

ICIMOD Initiatives for Regional Cooperation

As a first step towards fostering regional cooperation for sustainable development of mountain agriculture among the agricultural research and educational institutions located in or concerned with mountain agriculture in the HKH, ICIMOD took the following initiatives:

- i. organised a Regional Consultation on Education and Research for Sustainable Mountain Agriculture and
- ii. established a Fellowship Programme in the field of Mountain Agriculture in Tibet.

The regional consultation on education and research was organised in Kathmandu in January, 1996, to provide a platform for sharing experiences, discussing issues of common concern, and identifying areas of action at national and regional levels. Among the eighty-five participants, who were representing agricultural education, research, extension, and development institutions from HKH countries, 20 were Vice-Chancellors from Universities based in the HKH. A similar number of high-level functionaries from National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) took part. Another 20 participants represented Ministries of Agriculture, NGOs, and other organisations with a mandate in agricultural extension.

The deliberations at this consultation were focussed on assessing the extent to which mountains are a focus in agricultural research, education, and training within academic and research institutions; to identify the strengths in the HKH; to identify priority areas of research, teaching, and training in sustainable mountain agriculture; and to identify mechanisms for cooperation and sharing knowledge and information.

The highlight of this consultation was the general consensus that, for sustainable mountain agricultural development, regional cooperation among institutions of the HKH is necessary in order to overcome institutional marginality within the national context. For operationalising such an arrangement, ICIMOD may have to play a pivotal role. The priority area for this network will be facilitation of the reorientation of farm education and research to suit local farming systems. This will have to be achieved through extensive efforts in human resources' development, exchange of knowledge and experiences across countries, and facilitating other institutional

strengthening needs. A number of recommendations has been made for follow-up at institutional level, national level, and by ICIMOD.

As a follow-up to the recommendations, ICIMOD made initial efforts by starting a Fellowship Programme in Tibet to help improve the academic qualifications (M.Sc and Ph.D) and research training in the field of mountain agriculture. In addition, the Tibet College of Agriculture and Animal Sciences, located in the county of Ninje Bye in eastern Tibet, has been given both technical and financial support to train a critical number of teachers to start regular course work on mountain agriculture. This also necessitated supporting the translation of relevant literature produced by ICIMOD into Chinese and Tibetan.

These examples of recent initiatives at the regional and national levels bring home the point that there is increased awareness about the need for making farm education and research in mountain areas more relevant to the local environment and farming communities. Further, the experiences of small localised initiatives at different levels need to be shared and combined with a major effort in this respect.

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