

The image shows two young girls in school uniforms walking on a dirt path in a rural, hilly area. The girl on the left is wearing a green dress and pink shoes, and the girl on the right is wearing a white shirt and green skirt. Both are carrying backpacks and smiling. The background features a lush green hillside with trees and a cloudy sky.

Strategic plan 2015–2020

Sustainable education, health and environmental programs

AUSTRALIAN
HI  ALAYAN
FOUNDATION



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Section 1:

Background

1.1 Evolution of AHF

The Australian Himalayan Foundation (AHF) celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2012. Since inception the geographic reach and diversity of our programs and project areas have expanded. The Foundation has also undergone significant change with new Board members and staff, and accreditation with the Australian Aid Program (DFAT).

This five-year Strategic Plan shapes our choices in responding to significant changes in the environment in which we operate to support the people of the Himalaya now and into the future.

This Strategic Plan is a 'living document' that will be reviewed annually and amended in response to changing circumstances and new opportunities.

1.2 A poor and isolated region with strong links to Australia

The Himalayan mountain range extends more than 2,000km across northern India, Nepal, the autonomous region of Tibet and Bhutan. Being a mountainous region, population is spread across remote areas where access to education, health and environmental resources, as well as government service delivery, is limited.

The Himalayan region in which we work is one of the poorest in the world. Nepal remains one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita GDP of only US\$1,200. While poverty rates are decreasing, some 25% of Nepal's 29 million people still live in real poverty. In addition, profound inequities run across geographic regions and across caste, ethnicity and gender. Development challenges exist in accessing quality primary education, improving basic health outcomes, adapting to climate change and the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, strengthening governance and, integrally, reducing poverty.

Nepal's neighbour, Bhutan, has made substantial progress with social indicators improving over the last decade. However, about half of Bhutan's 687,000 people live in extremely remote areas cut off from basic services. The Government faces the challenge of matching gains from strong economic growth to rising expectations of expanding employment opportunities and rapid urban migration.

In northern India substantial and persistent disparities of opportunity in education, health and economic prospects exist and reflect geographical, ethnic and gender differences. There is a significant gulf emerging between richer and poorer states in the country, especially in the Himalayan region.

Over the past 40 years hundreds of thousands of Australians have visited the Himalaya to trek beneath the world's highest peaks and appreciate some of the world's most hospitable cultures. AHF provides a vehicle to support sustainable community-based education, health and environment projects throughout the region; and strengthen and expand the long-term relationships between the Australian and Himalayan communities.

1.3 Responding to priority needs

AHF and its partners have examined the key issues facing the remote communities in the Himalaya through review and lessons learned from past programming, and consultations with national partners and other stakeholders. Broad AHF responses are summarised in Table 1 below. Our approaches are grounded on a theory of change that asserts:

- If targeted efforts are focussed on – improving educational levels; health outcomes; environmental outcomes and adaptation to climate change; access to education and health services in isolated communities; gender equality; opportunities for people with disabilities; income earning opportunities in rural areas; and capacity of in-country governments, especially at sub-national level;
- Then improvements can be made for people in the areas in which AHF works in terms of overall poverty; lack of opportunity; and unequal distribution of resources and services.

Table 1

Overarching challenges	Key obstacles	AHF response
Poverty	Low education levels	Increase education levels
	Poor health outcomes	Improve health outcomes
Lack of opportunity	Environmental degradation and climate change (impacting on incomes)	Address the impacts of climate change and improve environmental outcomes
	Geographic isolation	Improve access to services in isolated communities
Unequal distribution of resources and services	Few employment/income earning opportunities in rural areas	Increase income earning opportunities in rural areas
	Gender inequality	Improve gender equality
	Lack of opportunity for people with disabilities	Improve opportunities for people with disabilities
	Capacity-constrained governments	Work with in-country governments, especially at sub-national level



Section 2:

The 2015–2020 Strategy



Based on analysis of challenges and broad theory of change this Strategic Plan encompasses the following elements:

2.1 Our mission – ‘why we exist’

To improve the quality of life of the people most in need in remote areas of the Himalaya.

2.2 Our vision – ‘what we will help to change’

We work in partnership with the people of the Himalaya to help the most disadvantaged meet their priority needs through integrated improvements in education, health and the environment.

2.3 Our guiding principles – ‘how we work’

Our work is guided by:

Strong partnerships – we take a participatory approach with communities to understand issues from their perspective and, in partnership with them, work to deliver the outcomes they need most.

Empowerment – we aim to engage and empower people in the communities where we work so any change is sustained.

Alignment and harmonisation – we work closely with national governments to align our focus with their policies and priorities; and we harmonise our approaches with Australian development programs and those of other development partners.

A long term view – we are committed to building long-term capacity in the communities in which we operate.

Respect – we are cognisant of cultural and social sensitivities and are inclusive and respectful of all the people we work with.

Value for money – we monitor our projects to ensure they are evidence-based and relevant, delivered efficiently and are cost effective.

Excellent governance – we have robust internal processes and governance and work diligently with partners and governments to safeguard monies entrusted to us.

Independence – we are a secular NGO, with no political or religious affiliations, goals or policies.

2.4 Our geographic focus

Our geographic focus will remain in the remote, rural areas of Nepal, Bhutan, and the Indian Himalaya. The prime focus will be in Nepal and, specifically, in areas in the Solukhumbu district that have received less Government and external support over the years than those closest to Mt Everest.



2.5 Our goals and outcomes – ‘what we will achieve’

Our five Program Goals directly link to the issues and needs identified in Table 1 (page 5) and a sectoral focus on: education, health, environment and climate change, integrated community development, and gender and social inclusion. Our four Operational Goals will support AHF to deliver the Program Goals. These are:

PROGRAM GOALS

Goal 1

Increase education levels

Outcomes

Continued strengthening and development of teacher training and education programs in Nepal and Bhutan through:

Teacher Training and Quality

Education in Nepal – Teacher training in Solukhumbu to raise educational standards to create more child-friendly teaching environments and meet universal primary education goals; and associated community-based education assistance (supporting school attendance for less privileged students).

Girls’ Education and Vocational Training for Women – Nepal and Bhutan

– Supporting girls’ education in rural communities through community-based education assistance; and supporting vocational training for women with a focus on income generation and supporting livelihoods in local communities.

Schools for the Himalaya Program

– Linking Himalayan and Australian schools to provide funding support, knowledge sharing and learning and cross-cultural exchange.

Goal 2

Improve health outcomes

Outcomes

Strengthened primary health care with a focus on maternal and child health mixing modern and traditional approaches through:

Solukhumbu Health Program

– Maternal and child health care and service delivery.

Zanskar Primary Health Care

– Supporting and training Amchi (traditional healers) in the remote region of Ladakh in the Indian Himalaya, in modern medical practices to decrease high rates of infant mortality and improve maternal health.

Goal 3

Improve environmental outcomes and adaptation to climate change

Outcomes

Improved conservation efforts and community-based responses to the effects of climate change through:

Environmental Education

– Supporting awareness programs for school children and communities.

Snow Leopard Conservation

– integrating education and sustainable livelihoods into protection of the endangered snow leopard through partnerships with local communities in India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Emergency response

– Supporting community-based responses to natural disasters, as appropriate, in the communities in which we work.

Goal 4

Integrate community development

Outcomes

Enhanced multi-sectoral efforts to improve access to services and income earning opportunities in isolated communities through:

Linking education, income generation, health and environmental (and climate change adaptation) outcomes and operations in the communities in which we work – building on our relationships with and the capacity of local communities and district authorities.

Continued support for Himalayan arts and culture as important income generation avenues for local communities.

Goal 5

Strengthen gender equality and social inclusion

Outcome

Ensuring that those most in need contribute to and benefit from development opportunities through:

Mainstreaming a gender and social inclusion approach across all our work; and ongoing development of specific approaches for strengthening the inclusion of girls and women, the most vulnerable young people in communities, and people with disabilities.

OPERATIONAL GOALS

Goal 6

Continually improve robust governance and financial management processes and systems

Outcomes

Improved quality and expertise in operational and program management and financial management and planning through:

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of a skilled, ‘fit for purpose’ AHF Board working effectively and efficiently; strategic and annual planning that aligns outcomes with policies and processes; identification and management of organisational and program risk; regular performance monitoring, evaluation and reporting; efficient use of human and financial resources; and effective engagement, consultation and participation of all stakeholders.

Nurturing a strong and committed team culture with staff and volunteers supported by effective systems and leadership.

Providing ongoing training and development opportunities for in-country partners to ensure they continue to maintain sound financial and governance standards

Goal 7

Expand resource mobilisation

Outcomes

Improved stability and diversity of our income stream through:

Incorporating new donors and support from corporate entities, individuals and Australian and international agencies; and developing new and creative ways to generate income that align with our mission and vision.

Goal 8

Enhance communications and marketing

Outcome

Increased visibility and influence to expand knowledge of and support for AHF’s mission and vision through:

Improved strategic communications including strengthening the AHF brand and raising the profile of our work through enhanced media exposure and targeted marketing.

Goal 9

Improve monitoring, evaluation and learning

Outcomes

Strengthened monitoring, evaluation and learning of our operations and programs through:

Accountability to performance indicators for each of our goals and each program we deliver; and incorporating learning into ongoing programming delivery and operational decisions.



Section 3:

Governance and delivery: 'Implementing our goals'



3.1 Strategic governance and strong management

AHF is governed by a Board of Directors that sets strategic directions and targets, and monitors performance through regular reviews to ensure accountability. Directors have vital skills for influencing and supporting the direction and implementation of our programs and operations. We have mechanisms to ensure that the Board accounts for member views, communicates effectively, and regularly reviews and improves its performance.

The Board is supported by Advisory Committees, comprising Directors with relevant skills, and other specialists, that provide expert advice and strategic recommendations to management and the Board. These include the: Finance and Governance Advisory Committee; Program Advisory Committee; and Fundraising Advisory Committee.

The Board and its Advisory Committees are supported by management and operational staff, comprising a capable, well-directed and respected team that includes: General Manager, Program Manager, Marketing and Fundraising Manager, Book-keeper (supported by accountancy expertise), and Education and Health Advisers. These functions will continue to be supported by a dedicated core group of volunteers with technical capacity to assist with a range of tasks to maximise the efficiency of the use of our resources.

3.2 Value for money

This Strategic Plan represents a broad approach over a five-year period to meet Program and Operational Goals, underpinned by a range of policies and management systems. Separate and more detailed annual and quarterly planning processes will outline timing, resources, responsibilities and performance monitoring approaches. Planning will remain flexible to respond to opportunities as they arise. Further details of our programs are included in the Annual Reports on our website.

Activities will continue to be developed and managed in collaboration with reputable in-country partners with a strong track-record in community development – with AHF support for administration, project management, capacity development and monitoring. This approach will help ensure that local communities are empowered and equipped to manage and support activities in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

The General Manager oversees management of all AHF's operations. The Program Manager remains in regular contact with in-country partners, undertakes regular field trips and

manages program development, reporting, and monitoring and evaluation processes. The Education and Health Advisers provide regular support through mentoring and training of in-country delivery partners, attendance at in-country workshops, coordination of in-country volunteers and providing advice on latest international thinking and development.

With regular communications, field visits to in-country partners and activities, and ongoing capacity development, we have strong systems to ensure that programs are implemented in line with policy and contractual requirements. Partnerships Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) reflect: roles and responsibilities; agreement to AHF policies; and approaches to operations, procedures and financial management.

We are committed to ensuring value for money with administrative costs at levels appropriate for the effective and efficient management of projects and raising sufficient revenue. We will invest in business processes, systems and technology that support learning, efficiency and performance. We will maintain community-based, practical and cost-effective project management models and practices to maximise benefits to the people most in need in the Himalaya.



3.3 Partnerships

We will work primarily with in-country NGOs in Nepal, Bhutan and northern India to maximise the impact and reach of our development efforts. We recognise the specific qualities, attributes and valuable role of NGOs in: mobilising public support; forging strong links with community groups; expertise in meeting people's basic needs where quick and flexible responses are essential; promoting accountability; strengthening the voice of and empowering communities; promoting stronger links and transparency between governments and their citizens; and advocating for the most vulnerable members of society including the poor, women, children, people with disability and minority groups. We will examine the potential for working with new in-country partners as our programs expand based on a clearly articulated partnerships model.

We will strive to ensure that our activities align to national priorities and systems and that delivery partners have established, and have the capacity to further develop, association with government agencies in the interest of sustainability. This includes: integration of program activities into existing government and community systems; and encouraging involvement of government authorities at national and district levels in designing and implementing program activities, as well as in capacity development opportunities.

We will also seek harmonisation with other partners in our operations to reduce transaction costs for in-country partners, as well as minimise opportunities for duplication and fragmentation of external assistance. Improved coordination and partnerships in-country can also provide opportunities for leveraging additional support for programs. As an Australian NGO, we will particularly ensure that our work complements poverty reduction efforts under Australia's aid program in the Himalayan region. This includes improving access to: quality primary education (including targeted support for children from remote, poor and food-insecure families); and income generating opportunities to reduce poverty.

We will focus strongly on developing and building Australian community support for our development activities through ongoing engagement. This includes, for example, fund-raising, appeals, information events, providing volunteering opportunities and treks that provide opportunities to visit our work. This approach will be supported by several high-profile and youth AHF Ambassadors as well as AHF state representatives. We will develop communication strategies that increase our visibility and influence and foster collaboration.

3.4 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

We will hold ourselves accountable to performance indicators or targets for each of our Goals through a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework aligned to this Strategic Plan. Measuring performance of our operations and programs will involve:

- Gathering information on status and progress against objectives and expected outputs
- Appropriateness, value for money and timeliness of resources being provided
- Satisfaction of primary stakeholders
- Identifying issues, risks and constraints and defining appropriate responses to resolve and manage risks and realise opportunities
- Incorporating learning into ongoing programming delivery and operational decisions

Our monitoring and evaluation is based on principles of teamwork, engagement with partners and primary stakeholders, and ensuring that monitoring and evaluation outcomes are fed into decisions about future project management and implementation.

As all AHF programs and projects are implemented by in-country partners, local NGOs take a lead in monitoring to promote ownership and strengthen their monitoring capacity. A rolling program of evaluation will involve a strong partnership approach.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning will be based on an established reporting protocol that includes training and/or workshop reports, field visit reports, six monthly activity progress reports and Annual Plans. All reports will focus on activity objectives and outcomes with attention to risk management responses to address issues arising that may require remedial action. We will undertake assessment of organisational and Board performance regularly.

Our systems document and disseminate results and good practice to our broad range of stakeholders and supporters.

3.5 Risk assessment and management

Our Risk Management policy is in line with AS ISO 31000:2009 Risk Management guidelines. We will continually assess risk through monitoring and evaluation and reporting arrangements with formal assessment completed annually in consultation with in-country partners. Key areas include: program implementation; management (by both in-country partners and AHF); and cross-cutting issues such as child protection and security/terrorism.

Our Organisational Risk Management identifies and ranks a number of internal and external risks and we will assess these as part of annual planning and review processes.

We will continue to be assisted by professional risk management and assessment specialists in the development of our risk management policy and assessments.

3.6 Sustainability

We will continue to focus on sustainability and empowering of the people of the Himalaya to meet their development needs. We recognise that aid programs are more likely to be sustainable and effective when they are aligned with partner priorities, supported by local people, and involve beneficiaries in design and implementation. This requires inclusive project design and implementation arrangements and forms an integral part of our development philosophy and objectives. This approach is reflected in AHF's Constitution, regular Board meetings and, critically, in consultations and day-to-day management with in-country NGO partners. Through assistance with administration, project management, training, monitoring and risk management, we will ensure that activities are established and managed so that local NGOs and communities are empowered and equipped to manage and support projects sustainably and inclusively. All our projects stem from the needs of local communities. To maximise the chances of meeting project goals for communities, NGO project managers will involve and gain the support of all members of the local community to ensure ongoing grass-roots ownership of all projects.



How can you help?

You can help to make a difference in the Himalaya in the following ways:

Join as a Supporter

Our Supporters are crucial to our development – we are a community-based organization and rely on a pool of talented supporters to provide expertise, inspiration and assistance. We hold regular events and keep Supporters informed through our Yakety Yak newsletter and updates to our website.

Supporter Categories

All Supporter Fees are tax deductible:

Individual	\$50 per annum
Family	\$75 per annum
Bronze	\$250 per annum
Silver	\$500 per annum
Gold	\$1,000 per annum

Make a Donation

All donations to the AHF are greatly appreciated, and can be made online or by post. Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

Make a Bequest

Create a living legacy to assist future generations in the Himalaya by remembering the AHF in your will.

Trek for the AHF

Trekking in the Himalaya provides an ideal opportunity to raise funds for the AHF. Contact the AHF office for further information.



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