Connecting People and Ecosystems in the Indian Himalayas

Working in the Balkila Watershed in the Uttarakhand Himalayas, India

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Context

The project aims to invest in the environment, as a 'critical natural infrastructure' for enhancing climate change resilience while improving community livelihoods in the Balkila Watershed of Uttarakhand State, India. Increased population and development pressures leading to deforestation and changing land use patterns are resulting in ecosystem degradation within the Himalayas. Watersheds in the Himalayas have experienced significant increases over the last decades in soil erosion and deforestation, resulting in reduced groundwater availability and seasonal increase in surface water run-off. There is widespread concern among communities in the region over declining water availability and it is expected that this situation will intensify in the coming years.

Our approach

IUCN in collaboration with Nokia will encourage an integrated multi-stakeholder approach for developing sustainable and effective adaptive strategies to cope with climate change in the Himalayan region.

A priority of the project will be to document and disseminate best practices related to water management and climate change adaptation in the Indian Himalayas and presenting improved water management regimes from the perspective of indigenous systems, the work of government, civil society and community based organizations.

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Implementation

The project site, the Balkila watershed, lies in the hills below the towering peaks of the Himalayas, source of the Ganges River. The watershed descends from 4000mts, and is home to small farming communities whose way of life is rapidly changing. Villages in the watershed are struggling to deal with issues related to water security.

To enhance the effectiveness of better water management practices, the project's work on community resilience will explore options for ecosystem restoration and capacity building as simultaneous tools for watershed management. The activities will be oriented towards improving livelihoods through better water management practices, with a particular focus on accessibility of water supplies for women and girls.

The main activities will be:

- Rehabilitation of springs and water mills through provision of technical know-how and community activities.
- Community planning for building a knowledge base, empowering the communities and improving the local governance mechanisms.
- Develop nurseries of indigenous species as a means for women to create an income generating activity, as well as acquire new technical and business skills and gain confidence and greater control over their lives.
- Energy, food and water integration for securing livelihoods, maintaining the natural biodiversity and promoting high carbon landscapes through watershed protection.
- Demonstration of improved livelihoods to reduce vulnerability and increase the resilience of local populations.

- Communication products that feature the lives and experiences of local people within their watersheds and that share stories, messages and aspirations relevant to living in and managing the watershed.

The project will benefit the local communities through better access to safe water, watershed and habitat restoration and livelihood benefits, including income generation from forest products and enhanced adaptation to climate change. Lessons and approaches learned from this project will be scaled up and replicated in other Himalayan states and countries like Nepal and Bhutan.

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