

An aerial photograph of a mountainous region. The majority of the landscape is covered in dense, vibrant green forest. In the center-left, a series of terraced agricultural fields are visible, appearing as lighter green and yellowish patches against the darker forest. A small, simple structure is nestled among the trees near the terraces. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

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Introduction

ICIMOD's Future Agenda: A Way Forward

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25 Years – a time for reflecting on the past and thinking about the future

Publishing a book on the occasion of a 25th anniversary raises a number of questions: Has ICIMOD fulfilled the expectations defined at the beginning? Twenty-five years: is it not enough? Can we still do what we have not managed to do over the last 25 years? Celebrating such an important anniversary implies that ICIMOD continues: so what in this case is its future role?

We have posed a series of questions to very prominent authors who have been at the origin of the Centre, have accompanied its evolution, or have been critical observers. The 25th anniversary also provides us with a unique opportunity for the management to reflect on the role, potential, and future tasks of the institution. Our bold assumption is that ICIMOD is more required than ever before. What is the rationale for this assertion?

Twenty-five years ago, the Hindu Kush-Himalayas represented an isolated barrier dividing the continent. Today, thanks to the enormous growth of the economies of China and India, and to a lesser extent of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Himalayan chain is considered a system with corridors for the exchange of goods and services. The passes and valleys are used for road construction and railway projects. The geo-political situation within Asia has changed dramatically. With climate change and the accompanying increase in temperatures and irregularity of precipitation patterns, the Himalayas have become of central concern in terms of the availability of water and the provision of ecosystem services. The products of the mountain system not only impact on the livelihoods of the 200 million mountain inhabitants, but also directly affect the food security and economic development of the 1.3 billion people living downstream.

These factors have substantially changed the conditions for ICIMOD: whereas 25 years ago the initiative was taken by international institutions and the donor community, today the regional member countries of ICIMOD have taken an initiative in a context in which FAO, IUCN, and UNEP have no specific mountain policy. The Government of India has accepted the National Action Plan for climate change, with a special chapter on the Himalayas; the National Planning Commission has asked for a state of the art report on the mountain states; and the Ministry of Environment and Forest has created an advisory committee on mountain development. Similarly, for the first time in

history, the Government of PR China has organised a high level conference in Beijing on a strategy for sustainable mountain development. These are just a few examples. ICIMOD cannot pretend to have provoked these developments; they are a product of internal political processes. What we can say is that the conference in China has been convened and organised by the Chinese ICIMOD committee. The creation of an advisory committee for mountain development in India goes back to the initiative of a former staff member of ICIMOD. In other words, there is a clear footprint for ICIMOD.

This is confirmed by the feedback ICIMOD has received from the regional stakeholders. The issue is not whether the ICIMOD agenda is relevant; the question is rather whether ICIMOD is in a position to deliver and to respond to the expectations of its member states.

ICIMOD: changing expectations, new challenges

ICIMOD has always seen its role as one of continuous adjustment to new requirements and expectations. This permanent challenge of adaptation has made its mission subject to permanent questioning. This refers certainly to the role of the organisation, but also to the perception by the mountain population, the regional governments, and the international community of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan mountain system. The adjustment has not always followed a regular steady pattern. Sometimes there have been jumps and inconsistencies. Looking back and drawing lessons from recent developments, we think the following process can be observed.

Mountains: from a peripheral to a central concern

When the Centre was established, mountains were clearly on the periphery of development thinking. Priority was given to the so-called high potential areas of short-term investment, structural adjustment, macro-economic stabilisation, and human rights. Little attention was paid to mountain issues by the world development agencies, the regional governments, and the communities. Mountains were a concern for a few mountain thinkers and lovers.

Nevertheless, over the last few decades mountains have become of growing international concern. The Rio conference in 1992 and the International Year of the Mountains 2002 are proof of the changing mood. The international development agenda, however, remains dominated by global trends. Concerns for the mountains have been overshadowed by global topics calling for border to border national programmes. The mountains have become the subject of international declarations without substantial change of investment priorities.

The findings of the IPCC and the rising environmental awareness and concerns for global warming, climate change, and biodiversity loss, have been a wake up call. Changes in livelihoods systems and economies have made it evident that mountain areas merit special attention as highly fragile systems and reserves of freshwater. Mountain issues are now, we hope, achieving high international political and scientific visibility.

From donor driven to regional ownership

Initially, the idea of establishing ICIMOD came from a few scientists and development practitioners. The promoters were experts and donor representatives, and ownership was mainly with scientific communities, researchers, and international organisations. The programmes and projects were largely conceived and designed following the initiative of the international community and scientists at ICIMOD, and were then implemented with the support of the regional member countries (RMCs). As a result, participation from the RMCs was low and their ownership was rather weak.

This operating principle has changed significantly in recent years. The regional countries have built up institutions and are funding their own programmes. ICIMOD's programmes and projects are now prepared through consultation with relevant partner organisations in the RMCs. They take the lead and implement the programmes with the Centre adding value in their activities by bringing regional and international perspectives, views, and options. The RMCs now not only support the Centre, they have developed their own mission, vision, and activities. All the RMCs have increased their financial and in-kind contribution to ICIMOD significantly in recent years. In addition there are a growing number of programmes in the frame of an ICIMOD vision. Such programmes are funded by the national governments directly.

From technological solutions to policy options

Initially, the orientation of the Centre was technology biased. The focus was on generation and transfer of technologies such as soil conservation, green roads, and alternative energy. The socio-cultural aspects and economic dimensions remained on the sidelines. In the meantime these technologies have been largely mainstreamed. The emergence of the NGO world, particularly since the early 90s, has absorbed and further developed the technological dimensions. ICIMOD has been asked to shift its focus to strategic and policy aspects and issues. The Centre has been asked to change gradually, moving from a techno-centric to a people centric approach, providing solutions and also creating an environment for better adoption of suitable technologies and options. The stakeholders expect a clear impact on development issues and the human dimension. In view of these strategic changes, the nature of partnership has also changed, moving towards multi partnerships including those with local NGOs, grass-roots organisations, government ministries, national planning commissions, civil society, regional and global research and think tanks, and universities.

From direct implementation to facilitation

The emergence of strong, mountain-focused organisations and national programmes calls for other changes in the Centre's operating principles and modus operandi. Instead of direct implementation, ICIMOD's role is now more supportive and advisory. The Centre is becoming more of a regional learning and facilitating platform. It will gradually function as a regional think-tank on mountain

development and environmental issues. Scaling up responsibility lies primarily with the RMCs. The Centre provides technical support for piloting, testing, and scaling up new knowledge, options, and methodologies.

Emerging challenges: new perspectives

The nature of the problem has changed since ICIMOD was established, posing new challenges and demanding a new vision, strategy, and orientation. Initially, the Centre started from the concern for rural development. The impression then was that soil erosion is a major cause of poverty and environmental degradation. The issue was thus within the region and the problem was considered to be caused by internal forces leading to unsustainable land use. Now, with the emerging issue of climate change, the fragile Himalayan environment – the water tower of Asia – has been seen to be under threat. The Hindu Kush-Himalayan mountain system constitutes a set of challenges as a result of its specific geological, socio-cultural and geo-political situation. At the same time it is part of a regional and global context. This global context calls for a new perspective, new vision, and new focus. While previously, local technical solutions could suffice, it now requires a much broader effort, regional collaboration, and global solidarity. Mountain systems have to be seen in their upstream-downstream relations and with a vision that encompasses the downstream river basins. There is now a need for an optimal balance and mix between local, national, regional, and global responsibility.

While the need of the day is for regional cooperation to enable better management of transboundary resources, sharing of real time hydro-metrological data, and development of joint plans and programmes to better harness and address common concerns and challenges, the prevailing tradition is to handle these issues bilaterally, rather than regionally. Bringing a regional perspective, and facilitating regional dialogue and negotiation, is the much more challenging task that lies ahead. Moreover, in order to promote regional dialogue, it is necessary to have reliable scientific data that can be collated and compared across the region. But, there is little mountain specific scientific data, few models, and insufficient understanding available in the region. As such, the challenge is to reduce scientific uncertainties.

In addition, in order to facilitate adaptation to climate change and its consequences, continuous adherence to the mountain perspective and focus is needed. Even if proper mitigation measures are taken, it will take about 100 years to respond properly to climate change, as suggested by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Therefore, adaptation measures are important in order to adjust during this longer-term period. But, adaptation is location specific and needs to be tailored to local conditions. Blanket measures for the entire HKH region will not work. The challenge is thus to develop tailor-made adaptation measures for the mountain communities of the HKH region.

The stakeholders' view

The reflections and insights of the scholars and development practitioners in this publication indicate both the evolution and development of the Centre, new global and regional challenges, and possible new roles for ICIMOD. The contributions were invited from authors who had had some association with ICIMOD in the past and were known for their independent opinion.

The publication is divided into five sections: the first is this Introduction; the second looks at the 'Regional Member Countries' Commitment to a Common Future', the third reviews the 'Expectations and Role of ICIMOD', and the fourth and fifth sections focus on 'Meeting New Challenges' from a scientific and from a development perspective. Five Annexes provide details of the contributors, ICIMOD milestones, a list of Board Members, a list of Director Generals and Regent, and a list of ICIMOD sponsors and donors.

In the second section, the eight regional members of the ICIMOD Board of Governors in 2008, representing the eight regional member countries, provide messages reflecting their strong interest and commitment to the Centre as well as their expectations.

In the third section on the 'Expectations and the Role of ICIMOD', three papers indicate the global and regional context and issues at the time the Centre was established, the expectations at that time and how the Centre responded to the issues, the experiences that have been gained, the lessons learned, and how the response could have been better. The first paper on 'The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development: From an Ignored Idea to a Global Voice' is by Dr Klaus Lampe from Germany who was one of those who conceived the idea of establishing a mountain centre in the Himalayan region in the early 1970s. He, along with a few other mountain lovers, made constant efforts to establish the Centre. He describes vividly how the idea emerged, the global context, the expectations, and how the Centre itself was created, as well as how the global context has since changed and the implications for ICIMOD's future role and responsibility. Dr Lampe's paper is complemented by a contribution from another pioneer thinker: Mr AD Moddie from India. In his paper on 'Strategic Changes in the 21st Century: Remodelling ICIMOD for the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region', Mr Moddie takes a forward-looking approach, starting with an analysis of how the perspectives and realities have changed since the establishment of the Centre in 1983, and then discussing how ICIMOD should reorient and remodel itself in order to respond to the new challenges and opportunities offered by the global and regional changes. The final paper in this section on 'The Evolution of ICIMOD – From Concepts to Good Practices' is a joint contribution from three authors. Dr Narpat S Jodha, a prominent mountain thinker, has critically examined the role and contribution of the Centre from a broader perspective. Dr Ram P Yadav, the first Deputy Director of ICIMOD, and Dr Madhav B Karki, the present Deputy Director General of the Centre, together look at how the Centre has evolved over the years and its role and responsibilities in response to global and regional changes.

In the fourth section, five renowned scientists and academics suggest how ICIMOD should respond to future challenges from a scientific perspective. Professor Bruno Messerli, a leading thinker in mountain science, describes in his paper 'The Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region – Common Goods or Common Concerns' the universality of science, the role of the scientific community, and the role of political authority in responding to the common challenges faced by the HKH region and in addressing the 'common concerns' for building a common future for sustainable development. In a similar vein, Professor MS Swaminathan, a renowned scientist from Asia, highlights in his paper 'Towards a Better Common Present', the importance of conservation of the Himalayan ecosystem, as the status of this ecosystem determines the fate of Indo-Gangetic agriculture, which is the breadbasket of India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. As anthropogenic pressures accelerate the deterioration of Himalayan soil, water, and biological and non-biological resources, he argues for mainstreaming the social dimension in development strategies. In his words, "there can be no better common future, without a better common present". Professor SP Singh, former Vice Chancellor, HNB Garhwal University, India, highlights in his paper 'Preparing the Himalayas to Meet the Challenges of Climate Change: an Area for ICIMOD to Take a Lead' the changes in the Himalayas during the last 25 years and their role in global climate change. He also draws attention to the need for scientific data in order to enhance understanding, and sees ICIMOD's role as a facilitator and networker to connect the regional research and academic institutions. Finally, Professor Sun Honglie, a renowned scientist and academician, and Professor Ouyang Hua, both from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, focus in their paper 'The Environment of the Tibetan Plateau and its Sustainable Development' on the need for long-term scientific studies for better utilisation of resources, environmental protection, and sustainable development of the Tibetan Plateau, an ecological umbrella for east and South Asia.

In the fifth and final section, four development practitioners and policy makers discuss responding to future challenges from a development perspective. Dr Zafar Altaf, former Federal Secretary, Government of Pakistan, highlights in his paper 'Climate Change and the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region: Implications for Agriculture, Food, Poverty and Livelihoods' the nexus between environment and development, including climate change, food security, and livelihoods. He also reminds us of ICIMOD's contribution in facilitating technologies, with the examples of seabuckthorn, sloping agricultural land technology (SALT), and angora rabbits in northern Pakistan. Eng Quamrul Islam Siddique of the Global Water Partnership and former Secretary, Government of Bangladesh, and Eng Reba Paul, also of the Global Water Partnership, highlight in their paper 'Impacts of Climate Change on Himalayan Water and the Need for Regional Transboundary Cooperation' the need for regional cooperation and sharing of hydro-meteorological data among countries for disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of transboundary water resources. They see ICIMOD's role as being a catalyst in facilitating regional cooperation in water resource management and sharing hydro-meteorological data among the riparian countries. Dr RS Tolia, former Chief Secretary, Government of Uttarakhand, India in his paper 'Creation of ICIMOD and its Expected Role in Addressing Regional Environmental and Developmental Challenges' raises the question of whether ICIMOD has succeeded in rendering itself irrelevant to the HKH region. As a member of an

independent evaluation team (Fourth Quinquennial Review Panel of ICIMOD), he was able to explore the answers from an independent perspective. He considers that while ICIMOD has made progress in certain technological areas, regional ownership of its work has remained weak, and this hinders scaling up of the tested knowledge and good practices as well as sustainability of the achievements. He suggests taking a more regional and less bilateral approach, as well as enhancing understanding of the priorities and policies of the RMCs. Dr Pema Gyamtsho, Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture, Royal Government of Bhutan, and Mr Nawang Norbu, Ministry of Agriculture, Bhutan, discuss in their paper 'Linking Mountain Communities and Ecosystem Services: Options for Sustainable Livelihoods' the stewardship role played by mountain communities and argue for rewarding them for the environmental services they provide in the form of water, energy, biodiversity, carbon sinks, and recreation, thus contributing to both sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation.

ICIMOD's future agenda based on 25 years of learning

Given the growing interest in mountain issues among the RMCs and the changing regional and global contexts, the question arises as to what could ICIMOD's future role be, how it should function, and how it should meet the growing expectations of the regional and international stakeholders. The views expressed by independent scholars from within and outside the region, as well as by the regional and international stakeholders, indicate that ICIMOD will have an expanded and challenging role ahead as a result of the impacts of global warming and climate change on the Himalayan ecosystems that affect the lives of 1.3 billion people, and call for collective action at regional level to ensure sustainable development. No single country can address effectively such issues as crises in freshwater provision, increasing natural hazards, deterioration of the regional environment, degradation of the Himalayan ecosystem, rapid melting of ice, loss of biodiversity, persistent poverty and vulnerability, and human security. Concerted efforts from all countries of the region and support from global development partners are needed to address these challenges. The changing context offers an increased role for independent regional organisations like ICIMOD. Based on 25 years of experience, and taking the regional and international stakeholders' perspective into account, we see the following prospective role for ICIMOD in the near future. The suggestions are by no means complete, however, and will be subject to further discussion and thought.

- 1 **Promoting the mountain agenda.** While the role of mountain systems as a provider of essential services to the global community is increasingly recognised, the relevant international organisations have not yet set priorities in support of mountains. ICIMOD can play a critical role in raising awareness and drawing public attention to the Himalayan ecosystem and environment in order to enhance regional and global commitment and action to support adaptation processes in the mountains and strengthen upstream-downstream relationships.

- 2 Facilitating regional cooperation.** While the need for transboundary regional cooperation has now been realised, implementation is a real challenge given the geo-political situation. ICIMOD as a non-political regional organisation is in a unique position to support and facilitate regional dialogue and cooperation among the RMCs through provision of relevant data, knowledge, and understanding, as well as serving as a platform for exchange of ideas.
- 3 Facilitating information and knowledge sharing for disaster risk reduction.** The communities in the HKH region and downstream flood plains are prone to excessive natural disasters including landslides, floods, droughts, and glacial lake outburst floods. Reducing the risk of natural disasters is critical for poverty alleviation and sustaining development efforts. ICIMOD can play the role of a catalyst in sharing information and realtime data in order to reduce such risks and vulnerabilities.
- 4 Filling the missing link and reducing scientific uncertainties.** There is a lack of hard core facts and figures at a regional scale, which hinders proper planning and decision-making. The data generated by national and international institutions in the HKH region are often partial, fragmented, and scattered. Often different countries use different methods and standards for data collection and analysis. This makes interpretation of hydro-metrological data at a regional scale difficult. Even when compatible data are available, they are often not shared in time due to procedural and other complications. Because of this dearth of consistent scientific data, the IPCC report (2007) categorises the HKH region as a 'white spot' on the global climatic map. ICIMOD can play a significant role in reducing the scientific uncertainties by creating regional databases on different aspects of the mountain regions as well as strengthening regional cooperation for timely sharing of data and information in order to facilitate proper planning and decision making by the RMCs and international organisations. ICIMOD can also contribute by developing and tracking the trends in key indicators related to temperature, melting of snow, water availability, environment, hydrology, meteorology, and adaptation to climate change.
- 5 Valuing mountain ecosystem services.** Although, recently, awareness has been increasing about the role of the Himalayan mountain system, including water, watersheds, and rangelands, as a provider of freshwater and other ecosystem services, translating this into policies and actions has remained elusive due to poor understanding about the real value of the services provided. By providing an estimated economic value for these services, ICIMOD will facilitate promotion of payments for the environmental services provided by the mountains with a view to protecting these services as well as enhancing the livelihoods of the poor mountain communities who are the primary users, guardians, and managers of such resources and services.

6 Facilitating cross-country learning in adapting and mitigating climate change effects.

Adaptation to global and regional changes requires knowledge, understanding and good practices. Although much valuable knowledge is being generated by the HKH institutions, these are mostly limited to their own country's territory. ICIMOD can play an important role in facilitating cross-country learning for better adaptation and mitigation of climate change, by documenting and disseminating good practices

7 Adapting global knowledge for the HKH region. Knowledge, experience, and wisdom generated in different parts of the world including the Alps, the Andes, and the Rocky mountains, might have great relevance for the Himalayas. However, knowledge generated elsewhere may not always directly fit the HKH region due to differences in socioeconomic conditions. Customising knowledge to the HKH conditions can facilitate their application in the region. ICIMOD can work as a bridge between global and regional knowledge centres to customise global knowledge to match the HKH conditions and package and disseminate it for application in the region.

8 Building closer strategic partnerships within and beyond the region. ICIMOD is a small organisation. To play its expected role, it will continue to build strategic partnerships with relevant organisations within and beyond the region with a view to promoting symbiotic relationships to deal better with the multiple challenges confronting the HKH region and the implications at global level.