

Press Clipping

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ENVIRONMENT

Healthy wetlands, healthy people!

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The government is all set to observe the 12th World Wetlands Day on February 2 with the slogan of Health Wetlands, Healthy People but the issue falls to pieces when it comes to exclusive laws to guide wetland management in Nepal.

The National Wetland Policy 2059 BS has underscored the importance of wetland management. But there is no legal basis to define wetlands, nor how to manage wetlands management.

This has resulted in very poor management of the wetlands specially those outside the protected areas like the national parks and wildlife reserves. In many of the instances several of the wetlands are facing extinction due to indiscriminate human activities.

The wetland policy has emphasised the need to ensure management of wetlands through mobilisation of local communities, like that in the forest conservation, but there has been no headway in this regard in legal terms.

Whatever efforts are being done to encourage people to take up management of wetlands are being done through informal efforts and the people living nearby the wetlands have been engaged in conservation and management of the wetlands with the help of whatever knowledge they have on the matter.

The policy has tried to manage the wetlands by classifying them as community-managed wetlands, private wetlands, leasehold wetlands, jointly managed wetlands, religious wetlands and state managed wetlands but none of the wetlands so far has been classified and the management handed over to the stakeholders.

The National Wetland Policy 2003 has been adopted with an overarching aim of involving local people in management of wetlands and conserve wetlands biodiversity with wise use of wetlands resources, Nepal Policy and Action Plan 1993 and 1998 and Nepal Biodiversity Strategy 2002, which have spoken specifically over the management of the wetlands but these documents have not come under extensive use and applica-

tion when considered their scope in wetland conservation.

Wetlands conservation has much to do with the awareness to all people living in urban and rural areas alike and particularly to those who depend directly on wetlands for their livelihood. Any conservation can succeed only when people understand the fact that wetland ecosystems are integral part of their lives and that any impact on it affects humanity.

Moreover, for effective management and conservation of wetlands, the issue must be included exclusively in the country's plan documents and proper investment must be done in this regard.

Practices have shown that handing over of local resources and delegation of management of such resources to the local user groups ensures sustainable development of the resources, hence proper

modality to conserve wetlands through people's participation must be developed to ensure the socio-economic, cultural and aesthetic benefits. Investment for researches on wetlands and associated issues and their changing scenario would also help their conservation.

Economic incentives also play a major motivational role for conservation of wetlands. Therefore, providing a mechanism through which people can reap economic benefits from wetlands could help improve guardianship of wetland resources. Wetlands are important because they house the most number of biological diversity including birds, reptiles, mammals, amphibians, fish and other species. They also act as storehouse of water.

However, in the recent years the wetlands are in a constant threat of extinction, thanks to growing population and its pressure on water bodies and the insatiable resource-hunger of the humanity.

It is in this backdrop that Nepal is preparing to celebrate the day with joint efforts of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, International Union for Nature Conservation, Worldwide Fund for Nature Conservation, Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation and several national and community level organisations.

Wetland conservation has much to do with awareness among residents of rural and urban areas alike.



The Bis Hajari Lake within the Chitwan National Park.