

recommendations

The final form of the recommendations, agreed by all participants, is given below. The recommendations will be presented to appropriate organisations and audiences. Participants suggested the following, among other possibilities to be added later: ICIMOD and other organisations and governments that are supporting sustainable development (for example FAO and other donors); practitioners; and at global conferences (Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, conferences of global partnerships).

Ascending the Mountains of Opportunity through Ecoregional Research

Preamble

An 'ecoregional initiative' has been developing and testing methods to support sustainable development for mountain areas over the last five years in the Himalayas, Andes, and African highlands. This initiative brings modern science to bear on pressing social, economic, and environmental problems of mountain areas. It seeks to expand opportunities for mountain people to improve their livelihoods as well as the environment.

As part of the contribution to the International Year of Mountains (IYM), the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), FAO, the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), and the Ecoregional Fund joined hands to sponsor a meeting on 'Ecoregional Perspective to Mountain Agricultural Systems: Opportunities and Tools for Planning and Development' from 22-25 October 2002 in Kathmandu to share and deliberate upon the achievements and challenges. This meeting served to be a turning point in recognising that we are moving from building awareness on mountain issues and opportunities to identifying action and interventions. Researchers, policy makers, and development workers gathered in this meeting from Asia, Africa, and the Andean region and after deliberations came to the following conclusions and made the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Mountain areas are made up of ecoregions that cross borders and share common resources and issues. An ecoregional approach assists in analysing problems and in sharing information to solve these common issues. It provides a platform for strategic partnerships and collaborative networks that create synergies and enhance information sharing with the goal of aiding development.
2. Mountains are often perceived as marginal, fragile, and inaccessible areas as well as having great diversity and unique resource endowments. These areas are therefore 'geographic storehouses of opportunity'. The ecoregional approach can assist in identifying and documenting islands of success and extrapolating them to locations where environmental and social conditions are comparable.
3. Ecoregional tools and information and communication technology can assist in making scattered data more accessible by mobilising and systematising this information in a usable form for R&D and policy making.
4. The research community involved in ecoregional research should proactively work with policy makers at various levels.
5. Improved communication and dialogue mechanisms are required to ensure that action at local levels is informed by policies and ecoregional analyses and that these analyses are informed by the needs and knowledge of the local people.
6. To reduce the gap between researchers and decision-makers and increase the use of research results, ecoregional analysis needs to be grounded in real problems jointly identified by researchers and decision-makers at all levels.
7. Given the innovative nature of the tools and methods used in ecoregional research, a joint learning and capacity building approach is needed as a positive strategy to 'open the doors' between the users and researchers.