

SECTION 1

Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Himalayas

Kangchenjunga range as seen from Darjeeling





Glacial lake at the base of Zumolari mountain in Jigme Dorji National Park, Bhutan

Introduction

It has become increasingly clear over the years that to be successful conservation activities must look beyond protecting a particular species or delimited area. Biodiversity conservation has to take a holistic view, using a comprehensive and multi-scaled approach that not only considers a whole range of interlinked plant, animal, and insect species, but also includes both reserve and non-reserve areas, considers the needs and interests of the people who rely on these areas for their livelihoods, and takes into account the entire landscape, physical and human, in which an area is situated (the matrix). Protected areas have increased greatly in number and extent in many countries, but they 'cannot exist in isolation as islands' (Secretariat of the CBD 2004) if they are to fulfil their function.

This applies not only to single countries. Landscapes are not confined by national borders. In many places, areas of interest for biodiversity conservation include parts of two, three, or even more countries. This is particularly true of mountain landscapes, where borders often follow ridges along mountain chains, dividing the contiguous mountain slopes. In such areas, the success of conservation measures in one country, may depend heavily on the situation across the border. Biodiversity conservation approaches in such areas need to be agreed among all the countries concerned if they are to be of real benefit, if not they may run the risk of becoming contradictory and even counterproductive.

The transboundary conservation approach represents an important means for coordinating the efforts of those countries that share important trans-border ecosystems (Secretariat of the CBD 2004). It implies using a landscape approach to conservation, with coordinated planning for a whole landscape rather than for a limited area defined in terms of political or other boundaries. There is an increasing awareness that using a transboundary ecosystem approach can also contribute to reconciling the demands of biodiversity conservation with those of sustainable development. It takes into account both the ecological interdependence across the international boundary, and the interdependence of the communities located along or close to the border. Many countries realise that both the economic and the environmental interdependence between neighbouring countries can offer opportunities for cooperation, particularly in sharing the benefits of biodiversity conservation. International boundaries play an important role given their multifaceted functions as filter zones for illicit activities, gateways for people and goods, and zones of socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental integration.

In the past few years a number of transboundary initiatives have developed for biodiversity conservation with successful examples of formal cooperation agreements especially in Europe. In the eastern Himalayas, marked progress has been made towards developing a transboundary conservation approach and cooperation agreement for the Kangchenjunga landscape, which is a major centre



Haugetham forest, a critical transboundary habitat for red panda in Ilam, Nepal

of biodiversity spread across four countries. This publication describes briefly the development of the concept of transboundary landscape management and its close connection with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), followed by the activities that culminated in the development of a Regional Cooperation Framework for implementation of the CBD and conservation of the Kangchenjunga landscape. The Framework is presented in detail in Part 2, and further information about the CBD and existing European initiatives that acted as a model is provided in Part 3.

Transboundary Landscape Management

The Convention on Biological Diversity and the concept of transboundary landscape management

Transboundary landscape management is an evolving concept in the conservation of biological diversity, in which conservation means much more than simply protecting a species or an ecosystem within a confined area (Hamilton and McMillan 2004). As an approach it falls under the overall framework of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) – the major global agreement on the sustainable use and conservation of biological diversity. The CBD has three main goals: 1) conservation of biological diversity, 2) sustainable use of its components, and 3) fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

The Convention was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 and entered into force on 29 December 1993. There are currently 188 parties to the CBD, including Bhutan, China, India, and Nepal. The CBD provides guidelines for many aspects of biodiversity conservation. Any new conservation recommendations are discussed at the various meetings and then amended in the CBD through the Conference of Parties (COP) to the CBD. Section 3 provides a more detailed account of the background, development, and implications of the CBD.

Transboundary landscape management received global attention after the seventh COP meeting in early 2004, which endorsed the ‘ecosystem approach’ to conservation and highlighted the significance of regional cooperation among the signatories to the convention (Secretariat of the CBD 2004).

Landscape management implies using an integrated approach in the management of extended landscapes, defined by ecosystems rather than boundaries, in which both conservation and sustainable use of the components of biological diversity are considered, and in which people and their sociocultural resources are placed at the centre of the conservation framework. This approach has been strongly recommended for linking conservation with sustainability, involving communities in decision-making processes, and exploiting biodiversity judiciously to secure effective management.

The seventh COP meeting also adopted ‘Mountain Biodiversity’ as a programme of work for mountain-specific activities with the same emphasis on



Origin of Zemu glacier from the base of Mt. Kangchenjunga range in Sikkim

regional cooperation and the ecosystem approach as an effective means of biodiversity conservation (Sharma and Acharya 2004).

Transboundary cooperation in mountain areas

In order to achieve the CBD goals as specifically mentioned in the 'Mountain Biodiversity' decision, biodiversity conservation and programmes related to sustainable use must be scaled up across larger – often transboundary – landscapes. Transboundary biodiversity conservation landscapes incorporate the ecosystems approach while facilitating integration and networking of regional protected areas. This approach is an evolving process for international collaboration in managing and sharing experiences and information in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It is also an effective tool for conserving biodiversity, for strengthening collaboration, and for collective measures to harness environmental services by the countries in the landscape.

Already there are some well-developed examples of how this type of cooperation can work. They include two European agreements: the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention. The Alpine Convention covers an area of 191,000 sq.km and a population of 12 million people belonging to seven countries in western Europe, as well as the European Union. It was signed in 1991 and ratified in 1999. The Carpathian Convention was adopted by the seven Carpathian countries in central and eastern Europe in May 2003 and came into force in January 2006. Both focus on preservation and protection linked

to balanced and sustainable development. Section 3 provides further details. Similar efforts are also underway in the Andes and other mountain areas in the Caucasus and Balkans.

Transboundary cooperation in the eastern Himalayas

Transboundary biodiversity conservation efforts began in the Himalayan region in 1992 when several sites were identified as potential transnational parks and the first regional symposium on transboundary conservation in the Himalayas was held in Kathmandu. A subsequent meeting on transboundary biodiversity conservation in the eastern Himalayas in 1994 brought together people from government and non-government sectors and raised awareness of the need for transboundary protected areas in the region (Box 1.1). In 1994/95, transboundary biodiversity conservation programmes were initiated in the eastern Himalayas by The Mountain Institute,

Box 1.1: Hands Around Everest

Key issues requiring transboundary cooperation in the Mt. Everest ecosystem:

- #1: Poaching and smuggling of wildlife products
- #2: Cross-border spread of livestock disease
- #3: Cross-border spread of forest fires
- #4: Livelihoods of people near the border

(Sherpa et al. 2003)



A herd of blue sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*) in Kangchenjunga Biosphere Reserve, Sikkim

the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), and the Governments of Nepal and China. These programmes supported a series of discussions and exchange activities among protected area managers, scientists, and local people in four contiguous protected areas around Mt. Everest (Qomolangma Nature Preserve in Tibet Autonomous Region, China, and Sagarmatha, Makalu-Barun, and Langtang National Parks in Nepal) and the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in Nepal. The Everest experience demonstrated that the concept of transboundary cooperation could receive strong local support and interest despite logistical challenges for its implementation (Sherpa et al. 2003).

Conservation planning in the eastern Himalayas has taken a stride forward during the last decade, particularly in relation to cooperation for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the transboundary conservation complexes (Chettri et al. 2007). With a regional mandate in its strategic working plans, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has been bringing stakeholders together including government officials from its different regional member countries, to discuss on a common platform for transboundary regional cooperation for biodiversity conservation for more than a decade (Rastogi et al. 1997; Guangwei 2002; Sherpa et al. 2003). While transboundary approaches continue to develop in the Everest area as well as other parts of the greater Himalayan region, recent efforts have focused on the landscape area of Mt. Kangchenjunga in the eastern Himalayas. This area was identified as an important transboundary landscape through research, dialogue, and information sharing processes (WWF and ICIMOD 2001; CEPF 2005; Chettri et al. 2007).

The Kangchenjunga landscape provides an exceptional opportunity for regional cooperation in transboundary biodiversity conservation within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and in particular towards achieving the purpose of the CBD's Mountain Biodiversity programme of work (Sharma and Acharya 2004). Geographically, it spreads over the natural and national boundaries of Nepal, India, Bhutan and Tibet Autonomous Region of China. It includes two of the WWF Global 200 Ecoregions (Olson and Dinerstein 2002) and lies within the Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspot (Mittermeier et al. 2004), a testament to the global significance of its biodiversity. A number of the protected areas (PAs) are located at national boundaries providing contiguous habitat for many wildlife species. The initiative that has been developed in this area is intended to serve as an example for the whole Himalayan region, and to provide a model that others can follow.

Transboundary Cooperation and the Landscape Approach in the Kangchenjunga Area

The Kangchenjunga landscape

On the southern side, the landscape surrounding Mt Kangchenjunga (8,586m) spreads over diverse ecological zones in eastern Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim in India, and extending to western Bhutan (Figure 1.1). On the northern side, a small part of the northern slope extends into the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China. The large southern part of the landscape encompasses an area of about 6,000 sq.km. The area is included in one of 34 global biodiversity hotspots: within a 100 km north-south stretch, the landscape contains tropical to alpine vegetation that serves as a habitat for many umbrella and charismatic species including the snow leopard, red panda, takin, blue sheep, serow, Himalayan musk deer, Himalayan thar, tiger, and Asian elephant. Most remnant areas with high biological diversity are found in the border areas of the complex and are facing many conservation issues that are transboundary in nature, demanding an integrated approach for effective conservation through regional cooperation (Pei and Sharma 1998; Sherpa et al. 2003; Sharma and Chettri 2005).

There are 14 important protected areas scattered across the southern part of the complex, six of them transboundary in nature (Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1). The majority of the protected areas are still isolated as conservation 'islands' following a protectionist approach and ignoring the human dimension and cultural aspect embedded in the landscape dynamics. They are scattered at a distance without natural connectivity.

The Kangchenjunga landscape is not only a biodiversity repository endowed with a rich variety of genetic, species, and ecosystem diversities, equally diverse are the cultures and indigenous knowledge and practices in this region. The conservation and environmental services that this landscape provides are locally, regionally, and globally significant. The area also falls within the proposed Sacred Himalayan Landscape (SHL) that extends from Langtang National Park in central Nepal through the Kangchenjunga region to Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve in western Bhutan (GoN/MoFSC 2005). The vision of SHL is "a Himalayan landscape where the biological and cultural treasures of the world's highest sacred mountains and deepest valleys are safeguarded while traditional rights over sustainable resources

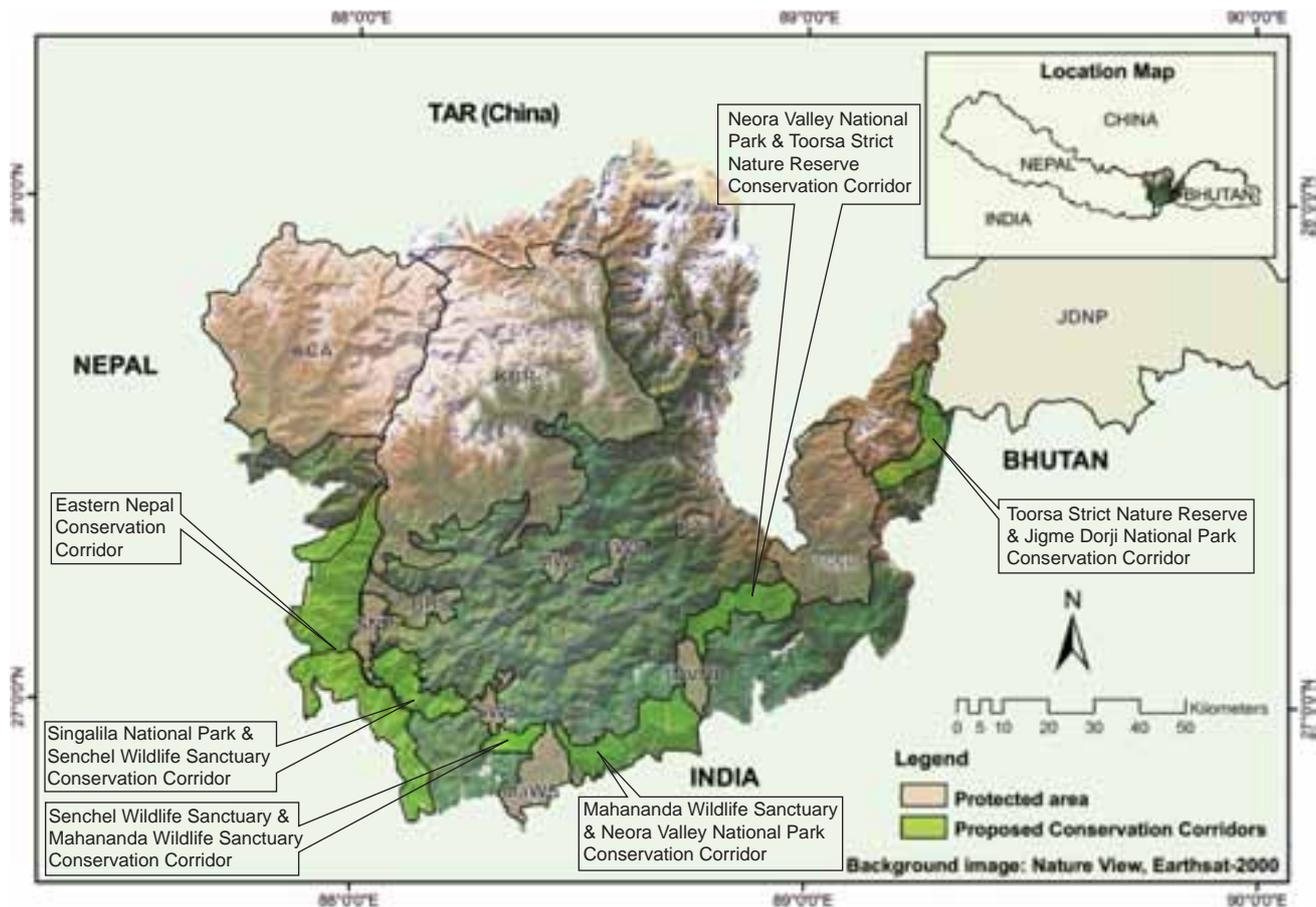


Figure 1.1: Protected areas and proposed conservation corridors in the Kangchenjunga landscape

KCA = Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, Nepal; KBR = Kangchenjunga Biosphere Reserve, BRS = Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary, FWS = Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary, SRS = Singba Rhododendron Sanctuary, MWS = Mainam Wildlife Sanctuary, KAS = Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, Sikkim, India; SNP = Singhalila National Park, SWS = Sanchel Wildlife Sanctuary, MaWS = Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, NVNP = Neora Valley National Park, Darjeeling, India; and TSNR = Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve, JDNP = Jigme Dorzi National Park, Bhutan

Table 1.1: Protected areas in the (southern) Kangchenjunga landscape		
Protected Area	Location	Area (sq.km)
1. Kangchenjunga Conservation Area	Taplejung, Nepal	2,035
2. Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve	Sikkim, India	2,620
3. Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary	Sikkim, India	104
4. Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary	Sikkim, India	52
5. Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary	Sikkim, India	31
6. Mainam Wildlife Sanctuary	Sikkim, India	35
7. Singha Rhododendron Sanctuary	Sikkim, India	43
8. Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary	Sikkim, India	128
9. Jore Pokhari Salamander Sanctuary	Darjeeling, India	0.4
10. Singhalila National Park	Darjeeling, India	79
11. Sanchel Wildlife Sanctuary	Darjeeling, India	39
12. Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary	Darjeeling, India	127
13. Neora Valley National Park	Darjeeling, India	88
14. Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve	Bhutan	651
Total area		6,032.4

are ensured and livelihoods of mountain people are enhanced.” The programme aims to sustain cultures and traditions that nurture and revere nature so that Himalayan biodiversity is conserved and sustainable livelihoods ensured within the landscape as reflected in the SHL vision.

Significant conservation issues

Notwithstanding its significance, the Kangchenjunga landscape faces numerous threats to its biological and other diversity as a result of habitat transformation and fragmentation, unsustainable extraction and use of natural resources, impacts from unregulated tourism, and others. Some 65 plant, 19 mammal, and 11 bird species are already threatened in this region (Chettri 2000). As a result of the diverse cultural, political, and administrative settings in the three countries of the southern landscape, conservation issues and priorities differ, however. Table 1.2 summarises conservation issues of local and transboundary significance identified during stakeholder consultations in Bhutan, India and Nepal held during 2003 and 2004.

The overall priority transboundary conservation issues in the Kangchenjunga landscape are

- 1) **overextraction of resources** – poaching of wildlife (e.g. musk bile) and plant species (e.g. *Cordyceps*, *Daphne*); unregulated collection of fuelwood and medicinal plants; and timber extraction by corporations as well as individuals;
- 2) **haphazard land-use practices** – inadequate buffer for protected areas from one country to the other; unregulated cross-border grazing; habitat fragmentation by encroachment, and over-use of resources;
- 3) **livelihood thrusts** – unregulated/unplanned tourism; transhumance; and people-wildlife management related conflicts;
- 4) **policies** – weak enforcement of existing policies and laws; asset ownership and resource use across the border; undefined and weak policies and regulations for cross-border related trade.

These transboundary issues present further challenges:

- A comprehensive information database is required in order to develop intervention strategies and to adequately address transboundary issues including compensation for environmental services and upland-lowland linkages;

Table 1.2: Major conservation issues in the Kangchenjunga landscape

Issue	Bhutan	India	Nepal	Transboundary
Resource extraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● poaching for bile and musk ● collection of NTFPs ● unregulated collection of medicinal and aromatic plants ● illegal felling of trees ● collection of fuelwood and timber extraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● illegal timber logging ● firewood collection for sale ● fodder collection ● poaching/hunting and illegal butterfly collection ● over-exploitation of NTFPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● poaching ● over-harvesting of NTFPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● poaching (both plants and wildlife) ● illegal fuelwood and timber extraction
Land-use systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● grazing /grazing pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● landslide-prone areas ● siltation ● use of chemicals in tea gardens and agricultural land ● open grazing ● encroachment and habitat destruction ● small-scale forest fires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● forest/grazing encroachment ● conflicting land tenure systems ● forest fires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cross-border grazing (transhumance)
Livelihood options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● livestock depredation by wild dogs and leopards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● communities with limited agricultural land and production ● dependency of tea-garden labourers on adjoining forests ● people-wildlife conflict ● improper waste management ● high volume of tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● transhumance system of animal rearing ● large number of unproductive livestock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cross border and unregulated tourism
Policies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● weak enforcement of requirement for ground and forest management practices to adopt more effective participatory approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● poor implementation of policies and laws outside the protected areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● dual citizenship and ownership of resources ● customs barriers ● cross-border related trade issues

- Varying legal and policy aspects affect resource use and conservation mechanisms (including community rights on the use and tenure of resources) differently in the countries within the landscape;
- Alternative livelihood options are limited and have limited possibilities for scaling up; and
- Physical and financial constraints prevent networking and regular exchange of information and best practices among countries within the landscape.

Transboundary cooperation initiatives

Transboundary cooperation started in the Kangchenjunga landscape in 1997, when researchers and officials from the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, India, and Nepal attended a regional consultation workshop organised by ICIMOD to discuss the status and potential of the Kangchenjunga landscape in terms of conservation of biological diversity (Rastogi et al. 1997). As in many places, the Kangchenjunga landscape had witnessed conservation efforts that ranged from species to landscape level. The aim was to bring the different countries together to develop effective conservation measures for the critical transboundary complexes across the landscape. Transboundary exchanges were identified as crucial mechanisms for promoting collaboration among the countries. The recommendations were:

- formal establishment of a transboundary protected area in the Kangchenjunga area,
- development of a standardised information database of transboundary resources, and
- promotion of a participatory approach to involve local people in the planning process, to ensure conservation awareness, and to introduce economic benefits by developing tourism and other biodiversity-based enterprises.

With support from the MacArthur Foundation, ICIMOD initiated the 'Transboundary Biodiversity Management' project in 2002 to promote the sustainable use of biodiversity resources



Rhododendrons are a keystone species in the Kangchenjunga landscape



Red Panda: an endangered species in the Kangchenjunga landscape



Intensive agriculture and degradation of natural forest, Ilam, Nepal

and effective conservation in the landscape. This initiative addresses the need to fill gaps in cooperation on biodiversity conservation at the landscape level, as agreed in the 'Mountain Biodiversity' decision at the seventh COP meeting. The aim is to achieve biodiversity conservation through regional cooperation while complying with national and international agendas (e.g. national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and the CBD).

The first phase of the TBM programme focused on cooperation among the three countries sharing the larger southern part of the landscape. Recently activities have been initiated to extend cooperation across the northern boundary and especially to explore possibilities for linking the landscape with the very large Qomolangma National Nature Reserve in Tibet Autonomous Region which is contiguous with Sagarmatha National Park (Everest region) in Nepal.

The TBM programme aims to achieve participatory conservation at a landscape level using an integrated approach. It strongly emphasises community development, regional cooperation, partnership, and biodiversity-based micro-enterprises. The programme has also identified six potential conservation corridors (landscape features that connect large tracts of isolated habitat across a fragmented terrain) that will re-establish natural connectivity among 9 of the 14 protected areas in the southern

half of the Kangchenjunga landscape (Sharma and Chettri 2005). Activities are ongoing to develop these corridors with cooperation from all levels of stakeholders from Nepal, India and Bhutan. In the next phase, the possibility of linking the remaining PAs will also be investigated.

ICIMOD has been playing a pivotal role in forming partnerships; developing community-based natural resources management strategies in and around the protected areas, and exploring the feasibility of developing conservation corridors to link the protected areas in the landscape (Sharma and Chettri 2005). ICIMOD and partners have been trying to address the issues of linking conservation and development through a 'landscape approach' that also involves its most important resource, the people, in conservation planning and seeks to provide them with an economic gain from the conservation efforts. The essence of the transboundary landscape initiative is the use of an integrated approach with partnerships between the communities and government agencies of the countries that share a conservation area of common interest, for effective biodiversity management.

Development of a regional framework for conservation

In the past few years, ICIMOD with its regional partners in India, Nepal and Bhutan have worked towards developing a common regional framework



Making mats from rice straw: sustainable use of local resources



Most of the high altitude areas are critical as they are important habitats for many flagship species including snow leopard

for conservation in the Kangchenjunga landscape. This common framework provides a major tool for coordination and integration of conservation and development activities and represents the culmination of a long process carried out to achieve a common understanding.

The process began in 2002 with a series of stakeholder consultations on planning and improvement of biological corridors between the protected areas in Bhutan, India, and Nepal. These led to development of a consensus on the feasibility of establishing conservation corridors between a number of protected areas in the Kangchenjunga landscape, and also explored conservation-linked development opportunities for communities in the corridor areas (see Sharma and Chettri 2005; Chettri et al. 2007). ICIMOD was instrumental in developing three strategic documents, one each for Nepal, Bhutan, and India, for management of the corridors. ICIMOD also played a pivotal role in conceptualising and developing a strategic document on the Sacred Himalayan Landscape (SHL) to broaden the conservation area in Nepal (GoN/MFSC 2006).

Following the national consultations, ICIMOD organised a regional technical experts' consultative workshop in May 2004 in Kathmandu with some 50 experts, from government, non-government, and civil society organisations in India, Bhutan, and Nepal (ICIMOD 2004). The outcomes of the national stakeholders' consultations were shared and participants developed and agreed on conservation activities for regional cooperation in the Kangchenjunga landscape. A series of action

research activities were carried out including collection of baseline information, feasibility assessments, capacity building, participatory planning, and policy dialogue, to provide the basis for subsequent activities.

A regional technical workshop on 'Policy Framework for Cooperation and Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Kangchenjunga Landscape, Sikkim, India' was organised in June 2006 with representatives of the Ministries and Departments related to conservation in Bhutan, India, and Nepal, and technical institutions. A 'Regional Cooperation Framework' was developed during this workshop guided by implementation of the Mountain Biodiversity decision of the CBD. The landscape-based ecosystem approach for conservation was emphasised together with programme elements related to regional cooperation. Advice and ideas from the technical experts participating in the workshop were incorporated, as were the results of the national and regional consultations and the applied baseline research. The framework is presented in full in Section 2.

The framework indicates clearly that conservation with cooperation, and sharing of resources, expertise, and information are seen to be effective options that will enable the countries sharing this complex to benefit mutually from the ecological services rendered by the biological resources.

The Regional Policy Framework is a step forward in the implementation of the CBD in the countries of the Kangchenjunga landscape (Figure 1.2).

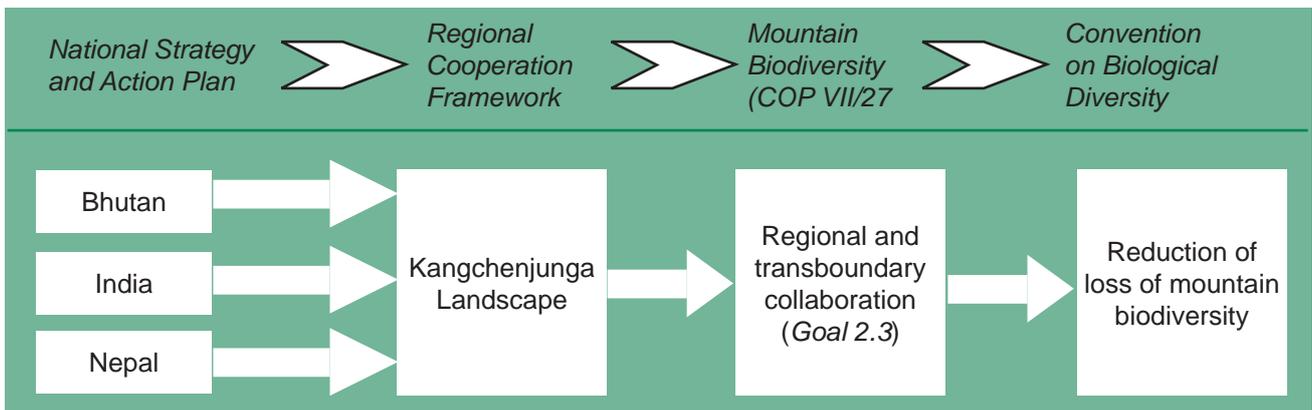


Figure 1.2: The Regional Cooperation Framework for the Kangchenjunga landscape in the context of policy linkage from national to global levels

A Way Forward

The regional cooperation framework is the output of a long process for prioritising conservation areas of global importance and developing consensus among the experts and governments concerned. The process was focussed on customising the CBD provisions to the regional, national, and local levels – in other words on facilitating implementation of the convention by the regional signatories.

The framework will act as a bridging document towards regional cooperation for this critical landscape and could be expanded to other landscapes in the region. The process provides concrete suggestions for strategic directions to make the framework functional and guide the countries sharing this landscape towards a common goal of effective conservation. The guiding principles of the framework include recognition of local and indigenous knowledge and practices, capacity building for livelihood options, exchange of information on illegal resource extraction and animal movement, institutionalising the process through national and regional committees, and enhanced regional cooperation.

Numerous strategic directions for each of the four thematic areas were discussed and recommended for further action with some guidelines and an advocacy strategy for implementation. The recommended strategic directions included creation of common platforms to facilitate information exchange and sharing; strengthening and supporting local and national institutions; building capacity of stakeholders for conservation and livelihood improvement; preparation of a common action plan to build synergy among transboundary stakeholders; formation of a steering committee at the landscape level, and enhancing regional cooperation. ICIMOD is committed in its facilitating role to help make the framework functional to provide a basis for effective conservation in the landscape with active support from the governments, conservation organizations, and civil society.

The processes involved in developing transboundary biodiversity management using a landscape approach in the Kangchenjunga area, and the framework developed for regional cooperation, provide an example of an approach that could be used equally successfully in other transboundary complexes in the greater Himalayan region.



Conservation corridors: landscape mosaic supporting diversity

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