

Background and Objectives of the Workshop

Present policies, investments, research, and technology development have only a limited focus on mountain problems. Even if there have been efforts towards crisis management, most interventions have been undertaken with a predominately plains' bias. These are significant lacunae in our understanding of the interventions that should be undertaken in future to render mountain agriculture sustainable. The alleviation of poverty and the extent to which we can improve mountain environmental conditions will greatly depend upon a comprehensive understanding of the constraints and opportunities prevailing in this extremely challenging environment.

Under these circumstances, the daunting task of sustainable mountain development emphasises the need for fundamental changes in agricultural research and education. First, there are relatively few universities in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region. Second, most of the existing universities suffer from the same type of neglect and isolation that mountain populations and areas have experienced in the past. Thirdly, mountain institutions have also overlooked their immediate envi-

ronment in their research and teaching activities and focussed more on non-mountain and lowland concerns. Fourthly, because of the problems of access and communications prevailing in mountain areas, professionals there have always found it easier to liaise with their counterparts in the plains than with those in mountain areas, reinforcing the plains' bias in teaching and research activities.

With this in mind, ICIMOD carried out a comprehensive review of the existing institutional systems in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region to assess the existing institutional capacities for sustainable development of mountain agriculture*. A number of issues emerged from this exercise.

These issues were as follow.

- i. Most institutions have been greatly influenced by plains' based research. Only some institutions have been able to incorporate the mountain perspective into their mandates and functioning.
- ii. R & D institutions for mountain agricultural development are still

* For further details see ICIMOD 1995, *International Workshop on Institutional Strengthening for Sustainable Mountain Agriculture. Report of the International Workshop on Institutional Strengthening for Sustainable Mountain Agriculture Kathmandu: ICIMOD.*

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very sectorally oriented and continue to focus primarily on maximising yields rather than on the sustainable use of fragile resources.

- iii. Incorporation of indigenous knowledge in formal agricultural research systems has received very low priority, thus leading to limited adoption of modern technologies by mountain farmers.
- iv. Wherever agricultural research institutions have been able to make a significant impact, the key factor behind this was their ability to understand and harness the comparative advantages of mountain areas.

At a time when more questions are being raised than answers provided in every aspect of development, the present role of agricultural research and educational institutions in mountain areas in generating appropriate knowledge, technologies, and human resources; in promoting

relevant research; and in providing answers to complex economic and environmental issues appears to be fairly limited, sporadic, and far fetched. Many institutions are being increasingly criticised for research activities that appear to have little relevance to the problems of their surrounding environment.

The strange anomaly is that while much of the present development discussion emphasises the need for greater familiarity and understanding of the local environment, local resources, local knowledge base, local cultures, and local adaptation mechanisms, most of the teaching and research institutions in mountain areas do not focus on the problems of their local environment. A great effort is needed to integrate modern science and technology with the conditions of the local environment in the academic and research activities of most of the teaching and research institutions working in mountain areas.

As mountain areas open up and come into contact with the wider market

Expansion of horticulture on to sloping marginal lands and forest areas: economically beneficial and ecologically viable - Himachal Pradesh, India
T. Partap



economy, and governments seek to launch an increasing number of development activities, balancing environmental damage with conservation and sustainable use is becoming both an intellectual as well as a practical challenge for these institutions. Research centres and institutions of higher learning in mountain areas should begin to focus on some of these critical issues.

Objectives of the Regional Consultation

ICIMOD organised this consultation 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. The consultation was intended to provide a platform for sharing experiences, discussing issues of common concern, and identifying areas for joint activities among the research and educational institutions in the HKH Region.

The consultation also provided a forum for discussing priority areas and activities for ICIMOD, in general, and for its Mountain Farming Systems' Division in particular.

More specifically the consultation attempted to address the following.

- i. To assess the extent to which the mountain focus is being taken into consideration in agricultural research, education, and training within academic and research institutions.
- ii. To identify the gaps in the roles required of agricultural universities and research institutions in the region to facilitate a sustainable transformation of farming in the HKH.
- iii. To identify priority areas for research, teaching, and training in sustainable mountain agricultural development in the HKH.
- iv. To identify mechanisms through which data exchange, sharing of

ICIMOD's comparative advantage lies in partnership and collaboration with development agencies both inside and outside the region.

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Participatory on-farm research, training, and scientist-farmer interaction in Ningnan County, Sichuan, China
Tang Ya



Group photo of participants at the Regional Consultation with the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Nepal

experiences, and joint programmes related to sustainable development of mountain agriculture could be established and promoted in the future between universities, national agricultural research centres, and concerned agencies in the HKH Region.

Programme and Participation

This programme brought together the main actors in the Region concerned with mountain agricultural education and research to discuss sustainable mountain agriculture. By generating awareness about the condition of mountain agriculture, a dialogue was initiated between research organisations and agricultural universities through which stronger mountain-oriented agricultural education and research and extension programmes in the Hindu Kush- Himalayan Region could be developed. A number of

priority areas for ICIMOD programme activities was also discussed.

The participants were drawn mainly from the seven countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region. There were ten Vice- Chancellors; many Director Generals, or their representatives, from national agricultural research organisations; and senior officials from agricultural development agencies. There were also some participants from outside the region, one from a CGIAR centre, and others from a few international agencies. A number of bilateral agencies also participated, including the senior staff of ICIMOD.