ICIMOD's Approach to Policy Support: A Strategic Way Forward

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The Bhutan *(left)* and India *(right)* country consultations for the Medium Term Action Plan, 2008/2012

ICIMOD is an independent regional knowledge, learning and enabling centre committed to contributing to improving people's lives and the environment of the hill and mountain areas of eight regional member countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Strategic orientation

In line with emerging regional and global development and environmental challenges and priorities, ICIMOD has developed a more focused and coherent programming thrust under the new strategy. The new strategic programme encompasses three interrelated issues to sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation, adaptation to environmental change, and integrated management of water and natural disasters.

The thrust areas are interconnected and reinforce one another. Poverty in the mountains, for example, is linked with accessibility and the availability of a range of natural resources, especially land, water, and forests. Poverty is often exacerbated by environmental deterioration including rapidly manifested impact of climate change, as mountain communities largely depend on natural and environment resources for their sustenance and well-being. Experts point out that the degradation of ecosystem services in mountains is largely driven by several factors including poverty and deprivation, and lack of awareness. To effectively deal with these issues requires a holistic and integrated approach, one which cuts across both the natural and the social science disciplines. Realising this, ICIMOD has adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach which includes a combination of critical thematic and crosscutting issues such as policy, governance, equity and gender, and information and knowledge management (Figure 1, p. 35). ICIMOD's approach to policy support is driven by this framework.

Strategic approach to policy support: a framework

ICIMOD, based on experience and its existing knowledge base, realises that national and sectoral policies have failed to make a significant impact on reducing poverty, conserving natural resources, and keeping environmental quality in the mountains. Growing evidence suggests that purely technical solutions

are neither effective nor sustainable unless they are supported by favourable policies and institutions. While policy decisions are the prerogative of the RMC governments, relevant information and knowledge, and proper ground-level understanding are necessary for policy makers to make the right choices in terms of formulating appropriate policy.

Being a non-political regional organisation, ICIMOD plays important roles to support and facilitate informed decision-making by concerned agencies at national and sub-national levels. Founded 24 years ago by the RMCs with the support of international partners, ICIMOD's role is to build a regional knowledge base through generation, analysis, and mutual sharing of knowledge and good practices gained by the member countries and other mountain partners in both the region and the globe. With necessary data, information, and knowledge, relevant policy-making bodies will be in a better position to make wise decisions in adopting appropriate policy options and, most importantly, to successfully implement formulated policies.

As knowledge is a critical factor in development and environmental management, ICIMOD aims to support the RMCs through gathering, generating, analysing, and transferring necessary information, knowledge, practices, and suitable policy options through our integrated knowledge management and scientific backstopping approaches. The aim is to achieve meaningful and long-term impact on poverty, development, livelihoods, and climate change. The key elements of ICIMOD's approach to policy support may be summarised as follows:
a. Generating and synthesing knowledge on three thrust areas: poverty, environmental change, and water resources;
b. Facilitating pro-poor and pro-mountain development and promoting appropriate approaches, methodologies, strategies, institutions, and models;
c. Disseminating appropriate and necessary information, knowledge, and good practices;
d. Supporting policy making processes and advocacy; and
e. Facilitating multi-way communication by providing a platform for dialogue and understanding.

The schema in the following page illustrates how ICIMOD's policy inputs feed into different stages of the policy making process and eventually contribute to achieving ICIMOD's strategic goals (Figure 2).
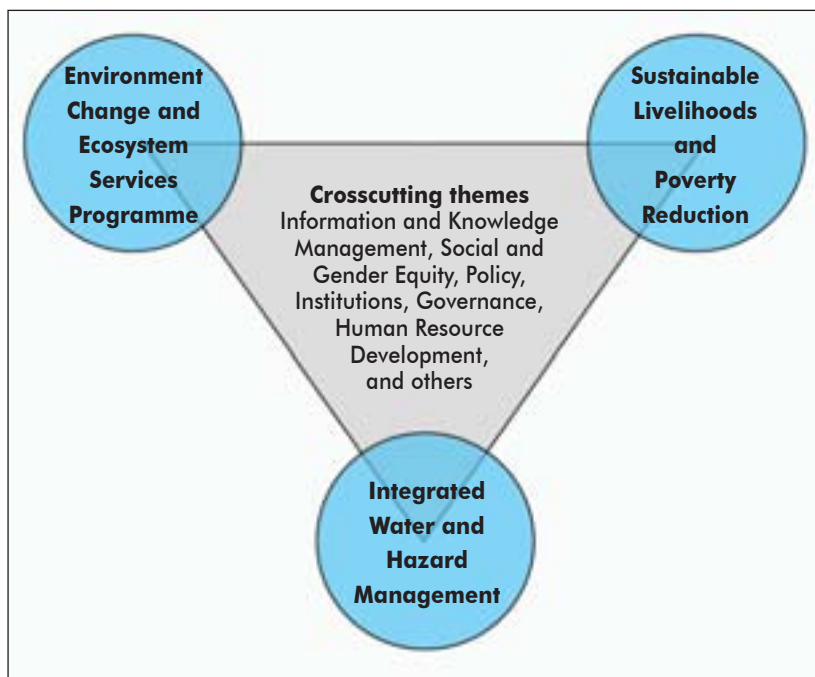

Figure 1: **ICIMOD's Strategic Thrusts and Crosscutting Themes**

Strategy for enhancing policy support

ICIMOD's new strategy for improving policy support work in line with the new programmatic approaches includes the following key elements:

1. ***Developing a knowledge base in the three strategic thrusts and crosscutting areas***
   a. Thoughtful and correct policy decisions require reliable data and information, especially on costs and benefits of adopting different policy options. However, for the mountain regions of all the RMCs, there is a dearth of reliable data and information at the regional scale. To fill in this gap, ICIMOD will develop a suitable knowledge base in the three programme thrust areas in order to make required knowledge available to RMCs and the global community.
   b. ICIMOD will sensitise policy makers through provision of mountain-specific data, information, knowledge, and cost-benefit analysis to enable them to act on and respond to new issues such as climate change, globalisation, natural resource management, and socioeconomic equity.
   c. ICIMOD will exert a concerted effort to highlight mountain issues and identify viable solutions in national, regional, and international policy discourse through various mechanisms.
   d. To cater to the needs of the RMCs, ICIMOD will strengthen policy-relevant trans-disciplinary research and will provide new concepts and practices for finding solutions to mountain problems and will strengthen the research-policy linkage. ICIMOD will continue to be a focal institution for the HKH region on key strategic areas to inform national and sub-national policy-

making processes by bringing in cross-regional learning. In order to enhance policy research, the following strategies will be adopted:

o Developing in-house capacity in policy review and analysis by forming a policy think-tank at ICIMOD which will regularly monitor and evaluate the regional policy scenario to develop and implement demand-driven policy research and analysis that can feed into national and regional policy-making processes;

o Developing vertical and horizontal institutional linkages with regional and international policy research institutions working in similar areas, and joint research on critical policy issues; planning advocacy and convening common e-platforms for targeted dissemination of research results;

o Facilitating and supporting placement for visiting researchers from the region and beyond with the aim of cross fertilising ideas, experiences, and knowledge.

*2. **Developing and promoting appropriate methodologies, approaches, strategies and options***

   a. ICIMOD will identify and customise simple technologies, options, coping mechanisms, and methodologies, and demonstrate and mainstream their application though scaled up projects in the RMCs.

b. Find practical solutions that minimise trade-offs between poverty reduction and environmental protection from the perspective of climate change as well as resource conservation.

c. Enhance the value of incorporating a policy dimension in our work: in order to remain connected with global discussions, ICIMOD's policy work will be integrated with global discourses such as on the Millennium Development Goals, globalisation, and climate change.

d. Improve networking and communication, identifying allies and champions, strategic partners, and sharing information, knowledge, and skills to build rapport, consensus, and alliances with key stakeholders including governments, NGOs, the private sector, bilateral and international organisations, to achieve common goals.

e. Enhance evaluation of current policies and development programmes relevant to mountain communities using outcomes and impacts as criteria to provide feedback to all stakeholders regarding effectiveness of resolving problems using a dynamic policy reform approach.
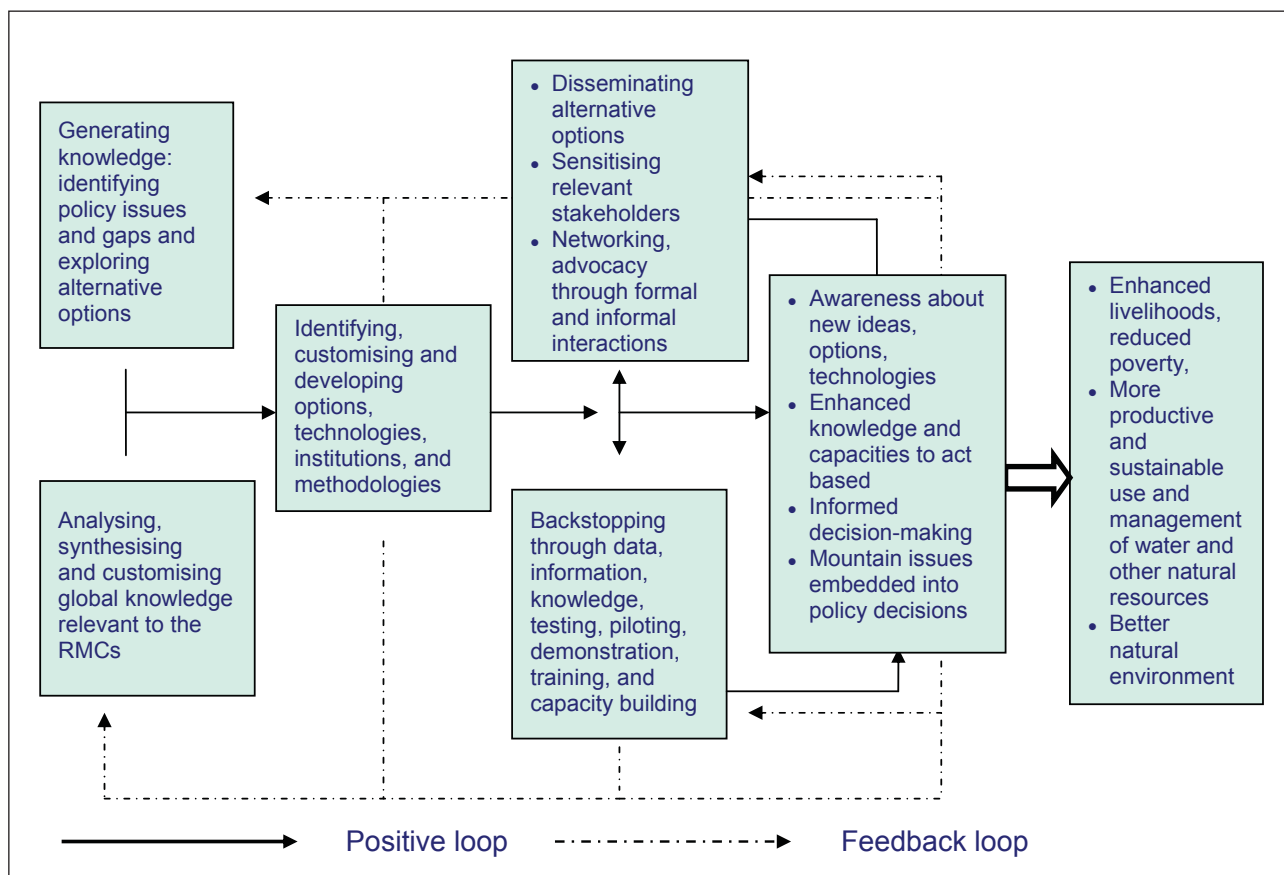

Figure 2: **Strategic approach to policy support**

ICIMOD Headquarters in Kathmandu, Nepal

f. Promote public-private sector partnership and introduce market-based instruments along with regulatory mechanisms to bring efficiency in poverty alleviation, resource management, and environmental conservation.

g. Document and disseminate good practices and successful approaches in implementing policy options and monitor pro-poor policy related impacts in the RMCs to facilitate and advocate their adoption and implementation.

h. Facilitate policy and programme evaluation by developing and providing necessary monitoring, evaluation, and rapid assessment tools for policy makers and other key stakeholders.

3. *Disseminating knowledge and information to feed into policy processes to promote informed choices and decision-making*

a. The general findings of policy research will be disseminated widely through professional journals, mass media, personal communication, and lobby groups in order to enlarge the constituents who can in turn sensitise and stimulate policy makers about mountain problems and transform knowledge and good practices into practical actions.

b. A communication strategy will be developed and implemented in order to disseminate knowledge and information in a more effective way to feed into policy-making processes in the region and the member countries.

4. *Facilitating communication for collaborative decision-making by providing a neutral platform*

a. ICIMOD will provide a platform/s for knowledge and information exchange among scientists and policy makers to discuss, debate, and negotiate in sharing ideas, building trust and confidence, and strengthening cooperation among key stakeholders for collaborative decision-making. Through a free flow of new and relevant information, it will facilitate the regular input of regional perspectives and global understanding on mountain development issues and themes.

b. Enhance the voice and expand the space for mountain communities in decision-making: in order to enhance the ability of mountain communities to respond to new challenges and opportunities, ICIMOD will generate and provide required information and knowledge to make the poor and marginalised speak with greater voice and to enable them to articulate their agenda and participate in decision-making through proper representation.

c. Provide evidence-based and properly analysed policy advice and options to targeted persons in governments, research institutions, development practitioners, and civil society for scaling up good practices through policy and programme support.

d. Enhance the capacities of regional partners by bringing in new ideas, options, and methodologies.