

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)



The Hindu Kush–Himalayan region (HKH) sustains approximately 140–150 million people and has an impact on the lives of 3 times as many people living on the plains and in the river basins below. The HKH is not only the world's highest mountain region but also the most complex. It extends over 3500 km, from Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east, and ranges from the plateau regions of Tibet and other mountain areas of China in the north to the Ganges Basin of India in the south. As a macroregion, it contains the upland watersheds of major river systems: the Indus, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Nu-Salween, the Lacang-Mekong, and the Yangtze (Jinsha). The wealth of the HKH lies in its diversity of flora and fauna and ethnic groups and languages. There are approximately 55 different mountain ethnic groups in the mountains of China alone. Yet despite this rich diversity, the people of this vast mountain region are, for the most part, abysmally poor.

This is why regional cooperation, bringing together regional policy-makers and planners on a nonpolitical platform, is so important.

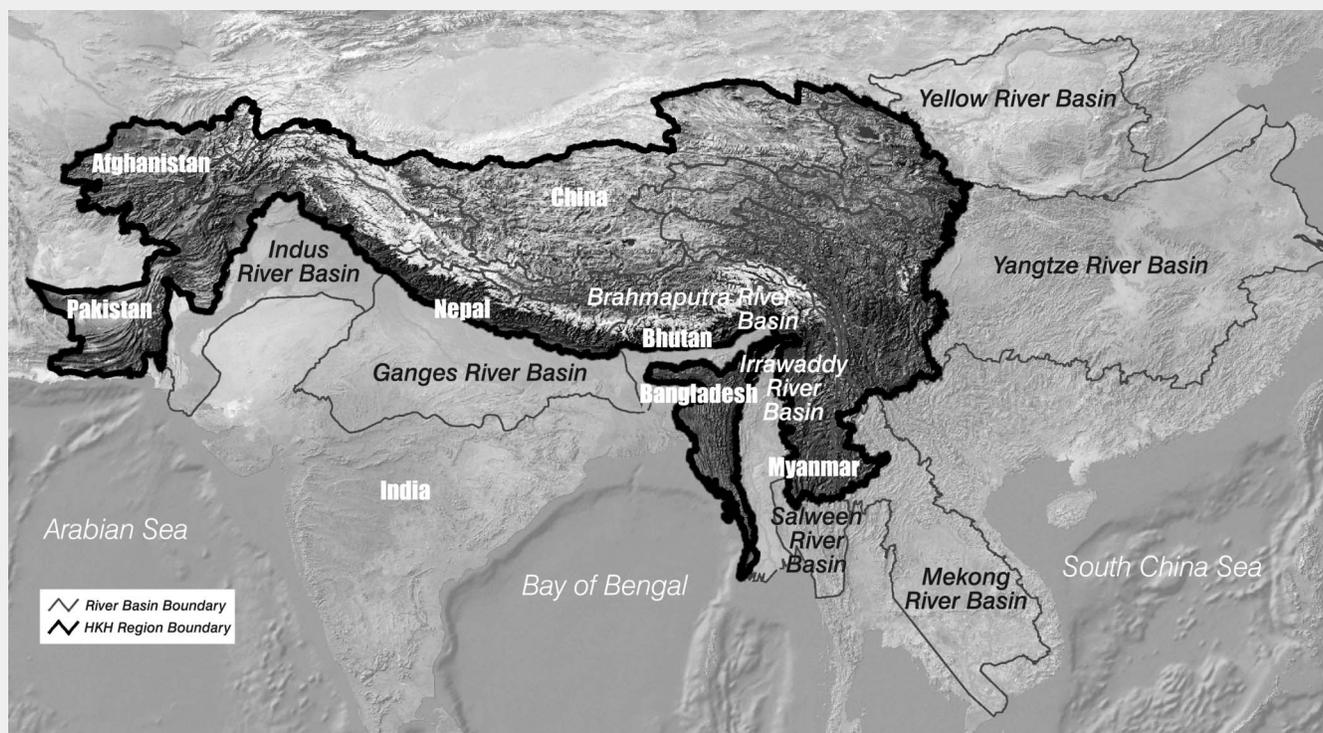
ICIMOD is the first International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development. It was established to serve the HKH through an ambitious mandate that gave it the responsibility to mobilize knowledge and disseminate it, along with skills necessary for its use. The acquisition and dissemination of relevant knowledge related to mountain development in the Hindu Kush–Himalayas is ICIMOD's most important activity. ICIMOD's statutes guide the Centre in the handling of knowledge and in its role as a knowledge bank, trainer, advisor, and advocate for the Hindu Kush–Himalayas and the populations inhabiting them.

Development reports constantly speak of the vicious cycle of poverty. Yet the poor have often been ignored, invisible, and marginalized; this is even more true for poor people who live in the mountains. It

was the specter of poverty in mountain regions and its impact in terms of outmigration, environmental destruction, and increasing scarcity of natural resources once taken for granted that, in the 1970s, produced a body of research about the increasing degradation of the Himalayan environment.

ICIMOD was established in 1983 "to help promote the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations in the Hindu Kush–Himalayan Region." The focus of ICIMOD's interests and work in research and development is mountain people themselves and the terrain that provides them with the products essential to their survival: natural resources, common property resources, agricultural and land-use systems established through human ingenuity, entrepreneurship skills, and off-farm and nonfarm activities.

ICIMOD implements its work through partnerships in the HKH,



Source: ESRI Data and Maps

largely in terms of a concerted outreach strategy. Without partners in the region, it would be difficult to carry out its work. ICIMOD sees these valuable intermediaries as a means of giving mountain people themselves a voice. Concomitantly, partners give valuable feedback not only on best practices, training, and replicable technologies but also on the impact of policies. This information in turn can be channeled to the policy-making level, giving an impetus to ICIMOD's advocacy role.

Improved and more equitable and sustainable livelihoods for mountain peoples are critical to both the region and the world. ICIMOD seeks support from governments and nongovernmental organizations in trying to improve living standards and ensure that fair policies govern the lives of the mountain poor. The last decade has shown that, although seemingly isolated, events in mountain areas and the increasing deterioration of living standards there do, indeed, have an important global impact. The need to address this phenomenon in a focused and concerted manner has led to ICIMOD's current strategy for 2003–2007 and the reorganization of the Centre into 6 integrated and interlinked programs. The integrated programs include the following 3 interrelated sectoral programs:

- Natural Resource Management (NRM);
- Agricultural and Rural Income Diversification (ARID);
- Water, Hazards, and Environmental Management (WHEM).

The plan also has 3 transversal programs:

- Culture, Equity, Gender, and Governance (CEGG);

- Policy and Partnership Development (PPD);
- Information and Knowledge Management (IKM).

The Centre's particular mission is to develop and provide integrated and innovative solutions to promote sustainable development in cooperation with regional and international partners, and through them to foster action and change to overcome mountain people's economic, social, and physical vulnerabilities. ICIMOD will help devise solutions by identifying options. This mission is translated into outcomes by analysis of the particularities of poverty and vulnerability in the mountains, which differ significantly from the poverty and vulnerability found in the plains surrounding the HKH. Analysis is also based on experience with mountain development to date, especially in the areas of greatest opportunity for achieving measurable impact. In overall congruence with the relevant part of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit Declaration, this strategy has identified 5 long-term outcomes that ICIMOD is committed to help achieve:

- Productive and sustainable community-based management of vulnerable mountain natural resources;
- Decreased physical vulnerability within watershed and regional river basins;
- Improved and diversified incomes for vulnerable rural and marginalized mountain peoples.
- Increased regional and local conservation of mountain biological and cultural heritage;
- Greater voice, influence, social security, and equitability for mountain people.

These outcomes also relate to the Millennium Development Goals to which the countries of the HKH are signatories, reaffirmed by the WSSD, particularly the goals of halving poverty by 2015, promoting gender equity, ensuring environmental sustainability, and promoting development partnerships.

It is ICIMOD's challenge now to use its knowledge to transfer wisdom gained from projects to policy, encourage best practices, seek methods of good governance, examine and promote pro-poor governance, and empower people through knowledge. ICIMOD has a comparative advantage in this kind of work because it provides a neutral ground on which people at various levels from across this region can discuss aspects of environmental sustainability, use of natural resources, innovative changes in livelihood endeavors, access and transparency, good decentralized governance, and regional cooperation. For this, ICIMOD seeks the support of governments and organizations that strive to improve living standards and ensure that fair policies govern the lives of the mountain poor.

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