

ACAP Approach: A Pioneer for Payment for Environmental Services in Nepal

ACAP Approach; Conservation for Development:

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), launched in 1986, is the largest undertaking of the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) with the objective of “Conservation for Development”. To sustain community-based development initiatives, the Nepali Government has allowed ACAP to collect conservation entry fees (NRs 2000 (\$25)/tourist) from all international trekkers and tourists visiting the region since 1989.

Background

Over 120,000 people are living within ACA and their dependency on natural resources is high; as such, ACAP has recognised the significance of people’s participation in conservation of natural resources as both actors and beneficiaries. The local community has been integrated into ACAP through a Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC), a local entity formulated at the grass roots level via the Village Development Committee (VDC). In total 57 CAMCs have been formed and legally registered within ACA (7629 sq. km), with members elected from and by local people.

Through ACAP programmes, people are receiving long term support from forest resources and have been made aware of the value of forest resources and the need for proactive conservation efforts. These include Natural Resource Conservation, Alternative Energy, Conservation Education, Tourism Management, Gender Development, Agriculture and Reproductive and Health Services. This revenue is sustainable due to the ongoing conservation of ACA and vice versa, i.e. distribution of funds from tourists through the local level and used by the CAMC for conservation and development activities. This Approach has established Annapurna Conservation Area Project as a successful model project in Asia.

Activities

Natural Resource Conservation is one of the major programmes of ACAP. Forest conservation, wildlife conservation, pasture management, soil and water conservation are considered to be a central focus of this programme, which encompass activities such as nursery establishment at the village level, seedling distribution, forest fire control, forest patrolling, corral construction/repair, water hole construction, non-timber forest product promotion, bio-engineering, research and documentation and sustainable harvesting of timbers.

The Alternative Energy Programme has been implemented with the aim of reducing fuel-wood consumption in ACA by providing alternative sources of energy, including hydropower, solar energy, biogas plants, bio briquettes and fossil fuels (Kerosene/LPG gas depots), as well as appropriate cooking and heating devices such as back boilers, improved stoves and smoke water heaters in an effort to reduce fuel-wood consumption.

The Conservation Education and Extension Programme (CEEP) disseminates information and ideas within local communities. In Grades 6, 7 and 8 many schools within ACA incorporate “Prakritiko Sandesh”, the “Message of Nature”, as an integral part of the curriculum. There are also various informal (out of school) CEEP activities in different locations including conservation

education, green force club formation, training/workshop, conservation awareness camps, mobile camps and study tours, which target the older as well as the younger generations.

Environmental Services within ACA:

Environmental Services provided by ACAP efforts within its territory are: forest products, biodiversity conservation, landscape beauty, water provision and carbon sequestration. Forest resources are managed through CAMCs and Forest Management Subcommittees (FMSCs); current forest management practice reveals that CAMCs and FMSCs act as service providers and that both local people and tourists are beneficiaries. Over 120,000 people are living within ACA and most livelihoods depend on agriculture, with the pasture area of the Mustang district alone supporting 67,108 livestock.

People are therefore dependent on the forests for fodder, pasture for grazing, fuel wood and timber. Local people pay CAMCs for timber (the price is capped and tagged for local use only), fuel wood, and medicinal plants. There are also many CAMCs within ACAP that are earning NRs 200,000 (\$2667) to NRs 200,000 (\$26,667) per year from permits given to local people for the collection of Yarsa Gumba (*Cordiceps sinensis*), as with other medicinal plants. Each CAMC uses the revenue for community development and conservation.

The ACA region is also rich in water resources. Most of the rivers are fed by glaciers, and the Kaligandaki, Modi, Mardi River, Seti and Marsagdi rivers are perennial sources of water which provide benefits (drinking, irrigation and electricity) to more than a million people. ACAP plays a vital role in conservation of the watersheds of these rivers, and has constructed 12 micro-hydropower plants comprising a total capacity of 468.3 KW, which are helping to reduce the dependency of local people on fuel wood, with a further 23 being installed. Micro-Hydropower Management Sub-committees (MHMSc) are selected from users (villagers) to manage hydropower under the supervision of CAMC; the charge of electricity varies from sub-committee to sub-committee. The revenue from future projects would be \$ 64 590 400/year. Meanwhile, mega hydropower projects (up to 70MW) bring in \$ 144 364 800/year in revenue.

In terms of tourism, landscape beauty has made this region a world renowned trekking destination, with many famous high peaks such as Annapurna I, II, III, IV and Machapuchure; the Kali Gandaki River Basin, the world's deepest valley, and numerous impressive waterfalls and glaciers. Within the ACAP territory, there are 1226 species of plants, including endemic and highly valuable medicinal plants such as Yarsa Gomba (*Cordyceps sinensis*), Sarpagandha (*Rouvolfia serpentina*), and Lotsalla (*Taxus baccata*); 101 species of mammals including flagship species such as Snow Leopards (*Uncia uncia*) and other globally threatened species such as Musk Deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*); 474 species of avifauna; 39 species of reptiles and 22 species of amphibians.

Payments for Environment Services: Is it in operation within ACA?

The basic principle of PES is that those who "provide" environmental services should be rewarded for doing so. Ultimately, the benefits have come because ACA's potential for tourism is easy to sell, enabling investment in conservation to provide a cycle of benefits to tourists and the local community. In 2008, a total of 75,925 tourists visited ACA which generated NRs 130,000,000 (\$1.7 million). The stronghold of ACAP is that it has focused especially on the rural poor, giving stipends to students from poor families, skill development trainings to local people,

distributing solar panels, installing micro-hydropower and developing infrastructure; this is the key to effective conservation.

References:

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