

6 Lessons Learned

Over the two decades of its existence, ICIMOD has learned many lessons from the programmes and projects it implemented. Annex 1 provides a more detailed analysis of the level of success achieved in some initiatives and the reasons for their success or failure. The following general lessons have been drawn from this analysis and were used to develop the new strategy and Medium Term Action Plan (2003-07).

Strengthen Ownership by the Regional Member Countries

For ICIMOD to pursue its vision of securing prosperity and security for mountain communities and accomplish its mission of developing and providing economically and environmentally sound solutions to overcome economic, social, and physical vulnerabilities, there is a fundamental need to increase ownership of its programmes by the regional member countries. In addition to strengthening joint planning and strategic partnerships, increased continuity in governance and, in some instances, better alignment with regional country organisational mandates have proven to be effective pathways towards increased national and regional ownership. Countries that have appointed supporting technical persons within the Board Member's Ministry or organisation, whose tenure is usually longer than shorter-term Secretary-level appointments, have helped to provide continuity and institutional memory. A similar mechanism could be extended to other RMCs. Perhaps most importantly, with the fast economic growth and improving relations between its key regional member countries, there is now ample scope for them to demonstrate ownership of the Centre through an increase in their contributions, although support from the ICIMOD Support Group (ISG) will continue to be important for some time to come to foster this development.

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Align Programmes with Perceived Priorities and Innovative Solutions

ICIMOD has learned that many of its more successful efforts have come through identifying innovative solutions to problems identified by governments and organisations in the region. Where the perceived priority is high – e.g., deforestation of prime forest land, erosion of sloping agricultural land and rangelands, destructive and unpredicted floods, shifting cultivation, and marginalisation of women farmers – and where innovative solutions offer a promise to address these issues, the likelihood of high impact policy change and large scale uptake has been higher. This calls for more joint planning, and greater relevance of programmes that fit with the national and state/provincial planning priorities as has been advocated in the new strategy.

Choose Strategic Lead Partners and Champions

The new strategy advocates more joint planning and programmes that fit with national, state, and provincial priorities.

The time and effort spent in selecting and developing strategic lead partners has been recognised as the key to successful interventions and the sustainability of cooperation. Important lessons have been learned from the behaviour of the range of partner institutions, from grassroots community-based organisations to NGOs to government institutions. Most successful partnerships are established in those areas of work where sufficient trust and confidence building measures were developed and where there was mutual interest and sharing of programme objectives, e.g., partnerships developed by Mountain Environment and Natural Resources Information Systems (MENRIS), PARDYP, and the regional rangeland and beekeeping programmes. ICIMOD has learned that involving partners from the start of project



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Presentation by a women's group in a project assessment meeting

planning rather than only at a later stage is much more effective, and hence resources and mindsets should focus on engaging partners in participatory planning of regional programmes.

Secure Long-term Commitments from Donors

One of ICIMOD's continuing challenges is taking interventions to a scale where national partners can take over the programme. In many cases, useful information was gathered and technologies identified, but they were not delivered to the beneficiaries for lack of continued funding support or adequate partner ownership. Documents and workshops are not enough to convince policy makers, planners, and practitioners to embrace new interventions, it is necessary to actually test and demonstrate the successful application. Some pertinent pro-poor technologies like water harvesting and greenhouse vegetable cultivation for income generation were not taken to scale because of lack of funding continuity. ICIMOD is now focusing on including plans for taking to scale in the initial project design itself. In many cases this means developing strategies to hand over successful technologies for scaling up to other interested parties, as for example in the Women, Water and Energy project, the results of which have been included in district level programmes in Nepal.

Working from both ends – policy makers and grassroots' communities – has proved equally important.

Use Different Approaches to Influence Change

ICIMOD has learned that using just one entry point to influence policy change or for adopting technological interventions is not adequate and that a multiple approach with long-term follow up needs to be taken. While meetings, workshops, conferences, and exposure visits are important venues for educating the public and creating awareness, they do not necessarily provide policy makers or practitioners with enough confidence to effect change. Working from both ends, with policy makers and researchers at one, and grassroots beneficiaries at the other, has proved to be equally important to bring about changes in policies and the adoption of technologies. In other words, sowing seeds of change and mobilising the support of different groups of stakeholders are necessary to bring about visible and rapid change.

Positive experiences from the approach used by working with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to link with its country projects in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, in the scaling up of water harvesting, SALT, and medicinal plant cultivation and to influence policies on shifting cultivation and land use changes need to be replicated. Similarly, the approach used in training of trainers

from rural communities in Mustang, Humla, and Khumbu in Nepal on water harvesting, energy generation, and income generating technologies at the Godavari site has shown that the gap between research and application can be narrowed significantly and should be pursued further. Similarly, working to build the advocacy skills of NGOs and research organisations is showing promise for larger scale adoption of new policies and practices. ICIMOD's new strategy is to integrate these strategies in each of its programmes.

Achieve the Right Mix of Programme Activities

Because of resource constraints and the feasibility of implementing on a regional scale, ICIMOD has to limit its active involvement in research and development to a few key issues of regional importance. However, in keeping with the diversity of the regional member countries as well as the diversity of needs within the countries, it is important for ICIMOD to maintain a range of policy and technology options that could be provided on demand. The Centre has learned that failing to respond to these needs can lead to disappointment and be a deterrent to further cooperation. This does not mean that the Centre has to have all the expertise in-house. It can meet such demands by linking requesting partners to sources of expertise available among its other partners. To this end, ICIMOD has started to maintain an inventory of appropriate technologies and sources of information and a roster of experts in various fields, including former employees of the Centre, so that it can link demand and supply of information and expertise.

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Systematic Capacity Building

ICIMOD has seen that one of the most tangible benefits from its past work has been in the capacity building of partner institutions, be it in natural resources management and planning, local institutional governance, gender mainstreaming, mountain perspective analytic tools, GIS and RS technology applications, beekeeping, or planning and monitoring. Many of the alumni from the various training programmes have become champions for taking forward the agenda of integrated mountain development, whether in Tibet or Sichuan, Uttaranchal or Sikkim, Gilgit, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bhutan, or Nepal. ICIMOD has realised the need to strengthen its training services so that the capacity building of partner institutions can be taken up more systematically.

Appropriate Media for Outreach and Dissemination

ICIMOD has learned that publications do not directly reach their end group of users, the poor mountain people of the HKH, and that there is

a need to come up with innovative means of disseminating information and knowledge to this group together with partners. Furthermore, while electronic media like the Internet and websites are of growing use and importance in the RMCs, they still suffer from limited access by poor and marginalised mountain people. ICIMOD is learning to be more selective in the choice of media used to reach specific target groups, such as briefing papers for policy makers and alternative media for farmers and other grassroots stakeholders, and is developing a comprehensive information and knowledge management strategy to increase the effectiveness of its outreach. This will only be truly effective if it brings partners together in a capacity building programme while learning to focus more on the need for local languages and media.

ICIMOD has much to learn from its partners, and much to share from its own knowledge and experience.

ICIMOD as a Learning Organisation

ICIMOD has recognised that it has much to learn from its partners, as well as much to share from its own knowledge and experience. There are several institutions and agencies of excellence in the region engaged in mountain development issues. The expertise and experience available within them remains largely untapped by ICIMOD. There is a need for ICIMOD to engage more actively in fostering stronger partnership arrangements with these centres. Increasingly, partnerships need to be built to ensure that concrete and scalable results are generated that can help the RMCs and other partners to develop appropriate policies, initiate good practices, and better address poverty and environmental problems on a continuous basis.



Cung Chin Thang

Myanmar Ministry of Forestry officials participating in a workshop on best practices in mountain development

