



HIMALAYAN insight

CREATING JOY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HIMALAYAS



HIMALAYAN INSIGHT

Himalayan **I**nitiatives for **S**ustainable and
Inclusive **G**oals towards a **H**armonious **T**omorrow

An initiative by



Himalayan Insight is a **non-profit** organization initiated by **Himalayan Ecotourism (HET)**, an **award-winning social enterprise** that uses tourism as an opportunity to promote **sustainable development** in the Western Himalayas. At the heart of Himalayan Insight is the vision to build empowered and **environmentally conscious communities** that advocate for sustainable development and **nature conservation**. Through this document, we hope to share Himalayan Insight’s **plan for the coming year** towards achieving this ambitious goal by supplementing HET’s past efforts.

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THE CONTEXT

The **Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP)**, established in 1999, lies entirely in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh and spans over approximately 750 km². Its southwest face, composed of the GHNP Ecozone, is home to approximately 2400 households that presently, rely on a range of livelihoods including agriculture, sale of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFPs) and more recently, tourism.



The mountain range of the Great Himalayan National Park

While tourism has offered some an alternate livelihood, it has detrimental effects on the surrounding natural ecosystems through intense resource use. Himalayan Ecotourism (HET) nurtures **a collaboration with the local communities** of the Ecozone to support economic development of the local people through ethical business to reduce pressures of resource use on the National Park, while diverting profits to social and ecological initiatives such as children's education, women empowerment, reforestation and forest fire prevention.



Meeting of the GHNP Community- Based Ecotourism Cooperative

Due to HET's model, we've found the extent of our non-profit work is strongly limited by the profits we secure from tourism. Hence, we want to shift the forest fire prevention, ecological restoration and children's education programs to **our new NGO**, Himalayan Insight.

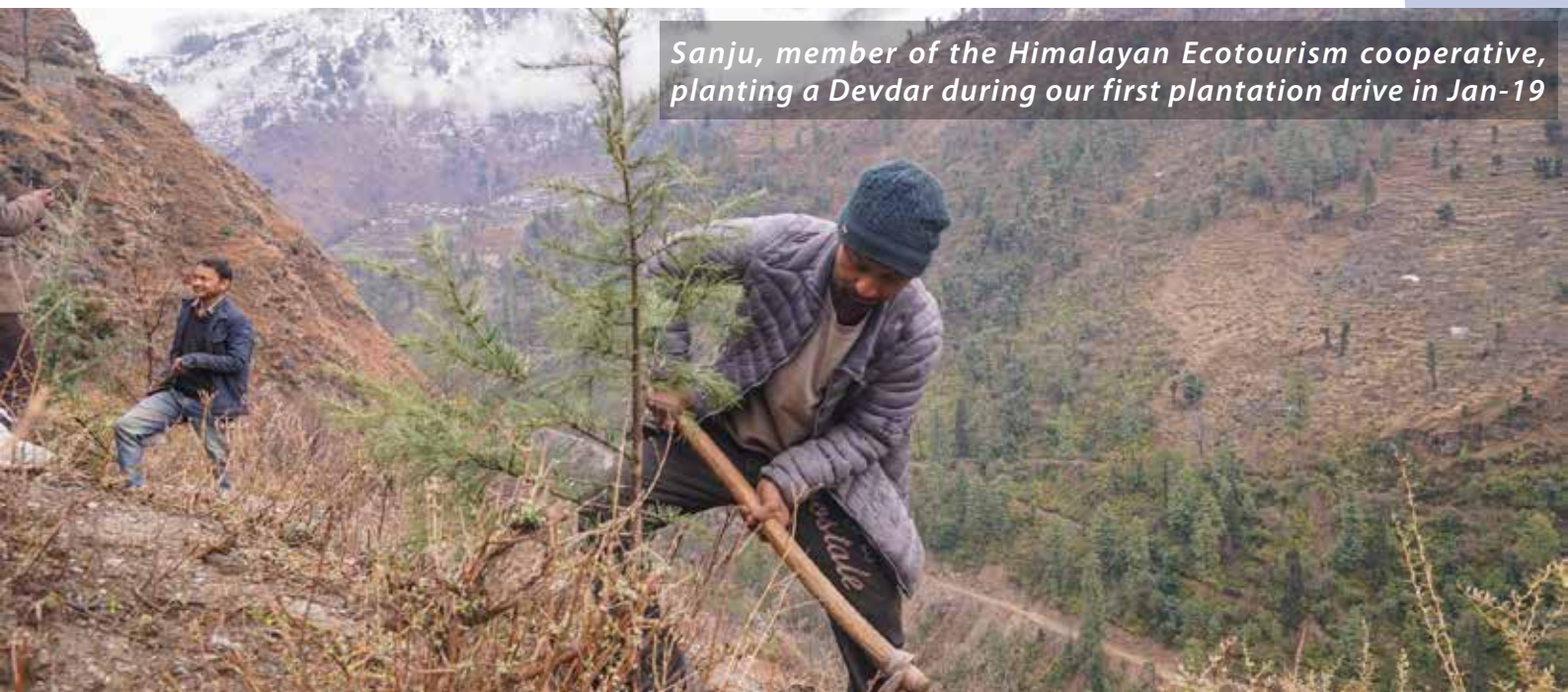
By supplementing the economic incentives created by HET that **brings local people as partners** on a path to sustainable development, Himalayan Insight intends to implement a **holistic nature conservation** program that creates the right environment for socio-economic development, for **empowerment** of the local community that, in turn, become **advocates** of nature conservation.

Our reforestation team developing a micro-plan with the collaboration of the local women in the village Pekhri.



The following **report** outlines the work that the social enterprise, HET, has completed till now, the existing issues in the Tirthan Valley that require attention and the **future prospects** for the work we would like to achieve as an NGO, Himalayan Insight.

Sanju, member of the Himalayan Ecotourism cooperative, planting a Devdar during our first plantation drive in Jan-19



AN OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK

FORMATION OF A COOPERATIVE SOCIETY

The GHNP Community- Based **Ecotourism Cooperative** was established to provide employment opportunities through sustainable tourism to the local villagers of Tirthan valley. We welcomed 65 members and together, became one of the major players in the tourism industry of the GHNP. The members are our business **partners** and **stakeholders** in a business they co-own and co-run.

A group of French trekkers with some cooperative members on a trek in the GHNP post-pandemic



Due to the **Covid-19** pandemic, the society's members suffered a **loss in income** due to a halt in tourism and this led to a feeling demotivation and discouragement. With a gradually increasing influx of tourists in the valley, we are **recovering** and restoring the cooperative's spirits.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

HET has created a **micro-enterprise** with a team of women from Gushaini and surrounding villages to encourage their entrepreneurial spirit and offer an alternative source of income. Under **Himalayan Eco-Creations**, we produce a range of 100% **natural cosmetics** like sunscreen, lip balms and **handmade** soaps for sale to tourists.

A few women from the villages of Pekhri and Bhiyar had an inclination for teaching and were trained under experienced educationalists to **become teachers** in their respective villages. They use interactive teaching methods to teach the children important subjects such as **computer skills** and **English**.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the micro-enterprise was forced to halt

Women and children participating in the inauguration of our reforestation program in the village Pekhri



production. Through crowdfunding, HET was able to keep women and cooperative members employed through our **reforestation program** which involved running the **nursery** and caring for saplings. We intend on keeping the micro-enterprise branch of the women empowerment program under the umbrella of HET while shifting the children's education program and reforestation work under the umbrella of Himalayan Insight and our further plans are discussed in the next section of the report.

GREEN TECHNOLOGIES

With an increased understanding of the day-to-day needs of the villagers, we noticed that many of their issues could be resolved with the introduction of simple but well-thought out technologies. **Energy-related challenges** appeared to be one of the most crucial issues that needs to be addressed. Most of the traditional wood stoves in this region of the Himalayas function very **inefficiently** and hence, pose three major problems:

- **Indoor pollution:** The women and often their children breathe a great amount of toxic smoke while cooking
- Cooking on these stoves requires the use of a **large quantity of wood**. This contributes to further **deforestation** and land degradation.



The conventional stoves emit toxic smoke inside the house and pose severe health hazards



We developed three models of clean stove perfectly matching the need of the villagers as they are multifunctional, fit in the kitchen and require much less wood

- Collection of fuelwood is typically the task of women and children. It is a **strenuous task** for them and it leads to a loss of precious time.

Our stove is designed in such a way that it promotes **efficient combustion** of the fuel and **optimizes** the utilization of the heat that is produced. The stoves feature a **multi-fuel** injector that allows the villagers to burn other dry biomass in case of wood scarcity, a water **heating system**, and **cooking** platforms. Our combustion chamber design is patented.

The prototypes were handed over to IIT Mandi for **further R&D**. We are looking for an entrepreneur to launch the **production** at a larger scale and find a way to introduce this practical and sustainable product to local communities here.



An intentional forest fire raging in the ecozone of the Great Himalayan National Park in April 2022

INTENTIONAL FOREST FIRE PREVENTION

Igniting fires in the forests is a **common practice** in the Tirthan Valley and throughout Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Forest fires are **intentionally** set due to a variety of reasons:

1. Burning dry grass to induce new shoots.
2. Clearing forests to facilitate illicit felling.
3. Inducing gucchi (Morel mushroom) growth.
4. Making collection of NTFPs easy by burning the undergrowth.

And the consequences are immensely dreadful.

Hence, we initiated our “**Stop Forest Fires**” campaign across the Tirthan Valley. Awareness campaigns through villages and schools, offering alternative livelihoods and involving communities in reforestation work all contributed to the **drastic decrease** in the frequency of forest fires from the years 2018-2020. Unfortunately, the pandemic forced us to halt our campaigning work and this year has seen a drastic return of forest fires. We are dedicated to reviving our past work as an NGO to combat this issue.

Anju (HET) performing an awareness program about the issue of forest fires in a local school



ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Due to the extensive **reduction in forest cover** and resource use by local communities that we have observed in the Tirthan Valley, HET has identified an area of 5 km² for ecological restoration (See the map below). A **reforestation** initiative in collaboration with local villagers was initiated on two plots of land, PE-Z01 and NA-Z01. We intend on **re-evaluating** the ecological progress of the plots and determining what work is required in the future.

To summarize, by bringing in business via tourism and the production of handicraft products, we have been able to **reduce pressures** of human-resource use on the national park. There is a need for continued and consistent presence to move forward with the local communities of Tirthan Valley with the help of Himalayan Insight. The following section outlines our plan for the coming year, 2022-2023.

Ecozone of the Great Himalayan National Park



Barchi top

3040 m

NA-Z01

Nadahar

2250 m



PE-Z01

2170 m

Pekhri

- Road
- Trekking trail
- Village
- NA-Z01 Reforestation zone
- Project area

The 5 sqkm project area of ecological restoration for which a microplan has been devised

Cooperative members during a plantation drive



Devdar trees growing at our nursery near the village Pekhri

CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

In rural India, very little emphasis is paid during schooling years to focus on a child's overall **personality development**, hone their unique capacities and **skills** and encourage **curiosity**. Having worked in the Tirthan valley for close to a decade now, we believe the children here have immense potential to excel and become significant **change-makers** in their own communities if given the right kind of education and **opportunities**.



Tanmayi (HET) at our Bhiyar school introduces the Plastic free July operation to the children

At the request of the local community, HET supported the creation and running of **two schools** in two villages, Bhiyar and Pekhri during the pandemic. Through our internship program, we have also had experienced individuals come on board to enhance the **teaching methods** employed at their schools to expose children to important concepts like climate change and the harmful effects of intentional forest fires. We screened documentaries and ran a range of exciting **activities** to stimulate them and nudge them towards understanding their environment in a better way.



Girl children learning computers at our school in Pekhri

OUR PLAN FOR 2022 - 2023

As a grassroots NGO, Himalayan Insight wants to carefully **build a team** of specialist researchers and conservationists that can tackle each of our projects with a comprehensive set of knowledge and experience. Hence, we've developed a general outline of how we envision our past efforts developing in the next five years.

Intense resource use of the local people's surrounding forests is resulting in worsening issues of land degradation and water insecurity, further exacerbated by climate change.

With tourism expected to increase in Himachal Pradesh at an average annual rate of 7.9% every year until 2023, sustainable socio-economic development of rural communities crying need of the hour as communities

Inauguration of our ecological restoration program by the director of the GHNP in Aug-20



experience economic development and employment generation. Culturally, modernized and fast-paced development in the valley has led communities here to a state of disequilibrium in the form of loss of a collective culture and a detachment from traditional roots and practices.

By providing engaging and meaningful education to revive the local people's connection to their forests and indigenous knowledge, we want to find ways to generate economic benefits from this valuable knowledge. We also want to shift the analytic lens from the male's perspective toward that of the woman's. We want to provide a safe space for the local women to explore their interests to alleviate economic inequalities that result from gender inequalities deeply embedded in the traditional workings of their society.

Hence, **our mission** is to explore a **holistic approach** to nature conservation by nurturing an inclusive conscious collective for and in local communities

in the valley for sustainable socio-economic development through engaging environmental education.

FOREST FIRE PREVENTION

We are dedicated to reviving our past work as an NGO to combat the rising prevalence of intentional forest fires. Based on previous interactions and fieldwork, we plan on conducting further interviews with villagers to better understand **why** forest fires are intentionally set and **plan** intervention measures. Relationships formed from interviews will enable us to identify trust-worthy representatives across the valley who we intend on calling



Deepak getting ready with the material for campaigning in the villages against the intentional forest fires

'Defenders'. In collaboration with the Forest Department and our 'Defenders', a **Quick-Response-System** for real-time intervention and tracking of induced forest fires can be started.

This robust data collection and analysis will help obtain data on forest fires in Tirthan Valley and streamline our **intervention measures**. Alongside experimentation of Morel mushroom cultivation, we plan on running **awareness campaigns** at villages and exploring opportunities for **alternative livelihoods** such as handicraft and cosmetics production, inspired by our women empowerment program.

ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Presently, we intend on evaluating the ecological progress of the plots, PE-Z01 and NA-Z01, for presence of invasive species, growth rate of planted fauna, succession of the planted species and what work is required for the future.



Meeting with the DFO - GHNP to set the goals of our ecological restoration program

We want to **diversify** the flora species we are caring for in the nursery by initiating a village-wide initiative of **seed collection** and growing of seeds into saplings for future reforestation drives. Monitoring the succession and progress of these habitats post-reforestation is crucial for future expansion plans in the area.

We have devised a **micro-plan** in collaboration with local community members and experienced researchers with the encouragement of the **Forest Department** that we want to implement in the next 5 years.

This micro-plan tackles our actions and goals for the ecological restoration of the total 5 km² project area.

WOMEN'S MICRO-ENTERPRISE

In the continuity of our past efforts, we want to provide the marginalized women of Tirthan Valley with education and the creative skills training needed to become professional and talented designers, seamstresses, embroiderers, weavers, and jewelry designers of the handcraft industry. Through our program, more women would gain the creative skills and financial independence by creating sustainable fashion that is life affirming and supports a healthy environment.



Women at our workshop for making of natural cosmetics with local apricot kernel oil

The range of products that these women offer with their fine craftsmanship includes soaps, creams, oils, woolen socks and other knitted items. HET plans on reviving this micro-enterprise and beginning production of these products once again by training more women and providing the materials required. With a sustained presence and a lively business, opportunities for growth and expansion within the valley can be explored.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Presently, our school in Bhiyar is closed because the nearby government school reopened. The school in Pekhri has seen a reduction in the number of students that regularly attend classes for similar reasons.

We are determined to revive this program by collaborating with existing government schools and ensuring children can experience a holistic education both inside and outside a classroom setting.



Parul (HET) performs a session about waste management at our Pekhri school

We would like to revive our child development program as an NGO by critically evaluating the existing curriculum and training teachers with the help of education specialists. We want to curate engaging environmental education modules and reach out to government schools to conduct regular classes with the children.

Some households in Chehni Panchayat have expressed an interest in their children participating in nature workshops on Sundays and hence, we are designing activities with these children that include nature walks, nature journaling and theatrical skits.

We also want to curate workshops for yoga, meditation and up-skilling for the women and youth of the Panchayat. Through close interactions with them,

we've come to understand that they have a deep interest in exploring yoga and meditation and building skill sets that can enhance their employability and give them the confidence to start their own businesses.

TIMELINE OF OUR WORK

2013

The onset of a community movement

With the support of the "Friends of the GHNP", a private social initiative in support of the National Park, the budding Himalayan Ecotourism conducts a socioeconomic survey in the ecozone of the GHNP and starts interacting with the local men engaged in tourism activities. The core team of the future GHNP Community-Based Ecotourism Cooperative is formed.

Himalayan Ecotourism plans to work with the women folk in the ecozone of the Great Himalayan National Park by organizing regular meetings in 2 panchayats.

2014

Cooperative society and World heritage tag

Sixty-five villagers from the Ecozone join the Cooperative Society, registered on 2-July despite the sharp resistance from the local elite. Himalayan Ecotourism becomes an association between the cooperative and a group of sustainability leaders & industry professionals. Almost simultaneously, with the support of the cooperative, the GHNP is nominated as a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

We take dozens of groups on treks in or around the GHNP. It is the beginning of the successful story of our social enterprise "Himalayan Ecotourism".

We welcome 14 interns and volunteers to work on capacity building of the cooperative members and to mobilize & train women for launching their micro-enterprise. The women are trained to make felted wool, hand-made soaps and fruit jams.

2015

Core strengthening

Himalayan Ecotourism welcomes 18 interns and volunteers to work on reinforcing the tour and trek marketing, the business structure of the cooperative, and to further mobilize and train women. We also decide to address the problems related to energy in the ecozone by developing an advanced clean wood stove prototype for the villagers.

Our first research to understand the issue of intentional forest fires is conducted.

Loaded with work for the cooperative and meeting some cultural opposition to women empowerment, we struggle to bring women together for the long term. In spite of everything, some of them are engaged in production of apricot oil, jams, soaps and body balm. They launched their own venture called "Himalayan Eco-Creations". The products are sold to the visiting tourists.

2016

The social wing of HET gets stronger

"Symbioz" is established as the daughter organization of Himalayan Ecotourism for designing, producing and selling of green technologies in the Ecozone.

The 'Stop Forest Fires' campaign is kickstarted to raise awareness about the adverse impacts of forest fires.

We have opened our main office in Banjar to be closer to local communities. A part of our premises has been renovated into a café entirely run by local women.

2017

Good at business, we can do more for sustainability

Himalayan Ecotourism is recognized as a unique concept and initiative in the Himalayas, achieving a 4.9/5 stars rating as a trek & tour operator. We are upgrading our camping equipment with a second import from Europe.

A huge community movement under our "Stop Forest Fires" campaign is initiated.

More women join our women empowerment program at the café. We are making all-natural, hand-made soaps, body cream and balm, fruit jams & pickles.

2018

Refocusing the work for the Himalayan Forests

The designs of our clean stoves and solar cookers are handed over to IIT Mandi. Unfortunately, after publishing scientific papers about the stove, they stop its development. Following this we decide to focus on our 'Stop Forest Fires' initiative. We believe that getting rid of forest fires has a much bigger impact than producing a clean stove.

All our interns and volunteers are engaged in the campaign, in the villages and in the local schools.

While the trekking business grows, our café in Banjar suffers losses. The café is closed and we plan moving the office to Gushaini again, closer to the tourists, the GHNP and the cooperative members.

The stove prototypes are taken back from IIT Mandi. We hope to get researchers on board to continue the R&D.

Virtually no forest fires are reported post-monsoon of 2018!

2019

We are an award-winning social enterprise

We win the Indian Responsible Tourism Award and the SKAL International and Biosphere sustainable tourism awards. Shortly after this, our cooperative members decide to plant trees in the ecozone of the GHNP.

The winter continues without seeing a forest fire, which makes us think we did the right thing. A drone surveillance strategy to locate any fire activity is developed and submitted to the Forest department.

2019 is the best business year for the cooperative ever. There is unity within the cooperative society and spirits are high.

2020

Transforming HET for resilience

The Covid-19 pandemic strikes hard and we have no business. As a social enterprise, how do we continue with all our efforts without a running business to support it? We decided to intensify our reforestation program so that it could give employment to our cooperative members and contribute to ecological restoration in the same time. We started the program thanks to private donations, but the idea was to get into the international carbon market.

In August 2020, we inaugurated our first integrated plantation in the village Pekhri. Integrated by involving the women and the kids, by raising the interest of the forest department and by setting up our own nursery.

Selected women of Pekhri were trained to become teachers in their own village. We have set up a small school with computer and other teaching material. Around 20 kids were attending the classes.

We also organized our first women-led trek in October with the goal of involving the local women in ecotourism activities.

2021

What about an NGO to supplement the work of HET?

With the help of a crowdfunding campaign, we successfully run another plantation drive in the village Nadahar. But what's next?

The carbon market, virtually inaccessible, didn't seem to be the right way to support our reforestation program.

On the request of the villagers, we opened a second school in the village Bhiyar. More than 60 children were being taught every day at the school.

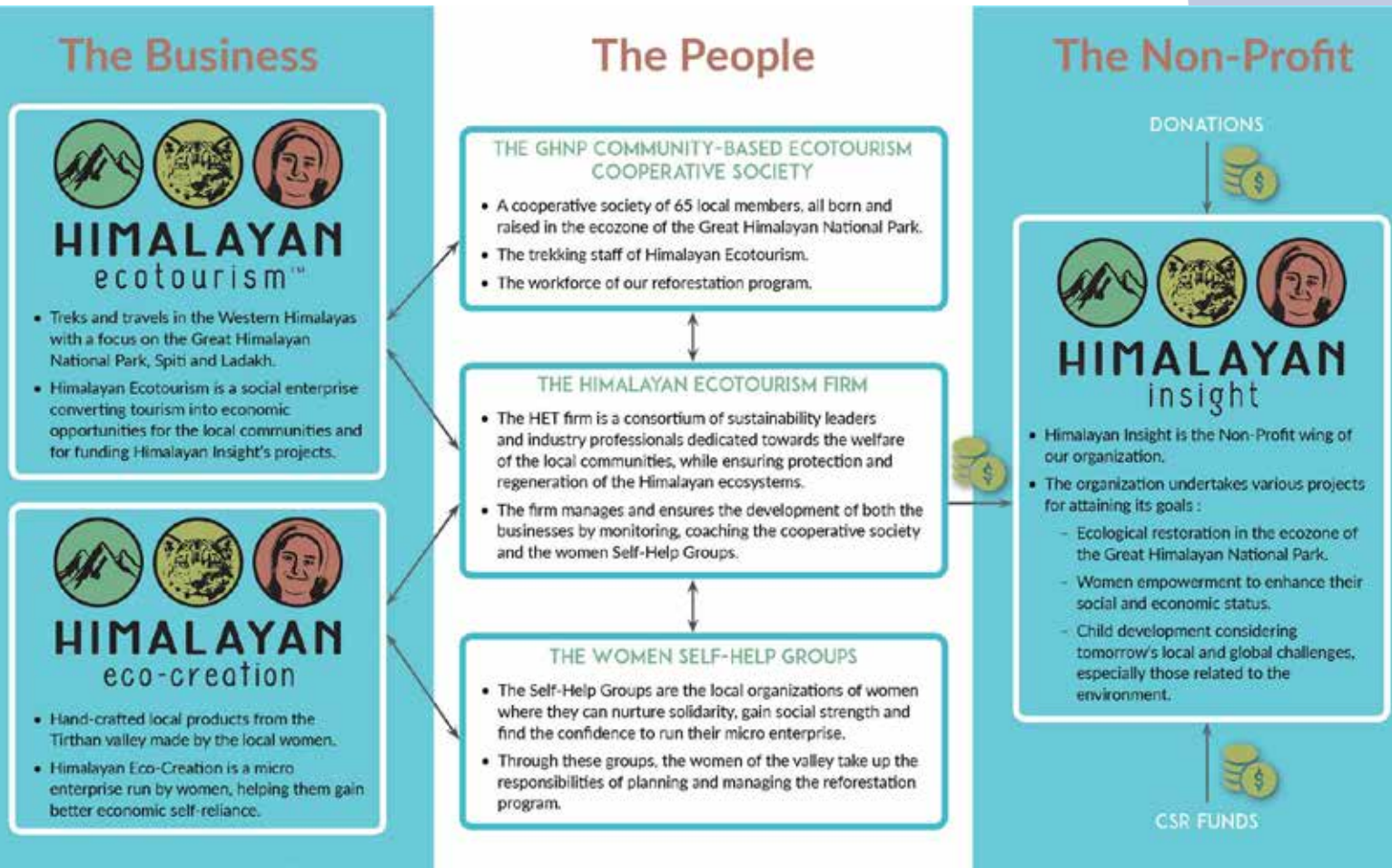
With very little business due to the pandemic, how can we support all our social projects? We decided to register an NGO to help HET to run the entire program. We called it Himalayan Insight!

We also consolidated the women group of Pekhri, formally registered as a Self-Help Group (SHG). Himalayan Insight is registered with one member of the cooperative, the women SHG and the HET firm.

2022

A fully fledged social enterprise model

With 9 years of work and partnership with the local community, HET has laid down a strong foundation for a durable social intervention in the Tirthan valley. With the establishment of Himalayan Insight, we have formed a solid system that creates economic opportunities while ensuring the subsequent development to be regenerating and sustainable.



At Himalayan Insight, we believe that there is a vast area of potential in the GHNP Conservation Area for research and community work. We are always looking for meaningful collaborations with organizations and corporate entities who want to exact social change in an area that desperately needs it.

If you are interested in learning about our work and getting in touch for future collaborations, please contact us at

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Visit us at

<https://www.himalayanecotourism.com/>