



Preserving Traditions and Strengthening Livelihoods through Transboundary Yak Conservation

11 Dec 2018

Like 76 Share

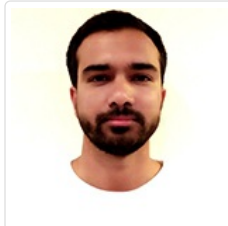
Tweet 0



Tashi Dorji



Nakul Chettri



Aseesh Pandey



Kailash Gaira

Domesticated yak (*Bos grunniens*), an icon of the Himalayan highlands, are an important part of the livelihoods of mountain communities in Asia. Yak herding is practiced across the Himalaya – including the Tibetan Plateau and Mongolia – and is tied to the shared culture of the region. However, changing contexts and environments resulting from development, climate change, and the geopolitical climate of the region have changed the practice, isolating and fragmenting herders and traditional pastures. The yak population is declining, local cultures with strong ties to yak herding are disappearing, and productivity has declined. Market opportunities are poor and younger generations have little interest in a way of life that involves such hardship.



A yak herd grazes in Lachen, North Sikkim, India. Domesticated yak are an important part of the livelihoods of mountain communities across the Himalaya.

Nepal, India, and Bhutan – which share the transboundary Kangchenjunga landscape in the eastern Himalaya – have been connected through the culture of yak herding and the yak economy for centuries. However, herding communities in the region also face isolation, low

productivity due to inbreeding, and market challenges leading to a decrease in yak herding and interest in the same across the landscape. A regional interaction among yak herders and officials representing the three countries were organized to discuss the shared challenges and explore common solutions with the objective of revitalizing yak herding in the landscape.

Karma Bonpo, District Magistrate, Mangan, North Sikkim, India, highlighted the importance of yak in Sikkim and said, “Yak are symbolic to communities of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim. However, other economic activities has overtaken traditional yak- and sheep-based livelihoods.” Other speakers including Guekay Lachenpa, Pipon Lachen and Tenzing Wongpu Lachungpa from Pipon, Lachung, a valley in North Sikkim, expressed common concerns: In the past, yaks were much bigger. Genetic exchange was not as difficult as herders and yak undertook long-range migration across country borders. This has changed now as a result of political divisions.

The challenges are not very different in Bhutan and Nepal. Ramchandra Gurung, chairperson of the Falelung Yak Herders Group in Panthar, Nepal and Aum Tshering Zam, a representative of yak herders from Haa, Bhutan, said that yak herding is no longer a lucrative option for younger generations. Zam, who is 68 and a yak herder himself, said, “Technological innovations that save labour and energy such as solar equipment and increased connectivity using information and communication technology could be useful in encouraging young herders to remain in the mountains.”



Interactions like this one in the Yumthang Valley of North Sikkim India among yak herders and officials from Bhutan, India, and Nepal provide opportunities to explore common solutions to revitalizing yak herding in the Kangchenjunga Landscape.

PK Pradhan, Director, Department of Animal Husbandry, Livestock, Fisheries and Veterinary Services, Sikkim, said, “The winter months, characterized by feed crises, are most critical for yak. We need scientists and researchers to look into this and fill the knowledge gaps related to winter feed solutions on a priority basis.” Appreciating the initiative shown by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in terms of finding regional solutions, RK Tamang, Principal Director of the same department noted, “We can empower local institutions by strengthening them to allow them to voice their concerns.” This, he said, would allow communities better opportunities to draw attention from multiple partners to achieve “convergence and synergy to address common issues around policies or practices”. Karma Bhutia, Deputy Director, appreciated the role that pipons, traditional headmen in Lachen and Lachung, as well as other local institutions play in such efforts. “Local institutions and governance must be given due recognition as they constitute an integral component of national policies and action plans,” he said.

The regional sharing platform highlighted numerous common issues between Bhutan, Nepal, and India. Potential solutions were identified, and a group called YAK – the Yak Association of Kangchenjunga – was formed on social messaging platform WhatsApp with renewed commitment to strengthen regional cooperation, knowledge exchange, and genetic exchange through yak breeding among the member countries. The YAK group will also contribute to broader regional and global discourse through the Pastoralist Knowledge Hub initiated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The interaction platform was facilitated by the GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and Sustainable Development (GBPNIHESD) in collaboration with the Department of Animal Husbandry, Livestock, Fisheries and Veterinary Science, Government of Sikkim,

Subscribe to our mailing list

E-mail

Subscribe

[About Us](#)

[Programmes](#)

[Resources](#)

[Events](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Home](#)

[Mountain Topics](#)

[News](#)

[Career](#)

Gallery

CORE DONORS

Regional countries

Afghanistan
Bangladesh
Bhutan
China
India
Myanmar
Nepal
Pakistan

Non-regional countries

Australia
Austria
Norway
Switzerland
United Kingdom

PROGRAMME DONORS

Austrian Development Agency (ADA)
Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit (BMZ), Germany
Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom
European Union (EU)
Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU), Germany
Government of Sweden (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [Sida])
International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC)
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kathmandu
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

STRATEGIC AND PROJECT FUNDING

Climate Research Fund (CRF)
DANIDA Fellowship Centre (DFC)
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
Institute for Global Environment Strategies (IGES)
Institute for Advanced Sustainable Studies (IASS), Germany
International Glaciological Society
International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
Secure World Foundation (SWF)
SVP Industrial Development – Statkraft AS
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
The Arizona Board of Regents, University of Arizona
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR)
Universiteit Utrecht
USAID – SERVIR Demand Activity
Wageningen University

