National Coordinator of the Indian chapter of WMPA. Responsibilities were allocated for each state from amongst the participants in Yuksam and the first working group of the WMPA India chapter was constituted.

Subsequently, an international workshop was organized at Quito, Ecuador in September 2002, where representatives of mountain people from 40 countries met to formulate a charter for WMPA. There were 7 representatives from the Indian Himalayas. A small step was then taken in Quito where the Indian chapter of WMPA would take forward the work on the basis of the common vision that emerged out of our collective inputs in Quito. Two representatives from Asia were then elected to the board of the International WMPA by the delegations from Nepal and India, Mr. Sri Krishna Upadhyay from SAPPROS, Nepal and Ms Rashmi Bharti, Avani, Uttaranchal, India.

The first India level meeting of WMPA was organized at Avani, with the financial support of WMPA (world). Avani is a community based organization working in Kumaon Himalayas, set up for developing and disseminating appropriate technology and enhancing livelihood opportunities and is a founder member of WMPA.

Delegates from all over the Indian Himalayas gathered to discuss the future strategies and action plans and the structure of the WMPA India chapter within the framework of the WMPA charter that was formulated during the Quito meet.

The workshop was organized from April 9-11 2005, and following is an account of the proceedings (minutes) of this workshop.

April 9th Morning Session

The Asian Representative of WMPA, Rashmi Bharti, welcomed the participants to the workshop and gave a brief introduction of the aims and objectives of this consultation. This consultation aimed to bring together mountain people from India on a common platform and to identify and address common issues together. The main objectives of the meeting were the following:

- To explore the possibilities of formalizing a network of associate members from the mountains.
- To discuss common goals and future strategy of the network
- To enable mountain communities to have a sustainable lifestyle in the mountains by recognizing and valuing the mountain product in global markets, namely through labeling and certification.

During these two days, we all would try to identify and prioritize mountain products that could be a beginning for the network to come together and discuss branding/labeling.

Dr. Denis Blamont, Vice President, (Research), WMPA Executive Bureau, Paris

Giving a background on the formation of WMPA, Dr. Blamont detailed the objectives for creation of the forum.

- I. To establish linkages between different mountain people of the world for understanding each other in terms of cultures, life-styles, and sharing technologies and solutions to problems.
 - To strengthen their own pride and sense of identity and values
 - To create linkages within various networks.
- II. To seek and work towards recognition of the mountain people as a geo-political entity having specific problems that would be addressed at various international forums and organizations.
 - To uphold the human value of the mountain people - putting people before trade.

The members of the Board of WMPA constitute of:

College I having 50% of votes that are representatives of the mountain people, elected or members of community based organizations.

College II comprises of representatives from NGOs and the private sector (35% of the votes).

College III (15% of the votes) comprises of individual persons, researchers and research organizations, representing only themselves.

The motto of WMPA, he said, is to give voice to the people who do not have it. We need to build WMPA in such a way that people become representatives. We need to work with NGOs that are committed to reaching out to the "farthest of the far" and the "poorest of the poor".

He emphasized the need to reflect on:

- What has been done?
- What do we have to do?
- How should we do it?

Dr Blamont informed those present that to facilitate fund raising for the work of WMPA, a foundation has been set up by WMPA, (world). This foundation will approach donors to support specific initiatives.

To also work actively with policy makers and to emphasize the specificity of the mountains, an Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) is to be held in Paris in 2006. Prior to that, a WMPA conference will be held to identify all issues to be brought up before the IGC. Some of these issues are:

- Policies and work done by various governments regarding mountain people
- Recognition of mountain people as a geo-political entity.

In the framework of the International Partnership of the Mountains (decided at Bishkek in 2002, monitored by FAO (Rome), the world office of WMPA, Paris has taken a leading role in the initiatives on:

- Policy and law
- Sustainable livelihoods (namely through the definition of a mountain product and labeling)

Also, a member of the second initiative, ICIMOD has been entrusted with the regional definition of a “Mountain Product” namely by identifying a product representative of the Himalayas. A wild berry called Sea Buck Thorn was identified for making fruit juice, medicines, ointment, herbal tea etc.

One of the learnings was that labeling and certification of mountain products involves a process that not only gives value addition but also expression to the life of mountain people – what it takes and means for the mountains to produce a particular product - their relationship with nature or its spiritual dimension.

A mountain label, should therefore, be a tool for the people to become conscious of their life and identity. It should emphasize quality, but not exclude people with lower quality products from the market. The trust of the consumer towards the label has to be built up by WMPA certification.

Dr. Shekhar Pathak, National Coordinator, WMPA, India

A Perspective on the Indian Himalayas

Talking about his association with WMPA, Dr. Pathak expressed that it has provided him with an opportunity to meet mountain people from different regions whether it was at Yuksam or Quito. He saw that aspirations and problems were the same for the mountain people all over the world. Yet, he feels that nothing seems to change despite meetings at international forums, the declaration of year 2002 as the Year of the Mountain, and WMPA.

The difficulties, with reference to the Himalayas, particularly Uttaranchal are:

- The problem of identity because of varied regional differences – societal, cultural and political.
- The strain on natural resources due to consumerism and globalization.
- The low percentage of land under agriculture/individual ownership (13% to 14% in UA)
- Treatment of water as a commodity as against a life-resource, selling rivers for electricity production, for example.
- The government holds forest land; we should focus on reenergizing the village level bodies
- Out-migration, which has an adverse impact on our labour use and energy due to no sustainable livelihood options.
- Insurgency in mountain states (Kashmir, NE India and Nepal) which results in energy being used for protest instead of construction and development. In UA, although there is high literacy there are 13 lacs literate unemployed persons, which may result in crime and insurgency if the problem is not addressed.
- Lack of good governance. The democratic and participatory institutions are present in theory only.
- Lack of market orientation and appropriate technologies, for example the proper use of malta and product differentiation for the apple grown in UA.
- Education is not purposeful and does not create opportunities for economic self-sufficiency.
- No laws for controlling environmental pollution. In case they do exist there is poor enforcement.

Ms Vibha Puri Das, Principal Secretary and Commissioner, Forests and Rural Development, Govt. of Uttaranchal

Ms Vibha Puri Das felt that despite some of the difficulties outlined by Dr Shekhar Pathak, she has seen a lot of hope and aspiration in the people of UA. This has to be focused and channelized. UA already being a knowledge society, we need to build on that. Out-migration has its own benefits: it breeds intellectuals and brings in money. We need to constantly re-dedicate ourselves to those 13% unemployed. Create self-employment livelihood opportunities; train master-trainers for the organic movement, horticulture; train and link manpower to projects and points of need, for example, providing computer literate accountants to Gram Sabhas, Watershed or Swajal programs.

In fact, since the formation of UA as a separate state, progress has been made in some areas, such as:

- **Organization Building**

Formation of Van Panchayats (allocating 3 hectares of forest land per family as “commons”) and their achievements in terms of management and income generation has in fact been a success story in UA. Similar is the case with Self Help Groups (SHGs) which have thrown up ideas for sustainable livelihoods and the consequent setting up of various support organisations, like the Bamboo Board, Poultry Board, Bio Board, etc.

- **Responsible Environment Management**

Two Air and Water Pollution Monitoring Stations have been set up. A garbage-baling unit has been set up at Srinagar. Learning from the sad experience of Nepal, a regulatory framework for adventure tourism has been put in place. For the Valley of Flowers trekking route, an environment committee has been set up and its suggestions being implemented for garbage disposal/recycling.

- The areas pertaining to creation of livelihood opportunities and natural resource management are receiving attention through the Watershed (Jalagam) approach. For the first time in the world, the World Bank has sponsored decentralized watershed development in UA. The implementation of the Swajal program through the Gram Panchayats is also an example of decentralized participatory management.

Ms Puri said that she can see the light at the end of the tunnel. We need to work towards bringing more unirrigated land under cultivation; diversification of agriculture; community based tourism; value addition to fruit, like making available malta juice on the pilgrim routes in Garhwal. We are already working towards a broadband support for the Himalayan agenda combining all Himalayan states and initiating dialogues on resource sharing.

Following the addresses, three presentations were made on how certification processes have been instituted in the field of organic farm produce and craft sector. The detailed presentations are given as Annexure I.

Presentation I Mr. Ajay Rastogi, Organic Program Coordinator, FAO, Delhi

Mr Ajay Rastogi has been working with the FAO on the certification processes for organic produce. In his presentation Mr Rastogi shared with us his experience with the certification of organic produce in the mountains and also the processes that need to be initiated for any labeling or certification of a product. He talked in detail on the following issues:

- What is a label
- Different types of labels
- Organisations involved in the labeling processes
- How are labels helpful
- How to proceed for labeling of a product
- What could be the parameters for the label for a mountain product

Presentation II Dr Thimmaiah, Director, Natura Agro Consultants Pvt. Ltd, Faridabad

Dr Thimmaiah is one of the leading experts on biodynamic agriculture. His presentation focused on the appropriateness of organic agriculture in the Himalayas due to marginal use of chemical pesticides and fertilizer. He presented the basic precepts of biodynamic agriculture that are as follows:

- Soil conservation
- Improvement of soil fertility
- Efficient management of available mountain natural resources
- Utilizing traditional knowledge
- Rehabilitation of degraded natural resources.

His presentation was a practical example of developing organic produce for an organic label.

Presentation III Mr. Adarsh Kumar, AIACA, New Delhi

Mr Adarsh Kumar was representing the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association that has been working to develop a label “Craftmark” for genuinely handcrafted products in India. He talked about the processes followed by AIACA to integrate different institutions working in the craft sector and what are the implications of such a label.

All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA) is a membership-based policy research and advocacy body for the handloom and handicrafts sectors

The main objectives of AIACA are:

- To improve the market for handlooms and handicrafts
- To raise the standard of living of craftworkers

AIACA currently has 62 member organizations including leading NGOs such as Dastkar and SEWA; and leading private retailers of crafts such as Anokhi and FabIndia.

Subsequent to the above presentations, there were small group discussions on the identification and definition of a mountain product. The aim of the small group discussions was to look at issues and concerns related to products of the mountains in different categories and bring out the specificity of mountain products thereby creating its niche market.

Afternoon Session

PRESENTATIONS ON THE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Group I

Natural Resources

Facilitator: Mr. E Theophilus

Issues that were discussed related to natural resource management are as follows:

1. Clear policy should be made on medicinal plants and herbs.
2. Species-specific cultivation should be done.
3. Producers should be given a better alternatives and wages.
4. A database of all the herbs and medicinal plants should be created.
5. Processing and value addition should be done at the local level.
6. Regulatory measures / trade restrictions for cross border transport should be instituted.
7. A clear organic program should be developed by the government – at present the government is also stocking and selling pesticides and chemical manures that are very harmful for the soil in the long run.
8. Advocacy for policy changes is required.
9. Creation of market for hill products, which should be recognized as exclusive.
10. Differentiation of a mountain product in the “mall culture” needs to be made.
11. Sensitivity to the environment would be crucial to the commercialization of these resources.

Group II

Arts and Crafts

Facilitator: Mr. Adarsh Kumar

The criteria for labeling a craft product, as a mountain product should be the following:

1. Geographical origin of the produce or the services should be in the mountains
2. The manufacturing process should be eco-sensitive and should not harm the people, water and soil of the area where it is produced.
3. The product should be made using traditional skills and know how.
4. It should give value addition to local raw materials.
5. The artisans involved should be given fair wages.
6. Benefits generated should reach the mountain communities that are producing the products (in the form of a sustainable livelihood).
7. Emphasis should be laid on quality products.

education and training of youth to enable them to earn their livelihoods. NMA runs an AIDS hospice and trains the inmates to make handmade recycled paper as well.

3. Dr Dinesh Vyas CARESS, Dharchula
Presentation V Annexure I

Dr Vyas works with CARESS, an NGO working with the Bhotia Heritage Revival Program in Kumaon by promoting community based tourism in his area. He is working mainly with the Rung community living in the Vyas, Chaundas, Darma and Vyas valleys. This is a self help program based on past research efforts by Dr Vineeta Hoon. The aim is to develop sustainable livelihood options that would enable the Bhotias to carry on with their traditional lifestyles.

The focus areas of work of CARESS will be :

- Community Based Tourism
- Vegetable Production (poly tunnels)
- Traditional crops
- Renewable Energy systems (solar and water turbines)
- Handicraft Development
- Appropriate Sanitation

CARESS is already working with the existing village bodies to promote community based tourism in Chaundas valley.

4. Mr Arjun Dey Arpan, Tripura
Presentation VI Annexure I

Mr Dey shared with us the work done by Arpan during the past three years. He also presented the challenges faced by Tripura today, like cross border terrorism, monoculture and natural disasters.

Arpan has been working for the past three years with all round development of the state. It has groups of experts on multidisciplinary subjects. The organization has been working in the social, environmental and development sectors.

5. Dr Shekhar Pathak Pahar, Nainital
Presentation VII Annexure I

Dr Pathak is a professor of history in the Kumaon University. He also runs an organization called Pahar that publishes books about Uttaranchal and also brings out a newsletter, Himantar. Every ten years, Dr Pathak along with other friends does a transect walk across Uttaranchal to document the current socio economic conditions, culture, arts, agricultural practices and other related aspects in the villages en route. He shared with the participants his experiences of their most recent walk in 2004 from Askote to Aarakot. His presentation was very illuminating. The results of this study will be made available soon once all the compilation is complete. Pahar has also printed a detailed map of Uttaranchal in collaboration with FES, Munsiri.

APRIL 10th, 2005

Presentations and General Discussions

1. Mr. Rajendra Pokhrel – FECOFUN and WMPA Nepal
Presentation VIII (Annexure I)

Mr. Pokhrel shared his experience with the WMPA with those present. He said that the issues of mountain communities raised in Yuksam were similar for the 4 countries (India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh). And in Quito even across 40 countries and a few continents the issues were similar / same.

He emphasised that governance laws should be made taking into consideration the work and efforts of local communities. Natural Resource Management has to be done by giving full rights to the communities.

Mr. Pokharel also talked about the formation of the WMPA in Nepal. It has already been registered under the Nepali law and its rules and regulations have been defined. The WMPA, Nepal works through forest users

groups and protested about the increase in taxes in the minor forest produce. As a result, the taxes were lowered. The implementation of JFM in Nepal was also protested against and it was withdrawn. However, due to the present situation in Nepal, it is not as active as it would like to be.

He then appraised everyone about the present situation in Nepal and its ramifications for the people of Nepal. He said that the systemic problems need to be resolved as the violence is leading to much bitterness in the people. Post feudal system a new form of feudalism has come up. Feudal lords have become political lords. An Alternate justice system came up, which is one of the reasons for the current situation.

2. Mayfereen Lyngdoh – VHAM and representative, WMPA North East Presentation IX (Annexure I)

Ms Lyngdoh, works with the Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya and also represents the WMPA in the North East.

Ms Lyngdoh first presented a case study of Mawtari village in the district Ri Bhoi where VHAM has been working to revive the traditional art of weaving, spinning and natural dyeing. The artisans still use traditional wild silks and natural dyes like turmeric and lac.

She also mentioned that there was not much aid given by the government to local arts and crafts. There is also a need to promote/ preserve arts and crafts.

WMPA, India related in Meghalaya

Ms Lyngdoh is also responsible for taking the activities of the WMPA forward in the North Eastern states. Post Yuksam and Quito a series of meetings were held and other organizations got involved and interested. However, because of lack of direction and concretization of a common agenda, the WMPA initiative in Meghalaya died down.

3. Basanti Behen – Laxmi Ashram and Himwanti Network Presentation (Hindi):

Basanti Behen gave an overview of Laxmi Ashram and its activities and also of Himwanti and its work in Uttaranchal.

Sarla Behen, a close disciple of Gandhiji, founded the Sarla ashram. The ashram is dedicated to giving education to girls up to class 10th in an integrated fashion where they are taught vocational skills and also work for the upkeep and maintenance of the ashram on a daily bases. In Dania, a remote area in Almora Dist, the ashram, had provided opportunities for education of girls bound to household work through Bal Wadis. They were then integrated in primary schools. The ideology behind this exercise was that “ if the girls cannot be brought to the schools, let the schools be taken to them”

Basanti Behen felt that problems related to village women, whether in Nepal, Bangladesh, India or Pakistan were the same. Networks among these women need to be established.

ICIMOD has supported a program called Himwanti, which started from Nepal whose main purpose was to work towards women awareness and creation of network of their organizations. The program was successful for some time and it was their experience that the government in Nepal works closely with community based organizations in support for trainings, meetings, etc. In India there was difficulty in getting such kind of support from the govt.

Himwanti has also worked in the area of networking but not much progress could be achieved due to lack of financial support from partner organizations.

Water, Forests and Land (*Jal, Jungal, Jameen*) are the core issues of women and the women collectives. Current Himwanti workers are all voluntary. There is a lot of support from people and communities.

She also shared successful experiences of forming some collectives around protection of forests and water catchments. In these collectives women have decided to protect and use the forests even without the cooperation of the government.

“If we wait for suitable rules and policies to be made in favour of communities it will never happen, Women have to take things into their own hands and get back the rights to use and govern the resources”

This achievement has led to the strengthening of their collective (mahila mangal dal) and they are now working in the area of plantation and skill development and are also receiving grants for these activities.

4. Mr. Reuben Furtado

SMTA and Sambandh, Uttarakhand

Mr. Furtado shared his experiences of working for more than 20 years in these hills with the communities and also with network. He founded SMTA, a community based organization working with integrated development in the hills. He has also been involved in the formation of a network called Sambandh, of NGOs in the hills working with natural resource management. He said that for any network to be successful a clear vision is of paramount importance. In Sambandh, it took two years of collective discussions to have a clear vision.

Another important factor was that each member should be first willing to give, to strengthen the network, before expecting benefits from the network. The four most important aspects of a network are:

- Democracy
- Transparency and
- Accountability
- People Centric

The network is working for the advocacy of people's rights. It is recognized by the government and invited for all the important meetings. It has been able to influence policy on jalagam-based development. They are now advocating for state-based Panchayati Raj Act on the water policy, women's issues, etc.

He emphasised that the most important issues to be addressed are *Jal, Jungal, Jameen* (Water, Forests and Land). He also shared that fact that there were many types of networks

- Issue based,
- Budget based etc.

But most of these networks suffer from lack of accountability and clear objectives, invariably leading to their collapse.

NGO's, he said, are an alternate, better and much cheaper delivery mechanism for implementing Government programs. However, NGO's are not involved/ consulted in policy formulations. Therefore NGOs should take an active role in inclusion in policy making. He also said that NGO's need to move towards rights based issues.

He emphasised that networks are not for individual benefits. It needs commitment and sacrifice from the members to form and sustain a network.

Final Discussions

Facilitator: Dr Nakul Chettri (ICIMOD, Nepal and Darjeeling)

To conclude the deliberations of the two days, discussion was held focussing on a common point of action around which a network of mountain people could begin to form. The following issues were identified:

1. There is need to identify concrete activities in a specified period of time to achieve some results for each state. Each participant would discuss the mandate of the WMPA, the work done until now and the conclusions from this workshop to integrate more members from the state in the network.
2. The identification of mountain products that are linked to livelihoods in each state could be the centre around which the network could converge.
3. To influence government to make mountain centric policies, there is need for exchange of information on existing laws from different mountain countries where they have been formulated and implemented.
4. A workshop is required to showcase successful and indigenous methods of governance, that are in practice but not widely known, especially the traditional models of governance that are in danger of being lost.
5. There is a need to focus on the consumer (of mountain products) to have clarity on the different types of customers.

6. There is need to document the potential mountain products in each area.
7. The role of WMPA would not be that of a certification agency, but rather it is an association of people. Organizations who have understood the charter of WMPA and are willing to participate in this association.
8. The concept of mountain products is not to just work with certification but it would create a brand identity that would characterize the mountains and their people.

To concretize the above suggestions the following plan of action has emerged:

The four main points of focus were:

- Prioritize responsibilities and areas of work
- Plan of Action
- Membership Fee
- Membership criteria

1- Roles and responsibilities

It was decided that roles and responsibilities should be defined of the present working group in the WMPA. This group was formed in Yuksam and Quito.

- The existing team should continue until the network becomes stronger
- The responsibilities within the group should be rotational for the execution of organization of the network.

2- Plan of action

- First, the needs of the mountain people have to be assessed in each state
- Then, the mountain products that are already eligible for the creation of a brand identity should be identified.
- There should be strong emphasis on quality of services and goods delivered to make this intervention a sustainable livelihood option.
- A local controlling mechanism should be put in place that involves the community.
- To begin with, it was felt that to document and share the traditional know how in the use of Natural Dyes could be a starting point for the network.
- Exchange of areas of expertise for training could be another way to bring together the network.
- The potential of tourism (eco tourism, community based tourism CBT) is an area that is common in all mountain regions and could be another way to exchange, cooperate and work together to build a network.
- We should try to work towards the creation and implementation of laws specific to the mountains.

3- Membership Fees

The following suggestions came up during the discussion on criterion for membership fees:

One day's salary per annum

- Rs. 500 as registration fees
- Rs. 1000 as annual fees
- Community contribution could also be defined on the basis of a day's earning of a member.
- This suggestion was debated and it was recommended that as all organisations are not of the same size, categories could be defined where the fees could be according to the size and turnover of the organization. To begin with, the fees structure could be as follows:

Rs 50 Registration Fees

Rs 100 annum Membership fees

4- Membership Criteria

- The member should be an organization or an individual associated with mountain areas. (Mountains are defined as all areas 300 m above sea level. And for all those areas below 300 m, both the slope and the altitude are criteria for definition)
- Individual, researchers, academicians working in and on mountain issues could participate
- Membership of rural communities has to be ensured

5- Process of integration of new members

- People living and working in or for the mountain people, if in the mountains and if the concerned person/organization expresses interest in the mandate of the WMPA
- They can then submit an application for membership to the WMPA working group (format for the application needs to be developed)
- If applicants meet the criteria defined by the WMPA, the interested individuals can then be observers for the next 2-3 meetings.
- Finally they would be integrated as members after payment of membership fees.

6- Identification of a product of the mountains

- The creation of a brand identity that represents the lifestyle of the mountain people and their spiritual relationship to nature would characterize the product from the mountains.
- This process would not be certification but would be an identity that is created by association of mountain people the world over.

Evening Session:

Short Presentations:

Some of these presentations are part of the Annexure I

1. Mr. K. Ramnarayan Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) Presentation X (Annexure I)

FES was established in 1992 as the National Tree Grower's Cooperative in Munsiri. In 2000 it began working as FES. The organization has been working in the Gori River Basin with regeneration and proper management of community forests through active participation of the Van Panchayats. Through its work of the past 13 years, the foundation has been able to substantially increase the participation of the community and especially women in natural resource management.

The main aims of the FES Himalaya Project are as follows:

- Restoration of the ecological security of rural communities in marginalized and critical mountain river basins and consequent eco-system services to down stream habitations
- Setting in place or strengthening the processes of local democratic governance and management of Natural resource commons
- To strengthen the various inter-linkages between biological components of mountain landscapes thereby ensuring ecological security and integrity

2. Ms Preeti Rao Aarohi, Satoli, Nainital Presentation XI (Annexure I)

Aarohi is an organization based in the Nainital district of Kumaon and has been working extensively in issues related to health, sanitation, water and natural resource management. Aarohi has also established a viable rural enterprise that produces high quality apricot oil, scrub, soaps and creams. The organisation also works with growing and marketing of dried herbs like peppermint, sage, rosemary, parsley etc. Aarohi has set up a rural hospital that provides health care facilities in a remote rural area and has trained local women as nurses to provide health care in the villages. Training of traditional mid wives is also an important part of Aarohi's work.

3. Ms Priyanka RCDC / Prerna, Darjeeling, West Bengal **Prerna is working in the hills of Darjeeling with issues of empowerment of women through self help groups and activities related to livelihoods and natural resource management.**

4. Dr Denis Blamont About Mustang, Nepal

Dr Blamont is a professor of geography at the Grenoble University in France. He is also a member of ASVIN Program, a French NGO that works with promotion of solar energy in the villages of India and Nepal. Asvin and SWRC, Tilonia initiated a rural solar electrification program in three Himalayan states of Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttaranchal. Avani was the implementing partner in Uttaranchal for this program. In the context of his work in the villages of Mustang, Nepal, Dr Blamont shared his experiences with solar

electrification and productive applications of solar energy like flour mills and water distillation units in these remote Himalayan villages.

11th April, 2005
Field visit to two villages

With two days of intense discussions, the third day focused on taking the participants on a field visit to Dharamghar and Saukyura, two small hamlets in Pithoragarh district of Kumaon. Both these hamlets comprise largely of the Shauka community that were traditionally traders with Tibet. After the closing of the borders, they reverted completely to their traditional craft of weaving and spinning of wool for their livelihoods.

Avani has been working in these villages since 1997 with both solar electrification and spinning and weaving of wool and silk. There is a training and production centre of Avani located at Dharamghar where 14 looms are installed and weavers from surrounding villages have been trained in the weaving of wool and silk textiles.

We all drove to Kot Many, a small market before Dharamghar and then walked for 3 kms through an oak and rhododendron forest to Dharamghar. This mixed forest has been protected by five gram sabhas and is one of the few mixed forests that still exist in our area that has been given to the village deity.

In Dharamghar, the participants visited the traditional home of a Shauka family and were able to partake of some traditional beverages. Then the group had some discussions about the weaving and spinning traditions of the Shaukas with Smt Nandi Devi and Smt Khashti Devi, and saw the traditional spinning wheels and looms. The group also visited the training centre of Avani at Dharamghar and interacted with the weavers and supervisors about:

- procurement of raw material
- wages and income levels
- impact and usefulness of such livelihood programs on their lives

We all then proceeded to Saukyura that comprises entirely of Shauka families and is the first village where Avani initiated its work. We all then had a traditional Kumaoni lunch prepared with great care and love by the village women.

The group also had discussions with the members of the solar committee of Saukyura. In this village, 95 per cent of the families have solar lights and are also collecting money for future replacement of batteries and panels.

On the way back from Saukyura, we visited the Sarla Ashram in Lam Vinayak that was founded by Gandhiji's disciple, Sarla Behen. This is where Avani was based in the beginning years of its work. We met the present manager of the ashram Shobha Behen and visited the library established by Sarla Behen and also her Samadhi.

The meeting was then concluded with thanks to all the participants.