

ICIMOD in 2008 – a Year of Outreach

ICIMOD's experiences in 2008 confirm the trend of growing interest in the mountain agenda and its programmes. The growing awareness of the important role played by the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, not only for the mountain population but also for the inhabitants of the downstream river basins, translated into a more substantial exchange and definition of common programmes. International sponsors increased their support and regional member countries (RMCs) expressed positive feedback and interest.

Having taken stock of its work over the past five and twenty-five years in 2007, ICIMOD took its first steps in a new five-year cycle in 2008. For many staff it was a year of internal capacity development and change management activities. It was also a year of reaching out to build awareness, and strengthening the basis for the work of the next five years.

Despite the positive developments, ICIMOD has encountered challenges along the way:

- The interest of many large global institutions in climate change still means largely the changes in coastal areas and challenges for endangered species.
- The launching of regional programmes in the Centre's Medium-term Action Plan (MTAP 2008-12) has proven more difficult for practical and methodological reasons.
- The interest of the RMCs has been translated into increased contributions to programmes facilitated by ICIMOD, but contributions to core functions are increasing only slowly.



ICIMOD's 25th Anniversary

A Milestone Year

2008 marked ICIMOD's 25th anniversary – a milestone year that ICIMOD celebrated by reaching out in many new ways to create wider awareness among a much broader public – regionally and globally.

ICIMOD celebrated the jubilee with a year-long series of events aimed at raising awareness of the impacts of climate change, the need to enhance the adaptation and resilience of mountain communities, and ICIMOD's role and way forward.

The occasion was an opportunity to present ICIMOD to a broader public in Nepal, in diplomatic circles, in

The Achievement of the Last 25 Years – Learning, adapting, and adjusting to changing situations and expectations

When ICIMOD first began its work 25 years ago, mountain development, especially in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, was regarded as a marginal issue. The mountains represented a barrier dividing the continent, isolated from the larger context of the region. ICIMOD was an initiative of international institutions and the donor community.

Today, with economic growth in the main member countries, the Himalayas are more and more becoming



the region, and in the international community. ICIMOD offered a field trip, open house, exhibition, and an event at the Godavari Demonstration and Training Centre to raise its profile and the awareness of issues in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. It also participated in the Eco Everest Expedition, a totally new kind of involvement for the centre.

a system of corridors for the exchange of goods and services and construction of road and railway projects.

With climate change, the ecological integrity of the Himalayas has become a major concern for the availability of water and provision of ecosystem services. These directly affect the livelihoods of the

“With climate change, the ecological integrity of the Himalayas has become a major concern”

210 million mountain inhabitants and the food security and economic development of the 1.3 billion people living downstream.

ICIMOD now functions in these substantially changed conditions. Today, the regional member countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas have expectations of the role that a regional institution, namely ICIMOD, can play.

In the process of adjustment, ICIMOD has adapted to various expectations and made several transitions.

- Mountains, once a peripheral concern, are now the subject of international declarations but without substantial change of investment priorities.

- ICIMOD was initially more technology biased, but has shifted its focus more to strategic and policy aspects and issues, from a techno-centric to a people-centric approach that provides solutions and a more conducive environment for adopting suitable technologies and options.
- The Centre, once more of a practical research organisation, has shifted to facilitating implementation by strong, mountain-focused organisations and national programmes. ICIMOD's role is now supportive and advisory.

Over the past 25 years, ICIMOD has developed into a vital institution. Its new strategy will increase its



- ICIMOD's existence and programmes are getting more attention from the regional countries, which assist in funding and implementing the activities. The Centre adds value by bringing regional and international perspectives, views, and options.

relevance regarding the needs of the region. ICIMOD has dedicated staff and modern facilities to implement the plan. It has also trained countless colleagues from within and outside the region who now represent a pool of expertise.

International Events – global concern based on regional cooperation and national responsibility

ICIMOD has increasingly participated in global platforms. These international forums offer opportunities to present the mountain agenda, especially for the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, and the issue of mountains as a hotspot for climate change – where previously only small island states and coastal areas were regarded as hotspots.

The message ICIMOD presents is that of the cause and challenges of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, the consequences to 1.3 billion people, and strategies for resilience and adaptation. It aims to make global and regional partners aware of the risks due to floods, glacial melt, and drought.

By building networks and presenting regional issues and concerns in global forums, ICIMOD has endeavoured to contribute actively to the international debate on climate change and water issues. It has earned membership in accredited forums – provisional admittance by the UNFCCC in April, observer status in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in June, and observer status by RAMSAR in July.

Growing interest in the mountain agenda is translating into increased donor funding and more interest from the regional member countries. For instance, Indian partners have proposed 28 new projects for collaboration.

Regional cooperation will enable better management of transboundary resources, sharing of real time hydro-metrological data, and development of joint plans and programmes to better harness and address common concerns and challenges.

Mountain issues are now, we hope, achieving high international political and scientific visibility. The main

challenge ICIMOD faces now is not mobilising interest, but being able to provide answers and deliver the relevant programmes.

Highlights of international events in 2008 included the following:

- ICIMOD held a seminar, together with the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) – China, on The Himalayan Water Towers where six regional experts presented their cases from six Himalayan countries, This was a side event in World Water Week, which brought everyone in the ‘water world’ to Stockholm for networking, capacity-building, partnership-building and follow-up on the implementation of international processes and programmes in water and development.
- The Centre supported and facilitated a knowledge forum on water issues at the 1st Abu Dhabi Knowledge Forum (ADKF) on Rivers of the Greater Himalayas: from Source to Sea, Present and Future, in Singapore.
- ICIMOD was invited to make a presentation on its potential technical role to the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Delhi, India. Since then, a number of interested international collaborators have visited ICIMOD to discuss and/or finalise collaborative work with ICIMOD.
- Attendance at the RAMSAR Conventions on Wetlands in S Korea has resulted in a Himalayan Wetlands Initiative.
- ICIMOD organised and hosted a number of regional events with global participation (Conference on Cryosphere, Conference on Biodiversity, and Conference on Mountain Cartography).

International Mountain Biodiversity Conference

– accepting the transect approach to understanding biodiversity loss caused by climate change

At present, the lack of basic environmental data for the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is serious. Reading the report of the IPCC, the world's apex body on climate change, it seems that the region is almost a 'white spot' in terms of data availability. But evidence-based decision making is only possible with sufficient reliable data.

To address the need for reliable data, ICIMOD convened the International Conference on Mountain Biodiversity, which took place from 16-18 November 2008. Biodiversity experts, global programme leaders, and representatives of Himalayan countries met in Kathmandu to share, network, and develop future strategies to understand climate change and help preserve mountain biodiversity.

The meeting was the culmination of a series of workshops on diverse aspects of climate change and biodiversity in the Himalayas. The papers and discussions helped to advance understanding of the effect of climate change on the biodiversity and the lives and livelihoods of the people of the region.

The three main themes of the Conference were:

- climate change and its implications for mountain biodiversity;
- biodiversity management for economic goods and ecosystem services from the mountains; and
- institutionalising long-term continuity in mountain research programmes.

The countries of the region have voiced the urgent need for reliable data and the need to share with and benefit from global programmes on climate change impacts, and volunteered to collaborate as needed. To fill the gap in data for the region, the delegates supported the transect approach as the way forward. The transects (latitudinal – north south) would stretch across national and international boundaries at various longitudes in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region through transboundary landscapes rich in biodiversity and their connectivity corridors. Typical transects will cover existing protected areas, national parks, bird sanctuaries, Ramsar sites, and World Heritage sites, covering critical eco-regions and transboundary areas.



Participants stressed that regional cooperation was needed to tackle the problems holistically. All researchers, from big global programmes to individuals, would be encouraged to focus their efforts in these sites under a coordinated arrangement that helps make all the information produced available for everyone to use.

Representatives of global programmes supported the proposal and offered all possible technical support. As a regional knowledge, learning, and enabling centre, ICIMOD can provide the crucial link between international technical support and the national institutions in Himalayan countries.

Himalaya – *Changing Landscapes*

ICIMOD Photo Exhibition ‘more than a hundred pages in a book’

Climate change is a topic very much on everybody’s agenda. The Himalaya – Changing Landscapes photo exhibition has started to attract global attention from environmental and development organisations, government bodies, international media, and potential new sponsors as well as the general public.

During the 1950s, Austrian and Swiss scientists conducted intensive studies of the Everest region in Nepal taking photographs of the glaciers, mountains, and valleys. Now, fifty years later, the black and white photographs are of immense value in trying to understand the impacts of climate change on Himalayan glaciers. Mountain geographer Alton Byers revisited many of the sites of the original photographs in 2007 and took replicates that illustrate the changes in the landscape.

ICIMOD united the old and new photographs in a unique photo exhibition: *Himalaya – Changing Landscapes* that aims to raise awareness of the impact of climate change and of the new challenges facing the mountain people.

“Only five decades have passed between the old and the new photographs and the changes are dramatic. Many small glaciers at low altitudes have disappeared entirely and many larger ones have lost around half of their volume. Some have formed huge glacial lakes at the foot of the glacier, threatening downstream communities in case of an outburst,” says Byers.

The Himalaya – *Changing Landscapes* photo exhibition was first unveiled in a customised format at Mt. Everest Base Camp (5300m) in April 2008, making it probably the highest photo exhibition in the world.



The exhibition then went to Stockholm, where it was shown at the World Water Week in August, 2008. This annual event involves more than 170 international organisations. Our message was well received by the participants. One visitor told us that the exhibition spoke more than “a hundred pages in a book”.

In Barcelona, eighteen four-metre long panels were displayed at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, 4-15 October 2008. The exhibition was also an information point where ICIMOD staff could distribute technical publications, brochures, flyers and other documents. An estimated 8000 people – IUCN congress participants and local Barcelona people – visited the exhibition.

In December 2008, as a part of ICIMOD’s 25th anniversary celebrations, the exhibition was held at Kathmandu Durbar Square. It drew the attention of locals and visitors towards the impact of climate change in the fragile environment of the Himalayas.

The Eco Everest Expedition 2008

– An on site opportunity to raise awareness

ICIMOD's partnership in the EcoEverest Expedition was a new and different approach to raising awareness.

The expedition used public interest in Everest and mountaineering to build awareness of the impact of climate change in the Himalayas. Through the partnership, ICIMOD was able to support the initiatives of Dawa Steven Sherpa of Asian Trekking to climb Everest in a more eco-friendly manner.

The Centre provided a website that was featured on Google Earth, which resulted in a wider dissemination of the issues. The site also displayed the photographic exhibition at Everest Base Camp, which made a wide variety of people – from international mountaineers and trekkers to local porters – aware of the impact of climate change on the glaciers.

ICIMOD also conducted an awareness workshop with local stakeholders to share information and engage locals in the research on glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). As part of the expedition, an ICIMOD research team carried out field studies of the Dig Tsho and Imja Tsho glacial lakes in April 2008.

ICIMOD also established an EcoEverest Trust Fund to finance further research, monitoring, and early warning of potential GLOFs, and build the capacity of local communities in the Khumbu region.

Says Dawa Sherpa, an Everest summiteer and environmental activist, of his partnership with ICIMOD:

“ICIMOD realised the value of what I was trying to do. I had a lot to promise them, but not much to guarantee. ICIMOD was open to sharing their information and listening to my ideas.

Through ICIMOD, I got accurate information so that I knew the facts. They shared any recent news and were excited to do that.

I have nothing but praise for ICIMOD for giving further than I ever expected. They trusted me to fulfill my passion for the environment.

Without ICIMOD, I would still be a very enthusiastic young man wanting to do something. ICIMOD opened doors for me to work with other organisations. People all around the world want to help in some way. Now, I want to open doors for other young people to get involved. ”

