



1. Villagers expecting the visitors for the inauguration.

Seismic Strengthening and Restoration of Lo Gekhar

U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, Award No. SNP40020GR0042

Project Report, First Year, Fourth Quarter – July to September 2021

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Mustang District, Gandaki Pradesh, Nepal

Kunjon Thakuri
Chairman

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Report Narrative

The second year of the project began auspiciously with an inauguration ceremony during the visit of an embassy delegation headed by Garrett E. Wilkerson, Public Affairs Chief of the U.S. Embassy. Besides the villagers of Marang also local representatives headed by Mahendra Bahadur Thakali, representative of Mustang in the Provincial Assembly of Gandaki Province, and Mr Raju (Lopsang Tsomfel) Bista, Chairperson of Lo-Ghaker Damondarkunda Rural Council, attended the ceremony.



2. Garrett E. Wilkerson, Public Affairs Chief of the U.S. Embassy speaking to the local representatives during the inauguration ceremony.

Ten days after the inauguration another group of US embassy members visited Mustang. Kunjon Thakuri guided them at Lo Gekhar and briefed them about the restoration project.

Application with DoA

As part of the application process with the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal (DoA), a representative, Prakash Khadka, visited Lo Gekhar October 19–20 to evaluate the site. Within that period he visited the site for half a day, took pictures of the damages, asked the caretaker about the details of the restoration, the history of the monastery and the caretaker's role. Norbusum covered his travels from Kagbeni to Lo Gekhar, the border and back to Jomsom.

Despite multiple follow up communications with Mr Khadka we neither received a copy of the report of his visit nor the permission for the conservation work. However, the Director of the DoA, Damodar Gautam, assured permission verbally.

Refinement of Restoration Plan

In autumn discussions between Thomas Schrom, John Harrison, Christian Luczanits and Kunjon Thakuri about different options for the restoration continued and now focused on the materials to be purchased.

A new element decided on is the addition of a waterproof plywood layer above cross-beam level to provide additional seismic support wherever necessary. This added substantial additional costs not calculated for earlier to the material purchases but they can be covered within the available budget.

Purchase of Material

The plywood, pillars, beams, joists and planking have all been ordered but not yet been paid. With these orders about 15.600 USD are committed but do not yet appear in the budget. The waterproof membrane and scaffolding have been researched but the purchase of them still needs to be decided.

Masterplan

While following the September meeting a group of villagers intended to outline a masterplan for the site as a whole, this has not happened despite multiple follow ups. Accordingly we also did not push our ideas about the plan forward.

On the positive side, the village committee wrote to the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, to maintain the site as is and not to allow any further construction in concrete. This is an encouraging sign that they are willing to take action if the integrity of the monument is endangered.

Evaluation

While the inauguration of the work at the beginning of the second year of the project was extremely positive, the fact that no masterplan for the site has been proposed by the villagers in autumn is disappointing. Obviously, we keep pushing for such a plan throughout the project, as individual letters as that to the DoA may not be sufficient to prevent major changes to the site under the pressure of local leadership.

Of course, the recent changes to Lo Gekhar are part of a wider pattern of disregarding historic heritage and its replacement throughout Mustang, including Choede Monastery in Lo Manthang and nearby Tsarang Monastery. As such, they are part of a larger pattern that needs to be addressed through pressure on the local political

representatives who drive or at least support these changes. Here the US Embassy and the activities it supports in Mustang could play a decisive role.

Concerning the actual restoration work, the extensive discussions over the last six months resulted in the adoption of new conservation ideas, such as the usage of plywood on ceiling level, to mitigate for the decreasing maintenance of buildings and increase seismic stability. This new technology is ideal, as it does not affect the appearance of the building but adds an additional protective layer that can be applied in future projects as well.

Going Forward

In the current quarter the purchase of materials for the actual restoration to begin early April continues. All materials need to be purchased by early March, as then they need to be transported to the Lo Gekhar. John Harrison has been asked to prepare to come to Nepal in early April to lead the restoration work. The details of this campaign are still in discussion.

That despite several months of efforts the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, has not granted permission to the project yet is disconcerting. There is no objective reasoning for this delay and it makes planning for April a risk. Nevertheless, we are hopeful that in the end the project can proceed smoothly.