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Editorial Contact

ICIMOD Publications
imco@icimod.org

Guest Editor: Kamal Banskota
Editors: Rosemary Thapa
Joyce M. Mendez
Coordinator: Nira Gurung
Design & Layout: Punam Pradhan

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Cover Photo: A woman with a water canister and firewood in the background, Bhutan (Elizabeth Khaka, UNEP, Nairobi)

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From the Director General's Desk...

Dear Friends of ICIMOD,

The energy needs of the poorest mountain people cannot be met by electricity alone. Although electrification is able to provide lighting in the mountains, its high cost makes electricity unsuitable for cooking and heating in poor rural households. Connecting small, scattered rural settlements to electricity is also not cost efficient. The energy requirements of the mountains are better met through the sustainable development of decentralised, renewable community-based energy options, in technology packages appropriate for specific areas. This has been the focus of ICIMOD's programme on energy.

Renewable energy technologies (RETs) reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pressure on forests. They also cut down the amount of time women spend collecting fuel and water, and reduce the health hazards of heavy loads and smoky kitchens. These technologies can promote the economically and environmentally sound development of energy resources, particularly biomass.

Over the years, ICIMOD's programme on energy has implemented initiatives that focus on renewable energy technologies. Action research has identified and implemented appropriate technology packages by communities and/or by local NGOs in selected areas of the Himalaya.

The lives of women all over the world are intimately connected to water, and yet women in the greater Himalayan region continue to face hardships related to fetching water. It is almost impossible to involve women in new livelihood opportunities without reducing the time they spend in collecting and managing the water and energy needs of their households.

ICIMOD executed a two-year project, 'Capacity Building of Women for Energy and Water Management in the Rural Areas of the Himalaya on a pilot basis in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. The project is making a marked difference in the lives of participating women and their families. The experiences and lessons learned from this project have been encapsulated in three publications, including policy guidelines, a training manual, project learning, and in a documentary film which hopes to help policy makers and rural development practitioners replicate and up-scale similar projects in their own regions.

This issue of the newsletter also features ICIMOD's research through the project 'Kyoto: Think Global, Act Local' into how the carbon saved in community-managed forests can be brought under the Clean Development Mechanism. Readers will also be interested in the gravity and diesel ropeways technology which could provide an appropriate solution to the challenge of accessibility in the mountains.

On another note, the Board of Governors, on my request, has commenced the search for the next Director General of ICIMOD (see announcement in this issue). Completing the recruitment process in 2006 will enable my successor to participate in an evaluation of the results of the fourth Quinquennial Review and take on the responsibility of the next Medium Term Action Plan and the resource generation this requires. This timetable, under which I would hand over responsibility one year before the completion of my full second four-year term, should ensure a smooth and sustainable transition for ICIMOD and its various mountain development initiatives.

Finally, I would like to thank all partner institutions who contributed to this volume, and express special thanks to Dr. Kamal Banskota, Programme Manager for ARID, who served as thematic editor for this issue. We look forward to your feedback and suggestions for improvement.

With best wishes for 2006.

Sincerely,
J. Gabriel Campbell, Ph.D.