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“If we don’t work with people, it’s not going to be an effective project, whether climate change or otherwise”

As part of IUCN Nepal, Ram Chandra Khanal is the monitoring and evaluation specialist tracking the progress of projects focused on environmental conservation, sustainable livelihoods, and climate change. At the moment, the office runs

two large projects focusing on ecosystems, as well as two smaller case studies assessing community-level vulnerability to climate change and adaptation potential on the ground.

Khanal hopes to see the climate change portfolio in the IUCN Nepal office expand; he specifically wants to promote adaptation projects in the South Asia region. However, he also wants to avoid “reinventing the wheel” and incorporate the issue in a way that would be in sync with the office’s focal themes. He maintains “People think that climate change is a stand-alone issue, but it’s not, and that’s not what we are doing; it is part of a bigger picture.... We not only take the climate change perspective, but also integrate it into the larger context.”

Along with incorporating the climate change dimension into the office’s work comes the need for appropriate evaluation mechanisms to help estimate impact, which is not always straightforward. Khanal asks, “How do we assess ecosystem vulnerability and how do we ascribe changes due to climate change?” As part of the current case study, Khanal hopes to answer these questions by collecting solid baseline data. However, he adds, “Establishing baselines for climate change is a challenging task.”

To this end, Khanal and his team are bringing on board local communities and local knowledge to help in the evaluation processes. In his opinion, the human element is vital in helping assess steps in the right direction, as no one is closer to the issue than those most affected by it on the ground. Khanal has noticed that extreme events, especially flooding, have increased in the last 10–15 years, and people are becoming increasingly vulnerable to changes in climatic patterns. He points out that “we can’t change precipitation patterns, but we can adapt to them,” and local inputs are essential to help do that.

So far, says Khanal, communities on the ground are rarely involved in a participatory fashion in project lifecycles, and feedback mechanisms linking beneficiaries to implementers and evaluators are weak. This is a drawback, as Khanal has found that

involving communities in the evaluation process has raised awareness of climate change among people and has resulted in empowerment and the promotion of a sense of ownership of efforts to combat climate change. Of course, all of this together bolsters preparedness and adaptation ability.

At the IUCN office in Nepal, the main elements of monitoring and evaluation approaches revolve around people-centred development, participatory processes, multidisciplinary actions and learning for improvement, taking due consideration of local context and issues. Although participatory monitoring and evaluation tools depend on the objectives of the project, the main ones used to assess vulnerability due to climate change are the seasonal calendar, focus group discussions, key informant surveys, social and resource mapping, and vulnerability mapping.

When asked what he got out of the International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development, Khanal says, “At conferences people usually talk at the national and global level, but not usually at the community level.” But he found that this conference covered all the bases and highlighted the fact that community involvement is still not where it should be on the development agenda.



A community-constructed and managed spur to minimize flashflood impacts in Ilam Siwalik, Nepal

In terms of steps forward, Khanal hopes to see a standardized but adaptable framework for involving communities in the evaluation process. He also believes that there is a serious disconnect between the international, national, and local evaluation communities, and that there must be more vertical links between them. “Priorities may differ at the different levels but there should still be some sort of framework, because if we can’t link between the household level and the international level then we’ll just keep talking. It’s a like a multistorey building without steps. You can’t get from one level to the other.”

For Ram Chandra Khanal’s conference presentation, please see

www.esdevaluation.org/images/Vulnerability - Khanal.ppt

For further information, please visit www.iucnnepal.org