

**FINAL REPORT  
FOR  
THE DISNEY SUPPORT  
FOR THE YEARS 2007-09**

**Submitted to  
SLOW LEOPARD CONSERVANCY**

**By**



**Muse**

**Creative Initiatives for Sustainable Development**

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**Goal of the Project, Learning and Successes:**

The project aimed at linking tourism to the conservation of the regions wildlife through the development of wildlife trails, trainings of nature guides, awareness generation amongst the local community, set up of marketing linkages and development of promotional material, etc.

The broad objective of the initiative was to work towards the conservation of the Snow Leopard and the Himalayan Wolf by showcasing their ecological significance for the region and linking them to the local economy.

Over the course of the project it was discovered through surveys and meetings with the locals that a strained relationship existed between them and the wildlife of the region and the above two mentioned carnivores in particular. In the target area where the thrust of the project was (Langza and its neighbouring areas) it was discovered that the major problem existed with the Himalayan Wolf as it was the key threat to the villager's livestock. Issues with the Snow Leopard although not as grave as with the Wolf, were also a major concern for the community and subsequently for our initiative.

One of the key findings was the complete lack of awareness amongst the local community pertaining to the significance of these species and their limited numbers across the globe. Muse initiated awareness generation camps and got the local youth of the villages involved in the same. This, on the one hand enhanced our understanding of the current reality and the issues that the locals have with the wildlife and on the other it enabled us to sensitise the local population on issues pertaining to the significance of conserving these very species, especially the youth.

With the success of the sensitization of the community one of the key questions that arose was pertaining to the involvement of the locals in the conservation of these carnivores. Muse proposed to the locals that the development of wildlife trails and linking these to the tourism industry could have double benefits for the region and the people. On the one hand this would assist the locals in developing an interesting eco-tourism product thereby generating significant incomes for the region and on the other hand it would enable the conservation of the wildlife. Nature trails and wildlife trails were subsequently developed in and around Langza, Komic and Demul inside the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary. Muse was able to link these with its other eco-tourism products that have been developed such as homestays, cultural troupes, etc.

In order to ensure the quality of services Muse organized various trainings such as naturalist guides, first aid, English language, etc.

Marketing of these eco-tourism products is another key aspect of ensuring the sustainability and progress of the initiative. Development of promotional material such as brochures, posters, etc has been very helpful in generating interest amongst the travelers to Spiti and also travel agents promoting the region. The website ([www.spitiecosphere.com](http://www.spitiecosphere.com)) has also proved extremely helpful in the same. Muse was also able to invite various writers to cover the initiative and has had articles in different magazines (Outlook Traveller, Travel & Leisure, etc.) and on the internet about its products.

One of the key successes for the initiative was winning the 2008-Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Award under the community initiative category. This has also generated a lot of

media attention as well as from the travel industry and in particular companies looking at promoting responsible eco-travel destinations.

With the successful implementation of the concept of developing a model of responsible tourism and linking the same to the conservation of the regions nature and culture and specifically the wildlife, Muse also developed mechanisms for the sustainability of the conservation linkages by diverting part of the earnings as a conservation fund. This fund is being further utilized for wildlife conservation schemes such as establishing better shepherding mechanisms, management of grazing and camping charges, etc.

Over the past 2 years Muse has been able to successfully integrate conservation of nature and culture of the region with the tourism industry there by not only providing for a sustainable source of income for the local community but also ensuring that they become the custodians of these resources.

**Conservation Linkages:** In the previous year Muse organized an **exposure visit to Ladakh** (details are attached in Annexure 1 B) to study the conservation linkages that have been put into practice by SLC and the local community. One of the key findings from Ladakh was that the employment of shepherds was far more successful than the insurance schemes. It was decided to propose the same in Spiti and the local community decided to adopt the employment of the shepherd as opposed to the insurance scheme. In Langza village where this scheme has been adopted the villagers will be contributing Rs. 100 per household/month and the remaining amount will be provided by from the conservation fund that is being generated from the camping and grazing charges and the homestays. The employment of the shepherds will ensure that negligence while grazing the livestock would be greatly reduced thereby reducing the killings by the wildlife.

In the winter of 08-09 an exposure visit was also organized to the north east states of India to learn from the initiatives that are being undertaken in states such as Assam and Meghalaya. The key objective of the exposure was to study the community model in the Manas National Park and the conservation linkages that have been implemented there. The other objective was to look into other successfully running community initiatives and models that truly represent a clear picture of responsible travel.

**Organisations and regions visited:**

1. Maozigendri Eco-Tourism and Conservation Society, Manas National Park
2. HELP Tourism
3. UNDP Endogenous tourism site in Guwahati, assam
4. Mawlynnong, Meghalaya

The north east of India is one of the least visited and also one of the most misinterpreted areas in the country. Except for a few popular destinations such as Darjeeling, Gangtok, Shillong, there isn't much that has been promoted in terms of tourism in the north east. However over the years a few organizations such as HELP tourism and initiatives such as the Maozigendri society has not only opened new areas for travelers it has also assisted greatly in the promotion of responsible travel in the region, thereby ensuring that the local communities themselves become stewards of conservation. It was primarily with this in mind that a exposure visit to this part was planned by Muse for its core team members and other locals involved in the tourism initiative.

One of the key findings and learnings of this exposure was with regards to the involvement of the local community in managing and running the Manas National Park. This is perhaps an extremely unique example where the local community is completely managing the entire management of a national park. However, this was not the case a few years ago where the locals were involved in poaching and smuggling of wood. However, due to the initiative of local leaders and other organization from the region poachers were converted into forest guards and today they are intently protecting and managing the forest. In partnership with HELP Tourism they have also started various eco-tourism programs and are now able to generate incomes for undertaking protection and conservation activities. The team from Spiti was able to see how the locals themselves have become the custodians of their environment and are successfully managing an entire national park.

Visits were also made to other regions such as the UNDP endogenous site in Guwahati and Mawlynnong village in the Cherapunji region of Meghalaya. The latter presenting an excellent model of how the villagers are running the entire tourism infrastructure on their own. The most striking feature of their initiative is the garbage management, and every household is involved in the same.

Other conservation linkages that we have managed to accomplish pertain to the set up of a Solar shower in LAngza village that has been co-supported by Muse and the local community through their conservation fund. This solar bathing facility will cater to the visitors in the summer months and will be extremely useful for the locals in the winters when huge amounts of fuelwood is used for heating water for all purposes, including washing and bathing. Another feature of the conservation work in this region pertains to the garbage pits that have been dug up in three different locations in Langza village. Villagers undertake regular cleaning drives and are successfully managing their garbage and ensuring that the village is plastic free and clean. Tie up has also been established with the public Welfare Committee that is working on garbage management in the region.

**Trainings:** Various trainings have been organized to enhance the skill of the guides such as naturalist trainings (with special emphasis on wildlife), first aid, English language, homestay providers training, computer trainings, mountaineering. Although support for lot of these trainings was not available through the grant amount, however, Muse managed to get support from other sources to undertake the same and ensure that the holistic development of the service sector is undertaken. Details of the same are attached in Annexure 1 A.

### **Sustainability Issues:**

The underlying issue for any community based initiative is its sustainability, post the project support period. As has already been mentioned the major objective of the project was establishing the linkage between conservation of the regions wildlife with the tourism industry. In order to ensure the long term sustainability of the same it is pertinent to have a steady market that can easily be managed and handled by the local community in partnership with travel agencies and tour operators. However, complete dependence on them is not the only solution and one requires to also develop in house marketing strategies. Development of a website and other promotional material is a key aspect in this matter. Training of the local team in handling website related marketing and marketing in general is another important issue pertaining to ensuring sustainability.

To achieve the above mentioned Muse laid the foundations for the formation of Ecosphere (a marketing platform for a consortium of organization working in the region on livelihood and

conservation issues), a social enterprise whose objective is to link local livelihoods to conservation of the region's nature and culture. Ecosphere has been working towards establishing marketing linkages for products ranging from tourism to health and organics. This platform is a collaborative of the local community and professionals from diverse backgrounds spanning the gap from the general to the niche.

The other issue pertains to the continuous sensitization of the local community on conservation and its significance. Involvement of the community on a long term basis with the feeling of ownership of the project is also important to ensure that the linkage with conservation is given priority by them over the economic gains being accrued from the promotion of the tourism industry. New ideas have to be constantly floated and for the same it is pertinent that the locals themselves are able to think in a proactive manner rather than be governed by the external partners. Muse feels that contextual trainings and exposures of the key members is imperative for achieving this goal.

Another important aspect to ensure sustainability is development of appropriate policies. There is need to liaison with the government in proposing policy measures that can be adopted for implementation in the region. This would go a long way in ensuring that Spiti is developed as a responsible eco-travel destination and hence doesn't fall prey to the fangs of conventional tourism that could adversely impact the model of community based tourism.

#### **Conservation Priorities:**

Wildlife conservation has been the major priority of the project and much has been done and accomplished in this front during the course of the project. The development of a wildlife trail with major focus on the Himalayan Wolf has been one of the key achievements of the project. The trail has been developed around the villages of Langza and Demul inside the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary. With the development of this trail and its successful marketing many travelers and wildlife enthusiasts have traveled to these regions primarily to get a glimpse of these elusive animals. This has led to a major attitudinal shift in the locals outlook towards these predators, both the Wolf and the Snow Leopard. People who once hated these carnivores are now slowly talking about how best to conserve them and also maybe how to increase their numbers in the region. This has perhaps been the single most significant success of the project.

Other conservation agendas in the region pertain to garbage management, preservation of cultural heritage, promotion of renewable energy, etc. These are being implemented through other project partners in the region.

#### **Example to showcase how the Project has impacted attitudes of the locals towards the wildlife.**

The project has impacted the lives of many people in the region, but one impact stands out the most. In the initial phases of the project there was a lot of skepticism towards the whole concept. People couldn't understand why anyone would ask them to conserve a species that was causing them so much grief and loss. When asked how they felt about these predators most common answer that came was "The Wolf is a big menace and so is the Snow Leopard and for the amount of damage they cause to us we are left with no choice most of the time but to take recourse in drastic measures. There is a lot of anger as there is no support or compensation that we have ever received either from the government or from any other organisation". However, persisting with our agenda of generating awareness amongst the community regarding the significance of conserving these species, we slowly managed in convincing some of the youth about the same. Subsequently, these very youth became the spokesperson for the carnivores and over the months more and more villagers started to get

convinced in the model being proposed. The model was simple, incorporate conservation with local livelihoods. For this one of the options was the development of wildlife trails which could be completely managed and run by the locals themselves as they were the most knowledgeable. Ecosphere would provide marketing support and also trainings on aspects pertaining to the management and running of such treks. These trainings would include naturalist guides, first aid, basic guiding skills, English language speaking skills, etc. On one occasion one of the elders remarked, “It is remarkable how the youth and everyone else is now talking of conserving these predators. Just a few months back we were having meetings in the village as to what measures to take to counter the menace of these predators and look what has happened now. I feel strange with the change in the scenario and also a bit skeptical whether it will be successful and sustainable in the long run”. Over the last 2 years it has been seen that none of the wildlife has been killed by the villagers in this particular region and they have now even agreed to employ a couple of shepherds to ensure that they minimize the killings by the predators so that no one feels the need for any retaliation. Villagers are still keen on adopting other mechanisms such as the insurance scheme to compensate for livestock losses by these carnivores, however due to certain reasons are not very convinced of its results. Muse is working in close liaison with other organizations in the region such as NCF, who have implemented an Insurance scheme in nearby areas with some success. Meetings between these villagers have been organized in the past, however not much success has been achieved in convincing them to adopt the insurance scheme. Other alternatives are also being worked upon in collaboration with the villagers.

**It is estimated that a total of 90 livestock was lost to wildlife in 2007 (83 sheep and goat, 4 donkeys and 3 calves). Figures for 2008 are still awaited.**

**Ownership for the 32 households in 2008 was cows – 52; goats – 87; sheep – 167; horses – 4; donkeys – 34; yaks – 40; churu (female yak) – 1.**

*‘It is strange how the village youth are now suddenly talking in terms of not killing the Wolf. Just a year back we had meetings to make arrangements to find the cubs of the wildlife and cause as much harm to them at an early age as possible. This is largely due to the economic gains from the increase in the number of tourist coming to the area. We will not be having these meetings now’.*



.... Nawang Tandup (Village Co-ordinator Komic village)

*‘With the starting of the homestays and training of the local youth as naturalist guides, boys keep asking me about this plant and that, their usage, benefits, importance, etc. Initially I was a bit skeptical in sharing the information, however, now I see their interest as genuine and linked to an important source of livelihood for them.. It is great to see these boys take interest in the ecology of the region, which will definitely help preserve the knowledge pertaining to the flora and medicinal plants of our region’.*



...Amchi (local doctor) Chundui (Demul Village)

**Development of Niche Products (Wildlife Trails):** In order to establish the linkage of local economies with conservation of the local wildlife a couple of wildlife trails have been developed in the region.

**A. The Kibber Wildlife Trail – 12 Days (Route Manali - Spiti – Manali)**

There are few big cats out there in the wild that have fascinated mankind as much as the Snow Leopard. Its elusive nature and majestic looks have made it one of the most sought after predators amongst wildlife enthusiasts. Spiti is home to this unique and beautiful predator which has its home inside the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary and the Pin Valley National Park.

Whereas the Snow Leopard is a sought after and well known predator its other partner in the region the Himalayan Wolf is if not more, equally unique. This is what one of the wildlife scientists have to say about this carnivore....“In today’s explored world, it is indeed a rare event to discover a new species of mammal, especially that of a large carnivore. When this happens to be a wolf— the most studied of the Carnivores— the discovery is as thrilling as it is surprising. The Indian wolves, which were in plain sight, yet whose origins were elusive to scientists, are the source of this surprise to wolf biologists throughout the world.”

.....Yadvendra Jhalla and D. Sharma.

The Himalayan wolf found in the Spiti valley of Himachal Pradesh is dated back to over 8,00,000 years and is considered to be the parent species of all the canids in the world. As per studies done on this carnivore it is said that there are only 350 of them left in the world, which makes them one of the most critically endangered and rare species of carnivores in the world. Spiti happens to be one of the few places where this rare species of canids is found.

This journey is designed to ensure that one gets an insight into these predators, their habits and habitats.

**B. Tracking the Himalayan Wolf – 16 Days ( Manali – Spiti – Manali)**

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per studies done on this carnivore it is said that there are only 350 of them left in the world, which makes them one of the most critically endangered and rare species of carnivores in the world. Spiti happens to be one of the few places where this rare species of canids is found. As is common knowledge, wolves have always been known to attack livestock for food as a result of which they have shared a strained relationship with the human population. In Spiti the scenario is no different, as a consequence of which there are serious issues pertaining to its conservation. With the efforts of Ecosphere many locals who were hardcore anti wolf propagators are now realizing the significance of conserving this rare species and have begun to participate in activities which could help conserve it on the one hand and provide an alternate livelihood option on the other. The task is far from accomplished and we feel that this is a humble attempt to initiate the conservation of this unique carnivore.

Spiti provides a great opportunity of exploration and chance to witness one of the oldest surviving living species in this breathless vastness.....The Himalayan wolf. The Himalayan Wolf (*Canis lupus chanco*), locally called Shanku has its prime habitat inside the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary and as mentioned has been living here for the past 8,00,000 years. Having lived in this region for so long, Spiti definitely belongs to the wolf before anyone else can lay claim over it. This experience is an opportunity to venture into the habitats of this extremely evolved predator to get a glimpse of its relationship that it shares with its surrounding locales. The larger goal is to be able to ensure that the strained human wildlife relationship is pacified and the locals shown the value in trying to conserve this critically endangered species of wildlife, so unique to this part of the world.

### **Milestones**

A total of 39 groups visited Spiti through Ecosphere in 2008 which amounted to a total of 101 visitors. In 2007 there were a total of 28 groups with 73 visitors.

**Homestays:** A total of 20 homestays in 6 villages have been set up in the valley over the past few years. These homestays are situated mostly in the highland villages of Langza, Komic, Demul, Lhalung, Dhankhar and Mikkim. Members of the local community from various villages have approached Muse for setting similar homestays in their villages and it is felt that in the coming years with adequate standardization and market, the same would be undertaken. In 2009 it is planned to set up homestays in 2 more villages, where both demand from tourists and interest from the local community is very high.

### **Incomes:**

Visitations in the homestays over the last 3 years have been increasing at a very rapid pace. This has led to enhanced incomes and subsequently more interest amongst the community members to continue with the same. In 2007 the homestays witnessed a total of 140 visitations, whereas in 2008 the figure was 203. In 2007 earnings from homestays were Rs. 56,000. Out of this homestay providers earned an income of Rs. 49,000 and Rs. 7000 was given as contribution towards a village conservation fund. In 2008 homestay providers were able to generate an income of Rs. 91,350. Out of this amount the earnings of the homestay providers amounted to Rs. 81200 and Rs. 10150 was set aside as contribution towards a village conservation fund.

In 2007 the earnings for guides, donkeys and yaks amounted to Rs. 75925 and in 2008 the earnings from the same was Rs. 99115.

The above figures are for all revenues the local communities earned through groups sent by Ecosphere. Incomes from independent groups or from other travel agents are not available but would be substantial as well. Youth and other service providers are from households other than Homestay households and are low income families.

**Conservation Fund:** An amount of Rs. 84,856 was set aside by Ecosphere as a conservation/development fund in 2008.

In 2009 it is anticipated with the successful partnerships with various tour operators and responsible travel organizations that the incomes for the local community should easily double from the preceding year.

## Annexure 1

### **A. TRAININGS**

- 1. First Aid trainings** – Spiti valley is a high altitude region and any training imparted needs to take into consideration the peculiar geo-climatic situation of the region. Initially it had been envisaged to use Government Doctors as resource persons for these trainings, however due to their limited number (only 1 in the region) and hence time constraints, Muse initiated dialogue with the Red Cross Society in Shimla. However the centre in Shimla requires a specific number of trainees to participate before they can undertake these trainings and as Shimla doesn't have a huge number of aspiring trainees it is difficult to have them conducted on a regular basis. It was decided that waiting for this would not make sense, and consequently, Muse contacted the Red Cross Society in Delhi. As they hold trainings regularly, it was easier to have persons trained through them. However as the associated costs of getting the youth trained in Delhi are high, Muse has got one boy belonging to a family of traditional doctors trained as a trainer in first aid from the Delhi Red Cross. It is envisaged that this boy will now undertake trainings for larger groups of boys/ girls in the Spiti valley in the summers this year. Muse also organized another first aid trainings in May for guides and Homestay providers. 2 professionally trained wilderness first responder guides conducted this training. The BMO (Block Medical Officer) of the Kaza hospital was also brought in as a local resource person. This training was attended by 20 boys and girls of Spiti and was quite a success. A refresher course is envisaged in April 09.
- 2. English Language Trainings** – Spoken English is a very important skill for the youth in order for them to be incorporated into the tourism industry. Hence Muse tied up with Aptech (Horizon Infosys) in Shimla for conducting these trainings and 4 boys were trained in Shimla for enhancing their English speaking skills last year. The training lasted 1 month. Muse also organized short daily classes for the youth in Spiti throughout the whole year both for its staff and the local youth (boys and girls). 15 boys and girls attended this training.  
English language trainings are again being conducted (over 2 months - Feb and Mar 09) for 4 more boys with APTECH in Shimla for guides and some of the permanent staff of Muse to further enhance their writing and speaking skills.
- 3. Nature Guiding Trainings** – to ensure the linkage of livelihoods to conservation of nature and wildlife it is imperative that the local youth are given ample trainings on the regions flora and fauna, thereby ensuring that they are able to not only interpret the same for tourism purposes but also realize their importance in terms of the ecological balance of their fragile ecosystem. Muse had tied up with The Nature

Conservation Foundation to conduct these trainings in the Summer of 2008. One such training for 7 boys was conducted in October 08 for a period of 4 days. This intensive training was held inside the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary area and focused on the wildlife and flora of the region. Monitoring of the wildlife and impacts on the flora were some of the key aspects of this training. Trainings have also been scheduled for May and June of 2009.

4. **Computer Trainings** – basic computer skills are imperative for the local youth of Spiti to enable them to communicate and market their skills to the outside world. These trainings are an on-going process and they have been conducted in-house as well as through a computer training centre APTECH, Shimla. Trainings were organized for 1 month in Jan 08 where 3 boys were trained and another follow up training is ongoing currently.
5. **Mountaineering Trainings** – Since trekking is a major tourism product in this part of the world it was felt that basics in mountaineering which cover rock climbing, snow craft, ice walking/ climbing, survival and safety in the mountains would be extremely useful for undertaking such treks and expeditions. Muse has sent one boy from Spiti in this initial phase for a 1 month basic mountaineering course to the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarkashi. Based on his feedback and the results of the training, another boy from Spiti is being sent for a similar course in April 09. It is also envisaged to send more boys to NIM in the future and also for more in-depth mountaineering courses.

## **B. Exposure to Ladakh of Muse Team from Spiti**

**Date:** 5<sup>th</sup> November to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007

**Number of Participants:** 4

**Duration:** 12 days

### **Objective:**

- To develop mechanisms for institutionalizing conservation activities. Primary objective is to learn from the Snow Leopard Conservancy's (SLC) initiative of developing community stewardship for nature and culture conservation through the promotion and development of community based tourism (cbt) in Ladakh.
- To enable the Spiti team to develop a better understanding of the conservation related activities, thereby ensuring enhanced capacity and skill enhancement for undertaking the same in the Spiti valley.

### **Aspects covered during the exposure:**

1. Homestays – set-up, support, marketing, standardisation, agreements, monitoring, rotation, quality and services
2. Nature guides and their involvement in wildlife monitoring
3. Community conservation initiatives – plantations, garbage management, mane wall and chorten repair and restoration, solar baths.
4. Wildlife Insurance Scheme, livestock management, grazing reserves, etc.
5. Trainings and other support to local communities by SLC
6. Environmental Education program
7. Parachute Café's

8. Literature developed by SLC, such as maps, brochures, posters and their utility and impacts.
9. Exposure to eco-tourism sites of Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG) – solar technologies being used and implemented in these sites.

**Introduction:** The Himalayan Homestays program that was initiated in the Himalayan belt of India in the year 2002, starting with Ladakh and Sikkim and gradually extending into Spiti, has seen tremendous growth and success over the past few years. While Ladakh and Sikkim have over the years developed various mechanisms and systems to ensure the sustainability of the program, Spiti is still learning and gradually moving in the same direction. In order to ensure that important lessons are learnt from both the sites, exposure visits have been undertaken by members of the local Spiti team to these locations. In 2005 a joint team of SLC, Ladakh and Muse, Spiti went to Sikkim to learn from the initiatives undertaken by ECOSS and their partner organisations in various parts of the state. This exposure was extremely useful in exposing the 2 organisations to the commonalities of the issues and approaches on the one hand the need to involve local communities on the other in every stage of planning and development of cbt. The lessons learnt were amply put into practice on return to Spiti, which has borne useful fruits. It was felt that a similar exposure to Ladakh could prove even more fruitful given the cultural, geographical and economical affinity of the neighbouring regions. As a consequence an exposure for the local Spiti team comprising of 4 members from Muse was organised to Ladakh, primarily with the focus of learning from SLC's initiatives and to enable the Spiti team to evaluate their work in comparison to that undertaken in Ladakh, which provided the perfect opportunity for the Spiti team to analyse and assess their work. Moreover, the scope of the work and activities in both the regions are very similar and with Ladakh having experimented on various initiatives to promote cbt in the region both successfully and unsuccessfully, it is the perfect learning ground for future actions to be adopted in Spiti.

### **Aspects Covered During the Exposure visit to Ladakh:**

1. **Homestays:** One of the core areas of intervention to involve local communities in planning and developing Community Based Tourism (CBT) has been the initiation of homestays across all the 3 sites, namely Ladakh, Sikkim and Spiti. These homestays have been developed with the sole purpose of ensuring that the locals can generate incomes from tourism related activities and as a consequence get involved in conserving their rich cultural and natural heritage. Ladakh was perhaps one of the first places in India where homestays were set up. Over the years these homestays have not only become a major tourist attraction but they have also served the larger purpose of community participation in conservation of which there are some great examples all over Ladakh.

For the Spiti team this was one of the main focus areas on this exposure. We visited 3 different homestay villages, namely Ulley, Hemis Shukpa Chen and Yangthang Tokpo, where we had various interactions with the villagers and got an insight into their issues, functionality, problems and strengths.

During these visits the Spiti team analysed the functioning of the homestays very closely with the aim of implementing the strengths of these homestays back in Spiti. It was learnt that each homestay has their own visitor registers in which details of the guests along with their remarks about their experience is noted. Most of the homestays visited were very traditional and the rooms were very

spacious with large windows and good views. It was amply evident that care had been taken in selecting the rooms for the guests.

The menu developed by the homestay providers in collaboration with SLC is very elaborate and has good options for local as well as western food. Dinner menu mostly comprises of local food and lunch incorporates the typical north Indian cuisine, sabzi, chappati etc. Breakfast has a mix of local and western with the options of local bread with jam, butter and eggs.

A basic SWOT analysis of the homestays revealed the following:

<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Selection of the rooms has been based on a strict criteria and the rooms have great views with large windows.</li><li>➤ Welcoming of the guests is very well organised. They are first taken to their room, then to the kitchen for tea and then to the rest of the house along with the toilet.</li><li>➤ Rooms are always ready for guests.</li><li>➤ Families try their best to ensure that the guests are pleased with their stay.</li><li>➤ Due to limited cash income options the homestay providers are very serious about this product as it provides them with a substantial amount of cash income.</li><li>➤ The Local stove is very elaborately and aesthetically designed.</li><li>➤ The utensils that are displayed in the kitchen are mostly the traditional ones.</li><li>➤ Food is also served in the traditional utensils</li><li>➤ Local snacks are served with options of tea such as Yuay (roasted barley).</li><li>➤ The women quickly change into their traditional dress as soon as the guests arrive.</li><li>➤ Hospitality is worth appreciating. The hosts are extremely respectful and warm.</li><li>➤ Solar lighting is common in most homestays.</li><li>➤ Solar bath in a few villages is also a great eco-friendly option for guests for a bath as well as a great source of income for the locals.</li></ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Overall cleanliness of the homestay was not satisfactory. The kitchens were not very clean in some of the homestays.</li><li>➤ In Ulley and Hemis Shukpa Chan, the homestays were too far from each other and posed a problem for coordination.</li><li>➤ Communication/ Interaction (language) was another weakness for the homestay providers.</li><li>➤ The bedding was not very clean in some homestays.</li><li>➤ Lack of awareness pertaining to conservation, especially amongst the women in some of the villages.</li><li>➤ Walk in guests are not entertained in the homestays.</li></ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Local blankets made from yak wool are a good option in late autumn and winters.</li> <li>➤ Homestay providers are also keenly involved in garbage management. In Ulley the villagers segregate waste at the household level, which is later sold in Leh.</li> <li>➤ Homestay providers are taking personal interest in replenishing old bed sheets, blankets and pillow covers to ensure standardisation.</li> <li>➤ Most of the homestay providers enjoy having guests in their homes, as it not only enriches their knowledge but also generates more awareness about other cultures besides giving opportunity to others to learn about theirs.</li> <li>➤ It is ensured that the guests get involved in activities to make the homestay experience more interactive and fruitful.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Wildlife trails can be developed and locals trained to run them</li> <li>➤ Solar showers can be set up in more villages</li> <li>➤ Cultural programs could be organised by the villagers</li> <li>➤ English to Ladakhi dictionary could be developed for sale.</li> <li>➤ Since most of the vegetables are grown locally and organically, food in the homestays could be marketed as organic.</li> <li>➤ Yak safaris could be another additional income source</li> <li>➤ Devising systems to provide accommodation in homestays to walk in tourists as well</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Homestays can slowly change their character and become more like guest houses.</li> <li>➤ Competition amongst the homestay providers and guesthouse owners could adversely affect the social status of homestay providers</li> <li>➤ Homestay providers can also be impacted by foreign cultures and try to imitate the same and in turn alienate themselves from their own culture and loose the sense of pride in their own value system.</li> </ul>

**2. Nature Guides and wildlife monitoring:** One of the key factors contributing to the success of SLC's initiative in Ladakh is the fact that the communities have been made adequately aware of the necessity of conserving both the natural as well as the cultural heritage. The grooming and training of the local youth (boys and girls alike) has had an immense impact in inculcating the value of community stewardship. On the one hand these naturalists are able to render their services to tourists visiting the area and earn an additional livelihood and on the other hand they learn about their immediate

environment and develop an understanding that inculcates respect and a sense of pride. SLC has trained various naturalists all across the valley and they in turn have become essential tools in ensuring conservation of the wildlife in the region. Some of the naturalists have specially been trained to monitor the movement and populations of wildlife in their respective areas. Tools such as the cyber tracker have been introduced to them, besides other manual monitoring mechanisms. However, not all the tools introduced have had favourable results and outcomes.

**Follow ups:** Naturalist guides trainings have been organised in the past in Spiti, though not with the primary focus of wildlife monitoring. However, during this visit to Ladakh it was realised that this an important area of intervention for Spiti and training for wildlife monitoring need to be conducted in the near future. Moreover the use of remote sensing cameras and tools such as the cyber tracker need to be introduced in Spiti with proper trainings to ensure better monitoring and in turn better results pertaining to wildlife conservation.

### **3. Conservation efforts initiated by the villagers:**

**Insurance scheme:** One of the major problems with regards to the depredation of livestock by wildlife is the poor compensation schemes of the wildlife department of the government. Most people end up spending more money in trying to get compensation for the loss of livestock by wildlife. Hence in earlier times the villagers had resorted to drastic measures due to lack of suitable options. However, with the intervention of SLC, the villagers realised that there were various simple techniques and measures that could be adopted to ensure that the livestock depredation by the wildlife could be reduced and in the event of a loss the locals could be adequately compensated in reasonable time. SLC along with National Insurance Company started an insurance scheme with the villagers in the year 2005, which was welcomed by the local villagers. The terms and conditions of the same have been developed mutually by the villagers, the insurance co. and SLC. However, SLC has no data so far pertaining to the effectiveness of the insurance scheme as no killings or deaths have occurred since the inception of the insurance scheme. This also goes to show that the other measures that they have undertaken have worked well in reducing the killings from wildlife.

**Follow up:** It is felt that the introduction of a similar scheme in Spiti will be an important step towards wildlife conservation as lack of compensation schemes is the major reason for retaliatory killings of the wildlife.

**Coral:** The villagers of Ulley have a summer pasture where the livestock sits in the summer. It is here that most of the killings from wildlife occur. SLC has helped the villagers in designing an effective coral for the livestock. For the same SLC provided the mesh (4 inch mesh) and the enclosure was made by the villagers. This practice has definitely contributed to reducing the livestock depredation by wildlife.

**Shepherding:** Another important mechanism adopted by the villagers of Ulley is better shepherding practices and more vigilance while moving with the livestock. 2 people from the village spend 2 months in the summer pasture with the livestock and are paid Rs. 300 each per family per month. Other nearby villages that send livestock here pay money as well. This has become a good source of income, as a result of which the shepherds are taking their job more seriously which in turn has lead to more vigil while moving with the livestock as a result of which killings by the Snow Leopard has drastically reduced thus contributing to the reduction in the human wildlife conflict in the region.

**Follow Up:** This practice can easily be replicated in Spiti, especially in the highland villages and besides contributing a substantial source of livelihood for a couple of locals it will contribute tremendously in reducing livestock depredation. It was felt that in the initial phase the village of Langza or Demul could be chosen as the site for this practice.

**Mane walls and Chorten restoration:** In some of the villages the locals have contributed part of the conservation fund towards the restoration of the chortens and the mane walls in the villages. This is definitely an activity that gains immense praise from both the village community as well as the monastery. The villagers in Ulley and Hemis Shukpa chen have done repairs and paint work on the existing chortens.

**Follow up:** In Spiti for the initiative to gain momentum and also to ensure that the chortens and mane walls are conserved this is one activity that can easily be started immediately in spring of 2008. This activity requires minimal funds and will also earn the appreciation of the entire community.

**Solar Showers:** One of the major agendas for SLC has been to promote eco-friendly services as much as possible. The set up of the solar shower in the village of Ulley was a perfect solution to the needs of the visitors who wished to be able to take a bath after trekking for a couple of days and at the same time be sensitive to the energy needs of the region. The village of Ulley doesn't have supply of electricity and depends completely on solar energy for any power requirements. The solar showers not only ensure conservation of the fuelwood that would otherwise be burnt to provide warm water but it also gives an additional livelihood to the locals from the earnings from the same. One family of the village of Ulley that has not been able to set up a homestay has been given the charge of maintaining and running the solar bath. This family charges Rs. 50/bath from the visitors thereby enabling themselves to supplement their incomes. (*A similar solar bath has also been set up in the village of Sku Kaya*). One of the important indirect social benefit that has arisen out of the set up of the solar bath is the fact that the locals have started using them more often thereby improving their personal hygiene. Although the solar showers have many benefits pertaining to environment, livelihoods and hygiene, yet there are some practical difficulties that the locals have faced in ensuring adequate turnover from them. One of the major problems faced by the locals is that there are not enough tourists using the solar baths currently at Ulley. There are various reasons for the same, one being the fact that the solar bath is located at one end of this village and 3 of the homestays are 30mins away from the same. It is unlikely that a guest is going to walk 30 mins either direction from their homestay to take a shower. The other reason for the same is the fact that there is a lovely stream in Ulley which most guests are currently using. However the villagers intend to ban bathing in the stream thereby ensuring that those who wish to bathe shall come to the solar bath and not pollute the stream. Another reason mentioned by the locals and members of the SLC team was the fact that if the same solar bath is set on a major trek route its turnover will be very high thereby ensuring its feasibility (as in the case of Sku Kya) and since Ulley is not on a major trek route it is not generating enough numbers to make it economically feasible.

**Follow up:** Set up of a solar bathing unit at Langza village in Spiti. One of the major tasks for the same is the identification of the right solar water heating system. One of the options could be the provision of a bucket bath instead of a shower.

**Garbage Management:** The beauty of any tourist destination is determined by its geographical location, landscape, people and last but not the least the cleanliness of the destination. One of the ways of ensuring that the destination doesn't lose its character is to have a proper garbage management plan. In most of the homestay villages in Ladakh the villagers are collecting their garbage and are sending it to Leh city where it is sold. The villagers segregate the garbage at the household level and then certain people are given the responsibility of transporting the same to Leh city. In the village itself there are designated sites where the garbage is piled up. In some of the villages there are garbage pits for the disposal of waste. One of the crucial areas of intervention is generating awareness amongst the locals pertaining to garbage segregation and utilizing the bio-degradable waste. Although

the latter is a common practice in the Trans-Himalayan regions the former is the critical area of intervention. It is also important that alternatives to burning are provided to the locals for disposing the garbage.

**Follow up:** Awareness generation on garbage management and segregation at home scale level.

**Community Plantations:** In the village of Rhumbak the community has undertaken plantations as a means of increasing greenery. This is also a great contributor to offsetting emissions that the guests cause through their travel. The Muse team suggested that since a portion of the money the tourists pay is ploughed back into ensuring that their trip has had minimum damage on the environment, this should be adequately advertised. The members of the SLC team informed us that there are not many villages where such an option is being offered, however they intend to increase this option to other villages and would try to advertise the same and use it as a marketing tool.

**Follow Up:** Such an option is already being planned for Spiti and what is happening in Rhumbak can easily be replicated in Spiti. One of the plants that can be planted is Seabuckthorn since it not only helps in greening and offsetting emissions, but it is also a source of income for the locals.

**4. Trainings and other logistical support to the villagers for better management of homestays and other tourism related services:** SLC has been involved in the promotion of community based tourism for over 6 years in Ladakh and other Himalayan regions. Over the years they have imparted trainings to the locals on various aspects pertaining to guest management, cookery, naturalist guides, conservation, wildlife monitoring and more. These trainings have been one of the critical factors for the success of the initiative in the region. SLC has trained the homestay providers on all aspects pertaining to the tourism industry and the service sector. However, despite these trainings there is always a need for refresher trainings which are essential for supplementing the earlier trainings. In some of the homestays it was observed by our team that there were certain aspects that the people wanted trainings on, however did not know where to go or whom to approach. It is important that SLC is able to repeatedly get feedback from these villagers in terms of their requirements for trainings. With the increase in the number of villages where these homestays have been set up it is extremely difficult to monitor the performance and needs of each of them constantly. SLC must look at devising new methods to ensure that there is no lacunae in the system to ensure standardisation.

**Follow ups:** One of the foremost tasks for the Spiti team will be to get a feedback from all the service providers on the trainings required by them and consequently arrange to impart the same to them.

**5. Environment Education Program:** The Environmental Education program of SLC has been developed in collaboration with KalpVriksh (NGO based out of Pune). The session started with a presentation by Angmo (SLC's environment education program trainer) on the objectives and genesis of the program. She explained the reasons for the initiation of the same and the outcomes.

Angmo first talked briefly about the work of SLC in Ladakh. She then gave a brief insight into the primary reasons for initiating the conservation work. Some of the key reasons for the same were related to human wildlife conflict, poorly developed livestock pens and enclosures for cattle, poor grazing practices, etc.

The environment education program was initiated with the prime objective of generating awareness amongst the children and ensuring that they grew up with a better understanding of their immediate environment and understood

aspects pertaining to the significance of the bio-diversity of the region along with the need for its conservation.

The method of attaining this objective was to devise techniques that would be easily understood by the children who have no previous knowledge or understanding of the same. The material was developed by Kalp Vriksh and focuses on the flora and fauna of Ladakh. The material has been developed in the form of games, interactive posters and handbooks. Flora and fauna posters, board games, card games and other interactive literature have been developed to impart knowledge to children.

Initially the program was started in 2006 in Leh and then taken to the Hemis NP area. SLC has been doing these programs primarily in Govt. Schools and one Tibetan school in Choglamsar. SLC initially contacts the Education Officer at Leh from whom they seek permission to undertake the program in different schools. As per SLC most of the schools have shown great interest i.e both teachers and students. Grades 4 to 8 have been selected for imparting these trainings to. A total of 4 training sessions are held in each school in a single year. These training sessions last for 2 days.

In order to assess the impact of the training a test (assessment and reassessment) is conducted in the beginning and end of the session which determines how much the child has gained.

Although replication has become a problem as the SLC team is a small unit, yet with Kalp Vriksh they have developed different posters to be purchased by schools which enable the program to be carried on by the schools themselves.

The Spiti team was lucky to have witnessed part of the training in a government school at Hemis Shukpa Chen. One of the highlights of the training for the team was the opportunity to participate in the games along with the school children. It was observed that the students were enjoying the program and were participating in it with tremendous enthusiasm and commitment.

**Follow up:** Replication of a similar program in Spiti will be extremely useful as it will enable the awareness generation of the local community at a very early stage of their growth. This is a great way of ensuring that the locals are adequately informed about their environment and also that they develop a conservation oriented attitude toward their immediate environment.

**6. Parachute Café:** Livelihood generation is one of the major goals of developing various activities that could be easily undertaken by the local populace. The Parachute Cafés have been one such product that has tremendously contributed to the generation of a sustainable source of income for the locals, especially the women. Although there are various groups in Ladakh working on the development of these cafés, they all practically work on the same principle. SLC and the Women's Alliance are the 2 major organisations that have been involved in the set up these parachute cafés in various locations all over Ladakh. The café is run and maintained by the Ama Chokspa (local women groups), who provide some basic amenities and services. Most of these cafés are located on trek routes where there is good demand for certain goods, such as safe drinking water, snacks, food items, etc. The parachute cafés set up by SLC use parabolic water heaters, basic water filters (water is pressure boiled and then filtered), sitting areas, etc. The set up of a solar bathing facility is also being explored, as it has been found that there is demand for the same. Overall the Parachute café is an extremely practical way of providing livelihoods to the local women and important service to the trekking tourists.

**Follow up:** There is some scope for the set up of a parachute café in Spiti, although there has to be ample research that has to be undertaken to select the right location.

**7. Marketing, Advertising and Interpretation Literature:** Another important aspect covered during the course of the exposure was getting an insight into the various literature developed by SLC for promoting their products and ensuring that there is ample interpretation for them. The following are some of the important material that was observed and collected:

- Map cum brochure for various trails
- Film on the Snow Leopard
- Livestock management posters
- Homestay promotion posters
- Snow Leopard posters

Most of the literature has been collected with the aim of utilizing the ideas that have gone into the development of the same. For example a brochure cum map is in the process of being developed for trails and treks in Spiti. The Snow Leopard and livestock management posters provide information and other general insights into the wildlife of the region and aspects pertaining to better practices. These will come extremely handy in explaining to the local community the significance and importance of better livestock management.

**8. Visits to LEDeG eco-tourism sites:** As part of the exposure the Muse team also made visits to some of the sites that have been and are being developed as potential eco-tourism sites in Durbuk block in the Changthang belt of Ladakh. The following were some of the sites visited:

**Spangmik Eco-Lodge:** The Spangmik Eco-Lodge is a 4 hour long drive towards Pangong Tso. This is a small eco-cottage that LEDeG has developed in collaboration with the women SHG of the village. The village has a total of 7 households and has an extremely picturesque location right on the banks of the Pangong lake. The lodge has a total of 3 rooms along with a kitchen and has plenty of solar items which have all been supplied by LEDeG. These include a Solar parabolic cooker (SK 14), a solar water heater, solar home lighting and cfl bulbs. Each room has 2 beds and the cost of the bed is Rs.100. Food is served at the rate of Rs. 35/plate, which includes dal rice and one vegetable (all vegetables are grown locally and are purely organic). The lodge has been made using local material and has various eco-friendly aspects that add value to it.

However, despite its eco-friendliness and stunning location, the lodge has not done good business and only 4 tourists (all foreign nationals) stayed at the facility this year. The reason for this seems to be lack of marketing and lack of adequate and standardised facilities. The J&K govt. lodge opposite the eco-lodge has regular business supported by a skilled workforce and standardised rooms and services. In order to compete with the govt. property the services and facilities need to be upgraded and standardized by LEDeG. Another reason for the lodge not having ample business is because it relies more on FIT's and the road from Lukung (the entry point to Pangong Tso) onwards is really bad because of which the Taxis don't go to Spangmik. As a result of this most of the tourists miss out on Spangmik. The improvement in the road could boost the number of guests to the lodge.

**Lukung Eco Huts:** At the entry point to the Pangong lake are 6 eco-huts that have been developed by LEDeG, which were conceived to be run as a joint venture between the various villages around the area. However, the villagers have further leased it out to some private contractor from TangTse, who has not been able to market and run it efficiently. There facility has a restaurant, toilets with

water supply and garbage pits as well. In terms of its eco-friendliness the place has ample to offer both with regards to solar power and also construction material used in the buildings. However, the property needs better management and adequate trainings of the locals to be able to run it by themselves instead of leasing it out. Business has been below the potential and needs lot more marketing and management.

**ChangLa Queen Camping and Lodge:** This was the best managed initiative in the entire Durbuk region that we visited. The place was earlier run as a guest house and later adopted by LEDeG to be made more eco-friendly. The place is located on the banks of the Kargyum river and offer the following facilities:

- a). camping area for 10-12 tents @ of Rs. 50/ tent
- b). 3 well furnished rooms @ Rs. 200/ room
- c). Toilets
- d) solar water heater, solar parabolic cooker and solar home lighting
- e) a shop with all basic requirements
- f). a small restaurant

The owner of the place Mr. Chhering Angchuk is a man of many talents and has been innovating to ensure that the place runs well. He has marketing tie ups with a few travel agents like Overland Escape who sent about 538 clients in 2007. Besides these clients there were about 80 people who spent the night at this facility (mostly foreigners). Most of the people however, come for food and he offers a wide variety of cuisine ranging from Ladakhi to Indian to Chinese, Italian, Continental etc. According to the owner majority of his clients this year were Indians (Gujarat and Bombay), which were mostly sent by Overland Escape.

For their guests he offers a 14 dish buffet @ Rs.250/ head. The main strength of the place is the fact that it lies on 2 important trek routes one going into Nubra and the other into Leh at Saboo. With the introduction of eco-friendly energy and other similar practices the owner now wishes to attract a different clientele. He also brought to our notice that besides these services he also offers other allied activities such as archery, skiing, expeditions, etc. He has a tie up with Marco Polo, a travel agent from Manali. He also organises expeditions into Pangong area where he provides services for scaling Mary Peak (6584 mts). According to Mr. Angchuk these allied activities are one of his major strengths as nobody else in the entire region is able to offer the same variety.

**Conclusion:** The exposure to Ladakh was extremely useful in terms of providing an insight into the practices adopted for standardisation, eco-friendliness, capacity building, interpretation and marketing. SLC has managed to involve the local communities in a pro active manner not only to provide tourism related services but also to participate in conservation activities. For the Spiti team this exposure has been useful for developing an in depth understanding of the need for institutionalizing conservation activities and linking it to local livelihoods. Since the Ladakh context is very similar to Spiti the various activities and initiatives undertaken by SLC can easily be replicated in Spiti.