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Dwindling Rhino Population in Nepal: National Concern

The great one horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), one of the five surviving species in the world, has now been confined to about 2500 individuals in some protected areas of Nepal and India. Due to the decreasing population of rhino in the world, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) has categorized this species in its red list. Similarly, it has been listed in Appendix I of CITES. The Government of Nepal has classified it as one of the major protected species.

Nepal's conservation effort in the past is regarded as noteworthy for the conservation of one-horned rhino. About one hundred population of rhino in the 1960s increased to 612 in 2000 because of effective implementation of the conservation measures. In recent years, the poaching of this species has been ever increasing in spite of various efforts carried out by the governmental as well as non-governmental organizations. The official record of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation shows that altogether 122 rhinos were found dead between 1998 to 2004 while more than 278 rhinos were found dead due to poaching and natural death during 2000-2007.

Decreasing rhino population is a major concern for conservation of rhino in perpetuity. It has brought major conservation threat and greater concern among the conservationist, civil society and academia as well as general public of Nepal. Recently, the Government of Nepal has approved Rhino Conservation Action Plan (2006-2011) which could be a significant step for conservation of rhino in Nepal. Habitat improvement and strengthening anti-poaching operations coupled with continued research, database upgrading, reintroduction, capacity building, trans-boundary cooperation, conflict minimization and sustainable development are the main features of the Action Plan.

Effective implementation of the conservation measures based on sound ecological principles will, no doubt, help in ensuring the future of rhino in Nepal. For this, wider commitment and concrete actions from all stakeholders together with peoples' participation is inevitable.