

# Advancing biodiversity conservation and community development in Qinghai Province, China

By Marc Foggin

The UNDP/GEF Qinghai Biodiversity Conservation Project was successfully launched by the Qinghai Forestry Department in January 2013 with support and co-financing from the provincial government. Most of the province is situated over 4000 m above sea level – including the Qilian, Kunlun, Tanggula and other high mountain ranges. A spectacular suite of globally endangered wildlife is still present in these highlands, including Tibetan antelope, wild yak, white lipped deer, argali, snow leopard, black necked crane, saker falcon, etc.

Traditionally, nomadic pastoralists grazed yak and sheep on these vast lands following their customary land tenure and livestock management practices, but presently many local herders are facing for the first time new aspects of globalization such as an increasing dependence on a cash economy, integration with national development



Photo: J. Marc Foggin

programmes and policies, and the need to share local resources with a host of stakeholders previously unknown in the region.

Through the development of co-management approaches, the project seeks to further refine collaborative conservation trials in the source areas of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, then to expand (scale-up) these approaches

to the regional level. With protected areas (PAs) already covering one-third of the province (thereby providing formal protection to 251,665 km<sup>2</sup> of land), it is important now to strengthen the PA system by mainstreaming biodiversity concerns into multiple government sectors, by developing a comprehensive training programme for future PA staff and other conservation partners, and by developing practical and context-specific management plans for selected, ecologically sensitive areas based on principles of genuine collaboration with communities and the sustainable utilization of natural resources.

Beyond the three major project components outlined above, this 5-year initiative also aims to integrate climate change scenarios into a revised PA system plan and to develop community-beneficial ecotourism and other potential sources of revenue to help both the provincial PA system and local co-management partners attain greater



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financial sustainability. Lessons learned elsewhere in China and globally, particularly in mountain areas, will help to guide the project. Likewise, the project may contribute to the global experience of collaborative conservation.

From a regional development planning perspective, the establishment and/or refining of a PA system will help mitigate some of the impacts of climate change by reducing the likelihood of species loss due to their distributional shifts (in response to climatic change) leading them out of current protection zones. This can be done by increasing the level of connectivity between PAs through rearranging existing PA boundaries or encouraging different livelihood options or forms of resource use within PAs and their internal management zones. It will be equally important to raise awareness of environmental issues both in and outside nature reserves, in order to promote landscape and ecosystem level conservation. Another way to minimize the impact of climate change on local communities is to decrease their dependence on livestock, particularly through a diversification of local herders' sources of income. It is expected that such diversification will lead to enhanced resilience in both local economies (with decreased risk) and ecosystems (with decreased grazing pressures). Increasing desiccation of the land and loss of permafrost, now clearly observed in the region, necessitate such approaches.

One of the financing options that is available for PAs and local communities, which is being considered by the project, is the development of community ecotourism. Based on a marketing of biodiversity as well as cultural landscapes, it is critical that such tourism include not only nature-based experiences but also contributions to conservation action and clear benefits to community members. Access to the benefits arising from the use of biodiversity – such as through ecotourism – should be shared equitably amongst stakeholders, particularly with local partners whose livelihoods are most directly connected to the land. In developing local governance



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and entrepreneurial skills for community tourism, a variety of capacities will be developed to effectively manage potential future eco-compensation funds, thereby enhancing broad partnerships and increasing the effective workforce for conservation in the country.

Input from a wide range of national and international specialists is welcome, particularly with submission of practical 'lessons learned' and 'key recommendations' from disciplines such as environmental planning, development studies, policy analysis and sociology.



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For more information about the GEF strategy, visit:

[www.thegef.org/gef/whatisgef](http://www.thegef.org/gef/whatisgef).

More information about the project itself can be found on the UNDP in China website at:

<http://tinyurl.com/k4pzd9r>.