

Obituary



Dr. Chandra Prasad Gurung

(Born Dec. 1, 1949. passed away on September 23, 2006)

Country Representative, WWF/Nepal

No Nepalese can ever forget the fateful day, *Ghatasthapana*, the first day of the *Dasain* Festival, September 23, 2006, not because it was such an auspicious day for the people of Nepal but because it was a fateful day when the Environmentalists of the World lost 24 of their very well renowned colleagues in a helicopter accident that took place in the very remote part of Nepal, Ghunsa, in the district of Taplejung, the far eastern Himalayan district of Nepal, adjacent to the State of Sikkim of India. It was most unbearable news. Dr. Chandra Prasad Gurung was one of those killed in the accident. He has been well known as a charismatic conservationist who was a champion of Community participation, convincing the conservation partners and local communities to work together for attaining the common goal of not only properly protecting nature and natural resources but also judiciously utilizing the bounties of nature for the benefit of the people in a sustainable manner.

He was born on Dec. 1, 1949, 1950 in Siklis a remote village in the district of Kaski and led a simple but contented life along with his sisters and brothers and parents. After the family came in contact with Ms. Dorothy Mierow who had come to Nepal as a Volunteer from Peace Corps, U.S.A. some time during the earlier years of the 1960s. She was stationed at Prithvi Narayan College for teaching Geography students at I.A. and B.A. stages. Realizing that the family wanted their children to pursue their studies further after graduating themselves from the local school. Chandra found his way to Pokhara where he was amply assisted by the benevolent lady, Ms. Mierow. Under her able guidance and guardianship Chandra could improve better. He was employed at the Prithvi Narayan College as a Clerk and soon he was transferred to the Library as its Librarian. But he did not give up studies and passed B.A with Geography as one of the subjects. Then he was admitted to the Tribhuvan University from where he passed the M.A. Examination in Geography. Later he went to Bangkok and joined the Human Settlements Division of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) from where he obtained another Master's degree

Then he went to Colorado Springs, the hometown of Ms. Mierow and studied Anthropology and then to Hawaii. He completed his Ph. D. there and came back to Nepal. He carried out the pilot study in the Annapurna Area which included the village where he was born and spent his unforgettable childhood days. During the time when he was studying Geography

in Tribhuvan University, he had the opportunity of visiting Surkhet, an upcoming district of the Mid-western Nepal for on-the-spot study of the area as a part of the then requirement for the degree of M.A. His exposure to the real situation in the field as a professional paid very well in his future life in the Annapurna area where he soon got an opportunity of working in the project, Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP). He is regarded as one of the pioneers in the project since it was guided by a completely new concept of the “protected area”. The earlier protected areas were called “national parks” and were managed as completely restricted area. These conservation areas on the other hand were to be treated differently with the philosophy of “protection and utilization” mobilizing the people’s participation in a massive scale. Formerly it was restricted to the pilot area covering a small portion from Birethanti to Ghandruk and later, after finding the pioneer study a workable idea, enlarged the area of their operation and the conservation area entered the nomenclature the protected areas of Nepal as a new but workable concept. Dr Gurung got the credit in introducing this concept on the ACAP and gradually other similar areas also followed suit. Kanchanjunga was one of them, which was recently selected for the purpose with an intention of replicating the experience of the ACAP region.

Dr. Gurung worked as the Project Director of ACAP until 1999. Then he joined World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as the Country Representative. He played a very important role in revamping the management of the protected area system in Nepal through decentralization as well as a series of policy and legislative changes. He worked for WWF to mobilize global resources and world opinion. The Nepal Geographical Society has the honour to express their heartfelt gratitude to WWF/Nepal for the generous financial assistance that was granted for conducting a National Conference at Pokhara on “Geography in Nepal: Reflections on Mountain Environment and Human Activities” in 2004. It was a great success. One hundred and forty-three geographers ranging from school teachers through College to University teachers and freelancers participated in this conference and forty three papers were presented in the parallel technical sessions.

He has travelled to various parts of Nepal and also to many countries of the world in connection with his responsibility. A number of honours and medals have been awarded to him in recognition of his contribution to the enhancement of the environmental conservation in different parts of the world.. The most notable one is the Order of the Golden Arc, awarded for his outstanding contribution to furthering conservation of nature. Many people have been found to be quoting what he often said, “When my people have food to eat on their plates, then they can think of conservation.

He is survived by his wife, three sons and one daughter.