

MOUNTAIN PROTECTION PLATFORM 2015

INITIATIVE 23 – Tourism Development Society, Nepal

Title: *Conservation and Development Initiative in the Khaptad National Park*

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Khaptad National Park (KNP) is situated in the middle of four districts in the Far-western region of Nepal. It is endowed with great natural beauty & vast wilderness. KNP is very rich in terms of its diversity having many animal species and vegetation types. The number of flowering plants so far recorded in the Mid Mountains is estimated to be 567, of which 346 flowering plant species have been recorded in the National Park alone. Similarly, the National Park is also a home to 23 species of mammals, 287 species of birds (local & migrating) and 23 species of amphibians. KNP is one of the most important tourism destinations in the region.

Mountain tourism in the Khaptad National Park presents the dilemma reconciling conservation with development, an issue that is currently discussed in the context of sustainable development. Nowadays tourism in the area is limited to little number of tourist groups annually, which currently organized by external providers (mostly from Kathmandu). External providers do not use the services of the local population. Without local participation in the planning, control, and decision-making mechanism, mountain tourism in the region is likely to cause the exploitation of natural resources without supporting local economic development.

T.D.S. aims to protect natural and cultural heritage of the National Park. T.D.S. aims to mobilize local resources to provide requested services in acceptable quality. The few service providers that exist are not interlinked and have very little understanding of their potential clients' wishes, let alone of international standards or trends in tourism. The goal of the project is to develop sustainable tourism in the Khaptad National Park for enhancing economic opportunities for local people and preserving environment and culture.

OBJECTIVES

- Increase income generation and uplift livelihood;
- Enable locals to learn new skills;
- Increase funds for protected areas and local communities through development of routes and their promotion;
- Protect ecological processes and preserve biodiversity;
- Introduce environmental education for visitors and locals.

HOW DOES IT CONTRIBUTE TO MOUNTAIN PROTECTION

We believe that working with local communities we will bring the results we are targeting. As the communities are being involved in all the processes of planning, implementing and monitoring of the project activities and most importantly they are noticing the visible improvement in their livelihood as the outcomes of this initiatives and it is obvious that the ownership of the community over the natural

and cultural assets of the Park will be created. The local tour operators and guides who lead the groups in the Khaptad National Park follow the golden rule of "No Waste" in the Park and they are requested to see that other visitors follow this rule as well. In the villages located in the buffer zone of the parks the visitors now can find basic hospitality services too. We work with home stay operators offering seminars to the different topics from how to start the businesses to how to protect their main assets - nature and culture.

COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND AUTHORITIES

Ensuing the better collaboration and generate the sustainable benefits to the locals we follow the measures as discussed below:

- Mobilizing Community for the identification for the potential tourism Service Providers
- Conducting the survey for the need assessment
- Facilitate to establish community based management committees
- Based on the findings facilitate to prepare the plan of action for the further intervention and technically support for the upgrading of the services in the villages
- Linking local service providers with buyer via meetings, seminars, marketing, explorations etc.

On the first stage during exploration visits we identified villages and services providers offering home stay, guide and porter services. The home stay services are offered on the concept of community based project where the management committee takes lead for overall management of the home stay village. In such home stays it is believed that all the members get benefits and should have the equal liabilities towards the project. In the region here are some unique communities where the absolute populations speak the same language, tradition and culture.

To develop such type of villages as the unique destinations for cultural tourism it is very necessary to have the common understanding the develop system for the social entrepreneurship where the equal distribution of sustainable benefits in ensured. Considering this aim we conducted one social entrepreneurship development training and home stay operating training to the 15 selected participants from the selected three villages. Through the technical training for different service providers in the region we try to increases jobs for local residents and increase their incomes through additional earnings.

Three new routes covering the Khaptad National were developed: Khaptad - Chainpur Trek, Far West Heritage Trail and Khaptad - Rara Trail. Through the exploration of the new routes and their promotion we wanted to enable the local tour operators in the Far Western Region to offer the new tourism products, but also to use the services of the local communities living around the Khaptad National Park; Through our new assessment trips we identified local traditional handicrafts which will be encouraged for local manufacture of goods and their selling to tourists; In the three districts around the Khaptad National Park three Tourism Action Groups were created.

We work in strong cooperation both with local and national authorities: Khaptad Area Tourism Development Committee - Planning of interventions in the Khaptad National Park; - Support in implementation of all the activities such as exploration visits, mobilization work as well as all environmental activities Nepal Tourism Board - Promotion of the tourism products; - Support in implementation of marketing events at national and international levels. - Participation in National and regional tourism fairs.

GOING FURTHER THAN “BUSINESS AS USUAL”

Example 1 : Conservation of Extinct Himalayan Herbs

With the Promotion of Sustainable tourism in Khaptad area we are aiming to reduce the over harvesting of the Himalayan Herbs especially the Yarsa Gumba (<http://farwestnepal.org/sauka-the-nomads-of-himalayas/>). In cooperation with ICIMOD we have already started initiative in Darchula District. As a result two of trekking routes to Mount Api Base Camp have been already explored. In the upper part of the Khaptad National in Bajhang district where we are currently facing the same of problem of over harvesting as in Darchula. We see the touristic importance of our explored route Khaptad to Bajhang which will ultimately help to divert the local economy from the excessive Yarsa Gumba trade to the sustainable tourism.

Example 2 –Developing of Environmental routes

Two km west of Dhangadhi city, there is the Mohana River Ecological Corridor, a habitat of more than 100 species of birds (resident and migratory), five protected species of reptiles and amphibians, as well as 12 species of mammals. Ten years back the government nature preservation organizations and local residents have started working on the project to advocate the rights of wildlife to freely move in and around in their natural pathways, called ecological corridors, and buffer zones. In 2010, the government declared the areas with important biodiversity as protected forest areas for the conservation of buffer zones. After identification of the tourism potentials of this bird watching site, T.D.S. has started initiative to develop and promote the environmental friendly tour package. The Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), Mohana Community Forest Committee, and local tourism business are involved stakeholders in implementing the following activities:

- i) research on available bird species;
- ii) capacity building measures for potential guides;
- iii) promotion of the developed tourist product. In the meanwhile, the bird watching site has become a highlight of a 1-day tour package offered by the local tour operators. The tourism activities around Mohana River Ecological Corridor ensure the incomes to the local community involved (users of Mohana River community forest), and at the same time encourage to preserve the rare species of birds.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

We concentrate our activities in the cluster of Khaptad National Park to ensure the best practices, which can be applied in other destinations of the Far West Nepal. Our activities are driven according to the following factors:

- I. Upgrade processes: better coordination and communication within, and between stakeholders in the targeted districts
- II. Add value: through the diversification of products and service offers, sustainable development, reduction of transaction costs: -- Verifying villages, communities and clear identification of their involvement into tourism or tourism-related activities; -- Mobilizing / identifying potential service providers: accommodation establishments, camping places, guides, porters and mules or horse keepers; -- Environmental actions in the targeted villages, areas, attractions; -- Introduction of security measures /mechanism;
- III. Upgrade products: providing better quality services, products related to market demand, -- Technical trainings to existing and new service providers; -- Exposure visits and other activities; IV. Volume Increase: more demand, more sales of tourism packages, crafts etc. -- Establish very good network between organizers - local tour operators and with buyers - national and international tour operators; -- Familiarization tours for international tour operators; -- Provide set of materials for end customers: detailed trekking maps; tour descriptions, sign boards with the trekking route in the main points of the route; -- Test tours for customers for the selected products;

This project was launched in 2013 and at the moment we are in the stage III and IV where we focus on upgrading the products and volume increasing. The project will last till End of 2016. On this project the teams of five regular staff is involved in the management and implementation of this project. On the other hand we have very active 3 member executive team and Tourism Action Group (TAG) Networks in all 9 districts of Far West. The following capacity building measures were conducted for staff: • Participation of T.D.S. staff on Green Tourism Workshop in Thailand (1 participant); • Participation of T.D.S. staff on exposure visit in Kenya (3 participants); • Participation of TAG member on exposure visit in Ghaligaun Homestay Village (10 participants) • Sustainable guidelines for accommodation are developed and presented.

VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES PROPOSED

This year we have established cooperation with ASA-Programm: <http://www.asa-programm.de/en/english/home/>

In autumn 2015 we expect two volunteers joining our team in Dhangadhi. They will support our team and Tourism Action Groups in three districts around Khaptad National Park in introducing sustainable guidelines for the new entrant homestays in the region. TDS believes in international volunteerism for the local development which supports the knowledge exchange and partnership. So we always welcome volunteer workers in our areas. Supports to the volunteers can be provided directly from TDS and our regional TAG Networks in the districts.