

Foreword

The Hindu-Kush Himalayan Region is one of the world's richest ecosystems in terms of biodiversity. This is due to the extreme altitudinal variations with concurrent changes in temperature and precipitation, and differences in soil conditions, which have combined to create a striking vertical zonation in the natural vegetation.

Biodiversity is a function of both natural and social systems; its utilisation and conservation involve interactions between species, populations, communities, landscape, and natural ecosystems, on the one hand, and culture, technology, indigenous knowledge, and commercialisation on the other. The HKH Region is characterised by diverse ethnic groups which have developed their own cultures based on available natural resources, giving rise to a cultural diversity on par with the high level of biological diversity found in the region. The essential and long-standing relationships that humans have with these resources embrace cultural identity, spirituality, and subsistence practices that sustain communities and frequently contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity.

The necessity of involving inhabitants of areas within and bordering protected areas in processes of biodiversity management is now being recognised by governments and international conservation organisations. The HKH Region is fortunate to have within its borders a few examples of protected areas where conservation efforts have been made compatible with the socioeconomic interests of local people. Such areas can provide a valuable learning tool for others to visit and learn from.

This joint meeting of ICIMOD and the MacArthur Foundation provided participants with a valuable opportunity to learn of initiatives to enhance biodiversity management in the Eastern Himalayas and in Southeast Asia, and to share thoughts on ways to further promote these objectives in the future. In view of the shared concerns of the eastern Himalayan countries, and the innovative actions undertaken in some of them, the participants at the seminar expressed a keen interest in the establishment of collaborative arrangements between institutions, organisations, and individuals working in the field of biodiversity research and management. ICIMOD is committed to facilitating exactly these kinds of exchange in the coming years.

ICIMOD is grateful to the World Environment and Resources' Programme of the MacArthur Foundation for making possible this meeting of professionals involved in the management of biodiversity from the Himalayan region and beyond. Specifically, we would like to offer our thanks to Kuswata Kartawinata and Dan Martin for their suggestions, and flexible and generous support for this seminar and for their support to the ICIMOD biodiversity project being implemented over the last three years in eastern Nepal and Yunnan, China. This workshop has created an environment for future collaboration on indigenous knowledge on biodiversity management in the HKH. I am looking forward to further in-depth analyses and field-level applications for the benefit of present and future generations.

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