



2010 Biodiversity, Youth, and Remote Sensing

The year 2010 was full of positive challenges, opportunities, and events, especially under the three topics of biodiversity, youth, and remote sensing. Each deserves a special mention and serves as an example of ICIMOD's evolution in the past year.

In general, ICIMOD had a year where it began to work more strategically to interconnect its main programmes. It utilised opportunities to link tourism into the environmental Kailash Sacred Landscape Initiative, youth outreach into a remote sensing symposium, livelihoods and poverty analysis to research on water availability, and economic analysis into payment for environmental services. Interconnecting these activities was challenging, but brought ICIMOD another step towards understanding and finding ways to address the vital issues of climate change in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region.

By working more strategically, ICIMOD has attracted more attention this year from regional member countries and international sponsors. We had the honour of welcoming Shri Jairam Ramesh, Minister of Environment and Forest, Government of India, who stated, "ICIMOD is an anchor for regional cooperation for the Government of India." This was the first ever visit by a Minister of the Government of India to ICIMOD.

Other examples of regional and international interest are China's sponsorship of the Third Pole Environment Programme, for which ICIMOD was able to host the second workshop, and the visit of the Administrator of NASA, who came to Nepal explicitly to visit ICIMOD.

The accelerated pace and scale of our programmes had consequences for the operational budget of the Centre, which has increased more than expected. In 2010, ICIMOD organised close to 130 national, regional, and international workshops, conferences, and other meetings in Kathmandu with more than 3,000 participants, as well as training and other events in different countries in the region.

Shri Jairam Ramesh addressing participants



Women in a village in Almora, India, preparing a seasonal calendar



Advocating for Biodiversity

In 2010, the UN International Year for Biodiversity, with its international events and agenda, helped to mobilise interest in the biodiversity of the region. This year, ICIMOD had the chance to participate in meetings of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) that advises the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biodiversity on matters of science, technology, and methodology.



ICIMOD at CBD – COP10 in Nagoya, Japan

ICIMOD presented thematic papers highlighting the importance of mountain biodiversity and advocating for the increased application of the Convention in the regional countries. ICIMOD also carried out tangible activities, such as the launching of a regional biodiversity portal and starting field activities in Bhutan.

As with the COPs of the UN Convention for Climate Change, CBD COP 10 held in September in Nagoya, Japan, showed how ICIMOD as a regional organisation could argue the case of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas and present the mountain agenda at the highest level. However, both events revealed a limitation of the mountain agenda: that the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is the only mountain area with a regional organisation like ICIMOD. At the COP 10 meeting, it became evident that it is also essential for other mountain regions, such as the Andes, to be represented at the global level. This makes the Mountain Initiative launched by Nepal even more important. But the COP 16 Climate Change conference in Cancun has shown the limitations of such an initiative if the country launching it does not have a government in place to lead the process.



Posters from the Youth Forum

Modern Technology and Climate Change

The launching of SERVIR-Himalaya at the GEOSS symposium demonstrated the interest of the regional member countries to cooperate at professional and regional levels. The regional and international participation in the symposium was overwhelming and showed the potential of using space-based technology for planning and decision-making.

The strategic role of ICIMOD in providing near real time mapping of the flooding in Pakistan is a good example of how the Centre is evolving from being a regional centre based institution to being a provider of important services to the regional stakeholders.

Youth as a Strategic Anchor for Outreach

A third new feature in 2011 represents a next step in the intensification of ICIMOD's outreach activities by reaching out to young people, as they will be the most affected by climate change. ICIMOD worked together with the British Council to organise the training of young Climate Champions from three different countries. In parallel with the launching of SERVIR, ICIMOD organised a Youth Symposium, presenting GIS instruments and discussing their use for climate change initiatives. These activities were complemented by the organisation of a herbal garden initiative with schools.

These outreach initiatives are based on the premise that youth plays an important role in bringing about change. The events also served to highlight a key challenge for outreach: how to present information, learning, and the use of top technology in a way that engages youth and the public in activities to make positive changes in the world in which we live.

A special role in the climate change agenda for mountain regions

Bindu N Lohani, Vice President, Asian Development Bank

"My memories go back to when the ADB was in collaboration with ICIMOD on several areas. On matters relating to environment and natural resources and in my own personal involvement with ICIMOD, ICIMOD has always done an outstanding job in carrying out its work in a most professional way in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. Today, environment and climate change are very pressing global issues. ICIMOD certainly has a special role in the climate change agenda for the Hindu Kush-Himalayan mountain region. I wish you continued success in future and look forward to greater collaboration."

A supporting platform for regional cooperation

Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests **Shri Jairam Ramesh** visited ICIMOD on 4 October 2010. He reiterated India's commitment to deepening regional cooperation and institution building in the fields of environment, forestry, and climate change. Here some excerpts from his address:



"There's a need for more science to understand the complex behaviour of Himalayan glaciers, whose health is of deep concern. The behaviour of Himalayan glaciers is fundamentally different to that of the glaciers in polar regions, and they need special investigation and analysis ... [so we can] use scientific information as a basis for political decision making and improving governance..."

Biodiversity does not stop at geographical boundaries, and countries must work together for protection and management and to support adaptation."

"The future lies in regional cooperation based on strong national institutions. ICIMOD can provide a supporting platform. The Government of India has a strong commitment to regional cooperation on issues relevant to the environment, including climate change."

The cooperation of India, Nepal, and China on the Kailash Sacred Landscape, facilitated by ICIMOD and supported by UNEP, is a new departure. India looks forward to supporting similar initiatives in the three other transboundary landscapes with parts in India."

Bringing the mountain agenda to climate change negotiations

Notwithstanding the importance of mountain ecosystems, the UNFCCC climate deliberations have not addressed the mountain agenda. The **Prime Minister of Nepal** in his address to COP 15 at Copenhagen said:

"I therefore take this opportunity to call on all the mountain countries and stakeholders to form a common platform and ensure that mountain concerns ... are prominently represented in future COP negotiations and that our efforts towards adaptation obtain the required international support."

Following this, in 2010, Nepal, together with regional and global stakeholders including ICIMOD, the Mountain Partnership, and other development partners, launched the 'Mountain Initiative for Climate Change Adaptation in Mountains'. The Mountain Initiative (MI) aims to provide a framework under which mountain countries can collaborate with global and regional agencies to understand better the changes occurring in mountains and the challenges they face because of climate and global changes. The Ministry of Environment, Government of Nepal (MOE/GON), ICIMOD, development partners, and global stakeholders, especially key Asian and Andean mountain countries, are taking the lead to implement the Mountain Initiative. The first International Expert Consultation Meeting was held in Kathmandu in September 2010 where 15 mountain countries met to develop the agenda for the Initiative.



Jangothang, Bhutan

In the side event at COP 16, **Warren Evans**, Director of the Environment Department, World Bank, recognised the potential of the Mountain Initiative and lauded ICIMOD for supporting it with "high quality knowledge development and technical support," and further that,

"ICIMOD has become a key partner for the global mountain countries especially in looking into the challenges that mountains face across the world and bringing in technical expertise."

The **Hon Dr Dinesh Devkota**, Environment Division and Member of the National Planning Commission, Nepal, said:

"The world's mountain environments and ecosystems are facing a grave threat due to climate change. They have regional and global importance, and the global community must support long-term adaptation and resilience building in the mountains. A long-term adaption programme requires sustainable finance, scientific knowledge, technology transfer, and capacity building. The Government of Nepal has started the Mountain Initiative with the aim of bringing global mountain countries and communities together to ensure that the mountain agenda is addressed by the UNFCCC process. We are very pleased to see the support extended by the numerous countries and institutions to address this common agenda, which is also a global agenda."

Engaging young students in biodiversity: Promoting herbal gardens in schools

"If we learn as a student, then we can use it in our future. It also balances the ecosystem. I like that we can use these simple medicines for small diseases," says **Srijana Banjade**, a herbal garden participant

In collaboration with the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and the Private and Boarding Schools Organisation of Nepal (PABSON), ICIMOD promoted the development of herbal gardens in schools in the Kathmandu Valley as a youth initiative to mark the 2010 Year of Biodiversity. The aim is to help schoolchildren learn about the conservation of medicinal and herbal plants; how to identify and use herbs, especially in medicines and food; and how to grow herbs in a garden.

The initiative had four main 'ingredients': a fun competition to create a herb and recipe poster, and make the recipe; a visit to ICIMOD's Demonstration and Training Centre at Godavari to see some of the many medicinal plants in the Himalayas and learn



about some of their wealth of uses; creation of a school herbal garden using the students' choice of herbs; and preparation of a herbal profile with a detailed account of the herbs growing in the garden. Awards were given for each part.

A monitoring team from ICIMOD and NTNC made three visits to monitor the progress of the gardens and found most of them well developed and impressively maintained, with informative labels. Each school had a core team of student guides who shared relevant information on the herbs with their fellow students and outsiders. In the coming year, these schools will create a chain of awareness by sharing the concept with government schools, some from outside the Kathmandu Valley.

As one of the monitoring team members remarked, *"I am happy to see that our objective to generate interest in students on various aspects of Himalayan medicinal and aromatic plants ... is developing positively as the herbal gardens in the majority of the schools have already been institutionalised."*

Empowering youth for climate change activities

"The Youth Forum was helpful in awaking and strengthening the youth of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region to take initiatives for mitigating the impact of climate change using Earth observation techniques," says **Nanda Nautiyal**, a young researcher from India.

About forty young people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan attended a six-day long Youth Forum, Empowering Youth with Earth Observation Information for Climate Actions, in a special event organised in October 2010. These 40, more than half of them young women, were selected from some 750 applicants based on their essays, social involvement, and fields of study.

ICIMOD also started a youth for sustainable mountain development initiative to engage young people in climate change activities. In a first event, ICIMOD and the British Council organised a Café Climate in February to bring science to youth in an informal setting, with more than 75 young people participating in the debate. Later, a capacity-building workshop was organised for more than 40 youth climate champions from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Uzbekistan using information resources, networking, and climate adaptation methodologies they can apply at the community level.

The Youth Forum was another step in the youth strategy. It was organised by ICIMOD, Nepalese Youth for Climate Action (NYCA), and the GIS Society of Nepal, under the framework of the SERVIR Himalaya Youth Initiative, and supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The participants discussed emerging issues and learned about remote sensing and geographic information systems (RS/GIS), and resources such as Google Earth.

Pragati Shah, a participant from Nepal, is an environmental journalist:

"Participating in the International Youth Forum was a great opportunity that helped to deepen my learning on the technologies used to assess climate change and provide relevant data. It provided me a platform to know youth from different countries in the region and beyond to share and discuss views and experiences on climate change and its impacts in the region."

Nanda Nautiyal, added:

"I am applying my Youth Forum learning in my research work on climate change impact in the HKH region... I used my learning in an International conference on Cooling the Earth in November 2010 organised by our department... I hope we get a chance to work for the wellbeing of our vulnerable HKH region."

"The message from the Youth Forum is going to be a beginning in itself – for advocacy based on good science, for building regional and international cooperation, for responsible action, and we hope, for good governance as well. I would like to share with you an inspirational quote by one of my friends, 'What will decide the destiny of our future is not the power of uranium or plutonium, but the power of this millennium's youthanium,'" remarked participant **Hari Priya** at the close.





Skardu valley, Baltistan, Pakistan

ICIMOD External Mid-Term Review[†]

ICIMOD's four major donors – Germany, Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden – organised an external review of progress in the third year of the present five-year cycle. Three international and three regional experts conducted the review. Overall, the assessment was very positive. The reviewers commended staff and management for bringing about important changes and improvements in the institution and its outreach and impact.

Major highlights of the report

What is on track?

- ICIMOD is being recognised increasingly as a relevant, responsive, results-oriented regional learning and knowledge organisation.
- The change management process ICIMOD is undergoing has the full support of the staff and has in general contributed to a more professional and efficient institution and to improvement of the organisational management systems and tools.
- In general, ICIMOD is on track in the implementation of the programme of the five years cycle and the long-term strategy.
- There are also positive trends in transboundary relationships and in the steady expansion and improvement of mechanisms for sustainable regional cooperation.
- Significant achievements have been made in positioning ICIMOD as a regional knowledge centre
- The work of ICIMOD is highly appreciated by the RMCs and regional institutions.

What needs to be improved?

- The process of change management needs consolidation to secure achievements in the remaining implementation period.
- The quality of outputs and ICIMOD products still needs to be improved for ICIMOD to be fully recognised as a centre of excellence in the region, as well as globally.

- The objectives related to ownership of ICIMOD by the regional member countries have yet to be achieved with regard to the member countries' financial contributions.
- The necessary common understanding of the role and position of ICIMOD among the various partners in the regional member countries also still needs to be improved.

Key recommendations confirmed by the ICIMOD Board of Governors

- The Strategy of ICIMOD shall be revisited in view of clarifying the relation with the regional member countries.
- ICIMOD needs increased long-term programme funding.
- The Board of Governors is invited to provide guidance to the ICIMOD management on how to best integrate the themes of global significance in its responses to the portfolio of regional member countries' priorities, which are relevant for the integrated mountain development agenda.
- The management is encouraged to promote annual 'ICIMOD-days' in the regional member countries where this is not yet instituted.
- ICIMOD should continue the dialogue with the regional member countries on how to meet the stated objective of 50% funding from member countries for the core budget, how to establish procedures for regional member countries to fund specific regional programmes, and on the modalities to make the ICIMOD Foundation operational.
- The Board should encourage ICIMOD Management to give higher priority to responding to international and regional demands for high quality integrated information and assessments on themes of global significance such as climate change, water resources, and biodiversity, and to develop the skill profiles of its staff accordingly applying an open minded recruitment policy.

[†] For details, the reader is invited to read the full report at www.icimod.org.



A pathway through the rice paddies, Rangamati district, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh