Building Together: The First ICIMOD Advance

Under the new leadership of Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell and Dr. Binayak Bhadra, ICIMOD commenced a series of 'ICIMOD Advances' on 10 May 2000 to chart out a concrete course of action towards building a more effective institution. About 60 ICIMOD staff gathered in the hills of Godavari - of ICIMOD's new training centre. Facilitated by Mr. Ravi Pradhan and Mr. Anil Chitrakar, the group reflected over a three-day period on many aspects of taking ICIMOD forward.

On the third day, the group was joined by all other staff for the final presentation, sharing, and tree plantation. A one-day follow-up programme for those who could not attend the first group Advance and a further one-day programme in Nepali for auxiliary staff was organised on 5 and 6 July respectively. The participants at the one-day programme had a more condensed programme and the results from this were incorporated into the action plans.

The entire proceedings can be found in a report and steps have already been taken to implement and/or analyse the suggested action plans.

The Launch

The main part of the launch was a session of appreciative inquiry into personal best or personal achievements. First, the entire group worked in pairs by meeting and introducing their partners and discovering their personal best and future aspirations. The groups then identified collective patterns in the personal best stories.

Second, they met in smaller groups to inquire into the best achievements of ICIMOD, the key turning points, and the factors and practices that helped create these achievements. Each group presented the results of their appreciative inquiry in a 'marketplace' format, where people walked around to share, learn, and engage in dialogue.

Looking Forward

Small groups examined ICIMOD from the perspectives of key stakeholder groups such as governments, NGO, donors, mountain people, and partners/researchers. What did these groups value about ICIMOD, and what are they seeking from ICIMOD (as seen through the eyes of the staff)? The results were presented and discussed in the plenary. See box text for highlights.

The same groups engaged in a process to envision the future for ICIMOD by focusing on the following ideas:

> **HIGHLIGHTS OF STAKEHOLDER VALUES/WISHES**
> - Platform for the voice of mountain people
> - Knowledge bank/Source of innovations
> - Forum for debating and planning mountain development
> - Capacity building/training
> - Respond to specific needs and problems
> - Advocate particular policy positions
> - Active input into ICIMOD planning
> - More attention to social issues affecting mountain communities
> - Results to be disseminated using local languages/medium

- the kind of institution ICIMOD will have become by 2015;
- the kind of programmes and activities it is doing or will have done; and
- the kind of impact and difference it will have made in the mountain region.

The groups imagined that the BBC was doing a story on a very successful ICIMOD in the year 2015 and wrote/drew/sketched their presentations. These results were also presented in a 'marketplace'. A plenary session was then devoted to a short discussion in which participants tried to identify the critical factors for success in the future in terms of programme management, internal work processes, and organisational culture.

Critical Programme and Process Areas

This part of the Advance was dedicated to discussing and reflecting on the critical programme and process areas for ICIMOD. The exercise assessed current reality, i.e., what is working well and what is not working well, and also what must be addressed in the coming 12 months.

This was followed by discussion on changes and improvements that were needed in the next 12 months as well as ways to move forward. The degree of consensus was evaluated for each of the seven areas identified: gender, communication/ information, reaching the poor, fund raising and cost recovery, collaborations/ planning/ monitoring, administrative processes, and personnel. There was an overall consensus to move ahead with speed on most of these themes.

Action Plans/Next Steps

Each functional group identified five things that could be done to improve the quality and effectiveness of their team work as well as inter-departmental cooperation within ICIMOD. The remainder of the time was dedicated to action planning and determining the next steps by specifying who, what, and by when.

Several working committees have been established as a follow up to the action plans that were recommended to look into aspects such as
- communications/information/knowledge;
- reaching the poor; gender and organisational development;
- cost recovery, savings, and budgeting including funding from the private sector; planning and programme monitoring; and
- collaboration and database monitoring.