

Planning Session

future programmes for biodiversity management



MUKTI LAMA

A planning meeting in Tamku-Makalu Barun Conservation area

The third and final day of the seminar was devoted to planning for future programmes for biodiversity management in the Eastern Himalayas. Initially, there was a lot of discussion on the use of the term "trans-boundary" in relation to conservation areas and plans, but soon it became clear that the major interest of the participants was the identification of opportunities for cooperation and coordination among the countries of the region to establish conservation programmes across similar biospheres in neighbouring countries. There was a general consensus that international cooperation is necessary for biodiversity conservation, especially in the eastern Himalayas.

It was noted that many international treaties exist but implementation is needed. What was needed was examples of international involvement in the management of parks. Scientists from different countries had been cooperating for many years although they still had to work out specific areas of cooperation (in livestock, tourism) and the bases for working relationships between park managers and scientists for effective conservation.

An emphasis on practical management and technical cooperation was needed, especially as most of the countries involved shared ethnic communities, particularly in potential conservation areas. It is important to consider the needs and sensitivities of all parties involved.

In this respect NGOs have a great role to play as some issues can be resolved by them. NGOs have a special faculty for encouraging participation and cooperation. Technical cooperation can lead to the resolution of many long-standing problems.

It was thought that it was important to ensure that all parties had an

equal voice. Coordination and cooperation worked best among peers who respect each other on an equal basis, especially as the Eastern Himalayan ecosystem covers a vast area and conservation is no easy task.

The accent should be on international cooperation. CITES and the Migratory Species' Convention are two instruments for cooperation that can prove useful. Everyone should get down to specifics and start the cooperation process on selected items through technical agencies directly responsible for managing the areas. It was stated that the concerned NGOs should have presence and credibility in the area (e.g., Manas-WWF Bhutan). Bilateral cooperation has proved successful. India and China signed a treaty in 1984 on migratory species of birds (303 approx. were listed).

One of the participants noted that the QNP was established five years ago and is recognised as one of the national/State nature reserves. The protected areas in Tibet border Nepal and Bhutan and contact had been established with the Makalu-Barun project staff.

Poaching was discussed as one problem that is solved through International cooperation.

The problems are common although approaches differ was another observation. Like-minded people should meet more often for informal exchange on methodologies, and agencies should work toward positive changes on the ground.

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International agencies, such as UNESCO, could be involved in joint programmes to encourage action research and implementation. Under thematic-comparative studies there could be greater academic cooperation, and common themes could be identified for parallel programme implementation in different countries. A programme of human resource development would be a good idea. Endangered areas could be identified as case studies for broader generalisation of the region as a whole. For instance, the North-eastern region of India and Chiang Mai in Thailand share common problems, issues, and approaches.

The areas of least knowledge should be identified (areas inaccessible to field research) to fill knowledge gaps.

There are opportunities for bilateral cooperation between Nepal and India, which have adjacent areas with similar conditions. In the mid-60s, a barrage was built on the border. The Koshi Tapu Wildlife Reserve is located 22 km from the barrage where the last remnant population (approx. 100) of wild buffaloes was found. The volume of water accumulation on the site (including inundation by floods) has created a unique habitat for water species. People from both India and Nepal bring cattle (domestic buffaloes) to the reserve for mating with the wild buffaloes to improve the genetic stock. Dr. Yonzon felt this area afforded an opportunity for INGOs such as WWF-India to cooperate with others in Nepal.

One participant suggested that Nepali and Tibetan villagers could gain

from exchanging ideas regarding protection and conservation as those inhabiting the border areas spoke the same language. Specific problems could be addressed. He said an information network would facilitate the timely tackling of conservation problems.

It was mentioned that the ecological boundary of the Eastern Himalayas had brought participants to a common forum in which the key words were cooperation and coordination. Policies, methodologies, comparative studies, and a biodiversity database are vital concerns. The needs of biodiversity protection had to be linked to existing protected areas and other areas could be included for future inter-country conservation.

A view was expressed that research and management methodologies should be identified through international collaboration, e.g., inventory of species in established PAs, training, database building, etc. The IK of local people had to be used to help biodiversity conservation. It is believed that ICIMOD is a suitable institution to collaborate with in setting up a database for the HKH Region.

What is important is to get down to the nitty-gritty details. One or two common methodologies have to be identified, the results shared on exchange visits, and methodologies modified in accordance with on-site requirements.

Noting that governments alone cannot be responsible for conserving

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biodiversity, the QNP was cited as a model for other areas.

A bottom-up approach, e.g., exchanges between wardens, collaborative research efforts, and information exchange, is appropriate for conservation. While governments have to be involved at the central level, it is necessary to start from the field level.

Another view stated was that research should be synergistic and linked to management, and both these linked to the ground realities. It was stressed that on-ground programmes, linkages (networking), as well as site-specific linkage building in the region, e.g., the link between ICIMOD and Woodlands M.I., are extremely important.

The grassroots' representatives should promote exchange visits. Perhaps money from the grant could be allocated for travel every six months. UNESCO encouraged "Apprentice Programmes" and noted that inter-government and researcher interaction is useful, including programmes for technicians/park naturalists.

Although securing permission for programmes/projects can be difficult, and persons selected might not always be suitable for the exchange, regional organisations can play a positive role in this respect.

It was noted that the difficulties of research, such as the prevalence of different languages/dialects in the research area and the reluctance of local people to talk with officials and university professors, have to be surmounted. A team of tribal researchers - partly university students and partly villagers themselves (who are familiar with the local language and customs) - would be more effective in eliciting information through informal friendly discussions and without questionnaires.

One participant spoke of the need for an accessible organisation - not

merely of experts - with a holistic approach that encompassed a wide range of issues, called for an international network, taking cultural aspects into consideration.

The first step is scientific cooperation, it was stated, adding that international agencies can also participate in the process.

It was noted that many conservation areas are characterised by cultural diversity but the people who inhabit them are often marginalised. The real difficulty lies in gaining access to the people who have IK. In such instances, credible NGOs can play a role.

The Myanmar Government's interest in collaborating with ICIMOD member countries was mentioned. Eight counties in the north had been designated as project areas for international cooperation, potentially with ICIMOD. Because the rains lasted for 11 months, the area was not easily accessible. Three national protected areas had already been established. The Myanmar Government was keen on human resource development projects.

One participant had visited Myanmar on behalf of IUCN, he met government officials, and visited a National Park near the Indian border. At the lower administrative levels, people were enthusiastic for funds and training. IUCN, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Smithsonian Institution had established contacts. There was a proposal to survey at least 50 per

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cent of the forest area, primarily for elephants and, secondarily, to set up PAs or a network of protected areas.

Finally, it was observed that discussion had focussed on concepts and networking, whereas most projects face resource constraints. Still, many good ideas had been generated by participants. Perhaps funds can be dispersed for individual or regional activities as

additional investment is needed, it was stated. Given that ICIMOD's primary mandate is to document and exchange information, on methodologies for example, it was stated that ICIMOD is willing to cooperate with the MacArthur Foundation or other organisations. An appeal was made to all institutions, including those based in the US, to discuss funding for deserving projects and programmes.

Field Trip

The day concluded with a visit to ICIMOD for a briefing on the organisation's programmes in the Hindu Kush-Kimalayas, followed by a field visit to Godavari, site of ICIMOD's trials and demonstrations for agroforestry and erosion control practices.

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