

# Consultative Technical Workshop on High Altitude Wetlands in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region

## Recommendations

A consultative technical workshop on the High Altitude Wetlands (HAWs) in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas was organised by ICIMOD in Kathmandu from 3-4 December 2009. The 41 participants from six regional member countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan), international organisations (IUCN, Wetlands International, WWF), research institutions, and academia, discussed the key role of these wetlands, the challenges they are facing, and the opportunities.

Taking into account the suggestions and recommendations of previous workshops held under the framework of the Himalayan Wetland Forum (Urumqi 2002, Kathmandu 2008), and the Delhi Declaration on HAWs and River Basin Management (2008), the participants unanimously called upon ICIMOD, its regional member countries, international organisations – especially WWF, Wetlands International, and IUCN, NGOs, civil society, and academia to take the following urgent actions to support and promote the conservation and sustainable development of HAWs in the HKH region:

1. Support the efforts of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat to secure endorsement of the formalisation of the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative (HWI) by the concerned contracting parties in the region and strategic partners;
2. Promote integration of the conservation and wise use of HAWs into river basin management and the HKH transect initiative, and develop model initiatives;
3. Promote research to support the conservation and management of HAWs;
4. Undertake efforts to bridge the science-policy divide and link local culture and traditional knowledge for the conservation of HAWs and their ecosystem services;
5. Develop mechanisms to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of communication, education, participation, and awareness (CEPA) on HAWs;
6. Develop mechanisms for strategic environmental impact assessments to support decision making regarding development projects which are likely to impact on HAWs and their ecosystem services;
7. Encourage, document, and disseminate traditional techniques, good practices, lessons learnt, and successful examples of the wise use of HAWs in the region;
8. Encourage the use of science in understanding HAWs;
9. Develop mechanisms to facilitate integration of the views, rights, and capacities of local communities so that maintenance of their livelihoods is ensured while conserving the overarching role of HAWs;
10. Notwithstanding the gaps in existing science and knowledge on wetlands in general and HAWs in particular, promote integration of conservation and wise use of HAWs into climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and strategies, including strategies for reducing vulnerabilities in local livelihoods;
11. Develop cross-sectoral wetland governance and management approaches for wetland management, as the HAWs transcend the borders of different sectors, disciplines, agencies, and ideologies;
12. Support the development of national wetlands policies in the HKH region which adequately address HAWs and their ecosystem services and, in countries where a policy exists, undertake efforts to incorporate new research and lessons learnt; and
13. Encourage strategic partners, academia, NGOs, and research institutions to help governments develop and implement management plans for HAWs.

The participants request ICIMOD, the Ramsar Secretariat, and participating international organisations and experts to disseminate and promote the results of the consultation within appropriate fora, with partners, and through other mechanisms in the HKH region.

4 December 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal

# Himalayan Wetlands

The wetlands in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas include lakes, marshes, peatlands, wet grasslands, streams, lakes, and rivers. They store water, feed groundwater aquifers, trap sediments, and recycle nutrients and support high biological and cultural diversity. They provide many important ecological functions and services to sustain livelihoods in the mountains as well as in the more heavily populated, economically and agriculturally valuable areas downstream. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment summarises these services in four groups: provisioning (products), regulating (ecological functions), cultural, and supporting. High altitude wetlands (HAWs), defined as wetlands above 3000 masl, are of special interest for several reasons. Their single most important service is the provisioning of water; their role as water regulators is especially significant for maintaining the high altitude rangelands. HAWs also foster vegetation growth, which lessens soil erosion and helps stabilise mountain landscapes, and are crucial carbon 'sinks'. However, wetlands are under threat from land use change, climate change, over extraction, pollution, and many others and the widespread pressure has resulted in an overall state of decline.



## For further information contact

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