

ICIMOD's Road Map for the Next Five Years

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Kamal Banskota

A fertile river valley in the Nepal mid hills

Since its establishment in 1983, ICIMOD has been working to improve the environmental conditions of the HKH region and livelihoods of poor mountain people. The primary objective of ICIMOD as per its statutes is to 'help promote the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region.

To this end the Centre is expected to serve

- a) as a multidisciplinary documentation centre;
- b) as a focal point for training and applied research activities; and
- c) as a consultative centre in scientific and technical matters for all the countries of the region.

ICIMOD is unique in being one of only a very few regional intergovernmental organisations and, as such, it shares part of the agenda with some Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) institutions, specialised UN organisations like the United Nations University (UNU), and international non-government organisations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Wide

Fund for Nature (WWF). The specificity of ICIMOD in this context is its mountain perspective – the fact that it is positioned between research and practice and its ability to address transboundary issues in a pragmatic, non-bureaucratic, and technical manner by promoting regional cooperation.

During the last five years, there has been an increased regional awareness of how global and regional changes, especially those related to climate and globalisation, can directly influence livelihoods, and of the consequences they can have in terms of natural hazards. In response, ICIMOD member countries have created centres whose goal is to improve preparedness for disaster management and to put adaptation and mitigation

measures in place; these need further strengthening and regional networking. Since these national centres often have more resources than ICIMOD, they are in a better position to provide the quality and quantity of research needed at the national level. ICIMOD has an important role to play in bringing in the regional perspective. This change in the institutional landscape of the region means that ICIMOD will have to rethink its mode of operation and redefine its role as a regional learning, knowledge and enabling centre.

ICIMOD's new strategy

In January 2008, ICIMOD commenced implementation of its new strategic framework and Medium-Term Action Plan 2008-2012 (MTAP II). These set ICIMOD's course for the next five years. This article highlights some of the salient features of the strategic framework and the programmatic plan. The strategy describe five strategic goals (see box). The MTAP is guided by the framework, and is based on the directives of the Board of Governors and the ICIMOD Support Group and recommendations from an external review of ICIMOD conducted in 2006. The draft plan was discussed in national and regional consultations held in all eight ICIMOD member countries, as well as in a regional consultation organised at ICIMOD. These consultations were in most cases attended by the board members of the concerned country, senior policy makers, and members of ICIMOD's partner institutions (including GOs, NGOs, academic institutions, and research organisations). Some of the key recommendations made during the consultations were that ICIMOD should

- scale up its pilot projects, nationally and regionally, through its strong relationship with, and commitment from, its RMC partners;
- develop partnerships and realign itself with other centres of excellence in its RMCs;
- closely engage with national strategic partners from the planning phase onwards to avoid duplication;
- address climate change related impacts, especially expected water shortages and the degradation of environment services; and
- focus on high value products, their marketing, and value addition, and influence value chains.

Preparation of thematic and annual plans

Programmatic Framework

During the in-house planning exercise, three strategic programmes were defined and the medium-term and annual action plans were prepared: a) Integrated Water and Hazard Management, b) Adaptation to Environmental Change and Ecosystem Services, and c) Sustainable Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction. Each programme was further defined in terms of expected outcomes. Nine action areas, each headed by a team

ICIMOD's Five Strategic Goals

1. ICIMOD's knowledge and technical expertise are widely used and mainstreamed by its RMCs in their water, ecosystem services, and poverty reduction programmes, and contributes to the improvement of mountain people's livelihoods.
2. There is close collaboration with national partners through long-term, regional research and the scaling up of programmes, adding value and creating impacts.
3. ICIMOD's transboundary and regional approach, experiences, practices, and know-how are utilised regionally and globally.
4. ICIMOD is pro-actively learning and gaining in terms of knowledge and good practices and benefiting RMC partners through capacity building and knowledge sharing.
5. ICIMOD's support in strengthening key RMC institutions to better address water, ecosystem services, and livelihood related issues in the region results in a vibrant knowledge management and information sharing network.

leader, were identified to support the three programmes, with interdisciplinary team members drawn from all three programmes and knowledge management units. The action areas define the actions that will be implemented under each of the three strategic programmes working with and through our partners in the RMCs. The regional programmes (long-term research programmes, regional development pilot activities, and others) will function



Asha Kaji Thaku

Fruit is a useful cash crop for mountain farmers



Govinda Nepal

Women's group meeting on renewable energy, Palpa, Nepal

through ICIMOD's headquarters, but will be linked to partners in a programmatic manner. In order to enhance its role as a knowledge and learning centre, ICIMOD will develop knowledge resources to better implement its new action plans. Remote sensing and GIS will be developed as digitised information and learning resources linking partners across the entire HKH region and beyond. ICIMOD will be further developed and branded as a geo-information and knowledge resource centre. The publications policy and quality will be made audience-specific and will include electronic publications.

Strategic outputs and outcomes

ICIMOD staff were involved in the MTAP II planning process and transforming the five strategic goals into strategic outcomes at the thematic programme level. The outcomes are defined as changes or transformation in terms of behaviour, attitude, working styles, and processes of ICIMOD's boundary (direct) partners in the member countries in delivering their services to the primary stakeholders, i.e., mountain communities. The outcomes are also the short term impacts or the concrete area of contribution by ICIMOD's programme.

Importance of human resource development

To face the new challenges, ICIMOD is strengthening the capacities of its staff. A fully-fledged Human and Institutional Development (HID) unit has been created which will play a key role in scaling up good practices. In addition, ICIMOD also sees immense scope for the transfer of knowledge to universities in the region. For

this purpose, the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC) has been created. The HUC will focus on university faculty development, institutional capacity building, knowledge networking, and the development of a mountain-focused curricula and training. To gain relevant experience, ICIMOD will initially work with Afghan partner institutions on human capacity development.

MTAP implementation process

The implementation of MTAP II will commence by defining ICIMOD's annual plans in a more operational manner. The refinement and revision of the annual plans is being completed incorporating input given during the Board of Governors and Programme Advisory Committee meetings held in November 2007. The annual plans were finalised after a second round of consultation, which took place in each country between mid-February to mid-April 2008 to match the available resources and priorities of the countries with ICIMOD's plans. This is expected to improve the mainstreaming and alignment of ICIMOD plans with the priorities of its member countries.

Internally, several changes are also planned to qualitatively improve ICIMOD's overall output. From a programme perspective, gender and governance will be mainstreamed in all action areas of the Centre. A newly created economic analysis division will help strengthen ICIMOD's capacity in the area of environmental and institutional economics, which will be required by different action areas to deliver economically sound package of

practices to the RMCs. The strengthening of knowledge management in all programmes, as well as within the institution as a whole, will receive major attention.

Role of interdisciplinary action and functional coordination

Interdisciplinary coordination

Interdisciplinary coordination (i.e., the extraction of action area-based results and the management of these results to achieve programme level outcomes) will be the task of the programme managers in collaboration with action area team leaders. Quarterly, semi-annual, and annual monitoring of progress will be carried out by the Directorate through the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, as well as in regular programme management committee meetings. The recently concluded two-week 'Change Management Training' workshop provided ICIMOD's professional staff with useful tools and techniques to work in interdisciplinary teams. Recent training on 'Management by Objectives' has taught staff about working in a matrix management format. Realising that ICIMOD's work will be judged on its performance using verifiable indicators, the MTAP proposes 13 strategic outputs and indicators to assess results at the end of five years.

Collaboration with RMCs

ICIMOD will strive to achieve excellence in problem-solving research related to climate change, the packaging of good practices, and building the mountain knowledge base to improve ecosystem services. In the area of livelihoods and poverty reduction, ICIMOD will focus on high value products and services and innovative livelihood options. Promoting participatory and community processes in livelihood resource management, regional approaches, and knowledge building will remain the bedrock of ICIMOD's work. ICIMOD will strengthen its support for the efforts of its RMC partners by scaling up successful activities and promoting national and sub-national networks and initiatives. Whether helping to build institutional capacity, or to produce results that will inform public policy and practices, ICIMOD will expect the work that it supports to be methodologically sound, scientifically valid, and relevant to the HKH region.

The information, knowledge, and technologies developed directly by ICIMOD, or indirectly through support to its RMCs, will be made readily available to ICIMOD's regional partners and global stakeholders. Consistent with ICIMOD's policies and practices, our partner institutions are expected to gradually develop ownership of ICIMOD supported work by being part of our newly defined scaling up of projects at national and sub-national levels. ICIMOD will implement projects through programmatic and collaborative arrangements

with its strategic and cooperation partners in the region. Cooperation partners are essential in helping ICIMOD to implement and scale up its findings and proposals, and they will be in the best position to judge the usefulness of ICIMOD's outputs. ICIMOD's partners are also a vital channel for feedback and are often the main medium by which ICIMOD learns from its projects.

Realising the goal of sustainable mountain development

In closing, ICIMOD plans to implement the MTAP II in a programmatic and collaborative manner. In doing so, ICIMOD hopes to contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of the HKH region and, thereby, strengthen its relevance and effectiveness to impact on the global environment, as well as the regional economy. For ICIMOD, sustainable mountain development means allowing mountain people to progressively meet their current needs, without jeopardising the ability of mountain natural resources to regenerate and reproduce to meet the needs of future generations. Equitable development implies that economic growth benefits poor and disadvantaged groups and that inequity and inequalities are progressively reduced.

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Conclusion

ICIMOD hopes that the expansion of local capability to generate, interpret, and apply knowledge will contribute to the creation of a facilitating and enabling environment for economic growth, social progress, and greater human freedom in the Himalayas. In determining how and where to direct its support for research, the Centre will respond to the priorities expressed by researchers and the policy community in its regional member countries, who share ICIMOD's commitment to sustainable and equitable development, poverty reduction, and environment conservation.

As the ICIMOD charter makes clear, the Centre will be more concerned with the generation of knowledge and scientific information for sustainable mountain development through action research, regional knowledge sharing, and capacity building activities. Therefore, the key feature of ICIMOD's work in the next five years will be to implement sustainable interventions by directing its support to ensure that the results of the action research contribute to poverty alleviation and environment conservation, and influence policies, improve practices, and transfer technologies that have a bearing on the lives of our ultimate beneficiaries, poor and marginalised people in the HKH region.