

## Concept of *Lumbini Center for Sustainability*

The Consultation Meeting  
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### **Background**

The Nepal Study Center at the University of New Mexico, formed about 10 years ago, has been fostering South Asia related knowledge sharing activities through various platforms – research, annual conferences, international partnerships (MOU between UNM and institutions in Nepal –e.g., Kathmandu University and ICIMOD), and e-portals. Several high level visits have also taken place as a result of the growing linkages across the two continents (VC, Provost, and Deans from both universities). The center has produced several high quality doctoral research products related to Nepal: food security, solid waste management and recycling, water quality, poverty vulnerability, remittance, climate risk and vulnerability, urban pollution, and various health aspects (arsenic, micro health insurance) just to name a few. In North America, it has formed an extensive scholarly network which includes many Nepali diaspora scholars.

Motivated by such a track record, the NSC took the initiative to form an interdisciplinary group of scholars to further these activities, especially with a focus on the Himalayas. In particular, an interdisciplinary team from the University of New Mexico (social scientist – Dr. Alok Bohara, climate scientist --Dr. Joe Galewsky, and hydrologist Dr. Mark Stone) formed a collaborative linkage with Nepali and other regionally located colleagues from various institutions: Kathmandu University, Nepal Engineering College, NTNC, PNMHI, Tsinghua University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, etc. (Dr. Siddhartha Bajracharya, Dr. Madhav Karki, Dr. Hari Shrestha, Dr. Rijan Kayastha, Dr. Deepak Bhattarai, Dr. Jonathan Wright and Dr. AL Ramanathan, just to name a few).

### **The Lumbini Center for Sustainability**

At the heart of this initiative is the formation of a research hub in Bhairahawa aptly named as *the Lumbini Center for Sustainability (LCS)*. An excerpt from a white paper is attached below. Unlike any other institutions, the LCS is unique in its scope. A non-profit polytechnic institute (PNMHI) has offered a helping hand to host the LCS by providing necessary infrastructural resources. The LCS is an independent entity with all the rights to make its own decision.

For example, most academic institutions in Nepal are focused on teaching, and thus the faculty members do not get much research experience nor do they get exposed to latest research tools. This is true especially for those who work outside the valley. Many NGOs and INGOs, on the other hand, are doing wonderful work on the programmatic implementation side at the local as well as at the national levels, but they do not have the mandate to conduct scientifically sound research analysis and results. We also know that most international scholars tend to come and go. Likewise, most policy prescriptions in Nepal do not seem to be driven by good scientific methods and analysis.

The uniqueness of the proposed LCS entity is to fill these gaps. Importantly, the LCS platform can help diversify intellectual concentration away from Kathmandu. A consortium of various universities outside the valley should stand to gain from such a platform.

The LSC's three-pillar strategy may look like as follows:

- 1. Research:** The LCS platform will promote high quality research work connecting researchers from different continents and engaging bright Nepalese and foreign students. The area of research will be broader in scope and theatrically focused. For example, the Gandaki River Corridor could be a good starting point. The LCS platform will engage in proposal writing activities in collaboration with national and international partners.
- 2. Academics:** The LCS's platform can be very helpful in developing creative curricular designs, promote student exchanges etc. The host institution of the LCS –a polytechnic institute PNMHI-- could be converted into a four-year multidisciplinary college within the next 5 years. A one-year course on "eco-tourism and sustainable studies" could be developed in collaboration with a conservation organization like NTNC. These are some examples.
- 3. Capacity building and policy impact:** The LCS could be a platform to host valuable conferences such as *Nepal's River Strategy and The Interface Between Science, Buddhist Philosophy & the Ecosystem*. The platform can also host workshops for professional development for faculty from various academic institutions.

The three-prong strategy of the LCS will set this platform uniquely different from many other institutions in Nepal, and will help develop Lumbini as an attractive education hub.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This concept paper proposes to establish a center of excellence --Lumbini Center for Sustainability (LCS)-- as a knowledge platform with the aim to promote an informed policy debate and provide pragmatic policy advice or dossiers for enhancing human well-being and climate resiliency of the central Himalayan community. The center will embody global and regional efforts of individuals, institutions, and innovations and aims to spread the message of universal peace propounded by Lord Buddha as foundation for achieving development in harmony with nature. Keeping sustainable development and human welfare at its core, it proposes to combine methods of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities disciplines as integrative threads for exploring connected human-ecological system (CHES) to be analyzed and understood at spatial, temporal, and organizational scales. The concept of community resilience and well-being is considered holistically to include various key elements of sustainable development such as the food-energy-water nexus, natural disasters, environmental rehabilitation, bio-diversity conservation, ecosystem services, community health, resiliency and adaptation capacity building, indigenous knowledge, culture and values. To that end, the remarkable

variability in connected human-ecological systems (CHES) along the river corridors of Nepal's Himalayan range, linking the Tibetan plateau in the north and the Indian plain in the south, provides the ideal conditions to investigate causes and consequences of climatic changes in one of most vulnerable regions in the world.

The aim and objectives of the LCS are to leverage expertise and passion of a network of local, regional and global collaborators to advance research, education, and outreach in the areas of climate change risk, resilience, adaptation, and sustainable development (SD). To accomplish this, the center plans to build state-of-art research facility and human institutional capacity within the confines of the Himalayan river basin –close to the sources of climate vulnerability and impacts. Secondly, the LCS will help develop creative curriculum designs for related degree programs for its host institution and other local academic institutional partners. Thirdly, this center will help build local intellectual capacity for the local scholars and academic institutions. Fourthly, given the common threat caused by the climate change across the Himalayan range, the center will help promote trans-boundary collaborations across India, Nepal, and China, while welcoming others from around the world to join hands in the pursuit of new knowledge-based local and regional solutions to global problems. Fifthly, while maintaining the utmost scientific rigorousness in its research methods and analysis, the LCS hopes to provide public policy platforms that are creative, innovative, as well as practical and locally viable. It hopes to do so by organizing neutral knowledge forums and platforms, and developing virtual knowledge sharing and dissemination work space.

Finally, we believe that the world renowned heritage site of Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, is an ideal place to attract regional and international interests and collaboration. The name Lumbini Center for Sustainability and the location of Lumbini can serve as a good platform to bring together scientists, Dharma teachers, anthropologists, economists, and development researchers to discuss the impacts of climate change and formulate tailored strategies, options and action programs. In collaboration with local partner Lumbini Buddhist University, for example, we envision being able to offer regular teaching programs at the LCS to train local leaders and development professionals in the areas of climate change impacts, adaptation strategies, and SD in the context of creating a better understanding between science, knowledge and human well-being.