

A photograph of a person's hand reaching into a field of tall, thin grasses. The background shows a landscape with rolling hills and mountains under a blue sky with light clouds. The text is overlaid on a dark red rectangular area in the upper right.

2009  
Facing the  
Challenge of  
Climate Change

The year 2009 brought growing concern about climate change and its consequences for the vulnerability of mountain people and the sustainability of mountain ecosystems and their services; concern highlighted by the impending COP 15 conference in Copenhagen. In the region, this conveyed an increased awareness of the necessity for transboundary cooperation. It also meant awakening about the importance of the mountain system as a comprehensive system of interdependent factors influencing not only the livelihood of mountain inhabitants but also the vulnerability of downstream populations.

The discussion of climate change offers an opportunity to advocate for special recognition of the importance of mountains and the services they provide to downstream areas. Although this can best be illustrated with water, other ecosystem services and benefits provided by mountain systems include biodiversity, cultural diversity, and space for recreation for the growing urban middle class. ICIMOD is working to validate and promote some of these services and their sustainability.

The controversy around the IPCC report on glaciers in the second half of the year demonstrates the importance of serious evidence-based information. The general conclusion is a call to bridge the knowledge gap, which increases the expectations of the role of an organisation like ICIMOD.

Kailash landscape, Nepal



The opportunities on hand required ICIMOD to define more clearly how we can face the new challenges. Since our principal priority is adaptation to climate change, we have endeavoured to define what adaptation means for ICIMOD – given that it is entwined with efforts to cope with other drivers of change, such as globalisation and communication.

### **The Mountain Agenda and regional cooperation**

In 2009, the basic assumptions of our work were validated, at least partially, by increasing recognition of the importance of mountains and their environmental services in the context of climate change.

Regional member countries began to recognise the need for increased cooperation at the regional level and for an exchange of information and experiences in order to adapt to climate change and manage water as one of the most important resources of the mountains.

Signs of a growing interest in the Mountain Agenda were the interest of the mass media and invitations to present papers and deliver keynote speeches at the events such as the Conclave of the Chief Ministers of the Himalayan States in India and the Agriculture Conference of SAARC in Chittagong. In 2009, ICIMOD was recognised as a knowledge hub of the Asia Pacific Water Forum. We have been participating as a centre of competence of UNEP and we have started contact with the Global Center for Environmental Strategies in Japan.

We endeavoured to communicate the Mountain Agenda internationally at gatherings including the World Water Forum in Istanbul, the Tibetan Plateau Symposium in Beijing, and the Regional Meeting of UNDP in Thailand.

However, the COP15 conference in Copenhagen was a sobering experience – the Mountain Agenda was conspicuously absent from the main agenda. We were able to play an active role in technical side events and successfully hosted an event for the regional member

countries. Although no country or country group was ready to champion the mountain cause, the Government of Nepal declared an initiative to launch an alliance of countries with a concern for mountains and to organise a Conference of Ministers.

The initiative launched by the Government of Nepal explicitly expects the support of ICIMOD. The Government of Bhutan is convening a regional summit in order to define the action priorities after Copenhagen and has indicated their interest in scientific support from ICIMOD. We cannot fully assess the implications of these expressions of interest at present, but they certainly mean new challenges, where ICIMOD will have to find global partners in order to respond to the needs of the region.

In 2009, ICIMOD had a breakthrough with the Kailash Sacred Landscape project for ecosystem conservation and management. It also initiated a programme for the monitoring of the water resources of the Indus Basin. The concept of trans-Himalayan transects and regional cooperation received a strong boost when the Chinese Academy of Science proposed this approach in the form of a Third Pole Programme.

These new initiatives in 2009 might prove to be a turning point for ICIMOD. While usually it initiated regional programmes based on a general analysis of the priorities and needs of stakeholders, ICIMOD is now getting involved in regional programmes driven and initiated by a regional stakeholder. These include the Koshi basin monitoring programmes and the Third Pole initiative.

In the frame of the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC), a support programme was launched in Afghanistan. It is training teachers from Afghanistan at various other academic institutions in the region to develop the capacity of the future faculty. It is hoped that donors will eventually fund some elements of the HUC to build the capacity for development and research in the Himalayan region.

International agencies have expressed a growing interest to collaborate with ICIMOD to scale up its activities in their development programmes, including UNEP, IFAD,



Biodiversity as food, India

FAO, ADB, and UNDP. The European Commission has completed its Four Pillar Assessment of ICIMOD and declared it suitable as a working partner.

## Showing our impact

As a regional organisation, ICIMOD works with and through regional partners. The enduring question is: What is the impact of ICIMOD? How can it make a difference? How can it be shown? What is the added value of ICIMOD?

ICIMOD faces the challenges of creating regional platforms, bringing regional countries around a table, discussing common approaches and methodologies, and promoting regional transboundary cooperation. Yet, how do we show the relevance of what we are doing to the stakeholders – whether regional partners, governments, or sponsors?

Adding value to natural products such as medicinal herbs, and branding local products, can bring better prices to mountain producers. Some aspects, such as biodiversity and the conservation of hotspots, are more difficult to validate because water, air, and nature are considered to be public goods and have no market. However, once they have a price tag, there is political leverage for such issues as a long-term concern and priority.

For the first time, we are using the impact pathway as an approach. Although we can already show some good examples, we have to do more to introduce criteria and expected outcomes at the very beginning of the planning process for a programme.

## Impact Pathways – Documenting the results of a project on livelihoods

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, ICIMOD’s long-term efforts in small enterprise interventions have been successfully scaled up in close collaboration with a UNDP project and local government and non-government organisation (NGO) partners. The project has promoted beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, bio-briquetting, and medicinal plants activities to foster employment and income generation. National and regional exposure visits had a considerable impact as the communities observed new ways to improve their livelihoods, even under difficult situations. With training and marketing opportunities, several women in the communities were able to start cultivating mushrooms. Others are producing bio-briquettes. Their incomes have improved and on another level, their experience has started to show the importance of ICIMOD’s impact monitoring initiative. The impact pathway for one component, mushroom, is described as an example.



### Impact pathway: Livelihoods project - mushroom

ICIMOD - Inputs	Partners - Outputs	Outcomes/ Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and technical support – five days practical training, and grant support BDT 1,000/hh for start-up (for seeds)</li> <li>• Exposure visits – staff and beneficiaries</li> <li>• Interest free loans for making mushroom houses – in Rangamati district only</li> <li>• Some equipment support for starting of mushroom spore production and laboratory at Rangamati</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained 348 farmers on mushroom cultivation</li> <li>• Outlet centres and buy-back guarantee</li> <li>• Mushroom spore laboratory established</li> <li>• Production and culture house for demonstration – Rangamati and Bandarben</li> <li>• Mushroom spore locally available via mushroom laboratory in Rangapati</li> <li>• Marketing opportunities increased – explored possibilities of dried mushroom and mushroom powder market in Dhaka</li> <li>• Mushroom growers’ association formed</li> <li>• Local service providers in place</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual cash income per household before starting project was BDT 24,000/- (baseline), additional income from mushroom BDT 3,600/household (5 months production)</li> <li>• 250 of 348 trained households earning 15% to 30% additional income from mushroom cultivation</li> </ul> <p><b>Impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness for mushroom cultivation increased – 20 families started without training</li> <li>• Upgraded lifestyle of 250 households</li> <li>• Nutrition demands of villagers – met by 10%</li> </ul>

