

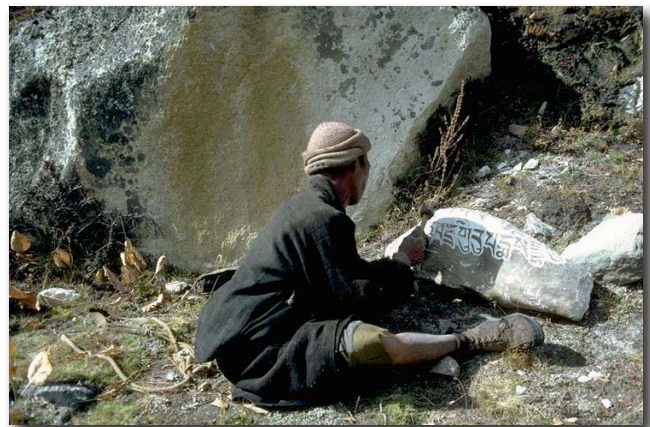
FINAL REPORT ON "SACRED SITES
IN KHUMBU REGION OF NEPAL"
PROJECT
SAGARMATHA NATIONAL PARK IN
(MOUNT EVEREST REGION) NEPAL

REPORT SUBMITTED
TO
TOURISM CARES
FOR TOMORROW
USA

REPORT SUBMITTED
BY



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Abbreviation

DNPWC	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
GMC	Gompa Management Committees
HMG	His Majesty's Government
KACC	Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PYC	Pangboche Youth Club
SNPBZ	Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone
SNP	Sagarmatha National Park
SPCC	Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee
TMI	The Mountain Institute
TRPAP	Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Project

FINAL REPORT ON “SACRED SITES IN KHUMBU REGION OF NEPAL” PROJECT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mountain Institute (TMI) received a 1-year grant from the Tourism Cares for Tomorrow to partially support specific activities of the “Sacred Sites in the Khumbu Region of Nepal” Project in and around Mount Everest (Sagarmatha in local language) which started in September 2007. This final report covers the accomplishment of project activities, covering the period from March 2007-March 2008 and documents the major achievements and challenges of the project.

The Tourism Cares for Tomorrow has awarded sum of US\$ 10,000 (ten thousand) to TMI to supplement TMI’s established Sacred Sites Trail Project in the Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone in the Solukhumbu, Nepal. Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) is one of the world’s premier mountain tourism (mostly trekking) regions, containing 4 peaks over 8,000 m and spectacular scenery. From 3,600 visitors in 1979, numbers increased to 21,520 by 2001. This increase has not been without some serious ecological and cultural impairment, which are being rectified. Trekking tourism economic benefits accrued mainly on the major established routes.

In 2003, TMI launched a Sacred Sites Trail Project in Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone with a view to improve the livelihoods of local people by expanding community-managed tourism to new areas of the park while enlisting sacred and cultural values in efforts to conserve the environment and to restore and enhance the cultural traditions of lesser-known sacred sites in the Khumbu region. The project’s circular trail passes through 12 monasteries and nunneries. An enormous effort has been put forth so far to build a strong foundation for cultural and natural sacred sites conservation initiatives and links it with biodiversity conservation. But there is still a lot to be done and learned.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT

Cultural preservation imparts in one not only the heritage facet but also the social structure of the local communities, their traditions, and their indigenous knowledge on protecting the environment they live in. Due to mass tourism, cultural values and moral essence of religion and cultural are gradually declining in the Khumbu region, making it imperative to mobilize the sensibilities of people toward preserving their cultural heritage for future generations.

3. TOURISM CARES GRANT

With the generous support from “Tourism Cares for Tomorrow’s fund has been extensively used to document folklore, traditional songs and renovate traditional sacred sites such as hermitages, worship platforms, entrance gates (“kani” in local Sherpa language), Mani walls and chortens in Nepal’s Mount Everest region.

The project sought to engage the Sherpa communities in more effective preservation of the historical, cultural and natural sites of the National Park and its buffer zone. The Tourism Cares grant for one year facilitated the creation and strengthening of the local institutions that ensures cultural preservation of the Khumbu valley of Nepal. Building on the foundation established in “Sacred Sites Trail Project” funded by the Ford Foundation, the project also endorsed sustainable cultural and heritage preservation actions, incorporating new interventions that deal with additional cultural conservation issues.

With the expanded opportunities in tourism, many young men and women of the Khumbu are pursuing tourism-based livelihoods, showing less interest to enter the monasteries and nunneries. As a result, the religious population is becoming older and younger people are losing some of the knowledge of oral traditions that influence their culture, knowledge and awareness. The Tourism Cares funds were used to capture and document some of these traditions and developed culturally appropriate interpretative materials to reduce some of these losses.

The project includes sites from Namche in the Buffer Zone to Khunde, Chemung, Thermo and Pangboche in the Sagarmatha National Park. The project restored and enhanced the cultural traditions of lesser-known sacred sites in the Khumbu region. Additionally, it aspired to strengthened community-based organizations with conservation and democratic management skills so that they can sustain our interventions beyond the life of the project. Working through local communities, we aimed to reinvigorate and enhanced local culture skills and traditions through direct interventions, fostering more sustainable management practices. The project continued to build local organizational capacities, training them to address cultural and natural heritage issues and continued interventions in perpetuity even after project completion.

In addition to support from Tourism Cares for Tomorrow, TMI raised about \$21,000 of matching funds to support conservation and livelihoods activities that complement the objectives of the Ford Foundation funded “Sacred Sites” Project.

4. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The goal and objectives of this program reflected the goal and preference of Tourism Cares for Tomorrow. The project focused on three main objectives, all closely tied with the goal of fortifying community-based organizations whereby sustainable cultural, natural and historical significant site conservation efforts has been achieved.

With this project, TMI addressed cultural conservation issues through assisting for restoration, renovation and maintenance of selected historical, cultural, and natural significant sites within Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone. The program further promoted cultural conservation awareness among the locals and tourists through different trainings and workshops and through development of interpretative materials of the sacred sites.

By promoting the cultural and sacred values of the natural and built environment, the project has designed to help tourists learn more about Sherpa culture, and encouraged Sherpas to preserve and reinvigorated their culture as unique and valuable assets.

The project has deliberated the promotion of the sacred values of Khumbu to influence locals and visitors to take necessary precautions for a sound cultural/heritage protection.

4.1 The Project Goal:

The goal of this project was to strengthen and make sustainable community-based initiatives conserving and managing the rich cultural heritage of the Khumbu region of Nepal.

4.2 Program Objectives and Rationale:

Objective 1: Restore and enhance the selected historical, cultural and natural Sacred Sites in the Khumbu region. This objective focused on the preservation and restoration of three important natural sacred sites (forests, water sources, and caves) and three man-made structures (Chortens, monasteries and worship places).

Objective 2: To create awareness and appreciation of the rich and time-honored culture and heritage of Khumbu among the locals and visitors. Through different interpretative materials and signs, this project fostered respect between visitors and local culture in ways that protect local cultural and natural heritage sites. It further strengthened the link between locals and their culture and prompted them to safeguard their invaluable cultural assets.

Objective 3: Strengthen the capacity of local communities to manage and sustain project interventions. Through this objective, TMI expected to improve local capability to sustain cultural conservation initiatives even after the project completion.

As such, the focus enabled local communities to improve their own conditions and environments themselves; TMI focused on providing technical and financial support to local stakeholder groups, community-based organizations and other partners.

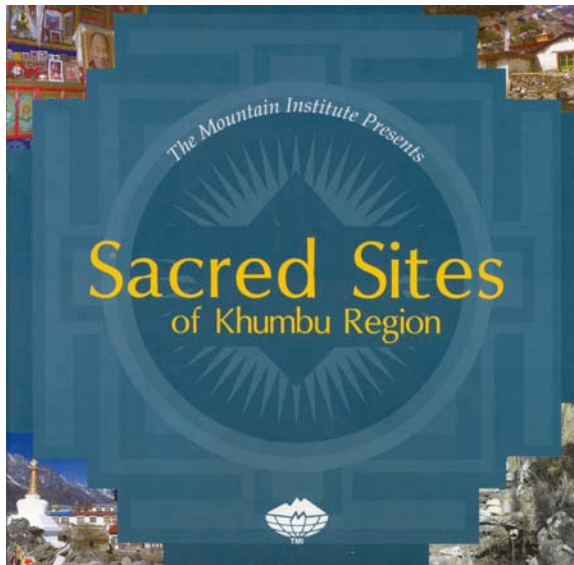
5. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

This program was built on the strong foundation set by TMI's Sacred Sites Trail Project funded by Ford Foundation. While Sacred Sites Trail Project activities focused more on identifying an appropriate trail for the promotion of community-based tourism, developing skills in ecotourism enterprise, strengthening local natural resource management and compiling profiles of the important sites of the Khumbu, this Tourism Cares for Tomorrow's funded program directly restored and protected several important natural and cultural sites (listed below). It further developed various interpretative signs, conducted trainings and workshops on conservation management and conservation awareness. In addition to protecting important sites, all the activities helped to promote responsible tourism in the area. The following were the major activities conducted for the combined Ford Foundation and Tourism Cares programs:

- Educational/Awareness raising workshop and interpretative materials of all the restored and protected sites under this program for both local residents and visitors (education and awareness)
- Roof restoration of Tewongma Nunnery (historical and cultural site)
- Floor restoration of Khunde worship place (Cultural site)
- Waste Management Guidelines
- Chorten restoration in Pangboche (Cultural and historical site)
- Institutional building trainings to CBOs (capacity building)

6. PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENT:

1. With the expanded opportunities in tourism, many young men and women of the Khumbu have been pursuing tourism-based livelihoods, showing less interest to enter the



Sacred Sites Brochure

monasteries and nunneries. As a result, the religious population has become older and younger people were losing some of the knowledge of local oral traditions that influence their culture, knowledge and awareness. The Sherpas of Khumbu as well as the abbot of Tengboche felt it is very important to capture all the lost documents before they wane even further. In order to reduce some of these losses, traditional songs, folklores, rituals and mantras were documented and published in a brochure called “Sacred Sites of the Khumbu Region.

Similarly with objective to provide information of natural and cultural heritage of the region, interpretative materials describing the history and significance of each monastery was developed and placed at each site, along with donation boxes to encourage voluntary contributions from visitors. These materials have been printed and laminated and are on display at each Gompa.

2. Roof restoration of Tewongma Nunnery (historical and cultural site)

Tewangma nunnery in Pangboche was established 350 years back by Lama Sangwa Dorji, who introduced Buddhism to Khumbu, near the end of the 17th century. This is one of the poorest yet historically significant sacred institutions of the Khumbu region that is in disrepair. Most of the Tourism Cares funding was used to conduct this restoration program.



Before the support

Many scholars of Buddhism in the Khumbu, and more specifically of the architectural history of Buddhist monasteries believe that this nunnery hermitage in Tewangma, built approximately 350 years ago and may be the oldest hermitage within the Khumbu region. Currently, there are only three nuns living in this tiny hermitage, and they tend to have a hard time as the buildings are quite old compared to other places and the nuns themselves are poor. Some of the nuns have left the area due to lack of facilities. With support from TMI, the nunnery was able to replace the roof of the main shrine hall. (See adjacent before and after pictures).



Roofing completed

3. Floor restoration of Khunde worship place (Cultural site)

In Khumbu region, there is a custom of worshipping the protector of the region i.e. Khumbu Yulha in collective manner by villagers. This ceremony is performed in a special sacred area up in the mountains. This festival is carried out before the Sherpas take their livestock up in the pasture. Tourism Cares funding was also specifically used to conduct this program.



Worship before the project

In this festival, the whole community takes part and has been in practice for centuries.

The local representatives provide chang (local rice beer) and drinks for the whole community for one day and the Sherpas gather for singing and dancing to please the gods. The responsibility for this falls on every household depending on the number of houses in the villages.

The local people felt that the existing site has become very congested due to increased population and needed to be expanded and restored to allow the whole village to perform the pujas in a comfortable manner. By expanding and restoring this site for better management not only lead to keep traditions alive but also helps to protect the depleted forest especially the juniper forest surrounding the areas. In order to complete the project for expansion, TMI with Tourism Cares for Tomorrow support allowed the local people to:



Worship platform completed

1) made the area wider, 2) manage the worship site better, 3) to carry out reforestation and plantation work surrounding the worship site and 4) conserve the existing vegetative cover. This program has been completed with matching from local sources either in cash or in kind with unskilled labor support.

4. Waste Management Guidelines

Environment conservation of the Khumbu region is one of the major objectives of Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone. Littering is a much-publicized problem in the National Park and garbage produced by trekking and mountaineering has caused significant environmental problems. With support from Ford Foundation and the Tourism Care for Tomorrow, TMI developed guidelines to reduce the use of plastic bags replacing them with reusable cloth bags, linking cultural conservation and environment conservation. This system of using cloth bags during festivals has been replicated in several Gompas throughout Khumbu.



Local women with cloth bags

Previously, monasteries were using plastic bags during festivals for distributing ceremonial food. Dumji is a festival in which the whole community takes part, in practice for more than 300 years.

The local representative provides food and drink for the whole community for 5 days, generating the need for many plastic bags. With project support, 4000 bags with a picture of Buddha, and the Gomba name were printed.

"One of the greatest successes of the Sacred Sites Trail project I feel is that it has made people to think seriously in order to reduce the pollution while performing the religious festivals such as Dumji. The cloth bag is impressive as it helps to educate the entire community regarding pollution control. If we can replicate this to other Gompas, there would be a great impact in the year".

*Mr. Nima Dorjee Sherpa
Phortse village (April 2008)*

Plastic bags are not degradable and therefore last hundreds of years at this altitude. Approximately 2000 plastic bags were distributed per day during key festivals. After the ceremonies, many plastic bags ended up as garbage, littering the local environment. To address this issue, Namche Gomba Management Committee requested help to develop a system replacing plastic bags with reusable cloth bags to reduce and control litter and pollution in the Monastery and adjacent areas during Dumji festival times.

The Gomba recycles the cloth bags each year for public use. After seeing the reduction of garbage at Namche Gomba, other Gomba Management Committees have requested assistance to replace the plastic bags with cloth bags with their own Gomba designs. This substitution effort produces 3 advantages. It reduces environmental pollution, while representing a return to traditional practices. Lastly, it helps reduce the annual Dumji costs, allowing contributions to go directly for cultural heritage conservation rather than to purchase plastic items.

5. Kani Restoration in Pangboche

The renovation of Chorten and Kani has taken place in Pangboche to preserve the natural sacred sites along the main trekking routes. As always, TMI's programs are based on a participatory planning process thereby developed to engage people in mutually supportive learning process. TMI believes that projects are not sustainable unless stakeholders are engaged in planning and implementation.



Kani constructions before and after 9

With active participation of Gumpa Management Committee and the Buffer Zone Users Committee, *kani*¹ has been renovated in Pangboche. In order to renovate this project, the villagers have contributed unskilled labor, locally available materials where feasible and TMI supported imported materials and transportation costs.

Mani wall restoration in Monju

The Sagarmatha Women Group (SWG) of Chaurikharka -1 has restored the Mani wall² starting from Phenkar with self-initiatives. The SWG has restored the Mani wall after seeing the successful restoration that took place in Khunde, Khumjung villages with the aim to conserve the environment, local culture, and religious and to empower. Besides the Mani wall restoration, the SWG also has been engaged in garbage collection and clean-up activities to raise awareness among people in environment conservation.



Mani carving in Monju

The reason for restoration was that there were old Mani that required urgent maintenance for preservation and tourism promotion. The women's group had raised money from each household at the rate for Rs.50 per month. The women's group had requested TMI to support the restoration of Mani wall along the main trekking route from Phakding to Jorsalle and this has helped to preserve the culture and at the same time has helped to attract tourism in the region. Based on their request and their self-motivation, TMI has supported sum of Rs.70, 000 (Seventy Thousand) to Sagarmatha Women's Group.

6. Institutional building training to CBOs (capacity building)

TMI conducted 3-day institutional development training for 11 Gumpa Management Committees, including 16 representatives from 10 monasteries. Specific training objectives included familiarizing participants with committee function, registration procedures, improving group and committee member skills, strengthening institutional management, improving accounting, record keeping and reporting skills and developing simple finance

¹ At the entrance to village settlement or to a monastery institution, there is a small gateway, or *Kani*, with its ceiling and walls usually painted with religious figures. These entrance gates and *chortens* stop the bad spirits that follow a person from entering the village.

² These are stones engraved with the sacred invocation "Om Mani Padme Hum" which are either built in to the walls or piled around the Chorten. People go around, keeping the wall on their right side, to gain sonam (Merit).

and accounting procedures for new committees. Pre and post test knowledge levels were measured to evaluate training effectiveness.

Standardized accounting and recording keeping manuals and forms were distributed and participants were trained in their use for follow up evaluation. Upon completion of the training, it was expected that the participants be able to:

- Establish record keeping, maintain meeting minutes, keep visitors record books, register and maintain incoming and out going letters.
- Establish simple books of accounts by using voucher, bills and receipts, cash receipts
- Maintain filing systems
- Develop constitution of Gump Management Committee for registration
- Establish inventory records by stock book or jinsi book



Institutional Training

7. Working Area/beneficiaries and participants

The working area for the project lies in Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone and includes sites from Namche in the buffer zone to major settlements within the park. The project working area complements The Mountain Institute's established sacred sites trail routes, which passes through 12 monasteries and nunneries, passing clockwise from Namche Bazar, visiting several sites in the 'Thames valley and ending at the Tengboche monastery. The 3,500 local Sherpas living inside the park and the 30,000 tourists (2009) and their support staff directly benefited from this cultural conservation efforts. Increased cultural tourism leads to increase funding and support for monasteries and gompas, which keeps these repositories of collective memory, rituals, and tradition alive. Vibrant communal religious institutions, in addition to their intrinsic cultural value, also serve as a long lasting source of tourist interests. By extension, the Sherpa community as a whole benefits from the increased focus on cultural preservation.

"The Mountain Institute provided training was the best training I had participated. This training made me think it is not easy to manage the gompa as we managed adhoc systems without proper book and account keeping system. The training also was invaluable importance as it involved all the stakeholders of each gompa taking part in the preservation and restorations of their own gompas and natural sites thereby documenting all the important religious messages for the future generation"

Jangbu

Khunde Tsamkang

April 2005

8. The Impact of Tourism Cares for Tomorrow to the project

The impact of this project is immense. The grant has provided direct cultural preservation interventions, enriching cultural assets that evolve into enterprises and generate sustainable livelihoods. To date, Khumbu attracts visitors mostly for its geophysical attributes; once the rich and thriving culture is preserved, Khumbu valley can become a cultural tourism destination that contains not just the magnificent mountain scenery but also displays an equally vibrant culture and historical/religious monuments. Finally, through the continued community capacity building process, long-term maintenance of important sites and monuments helps ensure that these sites remain active and vibrant, lasting for hundreds of years.

The Sacred Sites approach has the benefit of preserving sacred traditions and environments that are threatened by cosmopolitan culture, increased tourism and depressed livelihood opportunities. Our activities so far mainly focused on the preservation and restoration of man made sacred structures, such as kanis, chorten and Mani walls and infrastructure support to monasteries.

The project links cultural and sacred values to conservation issues and integrates conservation ethos into indigenous knowledge systems - an approach that is both culturally and economically self-sustaining. The project continues to strengthen local capacity to implement activities and programs with technical and democratic management skills, creating examples of positive culturally appropriate growth within the country.

End of narrative report

APPENDIX ONE:

FINANCIAL REPORT FROM TOURISM CARES FOR TOMORROW

The Mountain Institute
Asian Regional Office
Baluwatar, Kathmandu

Financial Report for April 2007 to March 31, 2008

Title of the Project

Tourism Care for Tomorrow Grant for Sacred Sites Trail
Project in Everest Region-NEPAL

Activities	Amount in US\$
Salaries	1,713.00
Program Expenses	6,135.00
Staff Travel	352.00
G & A (General & Administration)	1,800.00
Total	10,000.00