



**Integrating Mountain Culture  
and  
Natural Resource Management**

an e-conference, September 2001



**introduction**

**the conference proceedings**

**conclusions**

**references**

**annexes**







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# about the organisations

## ICIMOD

The **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development** (ICIMOD) is an independent 'Mountain Learning and Knowledge Centre' serving the eight countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas – Afghanistan , Bangladesh , Bhutan , China , India , Myanmar , Nepal , and Pakistan  – and the global mountain community. Founded in 1983, ICIMOD is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, and brings together a partnership of regional member countries, partner institutions, and donors with a commitment for development action to secure the future of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. The primary objective of the Centre is to promote the development of economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystems and to improve the living standards of mountain populations.

## The Mountain Institute

**The Mountain Institute's** mission is to advance mountain cultures and preserve mountain environments. Founded in 1972, The Mountain Institute is based in Washington, DC, and has offices and community-based programs in the Andean, Appalachian and Himalayan mountain ranges, partnering with local people to strengthen their communities and to conserve their natural resources and cultural heritage. The Mountain Institute also supports three global initiatives: the Mountain Forum, Sacred Mountains, and Sustainable Living Systems.

'**Partnership Platforms**' is a new series from ICIMOD intended for publications of brief summaries of workshops and seminars, without full papers, whose contents and outputs are likely to be useful to a wider audience, for example because an approach was used that turned out to be particularly creative and that others might like to follow, or because the results of the participant discussions are likely to be of widespread interest. The emphasis is on the creative partnership involved and the exchange of views and synergistic production of ideas that takes place at such a meeting.

integrating mountain culture and natural  
resource management  
results of an e-conference  
held in september 2001

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Note: The affiliation and professional positions of the various participants were those current at the time of the meeting.

## **preface**

The e-conference on 'Integrating Mountain Culture and Natural Resource Management' was a joint effort of ICIMOD and The Mountain Institute, who worked closely together on the concept and on conference management. Organised as a planning event for the 'International Year of the Mountains-2002', the e-conference brought together 80 participants from all over the world to contribute to promoting awareness and understanding of the urgency to integrate culture with sustainable natural resource management in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH), a huge mountainous region that includes part or all of the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Forty per cent (32) of the conference participants came from the HKH.

The conference evolved from a growing recognition of the important role an appreciation of culture can play in determining the type and rate of ecological, economic, and environmental change. The cultural aspects of the mountains appear in both physical manifestations as buildings and landscapes and in non-physical forms like language, traditions, and beliefs. In healthy mountain ecosystems, culture is closely linked with the physical environment, and sacred beliefs are inextricably bound up with everyday routines and the practice of natural resource management.

The role of culture in mountain peoples' lives and the relationship of traditional mountain culture with environmental management must be recognised and valued. While tradition as a mechanism serves to slow down a too rapid pace of change, cultures are in actuality always changing and experiencing transitions. A culture is as strong as its ability to respond and accommodate to change without disintegrating. Rather than either clinging to outmoded traditional beliefs and practices or throwing them out wholesale in favour of a new-found modernity, we need to examine how to maintain and strengthen the valuable aspects of mountain cultures and their relationship with their environment while helping those cultures absorb and make use of modern developments such as information technology.

ICIMOD's mission is to help promote an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem for the 140 million inhabitants of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Recognising that mountain people, often living marginalised lives in isolated areas, are particularly vulnerable to outside influences affecting the integrity of their cultural heritage and traditions, the Centre is very happy to be able to present the results of the deliberations of the e-conference on 'Integrating Mountain Culture and Natural Resource Management' so that it can be shared by an even broader audience. We are confident that such discussion and debate can promote the emergence of development planning in partnership with local communities. This then will lead to self-sufficient,

economically viable and culturally vibrant mountain communities whose desires and opinions are listened to and respected and whose natural resources are well managed for the benefit of present and future generations.

Anupam Bhatia  
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Integrated Programme Culture, Equity,  
Gender, and Governance

## executive summary

This month-long conference was divided into four broad weekly topics: Conceptual Issues, Challenges and Responses, Ethics, and Which Way Ahead. Conference moderators, one for each week, were experts in their fields with a wide variety of experience and knowledge.

Contributions to the conference were frequently in a critical vein, and one burning issue tying together discussions of all four themes was the influence of 'developer culture' on decision making for local mountain communities. It seems that, for various reasons, developer culture invariably seeps into local cultures. Although such seepage can be beneficial, it often occurs at the cost of these communities' natural resource management. Clearly the communities in question must have the right to participate when development policies are framed, and even when the parameters and definitions are being created. Care is needed to assure that neither developer culture nor donor needs take precedence over the actual needs of local communities and their natural resource management.

Contributors argued that alternative mechanisms of mountain development are required. The question remains of whether such development can occur without extracting a cost from traditional culture. Measures should be taken to ensure that traditional culture does not become extinct. Similarly, side effects leading to biological adversities must be avoided. Research should be genuinely collaborative with local people, using ethno-scientific methods to experiment with local knowledge claims by combining traditional and external experimental methods.

Gender discrimination was a major challenge raised, with developers themselves guilty of such practices. Special arrangements are needed to elicit women's knowledge and viewpoints, both in development organisations and in communities. Ethics were also subject to debate, and the need to frame policies that can integrate culture and natural resource management was made clear, despite recognition of the difficulties such a task presents. Overall it was felt that methods should be developed to ensure planned development that identifies local people's actual needs, incorporates past successes and works these to new frameworks on which new developments can be planned.



# acronyms and abbreviations

APPA	Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
HMG	His Majesty's Government
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
INEF	International Network on Ethnoforestry
IYM-2002	International Year of the Mountains-2002'
KMTNC	King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OD	Operational Directive
PIC	Prior Informed Consent
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RCUP	Resource Conservation Utilization Project
REDP	Rural Energy Development Project
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
TMI	The Mountain Institute
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee

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