



WWF

LHI

Special
report

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CONSERVATION SUCCESSES IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

Bhutan India Nepal

In 2009, the Living Himalayas Initiative (LHI) was established as one of WWF's global initiatives to bring about transformational conservation impact across the three Eastern Himalayan countries of Bhutan, India (North-East) and Nepal.

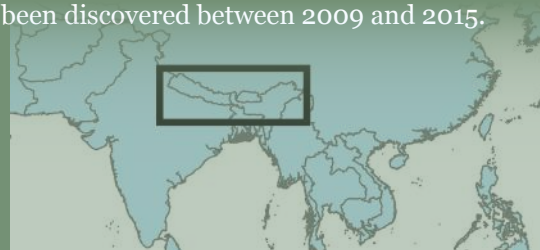
Since then, LHI - building on WWF's almost 50 years of conservation experience in this region driven by WWF India, WWF Nepal and WWF Bhutan - has been working to ensure that the tapestry of life in the Eastern Himalayas is preserved for generations to come.

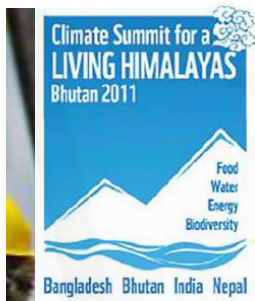
WWF LHI urges the governments of Bhutan, India and Nepal and other stakeholders to commit to cooperate on conservation efforts that transcend the borders of the three countries to protect the landscape and the livelihoods of the people.

Here in this newsletter, we outline some of the milestones and conservation achievements that we have celebrated for the Eastern Himalayas in recent times (2009 - 2015) .

The Eastern Himalayas is one of the world's most biodiversity-rich regions. It harbours over 10,000 types of plants, 300 mammals, 750 birds and 270 freshwater fish. It is a place where people of diverse cultural and spiritual heritage coexist with a fascinating yet fragile assemblage of flora and fauna.

More than 350 new species were discovered in the Eastern Himalayas between 1998 and 2008, and more than 200 new species have been discovered between 2009 and 2015.





About 300 volunteers on a mission to manually drain a glacier lake which was on the verge of overflowing in Bhutan.

We set a milestone for reinforcing regional conservation action

Regional Climate summit for a Living Himalayas, 2011

In November 2011, four Himalayan nations - Bhutan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh - attended the Climate Summit for a Living Himalayas in Bhutan's capital, Thimphu and signed a declaration to collaborate on energy, water, food and biodiversity issues across the region.

WWF through its Living Himalayas Initiative supported the Bhutanese government in its efforts to bring together these nations for the summit and also provided technical support and advice.

The summit brought high-level government officials, NGOs, leaders of civil society and youth ambassadors from the four Eastern Himalayan nations. The countries signed a declaration and a regional Framework of Cooperation (FoC) that addressed four key thematic areas:

- Securing biodiversity and ensuring its sustainable use;
- Ensuring food security and livelihoods
- Securing the natural freshwater systems of the Himalayas; and

- Ensuring energy security and enhancing alternate technologies

The summit was a grand success because this was a first kind of regional agreement signed between the four countries in South Asia. WWF was instrumental in reinforcing regional conservation actions by bringing together the four countries.

The FoC adopted at the summit has been significant in initiating a process towards nexus approach based on inter-linkages between water, food, and biodiversity and energy security between India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

However, there hasn't been much progress on the Summit FoC because of the change of governments and summit focal people in all the three countries. Meanwhile, WWF LHI is exploring other regional processes like SAARC and BIMSTEC to revive the regional collaboration linked to the Summit FoC.

A decade of Eastern Himalayan discovery

Where worlds collide, 2009

A species discovery report that reveals just how little we know about the world around us and how in the Eastern Himalayas, we have a region of extraordinary beauty and one of world's most biologically rich areas. Ironically, it is also one of the regions most at risk from climate change, population growth and unsustainable development.

This WWF LHI publication highlighted that more than 350 new species, including a flying frog and the world's smallest deer, were discovered in the Eastern Himalayas between 1998 and 2008. This equates to an average of 35 new species finds every year for the last 10 years. Among the reports that WWF has launched, this species discovery report was the most globally covered by international media. A second volume of the report will be published in 2015.



Regional action plan to protect the heart of the Eastern Himalayas

Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA)

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The idea of TraMCA was conceptualized in 2011 as a larger transboundary space which connects protected areas, biological corridors and adjoining reserve forests of south-eastern Bhutan with that of north-eastern India.

In December 2012, WWF Living Himalayas Initiative helped bring together stakeholders from the TraMCA landscape of Bhutan and India to develop a joint TraMCA vision and action plan to address the threats for the long term conservation and management of this rich transboundary space in the heart of the Eastern Himalayas.

The prioritized threats/issues identified in TraMCA landscape were:

1. Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation
2. Loss and decline of wildlife population
3. Human wildlife conflicts
4. Mechanisms to convert political willingness into action

In February 2015, the action plan was endorsed by India's BTC (Borderland Territorial Council) and Bhutan's Royal Manas Park, Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary and Jomotsangkha Wildlife Sanctuary authorities.

LHI continues to support TraMCA in mobilizing resources and through communications support.

TraMCA is a region of high biological diversity and forms a vital mosaic of conservation spaces across the Eastern Himalayas. It is home to flagship species like tigers, elephants, rhinos and more than 1,500 other species of mammals, birds and vascular plants. The space is equally rich with diverse cultures and traditions of indigenous communities.

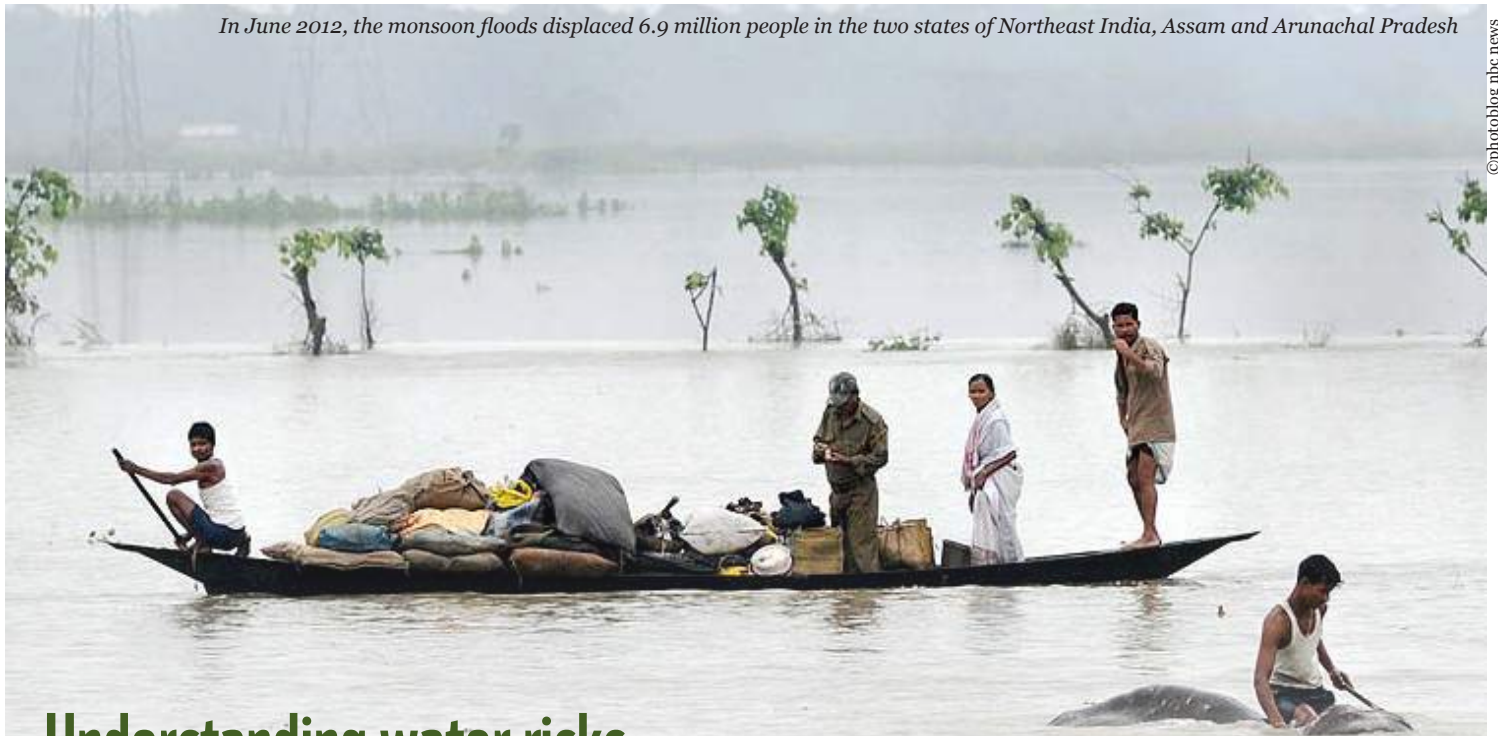


TraMCA has created a synergy between different offices and programmes. For instance, this is a big step towards creating a successful trans-border conservation action where WWF India, WWF Bhutan, two Global Initiatives (LHI and Tigers Alive Initiative) and WWF Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy (AREAS) are working together.



In June 2012, the monsoon floods displaced 6.9 million people in the two states of Northeast India, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

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Understanding water risks

The first ever Regional Water Risk Assessment study in the Eastern Himalayas

Freshwater is perhaps the most strategic resource that fuels the economic growth of the Eastern Himalayas region. Hence, there is a need to understand what risks are involved in terms of how we are utilising this most important resource and the risks related to disasters, economy, people, biodiversity and the ecosystem.

This is why the WWF Living Himalayas Initiative with offices in the region and the freshwater team of WWF International is carrying out a risk assessment to identify the major threats to the Ganges and Brahmaputra in the Eastern Himalayan region.

This is to engage with key decision-makers in the three countries to identify approaches to improve management of water resources, in order to safeguard the natural capital

within the mountainous regions of these basins and to build resilient economies.

The study is first of its kind in the Eastern Himalayan region and will provide a sound understanding of current and future ecological risks, highlight the social and economic implications of such risks and then provide guidance to decision makers on optimal pathways for better basin management and on how to build resilient economies in the Eastern Himalayas.

The 18-month process began in June 2014 and consultations are being held within the region with key stakeholders. Two rounds of stakeholder consultations have already taken place in the region to assess the findings and to develop the risk scenarios.

Supporting Bhutan's Wild River project – the first in the Eastern Himalayas

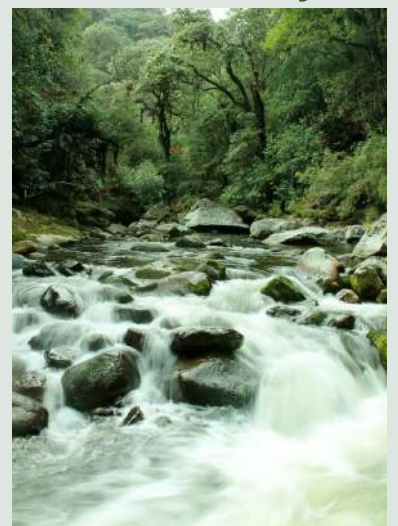
Learning and regional upscaling through a concrete demonstration

Evidence, from around the world and particularly, the Eastern Himalayan region, shows that diversion and damming of rivers and streams for hydropower, irrigation and other development activities impact river hydrology, alter aquatic habitats and hinder fish migration.

Given these impacts, the Royal Government of Bhutan is embarking on a wild river project to study the river systems and their ecology to identify the most appropriate stretch to be declared as a protected river.

WWF is providing technical expertise to assess the richness of Bhutan's river systems and thus, this project harnesses the power and capacity of the WWF network.

The wild rivers designation in Bhutan is in line with WWF Living Himalayas Initiative's objective and is an opportunity to have a concrete demonstration for the LHI region to draw lessons from.



The right tools to build the right capacity

Getting trained on environmental flows (e-flows)



It was in 2008 that India began examining environmental flows (E-flows) for the upper Ganga making it the only country in the Eastern Himalayas to adapt the e-flow methodologies.

However, in December 2014, WWF's Living Himalayas Initiative (LHI) held its first regional environmental flows (e-flows) assessment workshop in India allowing participants from the LHI region (Bhutan, Nepal and North-East India) to get a better understanding of the concept. With securing freshwater ecosystems as a critical objective, WWF-India offered to provide training for the colleagues in the region.

The participants walked along the banks of river Ganges in Rishikesh to understand the assessment of e-flows - the quantity, timing and quality of water flow needed to sustain the basin's ecosystems and the people who depend on it.

Participants from Nepal and Bhutan designed their own strategies to roll out the project. Meanwhile, the royal government of Bhutan will soon be carrying out a nationwide e-flows exercise and Nepal will start e-flows in its Gandaki River.

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A holistic approach to manage river basins

The Koshi (Nepal) and Dangme (Bhutan) river basins are of considerable significance for the hydrology of the Eastern Himalayas.

Hence since 2012, WWF LHI and the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation (PAIIF) have worked together in the two Eastern Himalayan countries, Nepal and Bhutan, to demonstrate how an integrated river basin management (IRBM) approach is the most practical way to bring the key stakeholders together to plan, implement and manage activities that are linked to freshwater resources.

Although WWF Nepal had already begun IRBM work on DudhKoshi basin in 2008 and in Indrawatti basin in 2010, WWF through the Living Himalayas Initiative has been promoting basin level planning and management of resources across the region. Nepal has already demonstrated successes in understanding the water poverty in the target catchments. This has enabled stakeholders to prioritise activities in the most vulnerable areas and design appropriate measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change more effectively, while improving agriculture-based livelihoods that are more resilient.

Bhutan is taking early steps in the approach and has delivered results in developing an understanding of aquatic ecosystems and freshwater resources. WWF-LHI has facilitated numerous learning and sharing between the two countries.



In October 2014, WWF sent a team of Bhutanese local leaders and relevant govt. officials to Nepal to learn from Nepal's experiences on IRBM.



Ten agricultural groups were formed under the agriculture cooperative at Siku catchment in Dudhkoshi basin to enhance sustainable livelihood development opportunities at the local level.



Raising the profile of the Himalayan icon

In October 2013, we brought together stakeholders from Bhutan, Nepal, India and Pakistan and developed a regional snow leopard strategy for the Himalayas.

In addition, WWF Living Himalayas Initiative's first regional Snow Leopard report highlights why conservation of snow leopards in the Eastern Himalayas is a global priority. Besides creating awareness on the endangered species, the report is used for communications and fund raising to support species conservation in the region.

Building Partnerships and Alliances

WWF Living Himalayas Initiative's most precious resource is its partnerships. With WWF as a trusted organisation in the region for over 50 years, WWF LHI's relationships with communities, local and national governments, private sector and the civil society are growing.

In response to our increasing work to ensure that the biodiversity and viability of freshwater ecosystems in the Eastern Himalayas are maintained at optimal levels, we are now working closely with several organisations to build synergy between their's and WWF LHI's work in the region. For instance, LHI collaborates with World Bank and its South Asia Water Initiative (SAWI) that focuses on several basins including the Ganges and the Brahmaputra to promote an integrated water resources management, and to enhance transboundary cooperation in water management. Also, good collaboration has been established with with ICIMOD team at technical level through Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMAP), Kanchenjunga Transboundary Landscape programme, Third Pole Circle and Water Risk Assessment.

WWF LHI is also working closely with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) around sustainable linear infrastructure and water resource management. Similarly, we have established a partnership with the International Hydropower Association, Nepal Hydropower Association, Druk Green Power Corporation in Bhutan and other hydropower agencies to promote sustainable hydropower development.

Promoting Sustainable Infrastructure in the Eastern Himalayas

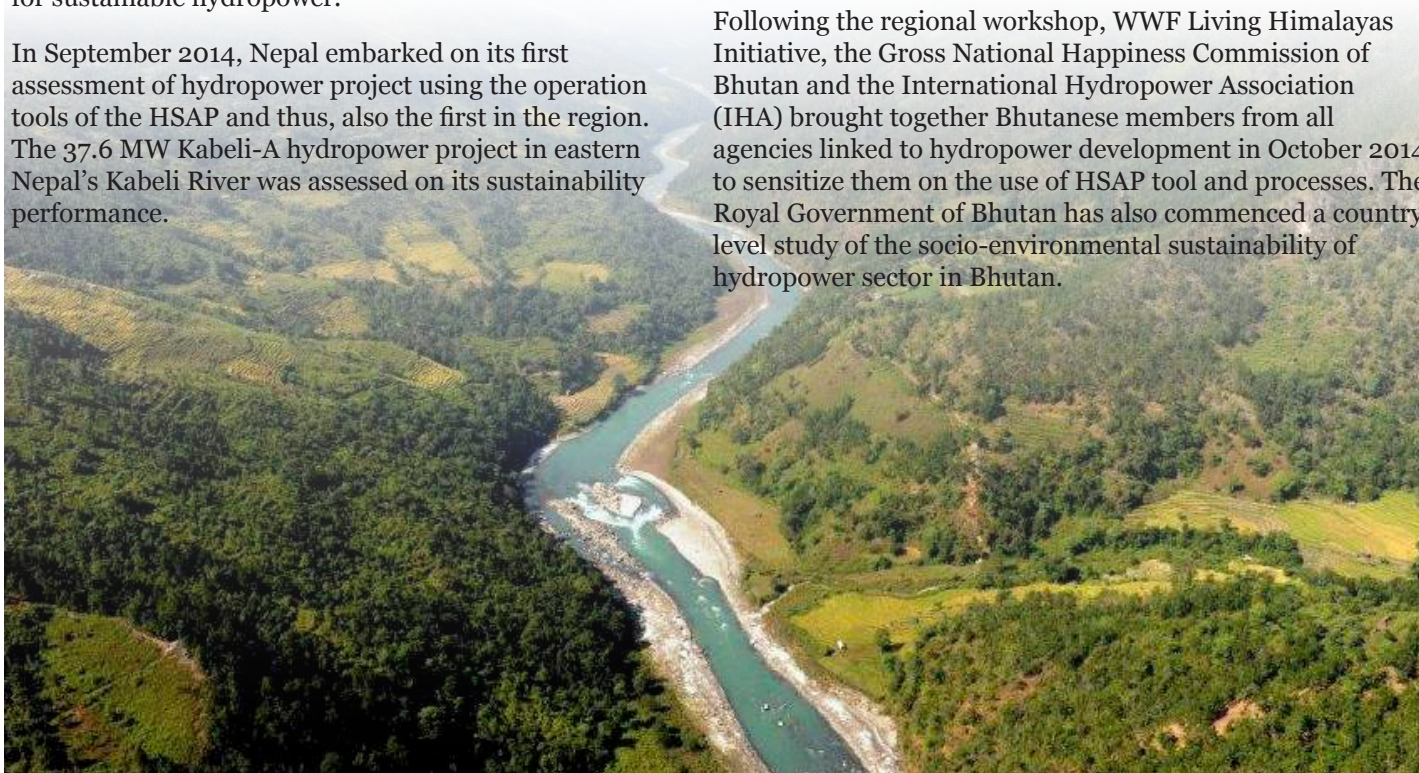
Facilitating dialogue on sustainable hydropower

WWF Living Himalayas Initiative continues to promote sustainable infrastructure development in the region through the three WWF country offices - Bhutan, India and Nepal. LHI works to ensure that the ecosystem services are responsibly used and managed through application of best practices and tools such as Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol (HSAP) for sustainable hydropower.

In September 2014, Nepal embarked on its first assessment of hydropower project using the operation tools of the HSAP and thus, also the first in the region. The 37.6 MW Kabeli-A hydropower project in eastern Nepal's Kabeli River was assessed on its sustainability performance.

Engagement on HSAP protocol began in 2014 between WWF LHI and International Hydropower Association (IHA). Since then, collaboration with the Nepal Hydropower Association has also been strengthened to identify potential partners to upscale HSAP in Nepal. IHA organized the regional workshop on Sustainable Hydropower Development in Kathmandu, Nepal in May 2014.

Following the regional workshop, WWF Living Himalayas Initiative, the Gross National Happiness Commission of Bhutan and the International Hydropower Association (IHA) brought together Bhutanese members from all agencies linked to hydropower development in October 2014 to sensitize them on the use of HSAP tool and processes. The Royal Government of Bhutan has also commenced a country level study of the socio-environmental sustainability of hydropower sector in Bhutan.



Kabeli-A hydro project site in eastern Nepal



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

<http://www.wwf.panda.org/livinghimalayas>

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