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Authors: Anand, Anupam, Chandan, Pankaj, and Singh, Ram Babu

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Homestays at Korzok: Supplementing Rural Livelihoods and Supporting Green Tourism in the Indian Himalayas

Anupam Anand^{1*}, Pankaj Chandan², and Ram Babu Singh³

* Corresponding author: anupam.anand@gmail.com

¹ Department of Geographical Sciences, University of Maryland, 2181 Samuel J. LeFrak Hall, College Park, MD 20742, USA

² High Altitude Wetlands Conservation Programme, World Wide Fund for Nature India, 172 B Lodhi Estate, New Delhi-110003, India

³ Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi-110007, India

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Ladakh presents some unique challenges for development and nature conservation initiatives. Since opening to tourism in 1974, its unique landscapes, biodiversity, and culture have attracted adventure-seeking tourists from all over the

world. Tourism, especially in the past few decades, has developed very rapidly, bringing many economic and social changes with adverse environmental impacts. By recognizing the threats posed by unplanned tourism, a number of organizations and institutions working in the area felt the urgency to initiate sustainable community-based tourism projects that would protect the local wildlife and natural

resources and offer alternative livelihood opportunities to the local population. The homestay model in Ladakh is designed on the principle of equitable access and hence is available for adoption by households across economic classes. This article uses the particular case of Korzok homestays, implemented by the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF-India) near the Ramsar wetland Tsomoriri, to illustrate how community development needs can be integrated with conservation goals. It elaborates on the evolution of the initiative, some early impacts, and how the initiative might evolve in the future. A general list of recommendations is also presented.

Keywords: Green economy; ecotourism; conservation; rural livelihoods; homestays; development; high-altitude wetlands; climate change; Ladakh.

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Introduction

Development of responsible tourism, especially in the fragile high-altitude Himalayan region, is fraught with significant challenges. These challenges include operational and infrastructural barriers as well as issues related to adverse impacts on the local environments. However, tourism is also one of the few available alternative pathways that can create new jobs and reduce poverty for the communities in the remote and resource-scarce region of Ladakh. By providing supplementary income to the rural communities, ecotourism can also prevent land abandonment and subsequent rural-urban migration.

People in the Ladakh Himalaya led a secluded and subsistence form of life until 1974. Outsiders were not allowed to enter the region before then. The Srinagar-Leh road came into existence in 1960s (Rizvi 1998). Although Ladakh opened to tourism only recently, the sector is rapidly advancing on an unsustainable course. Of the various conservation and development organizations that work in the area, the Snow Leopard Conservancy pioneered the homestay model in Ladakh and demonstrated a need to integrate development and conservation goals (Jackson and Wangchuk 2004). This homestay model

is now being adopted by various agencies that are working in the region.

With growing global awareness and initiatives to preserve the environment, in tourism, conservation, and rural development sectors, community-based ecotourism is being promoted as a low-impact, environmentally sensitive way to travel (Honey 1999; Kiss 2004; Jones 2005; Nelson 2007). In recognizing the threats posed by unplanned tourism, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India) felt the need to integrate a community-based ecotourism project in Korzok that would protect Lake Tsomoriri and offer supplementary income-generating opportunities to the Changpa population. Situated at about 4595 m, Korzok (Box 1) is a small picturesque village (Figure 1) on the northwestern shores of Lake Tsomoriri, in the Rukchen Valley of Leh district in Ladakh, India. The lake, situated at 4586 m and 140 km² in area, is designated as a wetland of international importance or Ramsar site (Gujja et al 2003). Significant numbers of endemic and migratory species found in the area, including the vulnerable black-necked crane, *Grus nigricollis* (BirdLife International 2009), are protected by the Wildlife Protection Act of India (1972). Korzok's resources, like the rest of the Changthang plateau, are

BOX 1: Location and characteristics of Korzok

- Location: 32°58'N and 78°15'E; altitude: 4595 masl.
- The temperature ranges from 30°C in summer to -40°C in winter. Absence of frost-free season results in formation of extensive permafrost.
- The nearest urban center is Leh, 215 km away.
- Connectivity by a single-track road, which has limited accessibility during winter.
- Population: 179 households; 22 households live in permanent structures but they also migrate seasonally; the rest of the households live in tents called Rebos.
- One primary health center at the village.
- No school; there used to be one primary school, but now all students have been shifted to a centralized school in the Puga Valley.
- No electricity or running water; recently the village was provided with a diesel generator by the local hill council, which is used to provide electricity to the local villagers for 4 hours in the evening.
- Seventy percent practice subsistence agriculture during a short cultivation season and are nomadic pastoralists.
- Barley, wheat, and peas are grown mainly for fodder.
- This village is one of the very few highest permanent settlements and one of the very few such places in the world where agriculture is practiced.

scarce, and the terrain is physically challenging, with a harsh and fragile environment, but it is endowed with unique and beautiful landscapes, unique biodiversity, trekking routes, and cultural assets, which are all major tourist attractions. It has been pointed out that locally based monitoring and enforcement of resources use generates strong ownership and positive conservation outcomes (Chhatre and Agrawal 2008). Given the long tradition of democratic decision-making and common resource use practices among the Changpas, the initiative had to be embedded in the local cultural context in order to generate benefits for the inhabitants and the surrounding environment at the same time.

The central development issue in Korzok was to create conditions for an enabling environment that would reconcile the needs of generating alternate livelihood opportunities and high-altitude wetland conservation to support the local economy and reduce poverty through a socially inclusive green tourism project. The main development issue, the evolution of the initiative, and some of the early impacts of the project constitute the focus of the present article. The case of Korzok is unique

FIGURE 1 Korzok Village with Lake Tsomoriri and the designated tourist camps in the background. (Photo by Anupam Anand)



due to the site and situation, demography, and the history of the region. Hence, the early impacts of the project and the few general recommendations gleaned from it are not meant to be prescriptive in nature but could serve as an aggregated checklist for similar small-scale initiatives.

The Korzok homestay initiative

WWF-India launched a project in 1999 to “develop a strategy and plan for conservation” of high-altitude wetlands in the Indian Himalaya. Conservation of high-altitude wetlands is of prime importance in view of their role as water reservoirs, as a source of ecosystem goods and services, and in terms of adaptation to climate change (Chatterjee et al 2010). Tourism offered the potential for reducing poverty in Korzok, but it also was creating immense threats to the local environment and biodiversity in the absence of any regulatory framework. Apart from meager cash income from collecting camping fees from the tourists or hiring out animals for trekking purposes, tourism neither provided economic incentives to the Changpas nor any motivation for the Changpas to get involved in activities for conserving the wetlands. The villagers nonetheless felt the adverse impacts of unplanned and unregulated tourism activities beginning to put pressure on their pasturelands because of the presence of pack animals such as horses, donkeys, and mules. Tourist vehicles were causing noise and water pollution, and camping on surrounding grasslands was disturbing the pastures as well as the breeding sites of various birds. Campers were leaving behind nonbio-degradable wastes on the virgin land. The absence of designated camping grounds and proper accommodations led tourists to camp irresponsibly.

Economic incentives for conservation are particularly essential in isolated areas because inaccessibility and the lack of strong authority makes monitoring and regulation difficult (Wunder 2000). Tourism clearly provided additional income-generating opportunities, but the principal development challenge was reconciling the creation of alternate livelihood paths for the Changpas and conservation of Lake Tsomoriri. Responsible and sustainable tourism or ecotourism is widely viewed as an ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable alternative to traditional tourism activities that were not sensitive to local culture and environment (Hvenegaard 1994). WWF-India with its long-standing experience in the region needed the support of the Changpas to conserve the high-altitude wetland, and the resident population needed the support of WWF-India to increase their stake in the tourism industry.

Initial consultations by the WWF-India staff with community leaders and surveys conducted in all 23 permanently settled households in July 2005 revealed the interest of the villagers in homestays. Changpa societies follow a complex system of customary tradition of

reciprocities, rules, and regulations. Before independence, village headman or *goba* wielded considerable social and financial power, but, over the years, the institution of *goba* or headman has weakened. Instead of entrusting one person with the responsibilities of representing the village, the position is passed on at short intervals to the next family under a roster system. The absence of a distinctive class hierarchy among the Changpas in Korzok and a revolving locus of authority within the village helped avoid elite capture at the beginning of the project.

The cultural disposition of the Ladakhi people to host visitors and the convenience of running a homestay without major investments generated interest in the initiative. However, before instituting a full-fledged sustainable community-based tourism project, Participatory Rural Appraisal exercises and visitor surveys were conducted to explore the technical and economic dimensions of the planned activity. The tourism surveys, conducted from 2004 to 2006, during the peak tourist season of July–September, helped to clarify attitudes concerning the visitors’ experience and to assess the homestay potential, accommodation preferences, and budget considerations. Both visitor surveys interviewed tourist groups: 450 in 2004 and approximately 300 in 2006, each group comprising 3 to 25 members. The survey data were analyzed, and the results were used internally by WWF-India to inform subsequent project design. The initial groundwork also helped clarify tourists’ perception of the ecotourism potential at Korzok, the impact of tourism-related activities on the wetland ecosystem, and the threats to the ecosystem and possible conservation measures. The tourist surveys showed that more than 60% of the tourists expressed interest in the homestay initiative and believed that it would encourage responsible tourism in the area and minimize adverse impacts on the surrounding environment.

The indigenous Changpas who live in this challenging cold desert environment are pastoralists, with livelihoods deeply embedded in nature. They practice subsistence agriculture on marginal lands, and raising “pashmina goats” or *Changra* goats has been a mainstay for more than 4 centuries (Ahmed 2004). Yet, with the rapid pace of development and environmental changes, the traditionally nomadic Changpas are struggling for work and access to resources. A territorial dispute between India and Pakistan has resulted in a large and lasting military presence that has catalyzed change from the traditional subsistence economy and trade to dependence upon a market economy and subsidized goods imported by the central government (Goodall 2004). The Changpas, like other indigenous populations in the region, are compelled to choose a sedentary lifestyle (Chaudhuri 2000; Goodall 2004) and are seeking alternative forms of employment to supplement their incomes, although they do not necessarily possess the skills or required training

FIGURE 2 Local women receiving training in a homestay at Korzok. (Photo by Pankaj Chandan)



to make these transitions. Understanding the gap in required skills, WWF-India facilitated a series of capacity-building exercises (Figure 2) for the Changpa community with homestay facilities. The resource persons were fellow Ladakhis who had experience with running successful homestays near the Hemis National Park. The capacity-building exercise included hands-on experience with a wide range of subjects such as hygiene, waste segregation, developing marketing strategies, handling finance, and drawing up and finalizing guidelines for tourists. Selected youths from the village were trained as wildlife guides, and financial assistance was provided to the women's self-help group to start a parachute café in the village. The training programs stressed the close and clear link between ecological conservation of the area and the livelihood sustenance of the villagers.

Ten permanent dwellings were initially selected for homestays by the Tsomoriri Conservation Committee, based on the ability of households to assign at least one room for lodging throughout the year (Box 2; Figure 3). The Tsomoriri Conservation Committee was the initial management committee of a few villagers, monks from the monastery, and the WWF project officer. This committee later evolved to form the Tsomoriri Conservation Trust. Once a house is approved for homestay by the

committee, the family is provided with furnishings and assistance in setting up the room for guests.

The unique concept of local conservation trusts gives regulatory and financial power to local actors for maintaining conservation measures (Gujja 2007). These representative decision-making bodies are also more accountable and responsive to local needs in terms of resource management and delivery of tourism-related services. The initial working committee of villagers was legally registered as the Tsomoriri Conservation Trust (TCT) in 2002.

The Tsomoriri Conservation Trust

The TCT's conversion to a trust in 2002 gave it more institutional power. Its members are the Changpas of the village and lamas of the 400-year-old Korzok monastery. As per the constitution of the Trust, any resident of Changthang can become a member of its General Body by paying a nominal admission and membership fee as long as the member adheres to the code of conduct of the TCT. The lamas or the Buddhist monks are much respected and have authority in Ladakhi society. The spiritual leader and head lama of the monastery is the chairman of the TCT. The general body members of the trust meet every month and the meetings are presided over by the chairman or

BOX 2: The homestays

Homestays in Korzok have been named after various faunal species found around the lake, such as golden eagle, shelduck, black-necked crane, redshank, etc. Starting with 10 in 2000, Korzok now has 15 homestays. Fees have been fixed by the TCT and are strictly adhered to by the owners; room charges are INR 800 (US\$ 16.40) per person and INR 150 (US\$ 3.10) for 3 meals a day, which consist of traditional Ladakhi food such as noodle soup *thup-ka* and roasted barley or *yos* and salty butter tea, rice with lentils, and vegetables. Boiled spring water is available for drinking. Posters are displayed in each homestay listing the key dos and don'ts for the tourists. One room with bedding and basic furnishings is provided.

deputy chairman of the TCT. The board of trustees meets every 6 months. WWF or any government officials are not present during the trust meetings. TCT instead has a provision for an advisory committee that consists of government officials, academicians, and elected officials whom the TCT may approach for consultation. The decisions are taken through consensus. Some of the aims and responsibilities of the TCT are the following:

1. A regulatory and supervisory body for the Ladakh homestay initiatives. It manages the flow of tourists to the area.
2. Conservation and monitoring of the high-altitude lake ecosystem. It regulates the camping and parking areas around the lake.
3. Providing support to the ecotourism initiatives by providing tourist information facilities.
4. Support to traditional industries, for example, shawl making.
5. The management of tourists in homestays is on a rotational basis and is regulated by the TCT. This ensures equal distribution of money to all the homestays. For this management the trust charges 10% of the income of each homestay, which becomes income of the TCT.
6. The income generated by the TCT is spent on the day-to-day activities of the TCT, for managing the camping sites and for garbage cleaning. Some income is spent on repair work in the village and also for restoration and repair of cultural features, such as *stupas* and *manay* (prayer) walls, etc.

FIGURE 3 Typical homestays named after local birds. (Photo by Anupam Anand)



Any violation of the rules warrants a hearing by the TCT. The TCT decides on the penalty, which might be monetary or other disciplinary action. One particular homestay owner converted the traditional dry toilet system into a European style system and thereby violated the homestay guidelines of adhering to environmentally friendly practices. On this occasion, the TCT decided not to allow the homestay to operate any further.

Green tourism in practice: a path to sustainable development

The operating framework of the Korzok homestay project is a green initiative based on equity, accountability and cooperation, and participation, a few of the guiding principles for a Green Economy (Stoddart et al 2011). The Changpa community has ownership of its natural resources and runs various community-based tourism activities. The project demonstrates its sustainability and green approach through the following practices:

(1) *Use of green, efficient, and renewable energy sources:* Excluding the tourism-related transport to Korzok, the onsite energy usage is very low. The homestays are not luxuriously designed but provide the necessities required for a comfortable stay and hence do not consume huge amounts of energy as do hotels. The houses are based on traditional designs constructed from rammed earth, which keep the interiors warm without the need for additional heating by burning fossil fuels or wood. Solar panels provide electricity for heating and lighting.

(2) *Efficient water consumption and usage:* The homestays use a minimum of water because there is no need for landscape maintenance or wellness facilities. Water for drinking and washing is sourced from nearby springs and boiled by using solar energy, which lessens the pressure on fuelwood and also discourages the use of bottled water.

(3) *Efficient waste management:* The homestays have traditional toilet systems. The traditional dry closet toilet system has evolved as a means of adaptation to the harsh environment. It is a practical solution for scarce water and freezing temperatures. Cold dry air aids in rapid decomposition of waste matter, which is used as manure in the agricultural fields.

(4) *Conservation of fragile ecosystem and biodiversity:* No tourism activities such as camping or hiking are allowed in the key feeding and breeding areas of the black-necked crane and bar-headed goose. Restrictions that prohibit camping in the nearby grasslands (Figure 4) have provided benefits both to the nomadic community by preserving pasture grounds and by maintaining the health of critical wildlife habitats. Currently, the preventive measures of strictly enforcing zero tourism activities in the pasture and breeding grounds have restored the health of these pasture lands. Another long-term goal is to

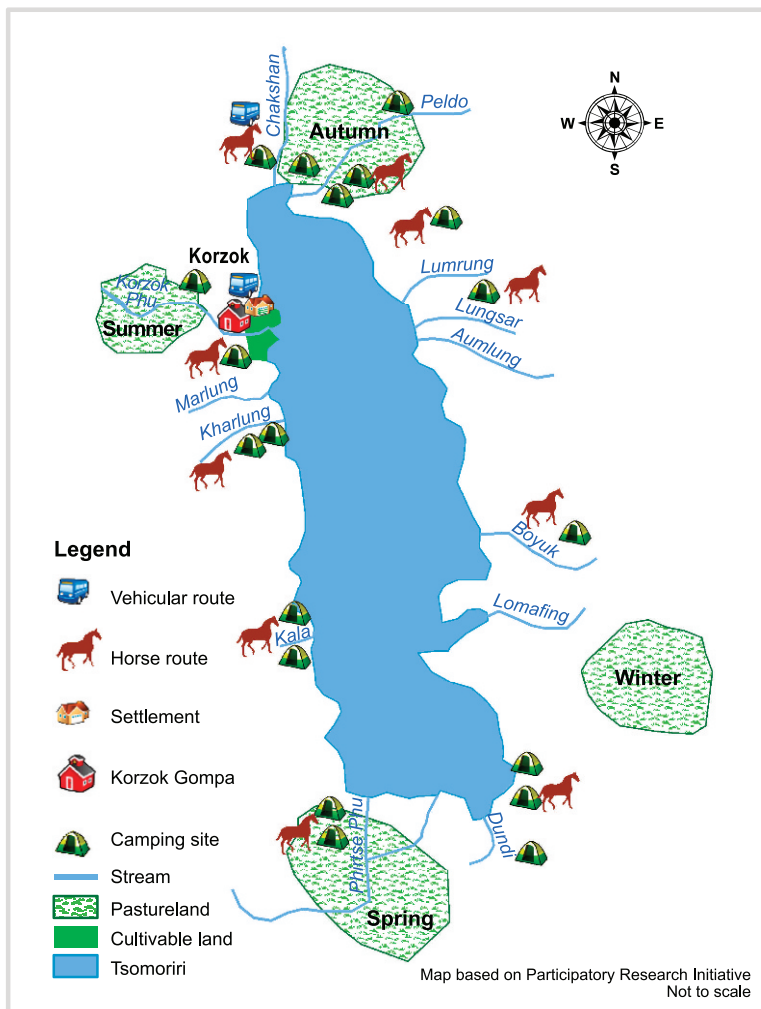
gradually reduce the dependency of Changpas on livestock, which is a major source of income, through the sale of *Pashmina* wool. With the adoption by the Changpas of a sedentary lifestyle in many parts of Changthang (Namgail et al 2007), which has led to population growth in the area, there is an urgent need to establish a sustainable alternate livelihood system so that the numbers of livestock upon which the population depend do not increase with the increase in population. To reduce the impact of pack animals on pasture lands, some areas have been designated for grazing.

(5) *Effective management of cultural heritage, traditional values, and promotion of intercultural understanding:* The homestays promote cultural sensitivity. Both the host and the visitors have to be aware of each other's cultural practices. Visitors can take part in various Ladakhi festivals, get first-hand experience of people's lifestyles, enjoy traditional cuisine, and gain knowledge of the material and spiritual culture of Ladakh.

(6) *Improving livelihoods and poverty reduction:* On average, during the tourist season (June to September), the occupancy rate for these homestays is 80%. Presently, each homestay charges INR 800 (US\$ 16.40) per room, and the present camping fee is INR 50 (US\$ 1) per tent. Many village youths have found jobs as porters, cooks, and guides for the tourists who trek in the area.

In Korzok, the main source of livelihood is livestock rearing and income from *pashmina*. It is difficult to calculate the exact income from selling wool, because the market demand fluctuates greatly (Ahmed 2004). The average yearly income from *pashmina* can range between INR 16,000 (US\$ 320) and INR 24,000 (US\$ 480), which is dependent on flock size, production, etc. A part of the income is lost to bribing government officials if they sell through the government-established system and to middlemen if they adopt the traditional system (Ahmed 2004). Through the homestays, each family earns between INR 35,000 (\$700) and INR 60,000 (\$1200) during the summer months, and the income stays within the household. The success of this integrated sustainable tourism and conservation enterprise in Korzok attracted major funding of INR 1.5 crores (\$307,629) from the government of India in 2009 to develop infrastructure and make the village a model village in the Ladakh region. Although economic access to consumer goods is not an indicator of livelihood success, households that participate in the homestay initiative now have the capacity to buy material assets such as televisions, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and vehicles for transportation, things that were not common in 1999. These minor changes through the ecotourism initiative at least open up new spaces for people to explore alternatives when only a few are present, such as livestock rearing and pack animals for tour operators.

FIGURE 4 Resource map of Korzok. (Map by Anupam Anand)



To quote Sonam Gyaltsen, who has been running the black-necked crane homestay for the past 7 years and who supports a family of 8 persons, “After I started the business of running a homestay, the condition of my family has improved and now we are living a much better life.”

(7) *Supporting women’s income:* The homestays are mostly run by women. Operating the homestays causes no interference with other household chores, such as weaving, milking the goats and yaks, cooking, cleaning, or grinding barley. The tourists eat at fixed times, which are explained to the tourists upon their arrival. Overall, all the activities are woven into their regular activities so they continue playing their traditional roles of taking care of children and managing the homefront. Mrs Tsering, who runs the Magpie Homestay, said “My husband died last year and now the income from the homestay is the only source of livelihood for me.” Her husband died in 2010 and depended on *pashmina* trade for income. She now supports a family of four.

(8) *Shared learning and diffusion of ideas:* The Changpas share their knowledge about their culture and environment with the tourists and visitors. Many non-governmental organizations and schools in Ladakh bring students and other community members to see the wildlife of the area and to stay in these homestays to experience the lifestyle lived by the Changpas. Research institutions in Jammu and Kashmir and other community-based organizations, such as farmers’ cooperatives, also organize meetings at Korzok, which provides the homestay owners with an opportunity to share their experiences through the platforms provided by other organizations.

At present, apart from the 15 homestays in Korzok, there are 2 guesthouses, 21 tented accommodations, and 1 resort. These facilities, although not designed on sustainability principles, are required to adhere to camping and trekking regulations. They have accountability relationships with the TCT and cannot flaunt environmental regulations.

BOX 3: The Changpas are already touching hearts...

"Thank you for hospitality and good caretaking. We hope very much that the excellent Korzok homestay system will help local people as well as conserve the wonderful flora and fauna of Tsomoriri. You live in a very special place."

Wendy and Davis Durlime, Switzerland

"To our dear host! Thank you so much for our wonderful stay. The room was nice and your hospitality exceptional. Thank you also for the fantastic food and for giving us the feeling of being welcome as part of the family. Exactly how one would expect homestay to be. One night was far too little. Best of luck for the future."

Frances Daniel

"Julley! Thank you for your kindness, wonderful food and constant attention. Good luck with home-stay. I hope that earning more money will not create problems and tension for you. Your values are very precious. We in the West have so much to learn from you and your sense of hospitality. Namaste!"

Alescne, Switzerland

"To the greatest family possible. We cannot thank you enough for your generosity and warmth for the last two nights. You make the best curd in the world. We hope that you will continue to show visitors the traditional way of life, including the food. We wish you all the best for the future and hope that if we return to this beautiful lake one day we can repay your kindness. Never change, stay strong and good luck with all our love."

Laura Page and So Patterson, England

"It was lovely to stay at this beautiful place with a local family. We tasted some really good Ladakhi food."

Laura & Thomas, Czech Republic

Apart from regulatory measures enforced by the TCT, WWF-India systematically monitors the progress of the project through its field office situated at Korzok. The field staff interacts with the villagers on a daily basis and reports to the project leader about the on-ground activities. The field office mostly works in cooperation with the TCT to ensure that minor conflicts are amicably mediated by community leaders. The TCT as a representative body of the community also works in cooperation with the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Department. Although initial phases of the project required many external inputs from WWF-India, now that the various actors and institutions involved in the project are aware of their power and accountability relations with each other, the result has been an internal mechanism that helps to achieve the project outcomes.

Early impacts

Multiple stakeholder interests; issues of identity and representation; and the interrelationships between various actors, institutions, and policies influence the outcomes of community-based conservation (Belsky 1999). Community-based enterprise strategies do not necessarily lead to conservation and are contingent upon context (Goodwin 1996; Salafsky et al 2001). Although perfect examples of Integrated Conservation and Development Projects are difficult to find, the Korzok initiative offers a good case, because the Changpas have some measure of control over their natural and cultural resources, and they are on a path to share the benefits of tourism equitably. The Korzok homestay initiative has shown some initial success in addressing local livelihood needs through biodiversity conservation in the area by bringing environmental, economic, and livelihood benefits to the people. The homestays also have

supplemented women's income in Korzok households. Women are mainly engaged in running these facilities because this allows them to play their traditional role as primary caregivers to children and the elderly (Belsky 1999). This case study presents a practical example that tourism, if integrated in the local context, can also help in the conservation of a particular ecosystem and can be used to raise the economic standard of poor and marginalized communities. The homestays have been a positive experience for many tourists (Box 3; Figure 5). Concrete examples in the forestry sector have shown that shifting control of forest resources to the community level reduces costs and enhances management effectiveness (Gibson 2001; Brown et al 2002). Ensuring participation and representation of the community in tourism has helped them secure rights, in this case, through the assistance of a nongovernmental organization and the state government; the benefits of tourism were not monopolized by affluent outside actors. Entrusting responsibilities to the villagers of Korzok for running the enterprise has allowed for a more equitable, steady, and sustainable flow of monetary benefits. Homogeneity in cultural background at Korzok has minimized conflicts and issues that could arise from identity politics and that could have hampered the progress of the homestay initiative. The institutional choice of WWF-India to work with traditional authorities has enhanced representation of local interests.

The adoption of homestays is limited to households that have extra space and a permanent dwelling in the village, so not everybody in the village benefits equally. The absence of any mechanism that regulates the investment of income from ecotourism activities in nongreen tourism activities may create problems in the future. Increased income has undoubtedly given the Changpas more choices about where to invest and what to

FIGURE 5 Guests enjoying traditional butter tea at a homestay. (Photo by Pankaj Chandan)



spend on. Although some have invested in their children's education, others have purchased consumer goods. The Changpa households that live in tents in and around the Korzok settlement are also not benefitting economically from the homestay initiative, unlike their counterparts who live in permanent dwellings. Even if the seminomadic Changpas decide to join the homestay venture, it will invariably increase pressure on the ecosystem as well as competition. The TCT will need to evaluate and assess the optimal number of tourists the area can support in the future. Efforts such as banning trekking and camping in the grazing land in the surrounding areas have been undertaken to minimize impacts, but the rapidly growing tourism industry will continue to exert pressure on this fragile ecosystem. This calls for an evolving strategy for addressing future concerns. There also is a need to integrate traditional and spiritual belief systems with sustainable practices that have had documented impact on restoring habitats. For instance, Changpas depend on Tibetan astrological predictions recommended by monks for herd movements to different pastures (Namgail et al

2010), which can be attuned to the phenological cycle of fodder species, regeneration status, and grazing pressures.

Further reflection and conclusions

This project demonstrates the possibility of establishing pro-environment sustainable mountain tourism enterprises and equitable development in spite of inadequate infrastructure and skills, meager income-generating opportunities, and environmental challenges characteristic of many mountain regions of the world. As argued by Okazaki (2008), the success of a participatory project can be evaluated only after critical evaluation to identify the level of community participation. A good case of the perception and acceptance of this integrated conservation and ecotourism development model is how it has captured the interests and promoted entrepreneurship among other Changpas in the region. Inspired by the Korzok model, the Changpa inhabitants of Tso Kar, a high-altitude wetland in Changthang, have shown interest in developing a project

along similar lines. The villagers established the Tso Kar Conservation Trust in 2007 and now regularly interact with their counterparts at Korzok to engage in, share, and learn from each other's experiences.

However, sites of conservation and development are dynamic, with various actors and agencies continually exerting influence and thereby influencing outcomes (Bebbington 2000; Perreault 2003). Therefore, this model, which demonstrates success in the particular Ladakhi context, may not be widely applicable across mountainous regions. The case of Korzok might be an ideal setting, where agencies such as WWF and the governments of Jammu and Kashmir are merely catalyzing and assisting in connecting the place-based practices to the larger ecotourism discourse. Some early impacts are already visible because local resource governance systems were in place before the beginning of the project; moreover, no significant social and economic differences can currently be seen among the Changpa households in Korzok. Also, due to the relative isolation of the location there is an absence of external actors with interests that might not align with the interests of the Changpas. Early impacts as seen in this case have been seen in similar ecotourism based projects elsewhere, but those impacts were not long-lasting (Belsky 1999) or found to have only marginal impact on household income (Bookbinder et al 1998) or inequitable distribution of benefits among different stakeholders (Walpole and Goodwin 2000; He et al 2008). Ecotourism is also found to be less sustainable in mountain habitats (Kruger 2005) and tends to open up areas most vulnerable to cultural disturbance and environmental degradation (Cater 1993). Other empirical studies on community-based conservation and development projects have shown long-term institutional support and funding to be a requirement for ensuring success (Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001). It would be interesting to see, a few years from now, whether the homestays create different economic classes or differences between homestay owners and seminomadic pastoralist Changpas and affect the seemingly stable current social setting among the residents of Korzok, and how this project fares in the absence of any institutional support from external agencies. There is also a likelihood of an increase in localism and local identity politics, given the assertions of Changpas that only the residents of the Korzok should be involved in the homestays or work as local guides. Although local stakeholder involvement is crucial for maintaining accountability in these initiatives, it might also lead to conflicts between various groups, local versus migrants, Changpas versus non-Changpas, etc.

The case offers some key insights gained through regular stakeholder consultation meetings with the Changpas and individual feedback given by the inhabitants to the on-site project officer and one of the authors. These also include feedback from tourists who

visited the area and experienced homestays. However, the unique site and place-based context of this case study might limit its relevance elsewhere.

1. Members of the local population must have the awareness, information, and opportunities to participate and choose from in order to make decisions about their livelihoods. This initiative gave the Changpas this choice, and it remains to be seen where it will take them in the long run.
2. Equitable access to natural resource tenure, use, and management for various stakeholders involved at the project sites is essential for accountable outcomes with minimal conflict.
3. Social and economic incentives are a must for community involvement in the conservation process.
4. Communities should be empowered through financial and technical assistance, and skill-building exercises for a fair and smooth transition to adopt alternative sources of income based on pro-environment policies.
5. Cultural competence and sensitivity is required for aligning local livelihoods with the broader goals of poverty reduction, development, and conservation.
6. Local cultural and spiritual value systems should be represented and integrated in the projects. Because the communities have been in these areas for centuries, they are appropriately positioned for nature conservation activities in the area.
7. As this green tourism initiative is adopted by a greater number of communities, a certification system will be required to institute compliance standards across the region and at various operational scales for green economy projects; currently, a system by WWF-India is underway, wherein initial stakeholder consultation was conducted for designing the certification system.

This project was conceived and initiated with the aim of promoting high-altitude wetland conservation along with supporting the local economy and reducing poverty. So far, it has managed to generate awareness among the sedentary Changpas of Korzok and piqued their interest in the potential of homestays as an alternative source to supplement their income. At this point, it is premature to state whether this green initiative will be a sustainable alternative to their traditional sources of income, which revolve around livestock. A way forward will be to conduct a comprehensive livelihood impact assessment through household surveys, along with carrying out in-depth analysis of how the local site conditions have changed over time in Korzok in terms of their social, economic, and the environmental aspects. Detailed data on household income, employment, resource use, traditional rights, and rules are not available, and, therefore, local-level household surveys would help clarify this initiative and to what extent it has impacted the people of Korzok, and whether it has changed the existing and historic dynamics in resource use, income

generation, and distribution of benefits. Detailed interviews with the homestay owners and other residents of Korzok will be required to understand the underlying nuances of the project and to understand the probable causes that could make them opt out of the project. Their narrative will be required to understand whether the process of creating a green tourism-based initiative has given power to some people at the expense of excluding others. An explicit understanding of these place-based processes will help generate a dynamic strategy for

ensuring sustainable impacts in the future. Currently, consultations are underway among the various participating institutions and stakeholders in the Korzok initiative to conduct impact assessments of the project by an external agency every alternate year. A greater need in view of global climate change is also to understand the vulnerability and resilience of this fragile high-altitude ecosystem, because the co-benefits of conservation and development will only emerge if the local ecosystems are resilient.

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