



Section One Introduction

Background

The Himalayan region possesses an immense natural beauty and rich cultural diversity. Despite this rich diversity, many people in mountain regions still live in poverty. Taking this into consideration, the Himalayas present great opportunities for developing a kind of pro-poor sustainable tourism (PPST) that would not only generate high levels of employment and income for the poor, but also enhance the lives of rural communities through infrastructure development, social mobilization, training and education, and institutional development.

For about a decade, SNV (by strengthening capacities of local organisations at different levels) and ICIMOD (through research and innovation programmes) have supported PPST initiatives in the Himalayas. One of these initiatives is the Sustainable Mountain Tourism in the Himalayas (SuMiT) program, a collaborative initiative of SNV and ICIMOD that aims to contribute to poverty reduction and the sustainable use of natural and socio-cultural resources for communities in the Himalaya through sustainable mountain tourism development.

Within the context of the SuMiT program, the concept of The Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) has been developed. This project aims to exploit the significant potential for product and marketing synergies that exists within and between the Himalayan countries included in this project¹. It is envisioned that the GHT will help to attract more trekking tourists to visit the Himalayas, as well as encourage them to make repeat visits to the region and explore different products/destinations. In so doing, it is intended that the benefits of tourism will be spread to the more remote and least developed parts of the Himalayas, where poverty is often the most acute.

In Nepal, the proposed trail starts in the Karnali (West Nepal) and continues through Mustang, Manang, Manaslu, Ganesh Himal, Rolwaling, Everest, and Kangchenjunga. This project will be led by SNV and ICIMOD in partnership with the NTB and in close collaboration with the STN. As a first step a preparatory study for Nepal has been carried out. This document presents the results of this study.

Scope of the Report

The first section of this report summarises the goal and specific objectives of this study, the methodology used to gather the data and the most important challenges faced in developing this report. The second section of this report includes an inventory (per district) of infrastructure, facilities and the most important tourism resources available along the potential trail. Furthermore, an overview is given of organisations working in each of the districts, and their main work in tourism and/or other development activities². The third section describes the trekking route(s), including alternative routes, and their most important characteristics.

To complement and support the visualisation of the data compiled in this report, a Geo-Multimedia Information System was developed to support the display of tourism information (facilities and services) within a geographical context. It also allows users to interactively browse through the tourism information and products available within the geographical area represented.

¹ Bangladesh, Bhutan, Tibet AR / China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan

² See Annex 4 for contact information of all active organisations

In this initial phase an application for the Dolpo district has been developed. This application aims to present tourism information in an appealing and accessible format and to demonstrate possible features for displaying available tourism data for the proposed GHT. This can be used for fundraising purposes, as well as a tool for planning, management, and marketing of tourism products of the proposed trail.³

Objectives

The goal of this study is to give an overview of tourism assets, infrastructure, trails, and organisations along the proposed GHT.

Specifically, this study attempts to:

- Identify infrastructure and tourism assets/services existing in the districts covered by the trail.
- Identify organisations (government, (I)NGOs, private sector) that are/ have been actively involved in trekking tourism/development activities along the trail.
- Identify and map out major/side/alternative trekking route(s) along the trail.

Methodology

The information for this report was compiled and summarised through the review of literature, programme documents, web pages, brochures, and maps. Personal communication with programme officers from nine organisations active in mountain tourism development and several individuals from the private sector was also an important means of gathering and validating data.

To complement the information gathered through desk research, surveys, and interviews, and to receive input from companies that promote sustainable tourism in Nepal, a workshop with members of the STN was organised on the 30th of September, 2005. In this workshop seven private sector and 13 national and international development organisations were consulted. In addition to quantitative and qualitative research, a field trip to Rasuwa district and Langtang region was also carried out (November 2005).

To facilitate the reading of the information compiled in this report, the trekking trail with its infrastructure and assets is graphically represented in maps designed using (GIS) software.

Limitations

The most important limitations of this study are the nature and extent of available data. In most districts tourism is in its initial stage and, as a result, only limited information was available. Also, consistency was a problem as the available information varied from one source to another (i.e. maps from different sources presented different kinds of information although they were covering the same area). Finally, time was an important constraint, as this study was carried out during the months where most important Nepali festivals are celebrated (September to December). Hence, many consultations had to be postponed leaving only a short time for the analysis. For this reason, this report includes only the most important findings in both maps and texts.

³ See Annex 2 for a brief summary of the Geo-Multimedia Information System of Dolpo

