
The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment

Philippus Wester • Arabinda Mishra
Aditi Mukherji • Arun Bhakta Shrestha
Editors

The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment

Mountains, Climate Change, Sustainability
and People

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Editors

Philippus Wester
International Centre for Integrated Mountain
Development (ICIMOD)
Kathmandu, Nepal

Aditi Mukherji
International Centre for Integrated Mountain
Development (ICIMOD)
Kathmandu, Nepal

Arabinda Mishra
International Centre for Integrated Mountain
Development (ICIMOD)
Kathmandu, Nepal

Arun Bhakta Shrestha
International Centre for Integrated Mountain
Development (ICIMOD)
Kathmandu, Nepal



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Foreword

This assessment report establishes the value of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) for the 240 million hill and mountain people across the eight countries sharing the region, for the 1.65 billion people in the river basins downstream, and ultimately for the world. Yet, the region and its people face a range of old and new challenges moving forward, with climate change, globalization, movement of people, conflict and environmental degradation. At the same time, we also see incredible potential to meet these challenges in a sustainable manner.

In spite of its importance, relatively less is known about the HKH, its ecosystems and its people, especially in the context of rapid change. Over the last few decades, there has been more research on the region, but the knowledge gathered is often scattered, reaches a limited audience, is sectoral or based on single disciplines and, most importantly, does not reach decision-makers, whether they be in government, in local communities, or in the private sector.

The rationale for this assessment is manifold. The first is about extending the accessible knowledge base. There has been incredible value in bringing together people engaged in generating knowledge about the HKH to collate existing knowledge. Plus, by working across disciplines and countries, the assessment blends insights from different perspectives about the mountains. Global assessments and programmes like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) can now benefit from an important knowledge source about this region, and the book has great value in informing global debates and discourses. Then, there is a value beyond the assessment report itself, in bringing together a network of people who can work across disciplinary and geographical boundaries in the future.

But the main reason for the assessment goes beyond the collation of knowledge. It is to answer a range of policy-oriented questions we all grapple with. Some of these are quite scientific, such as what will happen with climate change, or what the impact of air pollution is. Others are more targeted to actions that people should take, like pathways to sustainable access to energy, or building resilience. The main objective of the assessment thus is to inform decision-makers with the best science and knowledge we have. This assessment has made important strides in this direction. A very important finding of the assessment is that while we have significant knowledge gaps, we know enough to take action.

The publication of the Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme's (HIMAP) flagship piece—*The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment: Mountains, Climate Change, Sustainability and People*—is an important milestone in a larger process that aims to bring together researchers, policy makers and the public to better manage the HKH so that women, men and children can enjoy improved well-being in a healthy mountain environment.

The HIMAP process will continue to engage in science-policy discussions at country and regional levels to enhance cooperation between communities, states and countries in managing the HKH. It will also develop more targeted assessments about specific areas of concern that emerge as we develop more knowledge about the region. Importantly, the authors of the assessment have laid out mountain-specific priorities consistent with the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), and this book provides an important baseline in reaching these goals for the mountains and people of the HKH region. Perhaps the greatest good is that we have an expanding community of practice working together to match and rise above the challenges facing the HKH today.

Kathmandu, Nepal

David Molden
Director General, International Centre
for Integrated Mountain Development

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The Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMAP) is a long-term, integrated science-policy initiative coordinated by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) that aims to promote enabling policies, sustainable solutions and more robust regional cooperation in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region to sustain mountain environments and livelihoods, by:

- Assessing the current state of knowledge of the HKH region, through comprehensive, thematic and subregional assessments and topical outlooks;
- Increasing the understanding of various drivers of change and their impacts;
- Developing evidence-based policy solutions and recommendations; and
- Engaging decision-makers across sectors and institutions through a series of HKH Science-Policy Forums.

HIMAP is a platform for long-term collaboration and coordination among a broad and diverse group of more than 350 leading researchers, practitioners and policy specialists working in the HKH. Under HIMAP, experts from the region have come together to develop the first HKH Assessment Report, as the first in a series of monitoring and assessment reports. It deals with major issues such as climate change, biodiversity, energy, cryosphere (frozen water), water, food security, air pollution, disaster and resilience, poverty, adaptation, gender and migration. The assessment addresses the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable mountain development and will serve as a basis for evidence-based decision-making to safeguard the environment and advance people's well-being in the HKH region.

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Overall Coordinator: Philippus Wester.

Chapter Coordinating Lead Authors: Arivudai Nambi Appadurai, Ruchi Badola, Soumyadeep Banerjee, Ram B. Bhagat, Tobias Bolch, Nakul Chettri, Dhruvad Choudhury, Shobhakar Dhakal, Lam Dorji, Rucha Ghate, Giovanna Gioli, Chanda Gurung Goodrich, Shichang Kang, Fawad Khan, Raghavan Krishnan, Shiyin Liu, Arabinda Mishra, Eddy Moors, Aditi Mukherji, M. S. R. Murthy, Nusrat Nasab, Hemant R. Ojha, Arnico Panday, Golam Rasul, Guoyu Ren, Bernadette P. Resurreccion, Joyashree Roy, Abdul Saboor,

Eri Saikawa, Christopher Scott, Bikash Sharma, Eklabya Sharma, Joseph Shea, Arun Bhakta Shrestha, Mandira Singh Shrestha, Tasneem Siddiqui, Yiching Song, Leena Srivastava, Ganesh Thapa, Ramesh Ananda Vaidya, Yanfen Wang, Ning Wu, Jianchu Xu, Fan Zhang.

Chapter Lead Authors: Bhupesh Adhikari, Lipy Adhikari, Ahsan Uddin Ahmad, Mozaharul Alam, Ghulam Muhammad Arif, Elisabetta Aurino, Mohd. Farooq Azam, Aditya Bastola, Luna Bharati, Pashupati Chaudhary, R. P. Chaudhary, Ganesh Chettri, Netra Chhetri, Zhiyuan Cong, Purnamita Dasgupta, Chao Fu, Yang Gao, Ritesh Gautam, Nilabja Ghosh, Anandajit Goswami, Stephan Gruber, Deo Raj Gurung, Christian Huggel, Abid Hussain, S. A. Hussain, Walter Immerzeel, Michiko Ito, Sanjay Jayanarayanan, Deepa Joshi, Ulka Kelkar, Yuba Raj Khatiwada, Bahadar Nawab Khattak, Rajan Kotru, Nagami Kozo, Anil Kulkarni, Clemens Kunze, Huilin Li, Janwillem Liebrand, Chengfan Liu, Hina Lotia, Brijesh Mainali, Ghulam Mohamad Malikyar, Laura Mapstone Scott, David Molden, Rashid Memon, Sanjay Kumar Mohanty, Seinn Seinn Mu, Daanish Mustafa, Thinley Namgyel, Dev Nathan, Orzala Ashraf Nemat, Rabindra Nepal, Andrea Nightingale, Debajit Palit, Dinesh Paudel, Shi Peili, Manfred Perlik, Bharat Pokhrel, Neera Shrestha Pradhan, Rebecca Pradhan, Sunita Pradhan, S. V. R. K. Prabhakar, Anjal Prakash, Pallav Purohit, Atiq Rahman, Rupak Rajbhandari, Bimal Raj Regmi, Yuyu Ren, Long Ruijun, Sajjad Saeed, Shaheen Ashraf Shah, Upasna Sharma, Ankita Shrestha, Krishna K. Shrestha, Bandita Sijapati, Surendra Pratap Singh, E. Somanathan, Md. Abu Syed, Adnan Ahmad Tahir, Pema Thinley, Prakash Tiwari, Ramesh Vellore, Kul Bahadur Wakhley, Robert James Wasson, Muhammad Arif Wattoo, Philippus Wester, Ying Xu, Tandong Yao, Qinglong You, Guoqing Zhang, Linxiu Zhang, Yinsheng Zhang, Robert Zomer, Eric Zusman.

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Graphics Design: Amy Sellmyer.

Steering Committee: David Molden, Chair (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), Yuba Raj Khatiwada (Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal), Atiq Rahman (Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies), Eklabya Sharma (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), SP Singh (Central Himalayan Environment Association), Tandong Yao (Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences), Linxiu Zhang (United Nations Environment Programme and Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, Chinese Academy of Sciences), Philippus Wester, Member Secretary (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development).

HIMAP Secretariat: Philippus Wester (Coordinator), Rekha Khatri Thapa, Ritu Meher Shrestha, Bhawana Syangden, Avash Pandey, Nisha Wagle.

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