



Passport applicants at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu, Nepal

Labour Migration and ICIMOD

Andreas Schild, Director General, ICIMOD, aschild@icimod.org

Migration, whether it is domestic or international, has emerged as a major livelihood strategy in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region. Although mountain people have migrated for centuries to search for work, better livelihoods, or human security, the numbers have risen rapidly in the past two decades. Social and financial remittances from these migrants form a significant element in the development of the region's economies. Given the persistent disparities in income levels and the economic interdependence among countries, the mobility of people in the region is unlikely to decrease in the coming years. With its growing scale and complexity, labour migration is emerging as a priority issue for the HKH region and ICIMOD.

Large inflows of remittances and outflows of migrants present numerous opportunities to the governments and people of the region. However, the consequences of skilled migration, the social costs of family separation, and the impact of migration on gender roles are also of great concern to the region. In order to be able to address the challenges, it is necessary to have a good understanding of the economic and social implications of migration in the region. The initial costs of migration are often high, recruitment processes and loan packages are not transparent, and the transfer and investment

options for remittances to mountain areas are poor. The financial institutions which could offer saving, credit, and insurance services have little outreach to remote mountain communities.

The United Nations recommended in its Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference (2002) to promote research on the interrelationship between migration, development, and poverty reduction, as well as to build national capacity for relevant data collection, analysis, and research. ICIMOD is responding to this challenge by exploring the linkages between labour migration and development so that benefits can be maximised and negative impacts minimised.

As the first mountain learning and enabling centre, ICIMOD has a unique regional mandate for the eight countries in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region: to enable and facilitate the equitable and sustainable wellbeing of the people of the region by supporting sustainable mountain development through active regional cooperation. ICIMOD is a regional platform where scientists, policy makers, development specialists, academics, and civil society meet and share knowledge, ideas, innovations, and perspectives. The objective in the field of migration and remittances is to provide a knowledge base and to offer country-specific, policy-relevant analysis to sustain an informed policy dialogue.