

(1992) National Science Conference organized by RONAST were distributed free of cost to participants of Third National Conference in 1999. Although reduced sales undermine the aim of publication, there is another aspect to this problem. The author visited the office of the dean of the Institute of Science and Technology (IOST, TU) to collect the recent issue of the *Journal of Institute of Science and Technology*. But the store keeper said that he could not give out the journal because it had not been decided to distribute or sell it, even a month after publication. The same was the case with *Banko Janakari*, published by the Forest Research and Information Service Center (FRISC). *Science Reporter*, published by the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resource (India), is available in the shops of Nepal; why not the publications of RONAST, IOST and FRISC?

If we cannot ensure that a journal is economically self-sustaining, we can know that it is going to perish soon. Peoples are realizing the importance of publication and the number of readers and customer is increasing. Researchers are facing difficult problems and have to waste more time getting information. If it is easily available in time they do not hesitate to pay a minimal price. So the first thing to do is to improve the quality of journals in content and printing. Articles should be reliable and reviewed by experts. A good journal has an expanding market and people can pay a reasonable price. Sometimes it may be necessary to encourage people to buy the journals by highlighting its significance. Journals and other publications of government organizations are distributed free of cost but are not available to all interested people. If you do not have a close relation with officials you have to request several times to get a single copy, and sometimes even then you will not succeed! This situation needs to be corrected promptly. If they are published in sufficient number, sold at price that reflects their actual cost, and made available on the public market (e.g. in book shops) the journals will not lose money, and interested people can get information easily. For this it is necessary to improve the distribution system. Books and journals published by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), IUCN (International Union for Nature Conservation), NEFAS (Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies) and other organizations are easily available in bookstores, but why not journals published by RONAST, ministry and TU? Major journals published by ministries, RONAST and TU should find a place in every library at academic institutions, research centers, NGOs and INGOs. Publishers can use existing book distributors to make them available to the general public. And, one important thing that is to be remembered from time to time is that a journal not available to those who want and need it is not worth publishing. ■

*Bharat B Shrestha is a teaching assistant at Central Department of Botany, Tribhuvan University. E-mail: bhbashre@yahoo.com*

## WTO casts a shadow over Nepal's natural legacy

Can't live with it, can't live without it. Confused? The golden rule: Economic priorities should not be allowed to outweigh environmental imperatives

Krishna Roka

APART FROM THE CURRENT POLITICAL turmoil, the major debate in our news media focuses on the issue of when Nepal should become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Globalization has erased boundaries among nations through economic, social, and environmental unification. This is a case of "can't live with it, can't live without it." The real question here involves the environmental consequences if Nepal does open its doors, for globalization has paradoxically brought forth new problems rather than solving old ones. The Northern bloc has long squandered the resources of developing countries in the name of economic progress.

Globalization in effect is not a single process but a concatenation of developments involving infrastructure enhancement; economic reforms, trade and market access, resource extraction, production and distribution of goods, and so on. The main thrust of globalization is to increase trade by increasing production. The expansion of urban societies has increased the demand for forest goods, from timber and pulp to medicinal plant, putting ever greater pressure on forest ecosystems. In recent decades, the pressures have intensified. Growing appetites for forest and agricultural products are driving logging and conversion. The Philippines' loss of 90% of its primary forest during the timber boom of the 1970s is a clear example of our shortsightedness (1). The loss started after the Second World War. Timber from the Philippines was supplied to markets in Europe and Japan after World War II, as war-ravaged countries rebuilt. Every year, forested areas four times the size of Switzerland are cleared worldwide (2). Foreign investment in logging, mining, and energy contributes to this deforestation. These enterprises are the wheels on which the globalization juggernaut careens around the world.

Under the circumstances, Nepal must think twice before opening its borders. As Nobel laureate and former chief economist of the World Bank Joseph Stiglitz says, "the borderless world through which goods and services flow is also a borderless world through which other things can flow that are less positive". Economic priorities should not be allowed to outweigh environmental imperatives. The greatest threat posed by globalization may be in the field of intellectual property rights (IPR). According to WTO rules, foreign companies and individuals may patent products and processes on which Nepalese livelihoods have depended for centuries.

Multinational companies (MNCs) are prying on developing countries with less effective central authority, gaining access to their assets with little effort. Taking advantage of the situation, they swiftly take over the country's business sector in their control. For the MNCs, economic return is all that matters; their role in squandering natural resources has become a sore point in many developing nations.

With economic liberalization, borders are open for the free exchange of ideas, culture, and technology. Via satellite, western products have flooded the screens of developing countries. Traditional ways have been transformed, as we have opted for a McDonaldized (urbanized) culture. McDonaldization of the society demands more food that both aggravates economic problems and increases pressure on the environment. Traditional agricultural practices have proven inefficient in meeting modern demands. Farmers have adapted to using excessive amount of chemical fertilizers and pesticides; the initial gains in production, however, have been followed by rapid declines, and increased dependence on chemical inputs. The damage to the soil has been incalculable.

In view of these facts, Nepal must proceed with caution, making every effort to distinguish short-term from long-term advantages, in order to minimize the adverse impacts of globalization. Although we boast of our wealth of biodiversity, the details are unknown. Myriad species are still undocumented and may wind up in the hands of MNCs. We should learn the lesson from past developmental activities (roads, dams, and so on) undertaken without environmental impact analysis: once we fritter away our resources they are lost forever. Nepal should formulate its own policies and regulations regarding patenting and extraction. Joining the WTO can and should be delayed until completion of this groundwork. Nature is Nepal's trump card, and we should play it wisely. ■

*For correspondence to the author, E-mail: roka@sify.com*

### References

- 1) JN Abramovitz. 1998. *Taking a stand: Cultivating a new relationship with the world's forests* [Worldwatch Paper 140]. Washington DC: World Watch Institute
- 2) M Vallianatos and A Durbin. 1998. *Licence to loot: The MAI and how to stop it*. Washington DC: Friends of the Earth. 49p