



The Glacier Trust

Patron: Sir Chris Bonington, CVO, CBE, DL

Enabling Himalayan communities to adapt to climate change

Many of us will have heard about the inaccurate reporting of the melting rates of the Himalayan glaciers. Even so, glaciers are melting at an alarming rate. There is now substantial evidence to suggest that the atmosphere in Himalayas is warming several times faster than at sea level. This has important consequences for Nepal's 15 million subsistence based mountain farmers.

In recent years, climate change has brought a high degree of uncertainty to what had been relatively stable weather patterns. For example, in both 2009 and 2010 much of Nepal suffered ten month droughts followed by intense monsoons compressed from over three months into just two. If you haven't been away from Nepal's tourist routes recently, it is difficult to imagine quite how rapidly the environment is changing. As to the future, even the most conservative estimates predict that temperatures will continue to increase in the foreseeable future at a rate unknown in mankind's history. This has the potential to cause widespread starvation if the farming communities do not have the skills to adapt.

Climate change is not understood by the mountain communities who live by the discipline of the seasons. Its adverse consequences are generally seen as divine retribution. Higher temperatures cause droughts,



floods and landsliding. One of the biggest worries is that crop failure is already causing malnutrition, which can impair children's development permanently. Within Nepal's diverse topography climate change has a range of different effects. This means there is no 'one answer' to the problems, which can vary considerably even within a relatively small area.

The Glacier Trust was founded in 2008 by art dealer Robin Garton in association with Southampton University and is committed to using education to prevent an agricultural disaster on a Himalayan scale. The Trust works through locally based Nepali organisations, providing education and expertise by which local communities can understand why their environment is changing so rapidly. Its programmes include water management, forest conservation and higher education.

*Children of the Middle Mountains.
Their future will depend on their ability to
understand and to adapt to climate change.*

We have learnt through these programmes that, with the benefit of education, local communities are the best people to decide how to adapt to their changing world. When decision making is shared, and the community motivated, village development committees have an impressive ability to implement change.



Their next homework is finding out just how much things have changed over the last few years.

We are therefore now focusing on a locally based self-help climate change adaptation programme, developed by one of our trustees in Nepal. This programme is simple and uses schools to collect information from the children's parents and grandparents about the changes to farming and the environment over their lifetimes, and compare it with what has been happening more recently. Examples might include increased livestock pests from warmer winters or that more erratic snowfall means that melt water can no longer be relied on for irrigation. Unseasonal heavy rainfall events might be destroying crop seedlings or causing terraced slope failure.

These findings are collated and presented to the community in the context of informed discussion about the causes and probable continuing effects of climate change. Now, with better understanding, the community can begin to decide upon the measures it needs to take to improve its resilience. Examples might include waste water storage, reducing erosion by tree planting, changes in soil management, contour planting, using different crops or livestock or introducing a forest conservation programme.

The strength of this programme lies in its community based 'bottom up' approach. With the guidance of trained experts, communities can be empowered to come up with their own solutions rather than being told what to do by outsiders. The programmes are supervised by international organisations such as Helvetas and Practical Action. This adds very little to the cost but experience shows that it will improve the quality of training, accountability and assessment. But most important it ensures the follow up needed to sustain the programmes and to deal with the unexpected.

In its three year life, the Trust has raised over £85,000 for its projects and education programme almost entirely from private donations and much of it from colleagues and clients in the fine art world. We have invested £8,500 in the first year of this programme and are now trying to raise £35,000 for each of next two years to promote it in different parts of Nepal. This meets the costs of teacher training, educational material and travel. The target is ambitious but the project is flexible so nothing is ever wasted. Our aim is to reduce malnutrition and potential starvation and bring long term benefits. No costs are deducted. **100%** of your donation will go to the project.



Informed discussion: village leaders considering possible courses of action.

For further details, please visit our website: www.theglaciertrust.org

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