

# Sustainable mountain development: The Himalayan tragedy\*

P. S. Ramakrishnan - School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110 067, India. [psr@mail.jnu.ac.in](mailto:psr@mail.jnu.ac.in)

\*Summary of the First 'Bharat Ratna Pt. G.B. Pant Memorial Lecture delivered by the author at G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pant Nagar.

Current Science, 308 Vol. 92, No. 3, 10 February 2007.  
<http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/feb102007/308.pdf>

## Abstract

Mountain systems in India, including the Himalayan region are characterized by highly complex socio-ecological systems, with rich cultural diversity linked with equally rich species of biological diversity. With a large number of ethnic societies having their own social, economic and cultural attributes placed in a highly heterogeneous mountain environment, any conservation-linked developmental initiative has to be based upon a value system that they understand, appreciate and therefore can participate. While textbook-based 'formal knowledge' has its value in this effort, the rich traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) derived through an experiential process and available with local communities forms a powerful connecting link between ecological and social systems.

Converting TEK, often seen as location-specific into broad generalizations that are applicable across socio-ecological systems was the major step that was undertaken by this author to convert research results into policy formulations and developmental initiatives, as illustrated here. In the ultimate analysis, developmental initiatives that link cultural diversity with biological diversity are seen as the basis for ensuring human security in these socio-ecologically fragile mountain systems.

**Keywords:** Mountain systems, socio-ecological system analysis, sustainable development, traditional societies, traditional ecological knowledge.