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Review of Institutional Capacities for Sustainable Mountain Agricultural Development: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh, India

INDIA COUNTRY REPORT

(Commissioned by the Mountain Farming Systems' Programme of ICIMOD)

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Preface

Mountain agriculture is entering a critical phase of transition as population demands for food and other agricultural commodities escalate rapidly and the damage to biological and physical systems supporting agriculture continues to accelerate. The mountain areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas already have a population close to 120 million and every year another two million are being added to a very fragile agricultural environment that has historically offered few other economic options for survival. Efforts to develop mountain agriculture are very recent. While some pockets demonstrate encouraging signs, the bulk of mountain agriculture, gripped by numerous environmental problems, is showing signs of unsustainable changes. A major effort is needed to restore the biological and physical systems and to improve and increase agricultural productivity to meet the burgeoning demands for food and other commodities.

ICIMOD's Mountain Farming Systems' Programme has started a systematic analysis of mountain agricultural development issues to identify ways to promote its sustainable development. Agricultural development strategies for mountain areas in different countries were reviewed. Case studies of agricultural changes in specific areas were undertaken to identify success stories. In order to share each other's experiences in the development of mountain agriculture, many discussions were organised including an International Symposium on Sustainable Strategies for Mountain agriculture. One of the main conclusions of these activities focussed on the critical need for strengthening organisations and institutional mechanisms for promoting sustainable mountain agriculture. The institutional gaps in terms of planning and policies, research and development, and support services were very large indeed. Available capacity did not match the challenge on hand and a major effort was needed to develop national and local capacities for managing mountain agriculture on a sustainable basis. ICIMOD launched a project to strengthen institutions devoted to mountain agriculture and the programme received financial support from the Government of the Netherlands.

During the first phase of this project a comparative review and an assessment of capacities of agricultural development institutions in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas were carried out. This monograph presents a case study of the existing institutional structure and functioning in Himachal Pradesh, India. It provides many important lessons that are both common throughout the HKH and specific in the case of Himachal Pradesh. It is hoped that the document will be of value to national and international agencies for strengthening agricultural development institutions in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas in their pursuit for Sustainable Development of Mountain Agriculture and, through them, to the millions of mountain farmers in their search for a sustainable livelihood.