

Highland livelihoods in a delicate ecology

The highlands of Nyaungshwe and Kalaw Townships are located a few miles from Myanmar's famous Inle Lake, but receive little benefit from the rapid tourism development occurring in the valley. Increased population in the highlands has made land scarce and continuation of their traditional agriculture practices difficult. In addition, while water during the monsoon months is plentiful, for half the year water resources are scarce and households are almost entirely reliant on untreated pond water. Erosion, deforestation, and a shortening monsoon season due to climate change have made life in these villages increasingly difficult, and adapting to the local-level changes — **let alone the economic and political changes occurring across the country** — is challenging. The transformation of Myanmar could be a source of opportunity for these villages, or they could remain left out and marginalized.



Main challenges

- ◆ Low adult average income, USD 376 a year
- ◆ Low education level
- ◆ Delicate soil conditions
- ◆ Lack of land ownership rights
- ◆ Deforestation
- ◆ Acute water shortages – dependency on rain water for drinking and irrigation
- ◆ Limited income generating options – primarily dependent on rain-fed agriculture
- ◆ Inadequate or lack of access to services, technology, and information

About ICIMOD

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development is a regional intergovernmental learning and knowledge sharing centre serving the eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. It aims to influence policy and practices to meet environmental and livelihood challenges emerging in the HKH region. ICIMOD delivers impact through its six Regional Programmes of Adaptation to Change, Transboundary Landscapes, River Basins, Cryosphere and Atmosphere, Mountain Environment Regional Information System, and Himalayan University Consortium. These regional programmes are supported by the four Thematic Areas of Livelihoods, Ecosystem Services, Water and Air, and Geospatial Solutions and underpinned by Knowledge Management and Communication. ICIMOD seeks to improve the lives and livelihoods of mountain women and men, now and for the future.

About MIID

The Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development (MIID) is a non-profit institute based in Yangon, Myanmar. MIID aims to promote meaningful participation and inclusion of ethnic communities in Myanmar's economic, social, and political transition by supporting a people-centered and sustainable approach to economic and social development. MIID works in collaboration with government, communities, local CSOs/NGOs, international organizations, and technical specialists to strengthen capacities, governance processes, knowledge bases, and intervention models for integrated development. MIID specializes in Myanmar's upland regions and rural areas with high proportions of ethnic minorities.

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Photos: MIID

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ICIMOD gratefully acknowledges the support of its core donors: the Governments of Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

September 2015



ICIMOD

FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE

Himalica Pilot Project Myanmar

Building resilience of highland communities by improving livelihoods and natural resource management



Overview of Himalica

The Rural Livelihoods and Climate Change Adaptation in the Himalayas (Himalica) Initiative is a demand-driven programme financed by the European Union (EU) and managed by ICIMOD. The programme aims to support vulnerable mountain communities in the HKH region in mitigating and adapting to climate and socio-economic changes.

The ultimate beneficiaries of Himalica are mountain communities. In most cases, these groups of people are either economically active or can potentially become so with access to appropriate technical support. Women and the young stand out as special vulnerable groups. The expected outcomes of Himalica are:

- ◆ The capacity of national and regional stakeholders in dealing with livelihood development, more sustainable and efficient use of natural resources, and the protection of the environment in the HKH region is enhanced.
- ◆ Poverty among mountain people is reduced through increased resilience and the unlocking of new livelihood opportunities, and through the promotion of more equitable approaches.

Pilot projects and capacity building are the two main areas that address the second expected outcome, i.e. the reduction of mountain poverty. Pilots intend to showcase results of improved resilience of mountain women and men in selected clusters through designing and implementing context/target community-specific interventions. Pilots may include (but are not limited to) the following topics:

- ◆ Promotion and development of pro-poor value chains of mountain niche products and services as an adaptation



strategy, ensuring the sustainable and equitable management of the natural resource base (including a strong element of cooperation between local community and the private sector).

- ◆ Promoting the diversification of livelihood opportunities through identification of new and risk reducing income and employment opportunities in mountain areas (e.g. linking value chain development to investment and employment generating activities; market-oriented services such as access to information, financial services, and micro-finance; leveraging financial and social remittances from labour migrants).
- ◆ Supporting the use of ecosystem services such as landscape and biodiversity for recreational activities with direct community involvement and benefits.



- ◆ Enhancing sustainable practices in the management of natural resources and identification of alternatives at local levels (e.g. use of fallow or degraded lands and forests, improved farming and water management systems, and improved planning capacity).

What we are doing

The pilot project in Myanmar is designed as part of the Himalica Initiative. The Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development (MIID) and ICIMOD are working with five villages totalling about 350 households to improve livelihoods, increase water access, and better equip communities to address key issues and



manage their natural resources. To do this we work with farmers, village leaders, and the Myanmar government to understand the people, environment, and political economy, and provide interventions that address identified needs for the communities. Our work includes strengthening community institutions, improving gender equality, constructing water facilities, maximizing value chains, and providing trainings that encourage continued use of traditional sustainable practices. We also teach new skills that increase the ability of the villages to improve their livelihoods and adapt to changes.

What we have done so far

- ◆ Conducted socio-economic, land use, water, geology, and value chain assessments
- ◆ Worked with the communities to set up Livelihood Development Groups and Water Management Committees
- ◆ Expanded village ponds to provide more water in the dry season
- ◆ Constructed community water tanks
- ◆ Provided trainings (some ongoing) on a range of issues including farming practices, soil management, and administration skills for village institutions
- ◆ Facilitated workshops to develop community-led micro-plans for management of water catchment and livelihood diversification
- ◆ Designed interventions for upgrading value chains of ginger and bamboo that offer good prospect to generate income for highland communities