



## Integrated Conservation and Development Programs (ICDP)

Improving Livelihoods and Protecting the Environment in Bhutan

In picturesque Sengor village just outside Thrumshingla National Park, an old woman calls her chickens to their daily feeding while her two red-cheeked girls watch and giggle. Across the valley, her neighbor milks his Jersey cow while the sun glints off the corrugated iron roof of his house. New barbed wire fencing ensures the cow stays put.

What does any of this have to do with conservation?

A lot. It's all part of an integrated conservation and development program, or ICDP. The woman bought the chickens at a reduced price so that she doesn't have to go into the forest to search for food and items to sell; the Jersey cow produces the same amount of milk as 3-5 local Siri cows, meaning less forest damaged by large herds of grazing cattle; and the metal roof and barbed wire replace the wooden shingles and fencing that deplete Bhutan's precious forests.

Strictly put, ICDPs are "projects that link biodiversity conservation in protected areas with local socio-economic development." What that means in real terms is that the woman and her neighbor have food in their pantries, money in their pockets, healthy, educated children and protected forests around them.

ICDPs emerged out of the recognition – long held by WWF – that conservation will fail without the support of local communities. And local communities are not going to care about saving forests and wildlife if they don't understand the long-term benefits, if their children are constantly sick and if they have no steady source of income or food.

WWF and the Nature Conservation Division are currently implementing ICDPs in three pilot areas – Thrumshingla National Park, Royal Manas National Park and Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary. In Thrumshingla, the current activities include:

- Sustainable natural resource management: Farmers learn to make more efficient use of natural resources through training in improved pasture development, the distribution of improved agricultural seeds, and the



Under the project, the farmers are provided with high yielding variety of seeds plus improved breed of live stock for better yield and production.



Meeting with the local officials

ICDPs are people-centered programs where local people take lead in planning and implementation of activities.

the beneficiaries of the project



### ICDP Project Sites





Meeting with the farmers



the beneficiaries of the project

**ICDP strikes balance between development and conservation thus directly supporting the implementation of the Bhutanese Conservation Strategy - The Middle Path.**



The CGI sheet supplied to Shengor village

Discussing with the farmers



construction of better irrigation facilities. The goal is efficiency, so that they get as much production out of the land as possible with minimal impact. Regular community meetings bring residents together to discuss issues such as sustainable harvesting and management of natural resources.

- **Animal husbandry:** Livestock rearing is one of the most important sources of food and cash for local communities in Thrumshingla. However, the large number of livestock in the protected area is exerting tremendous pressure on the forests due to overgrazing both within and outside the park. So ICDP staff have introduced improved breeds of cattle such as the afore-mentioned Jersey cows - these super-efficient cattle reduce overgrazing because less of them are needed to produce the same amount of milk. And less cows mean less work for the farmer. In addition, ICDP staff are helping farmers with improved fodder development and intensive manure production that cuts down on pollution.
- **Improving economic opportunities for the local people:** While a large percentage of people living within and outside the park are subsistence farmers, many are also involved in small-scale enterprises. In Thrumshingla, one of the biggest small businesses is the production and sale of yathra - hand-spun, hand-woven wool blankets, jackets and other products with traditional geometric designs specific to the region. ICDP staff are helping yathra weavers market their products, in addition to encouraging low-impact eco-tourism projects.
- **Reducing fuel wood consumption:** Local people are heavily dependent on forests for housing, fencing and fuel wood, which they use for cooking, space heating and lighting purposes. At two cubic meters per person, Bhutan has one of the highest annual per capita rates of fuel wood consumption in the world. Environmentally friendly cooking stoves, solar power, corrugated iron sheets for roofing and barbed wire fencing are dramatically reducing deforestation rates in and around the park.
- **Improving health and education services:** Winning the hearts and minds of local communities means investing in their health and education, especially with 42 percent of the population under 14 years old. Under the ICDP, villages in the vicinity of Thrumshingla National Park are receiving improved health, sanitation and education facilities, while scholarships are provided to children, especially girls who are underprivileged or orphans. The Girl Child Fund focuses on these girls, since studies have shown they are the most likely to drop out of school. By keeping children healthy, the ICDP ensures they will be better stewards of the land and will grow up to teach future generations about conservation.
- **Creating awareness among the local communities:** Many local people aren't aware of the benefits to them and the environment of conservation programs. Under the ICDP regular meetings and awareness workshops are organized for the local communities by the park management. In the schools, nature clubs involve students in bird watching, nature walks, campus beautification, in addition to offering a regular curriculum about conservation issues.

ICDPs aren't revolutionary. They are a basic, grassroots effort to gain the trust, respect and cooperation of local communities while reducing environmental damage and improving lives. They are proof that conservation and development don't have to be at odds with each other - they can work together, avoid duplication and achieve their own individual goals to the benefit of all.