

*Brief note on*  
Kangchenjunga Conservation Area

Ananta Bhandari  
WWF-Nepal

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## 'Gift to the Earth' to 'Conservation Area'

Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA), in the north-eastern region of Nepal, represents an extraordinary landscape with its unique floral and faunal diversity, breath-taking scenery, and rich cultural heritage. The area hosts the only extensive pure stands of Himalayan larch (*Larix griffithiana*) in Nepal, as well as extensive juniper (*Juniperus species*) forests. Among the numerous faunal species, the KCA is home to the endangered snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*), and musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*). In recognition of the rich natural and cultural resources of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, it was declared "A Gift to the Earth" in April 1997 by Government of Nepal in support of WWF's Living Planet Campaign. KCA borders Sikkim-India, in the east, and the Tibet Autonomous Region-China, in the north, thus providing an opportunity to promote trans-boundary conservation initiatives. KCA falls within the Global 200 Ecoregions and has gained global significance as it is included in WWF's landscape level Ecoregion Conservation (ERC) program. KCA is part of the Eastern Himalaya Ecoregion, which encompasses parts of Myanmar, India, Bhutan, Nepal, and China. In due recognition of beautiful mountain landscape, rich biodiversity and opportunities for transboundary conservation initiatives, the government of Nepal conferred it with protected area status in July 1997. In September 1998, the boundary of KCA extended from 1,650 km<sup>2</sup> to 2,035 km<sup>2</sup>.

## Conventional Model to Innovative Model of Protected Area Management

WWF Nepal in partnership with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) initiated Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) in November 1998. The primary objective of the KCAP was to promote community based integrated conservation and development. KCAP formed Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council (KCAMC) from the communities to engage and lead the conservation efforts within the KCA. KCAMC was reformed in 2008 and in 2014 as per the prevailing provisions.

As per the policy of GON 2003 (BS 2060) of providing management responsibility of certain protected areas to non-governmental organizations and other agencies, Government of Nepal provided a Letter of Intent (LoI) to the KCAMC in January 2004. The LoI was in response to the proposal submitted by the KCAMC for the management of the KCA. The government handed over the management responsibility of KCA to the local community, through KCAMC, for five years in 2006. This embedded KCA as a community managed conservation area, an innovative model of protected area management. Upon successful completion of five-year tenure, government handed over the management of KCA to local communities, through KCAMC, for next five years in 2012. A separate regulation (KCA Regulation-2064) was endorsed by the government in 2008 to manage KCA delegating authority to local communities. The regulation is the key milestone to promote community based protected area management in the country. A five-year management plan (2006-2011) was endorsed by the government in 2006 and implemented by the KCAMC. The second five-year management plan of KCA (2012-2017) has also been endorsed in 2012 and is being implemented by KCAMC.

## Ecosystem Approach to Landscape Approach of Conservation

WWF Nepal initiated landscape approach of conservation in Nepal in 2001 through Terai Arc Landscape (TAL). The government of Nepal declared TAL as a conservation landscape in 2004 and endorsed TAL strategic plan (2004-2014). As TAL being landscape with particular focus on 'tiger' and 'lowland ecosystems', a landscape felt need for conserving 'mountain ecosystems' in the country. As a result, concept of Sacred Himalayan Landscape (SHL) evolved in 2004. The government declared SHL as a conservation landscape in

2006 and endorsed SHL strategic plan (2006-2016). Since then KCAP is being managed within the SHL program jointly implemented by the DNPWC and WWF Nepal. KCA is one of the intervention sites of SHL program due to its richness in biodiversity, uniqueness in mountain ecosystems and potentials for trans-boundary conservation cooperation with both China and India.

#### Grantee to Conservation Partner

WWF has been continuously supporting technically and financially from the very beginning to empower communities and build their capacity for conservation and management of KCA. Initially such support was through KCAP. Until 2008, WWF provided grants to KCAP for the entire activities to be implemented in KCA. After KCA handover in 2006 and followed by endorsement of KCA Regulation in 2008, the KCAMC has legal mandates for managing KCA. Since 2008, WWF Nepal initiated to release direct grant to KCAMC to implement part of the activities, particularly conservation and livelihoods activities, in KCA. The objective of this shift was to empower and to build capacity of KCAMC towards institutional and financial sustainability.

#### Implementation Efforts to Conservation Achievements

WWF Nepal is the pioneer to support communities and the government for biodiversity conservation in KCA. Major achievements of the WWF support are as follows.

1. KCA handed over to the communities as community managed conservation area, a first innovative management system of protected areas in the country and in the region. The government first handed over it to the communities for five years in 2006 and again for five years in 2012.
2. KCA regulation 2064 endorsed by the government in 2008. It is a key milestone to promote community based protected area management model. An 'operational manual' endorsed by the government in 2013, particularly for financial and human resource management in KCA, under the regulation.
3. Well set-up of community institutions developed and institutionalized. KCAMC act as apex body representing all communities within the KCA. Initiated as an adhoc council in 2004, KCAMC reformed in 2008 and in 2014 as per the prevailing regulations.
4. Within the KCAMC institution, 7 Conservation Area User Committees (CAUC), 42 User Groups (UG), 35 Mother Groups (MG), 26 Community Forest User Groups (CFUG), 4 Snow Leopard Conservation Committees (SLCC) and 8 Community Based Anti-Poaching Operation (CBAPO) teams are functional to conserve and manage KCA.
5. Systematic management approach practiced and institutionalized in KCA. A five-year management plan endorsed in 2006 and implemented. After the completion of the tenure, second five-year management plan of KCA endorsed in 2012 and is under implementation.
6. Over 72,000 ha of forests brought under effective community management through 26 Community Forests (CF) benefiting entire 1,257 households of KCA.
7. Improvement in habitat and reduction in conservation threats resulted in the significantly increased population of focal species viz. snow leopard and blue sheep in KCA. Snow leopards increased by 33% from 18 individuals (13-21; mean 18) in 2009 to 24 individuals (19-29; mean 24) in 2013. Blue sheep increased by 15% from 1,167 individuals in 2007 to 1,346 individuals in 2013.
8. Community based snow leopard and prey base monitoring initiated and institutionalized through developing citizen scientists. Citizen scientists engaged and capacitated to use conventional technologies such as sign survey to state-of-art technologies such as camera traps and GPS collaring in snow leopard monitoring. GPS collaring successfully piloted to monitor snow leopard in KCA for the first time in the country.

9. Successful implementation of community based schemes such as 'livestock insurance schemes' and 'crop damage relief fund' significantly contributed to reduce human-wildlife conflict in KCA.
10. 100% households in KCA installed home solar systems and over 50% households installed improved cooking stoves to reduce pressure on forests for energy.
11. Over 40 million community capitals (revolving funds and endowment funds) generated and mobilized within the KCA communities for conservation and livelihoods.
12. Local and regional level transboundary meetings with China and India initiated and are in practice to strengthen trans-border cooperation and landscape level conservation.