

WMPA – HIMALAYAS

ACTION PLANNING 2006

1. Résumé of WMPA activities in the Himalayas since 2002

1.1 Regional meeting in Yuksam (April 2002)

As part of the preparation for the 1st constitutive General Assembly of the WMPA at Quito (Ecuador) in September 2002, the WMPA along with Denis Blamont and in collaboration with GERES, [Renewable Energy and Environment Group] organised in Yuksam, in the State of Sikkim (India), from 15 to 19 April 2002, a Himalayan Regional Meeting. This brought together 135 participants from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, who were essentially representatives from local populations, NGOs and some central and local administrative bodies (for full proceedings for the Meeting, please go to: <http://www.himalpeople.org>).

On the agenda: management by local communities of their own areas, control of their economy, social life and development, by means of the presentation of specific examples of community innovations. Whether technical or relating to resource management, these are targeted at overcoming the deterioration of socio-economic conditions in the mountains and growing disparities with the plains. The debate on development focused on the need to break away from oppressive social and administrative structures, whether at local or regional level, on the continuity of a very strong cultural Himalayan tradition, a deep and close spiritual relationship with nature. By managing/taking responsibility for their resources or processes of production, inaccessible to them until now, these populations, in particular the most oppressed — usually women — demonstrated both to themselves and others their **capacity for autonomy and for action**.

By taking control once more of the transmission of their knowledge and values, along with the knowledge gained from the outside world, some of these communities unite together to break away from commonly held ideas, firstly that the antagonism between innovation and local culture is a hurdle that cannot be overcome and secondly that they are incapable of evolving and adapting — whereas in actual fact they have never ceased doing this throughout the course of history. Local communities **are demanding the power to take decisions about their local areas and resources**, the right to say their say on education and culture, communications and health systems, and to control their finances.

Following this Meeting, a decision was taken to **create national and regional WMPA branches in the Himalayas** in order to follow up these aims and develop exchanges between mountain zones and other parts of the world, to build an awareness of the distinctive mountain identity as such and for it to be valued within the current context of globalisation.

1.2 Regional meeting in Tripuradevi (April 2005)

In 2005, the Himalayan dynamic of the WMPA was reaffirmed at the Tripuradevi Meeting in the State of Uttar Anchal (India) from 9 to 11 April 2005, organised by Rashmi Bharti, member of the Board and General Secretary of AVANI, an Indian NGO.

The Meeting which took place over three days brought together around thirty Indian and Nepalese participants and focused on the **problems inherent in the marketing of mountain produce and the specification of their origin**.

The participants decided to organise a (trade) fair of **dyeing and medicinal plants**, along with a seminar by specialists in this field from the Himalayan region, and a short-term project to **found a conservatory and centre to be located in Tripuradevi for research on and dissemination of**

these issues. Representatives will be invited to this seminar from every part of the Himalayas, from Europe (in particular the *Couleur Garantie* association, who founded a similar centre in the South of France) and from the Andes (particularly from the Potato Centre in the Cusco region where villagers are endeavouring to continue the utilisation of dyeing plants and have expressed a desire to receive help, particularly of a technical nature).

1.3 Constitution of national and provincial WMPAs (2002-2006)

In 2003, **the WMPA in Nepal registered its articles** and includes among its members representatives from communities such as the FECOFUN <http://www.fecofun.org> (Nepalese Federation of Forest Users) which has 1000 members representing local groups and 5 million people in Nepal's 75 districts), and others who manage water, irrigation, energy, education, health etc. In their regular meetings, they have begun to identify the most sensitive problems, particularly the marketing and labeling of mountain products. After the Full Board Meeting in Ispoure (France) in 2003, an initiative was launched on behalf of WMPA by FECOFUN, in the form of a petition. This resulted in a reduction in government tax on forest products from 40 % to 15 %, with benefits also for the local groups responsible for management of the forest.

During the Tripuradevi Meeting in 2005 discussions were held on the different stages required to create a viable and active WMPA in India. Initially it was decided to use people already involved to consolidate local networks before seeking to develop them further. The aim of these networks is both to initiate concrete measures (such as the certification project) and also encourage debate and action on mountain policies and decision-making processes.

In view of the extent of the Indian Himalayas and the impossibility of travelling within them without being compelled to come out, **WMPAs will be created specifically for each state or group of states concerned.** Initial entry fees and subscriptions have been discussed and drawn up. Meetings tailored for each WMPA will be arranged, particularly in Uttar Anchal, following the guidelines of this meeting.

2. New bases for reflection and action

2.1. Global approach: how to live sustainably in the Himalayas

Since 2002, the Himalayan members for the WMPA have acknowledged the Central States' failure to address the issues surrounding local development. The general move towards decentralisation has led to an increase in the devolution of management of natural resources to local stakeholders. In many cases this process has resulted in both the privatisation of these resources and the disqualification of communities benefiting from state assistance.

Consequently we need to put in place conditions that will enable the Himalayan peoples to live in a sustainable manner from their own produce, to allow their cultures to develop in their own way and more generally to regain control of their own destiny. This is the only way to reverse the process of rural and mountain exodus and create a **Himalayan community**, whose produce will play its part in the global creation of human values, cultural heritage and exchanges. These cultures constitute ways of living and managing territories, that is to say ways of life, production, practical skills, knowledge and expertise.

The next round of Himalayan meetings will focus primarily on exploring **the pressure, currently observable in some areas of Nepal, to move away from technical management of resources and towards the political management of territories.** By relying in particular on the possibility written into the Indian Constitution to base local management of territories on statutory ancestral structures and also on experience previously acquired by a number of Himalayan stakeholders (such as for example Nepalese forest users), it will therefore be advisable to discuss how to reinforce management and decision-making structures appropriate for the different Himalayan areas.

Proposals arising from these discussions and the pooling of experience at regional level across the Himalayas will be brought to the attention of local governments and national States and to the international institutions likely to adapt their programmes to the expectations expressed in this way.

2.2. Operational Approach: how to improve production conditions in mountain areas

2.2.1. The energy question

Because of their particular geographical situation, generally speaking Himalayan producers suffer from an **absence of satisfactory infrastructures** to ensure a stable and sustainable level of production which would allow the creation and structuring of agro-grazing and craft industries, as found in other large mountain areas (Andes for coffee and quinoa production, Alps and Pyrenees for sheep and cattle).

With regard to energy for example, in the absence of electrification for many isolated mountain villages, the use of wood as an energy source is in direct conflict with balanced forest management as a raw material for hand-crafted products such as hand-made paper. In this field we must promote renewable energies systems by assessing needs and finding appropriate solutions which may be duplicated, a major consideration for autonomous management by communities. In this way local stakeholders may present their requirements not only for solar power systems but also for micro hydroelectric power plants whose performance and use are not currently sustainable because of a policy of withdrawal in the long term and because of requirements from local governments for profitability.

The objective is to arrive at a definition of a **Himalayan model for decentralised rural energy** that will guarantee for producers working conditions that are both fair and sustainable.

2.2.2. Sharing expertise

Across the entire Himalayan chain (India, Nepal, Bhutan and China), communities have developed traditional expertise which, threatened with disappearance, will benefit from being recorded, formalised and disseminated locally with the aim of producing a structure of internal production networks. The operational objective pursued by the WMPA is to create **Conservatories of Himalayan products and expertise** organised around specific produce with high added value, which may be marketed widely under a "Himalayan Mountain Products" label (see below).

This global strategy will focus initially the "**Conservatory of dyeing plants**", a pilot project that the WMPA in Uttar Anchal has already begun to formalise, in collaboration with the UNESCO Arts Commission which has organised a series of meetings on dyeing plants since 2005.

This Conservatory or Centre for Research and Dissemination on dyeing plants (wild or cultivated) and their production techniques and various uses will be concerned with textile (cotton, wool, linen, silk, etc.), "rice" paper¹, and bamboo-based products.

All of the methods used to produce natural dyes from plants or other products will be collected and preserved here and research will be carried out on the introduction of new techniques and plants. Its central function will therefore be to provide information but it will also offer training in these production techniques and their various uses in order to meet high quality criteria.

2.3. Economic approach: conditions for the marketing of Himalayan mountain products

In line with the Tripuradevi Meeting and the WMPA's European work on the labeling of mountain products, discussions on the **certification of mountain products** must enter an operational phase which will ensure that mountain people's products are marketed both nationally in urban consumption areas and internationally, for example, through fair trade networks. This approach concerns "typical" products with a high added value such as mountain cheese within the food processing sector, wild silk or wood in the craft sector and fair and ethical tourism in the services sector.

At the end of an initial analysis, the WMPA devised this labeling process as a designation or registered trademark, designating not a manufacturing process or location, but the society that lives there and its way of embodying the universal values belonging to this type of location, that is to say the mountain. The WMPA could clearly see that this project responded perfectly to a widespread need in the Himalayas which had not yet acquired the means to express itself.

The 2006 objective is to put this labelling process into practice while at the same time supporting and coordinating production networks by means of Conservatories. This project will be carried out in

¹ this is in fact the "daphne", a tree from the Himalayas. This paper has been produced in the mountains for many generations and already has a very well structured market (particularly UNICEF in Nepal) which is valued very highly.

several stages, based on the model already used for *pashmina* wool following the initiative of the French Embassy in India:

- 1/ identification of the products responding to the societal, cultural and environmental values defined by local WMPAs through the drafting of specifications following the principles of the World Mountain People Charter;
- 2/ market research and initiatives with producers to coordinate the range of products on offer: processing of products, price setting, coordinated stock management, etc;
- 3/ integration of these products into production systems and local social infrastructures;
- 4/ creation of sales outlets in urban areas of the countries or regions concerned (cf. WMPA shop project in Kathmandu);
- 5/ identification of partners in the fair trade sector with a view to marketing the products abroad (cf. partnership project in Nepal with the NGO Alter Eco in the fair tourism and food processing sectors).

The implementation of this process requires the intervention of international specialists to identify international outlets and to validate and monitor the labeled products. The WMPA's objective is to avoid on the one hand the costs and limitations of the current certification procedures and on the other the risk of a number of communities being excluded due both to their poor economic status and their continuing lack of expertise. This is why the WMPA intends to seek international financial support and partnerships (UNDP, EU, DCC, and also innovative public-private partnerships) while also seeking the support of local authorities, whose representatives will be invited to workshops at the Regional Meeting (see below).

2.4. Economic approach: the search for roots and relationship between the mountain people and the mountains

One of the main themes of the WMPA's work in the Himalayas since 2002 has been the **question of identity**. Indeed the Himalayan people are increasingly starting to search for an identity which is often complex and difficult in that it involves a loss of traditional and cultural points of reference. An open and shared discussion on this issue should help to avoid ethnocentric or theocentric erosion of identity. With this objective in mind, the question of identity will be raised cross-regionally through the spiritual relationship between the communities and their territories in order to create common symbolic links between the different Himalayan peoples and in order to help to harmonise relationships between them. This questioning also permits an **assessment of the environmental policies** managed by the States at the behest of international organisations, which have often led to the disappropriation of the local populations in the name of the ambiguous notion of the "heritage of mankind".

2.5. Institutional approach: towards the creation of a Regional Centre for Cooperation and Exchange for the Himalayas

The specific relationships of the Himalayan people with their territories are conveyed through ancestral structures specially adapted to specific local requirements. One of the WMPA's objectives for 2006 is to study these structures with the aim of creating a **regional representation structure** enabling the Himalayan people and stakeholders to be recognised as partners, to become formally associated, to exchange information and to express their expectations to the various institutional representatives.

The proposal to create a **Regional Centre for Cooperation and Exchange for the Himalayas**, in collaboration with existing local and regional structures, will be discussed during Regional Meetings in order to clarify how it is organised and run. This Centre will not only serve local territorial management structures (communities, Conservatories, producers' unions) in an information, coordination and advisory capacity, but it will also have an important political function, defending the interests of the mountain populations with the institutions concerned. Ultimately, this role should enable it to put forward and negotiate laws and regulations with the local, national and regional powers. These will be adapted to the mountain territories and favourable to the objectives of the equitable and sustainable development of the Himalayas as mentioned above. It will also be a force for persuasion on an international level as a representative of the large international institutions and organisations (FAO, UNDP, UNEP, EU, IMF, World Bank, etc.) which will enable financing programmes to be defined jointly with these lenders (NGOs, bilateral cooperation, etc.). These programmes will correspond to the clearly identified expectations of the populations, and will focus on their potential to become stakeholders in their own development.

WMPA events – Himalayas 2006

In order to draw up a coherent report and a relevant and structured programme based on the focal points for discussion and action previously defined, the WMPA will hold a series of 3 Himalayan regional meetings supported by the legitimacy, diversity and representativeness of all of the mountain stakeholders it represents.

3.1. Shillong meeting (March 2006)

On the 8th, 9th and 10th March, in Shillong, in the State of Meghalaya, North-East India, the WMPA is organising the first of a series of three regional meetings which are to be held throughout the Himalayan chain (India, Nepal, and Bhutan).

This first meeting which is coordinated by Mayfereen Lyngdoh Rynthiang, a member of the Office of the WMPA and Director of the NGO Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya, will bring together around thirty participants mainly from North-East India. Its theme will be: **“Living in the mountains - local cultures and innovative production strategies”**.

The programme for this meeting (cf. Appendix) focuses on the **equitable and sustainable produce and services emanating from local cultures**: silkworm breeding, organic farming, tourism, water management and agro forestry. Based on the sharing of experience and information on the different participants' current projects, the discussions will help to identify common strategies for mobilisation and action both with a view to creating a WMPA in North-East India and for the next round of Regional Meetings.

N.B. This Meeting will be followed by a project in North-West India (Uttar Anchal) and Nepal, led by Denis Blamont, Vice President of the WMPA, to organise the two other Regional Meetings, along with members of the Indian and Nepalese WMPAs.

3.2. Tripuradevi Meeting (May 2006)

The Tripuradevi Meeting in the State of Uttar Anchal (India) will address the same problems: how to identify sustainable and equitable businesses/activities and means of living in the mountains, territorial management and discussions on how local communities can organise themselves to retake control of initiatives.

In view of the specific context of the North-West Indian Himalayas, the management of water, rivers and renewable energy (solar and hydraulic) systems will be the subject of a specific workshop during which the problems surrounding natural parks will also be broached, focusing in particular on the conflict between the local communities and the Nanda Devi Park.

Also on the agenda will be the setting up of the Conservatory for plants used in dyeing, the labeling of hand-crafted products made from wild silk and more generally support for micro-enterprises, whether farming or craft related.

3.3. Kathmandu Meeting (August-September 2006)

The first part of the Regional Meeting in Kathmandu (Nepal) which will bring this series to a close is to be dedicated to an in-depth examination of the catastrophic situation in Nepal. The WMPA will discuss ways in which it can offer short-term help to people in areas devastated by the civil war.

With the participation of representatives from India, Bangladesh and Bhutan from previous Meetings, the WMPA will seek to sum up the debates, draw up a structured programme for the Himalayas and define a global WMPA strategy, focusing both on new partnerships and on the region's major national and international events.

Preparation will be made both for the participation and representation of the Himalayan WMPAs at the next General Assembly of the WMPA, and applications for the new Asia posts created by the extension of the WMPA's International Board.