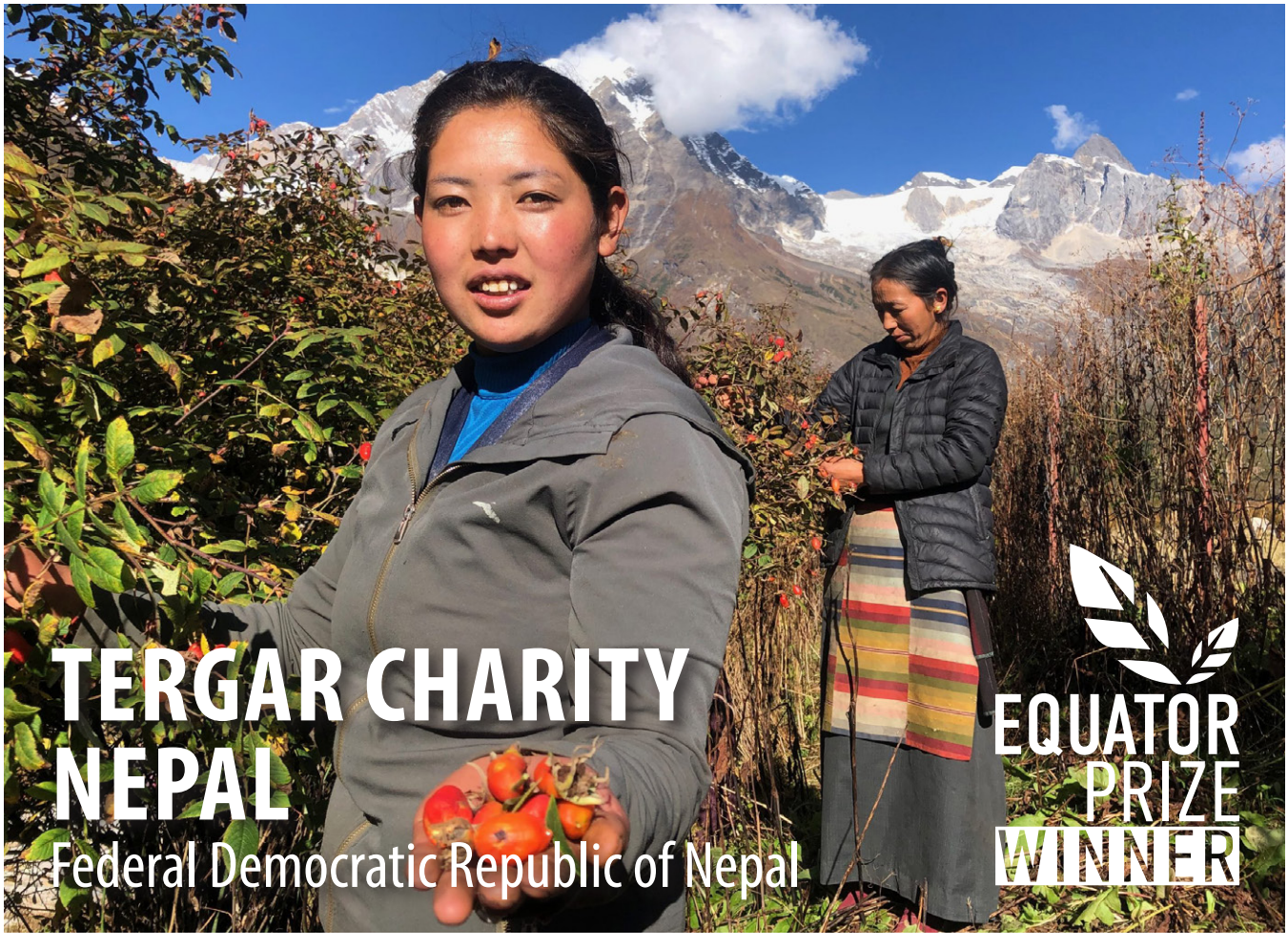
EQUATOR INITIATIVE

UNDP



Equator Initiative Case Studies

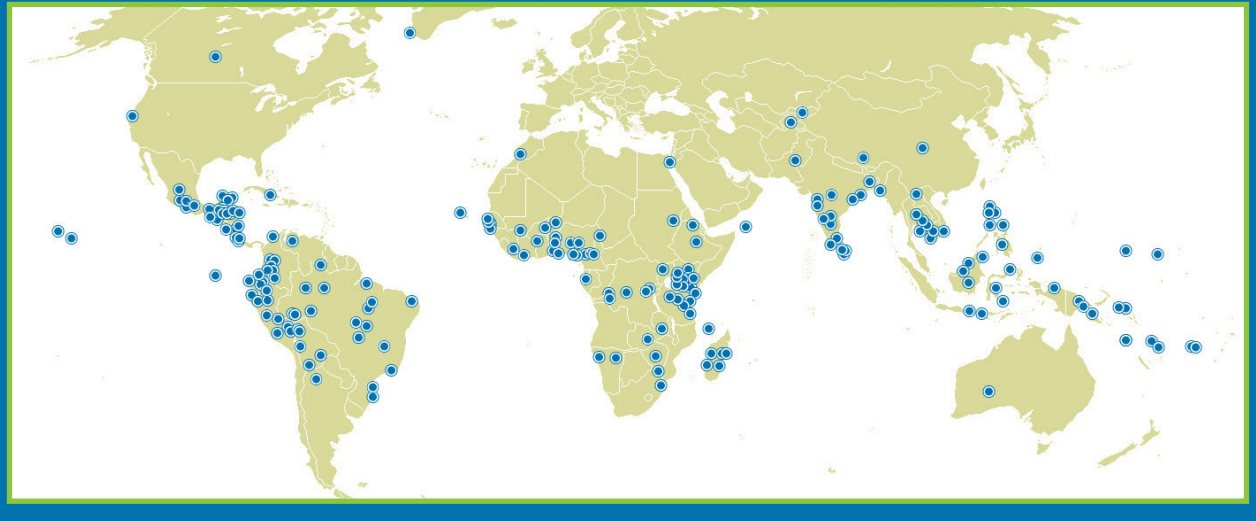
Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and Indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative. The Equator Initiative aims to fill that gap.

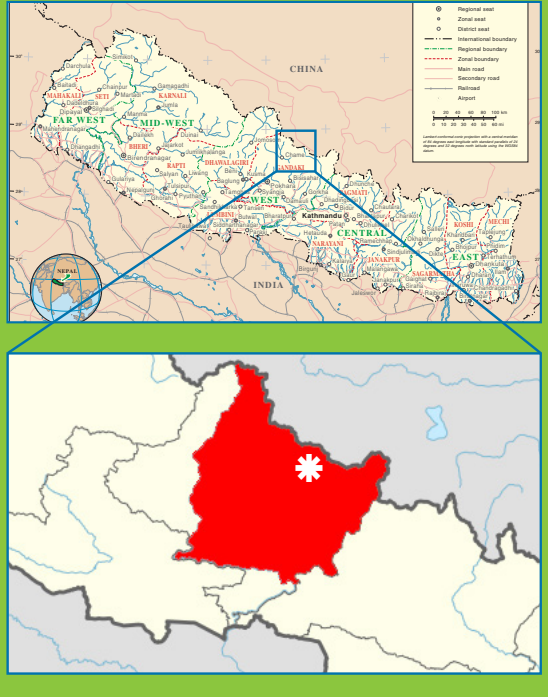
The **UNDP Equator Initiative**, supported by generous funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), awarded the Equator Prize in 2023 to 10 outstanding Indigenous and local communities from 10 countries. The winning organizations showcase innovative, nature-based solutions for tackling biodiversity loss and climate change. Selected from a pool of over 500 nominations from 108 countries, the winners were celebrated at a high-profile event, held virtually, on November 7th, in the lead up to the biodiversity and climate change negotiations at COP28. The event was part of the **Nature for Life Hub**, a three-day series of virtual events designed to raise ambition for nature-based solutions in global biodiversity and climate policy. The winners are sustainably protecting, restoring, and managing forests, farms, wetlands, marine ecosystems, and biodiversity to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, help communities adapt to climate change, and create a green new economy.

The following case study is one in a growing series that describes vetted and peer-reviewed best practices intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to scale nature-based solutions essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



PROJECT SUMMARY

Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN) is a locally-driven organization focused on improving food security and livelihoods in the remote Himalayan communities of Samagaun and Samdo in Northern Nepal. The organization promotes crop diversification and sustainable crop management while implementing bioclimatic passive solar greenhouses for enhanced food security. TCN promotes women's empowerment by raising awareness, providing guidance around menstrual health and hygiene, and encouraging women's education and income generation through literacy and professional development. In partnership with a Canadian luxury tea company, TCN has successfully developed a value chain project to increase income for women in the area. Women community members pick and process High Himalayan rose hips from Samagaun at 3550 metres and sell them for high-end medicinal teas in North America. Building upon this success, TCN expanded its agricultural value-chain projects by constructing 15 initial greenhouses in Samagaun and 47 additional greenhouses in 2022 in both Samagaun and Samdo.



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KEY FACTS

Equator Prize winner

2023

Founded

2018

Location

Samagaun and Samdo, Nubri Valley, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Beneficiaries

480 direct beneficiaries; 113 indirect beneficiaries

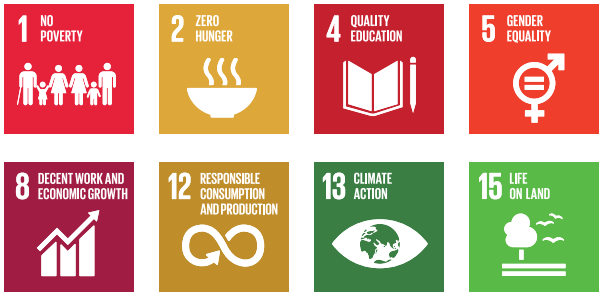
Thematic areas

Sustainable agriculture and food security; Sustainable livelihoods; Women's empowerment

Fields of work

Climate-smart agriculture; Eco-enterprise or green business; Women's groups

Sustainable Development Goals addressed



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

EQUATOR PRIZE 2023 WINNER FILM

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

> ***Although still quite remote and cut from the outside world, things are changing quickly in the Samagaun and Samdo communities, and the road coming in three to four years will accelerate the changes in livelihoods and lifestyles. As is most often the case, modernity has its load of good and bad. Tergar Charity will be there to support communities in favouring pathways to development that do not replicate the mistakes that were made in the West but emphasize nature-based, sustainable solutions, both for human flourishing and biodiversity, cultural heritage protection, income generation, women's empowerment, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.***
>
> — Margot Clavier, Programme Coordinator, Tergar Charity Nepal

The Nubri Valley region of northern Nepal is a remote landscape full of mountains, glaciers, and waterways ranging from 1,400 to 8,163 metres. The valley and its surrounding peaks are home to 39 mammals, 201 birds, and nearly 2,000 unique flowering plants. It is known in Buddhism and Indigenous culture as a 'hidden valley' or '*beyul*' in Tibetan. The eighth-century Buddhist master Padmasambhava (known as Guru *Rinpoche* in Tibetan) identified five hidden valleys in Nepal, including Nubri, where, in times of conflict, all practitioners of Buddhism could gather for safe haven. Thanks to the master's blessing, Buddhist practices are said to be multiplied 100,000 times in this special place.

In the Nubri Valley, a culture of respect for biodiversity is maintained, as killing animals and destroying natural resources (like cutting trees) were prohibited and considered to bring 'bad karma,' like sickness and conflict. These values for nature face many challenges today but remain deeply rooted in the Valley's cultural history.

In the far reaches of the Valley, are the remote villages of Samagaun and Samdo. The journey to reach these villages is a laborious five to six-day trek, as no roads reach their remote locations near the Tibetan border. At altitudes of 3,550 and 3,900 metres, communities face the challenges of a harsh climate and the impact of globalization and climate change.

Samagaun and Samdo community members identify as Bhote ethnicity and speak Tibetan. Their livelihoods, traditions, and knowledge are intricately tied to the high mountain landscapes surrounding them, including the formidable Mount Manaslu, the world's eighth-highest peak at 8,163 metres. Their traditional agro-pastoral lifestyle involves cultivating barley and potatoes and rearing yaks and dzos (a crossbreed between cows and yaks) for milk and wool. These resources are used to barter for other essential resources. The harsh climate, with temperatures plummeting to minus 20 degrees Celsius in winter, limits agriculture to two crops a year between April and September.

The passage of two decades has seen unprecedented change. The hardships of life in the small villages of the Nubri Valley, in conjunction with globalization and the additional negative impacts of climate change, have triggered a significant exodus predominantly of men and children in search of economic opportunities and better education in Kathmandu and Western countries. This migration has burdened the women of Samagaun and Samdo, struggling with the multi-facetted responsibilities of household chores, agricultural and community work, and earning a livelihood. Recent food insecurity has forced villagers to depend on other distant towns and cities for supplies, leading to inflated prices. The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded these challenges, with

lockdowns and roadblocks exacerbating the precarious economic and survival situation in Samdo and Samagaun.

In response to these pressing issues, Tergar Charity Nepal's (TCN) founder embarked on a mission to find solutions that prioritize communities, bringing together sustainable development with cultural preservation, human wellbeing, and environmental conservation. TCN addresses food and nutrition security, education, and economic opportunities while prioritizing the Nubri Valley's natural environment.

"We see our work as immersed in and interdependent of the natural world. We are inspired by the Buddhist view of Interdependence, where humans are part of a network linking all beings and things. As part of this inter-web of causes and effects, nature-based solutions are paramount in creating pathways to support human and all beings' flourishing while not harming or destroying the natural world- if possible, protecting and revitalising it. 'Ahimsa,' nonviolence in Sanskrit and 'Karuna,' compassion, are our guiding principles to design projects in relation to the natural world."

— Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, Founder, Tergar Charity Nepal

Origin and structure

Created by a Tibetan teacher and master of Buddhism in 2018, Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN) has, since its inception, centred its mission on supporting communities. The organization works in education, health, environment, and social services to empower and equip remote mountain communities with skills for better resilience, sustainable development, and social well-being. Its mission includes protecting the environment, mitigating climate change, and improving livelihoods to reduce all forms of life's suffering. The organization combines Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous practices with current innovations to help communities embrace holistic, culturally empowering, and effective sustainable development solutions, with a particular focus on partnering with women community members.

TCN is an officially registered Nepali non-governmental organization (NGO) with a staff team of seven, including six field staff and one admin manager in Kathmandu. A prioritization for gender equality has helped the organization build an inclusive and balanced staff team, including five women and three men. The organization has a board of nine members from the mountain villages of Samagaun and Samdo. Project design is done through engagement and needs assessments with communities and approval from the board. The TCN coordinator proposes ideas to the board, which has the power and authority to discuss, amend, or veto them. Projects that move forward are financed through fundraising, with support from aligned donors with whom the organization continues to build trusting partnerships for long-term support.

LOCAL CHALLENGES

Vulnerability to food insecurity

Rural communities in the Nubri Valley face particularly challenging living conditions which affect the area's food supply. The region's harsh climate reaches temperatures as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius in the winter, resulting in just two staple crops that can grow effectively annually between April and September. Further complicating food security, climate change is occurring here and across the entire Himalayan Plateau 2.5 times faster than in the rest of the world. Climate change causes melting of glaciers, drying of grasslands, erratic climate patterns, and more violent monsoons, affecting agricultural production and even causing crop failure.

Importing foods, particularly vegetables, from other areas is also challenging. There is no vehicle access to the remote and isolated communities of Samdo and Samagaun. In fact, the entire Nubri Valley is at least five to six days of trekking away from the closest vehicle access road. The only efficient way to access the area is via a chartered helicopter, which local people cannot afford. Such difficulty in access means that bringing goods and supplies to villages is extremely expensive.

Food insecurity and harsh living conditions make survival in Himalayan villages more uncertain. Nepal is among the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Around a quarter of the population lives on less than US$0.50 per day. About 36 percent of the country's children under the age of five are stunted, and 25 percent are malnourished. Mortality rates are high, especially in remote mountain villages where people die of common diseases.

Lack of livelihood opportunities and the impact on rural women

The Nubri Valley economic landscape has witnessed growing changes in the last two decades. Globalization and intensification of living conditions due to issues like climate change have compounded the challenges facing families, leaving villages grappling with a significant exodus of men and children pursuing economic prospects and enhanced educational opportunities elsewhere. A staggering 63 percent of the Nepali adult male population now resides outside their home villages. This outmigration has had a severe impact on traditional livelihood systems, pushing women who remain in the villages into a precarious situation where they bear the burdens of household responsibilities, agricultural work, community duties, and securing a livelihood.

The problem of insufficient resources and livelihood options for women is exacerbated when remittances sent by migrant men working abroad are exhausted within the first six months of the year. With remittances falling short, women must uphold households and work 14 to 19 hours a day, seven days a week, with minimal or no additional income. The results of this have been a state of heightened vulnerability for women and older people. The recent onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns and roadblocks further exacerbated the challenges faced by the community. This crisis led to acute food shortages and income insecurity. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, job losses and economic downturns are pushing the residents of Samagaun and Samdo perilously close to the brink, threatening the very existence of these communities.

Rapidly accelerating climate change

The Himalayan plateau is experiencing climate change at an alarming rate. Himalayan glaciers are melting faster than the global average, with serious consequences for downstream water availability and weather patterns. Accelerated warming and erratic weather disrupt agricultural yields, threatening local communities' precarious food security.

Rising temperatures also threaten to dry up high-altitude grasslands, jeopardizing the survival of yaks, vital to the Himalayan ecosystem, and pushing the traditional agro-pastoral livelihood system to the brink of collapse. Yaks, symbolic animals of the region, play a crucial role as "land mowers" in maintaining high-altitude grasslands, the Himalayas' primary carbon sinks and habitats for diverse flora and fauna. The decline of yaks puts biodiversity at risk and impacts the traditional livelihoods of Tibetan doctors and semi-nomadic yak herders. This loss also endangers cultural practices like the production of yak wool and Tibetan-Nubri handicrafts woven by women on traditional looms.

Local efforts to adapt agricultural and food production systems to temperature changes have fallen short, leaving communities' food security in disarray. Once again, women bear a disproportionate burden as they grapple with the consequences of climate change, which intensifies the challenges already faced by vulnerable remote mountain communities.

Biodiversity in peril

The warming climate threatens the rich biodiversity of the Himalayan region and has already pushed several animal species to the brink of extinction due to reduced habitat. In particular, melting glaciers and snow are threatening important habitats, especially those of the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The endemic Himalayan tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), classified as near-threatened, and the alpine musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*), classified as endangered, also are at risk of decline due to habitat loss. The threats of climate change extend to the decline of native trees, high-altitude wildflowers, and high-mountain herbs.

Human activities also exacerbate biodiversity loss. Over-harvesting of the medicinal fungus *cordyceps sinensis* has drastically declined the species over the last five years. This fossilized caterpillar fungus, found in meadows above 3,500 metres, is in high demand for aphrodisiac and immune-boosting Chinese medicines and picked by high Himalayan communities across Nepal to be sold at high prices on the Chinese market. Over-harvesting and climate change have endangered this species, diminishing its presence on high plateaus and threatening Himalayan ecosystems and community livelihoods.

The booming construction industry, stimulated by growing tourism across Nepal, as well as the increased demand for firewood, has caused unprecedented deforestation. Through community reports and observations, Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN) estimates that around 60 percent of Samagaun and Samdo forest cover has disappeared in the last two decades.

In the context of rapid deforestation, wild animals are venturing outside depleted forests in search of food. For example, snow leopards and other keystone predators from the high Himalayas now prey on traditional domesticated animals like yak. In Northern Nepal's Dolpo district, over 40 percent of the meat found in the stomachs of predatory animals was found to be domestic. This predatory cycle creates human-wildlife conflict and retaliation towards snow leopards, further threatening their declining population. It also accelerates the collapse of traditional agro-pastoral livelihoods, as it often forces semi-nomadic herders to sell their herds in desperation. Many herders have begun to prefer less strenuous livelihoods in tourism, for example. This loss of grazing activity affects not only livelihoods but also the climate, as grazing cuts but does not uproot grass, contributing to the building of deeply rooted Himalayan and Tibetan Plateau grasslands with immense carbon storage.

In addition, a widespread problem in high Himalayan tourist areas is the growing presence of feral dogs. The problem is stimulated by well-meaning tourists who feed dogs on the trails entering high Himalayan villages, causing them to leave their homes and venture higher into the mountains. Dogs eventually become feral and attack domestic animals and even locals and tourists.

LOCAL RESPONSES

"Tergar Charity Nepal's work is immersed in community: it promotes a holistic approach where Traditional Nubri and Tibetan Indigenous knowledge, livelihood, and culture is blended with innovative nature-based solutions. Hence, for example, bioclimatic greenhouses were built using passive solar technology while favouring traditional insulation as done in local houses with earth, yak dung, and hay. We try to answer real needs and challenges of the community using Traditional knowledge and new technology."

—Jigme Lama, Board Member, Tergar Charity Nepal

Building sustainable, resilient livelihoods through climate-smart agriculture

In response to the challenges facing rural villages across the Himalayas, Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN) championed advancing climate-smart agriculture through bioclimatic greenhouses. The groundbreaking project aligns with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and supports all three tiers of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.

The pilot project focused on constructing 15 bioclimatic and solar-passive greenhouses for the most vulnerable households in Samagaun, specifically targeting single or widowed women. TCN used local materials and incorporated Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to define the plans and strategies for construction and use. The resulting structures feature traditional earthquake-resistant 45-centimetre stone walls insulated with mud, yak dung, and hay. The roofs are constructed with double-layered polycarbonate, maximizing heat retention, while strategically placed doors and windows facilitate air circulation. The success of the initial 15 greenhouses prompted the construction of 47 additional structures in 2022 (32 in Samagaun and 15 in Samdo), boasting improved design, cost-effectiveness, and durability.

Community members use the bioclimatic greenhouses to grow a diverse range of vegetables that were not available in the villages before and had to imported from the lower valley or Kathmandu at high prices, including tomatoes, zucchinis, cucumbers, pumpkins, bok choi, beans, salad, lettuce, Nepalese spinach (*saag*), cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and chili. The greenhouses enabled year-round cultivation, with owners in Samagaun and Samdo growing vegetables for 10 to 12 months annually—a reality never experienced before.

Another initiative aimed at sustainable and climate-smart land management covers 7,451 hectares of land in Samagaun and Samdo. Land management practices

include the use of climate-resilient agricultural species and the introduction of permaculture and agroforestry practices. These practices combine to increase climate resilience and diversify nutrition.

The impact of greenhouse and land management projects on food and nutrition security has been remarkable, particularly for women, older people, and children under five years old. Beneficiaries experienced a substantial reduction in transportation costs for vegetables from the lower valley, resulting in significant savings ranging from NPR3,150 to NPR3,600 or US$24 to US$27 per household per year, for households with an average income of US$830 per year. In addition to the direct community benefits, the land management project safeguards 7,451 hectares of agricultural soils through sustainable management practices, especially through sustainable harvests of wild rose hip trees and their planting. This holistic approach is a transformative model for community resilience and sustainable development in the face of climate and livelihood challenges.

KEY IMPACTS

Building sustainable, resilient livelihoods through climate-smart agriculture

- TCN supports 7,451 hectares of land under sustainable management.
- The bioclimatic greenhouse project supported the building of 15 greenhouses in Samagaun.
- An additional 47 greenhouses were built by TCN in 2022, 32 in Samagaun and 15 in Samdo.
- Residents saved NPR3,150 to 3,600 (US$24 to $27) per year per household from avoiding vegetable imports from outside the valley.

Launching the *Rosa Macrophylla* nature-positive value chain

The *Rosa Macrophylla* project established a value chain for *Rosa Macrophylla* or rose hips, an agricultural specialty product containing high levels of vitamin A and C and antioxidants. *Rosa Macrophylla* is used traditionally by Tibetan doctors as herbal tea for curing colds, lowering blood pressure and preventing cancer. The project supports local women from Samagaun in collecting, cleaning, and solar drying wild rose hips and cultivating new rose hip trees from seed. Rose hips are picked and cleaned by community members. TCN support staff assist them with the use of two solar driers bought with partner grants. Weather permitting, leaves can also be dried on tarpaulins in individual back yards. In collaboration with a partner tea company, rose hips are sent to Canada to be transformed into luxury tea. The initiative takes a sustainable approach by preventing over-harvesting. For example, in the third year, the community decided upon a limit of 10 kilograms per household for wild rose hips. The initiative also supports diversifying agriculture. Communities were encouraged to plant rose trees in kitchen gardens, with other diverse crops, medicinal herbs and native plants, promoting biodiversity. Likewise, the tea's brew is changed every year to avoid mass production and keep it exclusive.

The establishment of the *Rosa Macrophylla* supply chain generated US$145 to US$207 per person in the first year an income vital in addressing essential needs, such as purchasing staple foods, covering medical expenses, and affording transportation. In the second year, the entire community engaged in rose hip harvesting, resulting in a substantial economic inflow to the community of US$21,182, equivalent to US$132 per household. This inclusive community model ensured a broad impact, benefitting 430 individuals from 160 households.

The *Rosa Macrophylla* project plays a vital role in reducing gender inequality by supporting healthy and sustainable livelihoods for women. Women engaged in the project have seen increased income, skills development, and social capital, contributing to their empowerment. The rose hip value chain also contributes to climate solutions, as planting *Rosa Macrophylla* trees amongst households and on agricultural lands increases carbon sequestration and can contribute to soil health.

KEY IMPACTS

Launching the *Rosa Macrophylla* nature-positive value chain

- Women earn between US$145 to US$207 per household annually from sales of rose hips.
- Samagaun brought in $21,182 from the project in 2021.
- Rose hip value chains benefit 430 individuals from 160 households.

Cultivating community forestry and agroforestry

TCN, under its newly formed climate organization, Himalayan Environment and Life Protection (H.E.L.P.), launched a transformative community reforestation project in Samdo that aims to combat soil erosion and increase carbon content in the soil by establishing community management of forests. Central to the Samdo community forestry project is the Community Forest User Group (CFUG). This collaborative team includes nine local community members who make land use and management decisions and participate in the reforestation and management of the land. The CFUG model is a widespread forest management system in Nepal, which for 25 years has helped to reforest the country from 23 percent to 47 percent of forest cover.

The project supported the construction of a tree nursery situated on community land in Samdo, which now serves as a hub for nurturing 2,000 test trees, including species like Himalayan poplar (*Populus Ciliata*), Black Juniper (*Juniperus Indica*), Himalayan Juniper (*Juniperus Recurva*), Himalayan Birtch (*Betula Utilis*), and Goat Willow (*Salix Caprea*). These trees will be transplanted in 2025, contributing to the overall goal of planting 25,000 trees on 20 hectares by 2026. The organization has built nurseries capable of growing 25,000 saplings.

Within the framework of this reforestation project, TCN is advancing the development of drone reforestation in collaboration with a Nepali drone start-up. The organization is testing native 'seed bombs,' looking for successful mixes of native seeds (including trees and medicinal herbs) that will germinate when dropped from a drone. Research and test flights are currently being conducted in Samagaun. TCN hopes a successful case study would mean utilizing this technology to replant broader areas in the Himalayan high mountains and the Hindu-Kush region.

TCN's community forestry project will advance the monitoring and recording of wildlife in the Manaslu Conservation Area in 2024 by installing two wildlife camera traps and flying remote sensing drones in Samagaun and Samdo in partnership with the Manaslu Conservation Area Project (MCAP). A veterinary camp aimed at regulating the population of feral dogs along the Manaslu trekking trail in collaboration with MCAP in 2024 will also improve the protection of native flora and fauna. Additionally, a pilot subproject promoting renewable energy through electric cooking and heating is being assessed as a way to reduce deforestation for firewood.

The project also launched an agroforestry component in 2023, integrating income-generating native trees with agricultural products such as disease-resistant and climate-resilient potatoes to fight serious threats to potato yields and survival. By integrating native trees and plant species with climate-resilient potato agriculture, TCN aims to support communities in restoring valuable food chains while supporting a healthy climate. Seven community members planted Himalayan poplar, peas, and medicinal herbs in potato fields to create a sustainable and integrated land-use approach. The pilot project also established a test field provided by the community. If successful, the project will grow to include 173 households of 563 community members in Samagaun and Samdo on 7.5 hectares.

The community forestry initiatives of TCN have played a crucial role in raising awareness for sustainable, community-based forest and landscape management. As traditional Tibetan villages, Samdo and Samagaun have shown immense openness to increasing environmental conservation and climate change mitigation. Village committees in Samagaun and the CFUG in Samdo decided to limit the amount of timber allowed to be cut per household, ban the cutting of live trees or branches for timber or firewood, and prohibit the use of electric wood cutting machines.

KEY IMPACTS

Cultivating community forestry and agroforestry

- The reforestation programme aims to plant 20,000 trees acr[illegible] by 2026.
- TCN constructed a tree nursery with capacity for 25,000 tre[illegible]
- The agroforestry project pilot phase includes seven comm[illegible] and one test field.
- The CFUG was created with nine local community members.
- The installation of two camera traps is slated for 2024.

Supporting women through literacy and vocational training

Organizationally, women comprise more than half of TCN's staff and board and most of its participating members and leaders across its projects. In this way, women contribute significantly to the effectiveness of TCN's mission and help ensure that the organization and its leaders maintain a deep understanding of the challenges that women from Samagaun and Samdo face. This gender-inclusive approach addresses the fundamental aspirations of women community members—education, health, financial empowerment, respect, recognition, harmonious family relationships, and the means to support their children and families.

In 2019, TCN and the non-governmental organization (NGO) 'Days for Girls Nepal' organized a two-day workshop for 10 women and 10 men leaders in Samagaun, focusing on women's health, hygiene, and leadership. This workshop served as the foundation for TCN's programme on Menstrual Health Management (MHM), raising awareness and launching a local production project of reusable sanitary cloth pads.

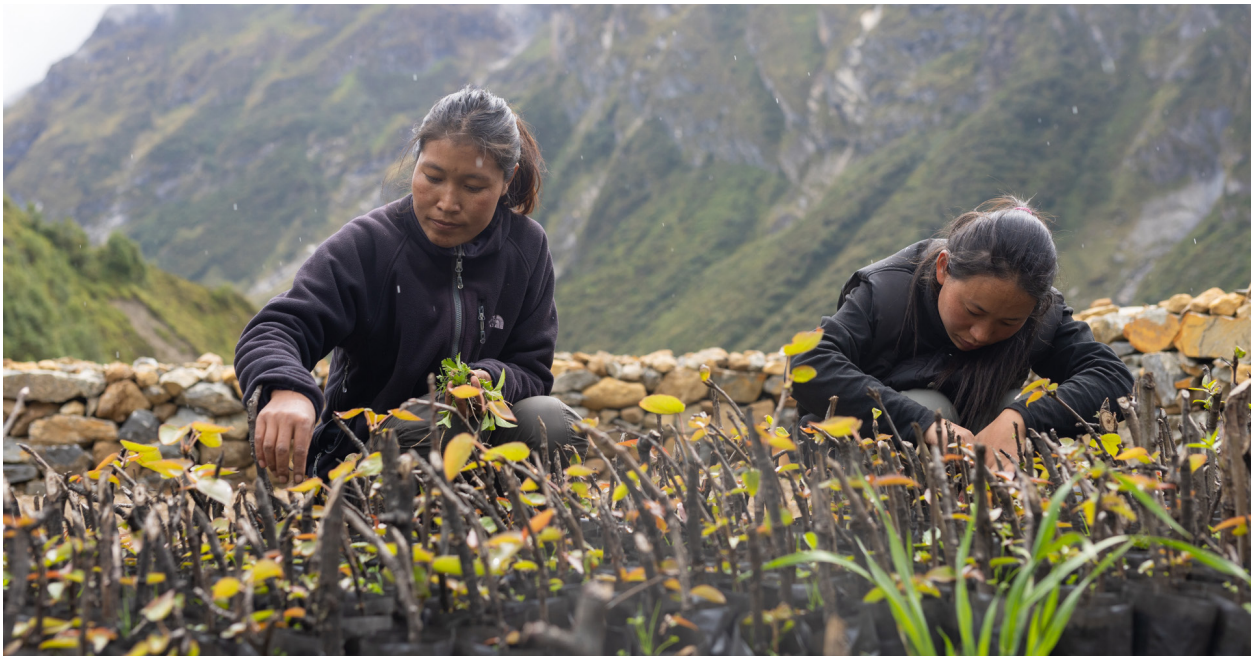
In 2020, TCN added introductory literacy, mathematics, nutrition, and vocational training classes, allowing the MHM initiative to evolve into a comprehensive capacity-building programme for women. It also provides training in income-generating activities like producing reusable cloth sanitary pads, yak cheese, and yak wool for sale and commercializing these value chains. From 2020 to 2023, 25 women attended training programme classes regularly. Many graduated to establish small businesses, including restaurants, guesthouses, and accounting enterprises operational for the 2023 mountaineering season.

In 2023, in collaboration with the Samagaun community women's group, Ama Samua, and the women's Buddhist group, Dharma Gyan, TCN constructed a women's community house in Samagaun designed to host classes for their women's programme, provide space for a shop where women can sell their handicrafts, agricultural products, rose hip tea, and for women's gatherings of all kinds, including Buddhist classes and religious ceremonies, community meetings, and social gatherings. In 2024, partnering with famed university Nepal Academy for Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM) to respond to the need for vocational training, 30 women guesthouse owners from Samagaun and Samdo attended a small lodge training for 15 days where they learned hospitality skills like cooking, food and beverage, baking, coffee barista, housekeeping, basic accounting, and reception skills.

KEY IMPACTS

Supporting women through literacy and vocational training

- More than 50 percent of TCN staff, board, and members are women.
- TCN organized a two-day workshop for 20 community members on women's health.
- TCN's women's programme saw 25 women engage in literacy, mathematics, nutrition, and vocational classes from 2020 to 2023.
- TCN constructed a community house for women's courses and gatherings.



"Being awarded the Equator Prize shows that a small group of passionate locals can make a difference in the lives of a remote mountain community. It is also a way to spread the message about climate change happening 2.5 times faster in the high Himalayas than in the rest of the world."

— Tsering Yangzom, Programme Manager, Tergar Charity Nepal

POLICY IMPACTS

"Climate change is happening 2.5 times faster in the high Himalayas and Tibetan plateau than in the rest of the world endangers the lives of 1.8 billion people depending on its glacier's waters for survival. We need promotion of nature-based solutions on a wide scale and bold action and commitments from world leaders to avoid climate catastrophe."

— Pasang Norbu Lama, Programme Manager, Tergar Charity Nepal

National policy impacts

The work of Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN) showcases the significance of upholding Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and locally adapted practices for sustainable development. TCN engages community members in effective value chains, training and education, and health and wellness initiatives that uphold local values and empower traditions. These examples affect regional actions and policy-level work required to support Nepali high Himalayan communities.

TCN's influence on regional and national policy has grown by establishing the initiative Himalayan Environment and Life Protection or H.E.L.P., which focuses on climate change in the broader Himalayan context. Its connection with the Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF) shows this influence. Together, they developed a case study on TCN's Samagaun agroforestry pilot project, influencing the nation's 2019 National Agroforestry Policy. Positioning papers leverage the findings and results of TCN's projects in Samdo and Samagaun to support specific agroforestry policies and best practices for high Himalayan communities. Given the research gap on agroforestry above 3000 metres, these papers are a vital contribution.

In early December 2023, H.E.L.P.'s programme team travelled from Samagaun village, high in the Himalayas, to the deserts of Dubai for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP 28). H.E.L.P.'s Director presented on the topic "Using innovation for sustainable development in Nepal", and H.E.L.P's Programme Managers spoke about "Scaling up inclusive climate action through private sector engagement in agriculture and land use" and "Rights-based, bottom-up and collaborative solutions for nature and climate." Their participation shared valuable insights for the benefit of the High Himalayan communities and remote mountain communities.

Contributions to the global agenda

At the global level, TCN supports the implementation of several critical multilateral agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

For example, by promoting opportunities for women to improve their livelihoods and engage in sustainable development, TCN supports the goals of gender equality (SDG 5), quality education (SDG 4), and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). Likewise, TNC programmes and initiatives in planting trees for conservation and agroforestry contribute to improving life on land (SDG 15) and taking climate action (SDG 13). As many of its activities create increased access to healthy food and sustainable value chains contributing to local incomes, TNC's work supports the goals of no poverty (SDG 1) and no hunger (SDG 2).

"We believe Tergar Charity Nepal and H.E.L.P, as community-based organisations implementing agroecological and nature based-solutions to make local communities more resilient to climate change and the challenges caused by globalization, can play a role in raising awareness about climate change in the Himalayas, as well as the interdepent nature of this phenomenon. As all phenomena, climate change and biodiversity loss are linked by a network of causes and effects: the dissapearance of bees can lead to the extinction of humankind, and warming of oceans will crucially endanger terrestrial biodiversity. It is in our hands to understand these interactions and act to prevent massive destruction which are already happening now which, if not stopped, will render our planet inhabitable for generations to come."

— Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, Founder, Tergar Charity Nepal

REPLICATION, SCALABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Replication

Community members across villages in the region have noticed the impact of Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN) and have begun to replicate its efforts, especially methods in sustainable production and greenhouse construction. TCN has encouraged this replication by sharing project updates on its website and social media platforms and posting information, photos, and videos to create open-source information and education for all, including about *Rosa Macrophylla* value chains and other projects that have proven to make an impact on the sustainable development of the area. Likewise, Nepali news outlets and other global online blogs have posted about Tergar Charity's work. The promotional film by TEALEAVES shot in Samagaun helped build momentum for the potential of the sustainable rose hip supply chains and encouraged community members to join the project. Similarly, TCN received growing support and interest in community projects with the announcement of being a winner of the 2023 Equator Prize.

Replication has been particularly quantifiable regarding the construction and use of greenhouses. In the village of Samdo, for example, the village leader, motivated by the impact of these bioclimatic greenhouses, is planning to build 28 greenhouses for the rest of the community, one for every household.

Scalability

TCN has evolved and created a new NGO, Himalayan Environment and Life Protection, or H.E.L.P., dedicated to building climate resilience, implementing agroecology, encouraging women's empowerment as well as women and children education, and preserving the environment in Himalayan communities more broadly. This larger scope of work represents a significant scaling up of the project area. H.E.L.P aims to increase reach and visibility with donors and to implement a broad and holistic mandate across the High Himalayas on environmental preservation and climate change mitigation. The board of H.E.L.P consists of members from the Samagaun and Samdo communities, allowing the organization to stay connected to the needs of small Himalayan communities and keep grassroots impact at the core of their objectives and as the chief guideline for all projects.

Sustainability

The recent creation of H.E.L.P. by TCN showcases the organization's growth and expansion. Through H.E.L.P., new funding sources have been secured, further sustaining TCN's projects. Community ownership and engagement also demonstrate a likelihood for sustainability and growth. Both community members and local leaders are carrying forward and expanding the activities of TCN.

FUTURE PLANS

TCN is in the planning stage of a strategy to increase the diversification of rose hip value-added products. H.E.L.P, TCN's recently formed climate organization, has experimented in making and selling rose hip, apple, and carrot jam during the trekking seasons and is currently running a trial of rose hip seed oil making. TCN recently started an introductory literacy class for kindergarten children in Samagaun, focusing on English, Nepali, and Tibetan. The play-based class uses ecology and activities like planting native seeds to teach children the importance of the environment while improving literacy.

The organization's recently launched domestic and street dog sterilization and vaccination camp in Tsum and Nubri will move onto its second phase in 2025, which involves flying remote sensing drones to identify feral dogs and other wild animals preying on yak herds and working with communities on mitigation measures. The project is related to an additional four-year project to mitigate the wildlife-domestic animal-human conflict in the Manaslu Conservation Area in collaboration with Tsum Nubri Municipality, Manaslu Conservation Area Project, Gorkha Vet Hospital, and Animal Nepal.

TCN has also begun efforts to explore creating a mountaineering and trekking guide school officially recognized by the Nepal Government in Samagaun. In November 2024, they conducted two pilot trainings in collaboration with the Nepal Academy of Tourism, which has a prestigious exchange programme with l'École hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) Hospitality Business School. The two courses helped 24 students from Samagaun explore careers in being a local guide and porter trekking guide. The interest displayed by participants and the high level of attendance for a pilot class was encouraging. If scaled up, the project could create ecotourism income, support the sustainable management of the area, and help retain more youth with interesting and healthy livelihood options.

PARTNERS

- ***Pema Chodron Foundation:*** Supports the Tergar Charity Nepal (TCN)/H.E.L.P.'s literacy and vocational training class for women and supports funding for bioclimatic greenhouses, *Rosa Macrophylla* value chain projects, and other nature-positive value chain projects.
- ***United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nepal:*** Supported the bioclimatic greenhouses and the *Rosa Macrophylla* value chain project from 2021 to2022. Continues to support TCN projects through the Small Grants Programme, particularly projects in enhancing climate resilience, climate change mitigation, and income generation which focus on nature-based solutions and sustainable value chains.
- ***Karuna-Shechen:*** Supported the bioclimatic greenhouse project and the construction of the Samagaun women community house and continues to support projects in climate resilience, climate change mitigation, community reforestation, agriculture, agroforestry, biodiversity-positive value-chains, and renewable energy.
- ***Nepal Agroforestry Foundation (NAF):*** Provided technical support for community reforestation as well as climate change and agroforestry projects from 2021 to 2023.
- ***Chumnubri Municipality:*** Supports the construction of the women's community house in Samagaun and domestic and street dog sterilization and vaccination camp in Tsum and Nubri in 2024.
- ***Animal Nepal:*** Supports the domestic and street dog sterilization and vaccination camp in Tsum and Nubri.

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