



WORLD TRAVEL & TOURISM COUNCIL

Tourism for Tomorrow

FINALIST 2015



Mountain Shepherds Initiative India

The mountain of Nanda Devi was once the second most popular summit to attempt in the Himalayas after Everest. However, such popularity brought heavy environmental pressures on the surrounding region, and in 1982 the Indian government created the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve and shut the whole region to human access.



This may have helped the natural environment, but it was a multiple tragedy for the local people, an Indo-Tibetan ethnic group known as the Bhotiya. In one go they lost access to their prime alpine pastures, to their source of medicinal herbs, and to the tourist trade that sustained them. The irony is that a few years earlier these same communities had given birth to the Chipko movement, whose activism to save the region's forests is one of the most celebrated stories in the history of Twentieth Century environmental activism.

In recent years, however, the state government of Uttarakhand has begun to reopen the park to limited ecotourism. In response the Bhotiya have worked to develop sustainable, community-based tourism around Nanda Devi. The pinnacle has been the foundation in 2006 of the Mountain Shepherds Initiative.

Since its foundation, more than 70 youth, both boys and girls, have been trained. Some now work with other groups, although a core group



manages the company itself, while also working as cooks, housekeepers, nature guides, or mountaineering and ski instructors. They are incentivised by the chance to own shares in the company should they stay and work hard. So far 12% of the total equity is owned by the youth, and the percentage is growing each year.

Recently the group has begun to share its model with other similar communities spread across the Himalayas. They have visited five locations in north east India to showcase their experiences and to encourage these communities that they too could develop responsible tourism. In so doing they are helping sustain these remote and inaccessible villages, while also ensuring the preservation of the natural heritage that surrounds them.

