

# A Regional Exploration of Women and Climate Change Adaptation

In 2011, ICIMOD completed the design of its first regional programme on climate change adaptation in transboundary river basins. The Himalayan Climate Change Adaptation Programme (HICAP) focuses on building knowledge from and for local communities to influence policy and have an on-the-ground impact, especially for women. It integrates cross-disciplinary research in the river basins and transboundary landscapes of the HKH to identify the upstream causes of change, the downstream impacts, and the opportunities and challenges for adaptation.

HICAP follows from two earlier projects – the Himalayan Climate Change Impact and Adaptation Assessment (HICIA) and the ‘Too Much, Too Little Water’ study. The results of these projects, with

additional scoping studies of the eastern Himalayas and consultations with strategic and operational partners, culminated in the creation of HICAP as a regional programme jointly implemented by ICIMOD, the Center for International Climate and Environment Research – Oslo (CICERO), and UNEP/GRID-Arendal.

HICAP has a special focus on women, because social, economic, and political barriers limit their coping capacity, making women more vulnerable than men to the impacts of climate change such as droughts or flooding. Often, women are more likely than men to lose their lives during natural disasters, owing to their lack of basic lifesaving skills or cultural impediments such as clothing that restricts their mobility. Natural disasters also expose women to other risks including human trafficking.

Indawgyi Lake, Kachin, Myanmar



However, women are well positioned to lead the way in adapting to a changing climate and environment because of their key roles in managing households, domestic water use, agriculture, forests, biodiversity, food security, and other sectors.

“Women often play a stronger role than men in the management of ecosystem services and food security. Hence, sustainable adaptation must focus on gender and the role of women if it is to become successful. Women’s voices, responsibilities, and knowledge on the environment and the challenges they face will need to be made a central part of governments’ adaptive responses to a rapidly changing climate.”

– Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director

This five-year programme will endeavour to answer several key questions:

- How does adaptation to climate change in mountain contexts differ from that in other regions?
- How can scientific knowledge on climate change be transferred to communities more effectively to help them adapt? What types of science and knowledge are needed?
- How does climate change affect women differently? What can be done to ensure that women are involved in the development and application of knowledge?
- What can be done to ensure that research on adaptation integrates action?

ICIMOD’s strategic and operational partners express enthusiasm for the road ahead as HICAP brings knowledge from the field to national and regional policy processes and global forums for on-the-ground impact.

“The fundamental benefit of working in partnership with ICIMOD is the access to a region that is very complex and diverse, with difficult access to research sites.

“ICIMOD, in addition to being an excellent research institute, is enabling our institution to learn about the problems in the region through the knowledge it produces together with its partner institutions and community level partners.

“In addition, a partnership with ICIMOD enables a level of policy dialogue and policy impact that is difficult for institutions



Udayapur, Nepal

outside the region like ours. Meanwhile, CICERO contributes to linking the on-going work in HICAP with the international community via our networks, our international reputation for high quality research, and our communications strategy. CICERO has an international legitimacy that can help bring regional knowledge to the attention of global policy makers.”

– Dr Asuncion St. Clair,  
HICAP Project Lead of CICERO

“We started working with ICIMOD in 2007 and our first assignment was in 2008 with Too Much, Too Little Water. Aaranyak has a strong focus on research and advocacy. Our mandate is similar to that of ICIMOD, which has helped us build contacts with individuals and organizations to share knowledge. It has helped us to grow as individuals and as an organization by helping us to write better and publish better.

“My individual capacity has been built to a great extent through exposure to international project management. I was able to attend workshops on leading edge technologies. My associates have attended workshops that contributed to their capacity. Technically, ICIMOD has helped us to learn new methodologies and use of new hardware. It contributed to the intellectual strength of the staff members of Aaranyak, and brought us into contact with experts and colleagues in the HKH countries.”

– Dr Partha Das, Aaranyak Society for Biodiversity Conservation in Northeast India, a national partner in Assam, India