

# Mountains Matter: Advocating for the Hindu Kush Himalayas

ICIMOD shares research and knowledge from the HKH region with an international community of experts, scientists, and policy makers at global environmental forums. It advocates for recognition of the importance of both the Hindu Kush Himalayas as a source of vital ecosystem services and water for a vast region and the role that mountain people play in sustaining these resources. The year 2012 was significant for ICIMOD and the Mountain Agenda, with ICIMOD's active participation in a wide range of international events raising awareness of the importance of mountains, especially those in the HKH region.

## Promoting the Mountain Agenda at Rio+20

At the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012, Heads of State and high-level representatives from around the world adopted a declaration calling for international support for sustainable mountain development and encouraging countries to adopt mountain-specific policies. The final outcome document recognizes the global benefits of mountain ecosystems and the vital contributions of mountain people to sustainable development, bringing official recognition to the Mountain Agenda introduced. This is a major step in promoting the future wellbeing of mountain people.

At Rio+20, ICIMOD-organized events highlighting green growth strategies in mountains, women's role on the frontline of sustainable mountain development, and the need to improve the natural resource management in mountain areas to ensure the provision of water, food, and clean energy. An appeal from mountain youth participating in the Global Youth Forum on Mountain Issues and Sustainable Actions was shared with delegates. Its influence can be seen in mountain-related paragraphs in the final Rio+20 Declaration.



“The three paragraphs on mountains lay out a long-term vision for a holistic approach for sustainable mountain development”

– Gyan Chandra Acharya

Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States



## From the Rio+20 Declaration, The Future We Want:

### Mountains

**210.** We recognize that the benefits derived from mountain regions are essential for sustainable development. Mountain ecosystems play a crucial role in providing water resources to a large portion of the world's population; fragile mountain ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation, land use change, land degradation, and natural disasters; and mountain glaciers around the world are retreating and getting thinner with increasing impacts on the environment and human well-being.

**211.** We further recognize that mountains are often home to communities, including indigenous peoples and local communities, who have developed sustainable uses of mountain resources. They are, however, often marginalized, and we therefore stress that continued effort will be required to address poverty, food security and nutrition, social exclusion and environmental degradation in these areas. We invite States to strengthen cooperative action with effective involvement and sharing of experience of all relevant stakeholders, by strengthening existing arrangements, agreements, and centers of excellence for sustainable mountain development, as well as exploring new arrangements and agreements, as appropriate.

**212.** We call for greater efforts toward the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity. We encourage States to adopt a long-term vision and holistic approaches, including through incorporating mountain-specific policies into national sustainable development strategies which could include, inter alia, poverty reduction plans and programmes in mountain areas, particularly in developing countries. In this regard, we call for international support for sustainable mountain development in developing countries

## Mountain biodiversity in CBD COP-11

An ICIMOD delegation attended the Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP-11) in October 2012 in Hyderabad, India, to follow negotiations on agenda relevant to ICIMOD's work. ICIMOD's work on transboundary landscapes was highlighted during a side event, during which representatives from Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan showed an interest in intensifying regional cooperation for the management of several of the region's transboundary landscapes.

ICIMOD also hosted side events on high-altitude wetlands and the Nagoya Protocol in collaboration with other regional and national institutes. ICIMOD was awarded the Public Choice Award during a poster competition in appreciation of ICIMOD's work towards meeting Aichi Biodiversity Targets and sustainable development goals.

## Green economy and mountain countries

Representatives of more than 25 mountain countries attended the International Conference of Mountain Countries on Climate Change in Kathmandu, organized in April 2012 by the Government of Nepal with ICIMOD's support. The Kathmandu Call for Action issued at the meeting was carried to Rio+20, after which Nepal was elected as chair of Least Developed Countries group for 2013 to 2014.

In 2012, ICIMOD contributed messages from the International Conference on Green Economy and Sustainable Mountain Development held in 2011 to a global report on green economy and mountain development.

## Mountain Day 2

At Mountain Day 2, organized by ICIMOD and the Mountain Partnership at the Eighteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Doha, participants shared climate change stories from the world's mountain regions that illustrated the potential impacts of climate change on mountain water resources, food security, and livelihoods. The stories sent a message to national negotiators that mountain-dependant water availability and use will be critical in the future and that mountain communities need global support to adapt and build resilience to climate change.



Poster awarded Public Choice Award at CBD COP-11

## Representing mountains at water events

At international and regional water events, ICIMOD presses for:

- regional cooperation for sharing data and information among countries in the HKH;
- greater emphasis on the need for water governance at a local level and better climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives; and
- integrated information systems for flood-risk management.

At the sixth World Water Forum, ICIMOD was invited to organize the Asia-Pacific session on 'Water Risks and Resilience'. ICIMOD also co-organized two sessions at Stockholm World Water Week. At the second World Water Week session, Dr Eklabya Sharma, Director of Programme Operations, noted that as the sources of the world's major rivers, mountain areas play a vital role in the water cycle, for biodiversity, and for hydroelectric power.

Knowledge cafe participants at Mountain Day 2





### **Bhutan+10: Attention to gender and cultural conditions**

The Bhutan+10 Conference – Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World – gave over 180 people from diverse backgrounds an opportunity to share experiences and good practices. A publication on gender and biodiversity and the Gender Environment Mountain (GEM) Network were launched during the conference, and the final declaration called for:

- Attention to gender at the highest policy levels in the region
- Consideration of the specific socio-cultural and ecological conditions of mountains
- Enabling conditions for change for women and farmers on the ground
- Special attention to issues arising from men’s outmigration, like the feminization of natural resource management and women’s increasing workload
- Support for networking and media engagement to raise awareness
- Integration of mountain perspectives in global and national agendas.

### **Indian Mountain Initiative**

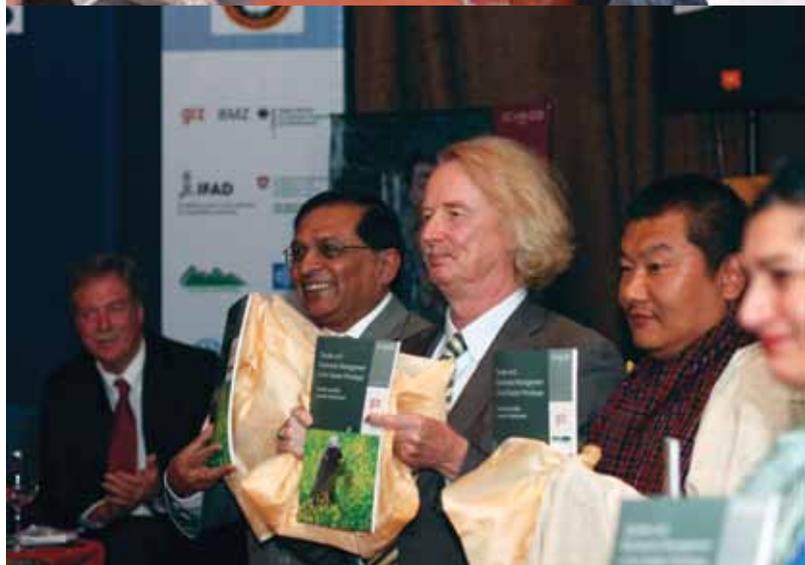
Progress made by the Indian Mountain Initiative (IMI) catalyses and galvanizes scientists, administrators, social workers, and development practitioners in India to reflect on the relationship between the environment and development efforts, demonstrates the growing ownership of the Mountain Agenda by regional countries.

In 2012, the IMI and several partners organized the second Sustainable Mountain Development Summit with support from ICIMOD, which closed with the Gangkok Declaration to take IMI forward.

*“The mountain states in India have not received due attention and we recommend that greater focus and emphasis be given to the sustainable mountain development without delay.”*

*“Mountains are important not only to mountain communities, but also to millions living downstream. It is important that mountains are considered in local, regional, and global terms.”*

*– KT Gyaltsen, Honourable Speaker, Sikkim Legislative Assembly*



# Empowering Youth to Drive Change

The ICIMOD Youth Initiative inspires and supports young people to advocate for mountain issues in global, regional, and national forums. Since it began in 2009, the global membership of the Youth Engagement in Sustainable Mountain Development (Y4SMD) initiative has grown to almost 4,000 members, a majority of which are from ICIMOD's regional member countries.

Whether dealing with climate change or sustainable mountain development, youth participants are encouraged and empowered to act and advocate for pressing local and global issues. And their voices make a difference. At a Global Youth Forum during Rio+20, participating mountain youth developed an appeal to delegates for recognition of mountain issues, which is reflected in three mountain-specific paragraphs in the final declaration.

*“ICIMOD's Youth Initiative inspires youth to be change agents. Since 2011, we have been organizing campaigns, projects, and awareness sessions on environmental sustainability issues in our communities. In 2013, we organized the Myanmar National Youth Forum. These are the result of ICIMOD's Youth Initiative. ICIMOD encouraged me to engage with other youth, to share knowledge to help my communities, and to raise my voice within national and global policy making platforms”*

– May Zin Thaw,  
Founder of Youth Informed, Myanmar

National Youth Forums were held in all of ICIMOD's regional member countries in late 2012 and early 2013. The issues raised and discussed were relevant for each country, with local resource persons leading discussion on country-specific issues. Local ICIMOD Youth Ambassadors drove these events with minimal guidance and financial support from ICIMOD.

Ten ICIMOD Youth Ambassadors organized a Global Youth Forum and a knowledge cafe on mountain issues at UNFCCC COP-18 in Doha. In the box to the right, some of these young people share their thoughts.

## Daring to talk

*“My walk with ICIMOD started in January 2012 when I attended the SERVIR-Himalaya Youth Forum in Dhaka. There I learned how to use new tools and improved my networking skills. In September, I attended the Asia-Pacific Graduates Youth Forum on Green Solutions in Nepal, where I was selected to attend UNFCCC COP-18.*



*“After returning, I organized the National Youth Forum on Green Solutions in Bangladesh to highlight issues from the country's hilly region. Without support and advice from ICIMOD, arranging such a big event in Bangladesh would not have been possible. This event was a reflection of the skills and knowledge I learned from ICIMOD. The ICIMOD youth initiative encourages youth to generate ideas and seek solutions to improve their own community and the world.”*

– Marufa Ishaque, ICIMOD Youth Ambassador from Bangladesh, presented a Youth Appeal to the negotiator from Bangladesh at the UNFCCC conference in Doha.

*“The best part of the Nepal Youth Task Force on Rio+20 was lobbying for mountain issues with other youth from the region and being recognized by the Government of Nepal for our initiative. ICIMOD's Youth Initiative should be broadened to motivate and provide new youth with a platform.”*

– Avishek Shrestha, Nepal,  
UNFCCC Youth Focal Point for the Global South 2012

*“ICIMOD's Youth Initiative has built my understanding of mountain and climate change issues, their impacts, and ways to find the best possible solution, including influencing policy. During Rio+20 and UNFCCC COP-18, I represented youth from the region and aired our concerns in front of policy makers. In Doha, I presented the Youth Appeal during the ministerial roundtable discussion for consideration in the international negotiations. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and attending Rio+20 was a once in a generation experience.”*

– Sameera Zaib, Coordinator of the  
Asia Pacific Youth Task Force on Rio+20, Pakistan