

## **State of Conservation Report of Sagarmatha National Park, Nepal (N 120)**

### **1. Executive Summary**

Sagarmatha National Park SNP, a world Heritage property since, 1979 is an example of superlative and exceptional natural beauty with high altitude rich biodiversity, which is embedded in the vivid mountains, glaciers, deep valley and majestic peaks including the world's highest peak, Mt. Everest. The park is home to several endangered species of wildlife including snow leopard and red panda. The region has the ecologically distinctive flora and fauna in the world sacred Himalayas, intricately blended with the rich Sherpa culture. The intricate linkages of the Sherpa culture with the ecosystem are major focus of the park and they form the basis for the sustainable conservation of the natural resources, which eventually contributes for the wellbeing of the local communities.

The world heritage committee at its extended 44th session-Fuzhou, China online meeting, 2021 has raised issues regarding the State of Conservation of Sagarmatha National Park as a world heritage property. In decision 45 COM 7B. 87, the committee has requested the state party to update and submit the relevant information to the World Heritage Center as well as suggest the State Party to take necessary actions to address the issues raised by the committee. In this context, this report is an update on the status of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Sagarmatha National Park. Furthermore, this report underlines the view of State Party on the issues raised by the World Heritage Committee. The report has been prepared using integrated approach; field observation and stakeholders' consultation.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in the centre and Sagarmatha National Park in the site closely monitor and regulate the tourism focalized activities. Visitor tracking system is established and operating for monitoring and tracking tourist activities in and around the park. The Management Plan of Sagarmatha National Park and its Buffer zone is in final stage which includes the Tourism chapter as an integral part of the plan. The park authority is managing waste and garbage of the property by the support of Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC). In 2023, nearly 14,000 kg of garbage and waste material was collected from disposal site of Everest region.

To monitor the illegal activities inside the national park, Nepali Army and National Park administration are undertaking joint patrolling. For further monitoring of Kongde View Resort's activities the Park management authority has established check post nearby. SNP is regularly coordinating with related Governmental and Non-Governmental stakeholder for effective implementation of laws and organizing several programs to capacitate Buffer zone User Committee and livelihood development of Buffer Zone residents. Similarly, formation and operation of district level Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), meetings with Nepali Army and other security agencies are being carried out regularly.

## **2. Response to the Decision of World Heritage Committee**

### **2.1 Having Examined Document WHC/ 23/45.COM/7B. Add,**

**Response – Not Applicable**

### **2.2 Recalling Decision 44 COM 7B.70 and 44 COM 7B.96 adopted at its 42nd (Bahrain, 2018) and extended 44<sup>th</sup> Fuzhou/online 2021) session respectively**

**Response- Not Applicable**

### **2.3. Welcomes that the revision of the 2016-2020 Management Plan for the property is in underway, and request the state party to frate as soon as possible, the revision to include the various pressures to the OUV of the property, and to subunit the revised plan to the World Heritage Centre:**

**Response:** The revision of the 2016-2020 Management Plan for the property is at its final stage and committed to submit to the World Heritage Centre.

### **2.4. Also recalling concerns regarding the impacts of increasing visitor numbers on the property, welcomes the State Party's intention to include a tourist chapter in the revised Management Plan, however, requests the State Party to provide an update on the planned development of a Tourism Management Plan and reiterates its request the State Party to:**

- a) Undertake a visitor carrying capacity study to establish an appropriate carrying capacity for the property, especially during peak season, and use the findings to inform the Tourism Management Plan,**
- b) Address how monitoring and regulation of tourism related helicopter traffic within the property and the nationally designated buffer zones of the park can be strengthened to reduce impacts,**
- c) Ensure that the Tourism Management Plan aligns with the revision of the Management Plan for the property.**

**Response:** Department adopted new strategy aiming climate resilient & sustainable financing of protected area management. Management plan is the key guiding document for the effective Park management. The State Party always welcomes the suggestions from the World Heritage Centre for the effective implementation of activities outlined by the approved management plan of SNP and its Buffer Zone. Management Plan of SNP and its Buffer Zone is in process of revision. During the revision process intensive field study and deep consultations with stakeholders will be carried out so that all the related subjects can be included in the Plan. Separate chapter for addressing the

tourism related issues and threats are included in the plan. SNP is implementing separate procedure for regulating hotel, lodge and tea shop and also waste management inside the park.

Park Initiated Visitors Tracking System to monitor and regulate the tourist in the area. Helicopters are being used for rescue and emergency works. Park in close co-ordination with stakeholders initiated a rescue operation at Lukla and Namche. Regular consultations and coordination are conducted at centre and field level with security agencies and Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal for managing the flights.

Sagarmatha National Park is collaborating with Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), Namche for managing waste disposal from all over the Khumbu region since more than a decade. It is a local level environmental conservation institution which has been actively engaged in every type of waste management in Khumbu Pasang Lahmu Rural Municipality of Sagarmatha National Park and its buffer zone. In close coordination with SNP and local communities, SPCC organizes campaign to collect and dispose of garbage from settlements, hotel area and along the trekking trails. With the permission of SNP this institution has constructed and installed numbers of solid waste collection containers dustbins along the trekking routes. SNP has co-ordinated the SPCC to develop and implement an action Plan for waste management from Khumbu Region. Furthermore, Nepali Army along with SPCC had made a great achievement of collecting and disposing garbage from Everest Region. About 10,000 kg of garbage was brought from disposal site in 2018 likewise another 10,000 kg were collected in 2022 and around 14000 kg in 2023. SPCC has been doing its best and succeeding to manage all types of waste and garbage from Khumbu region.

**2.5. Further recall its concerns regarding the serious threats of the Kongde View Resort to the OUV, takes note of the activities to patrol, monitor and control any environmental impacts and illegal activities relating to the continued operation of the resort, and urges the State party to continue these measures and finalize a detail environmental plan to mitigate the impacts of the resorts, submit this plan to the World Heritage Center for review by IUCN, and take any necessary measures to monitor its implementation.**

**Response:** Supreme Court has made final verdict with respect to Kongde View Resort. Full text of final verdict has already been submitted to the World Heritage Center. Sagarmatha National Park and Nepali Army doing regular patrolling and monitoring the area for controlling any types of adverse environmental impact in the park. Recently Park administration has built check post nearby this resort which regularly monitors any illegal activities around. Upcoming Management Plan of the property will have chapter about the mitigation plan.

**Response:** Sagarmatha National Park has made several interactions with the local government and buffer zone communities, highlighting the importance of World Heritage Site and obligation to maintain the OUV of the property. Similarly, Sagarmatha National Park authority conducted several meetings with relevant stakeholder to know local people's opinion regarding declaration of the buffer zone of the Park. State Party entrusted that capacity building activities should be implemented on eternal basis for long-term sustainability of the park.

**2.9. Notes with appreciation the continued ban on firewood collection in the property, Implementation of law enforcement, and planned interventions to reduce this activity and promote alternative energy, and further encourages the State Party to continue these measures and ensure their incorporation in the revised Management Plan.**

**Response:** Local communities of buffer zone of Sagarmatha National Park largely use LP gas as an alternative energy for cooking and electricity for heating. Buffer Zone Management Committee has totally banned for firewood collection within the property. State Party with the involvement of Nepali Army has carried out a numbers of law enforcement activities in close collaboration with local communities and Nepali Army. Park authority and community institutions have a strong understanding and commitment for regulating park activities and its management plan for effective conservation of park resources. Several interventions are included in the revised Management Plan for reducing firewood collection and promotion of alternative energy.

**2.10. Take note that Himalayan musk deer poaching incidence occurred when surveillance was impacted by COVID-19 and that surveillance has since resumed, and request moreover that antipoaching measures are continued and included in the revision of the Management plan.**

**Response:** Solukhumbu District court has made final verdict with respect to musk deer poacher according to national park and wildlife conservation act. During the lockdown period of COVID-19, patrolling and general surveillance activities from park authority and Nepali Army were confined to small area. The incidence of poaching of Himalayan musk deer from Sagarmatha National Park area took place during that period. Now the patrolling, general surveillance, checking of visitors and similar types of activities have been conducted from park authority to control the poaching. Sagarmatha National Park has conducted several coordination meeting and regular collaboration with security personnel and other agencies. Buffer zone management committee and other local level community institutions are also equally involved and engaged for controlling such types of activities in and around the park.



- 2.6. Recalling furthermore the State Party's decision to request a revision of the draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the optical fibre project based on the comments provided by IUCN, further request the State Party to keep the World Heritage Centre informed of progress and ensure the revised EIA is completed in line with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context.**

**Response:** Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the optical fibre project prepared by Everest Link Pvt. Ltd. for laying out optical fibre network in Khumbu Pashang Lahmu Rural Municipality was submitted by DNPWC for review to the World Heritage Center in 2019. A letter dated 21 November 2019 was received from World Heritage Center to DNPWC along with IUCN comments and recommendations. Based on the letter received, DNPWC has requested to Everest Link Pvt. Ltd. to incorporate comments and recommendations made by IUCN. Final version of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the optical fibre project Report was approved by Ministry of Forests and Environment, Nepal Government of Nepal on January 30, 2022.

- 2.7. Recalling again the proposal in the 2016-2020 Management Plan to consider introducing zonation as a management instrument within the property and the distinction between a zonation scheme and a buffer zone, requests furthermore the State Party to develop a zonation system as part of the revision of the management plan, notably as a means of ensuring appropriate provisions for enclave villages located within the property.**

**Response:** Sagarmatha National Park has clearly defined park zonation i.e. National Park and its buffer zone. The area of National Park is 1148 square kilometres which is surrounded by buffer zone with an area of 275 square kilometres. Government of Nepal has declared all the settlements inside the park are also considered as buffer zone. Management Plan included zonation system and different management activities in National Park and Buffer Zone.

- 2.8. Appreciate the ongoing engagement by the State party to consult with local communities regarding the formalization of the Nationally designated buffer zone of Sagarmatha National Park as a buffer zone to the property, and encourages it to continue the implementation of the Management Plan which applies to the nationally designated buffer zone, possibly with the aim of formalizing a buffer zone, with the support of local people, in line with paragraph 164 of the Operational Guidelines; also encourages the World Heritage Center to organize an online meeting with the State Party and the management authority of the property to allow IUCN to provide further Guidance.**

- 2.11. Also note with appreciation the commitment to monitor climate change impacts on biodiversity and the local community, and further reiterates its request to develop a climate adaptation strategy and integrate this into the revised Management Plan.**

**Response:** The impact of climate change seems very severe and prominent in high mountain ecosystem and biodiversity. Sagarmatha National Park is also making the strategies and has taken some initiatives to monitor impacts of climate change on biodiversity and local community, such as developing climate smart infrastructure, preparing climate friendly adaptive measures for the Sagarmatha National Park and buffer zone user committee and community forest, conducting various types of awareness raising activities related to climate change.

- 2.12. Notes with significant concern the confirmation by the state Party that construction of a hydropower project has been initiated in the Chaurikharka and Lukla areas without prior notification in line with the paragraph 172 of the operational guidelines, and without providing clarity on whether the potential impacts of the projects on the OUV were assessed prior to approval in line with paragraph 118bis, and considering the potential impact of the projects on the OUV given its location in the vicinity of the property and within the nationally designated buffer zone.**

**Response:** Construction of hydropower projects are proposed in Chauri kharka and Lukla areas, which is in buffer zone of the property. At first stage permission for feasibility study was granted and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out subsequently. The EIA report of the proposed projects was approved by the Ministry of Forests and Environment. The EIA report has specified the measures of mitigating the negative impact on the property. SNP is very alert to monitor measures adopted by the proponent to mitigate the negative impacts

- 2.13 Urges the State Party to halt the aforementioned hydropower project until the impact on the OUV has been determined, and to provide details including the type of hydropower project and associated developments, a map of its location in relation to the property, and the Initial Environmental Examination Report including any assessment of the project's potential impact on the property's OUV, as soon as possible and no later than 1 December 2023, to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN;**

**Response:** Currently three micro hydro powers and one large size hydropower projects are proposed in Chaurikharka and Lukla areas, which is buffer zone of Sagarmatha National Park. Among them two micro hydropower projects are in feasibility study stage and one i.e. Ama Dablam hydropower project is in Environmental Study stage. DNPWC had submitted the Environmental Study report to UNESCO and UNESCO had provided consent by Ref:

CLT/WHC/APA/HG/RL/23/07 and Ref: CLT/WHC/APA/HG/RL/24/025 letter for this project. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report of the macro hydropower project was approved by the Ministry of Forests and Environment. EIA report has specified the measures of mitigating the negative impact on the property. SNP is very alert to monitor measures adopted by the proponent to mitigate the negative impacts

**2.14 Finally requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2024, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session**

**Response-**This report has been prepared based on the field observations, discussion with site manager and field staff, concerned line agencies, relevant experts and department staff and submitted by the given deadline.