



The Path Forward – Progress, Challenges, and Immediate Actions for Conservation

Achievements and Cooperation Across the Himalayas

The transboundary activities since 1995 have started to address several objectives identified by the Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Himalayas Programme. These objectives are

- strengthening transboundary cooperation by establishing professional links
- building and exchanging participatory management methods
- establishing local-level committees
- planning cross-border ecotourism
- continuing support for transboundary exchange



Rai cultural dance

Brian Peniston

Promoting transboundary eco-tourism opportunities

With experienced protected area management systems operating on both sides of the border, and an already cooperative Tibet-Nepal private tourism industry in place, trekking between QNP and Langtang National Park (LNP) has the potential to be a model for international collaboration in community-based and conservation-linked ecotourism.

On the Nepal side, TMI's Langtang Ecotourism Project and LNP collaborated for three years to plan and promote community-based ecotourism in the Langtang area. Communities learned participatory planning skills and formed local committees to manage the impact of tourism, increase local benefits, and promote conservation. In a participatory workshop on planning ecotourism and related micro-enterprises, officials and community members from Langtang, and from Kyirong on the Tibet side of the border, began collecting information and planning to manage cross-border ecotourism in the area, if and when the border opens.

The opening of cross-border trekking routes is supported by the QNP Tourism Master Plan Study, in which TMI participated. The Qomolangma Nature Preserve Ecotourism Master Plan Summary suggests four sites for cross-border trekking with Nepal, including the Kyirong-Langtang area.

Coordination between TMI's Qomolangma Conservation Programme and Peak Enterprise Programme, and ICIMOD's Natural Resource Management Programme

TMI's Qomolangma Conservation Programme (QCP) is designed to build local capacity to conserve the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Mount Everest ecosystem while improving local livelihoods. Transboundary issues and strategies have been a major consideration in the design of the programme.

The Peak Enterprise Programme is a unique partnership of organisations and individuals, who came together to enhance private enterprise opportunities for Tibetans in rural communities and towns, including the border region. Peak Enterprise identifies possible enterprises for development in remote areas and assists businesses in developing positive environmental strategies and complementary conservation programmes.

ICIMOD will be implementing its new five-year plan (2003-2007), which will focus on knowledge management, capacity building, networking, and policy advocacy. Transboundary conservation will fit prominently in its integrated natural resource management programme, with conservation education as a special focus. ICIMOD is currently working in protected areas of TAR as part of its rangeland programme and wishes to extend the transboundary focus to the Changtang and south-eastern TAR. ICIMOD is uniquely positioned as a regional member country institution with a focus on trans-national policies and instruments for collaborative exchanges and activities.



Challenges Hindering Transboundary Cooperation

The following challenges, both recurring and new, at present hinder transboundary collaboration.

Travel across the border

Exchanges have been postponed at times due to delays in obtaining travel documents for the QNP participants. Furthermore, exchanges can only be conducted when the roads crossing Tibet's high passes are open (April to October) and when the roads into Nepal are not closed during the June to September rainy season. This leaves a very short time frame for activities. Travel in the region usually requires several days; for instance, travel to LNP from Kathmandu requires two days, participants from Kyirong had to drive for five days to reach Langtang, which lies only 20-25 km downstream. It would take two days to walk across the border.

Communication

The success of the exchange visits requires careful planning and follow-up by both the visiting and host participants. The lack of good communication infrastructure in QNP's remote areas is a constraint, both to pre-trip planning and to post-trip follow-up. Also, language barriers make discussions slow. Furthermore, all discourse materials must be translated into three or four languages (Chinese, Tibetan, Nepali, and English) to accommodate all the participants and facilitators. At the village level, Tibetan and Nepali participants all speak a similar Tibetan-based dialect and can communicate with each other directly.

Follow-through

Commitments to follow-up action are made in earnest; however, follow-up is often hampered by frequent changes of government or park staff and by the participation of different individuals in each exchange. Including new participants in each exchange provides learning opportunities to more people, but there is little continuity in understanding of the issues or in follow-through on the commitments and conclusions of prior exchanges.

Broad-level participation in exchanges

The involvement of local-level participants in the ecotourism workshop increased their awareness and practical skills in ecotourism planning and management and in biodiversity conservation, strengthened cross-border bonds, and promoted local committees. These participants enhanced the exchanges with their experience and knowledge of transboundary issues such as wildfires, wildlife management, and illegal trade.

However, without a representative of QNP among the participants, conclusions could not be endorsed as official recommendations until QNP management had reviewed and approved them. Hence, the suggested actions remained inconclusive. In exchanges where government officials participated, recommendations could be adopted immediately.



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Ready for dialogue – shepherds of the high pastures

The participants in the ecotourism workshop ranged from villagers to Lhasa-based forestry officials; it was difficult to design activities for such a diverse range of participants.

Recommendations

Consolidate and expand transboundary activities

The activities of the last five years for trans-boundary conservation of the shared Mt. Everest landscape have successfully established better communication and information sharing between the governments of Nepal and TAR, China. Progress is slow and incremental, but improvements are being seen in the field programmes, and goodwill and trust is developing.

The programme should evolve into a lasting commitment by both governments. Activities should include local-level exchanges and should formalise the exchange mechanisms at a higher level. Future programmes should concentrate on developing specific field skills and practical training.

An additional high-level transboundary exchange is necessary to formalise the existing programme in both countries. This exchange should also work to upgrade QNP into a World Heritage site. With Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal, it would be one of the few



People of Tingri, TAR, cross-border traders

transboundary World Heritage sites and would provide unique opportunities to conserve both natural and cultural heritages across an international boundary. World Heritage designation is also an important tool for increasing awareness and raising funds.

Future transboundary programmes should include participants from other agencies with shared responsibilities such as customs officials, border patrol personnel, and staff from other protected areas in TAR.

Finally, efforts need to be made to develop a sustainable funding mechanism to ensure transboundary cooperation between HMG Nepal and the TAR government, such as a regional trust fund for conservation of the Mt. Everest landscape. This would change the perception of Mt. Everest from a mountain to conquer into a landscape to conserve.

In general terms, a strategy that consolidates and then expands the present achievements can be followed to strengthen the Transboundary Programme. This includes the following.

Consolidate and regularise the interaction and communication of protected area professionals and managers. Promote annual or semi-annual meetings for the regular sharing of information, especially on technical issues.

Follow up on the recommendations for activities at the community level, especially by using existing forums, such as annual herders' meetings.

Promote joint World Heritage site designation for QNP.

Expand the transboundary activities to contiguous valleys that are not included in a protected area by inviting professionals of the agencies managing these areas to workshops and meetings in Nyalam and Sindhupalchowk (the district in Nepal between the Langtang and Sagarmatha National Parks). Gradually expand activities in non-protected areas to the community level by utilising existing forums, such as community forest user groups.

Expand transboundary cooperation beyond QNP to include other protected areas of TAR, such as the Great Bend area and Changtang, and develop a programme for long-term transboundary conservation and exchange beyond QCP project funding.

The **lessons learned** during the past six years of Mount Everest transboundary exchanges include the following.

- Exchanges work best when the logistics are simple and the costs are minimal.
- Exchanges work best with the involvement of committed local staff.
- Meetings of high-level officials can provide a foundation for future activities, but they must set priorities and schedules for specific follow-up activities.

Take the first step

Managers and participants in the meetings face a challenge in finding ways to start implementing the recommendations, especially given the logistical challenges and constraints presented by the landscape of the region. Some actions will require the signing of bilateral treaties, which could take several years. Other activities can be carried out through the initiative of project teams and protected area managers.

Immediate activities that can be undertaken to follow up on the recommendations of the transboundary meetings include the following:

- offering incentives for information on poaching activities,
- training in the identification of species that are traded illegally,
- providing veterinary services for livestock in Karta and Kimathanka,
- conducting a workshop on forest fire management,
- preparing a proposal for World Heritage Status.

These initial steps will inspire confidence and will start to build partnerships and commitment to a longer-term process of collaboration.



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