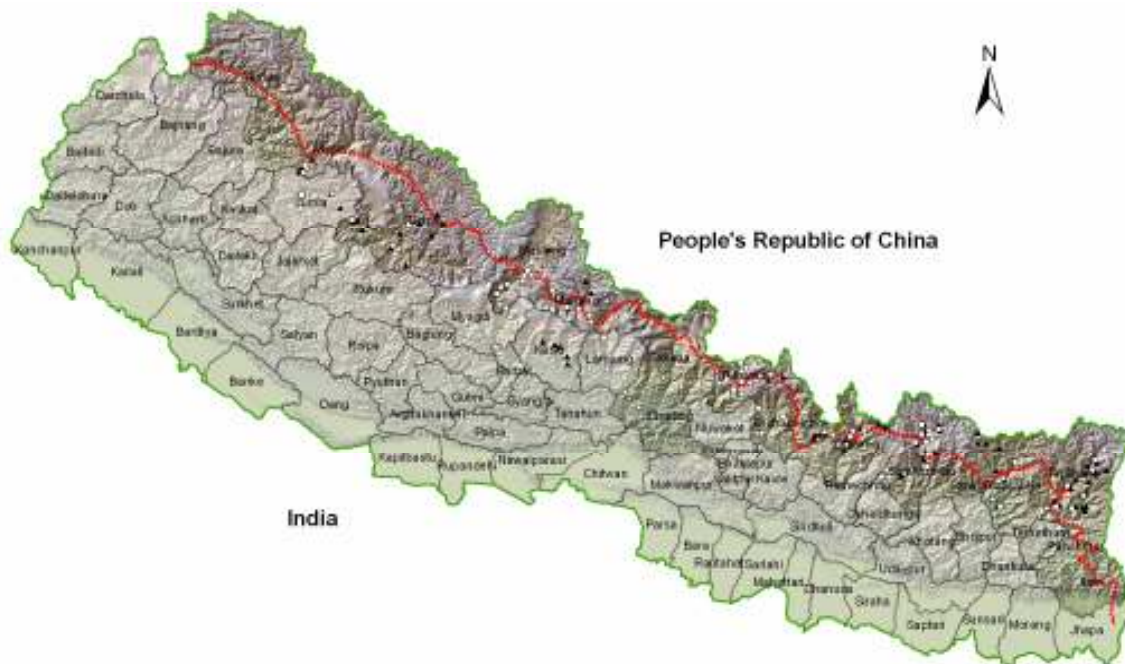


Great Himalaya Trail Development Programme

Concept Proposal

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Harnessing tourism and peace to drive sustainable development and poverty alleviation through the creation of an iconic and globally-significant new tourism product for Nepal. The 'Great Himalaya Trail' will span the entire length of the country – from Humla in the West to Kanchenjunga in the East – providing a significant boost to the tourism industry and its associated support sectors, channeling tourists and investment to under-developed districts, and stimulating a wide range of production, income and employment opportunities for impoverished local communities. The GHT Development Programme will contribute substantially to economic development in 16 of Nepal's most remote mountain districts benefiting an estimated 1.28 million people.

Introduction

Requiring relatively low levels of capital investment, tourism – by some estimates the world’s largest industry – can yield high levels of employment and income for the poor, particularly in rural areas where biodiversity and indigenous cultures have not yet been significantly eroded. The lives of these communities can be greatly enhanced by infrastructure development, social mobilization, institutional development, education, skills training and support for entrepreneurs: all of which are integral to pro-poor sustainable tourism (PPST). However, what really sets tourism apart from other industries is that it is able to attract foreign and domestic visitors to under-developed rural areas and in so doing stimulate a wide range of business and income-generating opportunities for local people. Consequently tourism, if sensitively planned and managed, can transform geographical remoteness and rugged landscape – normally obstacles to development in Nepal’s mountain districts – into economic assets.

Context

Subsequent to the signing of the peace accord in 2006 and the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008, the Government of Nepal has prioritised economic reconstruction and development particularly in support of impoverished rural areas and disadvantaged groups, including women. It has committed to investing in improved road and air access to remote districts however **business and employment opportunities are urgently needed for local people including ex-combatants and IDP returnees who, if lasting peace and security are to be achieved, must be quickly re-integrated into society.**

Recent experience of post-crisis development in Asian countries such as Cambodia and East Timor, has proven that the tourism sector can be a powerful driver for fast economic recovery and in Nepal it has been identified in the Interim Development Plan as a ‘national priority industry’ which contributes directly to the achievement of MDGs 1,3,7 and 8. The Tourism Satellite Accounting system recently adopted by the UN Statistical Commission has revealed the contribution of tourism to economic development and employment to be far greater than previously documented: it is estimated that at the destination level **one job is created directly in the tourism industry for every additional 3.5 tourists¹, and for every 100 jobs created directly, a further 80 jobs are created indirectly²** in support sectors. In Nepal, the contribution of the Travel & Tourism economy is expected to rise from 548,000 jobs in 2008 (5.3% of total employment or 1 in every 18.8 jobs) to 824,000 jobs (6.2% of total employment or 1 in every 16.0 jobs) by 2018³.

Nepal’s tourism industry, having survived a difficult period during the conflict, is now well placed to exploit the ‘peace dividend’ and is already enjoying a strong resurgence with a record numbers of international tourist arrivals recorded in both 2007 and 2008. Under-developed districts, which tourists had previously been unwilling or unable to visit, have now become viable tourism destinations and SNV – the only provider of specialist PPST capacity-building services in Nepal – is ideally positioned to help development partners from the public, private and NGO sectors harness favorable international market trends to ensure that the industry meets the expectations of Nepali citizens by contributing substantially to economic development that is both equitable and sustainable.

¹ SASEC/ADB Tourism Development Plan report, 2008

² National Council of Applied Economic Research (India), 2006

³ 2008 Travel & Tourism Economic Research Report, WTTC.

Key issues

There have been a number of development initiatives to promote Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism outside Nepal's established tourism destinations including the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP): a joint programme of UNDP, SNV, DfID, MoCTCA and the Nepal Tourism Board. However, despite their considerable successes and achievements, these programmes have all:

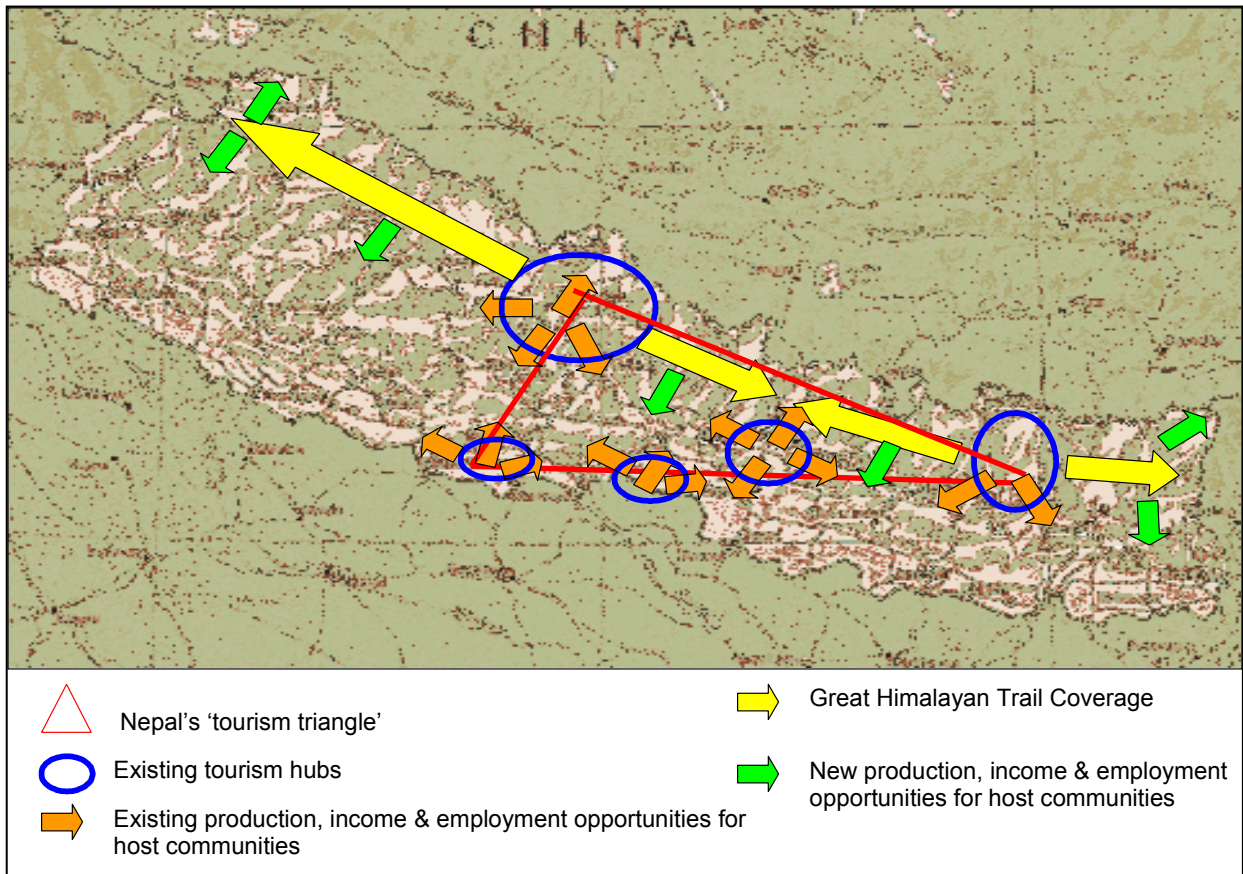
1. Concentrated on community-based tourism (CBT): an important, but small niche market within the industry. As a consequence, the benefits have largely been confined to a limited number of communities in the immediate locality of development projects.
2. Focused their activities primarily on creating direct employment (guiding, trekking & lodge staff etc), rather than addressing the extensive production, income and employment opportunities available within the tourism value chain. These tourism support sectors have the advantage of being more easily accessible to disadvantaged communities because they generally build on existing knowledge and expertise and do not require the extensive skills and language training that direct employment in the industry often necessitates.
3. Struggled with the challenge of attracting tourists away from the established tourism destinations into remoter, less developed districts. This problem has been further compounded by:
 - Insufficient and/or ineffective branding and marketing of new destinations
 - Supply-driven development of tourism products and services which have frequently failed to accurately meet the demands of target markets.

Underpinning many of these issues has been the failure of development partners to fully engage with the private sector of the tourism industry and to recognize that the great strengths of the business community – dynamism, energy, motivation, entrepreneurialism – must be harnessed if tourism is to fulfill its development potential.

GHT Development Programme

It is self-evident that only once tourists are visiting a district can the full potential of the industry as a driver for sustainable business, employment and other income generating opportunities among host communities be realised. The first component of the Great Himalaya Trail Development Programme will address this problem – as well as the lack of effective coordination and collaboration within and between the various stakeholders – by working in partnership with the Government of Nepal, District authorities, Nepal Tourism Board, industry associations and host communities to link together a range of tourism destinations and products with the objective of **creating an iconic new tourism attraction with global profile and appeal** that is greater than the sum of its constituent parts. Industry partners predict that this 'Great Himalaya Trail' will both attract increased numbers of new and repeat visitors to Nepal, and also motivate more of them to explore beyond the 'tourism triangle' of established destinations.

The second component of the GHT Development Programme will facilitate more effective partnerships between the industry and host communities by helping local people identify and successfully exploit the full range of production, income and employment opportunities within the tourism value chain that the presence of tourists offers.



Great Himalayan Trail Development Programme: Spreading the benefits of tourism
 by generating production, income and employment opportunities for disadvantaged communities beyond Nepal's established 'tourism triangle'

The programme builds directly on the achievements of past initiatives while addressing identified weaknesses and incorporating documented lessons-learned. Having generated widespread excitement and support within the tourism business community, it will be implemented through a genuine partnership between government, civil society and the private sector and (in conjunction with the *Responsible Travel Nepal* Initiative) will constitute a major step in **transitioning Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism from the periphery to the mainstream of Nepal's tourism industry.**

Core components of the programme

1. Marketing & Promotion

Increasing and expanding the flow of tourists to, and within, Nepal

- Support for NTB and industry representative bodies in developing 12 unique regional destination brands and complementary product packages (including unique local crafts and produce) within the GHT, in order to inspire and motivate tourists to visit less developed areas of the country.
- Production of national and regional GHT marketing and promotional materials, including a dedicated web portal, maps, guidebook, CDroms etc.
- Major launch event to and 'inaugural GHT trek', with international media coverage and celebrity participation from Nepal brand ambassadors. These would coincide with, and contribute to, the Government of Nepal's official 'Visit Nepal' campaign being prepared for 2011.
- Introduction of a system (e.g. certificate/trophy/'honours-board') for recognising/rewarding everyone who completes the entire Great Himalayan Trail route (either in one trek or cumulatively through multiple treks).
- Promotion in international media (BBC, National Geographic, travel publications), travelmarts, famtrips and specialist hiking/trekking/responsible tourism markets, as well as through mainstream Nepal tourism industry channels.

2. Institutional development and capacity-building

Building and embedding the necessary structures and capacity to enable long-term, effective and inclusive management of the GHT.

A careful balance is required between the need for local ownership/control and for effective coordination at the national and regional levels. To achieve this:

- *DDC Tourism Development Committees* with cross-sector participation will be created (where not already in existence) and provided with training and capacity-building support to enable them to coordinate tourism development in their respective districts.
- *Regional GHT steering committees* will facilitate coordination and collaboration between neighbouring districts.
- *A National GHT Association*, with balanced representation from key government, industry and development stakeholders, will provide the necessary strategic guidance and coordinate support.

3. Integrated tourism planning and development

Creating an environment which motivates and supports industry investment and maximizes benefits for local communities.

Supporting DDC Tourism Development Committees in the formulation/up-dating of District Tourism Development Plans based on PPST principles. These plans will:

- Facilitating co-ordinated tourism planning and product development building on unique destination brand identities.
- Creating district Tourism Multiple Use Visitor Centres (MUVCs) to act as communication hubs between tourists, tour operators/trekking agents, and local product and service providers.
- Helping planners and stakeholders identify and exploit destination, product and marketing synergies.
- Facilitating more *effective* targeting of development funds and technical support, channeling resources to where they will have maximum impact.

4. Local business development, job creation and income generation

Helping host communities identify and successfully exploit high potential production, income and employment opportunities within the tourism value chain

- Facilitating market-oriented development of tourism-related products and services by local people, placing a strong emphasis on the provision of business development/management training and support for small and micro entrepreneurs (SMEs) and facilitating effective B2B market linkages for their products and services.
- Improving access to necessary technical support and resources.

5. Infrastructure development

Ensuring the viability of the GHT as sustainable & responsible tourism product

The primary purpose of the GHTDP is to provide the development 'software' to complement the infrastructure development being implemented by government and development organizations, and the GHT will wherever possible make use of existing trails and facilities. However resources will be allocated for specific essential tourism infrastructure development (trail improvements and maintenance, porter shelters, signage, restoration of key historic/cultural attractions etc).

N.B. In addition to the above, the option of supporting a more comprehensive infrastructure development programme – designed to directly support and complement GHT development programme interventions with the emphasis on delivering improved accessibility to remote districts – will also be available to interested development partners.

6. Corporate Social Responsibility

Promoting and supporting best practice within Nepal's tourism industry

- Financial / technical / capacity-building support for the implementation by development partners of a series of carefully selected projects which exemplify the different elements of Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism (promoting role of women in tourism, renewable energy in tourism, enhancing welfare of porters etc), with a view to documenting and disseminating best practice and supporting accelerated up-scaling of successful initiatives.
- Collaborating with the *Responsible Travel Nepal* initiative (through which market mechanisms are being harnessed to promote, incentivise and reward environmentally sustainable and socially responsible best practice within the industry) by:
 - Supporting RTN training and capacity building for motivated GHT tourism businesses (hotels/lodges, trekking agencies etc) geared specifically towards helping them achieve 'Responsible Travel Nepal' certification.
 - Promoting RTN-certified Nepali tourism businesses to overseas travel and tourism partners and offering them preferential support in all GHT marketing materials, activities and events.

Current status

The GHT development programme has been planned by SNV Nepal and ICIMOD in consultation with industry stakeholders and significant progress has already been made: the preparatory and resource mapping phase has been completed and the outputs disseminated.

The UN World Tourism Organisation's *Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty* (ST-EP) programme has allocated a \$300,000 grant to support implementation of a **GHTDP pilot project in the Karnali**. This grant has been complemented by a similar investment from SNV in the form of technical advisory and capacity-building services. The project is being implemented in Humla and Dolpo in close partnership with local government, industry and civil society stakeholders.

Beneficiaries

The national GHT Development Programme will contribute substantially to economic development in 16 of Nepal's most remote mountain districts benefiting an estimated 1.28 million people ⁴.

	District	Population	Direct Beneficiaries	Indirect Beneficiaries	TOTAL BENEFICIARIES
1	Humla*	40,595	1,992	23,046	25,038
2	Mugu	43,937	2,197	21,969	24,165
3	Jumla	89,427	4,471	44,714	49,185
4	Dolpo*	29,545	1,477	14,773	16,250
5	Mustang	14,981	749	7,491	8,240
6	Manang	9,587	479	4,794	5,273
7	Gorkha	288,134	14,407	144,067	158,474
8	Dhading	338,658	16,933	169,329	186,262
9	Rasuwa	44,731	2,237	22,366	24,602
10	Sindhupalchok	305,857	15,293	152,929	168,221
11	Dolakha	204,229	10,211	102,115	112,326
12	Solukhumbu	107,686	5,384	53,843	59,227
13	Sankhuwasabha	159,203	7,960	79,602	87,562
14	Taplejung	134,698	6,735	67,349	74,084
15	Panchthar	211,099	10,555	105,550	116,104
16	Ilam	305,058	15,253	152,529	167,782
	Total	2,022,367	116,334	1,166,461	1,282,795

* GHTDP pilot project districts

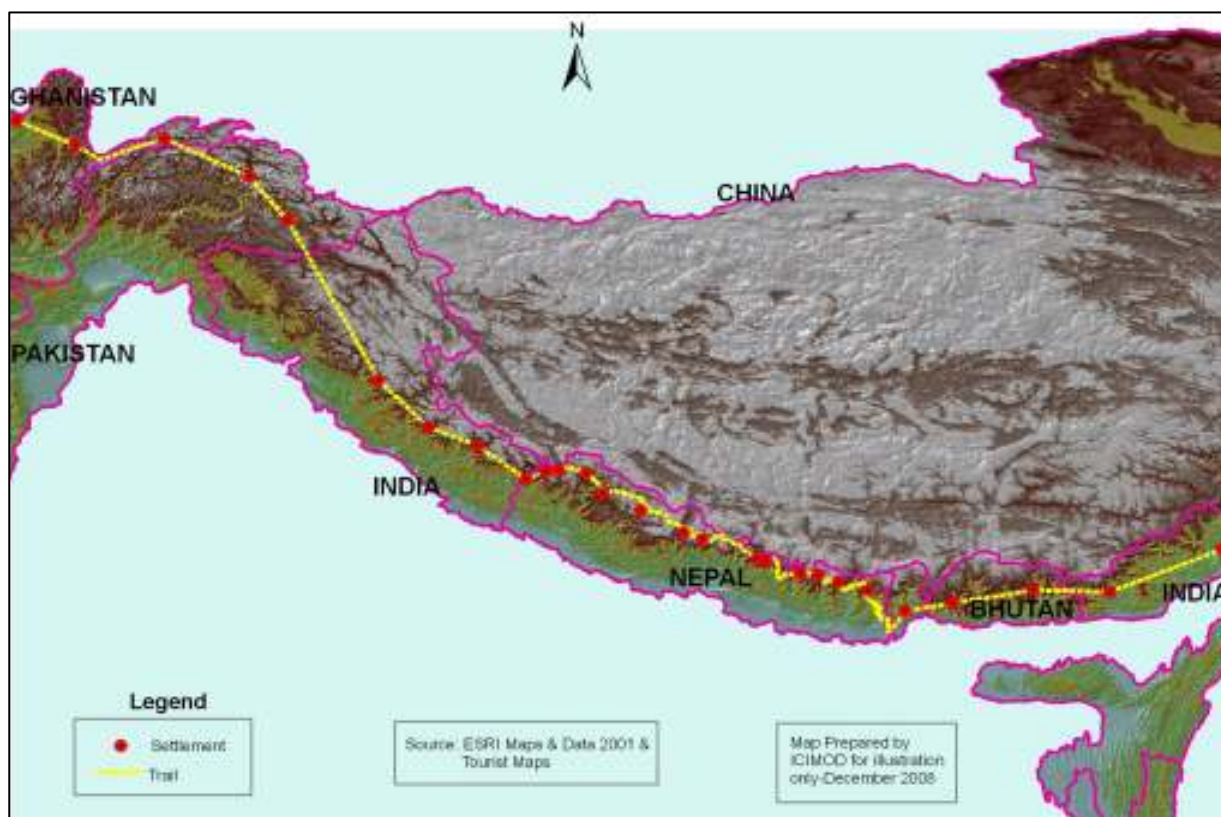
⁴ Calculated in accordance with the UN World Tourism Organisation's ST-EP '7 mechanisms' for poverty alleviation through tourism.

Implementation partners & roles

Implementation of the GHT Development Programme will involve the participation and support of numerous public, private and civil society organisations, but it is envisioned that the core partners will be:

Responsibility	Partner
National Coordination	Ministry of Tourism & Civil Aviation
Local Coordination	DDC's of participating districts Ministry of Local Development (MLD)
Tourism industry representation	Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) National Association of Tour Operators (NATO) Nepal Association of Travel (NATTA) Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN)
Enterprise development	MEDEP UNDP Ministry of Industry, Commerce & Supplies
Marketing & Promotion	Nepal Tourism Board
Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism advisory & capacity-building support	SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
International (Himalaya) coordination & knowledge development	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) *

*Nepal constitutes the heart of the Great Himalaya Trail, however there is strong potential for international up-scaling and collaboration and the medium-term objective is to expand the trail throughout the Himalaya. Consequently, the role of ICIMOD – with its regional mandate and partnerships – is of particular significance.



Conclusion

The Great Himalayan Trail Development Programme constitutes a step-change in the way in which the development community engages with the tourism industry in Nepal. It will accelerate the development of tourism in some of the country's most remote and impoverished districts, while simultaneously creating the necessary planning and enabling environment to motivate industry investment and maximize production, income and employment opportunities for host communities. Having won universal support from stakeholders, and with the planning phase already completed, the national programme can be implemented at short notice. In addition to its substantial long-term development impact, the programme has been designed to deliver quick and tangible benefits to target communities.

Summary

- ✓ Benefiting an estimated 1.28 million people in 16 remote, mountain districts where limited alternative development opportunities exist.
- ✓ Building on successful initiatives (ACAP, TRPAP, MEDEP) and enhancing Nepal's reputation as a global pioneer in Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism.
- ✓ Stimulating investment, job creation and diversified sustainable economic development.
- ✓ Helping cement peace and reduce rural-urban migration.
- ✓ Incorporating coordinated infrastructure & software packages.
- ✓ Benefiting from strong political support, market demand, enthusiastic industry participation, cross-sector stakeholder buy-in and media interest.
- ✓ Emphasising:
 - Local ownership and capacity-building
 - Market-based solutions, support for SME's, and B2B partnerships throughout the tourism value chain
 - Identifying and exploiting synergies with related (tourism & non-tourism) development partners and programmes.
- ✓ Contributing directly towards the achievement of the Government of Nepal's policy priorities and development objectives.

For further information, please contact:

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