

5 Major Achievements and Shortcomings

ICIMOD no doubt has faced serious challenges as a pioneer in the field of integrated mountain development charged with the mandate of reducing environmental degradation and enhancing conservation of natural resources at one end and reducing poverty by enhancing income generation among poor mountain inhabitants at the other. The Centre was created at a time when dialogue on sustainable development through balancing conservation and development was just taking off and when the need for such a paradigm shift was only beginning to emerge. Even after awareness and dialogue on sustainable development increased, following the adoption of Chapter 13, Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit in Rio, 1992, there continued to be major challenges, some of which ICIMOD has yet to address adequately.

Defining its Role and Building its Identity

The statutes of ICIMOD indicate that the Centre is intended to be neither a traditional research institution nor an implementer of development projects in the conventional sense. Its role has been often described as a facilitating institution occupying the interface between research and development with the following four main functions:

- i) a multi-disciplinary documentation centre on integrated mountain development based on the systematic exchange of knowledge and experience through an organised information network
- ii) a focal point for the mobilisation, conduct, and coordination of applied and problem solving research activities
- iii) a focal point for training on integrated mountain development with special emphasis on the assessment of training needs and the development of relevant training materials based directly on field case studies
- iv) a consultative centre to provide expert services on mountain development and resource management to the countries of the HKH Region

ICIMOD's role has often been described as that of a facilitating institution occupying the interface between research and development.

Left photo: The earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005 has been a big set back, but building on past work, ICIMOD is contributing to the rebuilding process.

In practice, however, it was difficult to fulfil these functions to everyone's satisfaction due to the varying degree of needs, priorities, and interests of the diverse clientele, and dependence on partners for implementation and on support from donors. The challenges faced by ICIMOD in fulfilling the above statutory functions can be summarised as follows.

The Centre has struggled to combine an integrated approach while keeping adequate focus to ensure results.

i) **As a documentation centre** – ICIMOD has been prolific in documentation and the publication and distribution of books within the region. Despite the popularity and widespread use of many of them, the utility of some has been criticised by some regional clients and development partners (2nd Quinquennial Review). Considering the vast majority of non-literate and non-English speaking people in the HKH, the primary use of written English media for information and knowledge dissemination means that many groups are reached only indirectly. However, the Centre has to meet the academic interests of many of its supporters and the challenge of living up to its reputation as an international institute on par with the CGIAR institutes with whom it is often associated. Publications written in English can be read across the region by the majority of mid and upper level officials and development workers, and can be used as a basis for preparing training and other materials. Working with partners, ICIMOD has increased publication in regional languages. The Centre has now embarked on some innovative means of communication using alternative media such as street and puppet theatre, and song and dance to communicate with less literate groups, and on preparing more focused information products within a comprehensive new knowledge management strategy.

ii) **As a focal point for problem solving research** – ICIMOD has struggled with combining its mandate to address mountain issues in an integrated approach that responds to partners' needs, with the need for sufficient focus to ensure adequate results. This twin mandate has been difficult to put into operation and has resulted in instances of programmatic initiatives being under-financed, under-staffed, or without adequate follow through. This has sometimes led the Centre's agenda to be over-influenced by the financing agencies or by more visible, influential, and accessible lobby groups among its



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Frame for a greenhouse, a simple mountain appropriate technology.

clientele. This is a challenge that the Centre has to overcome as rightly pointed out in the 3rd Quinquennial Review: the need to prioritise and focus on fewer, but more strategic, issues. For this reason, the Centre embarked on a two-year collaborative strategic planning process resulting in focused, integrated programmes for the 2003-2007 Medium Term Action Plan.

- iii) **As a focal point for training in integrated mountain development** – ICIMOD has been rightly credited with bringing together experiences from the region and sharing them in regional and international forums, creating awareness and building bridges among people of various backgrounds. However, its training programmes could be further strengthened and systematised including through the establishment of an Alumni Network. Training of staff from regional member countries has sometimes been too ad hoc. While responding to the specific needs of a partner institution, the training did not provide sufficient systematic learning and capacity building to bring about significant institutional change. Another challenge is that while technical and subject matter specialists are used to provide specific skills or knowledge training, they need additional skills to invoke attitudinal changes and learning. This gap still needs to be addressed.
- iv) **As a consultative centre to provide expert services** – ICIMOD's full potential has yet to be realised as an institution that can provide expert advisory services in integrated mountain development, apart from a few core areas of competence such as land use and GIS/RS technologies. While the trend is improving, the demand has often been linked to individuals rather than to ICIMOD as an institution. If the Centre decides to expand this service and become a resource Centre for expertise in mountain development, then a comprehensive strategy needs to be drawn up which would entail a fundamental shift from current thinking at the Centre. For most of its history, ICIMOD has chosen not to place emphasis on this originally identified role.
- v) **As a facilitator for regional cooperation and networking** – Although not identified in the original statutes, one of ICIMOD's most important implied functions has been to serve as a facilitator for regional cooperation through information exchange, mutual learning opportunities, the formation of networks, and more direct cooperative actions and joint projects. For many years, this function was not explicitly addressed and partnership arrangements with ICIMOD's over 300 partners were frequently ad hoc. Some opportunities to help promote and sustain regional collaboration were no doubt lost. It is for this reason that the Centre's new

For many years, ICIMOD's role in facilitating regional cooperation through information exchange, mutual learning, network building, and joint projects was inadequately addressed.

strategy incorporates explicit efforts to develop partnerships and regional cooperation more thoughtfully through a new partnership strategy.

Bridging the Missing Link between Research and Development

Scaling up successful technologies and approaches is an increasing priority.

ICIMOD has worked to bridge the gap between research and extension by triggering new policy options, innovative investment, and development programmes using the information and knowledge generated by research and by supporting capacity building. This goal has proven elusive in some programmes for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the scope and duration of some projects were too limited and dependent on the interest of the funding agencies. Secondly, when very practical and useful technologies were developed, there were no means identified to promote and upscale them, such as in the case of water harvesting, renewable energy, and gravity ropeway technologies. Developing longer-term planning and obtaining longer-term commitments that combine a search and packaging phase for technologies followed by a development and upscaling phase has been a challenge. Thirdly, research and development institutions in the regional member countries still operate along traditionally defined sectoral or functional divides and bringing them together towards a common cause needs time, methods of operations, and investment. Only those programmes that have longer-term support and continuity have been able to bridge this divide, as amply illustrated by the gradual



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Terrace agriculture for optimum use of mountain slopes

but steady progress made in the community forestry, watershed management, rangeland management, beekeeping, and GIS/RS programmes.

Meeting Divergent Interests

Meeting the interests and priorities of ICIMOD's diverse stakeholders, ranging from beneficiary groups, through research and development partners, to donors and regional and international members of the Board, has presented a special challenge. While development agencies and beneficiary groups demand 'on the ground' success stories and benefits in terms of enhanced income and livelihoods, partner institutes are often more concerned with training, study tours, and funding support. Similarly, research and university partners are more interested in academic opportunities, while governments are concerned with development interventions (funding support). Likewise, ICIMOD's Board represents a diverse interest group based on their national and organisational policies, and professional and functional backgrounds. The debate between the relative emphasis on social sciences versus natural sciences as well as between policy interventions, technology generation, and development interventions among the board members is a continuing one. This dynamic interplay poses a creative challenge for ICIMOD. On the one hand it opens up new avenues of opportunity that will contribute to the ongoing development of the Centre, on the other it encourages development of an inclusive approach to prioritisation of programme activities.

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Strengthening Ownership by the Regional Member Countries

ICIMOD's challenge from the start was to come up with ways and means of building trust and confidence, and fostering a sense of 'regional solidarity' around issues of common interest among its regional member countries. This was, and continues to be, a daunting challenge for the Centre as political and economic interests as well as cultural and ideological differences among the regional member countries continue to be major constraining factors. Although as a non-political body, ICIMOD has made significant headway in a number of areas, such as flood forecasting, information sharing in various fields, and biodiversity conservation, this has not yet matured to the level of regional ownership needed for ICIMOD to fulfil its mission in the long term. Inconsistent governance representation and ad hoc partnership arrangements have limited the scope for building greater ownership and more enduring relationships. Ex-officio regional member country representation has often resulted in rapid Board turnover. In addition, the Centre has not been able to fully capitalise on the emerging opportunities for regional cooperation presented by international



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Welcoming RMC partners to the Godavari Demonstration and Training Centre

conventions such as the Convention on Climate Change and Desertification and Millennium Development Goals to which the regional member countries are signatories.

Building Strategic Partnership Arrangements

Building lasting and fruitful partnerships is the key to ICIMOD's success.

Building lasting and fruitful partnerships, through which it can conduct its business, is the key to ICIMOD's success. While the Centre now boasts of an impressive list of approximately 60 major regional partners and 200 other collaborating partners from both in and out of the region, the relationships with many of them vary from informal contacts to a single activity level cooperation. The need for a more formal and strategic choice of partners was highlighted in the 3rd Quinquennial Review (2001) and adopted in the new Strategic Plan for 2003-2007. In the past, ICIMOD failed to adopt a set of criteria in choosing partners and in entering into formal partnership arrangements. While most partners contributed substantially to joint activities through financing in kind that roughly equalled ICIMOD's country allocation, few activities have been able to raise direct co-financing. Initiating joint planning from the outset and bringing a new collaborative mindset to programme development is the current challenge which ICIMOD must address for long-term sustainability. The challenge that faces ICIMOD is to strengthen representational mechanisms, continue to increase joint planning and implementation with partners, and engage in effective dialogue with appropriate focal point persons and institutions in regional member countries to build increased long-term ownership.

Adopting an Integrated Approach

While 'integration' and 'integrated approach' feature prominently in ICIMOD's lexicon, it has yet to evolve a successful integration of its programmes and to adopt a functional integrated approach. The new Medium Term Action Plan (2003-2007) attempts to address this challenge, however, while the programmes are all named as integrated, the level of programmatic integration remains modest and many of the programmes function by and large in the same manner as the divisions under the erstwhile RCPs I and II. The elements of integration need to be brought out more clearly after careful planning and further analysis. Likewise, the culture of adopting an integrated approach by the staff requires some degree of reorientation in individual and collective approaches.

Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) continues to be a weak area for ICIMOD. It has not been able to introduce an M&E system that can capture the outputs and outcomes of its interventions satisfactorily. Because it has to work through its partners, who have different M&E systems and reporting requirements, and because it has to report to donors who have their own reporting criteria, ICIMOD has consistently found it difficult to evolve such a system. Nevertheless, work is now underway to develop an M&E system that will meet the reporting and evaluation needs of the programmes and projects under the Medium Term Action Plan (2003-2007) and considerable progress was made towards this end in 2005.

Progress is being made to develop an M&E system that meets the reporting and evaluation needs of ICIMOD's programmes and projects.

