

Foreword

The potential impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly evident in mountain environments. Not only are mountain regions with their fragile ecosystems particularly vulnerable to anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases; there are indications that changes in temperature and other factors are taking place at a greater pace at higher altitudes than in the lowlands. Mountain social, economic and ecological systems are being affected, including the water and other resources on which billions of people in mountains and areas downstream depend. Although mountain people have contributed very little to global greenhouse gas emissions, they are the first among the vulnerable communities bearing the brunt of the impacts. Mountain areas cover about a quarter of the Earth's land; they provide essential ecosystem services and are water towers for billions of people living in downstream slopes, valleys, and plains. Although Agenda 21 and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adopted in 1992, provide a basis for addressing a multitude of issues and promoting sustainable mountain development, the mountain agenda has not yet been addressed adequately by the UNFCCC climate deliberations and associated processes to reflect the need to improve and maintain mountain ecosystem services, and the livelihoods that depend on them.

Recognising the urgent need for action, the Prime Minister of Nepal called on the mountain countries and stakeholders during the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to UNFCCC in Copenhagen to come together to form a common platform and ensure that mountain concerns get due attention in the climate change deliberations. The positive actions from the global community must address the vulnerable status of mountain ecosystems and afford protection to the lives and livelihoods of mountain people. To reach this goal, the Government of Nepal proposed to initiate a 'Mountain Alliance Initiative (MAI) for Climate Change Adaptation in Mountainous Regions'. The Initiative provides a framework within which mountain countries, in collaboration with specialised global and regional mountain agencies, can work for greater recognition of the fragility of mountain systems in view of global climate change, advocate based on state-of-the-art knowledge, and support mountain people more effectively in their struggle to adapt to the new challenges, while at the same time enabling them to benefit from emerging opportunities.

The Government of Nepal is moving this agenda forward with the technical and backstopping support of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which is providing advice and research-based knowledge based on its long experience of working on sustainable mountain development agenda in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region over the last 26 years.

The present paper has been prepared jointly by ICIMOD and the Government of Nepal to serve as a rationale and framework for the Mountain Initiative. It describes the context in which the Initiative is being set, elaborates the specific vulnerability contexts and situation of mountain people and their social-ecological systems, highlights the importance of mountain ecosystem goods and services for mountain people as well as downstream communities, and also explores the opportunities that are created by climate change. In order to achieve the goal of sustainable mountain development, the paper calls for all to develop a common vision and strong voice to advocate the case for mountain people and ecosystems. For this, improved networking among all mountainous states and key stakeholders will be necessary.

We believe that the paper will be a valuable source of information to support efforts to contribute to and advocate for regional and global approaches to address the critical challenges posed by climate and global change in the mountains.



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Shyok river, Khapalu valley, Pakistan