



Project Concept

Saving Mount Everest 2011–2012

Restoring dignity to the Mountain:

**A sustainable waste management concept for Nepal's
*World Nature Heritage Sagarmatha National Park***

The project in brief

The Mount Everest region has become a major tourism destination. The enormous growth in visitors has brought great strains on the natural environment and produced mountains of rubbish – from base camp and up to the high death zone. Also in the Sherpa villages and lodges along the trekking routes no responsible waste disposal system is in place. The consequences are both an eyesore and a threat to the fragile environment.

The project outlined here is to start in spring 2011 with a large-scale clean-up mission of Everest and will finish at the end of 2012 with the implementation of a waste prevention and recycling concept that will be turned over to local hands, to ensure future sustainability.

Background

Mount Everest, the highest point on earth, 8,848 m above sea level, is locally known as Sagarmatha by Nepalese and Chomolungma – Mother Goddess of the Universe – by Tibetans. The magnificence of this matchless peak, an incomparable icon of nature's splendour, has awakened human longings and attracted mountaineers from all over the globe. Since the first successful summit expedition in 1953, the stream of visitors to the region has grown exponentially. In 1976, the Government of Nepal established Sagarmatha National Park to conserve its unique diversity of flora, fauna and culture. An exceptional area with dramatic mountains, glaciers and deep valleys, dominated by Mount Everest and a haven to rare and endangered species like the snow leopard and the red panda, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

Problem description

Since 1953, the number of visitors to the Everest region has soared: from about 1,400 in 1972/73; to 31,599 tourists accompanied by 60,000 trekking and expedition staff and porters in 2008; and 32,124 tourists with some 80,000 back-up staff in 2010. This has meant a tremendous boost to the local economy. On the other hand, the heavy pressures exerted from tourism have been taking their toll – increased ecological degradation from erosion, wastes and deforestation. In addition, mountaineering expeditions have produced severe litter disposal problems on Mount Everest itself as well as along the trail from Lukla to



Everest Base Camp. Of the many problems, pollution of water and the environment poses perhaps the severest threat to the health of the natural environment and of the people who depend on the snow-fed rivers for their livelihoods.

The waste which is spread out all over the mountain consists of thousands of oxygen cylinders, gas cartridges, old tents, ropes, carcasses as well as all sorts of human waste. And with the increase in visitors to the region have come enormous amounts of untreated waste in the villages along the trail from Lukla up to Everest Base Camp.

The increasing amount of waste produced and accumulating in the area poses a severe threat to the fragile biodiversity and ecosystem and even more so to the local people. The region lacks infrastructures to cope with the solid waste or pollution; there are no recycling or waste management facilities at all. In the meantime, large amounts of trash continue to despoil the entire Everest area. A further challenge is the lack of local experience and expertise in managing such vast amounts of rubbish in an environmentally sustainable way. Today, wastes are found dumped haphazardly – a serious threat to the vulnerable natural environment as well as for all the people living in the region. Moreover, if this pollution is allowed to continue, it may bring irreparable damage to the image of the Everest region and Nepal. Any severe drop in the numbers of tourists and climbers would have extremely harsh consequences for the local population, who have come to depend heavily on tourism, as well as for the already impoverished national economy.

Project justification

Fortunately, there is a growing concern and local understanding about the urgency to address the increasing environmental problems created by the hazardous waste. The importance of tourism has encouraged local communities, local government and indigenous groups and the local entrepreneurs to help protect the area. The Government of Nepal and local communities have been seriously seeking to introduce and implement a sustainable waste management system, for mountaineering expeditions to Mount Everest as well as for all the tourists trekking in the region. In addition, regular small-scale clean-up efforts, both local and international, have been undertaken.

Now, the Everest Summiteers of Nepal (ESN) and members of the international community have commendably joined hands with the Government of Nepal to address the gravest concern – *sustainable waste management* in the Everest Region. The challenging and ambitious multi-stakeholder project “Saving Mount Everest 2011–2012” aims to clean up the litter scattered on and around Nepal’s national treasure – sacred Mount Everest, an incomparable icon of nature’s splendour. To ensure long-term effectiveness, a sustainable mechanism will be developed for waste management in the National Park region.



The project also coincides with '**Nepal Tourism Year 2011**' – a joint tourism campaign of the Government and private sectors of Nepal. Nepal Tourism Year 2011 places the 'Saving Mount Everest' project in the limelight, not least since Mount Everest is the country's undisputed major tourist attraction. This time it will be in focus *not* as 'the world's highest rubbish dump' – but through an exemplary project to restore dignity to this very special mountain, in line with the deeply held beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism that recognize the integrity of the landscape with all life under the protection of the gods.

Project implementation partners

'Saving Mount Everest' will be implemented with full support from the Nepalese Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation and the Ministry of the Environment. The Government of Nepal will also be responsible for part of the funding, as will the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA). Technical and financial support will be forthcoming from the Austrian specialist company UNTHA, who have placed three rubbish shredders at our disposal, to be accompanied by technical training of local personnel. Also part of the team is the Research Centre of Waste and Resource Management of the Technical University of Vienna, and the Austrian Alpine Club. To get the rubbish down from the mountain itself – and here we are talking of some eight to ten tonnes – the Everest Summiteers Association will provide assistance in the form of experienced Nepali mountaineers, expedition leaders and high-altitude porters. The project will be implemented under the patronage of UNESCO; notable Everest summiteers like Sir Chris Bonnington, David Breashears and Wolfgang Nairz have agreed to support the project as goodwill ambassadors.

On the local level, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee will be an active partner, as will the Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone Management, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the Himalayan Rescue Association.

Financial support will come first and foremost from Swedish Postcode Lottery and from Hannes Snellman Attorneys Ltd. A further sponsorship involvement of Swatch and of EOG Association for Conservation is currently under negotiation.

EcoHimal, Society for Cooperation Alps-Himalaya, will coordinate this unique international large-scale project. EcoHimal, with more than 20 years of working experience in the Everest region, has brought electricity, sewage systems and clean drinking water to the region, as well as contributing to cultural development in the National Park by establishing the Khumbu Mountain Centre. Most important of all: the local Sherpa people know and trust EcoHimal, and are highly motivated to cooperate.



Project goals and objectives

The major goal of the project 'Saving Mount Everest' is to liberate Mount Everest and its surroundings from garbage by the year 2012.

Specific objectives of the project are:

- to collect and remove approximately eight to ten tons of refuse from Mount Everest and its trekking trails in the spring of 2011.
- to develop a sustainable mechanism for responsible waste management in the region
- to support the Government of Nepal in formulating, implementing and monitoring policies for responsible solid waste management in the Everest region.
- to make this an exemplary project for waste management systems, which can then be replicated across other mountain regions.

Project activities

To achieve the project goals and objectives, the following activities will be carried out:

- A clean-up expedition on Mount Everest will be conducted in spring 2011, mobilizing approximately 100 mountaineers and porters to remove some eight to ten tons of refuse from the mountain and its trekking trails.
- This refuse will be sorted and handled responsibly, in accordance with international standards.
- Wastes that cannot be recycled or dealt with locally will be transported to Kathmandu for final treatment. Technical support will be provided by the Solid Waste Management and Resource Mobilization Unit of the Ministry of Local Development of the Government of Nepal.
- Local refuse management and recycling facilities will be installed along the trekking routes from Lukla to Everest Base Camp.
- Awareness-raising programmes and capacity development training in modern waste management and recycling techniques will be conducted for local Sherpa communities, to enhance their knowledge and capacity to take over responsibility for running these facilities.
- More complicated and locally non-recyclable products (like certain metals, plastics, etc.) will be sent on to Kathmandu for sale to specialized recycling companies.
- The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation on behalf of the Government of Nepal has established the 'Himalaya Environment Conservation; Monitoring and Management Committee' comprising concerned government representatives, local stakeholders and relevant national associations. This committee will formulate a new set of regulations on the Code of Conduct for all future trekking and climbing groups, to ensure environmentally sustainable waste-management systems for the entire



region. New environmental regulations for expeditions as well as for trekking groups to the Everest region will be introduced by autumn 2011.

- EcoHimal, ESA, NMA, NTB and the concerned authorities will support the Government of Nepal in formulating, implementing and monitoring policies for responsible solid waste management in the region.
- The entire project process will be documented in various forms and will be shared with the donor communities and related stakeholders. Project achievements in learning and procedures will be made available to like-minded organizations and authorities, for replication in other mountain regions, in Nepal and around the world.
- Public information and media campaigns will be organized in Nepal and abroad, to raise the profile of the project and disseminate project information so as to garner extended support from wider audiences and stakeholders. These public information and media campaigns will include organizing and attending various press conferences (the first in Stockholm, Sweden, 28 January 2011); interacting with local, national and international media; and developing and disseminating information materials about the project.

Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of the project 'Saving Mount Everest' will be the local communities, for various reasons:

- Their risk to health hazards from the solid wastes scattered in the region will be reduced and finally eliminated.
- They will be trained in the use and maintenance of the waste management and recycling facilities installed in the region.
- Moreover, the local communities will have employment and income-generation opportunities from the initiative.

The secondary beneficiaries will be visitors to come to the region for trekking and/or mountaineering.

Finally, the project will enhance the promotion of responsible tourism in the region, thereby benefiting the entire nation.

Sustainability

The Government of Nepal is deeply committed to the project 'Saving Mount Everest 2011-2012'. To ensure sustainability, the government is currently involved in preparing new environmental regulations for climbing expeditions as well as for trekking groups to the Everest region, to be introduced during 2011. Furthermore, the government has pledged to safeguard the enforcement of the new environmental regulations for Everest region.



Central to the project is a participatory approach, with the local institutions and communities actively involved in all stages. To ensure ownership, the project will be jointly implemented with active participation of local communities and local institution. Responsible for coordination is EcoHimal, Society for Cooperation Alps-Himalaya, which has over two decades of experience of working closely together with the Sherpa communities of the Everest region.

The project will enhance awareness and develop the capacities of local communities and institutions to operate the installed waste management and recycling facilities. This will enable local villagers to take over responsibility for running these facilities, thereby establishing local incentives to manage the waste generated in the region, as well as creating local work and revenue opportunities. The installed waste management system will be financed partly through fee collection from tourists, as set out in the new legislation to be enforced in 2011.

Estimated budget

Total project costs have been estimated at approximately 680 000 Euro. Approximately 50% of the total budget can be covered by already pledged funds. Further sponsors and financial partners are required to implement the project full scale and to guarantee its future sustainability.

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