

## Environmental Education In Sikkim

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Khangchendzongna Conservation Committee (KCC), a community-based organization from West Sikkim, India, received a grant from ISLT to conduct environmental education training in Sikkim's schools. The title of the project was "Conservation Education Training to School Teachers using the International Snow Leopard Trust Food Web Poster." This program aimed to foster inclusion of snow leopard conservation awareness into the school curriculum through interactive learning; train local school teachers, students, NGOs and community members in conservation education; and increase knowledge and understanding of the mountain ecosystem among school children.

Five one-day interactive training sessions were conducted in major school complexes in West Sikkim. The School Complex Director invited Feeder School teachers from rural areas to attend the one day workshop-cum-training. Ninety-seven teachers from 22 schools were trained, as follows: 13 teachers from 4 schools attended the training held in Gerethang, 15 teachers from 4 schools came to Tashiding, 18 from 6 schools came to Darap, 25 from 2 schools came to Thingling, and 26 from 6 schools came to Yuksam.

The training generally started with ice-breaking and introductions. The objective of the training was outlined, followed by a presentation on the beautiful Web of Life poster that was jointly developed and printed by ISLT, TMI and the Forest Department, Government of Sikkim.

Participants were first given time to observe the poster and have a short brainstorming session about what they saw and understood from it. Then a detailed explanation about the poster was made stressing the importance of snow leopard conservation and highlighting the linkages among the different components of the ecosystem.

To highlight the food chain linkages, teachers played the Web of Life game. They found this exercise very instructive, and felt that the hands-on activity enhanced the learning process. Other group activities were also either described or carried out, depending on the available time. Photocopied handbooks containing all these educational materials were distributed to participants. To ensure that the teachers were committed to impart environmental education, they were asked to

write on a postcard some activity they would do with the school children and specifically when they would do it. These postcards would later be mailed to them to remind them of their commitment.

An evaluation session was conducted at the end of the day from which very valuable suggestions and inputs for future such programs were obtained. Before concluding the training program, school teachers were handed the Web of Life poster which they could effectively use as a tool for environmental education in their classes.

From these workshops and trainings it has been found that there is a definite lack of environmental education in the schools of Sikkim. Teachers are not introduced to the techniques of interactive teaching, and refresher courses are seldom conducted for them to upgrade their skills. Many of the school faculty members have expressed their gratefulness to KCC and especially to ISLT for making funds, educational materials and continued support available to impart such training programs in the Sikkim Himalayas.

Most of the above trainings were held in Government schools but in certain places there were participants from other departments and some private schools. It has been very encouraging to find that the participation level

has been very positive and demand exists for such programs in other parts of Sikkim as well as in India. This small project has given the opportunity to KCC members to increase their area of work and also to build their capacity in training and imparting environmental education. Such programs are being planned for the North districts of Sikkim and probably would be imparted with the assistance of the Sikkim Forest Department during late spring of 2000. G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development, a research and developmental institution in India, has extended an invitation to KCC members to provide similar trainings in the central Himalayas.