



*Proceedings of the Sixth International Permaculture Conference
September-October 1996, Perth, Western Australia*

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The Work of the Jajarkot Permaculture Program

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[Submitted Paper]

In Nepal, 91% of the working population is dependent primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. Agricultural practices have developed to be finely in tune with climate and people's needs. They are intimately interwoven with the forest and other natural resources to maintain the balance of nutrients necessary to support agriculture and thus provide basic needs of food, fuel, fodder, timber, medicines, etc. Nationalisation of the forests, rising population, the move to a money-based economy and inappropriate "aid" programmes have combined to undermine the sustainability of traditional agriculture. Clearance of forest land for farming in an attempt to increase crop production has led to degradation of the very resources needed to support agriculture, and thus culture itself.

At present, the land cannot support the rising population. Apart from the clearance of forest land, this has led to the migration of villagers out of the region to India and urban areas in Nepal. The people of Nepal are faced with the need to integrate forestry with agriculture in order to supply the resources they need for farming and other basic needs.

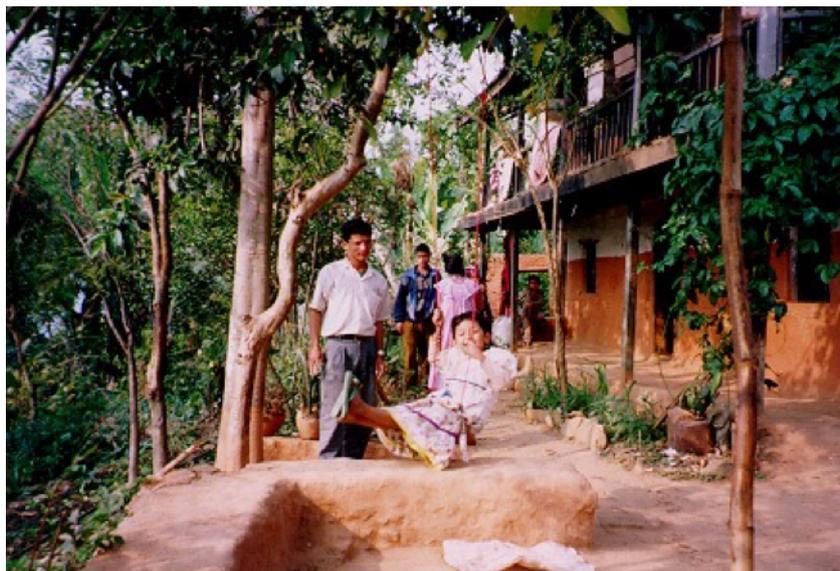


Figure 1: *Villagers involved in the program. (Photo: Chris Evans)*

The Jajarkot Permaculture Program (JPP) is an indigenous grass roots NGO. Started in June 1988 with the acquisition of a farmhouse and an acre of land, the programme has grown by working with local people and utilizing traditional farming practices as well as labour and product exchange systems. The JPP has achieved a high degree of community involvement, and this has been used to help expand and develop a wide range of programmes in more than 45 villages over four districts, employing over 120 local men and women.

The success of the programme so far is largely because of its use of local resources and traditional skills, and the fact that the teachers are all farmers themselves. Further, the JPP looks to support and enhance indigenous systems by the addition of appropriate skills from new and improved technologies. These include beekeeping, weaving, fruit and vegetable propagation, tree seedling production, plantation and land rehabilitation techniques, leatherworking and drinking water systems without using cement. These technologies, and others, are applied following specific demand from participating villagers, and involving them in the process.

A variety of teaching techniques are used, such as non-formal education, in-situ training on farmers' fields, and residential training at the JPP's resource centres. The objective is for villagers to learn and in a way that they can continue to establish and develop the technologies independently. Along with this approach, the JPP is continuously working to strengthen the natural resource base of forest, soil and water in order to provide the foundation for agricultural and thus social development.

Methods of work include: village-based resource centres for demonstration, training and resource production; village development committees and user groups; extension work in farmer's own fields; schools programme; publication of technical bulletins and newsletters; non-formal education; festivals, local cultural activities, songs and dance used in teaching and extension.

By establishing resources such as beekeeping, weaving, fruit and vegetable production and other income generating technologies, in 1992/93 the JPP generated some 20-25% of its needs from within the programme. With all these resources in place, the JPP is ready to move forward with more active support to achieve its goals of agricultural and cultural stability within its working areas and to help use this as a model for similar programmes elsewhere.

From 1988 to 1995, the Jajarkot Permaculture Programme has been responsible for introducing the following techniques and approaches for the first time in the district:

- Collection of soft-shelled walnut seed from neighbouring Jumla District to raise in JPP and Forest Division nurseries, and distribution to farmers. Between 1988 and 1992 over 20,000 seedlings were raised and distributed;
- Horticultural grafting and budding to produce improved fruit seedlings for temperate (apple, pear, peach, plum, walnut, apricot, cherry and almond) and sub-tropical (mango, citrus) fruits. Programmes are run for training and commercial production;
- Establishment of the first integrated fruit orchards, and 'mother' orchards of selected varieties for local scion production;

- Manufacture and distribution of improved bee hives, and the successful establishment of hives; extraction of honey from improved hives;
- Training and demonstration of forestry and low external input and sustainable agriculture (LEISA) techniques such as green manures, alley cropping, bunding, companion planting;
- Demonstration and training in establishment and maintenance of kitchen gardens for domestic vegetable production;
- Establishment of drinking water systems without using cement, instead relying on local, high quality skills of stonemasonry and carpentry;
- Village training in weaving on hand looms; establishment and operation of cooperative weaving cottage industry and reintroducing traditional cotton production and processing;
- Introduction of angora rabbits for wool production to be used in the weaving programme;
- Establishment of village committees (user groups) for integrated community development;
- Establishment of the first women’s working committee for forest protection and management;
- Organising festivals of dance and drama to integrate “development” with local culture;
- Establishment and operation of village-based resource centres (working farms) to carry out demonstration, training and research into the above;
- Re-introduction of a leatherworking cottage industry to produce shoes and bags;
- Generation of 250W micro-hydro demonstration from a traditional flour mill on one of JPP’s resource centres.

In addition, the JPP has supplemented the work of local government agriculture, forestry and livestock development offices with villages to establish and maintain forest tree nurseries and plantations, devise and implement forest management plans, distribute (and grow) vegetable and fodder grass seeds, and construct pit latrines.

Since its conception in 1988, about 75% of the JPP’s budgets have been spent on local resources (mainly wages). This has generated a local response and reciprocal investment from the villagers that is hard to quantify but has been absolutely essential to the success of the programme. It includes access to land in more than 30 village areas over four districts, barter of seeds, and the opportunity to research and propagate improved species preferred by farmers.

Chris Evans, co-founder (1991) and independent Technical Advisor to the Jarjakot Permaculture Programme, completed his BSc. (Hons) in Forestry, in 1984. During 1985-88 he worked for the VSO on various Community Forest Development Programmes in Nepal. Since 1989, Chris has been actively involved in Permaculture, he received his Diploma in 1991 and was awarded a Permaculture Community Service Award in 1992, for services to community development in Nepal. Chris has taught many Permaculture courses, lectured and presented on Permaculture & Sustainable Community Development in various places around the World, done fundraising for projects in Nepal and assisted with the organisation of both International Permaculture Conferences in Nepal (1991) and Scandinavia (1993).