

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT & COEXISTENCE  
/ CASE STUDIES

# FACILITATING A TRANSBOUNDARY GOVERNMENTAL APPROACH TO ADDRESS THE THREATS TO A SPECIES



## INTRODUCTION

The snow leopard *Panthera uncia* inhabits twelve countries in central and south Asia, which include Afghanistan, the Kingdom of Bhutan, China, India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

**IN 2013, OFFICIALS FROM THESE COUNTRIES MET IN BISHKEK, THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, UNDER THE INITIATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC'S PRESIDENT, TO ENDORSE A NEW GLOBAL INITIATIVE DURING THE FIRST GLOBAL SNOW LEOPARD & ECOSYSTEM FORUM.**



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**KEY INSIGHTS &  
LESSONS LEARNT**  
ON PAGE 12

# CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN, THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN, CHINA, INDIA, THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN,  
THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, MONGOLIA, NEPAL, PAKISTAN, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN, AND THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

This initiative aimed to protect the critical ecosystems used by the snow leopard, leading to the endorsement of the Bishkek Declaration on Snow Leopard Conservation, and launch of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystems Protection Program (GSLEP and hereafter “the Program”) implemented by all aforementioned nations at this meeting.

This case study delves into the transformative efforts of the GSLEP towards fostering unity among range country governments, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, local communities, and the private sector through a transboundary holistic approach and a collective embraced vision to conserve snow leopards and their valuable high-mountain ecosystems, including addressing conservation conflicts.



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## PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Snow leopards have large home ranges, with adult males covering an average range of 200 km<sup>2</sup> and some individuals having home ranges greater than 1000 km<sup>2</sup>. Country borders traverse much of the snow leopard range, with at least one-third of the range located within 100 km of an international border. Conservation of the snow leopard requires consolidated efforts that transcend country borders.

Impressive conservation efforts for snow leopards were conducted by numerous national and international organizations across the twelve range states. Organizations such as the Snow Leopard Network facilitated connections among researchers and practitioners from across the entire range.

**ALTHOUGH ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATED WITH GOVERNMENTS AT DIFFERENT ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS, INCLUDING LOCAL, PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL, AND GOVERNMENTS THEMSELVES WERE ENGAGED IN VARIOUS CONSERVATION EFFORTS INDIVIDUALLY, A CONCENTRATED MULTI-COUNTRY GOVERNMENT-LED APPROACH WAS MISSING.**



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The snow leopard is elusive and inhabits vast, rugged terrain. Lack of information exchange among the range countries made it difficult to seamlessly share best practices and learn from past failures. Reliable global population counts for snow leopards were especially unavailable, with some national estimates outdated, emphasizing the urgent need for up-to-date assessments of area of occupancy and population size. The estimated size of the snow leopard's distributional range is about 1.8 million km<sup>2</sup>, with the largest share in the Tibetan plateau of China, followed by Mongolia and India. However, there exists significant uncertainty about the snow leopard's current distribution, similar to the uncertainty about the size of the total snow leopard population. The population is roughly estimated to be between 4 000 and 6 500 individuals.



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**RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE TRANSBOUNDARY ENGAGEMENT WITH RANGE-COUNTRY GOVERNMENTS FOR SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVATION, IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT MEANINGFUL PROGRESS COULD ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY UNITING THE EFFORTS OF THESE RANGE COUNTRIES' EFFORTS UNDER A SHARED WORK PROGRAM.**

This realization led to the endorsement of the Bishkek Declaration, which then resulted in the establishment of the GSLEP to coordinate actions across countries and with multiple organizations.

## PROCESS OF SETTING UP THE PROGRAMME

Preceding the establishment of the GSLEP, all twelve range countries, in partnership with many stakeholders, convened a series of meetings to develop individual National Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Priorities (NSLEPs). These twelve distinct NSLEPs are the foundation of the GSLEP.

**AFTER A PROCESS OF SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND BEST PRACTICES, AND DEVELOPING A COMMON VISION, THE NSLEPs WERE DEVELOPED TO INCORPORATE A SET OF PRIORITY, CONCRETE PROJECT ACTIVITIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED TO MEET NATIONAL GOALS AND, COLLECTIVELY, THE OVERARCHING GLOBAL GOAL.**

The NSLEPs clearly outlined the project activities needed to be implemented for the range countries to meet their national snow leopard and ecosystem protection goals. In Uzbekistan, for instance, these priorities encompassed reducing conservation conflicts through practices such as using predator-proof corrals, livestock guard dogs, and improved husbandry practices, addressing threats to snow leopard prey, strengthening community-based



conservation programmes and protected area capacity, and strengthening research and monitoring of the snow leopard and prey species. Similarly, in India, the identified priorities centred on preparing scientific management plans, development and implementation of conservation projects through participatory approaches, collaborations, and enforcement, and substantial investments on capacity enhancement and dedicated research efforts.

The NSLEPs were buttressed by five Global Support Components (GSC) prepared by the international community, such as the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Flora and Fauna International (FFI), Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Global Tiger Initiative, INTERPOL, the World Bank, WWF and others, in order to address issues that transcend national boundaries and go beyond the capacity of one country.

**THE GSCS AIM TO SUPPORT THE RANGE COUNTRIES IN THE AREAS OF WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT, KNOWLEDGE SHARING, TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION, ENGAGING WITH INDUSTRY, AND RESEARCH AND MONITORING.**

The activities outlined in the NSLEPs and GSCs were grouped under broad themes and provided the foundations for achieving the goals of the GSLEP. Country governments provide annual Country Updates on their progress towards the NSLEP goals.

In terms of governance, formally endorsed in 2013, the GSLEP is owned by the twelve range country governments. The GSLEP took a pivotal step by establishing a high-level Steering Committee, which comprises of Environment Ministers, or their designates, from all twelve range countries. The Steering Committee guides the Program, reviews its progress, and maintains political commitment. It is chaired and co-chaired by members of the Steering Committee. The Chair is typically elected every two years, with the position rotating across range countries, whereas the Co-chair remains permanently with the Kyrgyz Republic that hosts the Program Secretariat in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology, and Technical Supervision. At the publication of this case study, the sitting Chair is Bhutan, unanimously elected in 2022. The Secretariat assists the range countries and partner organizations in coordinating the implementation of the Bishkek Declaration and the GSLEP, with each country designating a senior official as the national focal point for the Program's implementation.



The initial shared goal of the GSLEP was that “the snow leopard range countries agree, with support from interested organisations, to work together to identify and secure at least 20 snow leopard landscapes across the cat’s range by 2020 or, in shorthand – *Secure 20 by 2020*”. Country governments identified a total of 24 snow leopard landscapes that account for enhanced protection and sustainable development for 500 000 km<sup>2</sup> of snow leopard habitat (approximately 28 percent of the estimated snow leopard range). The actions of individual countries are helping almost 400 communities living in and around ten landscapes where the on-ground actions are already being implemented.

## ACTIVITIES

The GSLEP is mandated to coordinate implementation of the Bishkek Declaration. It acknowledges the critical role of the snow leopard and its ecosystem in Asia's mountain regions and emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts between range countries to address threats like habitat loss and poaching. The Declaration calls for strengthening community-based conservation programs, conducting population assessments of snow leopards, and developing capacity on the frontlines. It also urges international financial institutions to support conservation efforts and encourages the creation of regional conservation funds.

**ULTIMATELY, THE DECLARATION LOOKS AT THE CONSERVATION PARADIGM FROM A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE, BY AIMING TO ENSURE THE LONG-TERM SURVIVAL OF THE SNOW LEOPARD AND THE WELL-BEING OF MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES.**



During the Steering Committee meetings, the range countries provide updates on the snow leopard's status and conservation activities, including the efforts made in reducing conservation conflicts in their respective country. Additionally, GSLEP partner organisations such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Snow Leopard Trust (SLT), Snow Leopard Network (SLN), USAID, WWF, NABU, Panthera, World Conservation Society (WCS) and others, also deliver updates and reports on the activities they lead to support the GSLEP. Technical sessions are held on specific topics that are particularly relevant for all participants. These could include operational discussions on how to continue funding the GSLEP or could cover specific programme needs, such as the need to prioritise ecosystems in conflict management. After each GSLEP Steering Committee meeting, the Secretariat works with the national focal points and partner organisations to implement the activities in order to address the priority actions identified.



Until 2023, thirteen policy advisories have been published by the GSLEP, and more than 50 training and capacity building initiatives have been conducted in partnership with the SLN, ranging from assessment of snow leopard population and distribution, PARTNERS Principles online toolkit in community-based conservation, Wildlife Crime Scene Investigation, to climate smart planning, benefitting over 600 practitioners and frontline staff.

Concerning human-snow leopard conflict, it was recognized that “comprehensive training programs in community-based conservation with broad, interdisciplinary collaborations between conservationists and development practitioners, social scientists, and community partners – to share foundational principles while also providing opportunity to develop locally relevant and viable solutions for conservation” were needed. To address this, the GSLEP, in partnership with the SLN, developed several online training toolkits on prey surveys, occupancy-based distribution surveys, camera trapping, sustainable tourism and communication, with participants from the twelve range states attending the online training. The GSLEP also partnered with several organizations and individuals to develop train-the-trainers manuals for conservationists across the snow leopard range covering community engagement, communication, and storytelling. To date, training has been provided to over 450 participants.



## OUTCOMES

The GSLEP Steering Committee has convened seven times since its formation, and two International Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Forums have been held. The Forums have received participation from Presidents, Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers, Speakers and Ministers from different range countries, contributed to building a collective understanding of the complex issues related to snow leopards and their ecosystems across all range countries, and played a crucial role in maintaining momentum, raising awareness, and sustaining political and financial support for the Program at the highest level.

**AS A RESULT OF THE UNIFIED APPROACH OF THE GSLEP, MANY POLICY AND CAPACITY-RELATED DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED THAT HIGHLIGHT A STANDARDIZED APPROACH THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN WHEN IMPLEMENTING CONSERVATION INITIATIVES.**



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For example, in response to ad-hoc decision-making when snow leopards preyed on livestock, with some snow leopards being removed to captivity, others translocated, and some euthanised, the Steering Committee recognized the need for a standardized approach. Consequently, the Steering Committee requested the development of policy advisories. Notably, the year 2020 witnessed the release of two significant publications under the GSLEP: a policy brief addressing the management of snow leopards in unconventional and conflict situations, and a comprehensive conservation education strategy.

**THE POLICY DOCUMENT, ADDRESSING THE MANAGEMENT OF SNOW LEOPARDS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS, HAS BEEN FORMALLY INCORPORATED IN THE STANDARD OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES IN INDIA, THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, MONGOLIA, PAKISTAN AND SEVERAL OTHER COUNTRIES.**

The GSLEP and its collaborators have helped set up an Ethical Conservation Alliance to facilitate ethical conservation practices within as well as beyond the snow leopard range. The Alliance is developing and delivering toolkits aimed at bolstering community-based conservation approaches. In a preceding initiative in 2019, a notable publication titled “*Guide for trainers: training conservation practitioners in local community engagement*” was produced.

The GSLEP has accomplished numerous outcomes since its inception, demonstrating significant progress in securing snow leopard landscapes. It curates a collaborative database of cases of illegal wildlife trade in snow leopards (IWT database). It coordinated more than 200 surveys using a statistically robust framework under Population Assessment of the World’s Snow Leopards (PAWS) and has helped countries raise in excess of USD 50 million through the GEF and other sources for snow leopard conservation and community-development in the mountain habitat. Serving as a model Program, it has sparked discussions on the potential replication of similar initiatives for other species in different regions.



**THE GSLEP CURRENTLY PROVIDES THE ONLY INTERGOVERNMENTAL PLATFORM FOR COOPERATION AMONG THE RANGE COUNTRY GOVERNMENTS, CONSERVATIONISTS, SCIENTISTS, INDUSTRIES, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSERVE SNOW LEOPARDS AND THEIR ECOSYSTEMS IN ASIA.**

The success of the GSLEP not only marks a milestone in snow leopard conservation, but also inspires broader considerations for the application of its effective strategies in diverse conservation efforts worldwide.

## LESSONS LEARNT

### 01 | CONSISTENT ENGAGEMENT AMIDST CHALLENGES

Given the frequent workload challenges and high turnover among government staff, maintaining regular interactions, even informally, proved crucial in sustaining stakeholder engagement and activity. Personal one-on-one meetings are particularly effective in securing engagement from influential stakeholders, contributing significantly to the overall success of the initiative.

### 02 | SUPPORTIVE APPROACH

This approach towards country initiatives proved successful as GSLEP prioritized assisting countries in achieving their objectives. Recognizing the challenges faced by government officials who manage multiple roles and responsibilities, the GSLEP actively conducted activities, focusing on collaborative facilitation to support rather than adding to their workload.

### 03 | LEVERAGING GOVERNMENTS' SCALABILITY

The GSLEP works with governments on snow leopard conservation issues to achieve significant impacts by scaling-up known and tested critical actions and best practices implemented by other non-governmental actors.

### 04 | COMMON GOALS

Navigating the challenge of uniting twelve countries, each with its unique perspectives on various matters, the GSLEP recognized the power of identifying common goals. By focusing on shared objectives, the initiative facilitated collaboration among countries, enabling them to work collectively towards these common aspirations despite their differences on other issues.

### 05 | DIVERSITY OF PARTNERS

By fostering collaboration among governmental, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, institutional funders, academic institutions, and the private sector, the GSLEP accesses a spectrum of governmental, financial, technical, and logistical support. This collaborative approach amplifies the capacity to achieve shared goals, emphasizing the pivotal role of inclusive partnerships in advancing the objectives of the GSLEP.

### 06 | TRANSBOUNDARY APPROACH

The GSLEP recognized the need for a transboundary approach to address snow leopard threats, fostering collaboration among all range countries. This unified effort effectively tackles challenges beyond national borders, emphasizing the importance of coordinated conservation strategies.

### 07 | PRIORITIZE SUPPORT

The GSLEP emphasized support, identifying and aiding countries in need, building capacity without punitive measures, fostering an empowering and supportive environment and approach to conservation efforts.

### 08 | LEADERSHIP IMPACT

The pivotal role of the Kyrgyz Government at the highest levels in initiating and supporting the GSLEP highlights the significance of leaders and champions. Mobilizing high-level leadership in other countries created political space for the snow leopard conservation issue, emphasizing the importance of high-level committed leaders in driving impactful initiatives.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystems Protection Program
- Policy related reports and recommendations
- PARTNERS Principles in community-based conservation
- Global Snow Leopard Illegal Wildlife Crime Database

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## ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

The **Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations** (FAO) and the **IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group** (HWCCSG) have jointly developed a set of case studies with the aim of covering the process projects have taken to manage various aspects of a human-wildlife conflict & coexistence situation. This case study is one of many that will be used to illustrate key components of the **IUCN SSC Guidelines on Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence**. The published case studies can be found in the **Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Library**.

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