

## Project Update: May 2014

### Background:

With the notification Singhalila as a National Park in 1993, tourism saw an exponential growth in the area. The fragile, biologically rich and aesthetically beautiful landscape of Singhalila National Park in Darjeeling (Figure 1), feature as an important high altitude protected area in India, being home to threatened mammal such as the Red panda (Figure 2), *Ailurus fulgens*, threatened birds, various species of Rhododendrons, medicinal plants and over all aesthetic value provided by views of the world's highest mountain (Figure 3).



Singhalila has been experiencing an average decadal growth of 50 percent in tourism flow in the last 20 years. Despite, tourism having high potential in yielding significant benefits in remote areas where traditional livelihoods come under threat, it has been found that tourism contributed little to poverty reduction in mountain areas, attributing this to policy failures, poor regulations, lack of human resource development, lack of supply facilities and

Figure 1 Beautiful landscape of Singhalila that attracts

management and leakages of tourism generated income from mountain areas (ICIMOD 2007). In face of such cases where tourism loses its purpose in sensitive habitats, it could yield negative socio-ecological effects. The present project for the first time seeks to further understand factors influencing tourism in the Singhalila.



Figure 2 Red panda in Singhalila



Figure 3 Red panda habitat and Mt. Kunchenjunga from Singhalila

Progress of the Project so far:

This 15 months Project started from 1st April 2014. The study has completed the first phase of assessing the current status of tourism in Singhalila. Some of the aspects covered was contribution of tourism to local economy, to the socio-ecological environment, review of the existing governance related to tourism, existing demand and supply along with an assessment of visitor experiences. This was done by conducting surveys in 350 households of 22 villages along the Singhalila Trek route (Figure 4). More than 1000 visitors were also surveyed (Figure 5). We have also completed focus group interviews in Neora Valley.



Figure 4. Tourists providing their feedback

Figure 5. Local community being interviewed

Preliminary analysis of the data and information has been completed. We found three important clusters of tourism destinations- Rimbick and adjoining areas, Dhotrey and Manebhanjyang and adjoining areas, based on their tourism related issues.

We therefore decided to hold meetings in these three clusters. On the 9 -10th May 2014, we had a consultative meeting in Rimbick and Dhotrey during which, the findings of our study were shared with the local communities and stakeholders (Figure 6 - 9). These meetings provided an awareness on the current status of tourism in the region to the stakeholders. The participation and involvement of the participants was very encouraging which provided bottom up feedback for the Strategy Development for Responsible Nature based Tourism in the region.



Figure 6. Participants of Consultation Meeting in Rimbick



Figure 7. Consultation in progress



Figure 8. Participants of Consultation Meeting in Dhotre



Figure 9. Meeting in progress

Our next meeting will be held in Manebhanjyang on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014. By end of June and first week of July 2014, we aim to be able to compile a Final Report on the study.

Photo credits: Tenzing Sherpa, Samuel Thomas, Sunita Pradhan, Roshan Pradhan, Brin Chettri.