

executive summary of the first meeting of the consultative panel, May 2002

1. A Consultative Panel for the establishment of a flood information system in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region has been set up following a decision by participants of the First High-Level Consultative Meeting on the Development of a Framework for Flood Forecasting in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region that was held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 15-18 May 2001 (ICIMOD, 2002). The principal task of the Consultative Panel is to advise and provide support to representatives of participating countries, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in the development of a flood information system in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya.
2. The first meeting of the Consultative Panel was organised jointly by ICIMOD and WMO in May 2002, and was co-sponsored by the US Department of State's Regional Environment Office for South Asia and the US Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). The basis for discussion during the meeting was a concept document that had been prepared by ICIMOD and WMO. The draft version of this document had been circulated to participants prior to the meeting. The motto coined for the meeting was 'Making information travel faster than flood waters.'
3. The meeting was attended by government representatives of national hydrological and meteorological services from Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan, and representatives from the organising and sponsoring organisations.
4. The two main objectives of the meeting were as follow.
 - Discuss and reach agreement on the text of the concept document that forms the basis for further development of a project proposal for the establishment of a flood information system in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region.
 - Provide guidance in the development of the project using the conceptual framework of the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System (WHYCOS) of WMO
5. During the meeting, the concept document was extensively reviewed and its text agreed by all participants. The representative from India provided an additional note that documents the official stand of the Government of India with regard to the further development of the project. Agreement on the concept document is an important milestone for the promotion of the project's objectives and deliverables in the countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. The concept document is viewed as the reference document for the development of the project, especially with regard to the framework and implementation strategy. The document will be used to promote the development of this regional project at the level of relevant ministries and hydrological as well as meteorological services in the concerned countries.
6. Members of the panel agreed that the project design should build on existing bilateral agreements put in a regional context within a regional dialogue, and on technical cooperation in flood forecasting and the sharing of real-time data and flood-related information
7. To facilitate the development of the draft project proposal, the meeting defined the logical framework for the project including its objectives, expected results and key activities that need to be undertaken during the project. As a result, the following objectives were identified.

- Strategic objective
 - The proposed regional flood information system aims to provide the operational concepts and tools for improving integrated river basin management – specifically, by managing floods – and thus contribute to minimisation of the loss of lives and property, reduction of poverty, and acceleration of economic development in shared river basins affected by recurring flood events.
 - Specific objectives
 - Planning and implementation of a regional HKH-HYCOS focusing on the establishment of an efficient and operational flood forecasting information system based on real-time data and information.
 - Provision of relevant data and information products for disaster preparedness and reduction plans, and activities by and among participating countries.
8. To achieve the objectives, participants agreed on the following expected results.
 - Establishment of effective transmission and dissemination systems for sharing meteorological and hydrological data and information.
 - Approval from governments to disseminate more data and information that is of interest to other countries.
 - Availability of comprehensive, basin-wide flood information.
 - Improvement of institutional capacity and training of personnel.
 9. Participants felt that the project, if implemented, will contribute significantly to the reduction of flood disasters through the inclusion of meteorological forecasts and extreme events warning, the full sharing of real-time data and information, the improvement of accuracy of flood forecasting, especially in large river basins, and the extension of the lead-time for timely flood mitigation actions. In discussion of the regional context of the project, the panel recommended that Afghanistan and Myanmar should be invited to join the regional initiative.
 10. The panel agreed on the need to identify pilot basins to test the technical feasibility of the project and encouraged its members to identify such basins. Two basins were nominated during the meeting: the Kosi River Basin was nominated by Nepal, and the Chenab Basin by Pakistan. The results of the envisaged pilot projects are expected to demonstrate the on-the-ground efficiency and effectiveness of the proposed flood information system.
 11. Participants welcomed the establishment of a prototype webpage that will be built into a regional, flood-related information base. This webpage can be viewed at www.southasianfloods.org. Participants further recommended that national agencies should feed this web portal with information relevant to the needs of the region. The preparedness of participants to exchange good practices, know-how and expertise in modelling, flood forecasting and dissemination of information is seen as the basis for building a knowledge base in the region and beyond.
 12. Panel members recommended that capacity building should form an important cross-cutting component of the project to improve national and regional scientific, technical and managerial capabilities to establish, operate and maintain complex flood information systems.
 13. The meeting recognised that this project with its regional scope needs the full government support of participating countries and, therefore, recommended that the project document, once agreed by the planned Second High-Level Consultative Meeting (originally scheduled for December 2002; at present, planned for March 2003), requires endorsement at the appropriate governmental level in participating countries. This is envisaged to be achieved in the first half of 2003.
 14. The meeting also provided planning inputs to the Second High-Level Consultative Meeting. A prominent agenda item for this meeting will be the discussion, review and subsequent agreement of a draft project proposal.
 15. The panel agreed on short-, medium-, and long-term action plans for regional cooperation in flood forecasting and information exchange. The short-term action plan is to be completed prior to the Second High-Level Consultative Meeting.