

A Window to Landscape Conservation

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Review of Sharma, E.; Chettri, N.; Gurung, J.; [Shakya, B.](#) (2007) The Landscape Approach in Biodiversity Conservation : A Regional Cooperation Framework for Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Kangchenjunga Landscape, ICIMOD, Kathmandu, Nepal

Conservation practice that was launched in Nepal in the early Seventies had limited scope- species protection. The approach has come a long way. Now it has evolved into comprehensive landscape level approach that goes beyond natural reserves. This approach departs from the fragmented vision of conservation and deals with environment as a contiguous landscape that may extend beyond political borders. One of the important lessons learnt from the decades of conservation practice in Nepal is that encouraging results come only from awareness and involvement of the local people. Community participation has brought desirable results where the armed guards have failed.

Due to population growth and destruction that has often come in the name of development, important ecological regions are being over-exploited and fragmented. The vision of a landscape level conservation is to revive the ruined ecology and prevent further destruction in order to maintain vital biological linkages between national parks and reserves. It applies the multi-faceted programmes in an integrated way to cover both the protected as well as non-protected areas. The idea is to revive the ecological corridors connecting different reserve areas that may extend beyond the national borders.

The Kangchenjunga ecological landscape in the eastern Himalayas, which extends across Nepal, Bhutan, China and India, is an important hotspot in the world ecological map. Prominent conservation agencies have focussed their attention in this region to save the valuable biodiversity wealth found here. Fourteen protected areas lie in this landscape but the crucial ecological linkages between the protected areas are missing. Such linkages are vital for wildlife movement, genetic flow and transmission of biodiversity resources.

The book under review is a collection of research works related to social, economic, cultural, scientific and policy issues related with conservation of the Kangchenjunga region. Kangchenjunga landscape biodiversity conservation calls for integrated measures in order to create an ecological network that are under rising threats due to over-exploitation of resources. The challenge is to create a sustainable balance between the forest resources, wildlife, water and the communities.

Landscape level conservation programme is not implemented in isolation. It has to deal with social, economic, scientific and policy related issues. The socio-economic aspects will have to look into the livelihood of the local communities dependent on the natural resources. It is impossible to end the dependence but a sustainable method of resource use should be developed. Conservation methods should develop a way that involves the local people and delivers economic benefits to them. The scientific component involves taking stock of biodiversity status, problem tendencies and recommend policy interventions. These are the key issues this book has attempted to cover in a research based way.

Broadly speaking, the book has been divided into three key components of Kangchenjunga landscape conservation- biodiversity conservation, socio-economic and livelihood of the local people and the policy perspective.

The introductory chapter points out that heavy dependence of the local populace on the natural resources has brought critical environmental degradation in the area. Since it is not possible to cut off this human-nature link, it is important to put sustainable solutions in place. Five research articles under biodiversity conservation have dwelt on the key ecological threats, conservation challenges, feasibility of ecological corridors, biodiversity status, documentation of plant resources of the region and conservation strategies. Similarly eight articles under the livelihood section discuss conservation

issues related to agriculture, livestock and pasture, cash crop based income generation, livelihood strategies, ecotourism development and enterprises based on forest resources. This section dwells on the community-based conservation model and joint transboundary programmes for effective conservation linked to sustainable development of the landscape.

The final chapters under the policy related section deal with laws governing land use, natural resource management, conservation policy of governments and traditional laws of the ethnic people of the region.

As the Kangchenjunga landscape spreads beyond Nepalese borders, case studies have been presented from Bhutan and Darjeeling of India on different conservation issues. The book is useful for conservation strategists, scientists, policy designers, conservation area managers and students of ecology, among others.