

**Nepal**



# Connecting the dots



**H**om Bahadur Gurung stands in the crowded meeting room packed by the Hariyali community forestry user group from Bardaghat, Nepal. Over 40 people wait for him to begin. While many of the community members have heard about climate change, most have little idea of what it really means. The meeting is full of women because they are the ones who work in and manage the forest. Word has spread that water sources may no longer be consistent, and they want to – need to – know more. So the group gathers the funds – 10 dollars – and hire Hom for the day.

As a child, Hom grew up near Pokhara, a forested area of Nepal where fires burned freely and outsiders came in and ravished the forest without any order. At the time, he knew nothing about forest management – it was non-existent in Nepal. Still, Hom understood the importance of forests and from an early age, had an insatiable desire to know everything about trees.

It was while he was working in a temporary agroforestry job in Saudi Arabia that he first made the connection between healthy forests and local weather, water and agriculture. The area in which he was working was sweltering and bone dry, “only half an hour of rain a year,” he recalls. But the government and local people realized the role of forests in water management and started planting trees. Soon fruit orchards sprang up in areas where nothing had previously grown. He was fascinated, and returned home to Nepal determined to help communities around him better manage their forests.

He became a key member of his community in Chisapani (Nawalparasi district), actively campaigning for community forestry. It was 2001, and community forestry was beginning to blossom in the Terai area of Nepal. The

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government was granting rights to communities to manage their own forests. Hom was right there in the action, “I was the most curious person. How it happens. Why it happens. The community would always send me off to the trainings because I could not stop asking questions.” Then, in 2011, his community sent him to attend a RECOFTC training on REDD+ and climate change mitigation, organized under its regional project on grassroots capacity building for REDD+.

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Now, as he stands in front of his eager audience in Bardaghat, he smiles broadly and begins, “These cards are for you to use at any point

during the day. Whenever you have a question that you may be embarrassed to ask in front of the group, write it down, and I will try to answer your questions throughout the day,” he states as he passes out note cards to all of the participants. From his experience, he knows the cards show him the true knowledge of the participants. He is able to see the gaps in their knowledge, so that he can fill the void, wherever it is. Today is no different. He glances at the cards participants pass to him, and realizes there are lots of myths floating around the community that reflect a lack of basic knowledge of climate change. He now knows how to make his training more effective.

Hom is thus able to connect the science of climate change to the community’s everyday life. He first focuses on the basics of climate change and the potential impacts on the community – shifting weather patterns that can have a direct impact on their crops and water reliability. The community appears distressed, members of the group whispering to one another, worried. At just the right time, Hom changes direction, “Our forest is helping the problem. Without our







forest, this problem could become much worse. We are a part of the solution.” The faces around the room quickly change as Hom reinforced the pride the community has for their forest. “We need to protect our forest,” he says, “but we need to go further. We must be ready for the changes that are coming. We need to create plans to protect our water sources and better manage our grazing animals. In the future, the resources may become more scarce and we need to preserve them.”

At the end of the day the community meeting room is bustling with members drawing out plans and asking questions, “I have attended many trainings that have taught me many technical aspects of forestry,” Hom recalls, “but RECOFTC was the first and only one that connected the dots. I learned not only facts, but how those facts have impacts on the ground. And most importantly, I have learned how to teach so that the community listens.”

**Story and photography  
by Nick Wilder**







Since first hiring Hom to conduct a training on climate change in 2011, the Hariyali community forestry user group has hired him back twice to help them create plans to adapt to the affects of climate change. They now have two main initiatives in action. In order to conserve water, they created a protected area near their water source. In addition, they have drafted a grazing plan for the district that both sustains their forest and protects their water sources.

The training that Hom attended was one of 16 trainings of its kind conducted in Nepal by RECOFTC's Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ project in partnership with Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN). Since 2009, RECOFTC has been implementing the regional project, with the aim of promoting the effective engagement of diverse grassroots stakeholders in the climate change and REDD+ dialogues in Asia-Pacific region. For more information, see p 26.

