

## Preface

In the developing world, the concept of Protected Areas (PAs) is at crossroads. While the current impetus for the creation of such areas is very strong, past experiences has led to increasing resistance from both local communities and governments to expand the existing PA network. The American model of PAs (home of world's first National Park, Yellowstone established in 1872) isolated from human habitation and exploitation has since been replicated in many countries. This model has also resulted in inevitable conflict with local communities. People living in and around PAs have been regarded as a management problem, and historically, little effort has been made to involve them in the design and management of the PAs. The present Management Plan for the Great Himalayan National Park re-evaluates such exclusionary policies and recommends more socially responsive conservation processes and mechanisms.

Managing GHNP, or for that matter any other PA in our country, is like a juggling act. It is very difficult to manage habitat for the wild animals and plants if the local people continuously keep on using it. Hence in GHNP, we started working with the local people so that the animals and plants could remain safe from their interference. GHNP is quite remote, and without roads. The villagers in its neighbourhood are very poor, and reach of the govt., as well as NGOs, to these villages is extremely limited. We realized that the village poor women (who are 50% of the local population), also work with the natural resources that we try to conserve (i.e. water, fodder, fuelwood), but they remain alienated from the process of the nature conservation. At the same time the men have become used to the subsidy culture (an offshoot of the "lop-sided development"). So, we initiated our work in the GHNP ecozone by organizing the women of the poor households or (HHs) who depended upon the Park resources.

The proposed management is based on the experiential learning of user groups of women belonging to poor households. The process of planning and implementation should continue on a regular basis, because consensus cannot be reached on all issues and options in one term of a Management Plan. Experimental approaches and flexibility will be needed, demanding subsequent review and adaptation by stakeholders. The present Management Plan, based on a livelihood approach, is a precursor to ongoing strategic planning, and is thought to be a leading example of such processes in India.

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