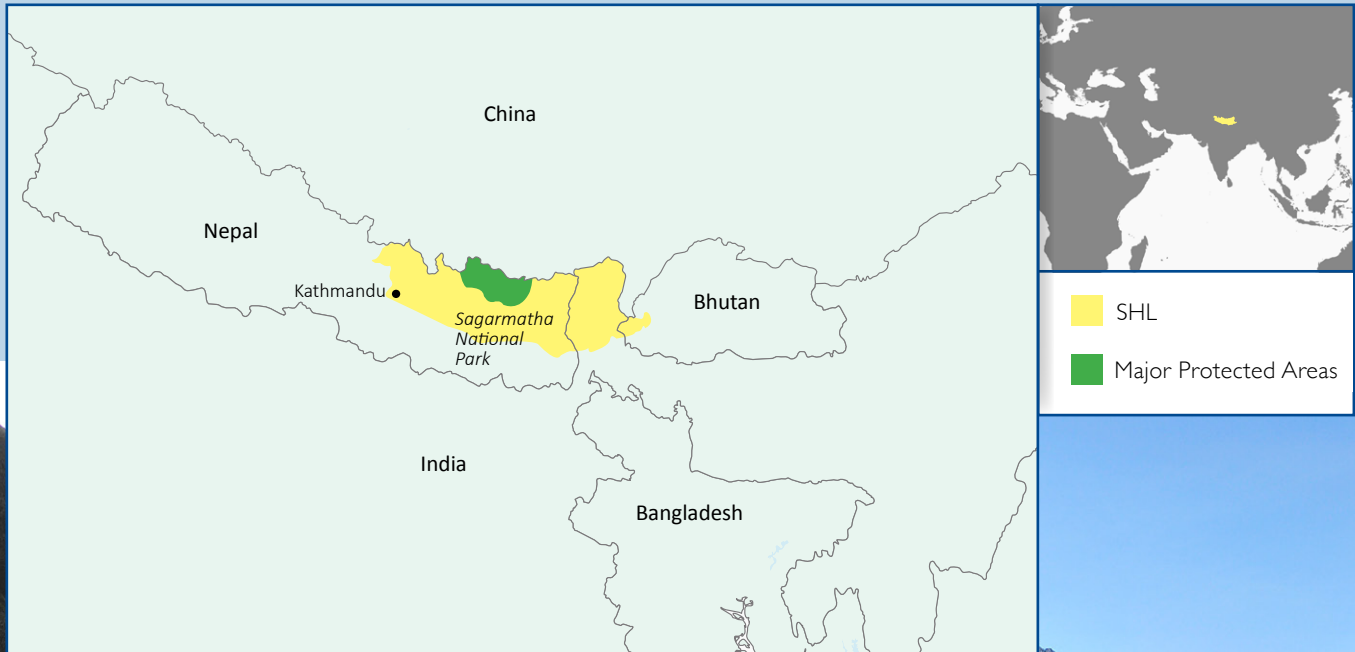




USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SCAPES LANDSCAPE PROFILE: THE SACRED HIMALAYAN LANDSCAPE



KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA, NEPAL, 2011: Headwater source, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area.
Photo © Susheel Shrestha / WWF Nepal

THE SACRED HIMALAYAN LANDSCAPE AT A GLANCE

- The Sacred Himalayan Landscape covers nearly 40,000 square kilometers (9.5 million acres), extending from central Nepal through the Sikkim region of northern India, to western Bhutan. The project brought nearly 283,000 hectares of biologically significant land under improved management.
- The project was implemented by the World Wildlife Fund, which partnered with CARE on community forestry endeavors.
- The project leveraged \$1,289,496 for conservation from the MacArthur Foundation and private donors.

THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

The Sacred Himalayan Landscape contains habitats found nowhere else in the world, from subtropical lowlands to the frigid peak of Mount Everest. This enormous range of ecosystems harbors the endangered snow leopard and red panda as well as blue sheep, musk deer and the takin, a large goat-antelope similar to the musk ox. The landscape's alpine forests are rich in rhododendrons, Himalayan oak and larch, and its meadows are flush with diverse plants unique to the landscape.

Six million people from a range of ethnic groups — Sherpa, Limbu, Rai, Lepcha, Drukpa and Bhutia — each with their own customs and languages, live in and depend on the landscape. Largely Buddhist, their spiritual values are tied to the land, but years of material deprivation have pressed them to overexploit forest resources and clear forests for agriculture. Some of their actions have consequences that are immediately tangible, such as more floods, landslides and avalanches

during monsoon season because trees and other vegetation have been cleared from steep slopes. Besides degradation of the land and habitat loss, threats to the Sacred Himalayan Landscape include poaching of endangered species and human-wildlife conflict. Climate change and climate variability have the potential to amplify these challenges.



SACRED HIMALAYAN LANDSCAPE, 2015: Snow leopard.
Photo © Reinhard / ARCO / WWF-Canon



KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA, NEPAL, 2014: Yak herder in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area.
Photo © Manan Karki / WWF Nepal

THE CHALLENGE

The Sacred Himalayan Landscape was one of nine transboundary landscape-scale efforts in USAID's Sustainable Conservation Approaches in Priority Ecosystems (SCAPES) project. Conservation of Sacred Himalayan Landscape was undertaken by the World Wildlife Fund, which partnered with CARE on community forestry endeavors. To enlist communities as conservation stewards, the project addressed their livelihood and resource needs. By working with existing community-based organizations and community-forest user groups, the project helped to improve pasture and natural resource management and expand alternative livelihoods, thus reducing pressure on the landscape.

Amid such a large and challenging landscape, the project zeroed in on connectivity between the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in northeast Nepal and the adjacent Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in Sikkim, India. Maintaining that connectivity required better management of forest and rangeland, reducing poaching and illegal harvesting, expanding livelihood options, ensuring a greater role for women and marginalized groups in decision-making, improving local capacity to plan for climate change, and increasing transboundary cooperation.

Community mobilization was the soul of the project. WWF and CARE helped develop operational plans for 37 community forests, which were endorsed by government authorities. More than 72,000 acres of forest are now under sustainable community management in the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area. The project also helped to create nurseries, and 158,000 seedlings were distributed and planted throughout the conservation area to restore forest corridors. In the KBR in India, the project collaborated with three major village clusters to map bio-resources and revise their community-based natural resource management plans.

Using CARE's Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis tool, the project conducted a landscape-level climate change vulnerability assessment, which led to local adaptation plans for 10 communities. In all, 4,037 people from 798 households benefited from those plans, which recommend specific strategies with respect to food and water security. "Water smart" activities include spring



KANGCHENJUNGA, NEPAL 2011: Adaptive agriculture.
Photo © Susheel Shrestha / WWF Nepal

The project trained nearly 5,600 people in natural resource management or conservation. Through 17 training sessions attended by 900 people, the project taught the rewards of conservation and the harm that comes from over-exploiting natural resources. To reach an even larger audience, the project distributed calendars with biodiversity information and produced 170 radio episodes in local languages about conservation and governance.

To relieve pressure on high-altitude grasslands, which are increasingly used for grazing and the collection of medicinal and aromatic plants, the project introduced rotational grazing practices and regulated medicinal and aromatic plant harvests on 2,000 hectares. To garner long-term commitments from the community to maintain these measures, the project helped develop nature-based business opportunities, such as essential oils production, beekeeping, papermaking and ecotourism. A total of 3,139 people received economic benefits as a result of training in these enterprises.

Himali Chungda, a hotel owner in Ghunsa, says "At present, camping groups comprise the majority of tourist arrivals in the region. However, one teahouse trekker spends the equivalent of three campers. This should enable more teahouse trekkers to visit the region."

Deoman Bhote, the owner of one of two hotels in the Yamphudin area of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, says "Tourism is a good source of income and employment. And the situation is far better than earlier, and I'm optimistic it will continue to improve. We received about 150 tourists in Yamphudin this season. Maybe in the next year or two we can expect twice as many."

The project included marginalized groups and women in its trainings, to encourage power-sharing and equity in the distribution of benefits. For communities to improve management of their natural resources, their institutions must be built upon good practices that value democratic input. Women, for example, were required to constitute 50 percent of the executive committee and hold two of the four major positions within community forest user groups.

Collaboration between India and Nepal was another breakthrough, because neither animals nor

poachers respect political borders. Four regional-level transboundary meetings were held for local and national governments, representatives of protected areas, communities and NGOs. Joint monitoring exercises have been conducted in the border areas, and protocols and desired outcomes have been formalized. This improved monitoring and community protection is credited with the increase of snow leopard and blue sheep populations during the project.

THE LESSONS

Creating market linkages for new nature-based products is a challenge. Despite market analyses and business planning undertaken during the program, the geography of the region complicates matters. Residents sometimes have to walk between one and three days to reach a road with public transportation. The end consumers for products such as handmade paper and essential oils live in distant urban areas, and those markets are controlled by traders who work in cartels. Because prices fluctuate, communities are not always aware of the fair market price for their products.

In negotiating transboundary cooperation, local communities — rather than central governments — came first. Because policymakers were far removed from the project sites, and their concerns hinged mostly on

trade and national security, informal approaches were necessary for the project to make headway, particularly through local partners.

Working at the community level was generally an asset, helping establish practical systems for monitoring conservation indicators and discouraging poaching and illegal wildlife trade. It brought its own set of challenges too. In the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve of Sikkim, for example, all forests are owned and managed by the state, while Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in eastern Nepal is community managed. This meant that different priorities and decision-making styles had to be considered while the project steered the parties toward mutually agreeable solutions.



KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA, NEPAL, 2012: Nepal Police and community-based anti-poaching members on joint patrol. Photo © WWF Nepal