

Growing Eco-Friendly Tea in Protected Wetlands

by Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF) Nepal

Background

The Mai Pokhari wetland lies in the mid-hill ranges of the Himalayas. Located about 2,150 meters above sea level and covering an area of 90 hectares, the wetland is approximately 545 km away from the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu. The wetland was formed from the subsidence of the ground which was filled with water from natural springs and precipitation.



Mai Pokhari Ramsar Site with Community Forest

In 2008, the Mai Pokhari wetland was declared a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. The Mai Pokhari Ramsar site spans three village development committees (VDCs), namely, Mai Pokhari, Sulubung and Sumbek. A VDC is a lower tier local government unit similar to a municipality.

The Mai Pokhari area has mild temperatures with cold and humid condition almost throughout the year. Located in the middle of Kanchenjunga-Singhalila Landscape Biodiversity Complex, which is recognized as a biodiversity hotspot, the site is an endemic bird area and a center for plant species dispersal and diversity. The area is a cloud forest or fog forest ecosystem. As such, it is a generally tropical or subtropical moist forest with a persistent, frequent or seasonal low-level cloud cover. East-Himalayan oak and laurel trees are the main components of the vegetation. The vegetation is capable of condensing fog water.



Growing Eco-Friendly Tea in Protected Wetlands

by Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF) Nepal

Mai Pokhari has a population of 2,498 belonging to 504 households, of which 61 live within the Ramsar site. The Mai Pokhari area is home to ethnic groups Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Sherpa, Gurung, Tamang and Magar, and the castes Brahmin and Chhetri. Each ethnic group or Janajati has its language rooted in the Tibet and Tibeto-Burman language families.

Communities in Action

Three groups in the Ramsar site help with the sustainable management of forest resources: Mai Pokhari RFG, Bhalu Kateri Community Forest Users Group (CFUG) and Bhedi Chowk CFUG. Additionally, two government agencies, the Forest Range Post under the Department of Forest and the Mai Pokhari Botanical Office under the Department of Plant Resources, have the primary function of monitoring and conserving plant diversity in the area.

Mai Pokhari RF	Bhalu Kateri CF	Bhedi chowk CF
VDC: Mai Pokhari	VDC: Sulubung ward: 2	VDC: Mai Pokhari,
Area: 12.2 hectare	Area: 35 hectare	ward: 4 and 6
Established date: April 2004	Established date: April 1992	Area: 200 hectare
Household = 305	Household = 42 ;	Established date: March 2001
Major species: Japanese pine, Katush, Kharane, Bajranth, Bante, bamboo species etc	Population = 214 (female 108 and male 106)	Household = 157;
	Major species: Japanese pine, Katush, Kharane, Bajranth, Kholme, Pipli, NTFP: Chiraito, Lokta, Nagbeli, bamboo species etc	Population = 647 (female 302 and male 345;
		Livestock = 502 (Cattle = 290, Buffalo = 52, Sheep/goat = 79 and Pig = 81)
		Major species: Katush, Kharane, Bajranth, Phalant, Japanese pine etc

Farmers are directly benefited by the Ramsar site community forest. From the forest, they collect firewood, fodder, leaf litter, wild vegetables, medicinal plants and timber. The Ramsar site is rich in water resources, which the farmers tap for their drinking and irrigation needs.



Growing Eco-Friendly Tea in Protected Wetlands

by Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF) Nepal

Eco-branding

Farmers in the Mai Pokhari Ramsar site grow different crops such as maize and potatoes in terraces around homesteads covering an area of 239 hectares. Significantly, farmers also grow exportable crops like tea, cardamom and herbs. The farmers use eco-friendly methods to grow the crops. The high quality of tea grown by the local farmers makes it especially suitable for export.

VDC	Number of wards	Population		Cash crop coverage (ha)
		Total HH	Total population	
Mai Pokhari	4	65	260	39
Mai Pokhari	6	80	365	48
Sulubung	2	113	674	38
Sulubung	4	112	478	45
Sulubung	5	86	421	35
Sumbek	8	48	300	34
Total		504	2498 (1248 male & 1250 female)	239

There are four tea processing factories and three tea cooperatives in the area. The cooperatives collect green leaf tea and sell these to the processing factories. On the average, farmers gather about 5,000,000 kg green leaf tea per day, while the factories process around 100,000 kg of tea.

While the tea produced in the area is already of exceptional quality, the stakeholders have determined that the use of the Mai Pokhari Ramsar Conservation brand for marketing would allow them to get a better price for their produce, enhancing the benefits from the protected area. Thus, the tea farmers, cooperatives and tea factories requested the local district government to promulgate rules and regulations regarding organic cultivation that is harmonious with the conservation of the Mai Pokhari Ramsar area. Farmers are producing eco-friendly crops but were not certified and were not allowed to use the Mai Pokhari Ramsar Conservation brand for marketing the product.

Growing Eco-Friendly Tea in Protected Wetlands

by Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF) Nepal



Farmers pluck green leaf tea at their own tea garden in Ramsar site

The Hariyali Jaibit tea cooperative and the Jasbire and Mai Pokhari tea processing factories together requested the local government and the management committee of the Mai Pokhari Ramsar Site to issue the rules on the use of the Mai Pokhari brand.

They were assisted in this effort by the Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF), a national apex body of tea farmers cooperatives, under the latter's implementation of a project between the UNFAO Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) and Asian Farmers Association (AFA), of which it is a member. CTCF conducted research on the details of the initiative and organized village-level meetings with stakeholders like farmers, tea cooperatives, tea processing factories, community forest groups, the Village Development Committees (VDC) and the National Tea and Coffee Development Board, the Nepal government's policy-making body for the tea and coffee sector.

The proponents met in September 2016 and requested the local governments to make rules and regulations to raise the awareness of all farmers regarding the importance of the use of the Mai Pokhari Ramsar conservation brand. The VDCs of Mai Pokhari and Sulubung supported the initiative and they endorsed the same to the District Development Committee (DDC) for further support.

Growing Eco-Friendly Tea in Protected Wetlands

by Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF) Nepal

Meanwhile, the Hariyali Jaibit tea cooperative and the Jaspire and Mai Pokhari tea processing factories are vigorously campaigning to make more tea farmers aware of the initiative. The farmers are responding positively, while DDCs and District Forest Offices are positive in this issues.

The proponents have determined that further follow-up with the government authorities is needed to realize their objective. Thus, CTCF, tea cooperatives, tea processing factories and forest communities in the Ramsar site continue their interaction with government on this initiative.

CTCF is set to organize district level workshops to build more support for the initiative until cooperatives and processing factories can use the Mai Pokhari Ramsar brand name to get better prices for their tea exports.



International tea buyers interested to buy tea from Mai Pokhari Ramsar Site

Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA)

Rm 206, Partnership Center

59 C. Salvador St., Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108 Philippines

Tel/fax: 436-4640 | **Email:** afa@asianfarmers.org | **URL:** www.asianfarmers.org

Facebook: [afa@asianfarmers.org](https://www.facebook.com/afa@asianfarmers.org) | **Twitter:** [@asianfarmers](https://twitter.com/asianfarmers)