

# the opening session

**Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell**, the Director General of ICIMOD, welcomed the participants to the workshop. He went on to set the tone for the conference by reminding the audience that during the past decade mountain ecoregions have become an increasing concern of national and international agencies dealing with sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is the largest, the most diverse, and by most measures the most economically and ecologically important mountain region in the world and it is undergoing rapid change in terms of its ecology, its economy, its human population structure, and its society. He went on to say that in order to deal with the complex problems of this globally vital region and to comprehend change in agricultural systems and natural resources, policies and programme development must be responsive to these. Planners and policy-makers need to have information and tools at hand in order to help them to formulate policies and set priorities. The tools to be aimed for are those that would allow them to extrapolate ecological niches of opportunity and 'islands of success' to larger areas to the benefit of all.

The Ecoregional Fund to Support Methodological Initiatives promotes research that is ecoregional in scope and addresses both problems of natural resource management and problems that require information from different levels of spatial or temporal analysis for resolution. The ecoregional approach stresses that special tools are needed for mountain agricultural development and planning. The mountain environment is characterised by extreme diversity and as such poses a special challenge.

Dr. Campbell said that for the past three years the Ecoregional Fund has supported a project titled, 'Developing Methodologies for Assessing Mountain Agricultural Systems in the HKH region: An Ecoregional Framework'. The project is housed at ICIMOD and its work is to address the problems of sustainability and poverty alleviation by making data available to planners and policy-makers in order to help them to make more informed decisions. The Ecoregional Project team at ICIMOD has made good progress in establishing a tool, acquiring data, and developing methodologies for assessing the diversity in mountain agricultural systems. During

this period, they have also established partnerships with various institutes in the region and in collaboration with them have fine-tuned the methodologies in order to render them of most use to the researchers, planners and decision-makers in the region. The Ecoregional Project team would demonstrate these achievements during the course of this workshop and hopefully the inputs from this workshop would further facilitate fine-tuning, consolidation, and dissemination of the methodologies and tools developed at ICIMOD to a wider scope of users.

Dr. Campbell concluded by thanking ISNAR and the Ecoregional Fund for their support of the project, he also expressed gratitude to FAO for their input through the IYM. Special thanks went to the project's institutional partners in China and India for their assistance in carrying out the pilot area case study work. Finally Dr. Campbell thanked all for their participation in the workshop and wished them a successful workshop and a pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

In his opening speech **Dr. Johan Bouma** set the stage for the workshop by putting all of the aspects in the context of sustainable development. He voiced what many in the development community feel about repeated commitments to the developing world made at many world level meetings, in terms of drinking water, environment, energy, and so many others. The follow-through has been somewhat disappointing. Sustainable development affects both the northern and southern hemispheres because we are all part of the same earth ecosystem – we all have a responsibility to make it sustainable – we are all interdependent. Wealthier countries in the Northern Hemisphere must be more responsible in sharing of resources, and farmers and people working at the grass roots level in the developing world must be more proactive in demanding better support. He gave the historical example of how in the last century farmers in the Netherlands had formed grass roots' 'fists' at the government. In so doing, they had obtained the legislation needed to make them the success story that they now are. The success of the agricultural sector and the affluence of European society in general have allowed them to consider more abstract ecological topics such as paying for green surfaces. Everyone uses green surfaces but no one particularly owns them or takes responsibility for them. There is now growing awareness in Europe that the preservation of green spaces is the responsibility of all and so the burden for their upkeep must be shouldered by all. Dr. Bouma went on to say that while the developing world is facing more immediate concerns, the preservation of green spaces is no less a problem here.

All aspects of the present situation where wealth is so unequally distributed, and where green spaces everywhere are threatened must be considered, this must include the ecological and moral aspects. Dr. Bouma went on to say that in his opinion the challenge ahead of us is the greatest in human history and that the survival of mankind itself is at stake.

**Dr. Subramiriam Thirugnanasambanthar**, Acting Representative FAO-Nepal, welcomed the guests and participants on behalf of FAO, the lead United Nations agency for the International Year of Mountains. He told the participants that efforts such as the discussions taking place at this workshop would go a long way towards achieving the goals of the protection of mountain ecosystems and the eradication of poverty in mountain communities. These efforts taking place in the context of the International Year of Mountains will produce lasting results.

The International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions that was launched at the recent Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development was structured to ensure multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary participation and long-term approaches. Dr. Thirugnanasambanthar told the audience that this was one more step towards the implementation of Agenda 21. Plans for the partnership would be further defined at the upcoming Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (to be held 28 October to 1 November 2002, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). Major global events this year had confirmed the importance of improving our understanding of mountain agricultural systems. He also told the audience that the FAO would be giving careful consideration to the results and recommendations that would be the outcome of this workshop. He concluded by wishing the participants a very successful meeting.