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Commentary

Sustainability- cliché in conservation circles

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A lot is being talked about the sustainable environment in Himalayas and its management these days. There is no doubt that it is getting affected. But how do we manage it? On this point is the question mark. Previous efforts have yielded little and attempt to improve other services, like infrastructure, agriculture, irrigation, water supply and to large extent man's greed to make a few quick bucks fast, have seriously impacted the environment in Himalayas. So what is the way out? Sustainable environment or is it? The torch bearers for sustainability have to be conservationist, and more important, conservation organizations which get huge sums of money for the projects' sustainability so that it runs on its own long after the project is over. Unfortunately, the word "sustainability" has become a fad these days. Almost all conservation projects talk about sustainability without knowing how to make conservation projects sustainable in reality.

If we look at various projects like; joint forest management, medicinal plants conservation, biodiversity conservation, cold desert development, pasture land development, social forestry and all other conservation projects, most of them are made to look sustainable till the funds keep flowing in and once the project gets over and funds dry up, sustainability also dries up as if it was affected by a severe drought or washed away by a powerful tsunami. Some conservationists contend that the sustainability of the project is time specific, and the project had achieved its target when it was running actively and they are not concerned about it once the project gets over. But is it the power of sustainability or money flow that keeps the project running? Doesn't sustainability mean long-lasting or is the word directly proportional to money flow? Alas! What became of the word "sustainability" which was splashed all over the pages when the project proposals were made and highlighted in a big way while submitting the project? Was it then misinterpreted or is it a word too big that anything and everything can hide behind it? Actually, at the end - a smart person knows what to highlight and what to hide, camouflaging the small achievements as big and juggling with data. The final outcome is a crisp report with all the achievements declaring that overall goals of the project have been met and a few lessons learnt.

Now, is any organization ready to open the can of worms of current sustainability of their previous projects? Has there been any assessment of the post impact of the project, let's say after 2 or 3 years after the project was completed to know whether the sustainability is still there or has fizzled out? Mostly no, because organizations don't get money to do assessment of projects long completed. They only get money for new projects, also no organization wants to count its failures as they might dent their standing position and maybe prospectus to get future projects can also damp. So it is time to write a new project proposal, involving high-caliber project proposal writers, having vast experience in writing good proposals, masters in splashing it with high-falutin words, some fancy ideas which can be made to look innovative but that have loose bonding with real goals and sustainability.

Cheers