

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR HIGH ALTITUDE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES FROM THE HIMALAYAS

By Gargi Banerji and Mashqura Fareedi, Pragya

POVERTY AND LIVELIHOODS IN THE HIMALAYAS

A Poverty of Many Hues:

The High Altitude mountain pockets of the Himalayas, stretching from Jammu & Kashmir in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east, remain in the rain shadow area of the larger development process of the country. The communities that inhabit this infinitely tough terrain reside in a scatter of small villages across the valleys and

Himalayan communities suffer multiple forms of poverty. Apart from the most recognized World Bank form of low incomes, they suffer many other forms of poverty far graver in nature of their consequences.

- *low incomes and lack of livelihood options,*
- *resource starvation,*
- *deprivation of basic services (education, health, sanitation) and development attention,*
- *exclusion from the mainstream, from participation in socio-political processes and in technological developments,*
- *lack of control over their resources and being at the mercy of the elements*

plateaux, cut-off from the world due to climatic and infrastructural adversities. They suffer multiple forms of poverty, exacerbated by environmental vulnerability. Economic stagnation & poverty is severe among population of the Indian Himalayan Region today, with 30-40% lying below poverty line and 45% of underemployment as well. This causes high food deficits as well and results in poor physical development, weak immune systems, and high maternal & infant mortality.

The highlanders have learnt to eke out a living from subsistence agriculture and pastoralism during the short, mild summers; winters are bitter stretches when no productive activity is possible. Poverty levels are high and the deprivation stark. Lack of irrigation makes cultivation of cash crops difficult and the produce is sold raw in distant markets with very low returns for the farmers. Limited arable land and small farm sizes hand, constrain agriculture and perpetuate traditional practices. Fragile soils, inadequate water resources, and severe climatic conditions, implies low crop productivity. As a result of infrastructural weaknesses, occupational diversification is limited. Compounded by high under-employment, this leads to outmigration, with associated increase in burden on women. The near total dependence on natural resources for cultivation, fodder, timber & fuelwood, is also having a grievous impact on the fragile land and further impoverishing the indigenous communities. Crop productivity is reducing and the burden on women, the traditional NTFP collectors, is steadily increasing which poses severe problems in their health & education. Population in the region has multiplied, but resources have shrunk, and has meant increasing resource stress and insecurity.

The remoteness, inaccessibility and fragility of the Himalayan region aggravate poverty. The region is poor in basic infrastructure and services. Road connectivity and communication services are limited. This leads to high inequality of exchange - sale of Himalayan produce at low prices, purchase of commodities from outside the region at far higher prices. Economic enablers for marketing, institutional credit, energy, technologies and information, are lacking and place Himalayan people at a disadvantage. This complex of factors marginalizes Himalayan people in the mainstream economic processes. Energy inadequacy for instance, disallows processing and value addition through mechanization. The altitude is also a barrier to flow of resources to the area, and the reach and quality of infrastructure and basic services of communication, healthcare, education, considered commonplace in the plains, is pathetically poor. While the rest of the nation strives for a double-digit economic growth, these areas are highly deprived even in terms of the basic services of drinking water, education and health. Human resource capacity in the Himalayas is therefore severely stunted and another cause for pegging down development. The insulation suffered by highland communities has meant an increasing gulf in skills and technologies. In spite of the immense advances made by the rest of the world therefore, these communities remain trapped in primitive practices, unable to produce/sell value-added products or new-age services, deriving at best, small benefits from low-end tourism employment in the flourishing tourist markets in their regions. Further, the region is characterized by very low population density with a scatter of villages on steep mountain slopes and in remote, unconnected valleys, which makes it difficult for Himalayan people to participate effectively in the socio-political processes of the nation. Mountain regions are perceived as peripheral and suffer from policy and development neglect. Policies tend to be developed for the lowlands and applied in these regions, and therefore fail. Investments in the region continue to be low and there are stark gaps in development. There is no value placed on public goods & services provided by mountains and communities do not gain from their stewardship. Rich in resources that plains communities depend on, high mountain regions are however characterised rather by a one-way extractive pattern- they provide water, timber, minerals, to downstream people, but negligible benefits flow back to them. Income inequalities between high altitudes and plains have been growing steadily. Low capacity of Himalayan people constrains them from rising out of poverty, and geographical barriers and cultural dissimilarity from mainstream populations, creates a social schism.

Opportunities and Options

Alternate occupations: Alternate non-farm livelihoods could help absorb the growing Himalayan population and their growing needs. Occupational diversity has been found to be significant catalysts for development of rural areas, bringing in revenues that in turn draw other constituents of development, viz, welfare services and infrastructure as well, while reducing pressure on natural resources. Ideally, livelihoods that the area/people have a competitive advantage in, would yield results faster, and enable an effective 'livelihood rehabilitation'. This would also have the benefit of reducing the growing pressure on natural resources with its resultant ecological degradation and resource insecurity among Himalayan communities.

Value-addition: Most natural resource rich/unique areas, being far from the mainstream, are also far from technologies and from markets, and hence are totally primary produce based economies; while some do trade this primary produce to distant markets, most tend to trade internally and are closed valley economies. A move up the

value chain, would imply that mountain communities would need to include at their point, some or all processing that the primary produce undergoes before purchase by the end-buyer. These processes would enable retention of greater share of revenues on the final products within the Himalayan valleys, and enable some of the Himalayan people to move out of the farm-based activities to working on or managing these processes. A likely spin-off of value-addition is the development of secondary industries to support it, which in turn generate additional employment. A direct access to buyers or even an enhanced strength through cooperatives and the like, could also help reduce channel losses in terms of margins to middlemen, and enable the Himalayan producers to retain more of the margins.

Niche sector clusters: High mountain regions have the potential to produce a variety niche products for which latent markets exist; additionally, the burgeoning tourist market in these regions have substantial consumption capacity for a range of goods and services. Yet, the disadvantages of mountain regions have meant a high leakage of revenues and inability to potentiate on advantages. The solution would lie in removing the bottlenecks to mountain areas' benefiting from their specific advantages of niche products and markets, developing eco- culturally appropriate solutions to address these problems. Economic development efforts in the highlands need to concentrate on creation of development clusters for ecological/cultural niches. Geographic proximity and commonality of resources/activities would give cluster constituents the economic benefits of several positive externalities. Forward linkages with regional techno-economic networks would ensure product-market compatibility for these clusters and help them maintain pace with ongoing development in the region while contributing to balanced regional growth. Area-specific produce such as medicinal plants and crafts, as well as ecotourism and culture-based products, can be developed as niche sector clusters with a high income and employment-generating potential.

THE PRAGYA APPROACH IN LIVELIHOODS DEVELOPMENT IN THE HIMALAYAS

Core Principles

Pragya, a not-for-profit organization, has been working towards enabling communities in the high altitude Himalayas (above 8,000 ft) to develop in a sustainable manner, achieve a higher quality of life and satisfaction of their aspirations. The guiding principles of the organization are: *Development without destruction* and *Empowerment for enabling choices*. Interventions include conservation of the natural ecosystems, fostering ethnic/alternate livelihoods, revitalizing traditional knowledge, formation and strengthening of community based institutions and infusion of appropriate technologies. Livelihood projects being implemented by Pragya adopt a holistic and multi-dimensional approach, and comprise interventions aimed at conservation of the rich natural and cultural heritage and capacity building and facilitation of the indigenous people for heritage based sustainable livelihood options.

Key Pragya principles in livelihood development of Himalayan communities include:

Endogenous Development: Development of Himalayan regions needs to evolve according to their local character, appropriate to their socio-ecological context. The endogenous development approach is one that places the goal of human development beyond that of mass consumption and respects values and cultures along with economic progress. It recognizes the accumulation of human capital or knowledge as the key engine of growth for regions. Pragya emphasizes investing in local human capacities and potential towards shaping livelihoods that adhere to and optimize on the socio-cultural-ecological milieu of the Himalayan people. Rural development that is rooted in the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity can release mountain regions from the tyranny of exogenous interventions and also give these communities a voice in the mainstream politico-administrative processes of the nation.

Development cum Conservation: In the less-developed, fragile ecosystems of the world, such as the Himalayan region, efforts towards building enterprises, should not be based on the principle of mere economic growth but be treated as means to achieve larger goals of conservation and equity. As an organization dedicated to sustainable development of fragile mountain systems and communities, Pragya understands the need to tread slowly on the economic path. The livelihood initiatives of Pragya function as a closely-knit weave that tie together development and conservation elements, ensuring economic returns to the community along with sustainable utilization of the mountain resources, and the conservation and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage. Livelihood interventions aim to reduce overuse of natural resources by the infusion of value-addition that enable enhanced revenues per unit of Natural Resource used, as well as through change to sustainable and less resource-intensive technologies and materials. Alternate low-impact non-farm livelihoods are also facilitated that accommodate people off the land.

We believe...

Two fundamentals guide all Pragya work:

Development without destruction ~ Pragya believes that the development of the Himalayan region needs to be closely attuned to its unique ecology and cultures. Interventions are designed combining development and conservation activities, addressing people's core needs while also helping to preserve the rich heritage of the region. Appropriate technologies are infused, blending them with the traditional knowledge of the communities.

Empowerment for enabling choices ~ All Pragya projects are anchored strongly with the Himalayan communities. Pragya emphasizes that local people participate in their development and take responsibility for project activities. Interventions build capacities of local people so that they can manage their cultural and natural heritage and address their development goals. Endogenous systems and organizations are also created that help address people's needs with minimal dependence on external support.

Strategies for Livelihoods Development

i. Local is Beautiful: Rather than be based on primary production for common products for distant markets, economic development that makes productive use of local resources of every mountain valley for the creation of unique products for both internal and new markets, could not only give a comparative advantage to the region, but also dynamise these very resources and ensure a far greater part of the benefits being retained by the local communities. Thus for instance, mountain communities would have a comparative advantage in the cultivation and processing of high value medicinal plants that grow only in the rarefied atmosphere of the mountain regions, and would be able to extract a higher proportion of the benefits thereof. Pragma promotes the development of Himalayan industries that use Himalayan resources, are run by the Himalayan people, and provide maximum benefits to Himalayan communities.

ii. Heritage Based Enterprises: Micro or small enterprises based on the local natural and cultural heritage, such as traditional arts and crafts of a region, have a number of advantages: they are usually easily acceptable as occupations to the community; the skill-base and inputs required for them are amply available in the community and region; they typically do not require high technology or high investment; they are usually environmentally suitable for the region and suitable for home-based or small-scale enterprises. Such heritage-based enterprises are therefore appropriate for low population density mountain regions. The problems usually lie in the loss of functionality of the products in the modern market, the low productivity and quality standards against the current requirements, and the lack of marketing infrastructure and efforts. Pragma interventions involve appropriate product modification and tool upgradation along with requisite marketing towards building them as successful rural enterprise options, while also helping preserve the heritage of traditional crafts.

iii. Weaving Technologies: Much that is truly valuable and locally appropriate lies in old wisdoms and traditional practices, albeit rusty and frequently eroding. Traditional knowledge systems are often more holistic and conservation-oriented. Modern-day problems are however better served through modern technological developments, which also have the advantages of higher productivity and quicker impact. In each livelihood interventions, Pragma assesses technologies-in-use and undertakes technology adaptations that blend the traditional and the modern, retaining the valued wisdoms and bringing in the required new themes. An added advantage of such adaptations is that they are more easily implementable, for they use local materials, are oriented to unique features of the local environment and culture, and are similar to traditional techniques and hence more acceptable to the local community.

iv. Capacity Building: As a result of historical neglect and continuing lower scale of development inputs and services being provided to the mountain regions in comparison to other parts of the country, the human resource capacity of the region remains severely stunted and a barrier to the uptake of alternate and high revenue livelihoods. Pragma's capacity building inputs are multi-pronged. At an individual level, skills are developed in the particular trade, sector, product/service that is being promoted, with upgradation of competencies to align them to current-day markets and product quality. There is considerable emphasis on technology infusion and associated skill building, as well as on entrepreneurship development and infusion of basic management skills. Enterprises are facilitated with group formation, management support and all manner of linkages - with Government as well as non-government institutions and bodies for the strengthening

and up-gradation of enterprises.

v. Phased Support: Seed inputs are known to be a requirement for enterprise development; most enterprise development work focuses on the provision of credit alone as a support to enterprise building. In the absence of adequate capacity, seed inputs are better provided in a phased manner however, enabling a gradual development of the enterprise. Pragma assists enterprise groups with the provision of equipment and materials (looms, tourism equipment, wool) aligned to their seasonal production quantities and based on the performance level of each.

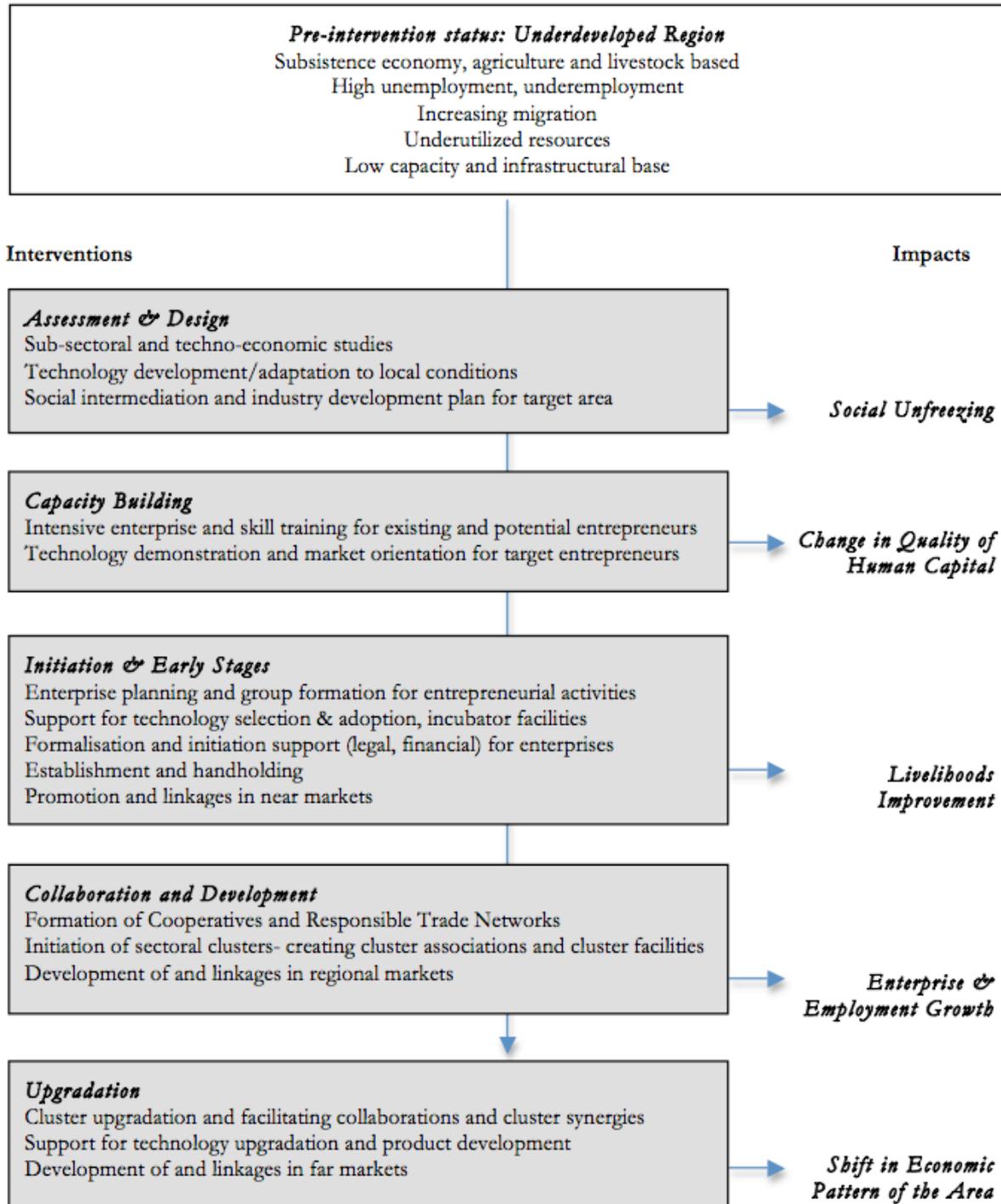
Management, technology and business development support is likewise provided for a longer duration and while the quantum of inputs reduces with time, the nature of inputs is graded upwards as the enterprise stabilizes and grows and the capacity of the entrepreneur group is enhanced.

vi. Fair Trade Mechanisms: Collaborative and group efforts are valuable in remote, rural areas where capacity to engage with modern technologies, markets and institutions is lower, and where solidarity and peer-group support therefore is significant in the value it provides. This is especially true of the high altitude Himalayan region. Collaboration in livelihoods would enable Himalayan communities to participate in the modern economy with some degree of equity, empowering them to negotiate from a position of greater strength in the marketplace. Pragma invests considerable effort in creating these collaborative structures such as Self Help Groups and Cooperatives to ensure equity in trade. All Pragma-facilitated enterprise groups are also provided inputs on fair trade mechanisms, as well as assistance in sales promotion, and are networked with select partners in the market/trade channel. Fair trade is also facilitated by working at the buyer end, educating the industry and helping set up Responsible Trade Networks that recognize producers' rights and protect these in transactions with mountain communities.

vii. Building Economies of Scale: Creation of niche-sector clusters, as has been mentioned earlier, is a socio-ecologically appropriate route for a broad-based economic development of mountain regions. Cluster building is a gradual process involving capacity building and forging of collaborative relations, and the appropriate positioning of the clusters in the economic mainstream. Pragma interventions are seeking to develop clusters on specific enterprises like crafts and agro processing in the Himalayan region. Cluster associations are created based on the necessary common services and/or facilities required for the cluster, such as equipment for value-addition or promotion for all cluster products/services. Such common facilities/services are then installed with cluster associations, thus helping all cluster members achieve a technology and product/service status that each would otherwise be unable to achieve. Scale building is also achieved through intensive efforts at networking and linking the cluster to market, credit and technology channels, helping it ford the barriers created by geographical remoteness and distance from enabling infrastructure and markets.

Process of Livelihoods Development

Our livelihood interventions follow a developmental process, as follows:



SELECT PRAGYA INTERVENTIONS FOR LIVELIHOODS DEVELOPMENT IN THE HIMALAYAS

Pragya is working on the promotion of both farm-based and non-farm livelihood options for Himalayan communities, from Jammu & Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh. Given below are our interventions in and experiences with two livelihood streams.

I. Himalayan Herbs for Local Livelihoods

The Indian Himalayas are a globally recognised biodiversity hotspot and its great heights are a storehouse of the most rare and valuable species of medicinal and aromatic plants. These plants are an integral part of the culture of the local communities of the Himalayas, woven into their lives in innumerable ways and a major input for the healthcare of the rural poor; they are also a source of lean season sustenance for high altitude fauna. Uncontrolled collection from the wild and degradation of natural habitats is leading to a rapid depletion of this herbal wealth however, and several species are critically endangered, as the market for alternative medicine and demand from pharmaceutical industries explodes. These root plants, which are systematically mined from entire hill slopes and meadows by locals as well as outside labour employed by traders, are subsequently exported from the region for use in perfumeries and medical preparations- both within India and abroad. Very little of the benefits of commercialisation flow back to the host communities however, who are typically paid collector's wages for harvesting the required plant parts. The unsustainable harvesting of the Himalayan MAPs has a serious impact on the rights of the indigenous population over the natural resource base and livelihoods, since large numbers of the rural poor are fully or partially dependent on these plants as a source of income; large-scale export of these medicinal plants has put the local health systems, which are almost totally dependent on the same, at risk.

Pragya is working for the conservation and sustainable utilisation of the medicinal and aromatic plants of the Indian Himalayas. The project promotes the cultivation of high-value herbal species as alternative cash crops by local communities, thus enhancing farmer incomes. Medicinal plants cultivation is a high-yield use of land resources in the Himalayas that has multiple benefits. These species are agro-climatically adapted and hence need lesser inputs of water and manure; they call for organic cultivation methods only and hence there need be no expenditure for chemical fertilizers and pesticides; being hardy, native species, they are less vulnerable to pests and diseases and even droughts to an extent; they do not degrade the land as other non-native species and in fact also perform certain other functions, such as soil binding; the income per unit of land with the cultivation of medicinal plants is much higher than with other cash crops such as peas or potatoes. Most important of all, the high-value Himalayan species are endemic to the region, giving the Himalayan farmer a definite competitive advantage in these species, vis a vis other cash crops. Alongside cultivation of medicinal plants, the Pragya intervention also encourages community stewardship for protecting the plants in the wild and preservation of the ethnobotanic traditions. The project is being implemented in 12 high altitude districts across 5 Himalayan states including Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The intervention comprises the following:

Medicinal plants cultivation: Farmers and traditional healers are being trained and assisted in setting up micro- plantations of medicinal plants at altitudes ranging from 8,000 ft. to 16,000 ft.; recognising women as the key repositories of knowledge on aromatic, spice & dye plants, the project has helped set up several Self-Help-Groups of women kitchen gardeners and supports them in undertaking cultivation of these species in the backyards of their houses. A survey helped identify the species that under threat and those that have a high value and demand in the market; typically these tend to converge. Species-area matching helped determine the most suitable species for cultivation in different parts of the Himalayan region. Wild harvested from time immemorial, high altitude medicinal plants had remained undomesticated. The Pragya agri-research team studied the high value species and developed simple, easy-to-use cultivation protocols for these. In order to bridge the notorious lab-to-land gap, regular training and field demonstrations are conducted for farmers and continual technical assistance is provided on propagation, cultivation, plantation-planning and pest management. Several nurseries and greenhouses and a demo farm for medicinal plants have also been set up for propagation of the high-value medicinal species and distribution of saplings to farmers. Farmer Expert Groups are being created in each valley for local level research into medicinal plants cultivation and mentoring of new medplants farmers. As a result of Pragya efforts, the cultivation of medicinal plants of the Himalayas is well on the way to being established as a viable alternative to their collection from the wild, and farmers across the Himalayas are today cultivating

Aconitum heterophyllum, *Picrorhiza kurrooa*, and other Himalayan species, which enables them to net a much higher income than they would through conventional cash crops.

Cooperative effort: Pragya has established medicinal plants growers' cooperatives in several Himalayan districts. This has involved intensive training on cooperative management, followed by assistance in registration with the authorities and handholding for formalization in terms of accounting systems and participation processes. The cooperatives have been helped to undertake their role with increasing effectiveness and aided in linking up with channel partners for marketing and sale of the produce.

Value-addition: Medicinal plants are an extremely sensitive produce and because of the nature of use, call for stringent quality norms. The market channel however, uses, in the main, the rudimentary measure of physical observation of plant parts for checking quality. This makes incorporation of processing at a local level difficult and value-addition has to be limited to post-harvest processes. Pragya has therefore equipped the medicinal plants growers' cooperatives with produce drying equipment that helps reduce wastage and transportation costs of the produce. Women's SHGs have also been facilitated to set up spices drying and packaging enterprises.

Fair trade: Fair trade mechanisms are being instituted as well. The cooperatives have further been provided direct linkages with end-market traders and buyers to enable them to draw a fair price for their produce. Buyer-seller meets are conducted periodically at which national level manufacturers of herbal products as well as large traders are brought face to face with Himalayan farmers. Farmers are likewise provided regular exposure to the regional and national markets and buyer requirements. These interventions have the potential of increasing medicinal plants revenues for the Himalayan farmer by several times.

THE JOURNEY IN MILESTONES for the Lahaul Cooperative: *A very successful Medicinal Plants Growers' Cooperative has been formed in Lahaul and is being assisted in forging linkages with bulk buyers at the national level, such as Dabur.*

- 1998:**
 - research into medicinal plants and cultivation prospects and protocols
 - launch of training for farmers in medicinal plants cultivation
- 2000:**
 - 6 experimental plots for medicinal plants set up by farmers in the district with technical inputs & assistance from Pragya
- 2001:**
 - the first tentative protocols for 3 medicinal species of the district
 - exposure visit for farmers to industry
- 2002:**
 - 2 nurseries set up in the district; distribution of seeds & saplings to farmers for medicinal plants. cultivation
 - several new farmers begin cultivation of medicinal plants
- 2003:**
 - first national seminar-cum-workshop with farmers and researchers
 - launch of cultivation protocols for 4 species
 - launch of the Lahaul Medicinal Plants Growers' Cooperative (MPGC) with training and registration
- 2004:**
 - first harvest from a Pragya-supported medicinal plants plantation and sale to traders in Kullu
 - distribution of seeds by MPGC to new members
- 2005:**
 - provision of solar dryer to MPGC
 - members in MPGC increased to 165
 - second national seminar cum workshop on medicinal plants
 - first buyer-seller meet with representation of 13 pharma/herbal companies
- 2006:**
 - third national seminar
 - second buyer-seller meet
 - exposure to national markets, processing centres
 - training on quality requirements by traders and Hamdard University
- 2007:**
 - increase of farmers in MPGC to 205
 - training of farmers by Unilever Research Lab on post-harvest technologies and quality requirements
 - participation of MPGC members in a stakeholder consultation commissioned by National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) towards determining policy inputs for the 11th Plan
 - cultivation protocols firmed up for total 18 species
- 2008:**
 - Business deal finalized with Dabur*
- 2009:**
 - a long-term agreement with industry for supply of medicinal plant material at a mutually negotiated and consented to rate.

** The Dabur-MPGC Deal:*

In order to ensure the sustainability of the medicinal plants cultivation, we worked towards creating market linkages between cultivators and buyers. Towards this end, an extensive market survey was conducted and potential buyers (both at the national and local level) were identified. Buyer-seller meets were organized at several stages to establish fair trade channels between the cultivators/producers of medicinal plants and the traders.

In 2008, we established a dialogue between MPGC and Dabur India Ltd., India's leading pharmaceutical company with approximately 90% of the medicinal plant market share. After several rounds of talks, quality checks on the produce and discussions with the MPGC, Lahaul, Dabur finalized the deal.

The deal earned the cooperative Rs. 2 million and several species like Inula, Saussurea and Aconitum were purchased over two phases. The details are given below:

- 1. Kuth (Saussurea lappa) 8 - 10 tons*
- 2. Manu (Inula racemosa) 8 - 10 tons*
- 3. Atish (Aconitum heterophyllum) 50 - 60 kg*

Apart from the apparent monetary benefit of this linkage, the deal served to act as a demonstration of the benefits flowing from a synergy of conservation efforts with market tie-ups. The success of this can be gauged by the steep increase in the membership of the cooperative, following the deal. This has also resulted in an increase in requests for seed and other planting material for growing of medicinal plants commercially.

Conservation actions: Recognizing the need for scientific data in order to ensure appropriate conservation planning and action, the project began with a mammoth and first-of-its-kind activity, that of inventorying and threat assessment of the herbal wealth of the high altitude Himalayas. Community awareness generation and participation in conservation is at the core of the project and a continual process. Children and women, youth and traditional healers, all are being educated and enlisted for active stewardship of the herbal resources in the wild. Community-based 'Natural Heritage Conservation Councils' have been formed in all Himalayan valleys with responsibility for the conservation of natural resources and local level activities directed towards it. They are also being encouraged to adopt and protect commonly owned lands which have a concentration of medicinal plants; measures include social or physical fencing or controlled usage of the sites. Some of these areas of plant wealth are being established as 'Indigenous Protected Areas' that could also serve as genetic reserves for the concerned species. The strong fabric of the people and plants relationship in the Himalayas is being documented and revitalised.

This project has also been awarded the 2000 Whitley Award, an international recognition for nature conservation projects, by the Whitley Foundation and the Royal Geographical Society.

II. Cultural Industries for the High Altitude Himalayas

A great, although not adequately recognized, wealth of the Himalayan region is its unique cultural heritage. With the strong homogenising influence of urban and mainstream cultures however, this is increasingly under threat. On the other hand, given burgeoning tourism and growing interest in diverse arts and crafts across the world, the cultural forms could well serve to create alternate livelihoods for the Himalayan people.

Pragya is helping Himalayan communities preserve and revive their cultural heritage, and shaping them into avenues for revenue generation. The pilot project was carried out in the district of Lahaul & Spiti in Himachal Pradesh; this is now being extended to all other high altitude districts in the country. Among efforts to valorize culture, groups and associations have been formed which focus primarily on the creation of *Heritage Based Enterprises* centered on products and services that reflect and augment the cultural diversity of the region. The effort is based on the understanding that most of the traditions, crafts, art and knowledge unique to these regions are dying because they do not bear the earlier held utility or value for the present generation. Our effort, therefore, is to identify those elements of culture that could be transformed into income generating activities, adapting, wherever necessary, the form to the current day needs and preferences. Among these are crafts, some forms of dance, art and food. The intervention comprises the following:

The Eco-museums: A network of eco-museums has been set up by Pragya in the district of Lahaul & Spiti- small, local facilities that display age-old artefacts, donated by local communities and conserved by Pragya museologists- that help recreate and depict a community's history and local way of life. Each eco-museum also comprises a Crafts Showroom that showcases and sells traditional crafts of the region, produced by local crafts persons, to locals and to visitors to the region. The eco-museums are operated by local youth that have been trained in professional museum and visitor management by faculty from the National Museum Institute. Windows for the promotion of local heritage, these have helped revive community identity, and are contributing to cultural tourism and revenues.

Crafts Enterprise Groups: The traditional woven crafts of the Himalayas that had been gradually disappearing with the threads of time have been revitalised and are being grown into supplementary livelihoods. Design experts (drawn from NIFT and NID) have worked with local crafts persons to develop a portfolio of alternate craft-based products attuned to current market trends. Intensive training has been imparted in a phased manner to the local crafts persons for skills upgradation and quality improvement. Crafts groups have been formed and are being facilitated with material and design inputs. Weaving centres have been set up, equipped with different types of looms. Crafts groups are being assisted to produce the traditional crafts (eg., *lingche, pherba*) as well as alternate products (such as bags, table mats, cushion covers) that use the same weaves and motifs; the Crafts Showrooms in the Eco-museums serve as the sales outlets for these. The crafts groups are also being helped with linkages to sales outlets in urban centres in the region.

Music & Dance Troupes: A fresh lease of life has been given to the ethnic music & dance forms of the area as well.

New generations of Himalayan people have been taught the local dances by local experts. Music & Dance troupes have been constituted and troupe members have been given inputs on choreography and stage management. The troupes perform at local events and

are being groomed to perform at the state and national levels as well, which would in turn generate wider awareness of and respect for the local culture. Still at a nascent stage, this model could well establish a sustainable culture tourism cluster, which benefits the locals in the area. On the anvil is the establishment of Heritage Interpretation Centres for conducting periodic local cultural festivals for the benefit of both locals and tourists.

Ecotourism training and enterprise facilitation: Recognising tourism as inevitable for the Himalayan region, Pragya has determined to make all efforts to promote a sustainable form of tourism in the area, one that conserves the local natural and cultural heritage while ensuring maximum benefits for local people. Towards this, a vocational course has been developed and a cadre of local trainers trained in the collaboration with the Department of Tourism, University of Kurukshetra. The vocational course is conducted annually in 18 Pragya established Resource Centres in the Himalayan region. In collaboration with institutes like the Directorate of Mountaineering and Allied Sports and Sita Resorts, young people are provided specialized training on adventure tourism, tour operations, home stays, food and beverages. A network of Ecotourism Centres have also been set up in various districts and are equipped with information databases that facilitate the uptake of ecotourism as an occupation. Efforts are being made to form clusters of tourism enterprises to strengthen the practice of ecological and culturally responsible tourism in all our areas.

Community capacity for culture management: Local communities have been catalysed for stewardship of their cultural heritage. Community-based Cultural Heritage Conservation Councils constituted in all districts are being helped to carry out local level conservation activities. Anthropologists from Pragya, in conjunction with community elders, are working on documenting the traditional cultural forms. A network of cultural actors of the Himalayas is being formed that will facilitate solidarity and thus enhance the practice of cultural forms and revenues from them.

CONCLUSION

The Pragya interventions on livelihoods development in the Himalayan region are still mid-stream. Significant learnings have been derived and these have been shared through the above. It is expected that we would learn more and need to develop newer strategies and modify processes as we progress into future stages in the interventions and when we upscale and replicate these as well. That said, it must be accepted that livelihoods development in mountain regions has to flow with the social and ecological fabric of these areas. On the other hand, the economic exclusion suffered by these areas, has to be addressed and the areas must be provided an equitable access to far markets, while not making them dependent on these as well. The capacity of mountain communities and areas must be developed to enable them to engage effectively in healthy competition in the larger economy of the nation.