Proceedings of the

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING YAK PASTORALISM AND RANGELAND NETWORK IN INDIA

1st - 2nd September 2025, Gangtok, Sikkim, India







Organized by

Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service (AHVS), Government of Sikkim
Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)

Supported by

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
&
Eicher Group Foundation under Royal Enfield Social Mission

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- Lachung Yak Farmers Cooperative Society Limited, Sikkim
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CONTENTS

Section / Topic	Page Number
I. Background	1
II. Aim of the Workshop	2
III. Workshop Highlights	3
3.1 Key Discussion Themes	3
3.2 Outcomes and Action Points	3-4
IV. Workshop in Details	5
4.1 Session I - Inaugural Session (Day 1)	5-6
4.2 Session II - Technical Session (Day 1)	6-10
4.3 Session I - Inaugural Session (Day 2)	11
4.4 Session II - Technical Session	15-20
4.5 Formation of Ad hoc Committee, Yak Federation of India (YFI) and Drafting Action Plan	20
4.6 Summary of Day 1 and Day 2	22
4.7 Future Prospects and Action Plan for Yak Federation of India	22-23
4.8 Closing Remarks	24
V. Annexure	25

ACRONYMS

AHVS	Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service
AP	Arunachal Pradesh
ATREE	Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
CAU	Central Agricultural University
COP17	17th Conference of Parties
FMD	Foot and Mouth Disease
GBPNIHE	GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment
GLOFs	Glacial Lake Outburst Floods
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IFS	Indian Forest Service
IHR	Indian Himalayan Region
KCC	Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee
KLCDI	Kangchenjunga Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PCCF	Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
SHGs	Self-Help Groups
SSB	Sashastra Seema Bal
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
YFI	Yak Federation of India
YHA	Yak Herders' Association

I. BACKGROUND

The high-altitude rangelands of the Hindu Kush Himalaya, located between 3,000 and 5,500 m, constitute about 60% of the region. Rangeland ecosystems in high-altitude regions of India Himalayan Region (IHR), such as Ladakh, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, are critical for the sustenance of traditional pastoral livelihoods, ecological balance, and biodiversity conservation. The yak (*Bos grunniens*), a key species adapted to alpine environments of the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau, plays a vital role in the socio-economic development and sustaining cultural richness of highland communities across these regions. The highland ecosystem is an integral part of the ecosystem shared by the Snow Leopard, Musk Deer, and many ungulates, including the Wild Ass. However, these fragile ecosystems and the traditional yak-based pastoral practices are increasingly facing pressures from changes in lifestyle, climate change, degradation of rangelands, and shrinking grazing grounds. Due to sparse populations, harsh living conditions, and isolated areas, their concern and challenges are not visible in the mainstream development discourses. History tells us that collective efforts are inevitable for addressing the challenges of voiceless communities. Therefore, there is a need for a pan-national coordinated effort, knowledge exchange platforms, and institutional mechanisms to address shared challenges and harness opportunities for sustainable rangeland and yak management across these landscapes in the IHR. While efforts have been made in different regions, there is scope to further recognize and integrate their invaluable traditional knowledge into scientific, developmental, and policy frameworks. The establishment of a unified and inclusive platform for the IHR can help strengthen collaboration, promote mutual learning, and co-develop context-specific solutions, thereby supporting sustainable rangeland and yak pastoralism in states such as Ladakh, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Recognizing this the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) supported the Department of Livestock in Bhutan and Nepal to mobilize herders' networks through the Kangchenjunga Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KLCDI) during 2019-2020. Efforts were also made to engage and sensitize herders in Sikkim under the same project, in collaboration with the GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (GBPNIHE) during 2020-2021. More recently, in November 2024, a consultation meeting was convened in Sikkim under the leadership of GBPNIHE and the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services (AHVS), Govt of Sikkim, with a focus on establishing an Indian Himalayan Yak Network. The meeting brought together yak herders and representatives from government agencies across Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Ladakh, and resulted in a consensus on the way forward for forming the Indian Himalayan Yak Network.

Building on this earlier initiatives to strengthen herder networks, ICIMOD and ATREE signed a Letter of Agreement in 2025 to explore yak dietary ecology in Sikkim and facilitate the formation of state-level Yak Herders' Associations and an Indian Himalayan Yak Herders Network. As part of this initiative, ATREE and AHVS, organized a two-day consultation workshop on Strengthening Yak Pastoralism and Rangeland Network in India, scheduled for 1-2 September 2025 in Gangtok, with the support of ICIMOD to promote knowledge exchange, community participation, and collaborative approaches to sustaining yak pastoralism across the Indian Himalayan region.

II. AIM OF THE WORKSHOP

This consultation workshop aimed to bring together key stakeholders in herding to initiate the formation of the yak herders' association, including pastoral communities, researchers, civil society organizations, and government representatives from Sikkim. In addition, the workshop focused on laying the foundation for a national-level Yak Federation of India (YFI) involving Sikkim, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh. The network will serve as a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, collaborative research, capacity building, and policy advocacy on issues about yak husbandry, rangeland management, and climate resilience in high-altitude landscapes. The workshop provided herders with an introduction to the key concepts, processes, and potential challenges involved in forming and sustaining community-based associations and networks. The specific objectives are as follows:

- Build awareness and capacity among yak herders regarding the concepts, processes, and potential challenges of forming community-based associations and collective institutions.
- Facilitate the formation of a State-wide Yak Herders' Association in Sikkim to enhance community organization, representation, and empowerment of pastoralist voices in relevant policy and development forums.
- Lay the foundation for the national-level network for the formation of YFI involving Sikkim, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh in India.
- Facilitate inclusive dialogue and knowledge exchange among yak herders, researchers, NGOs, and government representatives from across the India Himalayan Region to understand region-specific challenges and share traditional knowledge associated with rangeland management.



III. WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

3.1 Key Discussion Themes

3.1.1 Challenges of Yak Herding Practices in India

1. Environmental and Socioeconomic Challenges:

- Growing pressures such as shrinking and degraded grazing lands (due to landslides, infrastructure, and restricted military areas), increasing livestock predation (especially by feral and army-camp dogs), and the spread of invasive pasture weeds.
- Economic deterrents like fluctuating markets, lack of insurance, inadequate veterinary care, absence of branding/value addition for yak products, and minimal youth interest in herding due to lifestyle hardships and lack of economic incentives.
- Policy gaps, including unclear land tenure, lack of targeted insurance, limited state/national fiscal support, and the absence of protective legal frameworks like a Yak Slaughter Act to curb practices detrimental to herd viability and cultural continuity.

2. Social and Gender Dimensions:

- Loss of traditional knowledge as older generations retire and youth migrate.
- Undervalued roles of women who lead in yak product processing, fibre work, and day-to-day herding, with calls for greater recognition and inclusion in decision-making bodies.
- Shrinking interest in yak herding as a matrimonial and social pursuit, and accelerating socio-cultural change that threatens traditional livelihoods.

3.1.2 Policy and Knowledge Exchange

- Urgent need for collaborative platforms to share adaptive practices, exchange market and management knowledge, and promote innovations such as eco-tourism and biogas from yak dung.
- Importance of regional approaches to secure cross-border pasture access, disease control, and germplasm movement.
- Calls to build on successful models from neighbouring countries and align Indian policy learning with emerging global consensus on mountain rangeland resilience.

3.2 Outcomes and Action Points

3.2.1 Organizational Milestones

- Launch of the Adhoc Sikkim Yak Herders Association, modelled to inspire parallel formations in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Foundation for an ad hoc committee of pan-Himalayan, Yak Herders Federation of India (YIF), envisioned as an advocacy coalition to support rights, amplify voices, access schemes, and opportunities for herders across regions.
- Creation of a digital communication group and a four-month timeline committed toward formalization and national representation.

3.2.1 Recommendations and Pathways Forward

- Provide immediate insurance and veterinary interventions for yak herds.
- Enact a Yak Slaughter Act and pilot state/district-level compensation policies for lost livestock.
- Support youth mentorship, entrepreneurship, and training initiatives, integrating traditional and modern skills with better financial and market literacy.
- Institutionalize women's leadership via cooperative societies, product collectives, and risk-sharing mechanisms.
- Foster community-driven ecotourism linked to yak culture, branding, and value chain development for organic yak products (wool, cheese, churpi).
- Strengthen alliances with key institutions to develop genetic resource banks, landscape management guidelines, and anticipate landscape threats from climate change (glacial lake outburst, erratic weather, rangeland encroachment).

3.2.3 Pathways for Constituting Yak Herder Association of Sikkim

- Formation of the Yak Herder Association with key stakeholders, yak herders, government officials, researchers, and civil society.
- Selection of leadership, including President, Secretary, and Treasurer, with inclusive representation from the community.
- Drafting of the Memorandum of Association (Constitution) detailing governance rules, member rights, election procedures, and compliance requirements.
- Choose a legal framework for registration, typically a Cooperative Society or Society under Indian law, balancing ease of setup and compliance.
- Registration with the relevant state authority to gain legal recognition.

3.2.4 Pathways for Constituting the Yak Federation of India (YFI)

- Establish a national committee with representatives from all key yak-rearing states, facilitated by the ad hoc committee of the YFI.
- Formulate a draft constitution defining governance, membership criteria, decision-making, and roles.
- YFI establishes an operational agency in Sikkim, given its accessibility, while Arunachal Pradesh (AP) could take the lead at the national level, given its experience of managing a state-level body.
- Register the federation as an official body (likely under the Cooperative Societies Act or Society Registration Act).
- Develop governance structures with clear roles: President, Secretary, Treasurer, and regional representatives.
- Plan and conduct regular elections and general body meetings.
- Complete registration and operational setup within specified timelines (target time- 4 months)

IV. WORKSHOP IN DETAILS

Day-I, 1st September 2025

Formation of Sikkim Yak Herders' Association

4.1 Session I-Inaugural Session (Day 1)

4.1.1. Opening remarks

***Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia**, Principal Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim*

The workshop began with opening remarks from Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia, Principal Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim. In his address, Dr. Bhutia emphasized the importance of yak herding practices in sustaining high-altitude livelihoods and maintaining rangeland ecosystems. He also outlined the core objectives of the workshop — to build a collaborative network of yak herders across the Indian Himalayan Region aimed at safeguarding traditional pastoral livelihoods and promoting the resilience of rangeland ecosystems.

4.1.2 Aims and objectives of the workshop

***Dr. Nakul Chettri,** Associate Director - The Himalaya Initiative and Senior Fellow, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment*

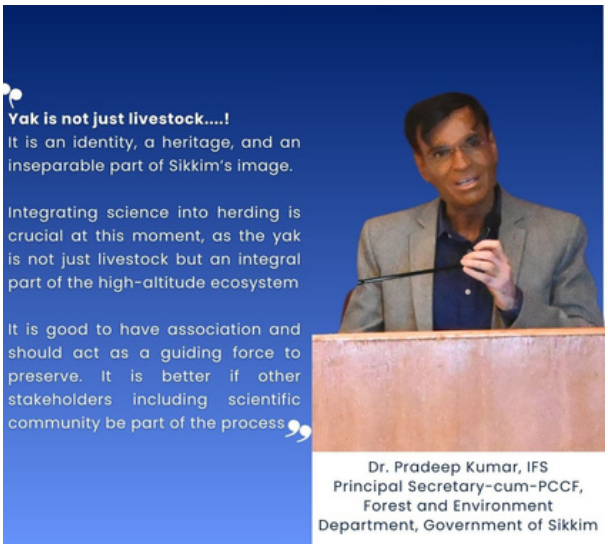
Dr. Nakul Chettri spoke about how rangelands and pastoralist communities had already gained global recognition for their ecological and cultural significance, with Mongolia spearheading the successful international campaign "International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists." That effort was endorsed by over 100 countries and hundreds of organizations, culminating in the United Nations officially designating 2026 for the initiative. Yak herding communities, which were integral to high-altitude pastoral systems, preserved unique traditional knowledge but remained highly vulnerable to predation, declining productivity, inbreeding, climate change, and natural disasters. These ecosystems also supported charismatic wildlife, demonstrating the persistent need for integrated approaches to human-wildlife-yak interactions.

Dr. Chettri argued that strengthening the collective representation of yak herders at the national level had been vital for addressing such challenges and for ensuring their voices were heard on international platforms. Therefore, the consultation workshop brought together key stakeholders from herding communities, researchers, civil society organizations, and government representatives from Sikkim to initiate the process for forming the yak herders' association. In addition, the workshop laid the foundation for establishing a national-level "Indian Himalayan Yak Herder Network," involving Sikkim, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh which will form the YFI. This network was intended to serve as a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, collaborative research, capacity building, and policy advocacy on issues relating to yak husbandry, rangeland management, and climate resilience in high-altitude landscapes. The workshop also provided herders with introductions to core concepts, processes, and the anticipated challenges connected to forming and sustaining their community-based associations and networks

4.1.3 Remarks by the Chief Guest

Dr. Pradeep Kumar, *IFS, Principal Secretary-cum-PCCF, Forest and Environment Department, Government of Sikkim*

Dr. Pradeep Kumar stated that the yak, like the red panda and snow leopard, is integral to Sikkim's cultural identity and high-altitude ecosystems. Past forest degradation and unsustainable practices, particularly through unregulated yak sheds, led to a grazing ban. The government is now revisiting this decision with a focus on scientifically informed grazing systems. Integrating science into herding is crucial to ensure ecological sustainability while preserving cultural heritage. An association of yak herders should therefore serve as a platform for knowledge exchange and sustainable practices, rather than functioning solely as a commercial or pressure group.



Dr. Pradeep Kumar, IFS
Principal Secretary-cum-PCCF,
Forest and Environment
Department, Government of Sikkim

4.2 Session II- Technical Session (Day 1)

4.2.1 Group Discussion: Current Status & Challenges of Yak Herders in Sikkim

Facilitated by: ***Dr Sailendra Dewan****, Fellow in Residence, ATREE*

a. Group 1: Challenges in Yak Herding Practices in North Sikkim

The group discussed the pressing challenges affecting yak herding practices in North Sikkim, highlighting the ecological, health, and socio-economic factors that threaten the sustainability of traditional pastoral livelihoods. One of the major issues identified was land shrinkage, caused by landslides, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), road and infrastructure development, and encroachment. Another significant concern was the presence of free-ranging dogs, which prey on calves and nursing mothers, cause infections through bites, and pose a risk of rabies. Diseases such as foot and mouth disease, rabies, lumpy skin disease, and rinderpest were reported as recurring threats to herd health.



Additionally, a low birth rate, with yaks producing only a single calf per year and experiencing high mortality rates, reduces herd replenishment and long-term herd viability. To address these challenges, the group suggested several measures. These included provisioning of supplementary fodder to support yaks during lean periods, procuring new grazing pastures to expand available forage areas, and planting fast-growing, nutrient-rich fodder species through improved land management. They also recommended strict enforcement of laws to prevent land encroachment and the sterilization of free-ranging dogs to control their population and reduce predation risks and vaccination programs to prevent yak diseases.

b. Group 2: Challenges in Yak Herding Practices in West Sikkim

The group discussed on the yak herding practices across West Sikkim, emphasizing the multiple challenges, social, economic, veterinary, and environmental, that affect the sustainability of this traditional livelihood. Discussions also included observations on species composition and trends from select villages.

Regarding socio-cultural challenges, the group noted that the younger generation is increasingly reluctant to continue yak herding due to harsh living conditions, limited infrastructure, and poor communication networks in high-altitude grazing areas. As a result, traditional pastoralism is gradually declining, with many youths opting for modern, less labor-intensive livelihoods. Additionally, government restrictions on open grazing have further constrained herding mobility and access to traditional pastures.

The group also highlighted several economic challenges. Yaks are generally less profitable than cows in the dairy sector, reducing their economic appeal to herders. While ponies can generate higher short-term income through local transport services for the army, they are unsuitable for rugged terrains. Dzo, the yak-cattle hybrids, remain economically important as draught animals, especially for Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) transportation. However, inbreeding and low reproductive rates, with yaks calving only once every two years, limit herd replenishment and overall productivity. Veterinary and health concerns were another major topic. Limited veterinary support and infrequent vaccination programs in high-altitude zones leave yaks vulnerable to disease.



Inbreeding has resulted in smaller and less productive yaks, while feral dogs, thriving on improperly managed waste, prey on calves and spread diseases such as rabies. As an adaptive measure, the group suggested shifting calving to the summer months instead of winter to improve calf survival rates. The group further discussed environmental and pastureland issues. Climate change has delayed fodder growth, altered rainfall patterns, and caused untimely snowfall, all of which disrupt traditional grazing cycles. Invasive weeds are spreading across rangelands, worsening fodder scarcity. The lack of dedicated research on high-altitude grasslands limits opportunities for sustainable management. Additionally, rangeland shrinkage and cross-border dependence on Nepalese pastures have intensified pressures on the herding system.

The group also recorded the species composition in the sample villages of West Sikkim. In Uttarey, there were 9 yaks, 115 bri, 56 dzo, and 41 ponies. Yambung had a larger population, with 165 yaks, 408 bri, 132 dzo, 25 dzomu, and 57 ponies. In contrast, Yuksam had no yaks, but maintained 105 dzo and 74 ponies. These figures highlight the variation in livestock distribution across villages and reflect differences in herd management, grazing conditions, and local economic priorities. The group concluded that yak herding in West Sikkim is facing a steady decline due to the interplay of socio-economic constraints, climate change impacts, and institutional challenges. Strengthened research, veterinary outreach, and adaptive policy measures are essential to sustain and revitalize yak herding traditions in the region.

c. Group 3: Challenges in Yak Herding Practices in in East Sikkim and Ladakh

The group reviewed population trends and major challenges affecting yak herding. In Sikkim's East District, the yak population rose from 200 in the 20th Livestock Census to 2,300 in the 21st Census, thanks to improved veterinary services, timely fodder distribution, provision of tents, incentives, and low snowfall. In contrast, Ladakh has seen declining yak numbers due to shrinking pasturelands from infrastructure projects and a decreasing number of herders due to low income.

Key challenges include predation and mortality, with free-ranging dogs, wild dogs, and snow leopards causing significant losses. Inbreeding is common, with limited exchange programs with Bhutan and Nepal. Socio-economic barriers such as low income, high product costs, lack of compensation schemes, and limited financial literacy discourage youth from herding.

Pastureland and security restrictions pose additional threats, as most grazing lands fall under army control, and activities like shooting, bombing, and land mines restrict access, causing loss of yaks and even deaths of herders. Policy gaps include lack of insurance for yaks and absence of national-level schemes, while unsustainable practices, such as the slaughter of yak calves, further threaten herds. Suggested actions include strengthening veterinary services, providing insurance, developing market linkages and value addition, promoting eco-tourism linked to yak culture, enforcing a Yak Slaughter Act, and regulating army activities to balance security and herders' livelihoods.





4.2.2 Understanding the Role and Process of Forming a Yak Herders' Association and Discussion

Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa, *Advocate, High Court of Sikkim*

Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa, Advocate at the High Court of Sikkim, emphasized that before registering an organization, it is crucial to understand the differences between various organizational forms cooperative society, trust, NGO, Society, and company as each has its own legal framework, governance structure, and compliance requirements.







Types of Organizations she highlighted are as follows:

- Association: Formed by a group to collectively pursue a common goal (e.g., yak herders). The memorandum serves as the constitution, regulating all aspects of its functioning.
- Trust: Can be created by two or more individuals, with trustees making decisions. Registration is done at the district office via a Trust Deed. Compliance requirements are relatively simple.
- Society: Requires a minimum of seven members. Decisions are made democratically through a governing body (President, Vice-President, etc.), with elections mandatory every two years and a General Body Meeting. Societies are registered under the Society Law
- Company (NGO under Section 8 of the Companies Act): Can be formed by two or more promoters who make the main decisions. Registration must be done outside Sikkim, and compliance is comparatively complex.
- Cooperative Society: Governed by the Cooperative Societies Act, these organizations focus primarily on economic activities and profit-sharing among members. Cooperative Societies are particularly suitable for groups like yak herders and are preferred by many funding agencies, including those supporting Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

In addition, Dr. Diki Palmu Sherpa, Superintendent at the Sikkim State Veterinary Polyclinic, noted that funding agencies often favour cooperative societies and SHGs. While associations are useful for welfare-oriented activities at the state level, cooperative societies are more practical for income generation and accessing funding opportunities.

4.2.3 Concluding remarks

Shri. Passang Tshering Bhutia, *Assistant Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim*



Shri Passang Tshering Bhutia, Assistant Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim, concluded the first day of the workshop by reflecting on his 36 years of experience with yaks. He expressed deep concern over their decline but also a sense of hope. He noted the presence of young men and women, many from herding families, who are highly capable and determined to advocate for the rights of both herders and yaks, even at the governmental level. He expressed encouragement at seeing scientists, professionals, and internationally recognized entrepreneurs committed to this cause. Observing the progress made in Arunachal Pradesh and hearing from young entrepreneurs like Agapi, he felt inspired by the collective energy and goodwill.

Shri Bhutia emphasized that the future leadership for yak conservation over the next 25 years, particularly within the Animal Husbandry Department of Sikkim, is present in this gathering. He urged that, with the guidance of the legal experts in attendance, the formation of a federation should be initiated within the next five days.



4.3 Session I- Inaugural Session (Day 2)

4.3.1 Opening remarks

Dr. Malavika Narayana, *Senior Project Manager, ATREE*
The workshop commenced with Dr. Malavika Narayana, Senior Project Manager, ATREE, who welcomed the participants and provided a brief introduction and summary of the programs held on the previous day.

4.3.2 Inaugural Remarks

Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia, *Principal Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim*





Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia commenced the address by acknowledging the contribution of multiple stakeholders involved in Yak herding and supporting its practices. He highlighted the contributions of Dr. Nakul Chettri and the ATREE team, as well as ICIMOD representatives, in establishing a collaborative framework spanning national and international levels. Mr. Sang Dorjee from Arunachal Pradesh was identified as a senior advisor to the newly formed association, providing guidance based on extensive field experience, while Mr. Thenlay and his team from Ladakh were recognized for their engagement in sustaining yak herding practices and attending the workshop despite logistical challenges. Key participants included Honourable Minister Shri Puran Gurung for institutional facilitation, Shri Sonam Gyatso Lachenpa for advisory support, Dr. Tashi Dorji (ICIMOD) for strategic engagement from project inception, Dr. Rakesh Kumar for implementing technological interventions for yak herding communities, and Dr. Nakul Chettri for operational coordination and field-level implementation with ATREE. He formally welcomed the Sikkim Yak Herders' Association, emphasizing its potential to foster national and international integration, and specifically noted the participation of Thupden Lachungpa, Sang Dorjee (AP Yak Herders Association), Norbu (Ladakh yak herders), Passang Tsering Bhutia, and yak farmers from West, East, and North Sikkim. Dr. Karma concluded by outlining the focus of the session, including the introduction of AGAPI, exploration of value addition, and strategies to enhance the livelihoods of yak herding communities.

4.3.3 Recap of Previous Discussions and Objectives of the Day

Dr Sailendra Dewan, *Fellow in Residence, ATREE*

Dr. Sailendra Dewan opened the session by welcoming the Honourable Ministers and offering a recap of the discussions from the previous day. He noted that Day 1 had been conducted through the collaborative efforts of the Animal Husbandry Department, ATREE, and ICIMOD, with the primary focus on building a network between yak herding communities of Gnathang, Kupup, Lachung, and Lachen in Sikkim. The programme featured delegates from the Sikkim Yak Herders' Association, Arunachal Pradesh Yak Herders Association, KCC, WWF, and GB Pant Institute. Key discussions centred on the challenges faced by yak herders in different regions of India.



4.3.4 Expert Talk on Prospects of Hindu Kush Himalaya- Yak Network

Dr. Tashi Dorji*, Senior Livestock and Rangeland Specialist, ICIMOD*

Dr. Tashi Dorji outlined the vision of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) Yak Network and ICIMOD's mandate as an intergovernmental organization of eight countries, India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Myanmar. He highlighted that climate change impacts, including glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and landscape degradation, are now seasonal realities. He emphasized the yak as a key Himalayan species, noting that five member countries maintain yak populations, with China alone hosting nearly 50 million, and stressed the need for a unified yak herders' platform, as no global association currently represents them.

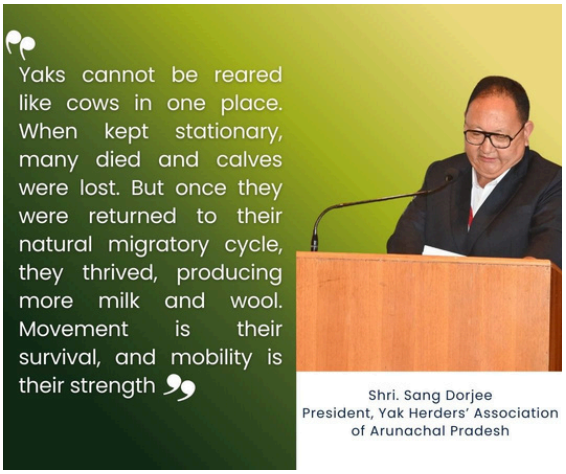


Dr. Dorji summarized ICIMOD's initiatives: the Khangchendzonga Landscape Initiative for integrated rangeland management, cross-border yak germplasm exchanges since 2019, agreements for yak wool transport during COVID-19, and the upcoming 2026 International Year of Yak Pastoralism.He recommended developing a 10-year yak conservation strategy, preserving genetic resources, strengthening interregional collaboration, and leveraging cultural events as platforms for advocacy and knowledge exchange. He concluded by highlighting the importance of leadership, coordinated action, and an integrated platform to ensure yak conservation receives adequate research, policy, and management support.

4.3.5 Process of Yak Association Formation in Arunachal Pradesh

Mr. Sang Dorjee, *President of the Yak Herders' Association (YHA) of Arunachal Pradesh*

Mr. Sang Dorjee, President of the Yak Herders' Association (YHA) of Arunachal Pradesh, outlined the formation process and objectives of the Association, primarily aimed at halting the decline in yak herders within the state. Before the Association, a Yak Product Development Cooperative Society with a yak research centre was established, which he led. Recognizing the need for broader representation, a state-level Association was initiated with support from the Chief Minister, who comes from a herding community. Mr. Dorjee emphasized that collective representation currentlyincluding 200 herders from Tawang and 94 from West Kameng strengthens advocacy for sustaining yak herding and preserving its cultural heritage.



Key challenges for herders include treacherous roads, fodder scarcity during winters, inadequate infrastructure, and land tenure issues where grazing lands are privately owned, with fees reaching up to Rs. 25,000. The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has introduced subsidies to alleviate this burden. To address these challenges, YHA has implemented projects such as constructing roofed shelters at intervals along migratory routes, storing and protecting winter fodder, preserving traditional grazing lands ("pangthang"), and providing emergency communication systems and health support. Mr. Dorjee also highlighted the underutilized multi-purpose value of yaks, food, fibre, and shelter materials, and noted research at ICAR-National Institute of Natural Fibre Engineering and Technology that has developed blended yak wool yarns, now sold at up to Rs. 600 per kilogram. Mr. Dorjee noted that traditional migratory practices are critical for yak health and productivity; attempts to rear yaks in one location led to significant losses, while restoring migration improved milk and wool output. Currently, 294 yak herders are registered in Arunachal Pradesh, and the YHA is focused on safeguarding livelihoods and ensuring the sustainability of yak pastoralism. He concluded by stressing that discussions on yak herding must translate into concrete, field-level actions.

4.3.6 Highlights of Yak Herding Practices in Ladakh

Mr. Lobzang Dadul, *Yak herders' representative from Ladakh*

Mr. Lobzang Dadul, a yak herder from Ladakh, described the integration of traditional pastoral practices with sustainable and organic approaches. Over the past decade, he has been involved in consolidating yak populations from different regions, including cross-border imports from China, and in the management of horse breeds, particularly in the Changthang region, where pastoral practices remain integral to community identity. He highlighted the role of festivals, such as the Nomadic Festival, in reinforcing cultural heritage and sustaining livelihoods.



4.3.6 Remarks by the Guest of Honour

Mr. Sonam Gyatso Lachenpa, *Chairman State Medicinal Plants Board, Government of Sikkim*

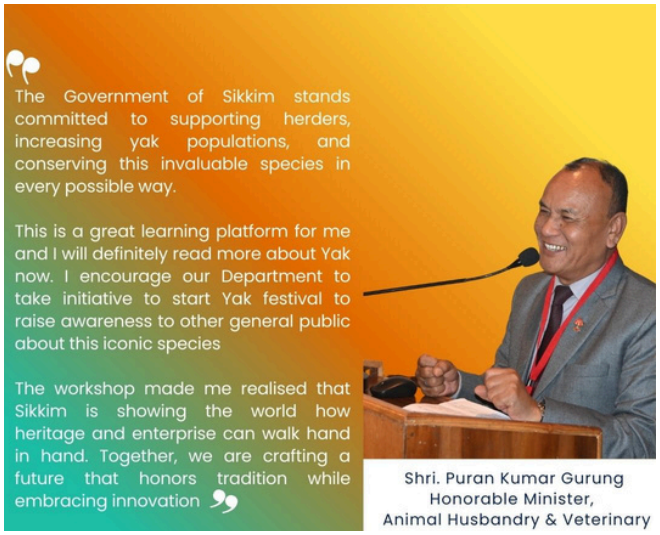
Mr. Lachenpa highlighted the workshop's role in promoting yak herding, particularly for youth engagement, and emphasized the need for stronger institutional presence in highland regions. He noted the impacts of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) on herders and yaks, the potential for value addition in yak products, and the importance of science and technology in enhancing livelihoods. He stressed that associations strengthen the collective voice of herders, improve resilience, and preserve traditional grazing practices, while noting the revival of interest in yak herding supported by organizations such as ATREE, ICIMOD, WWF, and local Dzumsas.



4.3.7 Remarks by the Chief Guest

Shri Puran Gurung, *Hon'ble Minister for Animal Husbandry, Government of Sikkim*

Shri Puran Gurung, Hon'ble Minister for Animal Husbandry, Government of Sikkim, emphasized the need to increase yak populations in Sikkim and support yak herders through targeted policies. He proposed a National Yak Festival at Tsomgo Lake by 2026 to raise awareness and recognition of yak conservation and cultural significance. The Minister highlighted education, income-generation opportunities, veterinary care, and feed support as critical interventions to engage youth and sustain herding. He announced plans to present yak conservation and herd expansion policies to the state cabinet within one month and stressed collaboration with NGOs, startups, and private enterprises to develop yak-based value chains.



Shri Gurung also recommended forming district-level associations, a State-level network, and ultimately an YFI integrated with the broader Asian Yak Network to ensure herders' representation at national and international levels. He concluded by underlining the need for research, policy alignment, and government engagement to enhance yak numbers, conserve the species, and secure socio-economic outcomes for herding communities.

4.4 Session II- Technical Session (Day 2)

4.4.1 Experience Sharing from Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh & by state representatives

Facilitated by: ***Dr. Malavika Narayana,*** *Senior Project Manager, ATREE*

a. Experiences from Ladakh: Mr. Thenlay Nurboo, Ms. Rigzin Yangdol, Mr. Lobzang Dadul

Yak herding in Ladakh remains a vital cultural and livelihood practice, though it faces serious challenges in the modern era. The practice is concentrated mainly in Leh district, while in Kargil district, where the majority population is Muslim, fewer communities are engaged in yak herding.

Traditional Practices and Livelihoods:

- Herders follow transhumance, migrating two to three times a year along a designated route.
- Each herd traditionally has a unique name and designated migration paths.
- Value addition is practiced: dried yak meat is used for winter consumption and pickles, while wool is used to make tents, carpets, mats, bags, and handicrafts.
- Yak cheese holds promise but faces logistical challenges, collection points are often 100–200 km away, and Ladakh's cold, dry climate makes cheese-making difficult without controlled facilities.

Cultural and Tourism Dimensions:

- Nomadic festivals, celebrated with government support, highlight Ladakhi traditions and promote cultural pride.
- However, in areas such as Durbuk Changthang, the rise of tourism has pulled younger generations away from herding into tourism-related jobs and army employment, leading to declining yak numbers.

Key Challenges:

- Youth disengagement: Children often move to lowland schools and pursue modern careers, reducing continuity in yak herding.
- Predation: Free-ranging dogs are a major cause of yak calf mortality.
- Overgrazing: Shrinking rangelands have increased pressure on pastures.
- Connectivity: Poor road and network infrastructure restricts access to markets.
- Development pressures: Expansion of the Indian Army's presence has restricted pasture access and created grazing conflicts. Solar energy projects (14,000–40,000 acres allocated for plants) and airport expansion have encroached on traditional pasturelands, often without prior consultation with local communities.
- Climate change: Rapid ecological shifts and extreme events have further disrupted the herding cycle.

Opportunities and Suggestions:

- Local processing units for yak milk and wool to add value and create markets.
- Training pastoralists in entrepreneurship, enabling them to develop new livelihood opportunities.
- Genetic exchange programmes to improve yak breeds, with proposals to share high-breed yaks with Sikkim and Bhutan.
- Greater support for the Ladakh Yak Federation, including legal and institutional strengthening.
- Dialogue with the army and energy developers to ensure community participation in land-use planning and avoid further loss of grazing lands.

b. Experiences from West Sikkim: Mr. Dawa Tsangpo Bhutia

Mr. Dawa Tsangpo Bhutia, representing the Yambung Yak and Dzo Cooperative Society from Chongri village, situated at the western border of Sikkim and Nepal, shared his experiences and reflections on yak herding. Yak rearing has been practiced in this region for over 200 years, yet even within Sikkim, many remain unaware that yaks exist in West Sikkim. The community has historically practiced transboundary grazing, with yaks migrating seasonally into eastern Nepal. In recent decades, however, multiple pressures, including policy restrictions, shrinking grazing land, predation, and limited institutional support, have brought this practice to the brink of collapse.

Cultural Significance:

- Yaks in West Sikkim are deeply tied to the cultural identity of the community.
- During the Pang Lhabsol festival (happening on the 7th of September, 2025), a thanksgiving ritual dedicated to Mount Kanchenjunga, yaks are revered as protectors of the mountains and symbols of nature's guardianship.
- Despite these traditions, the 2012 ban on grazing within reserve areas accelerated the decline of yak herding, leading to a drastic reduction in numbers.

Challenges Faced:

- Limited Grazing Lands: Yaks often migrate into Nepal in search of pasture, with many not returning. Encroachment of grazing lands and lack of official recognition of designated pastures further weaken the practice.
- Predation and Risks: Losses due to snow leopards, tigers, and feral dogs remain severe. The absence of strong shelters makes yaks more vulnerable.
- Infrastructure and Veterinary Gaps: No motorable roads; veterinary teams must hike to reach the village, making timely treatment difficult. Lack of veterinary facilities, fodder reserves, and permanent shelters create hardships.
- Socio-economic Pressures: Labour shortages: many herders rely on hired workers as youth migrate to other livelihoods. Firewood dependence: heavy reliance on firewood from biosphere areas raises ecological concerns.
- Declining Youth Engagement: Although 20-30 educated youths are actively working with the cooperative to revive yak herding, broader interest remains low.

Community Initiatives:

- Revival of the Yambung Cooperative Society, which had been dormant for 15 years.
- Integration of ecotourism: efforts to link yak herding with tourism (e.g., "live with the herders" experiences), including proposals to collaborate with Royal Enfield on projects.
- Advocacy for designated grazing lands and better institutional recognition.
- Introduction of yak dung for fuel and biogas, with suggestions to reduce dependence on firewood.
- Partnerships with organisations like ATREE, WWF and KCC to strengthen community voice and secure government support.

Way Forward:

- Policy recognition of yak herding in West Sikkim, including designated pastures and institutional support.
- Capacity building and training for herders, particularly in veterinary care, fodder management, and sustainable practices.
- Ecotourism integration as a sustainable income source, while retaining cultural identity.
- Youth engagement and incentives to counteract labour shortages.
- Expansion of biogas and dung-based energy use to reduce reliance on firewood and support sustainable practices.

c. Experiences from North Sikkim: Mr. Sonam Gyatso Lachenpa

Mr. Sonam Gyatso Lachenpa, President, Lachen Yak Herders' Cooperative Society Ltd., highlighted that the challenges faced by yak herders in Sikkim, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh are remarkably similar. He emphasized the importance of forming associations to strengthen the collective voice of herders, as drawing attention to their issues.

Importance of Collective Action:

- Formation of associations allows herders to access benefits, government schemes, and market opportunities more effectively.
- Many business and tourism ideas (such as branding high-quality Lachen churpi) cannot be executed individually but can be achieved through collective effort.

Traditional Practices and Sustainability:

- In Lachen, yak dung continues to be an important source of fire, reducing the need for firewood collection and supporting forest conservation.
- Educated youth are beginning to return to herding, suggesting a revival of interest in traditional livelihoods when linked to cultural pride and income generation.

Key Challenges:

- Military Activities and Land Rights: Lack of land ownership is a long-standing issue. The presence of the army creates additional challenges, including artillery testing and landmines, which threaten both herders and yaks. Constant vigilance is required to prevent animals from straying into unsafe areas.
- Climate Change and Natural Disasters: Heavy snowfall has resulted in the death of 200-300 yaks in recent years. Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) have cut off access to Lachen, severely impacting connectivity and resource supply.
- Animal Health and Veterinary Services: A mysterious disease[RP1] killed another 200-300 yaks, including females and calves, last year. Last year, there was a FMD outbreak around Thangu and Lashar Valley that had killed over 50 Yaks/Dzomo/Cows, also confirmed by the AHVS Dept. Many herders remain reluctant to vaccinate their yaks despite awareness campaigns. Remote areas like Muguthang and Naku remain inaccessible for timely veterinary care and medicine supply.
- Socio-cultural Shifts: Finding brides willing to marry herders is becoming increasingly difficult, as women prefer modern lifestyles over the hardships of mountain life. This contributes to the loss of herding skills, an irreversible cultural loss.
- Predation by Free-ranging Dogs: Packs of dogs, often associated with army camps, pose a severe threat. Recently, 40 adult dogs were seen roaming in the Gurudongmar area, with each herding family losing around 10 calves.

Way Forward:

- Strengthening herder associations to amplify voices and secure institutional recognition.
- Exploring value addition opportunities (e.g., churpi branding, eco-tourism) to create sustainable income.
- Improved coordination with veterinary services, including mobile health units for remote areas.
- Urgent management of free-ranging dog populations near herding zones.
- Policies that balance army requirements and herder rights, ensuring safe and secure pasturelands.

4.4.2 Panel discussion to recognise women leadership, understanding the role of entrepreneurs

Facilitated by: ***Ms. Pema Yangden Lepcha****, Research Associate ATREE*

The panel was structured around guiding themes such as recognizing women's leadership in yak herding communities and understanding the role of entrepreneurs in value addition and livelihood enhancement.

Under the first theme, women's contributions emerged as central to sustaining both yak herding operations and household management. Miss Rinzing Yangdol, a pastoralist from Ladakh, highlighted that herding and processing decisions are typically made collaboratively with male family members, though broader surveys by the Centre for Pastoralism indicate that decision-making is largely controlled by fathers and sons in most households. Women perform the majority of tasks including managing the household, churning butter, processing dairy products, and securing feed and water for the herd. These contributions, though critical for herd survival and cultural preservation, remain largely unrecognized. Thupden Lachungpa of the Lachung Yak Farmers Cooperative Society in Sikkim added that women dominate fiber-related operations, handling harvesting, cleaning, reeling, and weaving, producing materials that form the backbone of local handicraft-based economic activities.

The second theme addressed youth engagement and their role in maintaining yak pastoral practices. Panelists explored questions such as how young herders contribute to animal care, quality control, transport, and marketing, and how they balance pastoral responsibilities with formal education. Thupden Lachungpa noted that youth participation ensures continuity of cultural practices, yet challenges such as urban migration, labor shortages, and environmental risks (e.g., food waste attracting predators) complicate herd management. Mr. Lobzang Getsan from Arunachal Pradesh emphasized that educational pursuits often require hiring additional labor to maintain herd operations, but low economic returns limit the ability to retain these helpers, creating vulnerabilities for the pastoral sector.



The discussion further examined entrepreneurial opportunities within yak-based enterprises. Mr. Sonam Tashi Gyaltsen, founder of EchoStream in Gangtok, identified yak wool as a high-value fiber that remains underutilized, primarily due to gaps in innovation and product design rather than supply constraints. Ms. Neha Pradhan of Bodylicious, Gangtok, described her work in developing yak butter and milk-based products with nutritional and cosmetic applications. Despite financial and logistical challenges, including sourcing raw materials from remote areas of North and West Sikkim, these ventures have penetrated both national and international markets. The panel highlighted systemic challenges such as limited access to financing, skills gaps, and high operational risks in Himalayan terrain, underscoring the importance of networks and collaborative platforms to support knowledge exchange, capacity building, and scaling of yak-based products.

4.4.3 Redefining Dignity: Life as a Yak Herder in Gnathang, Sikkim

***Mr Nawang Bhuti**a, Gnathang, Sikkim*

Mr. Nawang highlighted that in the remote high-altitude pastures of Gnathang, Sikkim, yak herding is more than a livelihood; it represents a centuries-old tradition intertwined with culture, identity, and survival. He noted that within his community, the term "Gothala" carries a longstanding stigma, often labeling individuals as socially inferior and implying negative habits such as alcoholism. He reported that children were frequently warned: "Be anything, even a driver, but don't become a Gothala."

Mr. Nawang shared that this label imposed a burden, as all his family members had abandoned herding, leaving the full responsibility of the yaks to him. Initially, he experienced feelings of embarrassment and societal pressure but gradually made a conscious decision to embrace yak herding. He resigned from his position as a police officer to devote himself entirely to this work, transforming what was once perceived as a low-status task into a source of pride, cultural continuity, and purpose.

Currently, Mr. Nawang manages his herd with the assistance of five helpers, overseeing seasonal migrations, grazing rotations, and animal care across challenging terrain. He emphasized that modern tools, such as cream separators, have improved efficiency in butter production, yet the work remains demanding. In the current year, 14 yak calves were lost to predation by free-ranging dogs, illustrating the vulnerabilities inherent in pastoral life. Mr. Nawang stressed that his commitment to yak herding extends beyond economic considerations and is deeply rooted in culture, heritage, and identity.



He advocated for replacing the derogatory term "*Gothala*" with **"Dokpa,"** a designation that embodies dignity, resilience, and recognition of herders' contributions to high-altitude ecosystems and traditional livelihoods.

He further highlighted that yak herding represents a repository of generational knowledge, cultural memory, and ecological stewardship. Herds are managed along ancestral migration routes, livestock care is synchronized with harsh climatic conditions, and pastoral practices sustain fragile ecosystems. Through his experience, Mr. Nawang demonstrated that yak herding is not merely a means of subsistence or income but a practice that preserves the human and ecological fabric of the Himalayas.

Despite social stigma, logistical difficulties, and environmental risks, Mr. Nawang's journey exemplifies resilience, ingenuity, and dedication to sustaining traditional livelihoods. He envisions a future where yak herders are formally recognized as custodians of biodiversity and cultural heritage and where the title **"Dokpa"** replaces outdated labels, allowing future generations to engage in pastoral life with pride, dignity, and purpose.

4.4.4 Vision & Structure for Indian National Yak Network

***Mr. Ramesh Timilsina**, Senior Rangeland Associate, ICIMOD*

Mr. Ramesh Timilsina, Senior Rangeland Associate, ICIMOD shared that ten years ago, he would not have believed it possible for yak herders from 28 districts across the most remote regions of Nepal to come together and form a united federation. Given the geographical inaccessibility of these areas, establishing such a body seemed almost impossible. Yet today, the Nepal Yak Federation is a reality.

He explained that the Nepalese government had little awareness of yaks or yak herders, as their priorities lay elsewhere. Moreover, government rules required that district- level federations be formed in all provinces before a national federation could be recognized. This created a challenge, since four of Nepal's seven provinces are in the lowlands and do not have yaks. The requirement that all members be physically present at a designated location for federation formation was equally difficult, as some herders had to walk four days just to reach a point where they could board a vehicle.

Despite these challenges, the federation has successfully launched initiatives such as the "Adopt a Yak" campaign. Encouragingly, yak herders from across the country are now approaching the federation to join and participate. Mr. Timilsina emphasized that this is only the beginning: opportunities are emerging, but progress takes time and requires patience. Above all, success will depend on strong collaboration among researchers, herders, and stakeholders.

4.5 Formation of Ad hoc Committee, Yak Federation of India (YFI) and Drafting Action Plan

*Facilitated by: **Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia**, Principal Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim*

Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa, Advocate, recalled the personal impact of the grazing ban announced during her school years. She shared that while her mother grieved the loss of herding practices, she herself only understood its implications later during her legal studies. Drawing from her background in indigenous knowledge, she emphasized that such bans were unnecessary, as modernization itself would have naturally reduced grazing pressure. She underlined the need for a dedicated organization to combat such injustices, highlighting the growing mental health challenges faced by herding communities when they are unable to pursue their traditional livelihoods.



She also noted the importance of maintaining ownership by continuing to pay taxes, asserting that ownership cannot be claimed over what is not paid for. Ms. Sherpa committed to further legal research and to following up with members in subsequent meetings.

Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia proposed that the Yak Federation of India (YFI) should establish an operational agency in Sikkim, given its accessibility by air, while Arunachal Pradesh (AP) could take the lead give their pre-experience of managing a state level body. He suggested that the Animal Husbandry Department be designated as the lead agency and assured that he would communicate this proposal to the state administration.

Mr. Sang Dorjee emphasized that the main challenge in establishing the YFI would be bringing people together in one place. He suggested forming an ad hoc committee comprising governing heads, including a president, secretary, treasurer, and other members, to begin with a step-by- step approach, identify challenges, and assess members' ability to commit.

During the nominations, the following recommendations were made:

1. Mr. Thupden Lachungpa was proposed as Secretary. It was suggested that since the Secretary is from North Sikkim, the Treasurer could be chosen from West Sikkim.
2. Mr. Dawa Dorjee from Tawang was requested to be included as a member.
3. Mr. Lobzang Dadul noted that the Ladakh Youth Herder Association is currently revisiting its executive body, and changes will be made before confirming nominations as a response to him being nominated as the Treasurer.
4. Mr. Thupden Lachungpa clarified that the present structure is only ad hoc and formal registration could follow later, with Mr. Sang Dorjee accepted to serve as President for now.
5. Dr. Dechen Ongmu Kaleon stressed the importance of female representation and nominated Ms. Rigzin Yangdol from Ladakh for the position of Treasurer.

Ad hoc Yak Federation of India (YFI) - Proposed Structure		
Name	**Position**	**Region**
Mr. Sang Dorjee	President	Arunachal Pradesh
Thupden Lachungpa	Secretary	Sikkim
Ms. Rigzin Yangdol	Treasurer	Ladakh
Mr. Tashi Norboo	Member	Arunachal Pradesh
Dawa Sangpo Bhutia	Member	Sikkim
Mr. Lobzang Dadul	Member	Ladakh

4.6 Summary of Day 1 and Day 2

Dr. Nakul Chettri, *Associate Director, The Himalaya Initiative ATREE, Gangtok*

Dr. Chettri congratulated the entire team, noting that the workshop objectives had been fully met. He emphasized that "Yak is beyond yak", it is not only a species but also an icon of the Himalaya, deeply rooted in culture, craftsmanship, heritage, and life skills that sustain communities in harsh highland environments. Drawing parallels with Switzerland, where yak herding is recognized as world heritage, he underlined the cultural and ecological value of yak pastoralism.

He highlighted the diversity of participation, describing the experience of learning about innovations such as cosmetics and bags as a new dimension that enriched the dialogue. The unity in diversity of participants was, he remarked, lived fully over the two days.

Reflecting on the challenges, Dr. Nakul observed that while yak herders initially sought self-sustainability, today they struggle to sustain life itself, as challenges have become more aggravated and serious. Issues extend from conservation and livelihoods to sovereignty and national security in the highlands. However, he noted that opportunities accompany these challenges: the engagement of political leaders, NGOs, scientists, and government agencies, along with the enthusiasm of young entrepreneurs, shows that sensitization is taking place and momentum is building.

He stressed that cumulative effort is essential, as no single organization can carry this forward alone. The formation of associations is only an initial step; sustaining them will require planning, collaboration, and collective commitment. He concluded by acknowledging the knowledge exchange, good practices, and fertile grounds created during the workshop, while encouraging all stakeholders to join hands for the future of yak and pastoral communities.

4.7 Future Prospects and Action Plan for Yak Federation of India

Dr. Tashi Dorji, *Senior Livestock and Rangelands Specialist, ICIMOD*

The formation of the ad hoc Committee was recognized as the first step toward uniting every yak herder under one shared vision, ensuring that no herder from Himachal to Sikkim and beyond is left behind. Dr. Tashi Dorji emphasized that while the pathway ahead may appear complex, the process will become clear if the community moves forward step by step with inclusivity, clarity, and commitment.



India was encouraged to take leadership, given its unique position with a dedicated Yak Research Institute and strong institutional resources. With Bhutan already committed and Nepal prepared to join, the opportunity for regional collaboration was described as stronger than ever. The decision ahead, whether to evolve into a federation, network, or association, must be made with foresight, with consistency and sustainability seen as central.

The proposed timeline, forming a WhatsApp group within a month, registering the adhoc Committee within four months, and progressing toward the collective deadline in order to make our way to the proposed "rangeland meeting" in Mongolia in 2026 refers to UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) COP17, a landmark global conference held from August 17-28 in Ulaanbaatar. It is uniquely aligned with the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, making it a pivotal moment to advance sustainable rangeland management, mobilize international collaboration, and elevate pastoralist voices and ecosystems to the forefront of global environmental policy. Upcoming gatherings in Vietnam this October and in Kathmandu with women leaders from across the globe were highlighted as opportunities to demonstrate progress and global engagement. This process was framed as more than an administrative exercise; it represents the beginning of a legacy. In five years, today's young herders will be able to look back and witness the strength and transformation born from this moment. As Dr. Tashi reminded the participants, resources are not the only key, nature and wisdom will make way when leadership is right.

With ICIMOD, ATREE, and regional partners standing ready to provide support, the responsibility now lies with the community to carry the process forward. The proceedings concluded with a shared commitment to seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and to ensure that the voices of yak herders are heard, respected, and amplified on the world stage. The vision of a national federation was framed as a beacon of unity, resilience, and hope for generations to come.

Dr. Dichen Ongmu Kaleon, Additional Director and Head of Department, Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service of Sikkim, delivered the closing statement. She expressed her appreciation to all colleagues, partners, and herders for their contributions to what she described as a historic dialogue. She emphasized that the discussions were not only about institutions and frameworks but also about the lives and futures of herding communities who sustain the highland ecosystems and cultures.

Dr. Kaleon highlighted the importance of unity, collaboration, and clarity of purpose in addressing the challenges ahead. She noted that the formation of the ad hoc Committee was a promising beginning, but stressed that it must remain inclusive and participatory, ensuring that no herder and no region are left behind.

She further pointed out that the journey forward would require step-by-step progress, balancing national policies with regional and global processes. With India's leadership, Bhutan's commitment, and Nepal's readiness, she affirmed that there is a strong foundation for creating a federation that can represent yak herders with dignity and strength on the global stage.

In conclusion, Dr. Kaleon urged participants to carry the momentum forward with determination, guided by a shared vision and a sense of responsibility to future generations. She expressed hope that the efforts initiated through this workshop would grow into a legacy of resilience, solidarity, and pride for herders and rangelands.

4.8 Closing Remarks

Dr. Nakul Chettri, *Associate Director, The Himalaya Initiative ATREE, Gangtok*

Reflecting on the challenges, Dr. Nakul observed that while yak herders initially sought self sustainability, today they struggle to sustain life itself, as challenges have become more aggravated and serious. Issues extend from conservation and livelihoods to sovereignty and national security in the highlands. However, he noted that opportunities accompany these challenges: the engagement of political leaders, NGOs, scientists, and government agencies, along with the enthusiasm of young entrepreneurs, shows that sensitization is taking place and momentum is building. He stressed that cumulative effort is essential, as no single organization can carry this forward alone. The formation of associations is only an initial step; sustaining them will require planning, collaboration, and collective commitment. He concluded by acknowledging the knowledge exchange, good practices, and fertile grounds created during the workshop, while encouraging all stakeholders to join hands for the future of yak and pastoral communities.





V. ANNEXURE

Annex 1. Workshop Agenda

Consultation Workshop on Strengthening Yak Pastoralism and Rangeland Network in India
Organized by: Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service, Government of Sikkim; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
Date: 1st - 2nd September 2025
Venue: Hotel Mount Siniolchu, Gangtok, Sikkim

Focus: Formation of Sikkim Yak Herders' Association

Day1:1stSeptember 2025 (Monday)

Time	Session Title	Lead/Facilitator
Session I- Inaugural Session *Master of Ceremonies: Pema Yangden* *Rapporteurs - Dr. Avantika Thapa, MsUpama Rai*		
09:30 - 10:00	Registration	
10:00 - 10:05	Welcoming guest	
10:05 - 10:15	Welcome Address	**Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia,** Principal Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
10:15 - 10:25	Objective of the workshop	**Dr. Nakul Chettri,** Associate Director - The Himalaya Initiative and Senior Fellow, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
10:25 - 10:35	Address by the Guest of Honor	**Dr. Sharman Rai,** Principal Director cum Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
10:35-10:45	Address by the Chief Guest	**Dr. Pradeep Kumar, IFS** Secretary-cum-PCCF, Forest and Environment Department, Government of Sikkim
10:45 - 10:50	Vote of thanks	**Ms. Pema Yangden Lepcha,** Senior Research Associate, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
10:50-11:10	**Tea Break (Group Photo)**	
Session II- Technical Session *Master of Ceremonies: Pema Yangden* *Rapporteurs - Dr. Avantika Thapa, Ms Upama Rai, Mr Aditya Pradhan, Mr Satkar Deep Thapa*		

Consultation Workshop on Strengthening Yak Pastoralism and Rangeland Network in India
Organized by: Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service, Government of Sikkim; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
Date: 1st - 2nd September 2025
Venue: Hotel Mount Siniolchu, Gangtok, Sikkim

11:10 - 11:40	Setting the Context: Rangelands and Yak Pastoralism in Sikkim	GBPNIHE, WWF, AHVS, Forest and Environment Department, KCC, CAU
11:40 - 12:40	Group Discussion: Current Status & Challenges of Yak Herders in Sikkim	**Participants:** Yak Herders, Government Officials, Members From NGO and other associate organization **Moderator:** Dr. Sailendra Dewan
12:40 - 13:40	**Lunch Break**	
13:40 - 14:40	Presentation: Understanding the Role and Process of Forming a Yak Herders' Association and Discussion	**Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa,** Advocate High Court of Sikkim
14:40 - 15:00	**Tea Break**	
15:00 - 16:30	Formation and structuring of the Sikkim Yak Herders' Association	**Moderators:** Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia and Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa
16:30 - 16:40	Concluding remark	**Shri. Passang Tshering Bhutia,** Assistant Director, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
16:30 - 16:40	Vote of thanks	**Ms. Pema Yangden,** Senior Research Associate, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment

Consultation Workshop on Strengthening Yak Pastoralism and Rangeland Network in India
Organized by: Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service, Government of Sikkim; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
Date: 1st - 2nd September 2025
Venue: Hotel Mount Siniolchu, Gangtok, Sikkim

Dialogue, Knowledge Sharing, and National Network Establishment

Day 2: 2nd September 2025 (Tuesday)

Time	Session Title	Lead / Facilitator
Session I- Inaugural Session *Master of Ceremonies:Dr. MalavikaNarayana* *Rapporteurs: Mr Aditya Pradhan, Mr SatkarDeep Thapa*		
09:00 – 09:30	Arrival and Registration	
09:30-09:35	Welcoming guest	
09:35 – 09:45	Welcome Address and Opening Remarks	**Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia,** PrincipalDirector, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim.
09:45 – 09:55	Recap of Previous Discussions and Objectives of the Day	**Dr. Sailendra Dewan,** Fellow in Residence, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
09:55 – 10:15	Prospects of Hindu Kush Himalaya-Yak Network	**Dr. Tashi Dorji** Senior Livestock and Rangelands Specialist, ICIMOD
10:15 – 10:25	Process of Yak Association formation in Arunachal Pradesh	**Shri. Sang Dorjee,** President, Yak Herders Association of Arunachal Pradesh

Consultation Workshop on Strengthening Yak Pastoralism and Rangeland Network in India
Organized by: Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service, Government of Sikkim; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
Date: 1st - 2nd September 2025
Venue: Hotel Mount Siniolchu, Gangtok, Sikkim

10:25 – 10:30	Short remarks by the Ladakh Yak herders representative	**Mr. Thenlay Norboo,** Yak herders' representative Ladakh
10:30 – 10:40	Remark by the Guest of Honor	**Dr. Sharman Rai,** Principal Director cum Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
10:40-10:50	Remark by the Guest of Honor	**Shri.SonamGyatsoLachenpa,** State Medicinal Plants Board, Government of Sikkim
10:50-11:10	Remark by the Chief Guest	**Shri. Puran Gurung,** Honorable Minister Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services Department, Fisheries Department, Horticulture Department
11:10 – 11:15	Vote of Thanks	**Ms. Pema Yangden,** Senior Research Associate, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
11:15 – 11:25	**Tea Break (Group Photo)**	
Session II: Technical session *Rapporteurs - Dr. AvantikaThapa,MsUpama Rai,MrAdityaPradhan, Mr Satkar Deep Thapa*		
11:25 – 12:15	Experience Sharing from Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh & Ladakh	State Representatives - Ladakh/AP
12:15 – 12:45	Youth & Women in Yak Pastoralism – Panel Discussion	**Ms. Pema Yangden,** Senior Research Associate,

		Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
12:45 – 13:15	Vision & Structure for Indian National Yak Network	**Mr Ramesh Timilsina** Senior Rangelands Associate, ICIMOD Representative from Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh
13:15 – 14:15	**Lunch Break**	
14:15 – 15:15	Drafting Action Plan and Timeline for National Network	**Moderator:** Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia and Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa
15:15 – 15:30	**Tea Break**	
Concluding Session		
15:30 – 15:45	Summary of Day 1 and Day 2	**Dr. Nakul Chettri,** Associate Director - The Himalaya Initiative and Senior Fellow, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment
15:45 – 16: 15	Future Prospects and action plan for Indian Yak Herder Network	**Dr. Tashi Dorji,** Senior Livestock and Rangelands Specialist, ICIMOD
16:15 – 16:45	Closing Remarks	AHVS, Arunachal, Ladakh, WWF, GB PANT, ICIMOD, KCC
16:45 – 17:00	Final Vote of Thanks & Closing	**Dr. Sailendra Dewan,** Fellow in Residence, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment

Annex 2. Key Participants

- Shri Puran Gurung, Honourable Minister, Animal Husbandry Veterinary Services Department, Government of Sikkim
- Dr. Pradeep Kumar, IFS, Secretary-cum-PCCF, Forest and Environment Department, Government of Sikkim
- Dr. Sharman Rai, Secretary cum Principal Director, Animal Husbandry Veterinary Services Department, Government of Sikkim
- Shri Sonam Gyatso Lachenpa, State Medicinal Plants Board, Government of Sikkim
- Ms. Mingma Lhamu Sherpa, Advocate, High Court of Sikkim
- Dr. Tashi Dorji, Senior Livestock and Rangelands Specialist, ICIMOD
- Mr. Sang Dorjee, President, Yak Herders Association of Arunachal Pradesh
- Mr. Thupden Lachungpa, Lachung Yak Farmers Cooperative Society, Sikkim
- Ms. Rigzin Yangdol, Treasurer nominee from Ladakh
- Mr. Sonam Tashi Gyaltsen, Entrepreneur in EchoStream, Gangtok
- Ms. Neha Pradhan, Entrepreneur, Bodylicious, Gangtok
- Dr. Dechen Ongmu Kaleon, Additional Director, Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
- Mr. Gyaltsen, Entrepreneur, EchoStream, Gangtok
- Dr. Diki Palmo Sherpa, Superintendent, Sikkim State Veterinary Polyclinic
- Representatives from The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (GBPNIHE), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC) alongside entrepreneurs and startup companies such as Agape, Bodylicious, and EchoStream engaged in yak-based products, legal experts from the High Court of Sikkim and local Dzumsas (traditional community institutions)

Annex 3. Organizers

- Dr. Nakul Chettri, Associate Director, The Himalaya Initiative, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)
- Dr. Karma Tenzing Bhutia, Principal Director, Department of Animal Husbandry Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
- Ms. Pema Yangden Lepcha, Senior Research Associate, ATREE
- Dr Sailendra Dewan, Fellow in Residence, ATREE
- Shri Passang Tshering Bhutia, Assistant Director, Department of Animal Husbandry Veterinary Services, Government of Sikkim
- Mr. Sunil Dahal, Senior Finance Officer, ATREE
- Dr. Malavika Hosahally Narayana, Senior Project Manager, ATREE
- Dr. Avantika Thapa, Post-Doctoral Associate, ATREE
- Mr. Aditya Pradhan, Senior Research Associate, ATREE
- Ms. Upama Rai, Project Associate, ATREE
- Mr. Sangay Wangdi Bhutia, ATREE
- Mr. Ashwin Chettri, Database Associate, ATREE
- Mr. Satkar Deep Thapa, Junior Project Fellow, ATREE
- Ms. Repbamla Lepcha, Field Assistant, ATREE
- Mr. Bhaskhar Gurung, Field Assistant, ATREE
- Ms. Deepa Chettri, Assistant Monitoring and Evaluation, ATREE
- Ms. Yashvi Dewan, Research Intern, ATREE
- Ms. Srijana Sharma, Project Associate, ATREE
- Ms. Nisu Prasad, Assistant Finance, ATREE

CONTACT US

for additional information



ATREE's mission is to promote socially just environmental conservation and sustainable development by generating rigorous interdisciplinary knowledge that engages actively with academia, policy makers, practitioners, activists, students and wider public audiences. ATREE's Northeast / Eastern Himalayas Programme has a direct presence in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya with a range of local partners in the other states of North East India.

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