



Regional Consultation on Conservation of the Kanchanjunga Mountain Ecosystem

Editors

Ajay Rastogi

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October 1997

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Cover photo: Janu Peak, Kanchanjunga Area (*Devendra Amatya*)

Published by
International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
G.P.O. Box 3226,
Kathmandu, Nepal

ISBN 92 9115 709 0

Typesetting at ICIMOD Publications' Unit
Layout by D.R. Maharjan
Edited by G. Rana and A. Pandey
Cover page A.K. Thaku

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FOREWORD

The eastern Himalayas are one of the global 'hotspots' for biodiversity. Characterised by a diverse and unique flora and fauna, this area faces pressing conservation and development challenges. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) seeks to address these challenges through regional collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach. Transboundary cooperation is the key to effective management and sustained conservation of areas that lie along the international borders. The Kanchanjunga massif straddles the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of the People's Republic of China to the north, India to the east, and Nepal to the south and west. Thus, the protection of the Kanchanjunga Mountain System calls for effective cooperation between the official agencies of these three countries. ICIMOD organised and facilitated this meeting of experts and officials from China, India, and Nepal in close collaboration with WWF Nepal Programme, which also arranged for its funding.

The meeting clearly brought out that the three nations currently have different degrees of protection and legal categories of land-use systems. On the Indian side, it is a national park, which is likely to be further expanded and declared a Biosphere Reserve. In Nepal, it is a proposed Conservation Area and, in TAR currently, there are no plans to consign any special status to the area as it is quite remote, fairly inaccessible, and naturally protected. Similarly, the degree of information available on the biological diversity and sociocultural aspects is highly variable. There are certain strengths and weaknesses on each side and many gaps need to be filled for effective protection of the Kanchanjunga Mountain System as a whole. The meeting resulted in convening a working group to develop a common framework for sharing information and providing technical assistance to increase the prospects of developing and implementing a long-term conservation action plan for the region. The officials from the countries deliberated on accepting and sharing the responsibilities and consensually decided that common agreements should be operationalised within a specified time frame.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), also known as World Wildlife Fund in the USA and Canada, was well represented at the meeting with staff from the international as well as the regional offices, besides representatives from the WWF India. WWF, together with other international and regional organisations, such as the SNV and the Mountain Institute, has taken the lead in providing the necessary technical assistance to the three countries. ICIMOD with its regional mandate would be happy to provide support by fostering greater collaboration between the member countries. I would like to thank the officials and experts from the three countries and the international non-government organisations involved in this meeting and in the follow-up. I look forward to further action following this pioneering initiative in transboundary cooperation, as I see this as a beginning towards development of a common agenda for sustainable development and conservation of this unique ecosystem.

Egbert Pelinck
Director General

The Kanchanjunga massif straddles Nepal in the east, India to the west, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China to the north. This mountain system is characterised by rich biological and cultural diversity. For effective conservation and development of the Kanchanjunga Mountain System, it is important that the three countries collaborate in drawing up a common vision and a long-term action plan. In order to facilitate this important process of regional collaboration, ICIMOD organised this meeting with the active involvement and support of the World Wildlife Fund Nepal Programme in Kathmandu from March 31 to April 2, 1997.

The participants at the meeting were comprised of government officials from the Department of Forests/Wildlife from the three nations. They presented overviews on the status of the Kanchanjunga area in their respective countries. Conservation experts, representing international non-government organisations actively involved in the region, were present, and they facilitated an exchange of ideas and information by providing thematic technical reports. The follow-up discussions centred around development of a common framework for three key aspects: (i) biodiversity assessment and monitoring; (ii) sharing information and management; and (iii) sharing conservation benefits with local people. Deliberations on these three key aspects led to a set of recommendations and a follow-up action plan to be jointly pursued in future.

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