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BIODIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Sacred Himalayan Landscape in Nepal

THEMATIC RESEARCH WORKING BRIEF

Number 2

This thematic research brief draws on work in progress on the Sacred Himalayan Landscape Strategic Plan to disseminate and exchange the research issues and ideas as they come up. Since we want to develop further on these themes, we request readers to bear with sections that are not fully polished.

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Contents

Overview: Governing Approaches to Biodiversity Conservation

"Despite the 1992 Rio Convention on Biological Diversity, the world's biological resources continue to be lost at an alarming rate, and particularly so in developing countries where many of the remaining resources are concentrated. Both inside and outside protected areas, biological resources, their management, and people's livelihood systems are complex and intricately inter-connected. While conventions are signed globally the implementation of provisions has to be local, and prospects for success depend on assessment of likely costs and benefits among stakeholders at various levels, and the resolution of conflict of interest among them."

(Gimble and Laidlaw 2002)

Conception of biodiversity conservation, though intuitively arose from the ecological significance of diverse plants and animals in maintaining ecosystem functions, today the conception is dominantly anthropocentric and intrinsic to human needs. This corresponds to the socio-economic demand of biodiversity, which largely emanates from the fact that about half the world's population, especially the poor in developing countries, relies heavily on the management of natural resources for daily survival.

Over the years we saw a series of biodiversity conservation approaches evolve, out of which two approaches basically reined among conservation communities. One, the classical or traditional conservation approach to biodiversity conservation adopted the exclusionary principle permeated from the view that people and their livelihood activities are threatening to natural ecosystems and must be driven out. Inspired by this approach, a number of protected areas were set up in biodiversity hot spots. This approach, however, was a blatant failure in that socio-economic costs borne by it was higher and even in species conservation terms it was disappointing. The failure of traditional conservation approach gave insight to another approach that adopted the principle of inclusion, the primary goal of which was an integrated approach to conservation and development with an attempt to address the needs, constraints and opportunities of local people.

The latter approach, the inclusionary approach or the community-based conservation approach, appears more effective than the former approach, yet this conservation policy advancement has been conflictual. Much of the conflict revolves around issues of distributional justice originating from unequal access to resources and inequity in benefit sharing. For example, it is now increasingly reported that many of the local primary conservation groups such as indigenous people, the poor and backward groups and women have largely been excluded from the process, rendering them to being 'participatory exclusions' (Agarwal 2001) and the process 'pseudo-participatory'. One major challenge to add to the debate of appropriateness of conservation approach is the variability and uncertainty faced by natural resource management systems. Of the various forms of uncertainty, natural resource management particularly suffers from ecological, institutional and knowledge uncertainties (Mehta et al 1999). Ecological uncertainty refers to uncertainties arising from the unpredictable and variable nature of the ecosystems with which rural people interact; livelihood uncertainties encapsulates the unpredictable conditions in the social, ecological and economic worlds; and, knowledge uncertainty characterizes capacities to deal with risks originating from partial and plural and scientific and lay perspectives of understanding NRM process.

While this can reasonably be acknowledged that there is no clear solution to the debates and challenges surrounding biodiversity conservation and natural resource management, there is room however to provoke analytical thoughts to the generation of new approaches to conservation. One such newer and recent insight, the discussion for which has already been paved, has been to explore new forms of governance or improvements in the present governing patterns of biodiversity conservation.

2000 people's whose livelihoods are bound with sustainable use of biodiversity must be in the best position to make management decisions

1990s encourage people's participation in sustainable use of biodiversity

1980s people living on the outskirts of protected areas must be made aware of the importance of biodiversity

Biodiversity and Governance: Is there Coherence?

Biodiversity conservation and governance perhaps converge at the point where global and local issues arise. On the one hand, there seems to be a clear divide between the global and local and on the other hand such divide has become increasingly redundant because local events are highly influenced by global changes. Provided this context, there could be two scenarios where biodiversity conservation and governance converge. One, at global level: globalization has pointed to the increasing interdependence of the economies of the world and citizens of all nations, which is in fact a signpost that countries need to find ways to work together to tackle shared challenges (<http://www.iied.org/docs/wssd/bp_designew.pdf>). Environmental challenges, for example, climate change, ozone

Key challenges to exploring new governance system for natural resource management

GLOBAL LEVEL	SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL/LOCAL LEVEL
1. **Failed collective Action:** The forum for developing collective action is not yet strong and effective: need of new mechanisms for generating equitable incentive structures	1. **Incomplete decentralization:** Central government and authorities retain key aspects of NRM management authority, placing tight constraints on local decision-making
2. **Fragmentation:** International environmental governance is shared among too many institutions with diffuse, overlapping, and conflicting mandates: need of coherence	2. **Unclear and overlapping institutional jurisdiction:** Local level institutions often have overlapping jurisdictions and mandates in NRM, leading to their struggle for power and revenues
3. **Deficient expertise:** Fragmentation makes it difficult to compare problems or results and to build comprehensive programmes to address environmental issues: need of knowledge networking	3. **Local capacity:** Communities and their organizations are poorly organized and are unaware of their rights due to which decision-making system lacks representation, accountability and transparency
4. **Deficient authority:** No one organization has the political authority, vitality, expertise, and profile to serve as the center of gravity for international environmental regime: need of the center of gravity for common environmental concerns	4. **Lack of alliance and coordination:** Alliance and co-ordination among community organizations, local governments, private sectors, NGOs and donors has largely been lacking at local level
5. **Insufficient legitimacy:** Disillusionment with global environmental regime and structures to address issues of equity, trade and development: need to build trust between developed and developing nations through financial and technological transfers	5. **Disproportionate power-sharing within community organizations:** Traditional and hierarchical decision-making system exists and elite authorities continue to play a role in NRM with varying degree of legitimacy and control

Ref: (Shackleton et al 2003 & <http://magnet.undp.org/docs/gov/Lessons1.htm>)

depletion, biodiversity loss, illustrate the extent of interconnectedness. Two, at local level, decentralization process at national and sub-national level are supporting and encouraging community-based participatory resource conservation models. Contradictory to such provision are formal regulations and international treaties such as TRIPs and WTO that undermine the local control of resources and indigenous knowledge systems governing community-based conservation approaches. These illustrations of fuzziness in and contradiction between the interaction between global and local resource management systems leads us to explore new forms of governance for natural resource management and environmental protection.

Governance as a terminology follows different stances as above and also as stated in the huge collection of available literature. The essence carried by each however is more or less the same: that, governance essentially implies a state of 'rule of law' and 'no corruption', a process that is transparent and accountable, a mechanism that effectively takes into account the interests of people and empowers them, and comprises of the institutions and processes that determine how power is exercised and how decisions are taken in matters that affect people's well-being and socio-economic and political developmental affairs. Such implication does reflect on the meeting point of governance and biodiversity conservation, evidenced by, for example, changes in populations of elephants and black rhinos in a number of African countries, both during a period of decline (1987-1994) and during a period of recovery (1994-1998), were strongly related to mean national corruption scores (Smith et al 2003). This example, in fact, best observes that national corruption status, rather than poverty levels or human population pressure can actually accelerate the rate of biodiversity loss. The influence of corruption on biodiversity goes beyond Africa. Efforts to conserve Indonesia's forests, for example, have been hampered by illegal logging, supported by corrupt officials despite a raft of protective legislation (Jepson, Mackinnon, Monk 2001).

Beyond the more theoretical aspects of contextualizing the challenges faced by conservation regime, there are approaches to conceptualizing governance in biodiversity conservation. Here we start by demonstrating how different actors understand governance and what they imply.

'Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken.'

Commission on Global Governance

'Governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development.'

The World Bank (1994)

'Good governance embraces participatory development, democratization and human rights.'

OECD/DAC

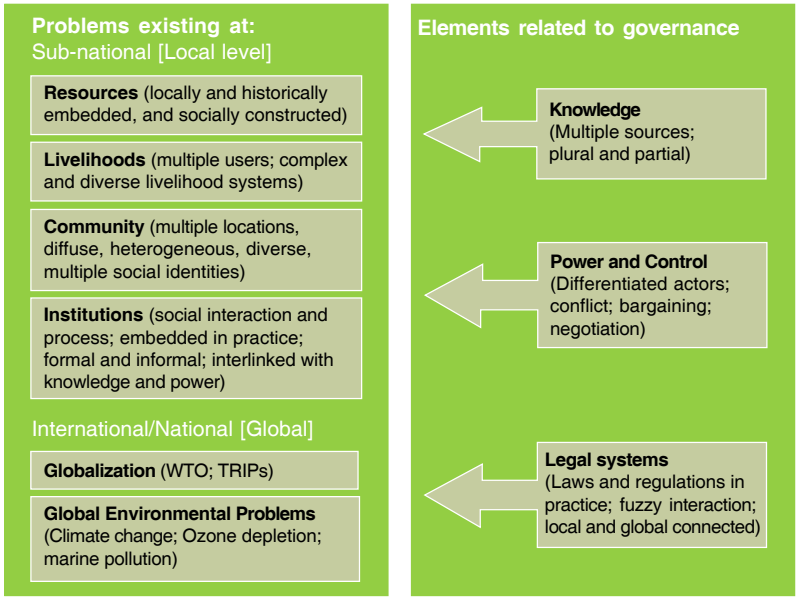
'Governance is the integral component of sustainable human development. It is the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels and the means by which states promote social cohesion, integration, and ensure the well-being of their populations.'

UNDP (1998)

From an economic perspective, the main underlying causes of biodiversity loss are failures in markets, resource ownership and policy (EC, DFID and IUCN Biodiversity Brief). This, nevertheless, can be complex considering sustainable utilization of biodiversity functions within a broader set of existing incentives, derived from a complex interaction of laws, policies, property rights, social conventions, cultural norms and levels of compliance. Given this, the effectiveness of equitable incentive-sharing measures would depend on a supportive framework for inter-institutional coordination, including institutional reform, capacity building, information, education and awareness-raising. Thus another important element of governance that directly translates to biodiversity conservation is the mechanism by which rules and laws are enforced such that it does not affect rights of any among the concerned stakeholders.

Furthermore, formal elements of governance include but are not limited to, the development of environmental laws and institutions and mechanisms for equitable benefit distribution, but constitute other important attribute of governance such as transparency and accountability. This can be related to the examples from many countries where environmental institutions lack the necessary funding, staff and equipment to carry out essential conservation tasks. In Costa Rica, much of deforestation due to land clearing for cattle ranching cost the country at least US$4b, and where included in national accounts would have reduced economic growth by 20% a year. The cost of environmental degradation in Nigeria is estimated over US$5b a year, which is more than 15% of its GDP (OECD 2001). The insufficient investments in biodiversity conservation and over-investment in activities which threaten biodiversity, activities that obviously defy accountability and transparency, are the prime causes of biodiversity loss (IUCN and CSERGE 1995).

Elements that relate biodiversity conservation to governance



Biodiversity Governance: A Case in Sacred Himalayan Landscape

This section builds up on the premise of the foregoing sections, that 'biodiversity governance is broadly about a system that governs people's relationship to natural resources and the complex dynamics involved in managing that system'. Sacred Himalayan Landscape is endowed with rich biological and cultural resources which are inextricably interwoven with the people's livelihoods. However, the systems of natural resource management and biodiversity governance in SHL have by no means remained constant. Rather, it has been a dynamic process wherein state intervention has been a key factor in determining the changing governance system.

Biodiversity governance in SHL, as discussed here, is related primarily to forest management practices

A brief look at the history of forest management practices in Nepal can help highlight the variety of perspectives on participatory management (Harini 2002). Prior to the mid-1950s, traditional practices of forest management were prevalent in the hills. The Nationalization Act of 1957 brought all forested land under government ownership. This is believed to have been a major factor resulting in the alienation of local communities. The National Forest Act of 1976 attempted to return some degree of ownership and control to the people. However, this attempt at decentralization was still formally linked to administratively defined government structures, the then Panchayats, and was not notably successful. Aware of these limitations and driven by a growing appreciation for the capacity of local communities to manage common property institutions and increasing donor pressure, Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, 1988, was drafted. This was later followed by the introduction of the Community Forestry Act in 1993. The major objectives of this policy were to hand over all accessible forests to user groups, provide them the right to manage and protect the forests, and the right to all forest produce and income derived from these forests.

Community Forestry in Sacred Himalayan Landscape

Community forests represent priority area of the forest management in the SHL. As of July 2005, CF covers approximately 33% of the forest area in SHL, with 4264 Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) comprising nearly 0.5 million households.

A major focus of the CF has been in the middle and high hills which accounts for nearly 70% of total CF area handed over in the entire SHL. The proportion of forest managed by people in the high mountains is still at a low level. The high altitude areas differ greatly from the mid-hills in bio-physical and natural aspects, socio-economic and demographic aspects, and institutional aspects (Acharya 2003). The forests in high altitude areas are extensive in area and contiguous at great distances, but under heavy pressure near human settlements. They include diverse vegetation types, high biodiversity, are remote and inaccessible, and largely used by transhumant grazers. The markets for forest products are distant and there is limited range of utilization. The villages around these forests are very small, often composed of only a few households spread sparsely over a large distance.

From a recent study and consultation workshops in two SHL districts- Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha, the idea of modifying the present CF model for high altitude application has emerged as an important issue. A number of alternative approaches have been suggested ranging from eco-zoning to landscape corridor model, leasehold forestry programme, and collaborative forest management. (Cited in Acharya 2003). Although there seems to be consensus about the need to modify the present CF model for high altitude areas, details of the modification are likely to subjects for discussion and debate.

CF status in SHL relative to Nepal

	July 2005		
	SHL		Nepal
No. of CFUGs	4264	(30.50%)	13,978
CF Area Handed Over (ha.)	417,192	(35.63%)	1,170,896
Forest Area	1,257,428		7,069,900
CF Area as % of Forest Area	33.18%		16.56%
No. of Households	476,905	(29.66%)	1,607,504

Source: CFUG Database Record, MIS Nepal, 13 July 2005
Note: Figures in brackets indicate SHL as a proportion of Nepal

Governance Issues in Community Forestry

Issues of property regimes, tenure and rights provide the legal basis for management of natural resources. In a broad sense, there are four types of property regimes: private property, state property, common property, and open access. Forest resources were originally private property during the Rana rule, which were converted into state property after nationalization. However, many places in the hills of SHL had traditional management and associated collective property rights system of natural resource management, such as the *kipat* land tenure and the *shinga naua* indigenous forest management systems.

Community forestry program, however, is not away from problems and concerns. Transparency and accountability in CFUG management are two matters of great concern. Serious allegations such as destruction of forests, violation of work plans, misuse of funds, among others, are levied against CFUGs (Pro-Public 2003). Such incidents often occur where CFUGs are wrongly constituted, and especially when work plans have been drafted with collusion between the forest bureaucracy and local elites. The participation of women in CF management is another crucial issue. In most communities, women do the bulk of collection, especially of resources like fuel, fodder, and NTFPs for commercial and domestic use. This is more so in the mountain areas like SHL where women do most of the in-house and outdoor agricultural and forest related tasks. Yet women have very little say in decisions regarding the management of these resources.

In the recent times CFUG level governance is increasingly judged by the benefits accrued

Women's Community Forest: Bistodhar Women's CFUG, located at Balthali VDC of Kavrepalanchok district, was the first group formed by women in Nepal. The CF covers a total area of 2.9 ha and the CFUG has women from 29 households. Likewise, Bhatar CFUG of Bhudabare VDC of Dhankuta district is the largest CF which is solely managed by women. The group consists of women from 55 households and manages the forest covering 573 ha. *(Source: FECOFUN)*

Kipat is an ancient type of communal land tenure where members had the usufructuary rights to use community land and pastures, but no right to sell it. It was historically prevalent among ethnic groups like Limbu, Rai, Bhote, Tamang, Sunuwar, Majhi, Lepcha, etc. distributed across the SHL area.

The *shinga nwua* system is found among the Sherpas of Solukhumbu. The *shinga nawa* were locally appointed officials with responsibility for allocating forest resources and ensuring that individuals adhered to the rules for forest use. *(Source: Cited in Acharya 2003)*

to the poor and disadvantaged groups from community forestry. A study by the Nepal Swiss Community Forest Project (NSCFP) in the mid-hills SHL districts of Ramechhap, Dolakha and Okhaldhunga reveals that while trends towards resource degradation have been arrested and in many cases forest cover has improved, the livelihoods of the local forest dependent communities, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, have not improved as expected (Pokharel and Nurse 2005). In the worst cases, the implementation of CF policy has inflicted added costs to the poor, such as reduced access to forest products. The forced allocation of household resources that were assured under indigenous management systems to the uncertainty of an externally sponsored system has allowed capture by rural elites. This has provided insecurity over the benefits of CF in some groups, particularly for the rural poor. Given the unequal social structure in terms of class, caste, gender and regional disparity, there is unequal access to decision making, to opportunities to contribute, and to benefits. Marginalized groups in multi-stakeholder settings have often been excluded and under-valued, with the perception that they have less ability to make and act on decisions. As a result, poor people's access to resources has been reduced, with consequent negative impacts on their livelihoods and on the condition of National forests in neighbouring areas.

A very important dimension of governance is the association of foreign donors in the CF programme. The donor community was very active in drawing up of the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector in the 80s. The enthusiasm grew fast after the promulgation of the new Forest Act in 1993, and now many donor agencies and countries have been continuously providing assistance for strengthening of CF management in Nepal. Pioneering initiatives and innovative practices by these donor assisted projects have contributed greatly to participatory resource governance, community empowerment and local institutionalization through their CF programmes.

Donor CF projects in SHL - Nepal

Project	Donor	Districts
Nepal Australia Community Resource Management and Livelihoods Project (NACRMLP)	Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)	Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchowk
Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project (NSCFP)	Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)	Ramechhap, Dolakha, Okhaldhunga
Livelihoods and Forestry Project (LFP)	Department for International Development, UK (DFID)	Dhankuta, Terhathum, Bhojpur, Sankhuwasabha

Source: Community Forestry Division, Department of Forest.

Biodiversity Conservation in Community Forests

Biodiversity conservation was not the mainstream activity of CFUGs under the Forest Act and Rules. Their immediate focus was regenerating the degraded forest tracts. A clear shortcoming of the CF policies, as it remains now, is the less consideration given to biodiversity conservation. Nevertheless, community forestry has helped to return the diversity of species through improved forest cover. In addition, CFUGs' aim has been to produce a range of forest products, including commercial NTFPs, thereby helping to maintain the natural diversity of CFs as well as becoming a means of improved livelihoods. Compared with uncontrolled exploitation in National forests, CF management leads to lower levels of grazing within the forest, fewer incidences of fire, increased numbers of threatened plant species, and control of illegal hunting (NBS 2002).

Protected Areas and Biodiversity Conservation

Exclusive biodiversity conservation in Nepal is governed by the Protected Area (PA) management system based on the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973. PAs were initially established purely for the protection of wildlife, especially endangered wildlife, while little concern was given to the people living in those areas and whose livelihoods depended entirely on the resources derived from the parks. Demands of effective biodiversity governance meant that increasingly local communities had to be engaged for sustainable conservation.

There are four protected areas the SHL, including Langtang National Park, Sagarmatha National Park, Makalu-Barun National Park and Kanchenjunga Conservation Area. Although all of them are situated in the high mountainous region, they have substantial human habitation inside and in the vicinity of the park and having their stakes in the rich resources. Consequently, the Buffer Zone Management Regulations 1996 was introduced which represents the most important legislative initiative focusing on the needs of local communities who are most likely to be affected by PAs, and subsequently avoid conflicts between parks and people. These are the only regulations to promote CF programmes in buffer zones and to improve regeneration of forests by the community (NBS 2002). Buffer zones have been demarcated around the periphery of all the three national parks in SHL, where local population has the right

KEY POINTS

- Biodiversity conservation and governance perhaps converge at the point where global and local issues arise. At global level, globalization has pointed to the increasing interdependence of the economies of the world citizens. At local level, decentralization process at national and sub-national level are supporting and encouraging community-based participatory resource conservation models.
- One important element of governance that directly translates to biodiversity conservation is the mechanism by which rules and laws are enforced.
- From an economic perspective, the main underlying causes of biodiversity loss are failures in markets, resource ownership and policy.
- Biodiversity governance in the SHL is related primarily to forest management practices and the trend from an exclusionary to a participatory approach.
- Given the inherent inequalities, diversity and disparity in the social structure of the SHL inhabitants, emphasis on equity and distributional implications of local level collective action would be highly imperative for effective biodiversity governance.

to sustainable utilization of forest resources and environmental conservation within the zone for community development.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation has also been developing innovative park management strategies in collaboration with local communities, NGOs, INGOs, and donors. Central to these efforts is the participation of user groups in the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources and the equitable distribution of benefits to local communities. For instance, the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area Project (WWF) is unique in that the management responsibility of the area is being handed over to the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council (KCAMC) which consists of local people on board.

Two other potential conservation areas have been identified in the SHL: (i)Tinjure-Milke-Jaljale Conservation Area between Kanchenjunga and Makalu Barun, and (ii) Gauri Shankar Conservation Area between Langtang and Sagarmatha. These will help to narrow the existing gaps in the current PA system in SHL and enable more sustainable biodiversity conservation across the landscape with the help of community stakeholders sharing the responsibilities of management.

Recommended Priority Actions

1. **Clarify ambiguities** on resource use and management
2. **Enhance indigenous people's capacity** to manage biodiversity
3. **Raise awareness** at all levels on indigenous people's rights over natural resources
4. **Develop mechanisms** for fair sharing of biodiversity use benefits and opportunity for indigenous people

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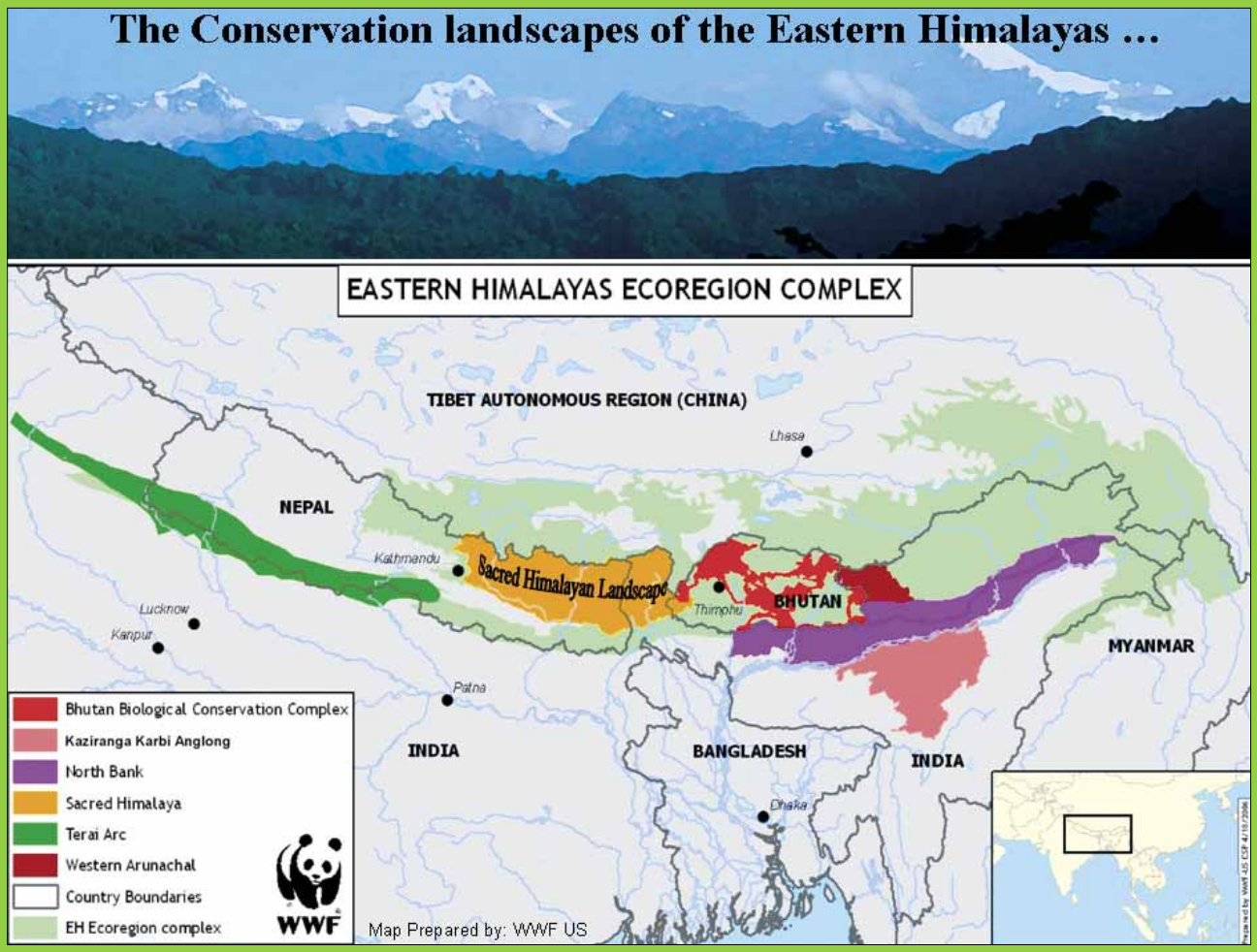
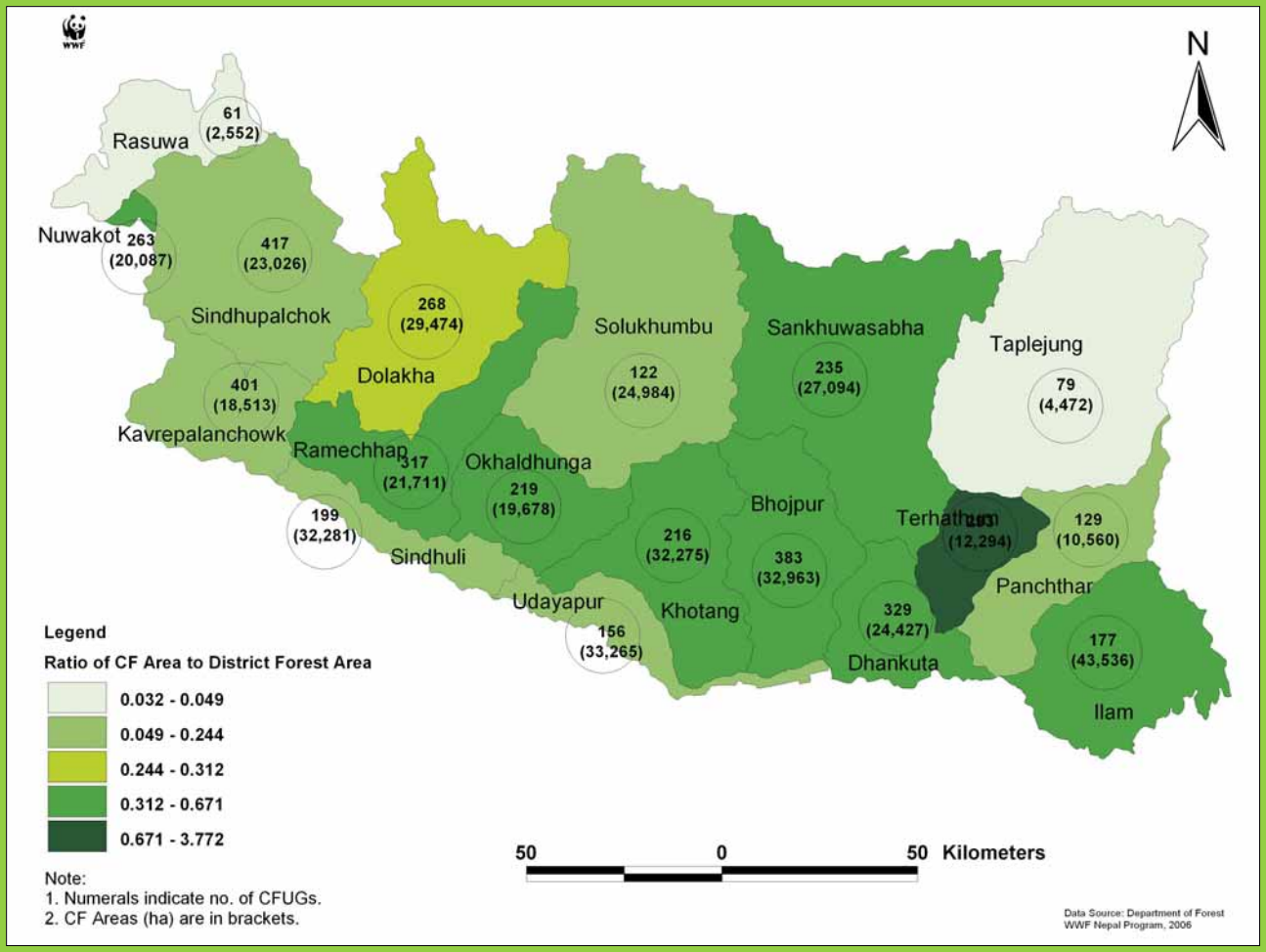
The Conservation landscapes of the Eastern Himalayas …



Protected Areas in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape-Nepal

SHL-Nepal Community Forest Areas



The Sacred Himalayan Landscape-Nepal Strategic Plan formulation process is currently underway. The Strategic Plan formulation is led and undertaken by the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation in partnership with the working group which consists of WWF Nepal Program, ICIMOD, TMI and IUCN.

The Sacred Himalayan Landscape extends from Langtang National Park in central Nepal to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in eastern Nepal. This further connects to Kangchenjunga region in Sikkim and Darjeeling in India to Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve in western Bhutan. The northern boundary of the landscape coincides with Nepal's international boundary with China.

This initiative builds on the SHL vision:
'A Himalayan landscape where the biological and cultural treasures of the world's highest sacred mountains and deepest valleys are safeguarded while people's rights over resources are ensured and livelihoods are enhanced and sustained.'

WWF is the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organization, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in more than 90 countries.

WWF's Mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature by:

- Conserving the world's biological diversity;
- Ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable; and
- Reducing pollution and wasteful consumption

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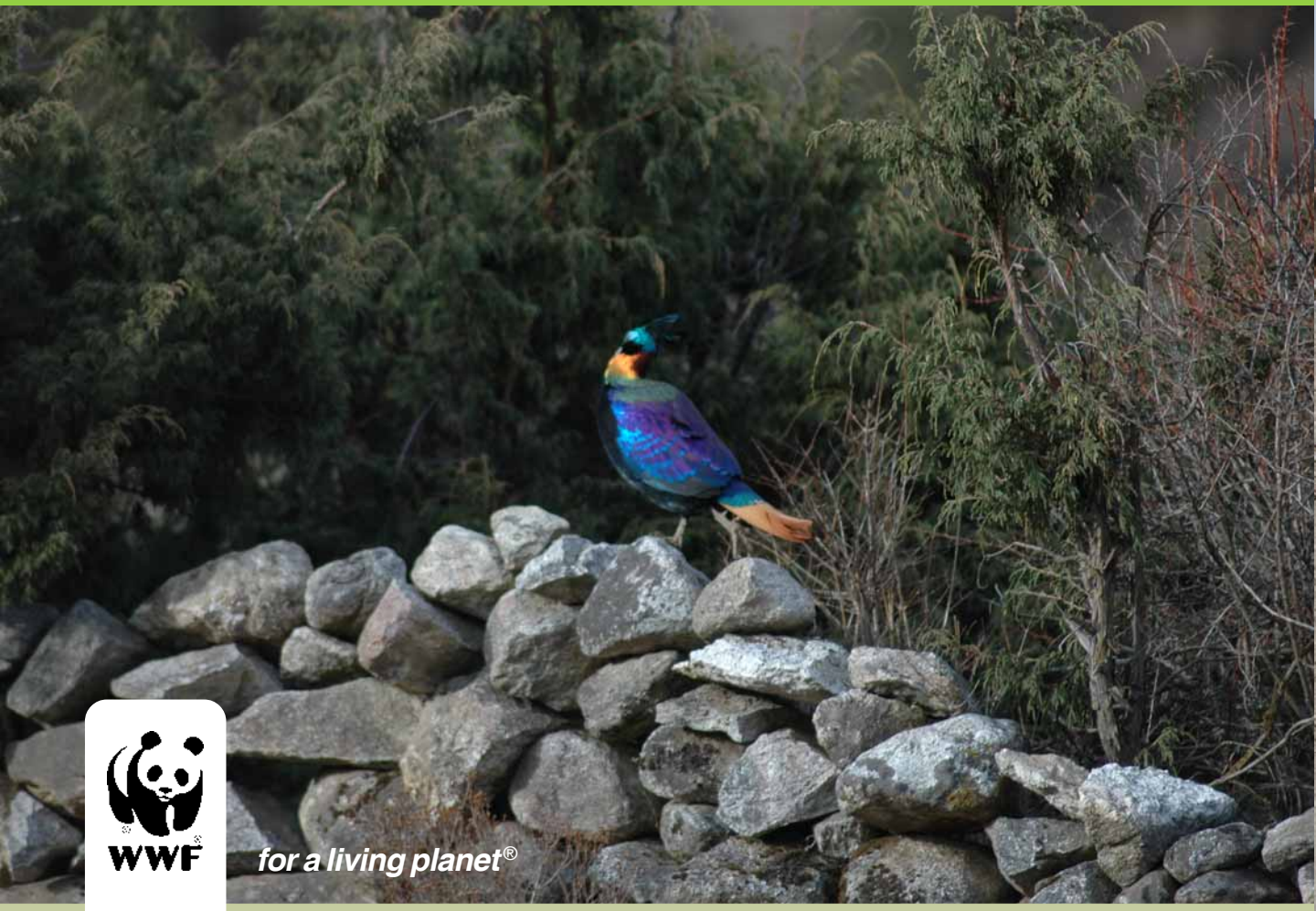

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NATURE, CULTURE & CONSERVATION

Sacred Himalayan Landscape in Nepal

THEMATIC RESEARCH WORKING BRIEF

Number 1

This thematic research brief draws on work in progress on the Sacred Himalayan Landscape Strategic Plan to disseminate and exchange the research issues and ideas as they come up. Since we want to develop further on these themes, we request readers to bear with sections that are not fully polished.

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Contents

Overview: Culture and Conservation

In the conservation circle, nature is now increasingly and more appropriately represented as the corollary of culture. Particularly in developing countries, natural resource management is often the assemblage of peoples' livelihoods, identities, their traditional knowledge of species, practices and belief systems. Many conservation landscapes have been rendered more biologically diverse through human interaction and intervention over centuries. They are the foundations of food production systems and living gene banks for the food crops of tomorrow. These areas are home to local populations and indigenous groups, and are rich in cultural diversity and intangible values, to be conserved as a whole for a sustainable future.

Conservation and culture have always been integral in many parts of the world. South Asian history shows that biodiversity rich areas such as scenic valleys and religious complexes were created in prehistoric times dating back to times unknown to humankind. The conceptual origins of the 'culture and conservation' as now understood, nevertheless, apparently promulgated only in the 20th century. Among the conservation communities, the idea was embraced rather later in the 1990s (Fowler 2002). It was not until 1992 that the Convention on the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972, established a unique international instrument recognizing and protecting both cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. Similarly, the Convention on Biological Diversity, adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit, acknowledged the need to protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation and sustainable use requirements. Both the Conventions were milestone achievement in many ways, but specifically they evoked the idea of recognizing the associative values of culture and nature to indigenous people and gave importance to conserving biological diversity through cultural diversity within landscapes. This certainly gave impetus to the understanding and valuing of both culture and nature in wider scales in countries and societies.

The three categories of World Heritage Cultural Landscape

Category	Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of World Heritage Convention
(i)	**Clearly defined landscape** designed and created intentionally by man. This embraces garden and parkland landscapes constructed for aesthetic reasons which are often (but not always) associated with religious or other monumental buildings and ensembles.
(ii)	**Organically evolved landscape.** This results from an initial social, economic, administrative, and/or religious imperative and has developed its present form by association with and in response to its natural environment. Such landscapes reflect that process of evolution in their form and component features. They fall into two sub-categories: • A relict (or fossil) landscape is one in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, either abruptly or over a period. Its significant distinguishing features are, however, still visible in material form. • A continuing landscape is one which retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress. At the same time it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time.
(iii)	**Associative cultural landscape.** The inclusion of such landscapes on the World Heritage List is justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent.

Adapted from (UNESCO 2002)

Diversity of Mountain Environment and Culture

> **"Cultural diversity is not an historical accident. It is the direct outcome of the local people learning to live in harmony with the mountains' extraordinary biological diversity"**
>
> *(Cited as Anil Agarwal, Centre of Science and Environment, New Delhi in Denniston 1995)*

What makes mountains unique biomes are their diversity in the vertical gradient and associated cultural values. The complexity of topography, including the variation in elevation, slope, and orientation to the sun, create large variations in temperature, radiation, wind, moisture availability, and soils over very short distances. This physical diversity gives variety in vegetation and animal life such that even the shade of a single rock can provide unique microhabitat for alpine plants and animals found nowhere else. This natural diversity has also enabled mountain communities to become their custodians through associated use and conservation practices. Given the imperative to survive in extreme environment, mountain people have acquired unique knowledge and skills by adapting to the specific constraints and advantages of their fragile and inhospitable environments. They possess millennia of experience in shifting cultivation, terraced fields, medicinal use of native plants, migratory grazing, and sustainable harvesting of food, fodder, and fuel from forests (Denniston 1995). With human survival so closely dependent on knowledge of local ecology, the differences in their knowledge practices results in sharp differences in culture.

The Significance of Sacred Sites in Conservation

In most cultures the sacred itself is indefinable. The significance of sacredness may vary depending on the opinions and beliefs of particular cultures and individuals. People experience the sacred nature of mountains and revere them as the temple of the gods, centre of the universe, or abode of the dead, sources of life, places of inspiration, and in many other ways.

The power of many mountains comes from the perception of them as dwelling places of deities, often regarded as protectors of local communities. The Sherpas of Khumbu in Nepal, for example, view the craggy, fortress like peak of Khumbila as the seat of the warrior god who watches over their homeland and protects their yaks. Actions that would make such a mountain unsuitable as the abode of its deity appearing to drive the god, spirit, or ancestor away may leave nearby villagers feeling vulnerable. These values and beliefs determine to a great extent which natural resources people seek to exploit and which features of the land they strive to protect. Many indigenous cultures draw vitality and cohesion from their relationship to mountains and other sacred features of the landscape. Destroying what makes such a site sacred may undermine a culture, resuming in negative social, economic, and environmental impacts as the society falls apart and traditional controls of land are lost (Mountain Forum Online Library).

Both in the modern and traditional societies, mountains awaken a sense of wonder and awe that set them apart as sacred places imbued with a special evocative power and significance. People often visit Mountains for spiritual inspiration and renewal, and regard them as embodiments of important cultural values. The cultural and inspirational value of mountains has played a vital role in the establishment of national parks and is one of the most effective tools for galvanizing public support for the conservation of wilderness areas. It also provides a means for eliciting empathy and support among people of influence in developed societies and economies for protecting and preserving the diverse environments and cultures of traditional sacred mountains (TMI 1998).

Belief and Faith System as a Tool of Conservation

Link between faith and belief and conservation has existed for many centuries throughout the world, through the preservation of particular places as sacred natural sites, through the conservation of sacred animal and plant species, through traditional religious based collective actions by indigenous people or through values ascribed to ethics of conservation. These links may be summarized as:

Sacred places - both sacred natural sites and build environments existing in antural or semi-natural areas. These can contribute very directly to global conservation efforts because they are often themselves well-conserved, through traditions that sometimes stretch back for thousand years;

Influence of faiths - through their philosophy, actions and influence, faiths can have a major impact on the way people view the protection of nature.

(WWF 2005)

Nature, Culture and Conservation: A Case in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape

Natural heritage

The topography of SHL is varied and characterized by a large number of hills and mountains, with an exceptional degree of relief. These unique ecological and topographic features have created a rich and diverse natural resource base. The high topographic diversity and related climatic diversity give rise to significant ecological gradients which gives rise to high ecosystem diversity over relatively small areas. This, in turn, leads to a large diversity and complex mosaic of habitats, many of which are unique, and to high species diversity. Finally, the SHL contains very significant genetic biodiversity, being an important centre of origin for many species, hosting many wild relatives of commercial species, and having important on-farm genetic biodiversity, both crop varieties and livestock races. The harsh and rapidly changing climatic conditions mean that many habitats and species exhibit high resilience, which may be of value in future climate change scenarios.

Out of three of the Global 200 Ecoregions that are represented within the Eastern Himalayan Ecoregion Complex, two are found within the SHL: 1) Eastern Himalayan Alpine Meadow Ecoregion, and 2) Temperate Broadleaf and

The value and importance of sacred mountains for biodiversity conservation are apparent in following aspects:

- The sacred mountains have kept their pristine nature and natural biodiversity of hundreds of years.
- They are the heritage bestowed for present and future generations as a legacy of the national traditions, customs, chronicles, history, culture, and science passed on from the ancestors.
- They ratify people's belief in maintaining the equilibrium between ecology and nature protection
- The importance of sacred mountains lies in that they not only benefit the ecology of a particular country but of the whole world.

***Beyuls* or the 'sacred hidden valleys'**

Beyul is the sacred hidden valley and its concept is rooted in the Nyingmapa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Beyuls exist throughout the Buddhist regions of the Himalayas. It is noted that there may be as many as 108 beyuls in the Himalaya. In the vicinity of Mount Everest, people revere sacred beyuls such as Khenbalung, Khumbu, Rongshar, and Kyirong valleys. *Beyuls* are generally large (hundreds of square kilometres in size), isolated, and vacant mountain valleys. They can be opened by *tertons* (treasure seekers) following discovery of *terma* (secret treasures i.e. ancient texts), which describe the access to these sacred lands. It is believed that only people with pure hearts can gain access to these sites, and that, while many beyuls have already been exposed and settled, there are others awaiting discovery.

Inherent natural and cultural qualities of *beyuls* lend themselves to the conservation of biodiversity. *Beyuls* are located in isolated and inaccessible mountain valleys and are generally sparsely populated. This accounts for relatively undisturbed forests and wild land, harbouring species of plants and animals that may not exist in areas of heavy human disturbance. Besides, the attitude of local Buddhist communities who refrain from killing has helps to protect wildlife and enforce their own rules and measures to keep the environment intact.

Source: Sherpa (2003).

Conifer Forests Ecoregion. Since representation of habitat from these ecoregions is an important contribution to global conservation targets, the SHL contributes significant extents of habitat towards these targets.

Cultural heritage

Sacred and Heritage sites

The SHL is a series of complex living cultural and natural landscapes. These are in fact central to the SHL's spirituality, culture, social organization and economic use. The SHL's sacred and heritage sites comprise sacred, natural and cultural places and objects that have special significance and value to the indigenous people because of the meanings they ascribe to them. They express people's unity with the natural and spiritual environment. They embody indigenous and traditional knowledge on the management of plants and animals, places, land uses, and environment. Since many of the natural sites are imbued with human associations, stories, myths and traditions, the sites that are inscribed as natural may also merit as being cultural and sacred sites.

Different ethnic groups in the SHL regard many landscapes and objects as sacred. Physically, a sacred place can vary from the size of a small rock to a few square meters to hundreds or thousands of square kilometers of land piece. The widespread concepts of '*beyuls*' or 'hidden valleys' and '*ters*' or 'hidden treasures' are large wilderness areas located in inaccessible or isolated parts, many still wild, unattended and unexplored. Similarly, objects such as religious sculpture, stones, painting, hierograms, and costumes; living things including animals, individual plants, and forests or groves; and images of the supernatural are held sacred by people. These sacred sites may hold significance for one household, a community, or multiple communities and ethnic groups. Sacred places are considered the source of powerful forces, energy, and wisdom. These Sacred landscapes are maintained through the practice of religious rituals, ceremonies, and sanctions within a specific cultural group.

Sacred sites and objects are often the materialistic representation of people's belief systems and culture. They usually have outstanding architectural works, sculpture and painting that exhibit remarkable combinations of

history, art and science. Therefore, their importance emanates from the fact that these are non-renewable and irreplaceable resources, and once these are lost it brings in the danger that civilizations and traditions associated with them are also lost.

Scenic and Aesthetic Values

The SHL contributes greatly to the quality of life of the local community and to the tourists or visitors experience. Local and indigenous people have developed a strong appreciation and spiritual connection with the scenic and aesthetic values of the SHL. Places of natural beauty with high aesthetic importance include areas such as Gaurishanker, Kanchenjunga, Makalu Barun and Langtang. The *beyuls* add to the adventures of getting into the fictional 'Shangri-La'. Many mountainous areas in the SHL provide tremendous opportunity for sight-seeing, spiritual healing and meditation, adventure tourism, trekking, hiking and bird watching. In 1997 the government declared Kanchenjunga Conservation Area as 'gift to the earth' considering its rich biodiversity, cultural heritage and pristine Himalayan landscape.

Caste/Ethnicity and Cultural Mosaic

The proposed SHL districts are inhabited by people belonging to various ethnic, caste and sub-caste groups. The indigenous people including Limbu, Rai and Tamang stand out as the most predominant groups in the whole SHL region. The proportion of disadvantaged caste groups such as Kami, Damai and Sarki are found in significant numbers in all the SHL districts. Some of the caste/ethnic groups have an interesting pattern of their population distribution in the region with pockets of areas dominated by one ethnic group over the other. Similarly, over 40 different languages and dialects are spoken in the landscape, which are important to consider as the knowledge and practices of diverse ethnic groups are memorised by elderly people who cannot speak any other languages or dialects and if documented, its mostly in their own language or script.

Kipat system of communal land management

Communal land or *Kipat* is a system of land holding based on tribal, village, kindred or family basis, and individuals have definite rights in this land by virtue of their belonging to a particular ethnic group. *Kipat* system is a relic of the customary land tenure that was established by ethnic groups including Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Sherpa and their clans and subclans. Before the Kipat system came to end after the nationalization of forests in 1957, the main activities of indigenous people associated with *Kipat* were land tax collection, settlement planning, land translator, dispute resolution, distribution natural resources/ management and establishing legal system of land ownership rights.

Mundhum-The Scripture of Kirat People

The word '*Mundhum*' means the power of great strength and the Kirat people of east Nepal take it to be a holy and a powerful scripture. The Mundhum contains stories of the creation of the Universe, the beginning of human kind, the evil spirits and the philosophy on spiritualism. From the beginning, *Kirat* people were rationalistic and so they neither had temples, altars nor images, but conceived that God resided in light and fire. Hence they worship spirits whom they believe to be the residents of sun and fire. The *Kirats* believe that Good Spirit gives energy, vitality and ambition to the humankind. There are different folklores that pray to Good Spirit to bring good production in the fields. The Bad or the Evil Spirits cause mischief and trouble to the humankind and are less powerful than the Good Spirit. The *Kirat* priests never use medicine for the treatment of sick people unless they are directed by the Good Spirit God. If the Evil Spirits do not get away from humble prayers, they use chilly rags. Besides beliefs in Good, Bad and Inspirational Spirits, Kirat people also believe in the existence of God Ningwaphuma, which tells stories about the creation of the fire, light, water and wind.

Source: http://www.limbulibrary.com.np/history/history_culture_by_imangsing.pdf

Cultural History and Significance

The ecosystems of the SHL have evolved over thousands of years through active interaction of its indigenous people with the land and management of its resources. Their cultural knowledge and perspectives of plants, animals and ecological processes have created a special context for conservation and sustainable management of natural resources. Activities such as livestock keeping, farming, and harvesting of materials for food and shelter, ceremonial tools or art and craft are essentially the part of indigenous people's culture and have always been integral to the ecology of the landscape. For example, the local Sherpa communities in Sagarmatha National Park have managed their forest on a sustainable manner through the Shinginawa system for centuries (*Singi* and *Naua* are words meaning 'Forest's Guards', chiefly used by indigenous people such as Tamang and Sherpa). Customary laws and collective resource management are often indigenous normal ways of life. Traditional healers, *Jhankri* and *Amchi*, genealogy tellers, witchcraft practitioners and priests are the ritual specialists in the communities. Their rituals and knowledge are mostly associated with the use of plants and animals or deriving power from the supernatural from the surrounding environment.

The importance of cultural history, traditional knowledge and practices lies in the genesis of indigenous people and farmer's rights in this modern era. In the mountain indigenous communities, it is perhaps the most pressing issue that rights to traditional knowledge, equity in benefit sharing process and participation in the decision making process is largely lacking and neglected.

Nawa System

Nawa System in Sherpa culture is associated with the 'permission' given by the locally selected persons authorized with local rights and duties to permit the villagers to carry out tasks, such as cutting down trees for building materials or for firewood, or for looking after the public properties, like monasteries and chortens. They have the right to permit people to carry out tasks so they are called 'Syula Nawa Syubu', which means the authorized person who gives permission. The Nawa who looks after the farming lands, decides the date of moving cattle to the pasture land away from the crop fields, decides the date for cutting grass and performs religious rites worshipping the earth to give good crops is called the 'Santok Nawa'. The Nawa who has the authority to protect the surrounding forest area, to give permission to cut down trees for building materials and firewood is called the 'Singhi Nawa'.

Source: Kathet M (2006)

Some cultural values relating to conservation in SHL

Spiritual	Ecological	Social	Economic
▸ Sacred sites, plants and animals ▸ Creation stories ▸ Festivals and ceremonies ▸ Burial grounds	▸ Medicinal plants ▸ Knowledge of ecological relationships ▸ Collective management ▸ Community NRM institutions ▸ Water supply ▸ Energy (hydro/fuelwood)	▸ Cultural identity ▸ Traditional and customary laws ▸ Kinship and clan belonging ▸ Language ▸ Sense of place and identity	▸ NTFP collection and harvesting ▸ Shelter building ▸ Food preparation ▸ Arts (rock, building) and crafts ▸ Recreation (Mountain climbing, cultural and natural tourism)

The Challenges of Conservation Planning in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape

Ordinary policy and instrument framework

Over 40 different ethnic and indigenous people live in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape. Not only that those people value nature differently, their vision of natural resource management are also different which are the results of differential perceptions, practices and knowledge about nature and its use or non-use value to people. For common people, nature and culture are generally understood and their elements are thought to be interlinked. However, their linkages cannot be so simplistic. In reality, the elements that belong to the nature interact with elements belonging to human faith, history and settlements.

This being so, we face the challenge of integrating culture with nature through unitary planning and within the ordinary or general framework. Since government policies and instruments so far hold the history of considering natural and cultural elements separately, the implementation carried under them has been not very effective and even failed. If we are to recognize that SHL carries unique and exceptional integration of nature and culture, 'exceptional policies and instruments' that can be integrated with 'ordinary policies and instruments' are needed to better understand, value and emanate the pride of the SHL.

Lack of general awareness on cultural linkage to nature conservation

The cultural heritage and sacred sites generally suffer from the lack of awareness on part of policy makers and general public regarding their importance. Both the sites and culture are taken as 'any other way of doing life' and perception is usually simplistic. Although a few culture and practices have now been increasingly brought into forefront and emphasized for promotion, there are less of them seen as having significance for nature conservation. As described throughout this document, culture and nature are intricately related, however, this relationship is often neglected in the everyday language of conservation.

Another challenge for the 'culture and nature link' is that less is known about the indigenous people, their culture, rituals and practices and relationship to nature. There is very few documentation of these and therefore awareness on how culture can be used as a tool of conservation largely lacks. Due to the same reason, approaches to cultural approach to conservation are still applied vaguely and remains fuzzy.

The effects of dynamics of cultural values and orientation

Culture and cultural values exhibit greater dynamism and so modernization or development may result in the loss or lesser valuation of traditions and cultures. In addition, some local traditions that have not yet come to common knowledge run the risk of being lost or assimilated into dominant cultures. As more places and cultures open up to the outside world due to the influence of tourism, pilgrimages or business, culture and traditions may be less valued by descendent generation. In many cases, while modernization, change in value system and cultural assimilation are unavoidable, there can be some measures or policies set up as to keep intact the culture of indigenous people yet bringing to them the fruits of modern development.

The Scars of conflict

The natural and cultural heritage sites within the SHL have undergone constant threats during the civil conflict that has been ongoing for over a decade now. Of those severely affected by conflict are those natural and cultural sites which are most remote but very rich in their possession of natural and cultural heritages. Assessing the impact of the present warfare, it's high time to consider when does the present risk become a threat and when does that eventually become a crisis and will go beyond the hands of Nepalese themselves, their neighbouring countries or the concerned international communities.

The civil conflict has caused tensions, threats and risks such as those related to bombing and littering of landmines, rebels seeking refuges in the forest areas, army posts established in near community forests or community settlements, intentional or unintentional destruction of natural and cultural elements by warring parties, etc. These already have had devastating impacts in many remote areas of the SHL. However, there is still hope and opportunity provided in the SHL as harmony between multi-cultural ethnic groups still persists which binds several areas otherwise severely disjointed by the conflict. But, until timely steps are taken the whole landscape may undergo an undesirable transformation.

Recommended priority actions

1. **Emphasize conservation - culture linkage:** Support and highlight spiritual, religious and cultural values and dimensions of traditional knowledge and practices for effective conservation outcomes.
2. **Cultural mapping:** Mapping of areas where indigenous people are located, their status, mobility of people around cultural and sacred sites.
3. **Enhancement of the awareness:** Enhance general awareness at all levels (from community to policy level) on cultural approach to conservation and application of the notion of the integrity and authenticity of cultural and natural heritage.

KEY POINTS

- Natural resource management is often the assemblage of peoples' livelihoods, identities, their traditional knowledge of species, practices and belief systems.

- What makes mountains unique biomes are their diversity in the vertical gradient and associated cultural values.

- Given the imperative to survive in extreme environment, mountain people have acquired unique knowledge and skills by adapting to the specific constraints and advantages of their fragile and inhospitable environments.

- The power of many mountains comes from the perception of them as dwelling places of deities, often regarded as protectors of local communities. Many indigenous cultures draw vitality and cohesion from their relationship to mountains and other sacred features of the landscape. Destroying what makes such a site sacred may undermine a culture, resuming in negative social, economic, and environmental impacts as the society falls apart and traditional controls of land are lost.

- The Sacred Himalayan Landscape is a series of complex living cultural and natural landscapes, which are in fact central to the SHL's spirituality, culture, social organization and economic use.

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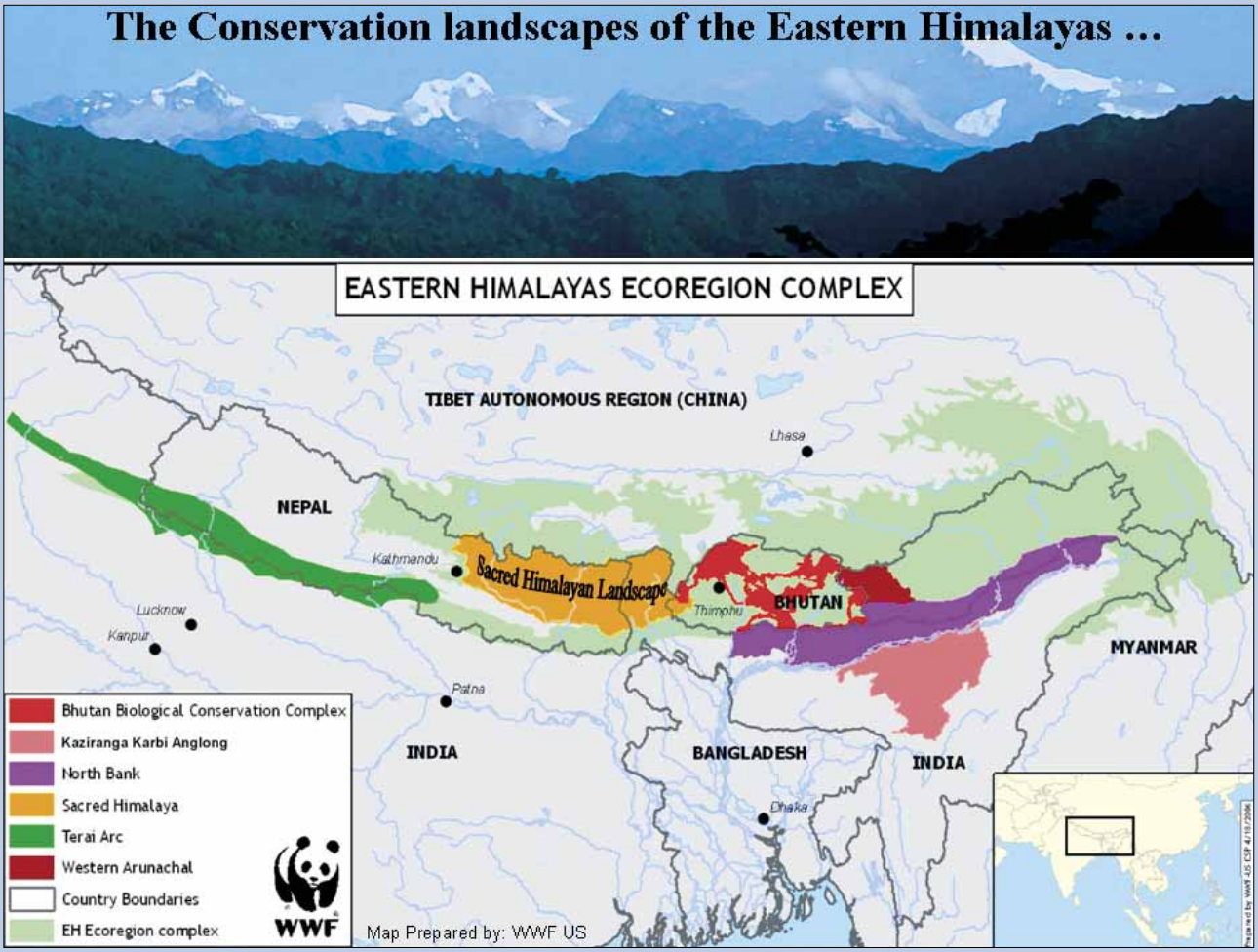
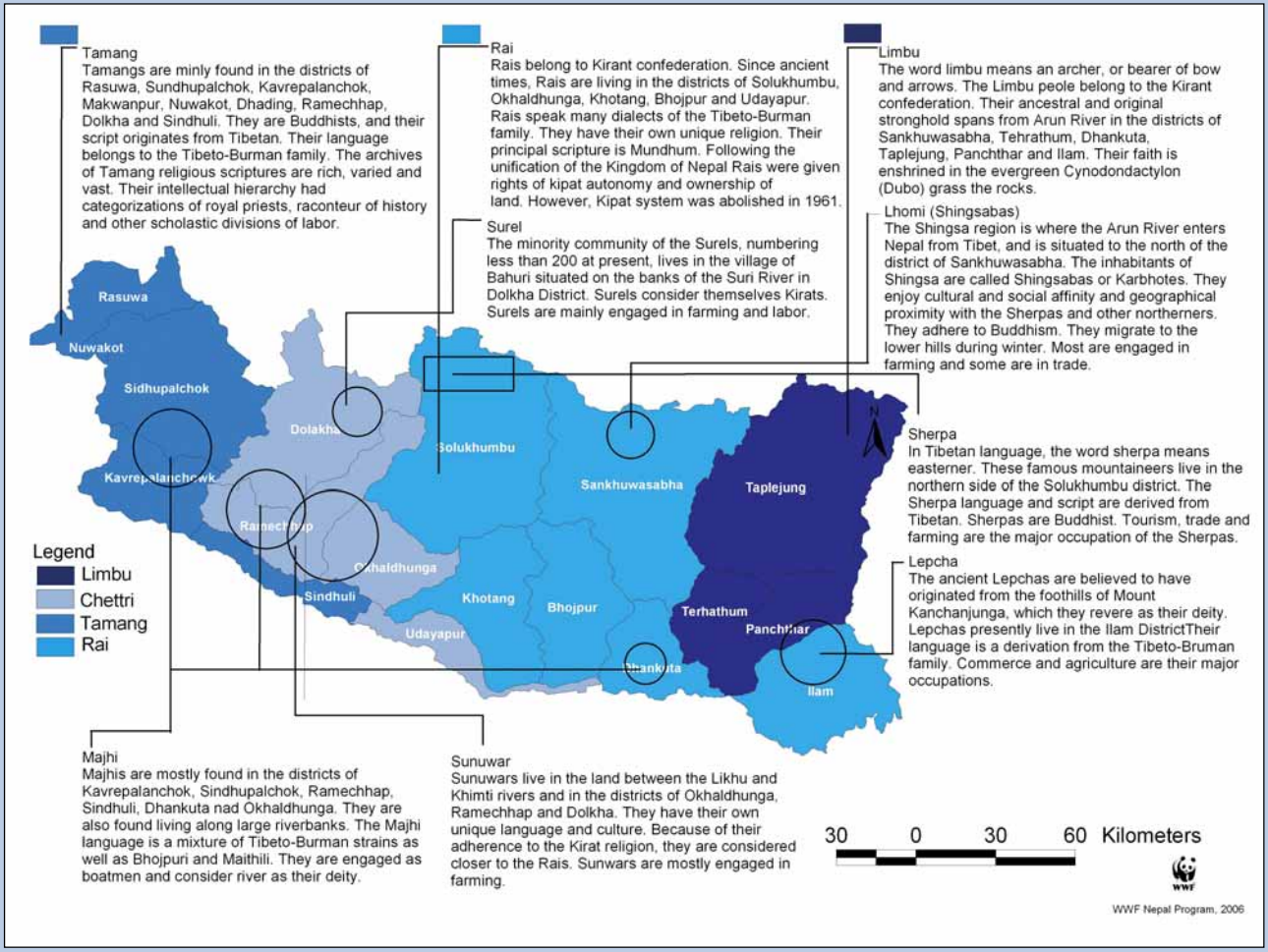
The Conservation landscapes of the Eastern Himalayas …

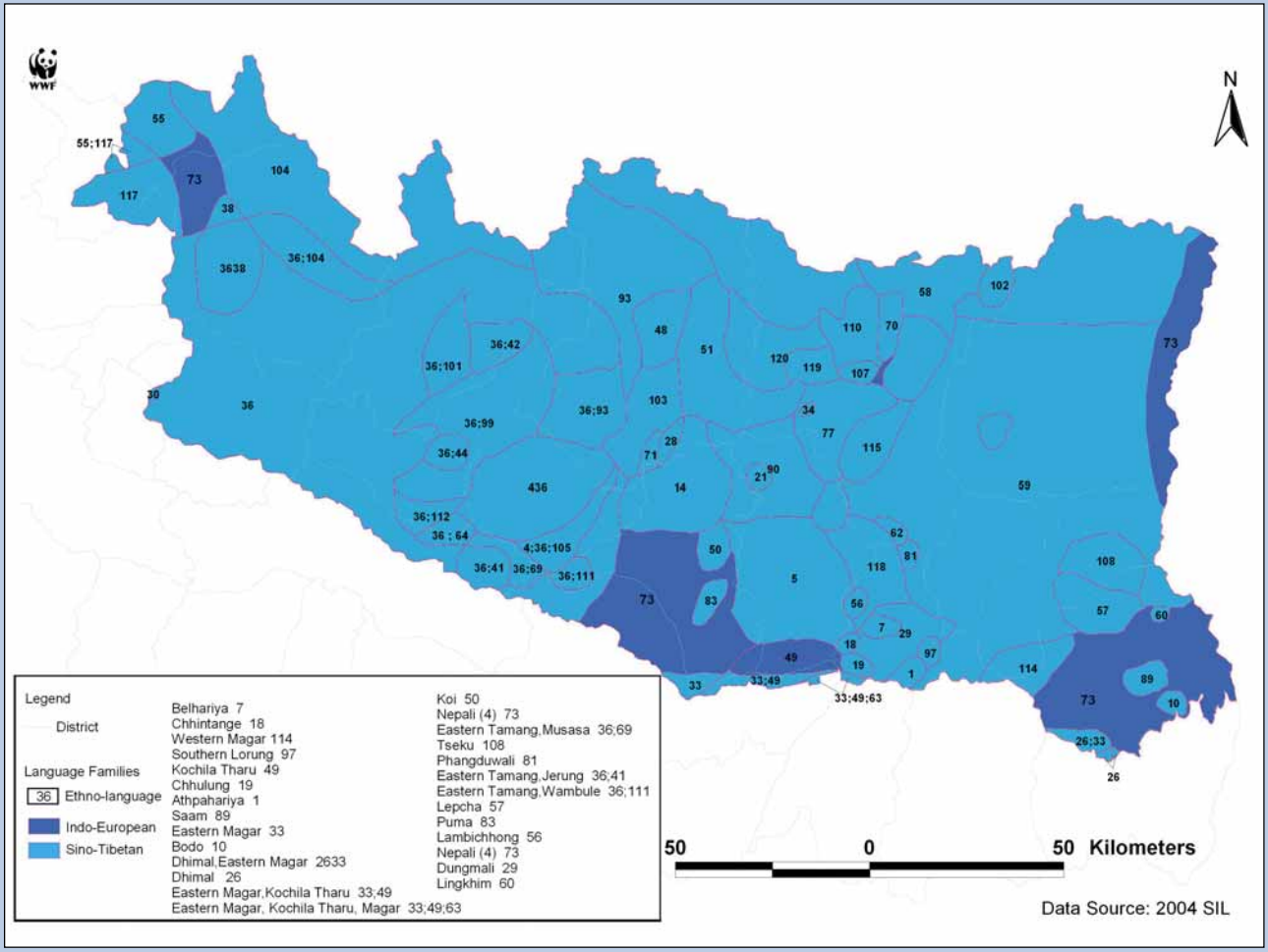


Indigenous People in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape-Nepal

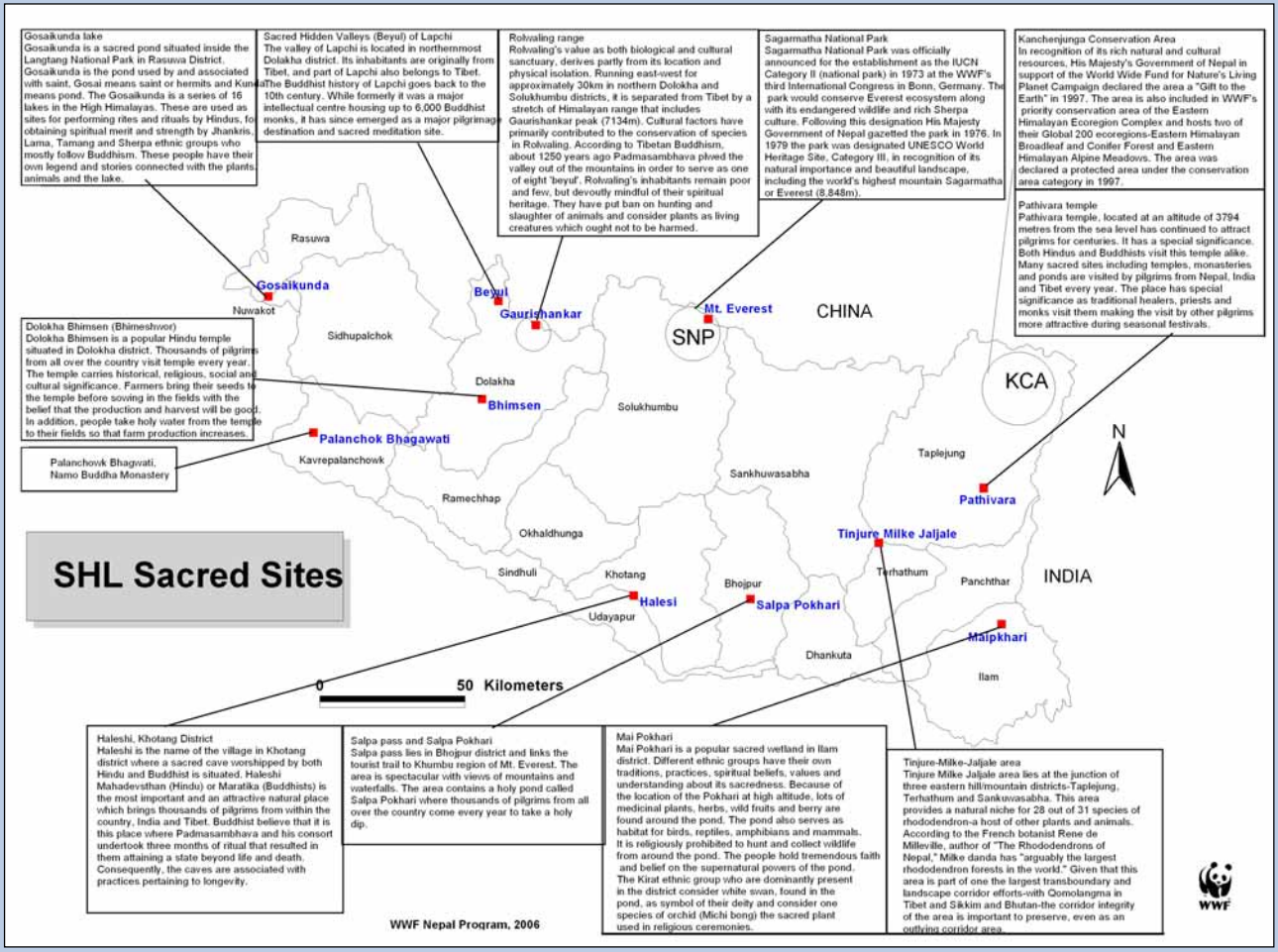


Note: Over 40 languages are spoken in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape-Nepal

Linguistic Distribution in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape

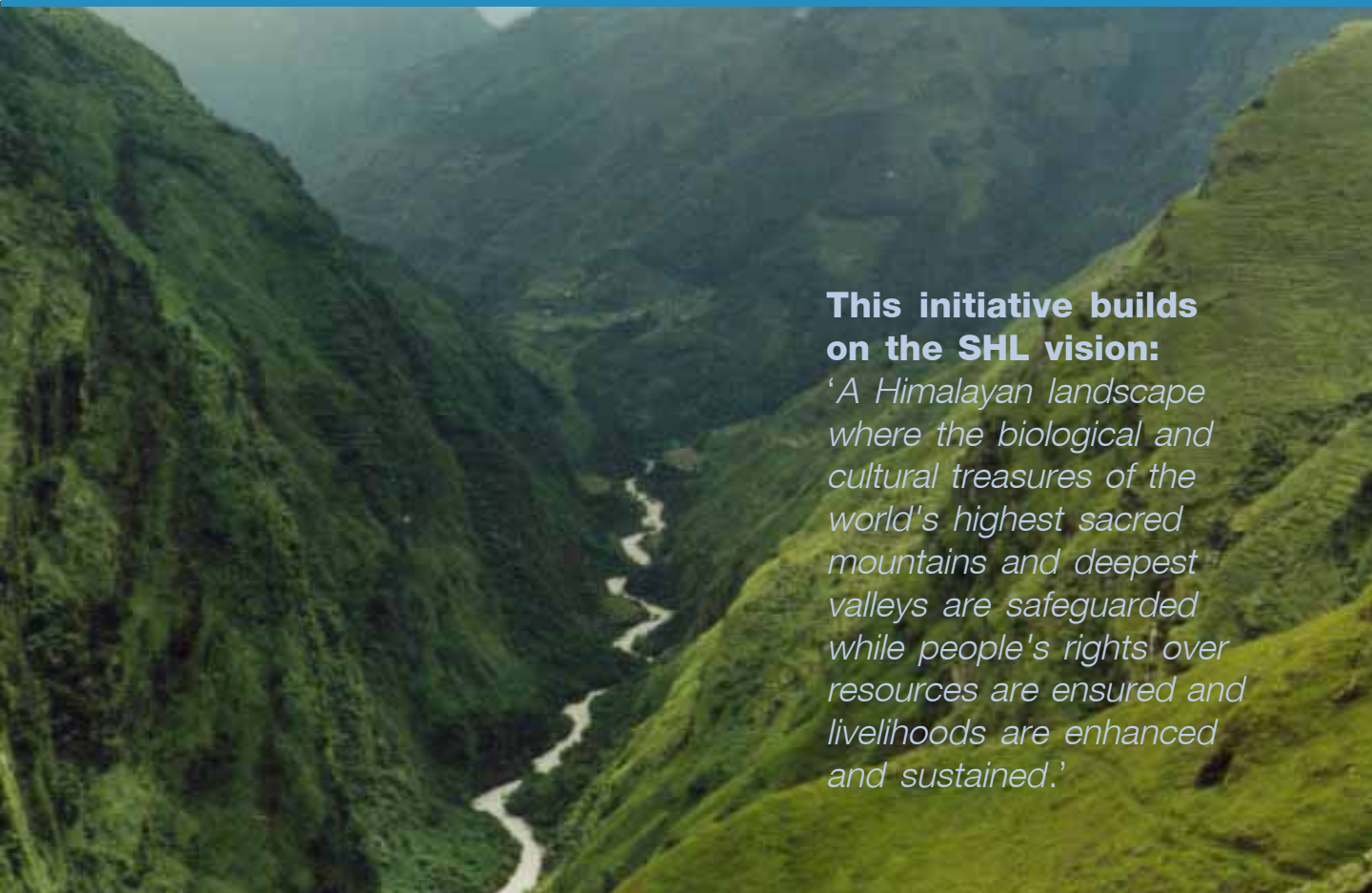


Places in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape-Nepal



The Sacred Himalayan Landscape-Nepal Strategic Plan formulation process is currently underway. The Strategic Plan formulation is led and undertaken by the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation in partnership with the working group which consists of WWF Nepal Program, ICIMOD, TMI and IUCN.

The Sacred Himalayan Landscape extends from Langtang National Park in central Nepal to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in eastern Nepal. This further connects to Kangchenjunga region in Sikkim and Darjeeling in India to Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve in western Bhutan. The northern boundary of the landscape coincides with Nepal's international boundary with China.



This initiative builds on the SHL vision:
'A Himalayan landscape where the biological and cultural treasures of the world's highest sacred mountains and deepest valleys are safeguarded while people's rights over resources are ensured and livelihoods are enhanced and sustained.'

WWF is the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organization, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in more than 90 countries.

WWF's Mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature by:

- Conserving the world's biological diversity;
- Ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable; and
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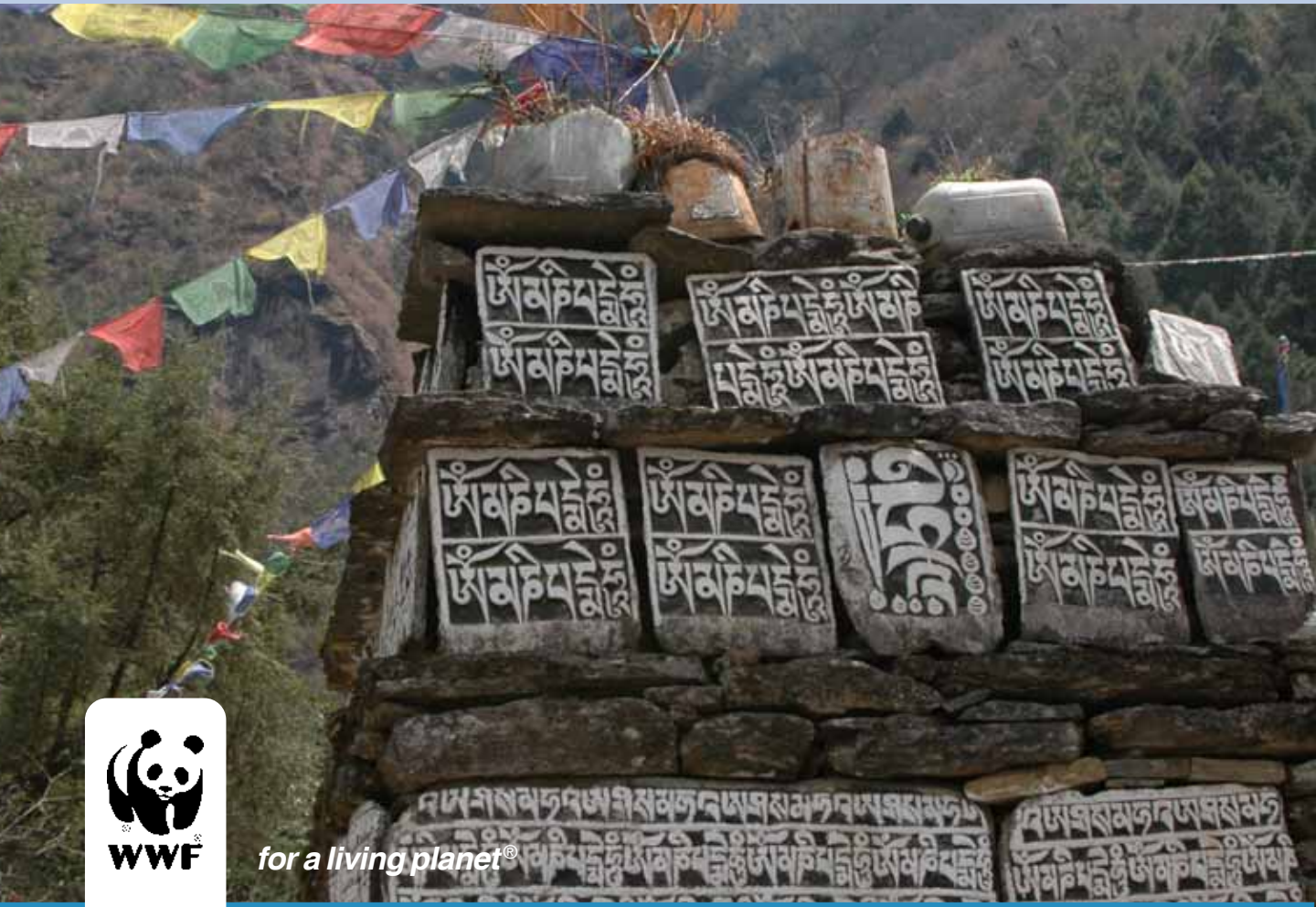

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