



CHAPTER 16 BRIEF

GOVERNANCE: KEY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HINDU KUSH HIMALAYA



Environmental governance holds the key to the future of sustainable development in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH). Broadly, it denotes the ways in which formal and informal institutions act to manage the environment in light of various social, cultural, economic, and ecological values. It also involves equitable sharing of benefits, costs, and risks. Environmental resources in the region are diverse and include forests, water, biodiversity, and agriculture. The governance of these resources involves a complex ensemble of policies, institutions, policy-making practices, and implementation procedures. This chapter documents the current state of governance and describes emerging trends in environmental policy and practice. It identifies both gaps and opportunities in policy-making, in regulatory arrangements and enforceability, and in adapting environmental governance to address climate change impacts.

KEY FINDINGS

- There are few existing regional policies and processes for environmental governance in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH); most are national and subnational.
- Environmental governance reforms in the HKH emphasize decentralization, often creating positive local outcomes. However, these local initiatives are not adequately supported through subnational and national governance systems.
- HKH countries lack institutions to link upstream and downstream communities in river basins and mountain landscapes.

POLICY MESSAGES

- Governments and environmental institutions in the HKH need to act now to strengthen the interface between science, policy, and practice.
- Transboundary cooperation is crucial for improving environmental governance in the HKH.
- Environmental policy implementation in HKH countries will improve only if national governments recognize the multi-sectoral and cross-scalar nature of environmental governance.
- Governments need to create regulatory frameworks and local institutional arrangements to scale up successful initiatives, empower community action, and inspire community-government partnerships.

LINKS TO





OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN THE HKH REMAINS UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED

While disproportionate in their influence, national environmental policies and institutions are complex and still evolving in response to the many challenges of environmental governance in the HKH. A number of state agencies have emerged in HKH countries, but they face challenges in achieving coordination and linkages across different levels: local, sub-national, national, regional, and global. At present, environmental governance in the HKH remains distributed unevenly across these various levels, with limited mechanisms and processes in place to build linkages across scales. Much of the planning and decision making power rests with national and subnational authorities, while regional and local authorities have much less. This imbalance in the vertical distribution of governing power is often incompatible with sustainable natural resource management.

Environmental governance in the HKH at present is distributed unevenly across various local, sub-national, national, regional, and global levels, with limited mechanisms and processes in place to build linkages across scales.



LOCAL INITIATIVES OF REFORM TEND TO PROVE LIMITED WHEN BROUGHT TO SCALE

Although many of the reforms at the national and sub-national level aimed at decentralization and devolution have succeeded locally, they cannot have a more substantial impact without concurrent reforms in national and sub-national governance. These are needed to ensure an adequate institutional set up and linkages at various levels of governance. The reason is that local initiatives tend to prove limited when brought to scale. The limitations arise not only from poorly conceived policy frameworks, but from inadequate attention to inequalities of power and from fundamental deficits in accountability and representation. Unclear lines of authority and accountability often hinder effective devolution, and significant policy reforms are not translated into practice. Another weakness is a continued disregard of scientific evidence which is itself limited in the context of environmental systems in the HKH. Although rich and abundant, local knowledge also remains underutilized in policy-making processes.



SPACE FOR MULTI-ACTOR ENGAGEMENT IS EXPANDING, BUT REMAINS UNDERUTILIZED

Institutional diversity in environmental governance is growing, creating opportunities for innovation. State agencies and local communities have a long history of environmental governance in the HKH and non-governmental organizations, private organizations, and knowledge communities have recently become more active. In general, the space for multi-actor engagement has expanded, but this opportunity remains underutilized. The HKH region has begun to see reforms in environmental governance, especially through decentralization and devolution, and a paradigm shift in conservation policies and practices: from exclusion to acceptance of local communities as an integral part of conservation initiatives, and from a species- and habitat-focused approach to a participatory, livelihood-based landscape approach. Other reforms have promoted a shift toward market mechanisms in resource governance, especially for the water, energy, and agriculture sectors.



ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONS HAVE NOT YET FULLY ADAPTED TO THE COMPLEX GEOGRAPHY OF THE HKH

Environmental governance faces other challenges besides the dominance of national and subnational authorities. One is that environmental institutions have not yet fully adapted to the complex geography of the HKH. As a result, the region lacks appropriate and context-specific institutions to link upstream and downstream communities in river basins. Another institutional challenge is the sectoral fragmentation of environmental governance, which impedes coordination.



- There are many examples of positive shifts in environmental governance in the HKH: from exclusion to acceptance of local communities as an integral part of conservation initiatives, and from a species- and habitat-focused approach to a participatory, livelihood-based landscape approach.

MANAGING THE RESOURCES OF THE HKH SUSTAINABLY WILL DEPEND LARGELY ON THE EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL AND INNOVATIVE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Cooperation among HKH country governments is hampered by limited cross-border knowledge sharing, as well as by recurrent geopolitical standoffs. At the national level, governance systems are characterized by weak cross-scale political representation and insufficient attention to social equity and inclusion. Increasingly, the need for a polycentric approach to environmental resource governance in the HKH is being recognized: one that emphasizes new partnerships and cross-scale linkages with improved knowledge-sharing platforms for diverse stakeholders.

THOUGH THE HKH IS A REGION OF INTERCONNECTED TRANSBOUNDARY LANDSCAPES, GOVERNANCE AND POLICY PROCESSES REMAIN PRIMARILY AT THE LEVEL OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

Although there is increasing acknowledgement of the HKH as a region of interconnected transboundary landscapes, governance and policy processes remain primarily at the level of individual countries. Forest, water, and rangeland are the most prominent resources of the environmental governance space in the HKH. Managing these resources sustainably will depend largely on the emergence of regional and innovative institutional arrangements — to foster intergovernmental dialogue, to further common policy initiatives, and to enable collaborative trans-border community practices.

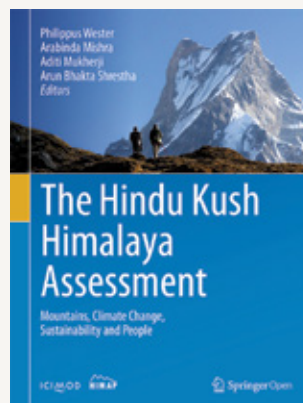


• Sustainably managing HKH resources depends on collaborative cross-border community practices and policy initiatives



GOVERNANCE KEYS TO THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF THE HKH:

- Institutional innovation for landscape level governance, upstream-downstream linkages, and for translating policy goals into action
- Upscaling and institutionalizing decentralized and community based resource management practices
- Transboundary cooperation for managing connected landscapes
- Science-policy-practice interface for decision making, learning, and effective implementation of policies and programmes



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