

# Bridging Boundaries: Strengthening Regional Cooperation across Transboundary River Basins and Landscapes in the Hindu Kush Himalaya



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The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a regional knowledge development and learning centre serving the eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan – based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Globalization and climate change have an increasing influence on the stability of fragile mountain ecosystems and the livelihoods of mountain people. ICIMOD aims to assist mountain people to understand these changes, adapt to them, and make the most of new opportunities, while addressing upstream and downstream issues. ICIMOD supports regional transboundary programmes through partnerships with regional partner institutions, facilitates the exchange of experiences, and serves as a regional knowledge hub. We strengthen networking among regional and global centres of excellence. Overall, we are working to develop economically and environmentally-sound mountain ecosystems to improve the living standards of mountain populations and to sustain vital ecosystem services for the billions of people living downstream – now and in the future.



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# Bridging Boundaries: Strengthening Regional Cooperation across Transboundary River Basins and Landscapes in the Hindu Kush Himalaya

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GLF	Global Landscapes Forum
HKH	Hindu Kush Himalaya
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
HIMAP	Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Report
LRG	Local and regional governments
SDGs	Sustainable development goals
TROSA	Transboundary Rivers of South Asia
UN	United Nations
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
VNR	Voluntary National Reviews
RMC	Regional member countries

# Executive Summary

An international consultative workshop titled “Bridging Boundaries: Strengthening Regional Cooperation across Transboundary River Basins and Landscapes in the Hindu Kush Himalaya” was held from November 15–16 2018 under the auspices of: ICIMOD’s Regional Programmes, River Basins and Cryosphere, and Transboundary Landscapes; in association with Oxfam; the Australian government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT); Germany’s Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF); and the Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSAs). The event brainstormed on the opportunities and challenges in deepening transboundary cooperation and the workable factors and conditions needed to achieve this; it also explored the roles and ways on how stakeholder networks, dialogue platforms, the private sector and the civil society could advance such a concept. The workshop brought together more than 100 participants from over 20 countries and provided an opportunity for donors, lawmakers, civil servants, researchers and policymakers to share their experiences in the context of river-basin management, cross-border landscape approaches, and regional cooperation. The overall set of recommendations stressed on the following issues: harnessing greater political commitment from countries; accessing and using regional data and information for decision-making on regional cooperation; adopting a strategic approach to raise awareness and capacity building in communicating the win-wins of transboundary cooperation; assessing risks for the long-term interest of the business sector; and finally, on the perils of non-action in countering climate change, as this would have a negative impact on sociocultural resilience and sustainable economic development in the HKH.

## Key Messages

1. Learning from transboundary conservation and cooperative efforts in the HKH within South Asia and elsewhere provides an actionable basis to secure political commitment on linking the key elements of river-basin and transboundary landscape approaches.
2. A synergy between river-basin and transboundary landscape approaches can bring greater conceptual clarity on how a synergistic pathway can lead to resilience building by contributing to food, water, energy, and livelihood security. The stakeholders’ engagement and matching of their priorities with the overarching needs can complement the process to achieve a refined approach to river-basin and landscape management.
3. A clear communications strategy encompassing science and the partnership dividends generated by institutions in the HKH is an important point of reference for policymakers. Such a strategy, if backed up by credible data, knowledge, and information, contributes strategically to the decision-making processes, and can facilitate the involvement of civil society in data generation, management, and dissemination.



# Introduction – Why Cooperate?

Does transboundary cooperation matter? In the international experience, achieving sustainable development, as outlined by the 2030 UN agenda on sustainable development goals (SDGs), requires a "...paradigm shift in international development cooperation...". It is thus implied that transboundary cooperation has been largely ignored in the pursuit of ambitious SDGs. In a 2016 policy brief on development cooperation, one definition has it that the cooperative relationships amongst countries ought to be "based on cooperative and non-hierarchical relationships between international partners...[and] should be respectful of countries' sovereignty in defining and steering national development strategies".

Such conditions can be replicated for countries within the HKH. However, the challenge lies in aligning national goals with those that focus on achieving shared developmental milestones.

For South Asia, especially for the HKH region, this becomes even more of a challenge given the multitude of development issues and opportunities. As shown in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Report (HIMAP), the HKH shows promise in heading towards a sustainable future where "an emphasis on...cooperative efforts will allow...people to prosper" (Wester et al. 2019).

In the light of these factors, the goal of the workshop was to focus on common grounds of synergy and then link and strengthen regional networks to further address policy needs of landscapes and river basins. A structured look at some of the expected outputs of the workshop is listed below:

- a) Explore common priority actions to strengthen regional cooperation in the HKH;
- b) Identify possible areas of synergy between the river-basin and transboundary landscape approaches to deliver greater impacts in influencing better regional cooperation in the HKH;
- c) Strengthen the networking of regional member countries (RMCs) in the area of regional cooperation through existing institutional mechanisms, and explore new procedures;
- d) Explore further the policy, science and practice aspects that can help promote agreements and ownership for innovations to be tested for upscaling/outscaling in the future; and
- e) Draw the attention of global and regional institutions, as well as donors, towards the HKH's experience in transboundary cooperation and the opportunities it presents for greater regional cooperation.



# Bridging of Boundaries – Setting the Stage



The move towards a strategic dialogue that bridges stakeholders and institutions across countries is provided by the discourse on adaptation measures in river basins and transboundary landscapes, which is also reflected by multilateral agencies like the United Nations (UN). For example, in 2016, an event was held by the UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) to contribute to further regional cooperation for a “successful and effective implementation of the 2030 agenda”.

The 2030 agenda on SDGs mirrors the strategic objectives which ICIMOD too serves to fulfil in the regional member countries that it works in. The HKH is a source of 10 major Asian river systems. It is also depended on by around 240 million people living in the immediate mountainous regions, and an additional 1.65 billion living in the river basins. Given the critical nature of rivers and the landscapes they embody, integration, policy coherence, strengthened knowledge-generation capacities and peer learning are important indicators for achieving the goals of sustainable development.

The interlinkages that exist within these systems also exist within the programmes at ICIMOD – the areas of focus for both the river basins and transboundary landscapes are largely on climate change, water and biodiversity security, and environmental governance and its associated impacts. The focus on landscapes is by way of critical inputs in the context of conservation and development. ICIMOD’s strategic objectives align with those of international policy dialogues such as the SDGs pertaining to SDG 6 (water and sanitation) and SDG 15 (life on land).

The need to lay emphasis on transboundary cooperation was reflected in the presentations made by regional programme managers Arun Bhakta Shrestha (River Basins and Cryosphere, ICIMOD) and Rajan Kotru (Transboundary Landscapes) during the opening session of the workshop. Shrestha, while highlighting the contributions of river-basin resources, explained that although a number of treaties on water have been operational, challenges continue in sectors like hydropower, and in terms of institutional capacities. Kotru spoke of the relevance of the landscape programme, citing that various successes have been achieved by way of integrated conservation efforts and targeted resilience-building interventions. The common strand that emerged from both the presentations was that greater harmonization is required in research protocols, along with greater coordination between governance mechanisms and institutions across sectors and borders. Setting common management objectives and matching targeted investments were shown as the way forward for bridging boundaries.

## Key Messages

1. Learning from transboundary conservation and cooperative efforts in the HKH within South Asia and elsewhere provides an actionable basis to secure political commitment on linking the key elements of river-basin and transboundary landscape approaches.

The earliest proof of transboundary cooperation efforts can be traced back to the 18th century. Some of these culminated in historic accords such as the Krakow Protocol of 1924 (Vasilijević et al., 2015). In Asia, collaborative efforts saw the establishment of marine reserves in Malaysia and the Philippines (pg. 5, Ibid). However, the present-day collaborative efforts have been offset by the competing agendas of the countries in the region, mainly because of a history of transboundary conflict.

A session of the workshop was designed to focus on these overarching issues, along with the other factors that hinder transboundary cooperation. A few questions posed to the participants were:

*What are the lessons that have been learnt from effective transboundary collaboration?*

*How can these lessons be adapted to the HKH region to harness emerging opportunities?*

From the group discussions, it became evident that the HKH has to be subjected to a realistic assessment – primarily by compiling all the local efforts that are in play, and then to build on these to realize what knowledge gaps exist. And these require efforts that are more technical in nature. The consensus was that a “water-alone” approach, as suggested by one of the discussion groups, is limited, and so, associated benefits have also got to be factored in. The discussions that followed focused on a number of factors: the identification and management of shared resources; understanding individual country’s needs so that they can be linked to regional goals; and overall technical support.

Elaborating on the need for technical support, it was suggested that the area of navigation held a huge potential in the mountainous regions of Bhutan, Nepal and Northeast India where there is a “vast water network for transportation”. It was stated that if tributaries were connected to larger waterbodies, freight transport would become more cost-effective for landlocked countries like Nepal. Another area of focus was on shared resources like fishery. A group suggested that since fishery is a key factor in livelihood generation in the region – host to vital species such as hilsa and mahseer – there should be an emphasis on the shared benefits that fishing offers for the communities living in Bangladesh and India, or in India and Nepal. It was pointed out, as an example, that poor regulations have led to the decline in the population of the golden mahseer, classified as one of the “Big 3 Aquatic Fauna”. Thus, it was observed that the conservation measures in this area should focus on greater cooperation between the fishery agencies and the policymakers.





And these conservation issues, it was suggested, could be addressed by arriving at bilateral and even multilateral agreements. Moreover, it was felt that the ambit of such issues has to be widened in terms of public policy, to include factors such as health and education. It was recommended that the way forward for landscapes and river basins was through a negotiated approach, including public consultations between multiple users and stakeholders which take into account land use, water management, biodiversity conservation, economic development, and sociocultural needs.<sup>1</sup>

It was also stated that the adverse outcomes of non-cooperation in these instances need to be evaluated and understood. It was identified that this could be done through a preliminary knowledge-gap analysis supported by good case studies from communities. Good stories are essential in taking this forward.

### **Action Areas**

The participants recommended the formation of a working group of expert members, government officials, scientists and advisors from the HKH in order to collate existing peer-reviewed work, white papers and grey literature on topics relevant to transdisciplinary adaptation and transboundary cooperation. Furthermore, the working group would assess scenarios and the risks of inaction, as well as play a role in the facilitation of regional dialogues. On the functioning principles of the group, the participants suggested that for further deliberations, ICIMOD could be a nodal agency. It was also put forth that the conditions for being part of such agreements could be kept binding as well as open-ended, based on the available expertise and the demand from different “communities of practice”, i.e., the decision makers, community members, and other relevant parties.

2. A synergy between river-basin and transboundary landscape approaches can bring greater conceptual clarity on how a synergistic pathway can lead to resilience building by contributing to food, water, energy and livelihood security. The stakeholders’ engagement and matching of their priorities with the overarching needs can complement the process to achieve a refined approach to river-basin and landscape management.

Managing a combined river basin–landscape strategy requires inputs from local communities and some key stakeholders which are increasingly involved in shaping land use processes and outcomes. As the participants suggested, this calls for a process that includes public consultation between multiple users and stakeholders which takes into account land use, water management, bio-diversity conservation, economic development, and socio-cultural needs.

A possible means of doing this is through reframing the approach, i.e., by “‘Mak[ing] the Shift’ to a rights based approach<sup>2</sup> at the center of local agendas” (UCLG 2019). The inclusion of communities must be embedded in the understanding that a “rights-based approach” (ibid.) is an important step in the implementation of broader SDGs. The overall interventions, as suggested by the participants, should largely focus on building capacities to access products, technologies, and markets.

<sup>1</sup> For further clarity, look at Key Message 2.

<sup>2</sup> For further clarity, please see: [https://www.academia.edu/245075/Setting\\_Higher\\_Goals\\_Rights\\_and\\_Development\\_-\\_Trade\\_Offs\\_and\\_Challenges\\_in\\_Implementing\\_a\\_Rights\\_Based\\_Approach\\_to\\_Development](https://www.academia.edu/245075/Setting_Higher_Goals_Rights_and_Development_-_Trade_Offs_and_Challenges_in_Implementing_a_Rights_Based_Approach_to_Development)

And this approach should fit in a larger framework that stresses on more synergy between river basins and landscapes. In this regard, the participants felt that greater conceptual clarity was essential. On the topic of how this framework could be synergized, the larger opinion was to develop a public consultation method through which the multiple users and stakeholders in upstream and downstream, as well as across sectors and borders, could be involved. This, it was stated, could lead to adopting the inclusive rights-based approach, and thus, to greater synergy.

However, in order to see to it that all the players in this consultation process are made accountable, the discussions pointed out that an enhanced ownership level should be secured at all levels of government with regard to policy formulation and financing. It was also recommended that the formation of common forums could enhance the collaboration between the transboundary actors in river basins and landscapes. In addition:

- Community engagement could be improved in terms of the planning, implementation, monitoring and capacity-building processes. And awareness packages for communities could be further customized depending on specific needs.
- The scope of multilateral forums could be widened to tackle conservation and development issues; and in order to ensure that the process is wholesome, all the stakeholders, including governments and local communities, should be an integral part.

The understanding was that such an exercise should yield critical inputs on land use, water management, biodiversity conservation, economic development, and sociocultural needs. A similar approach exists in the tracking and implementation of SDGs in a process called VNR (Voluntary National Review) (Fukuda-Parr 2018). The role of consultation with local and regional governments (LRGs) is crucial in the preparation of VNR. But this inclusive mechanism has to be carried out efficiently. For example, a recent assessment found that Bhutan's local governments were the least consulted in the VNR process. This is an important indicator, as one of the groups noted that enhanced ownership at all levels of government with regard to policy formulation and financing would lead to strengthened collaboration.

## Action Areas

From the discussions, what emerged was an immediate need for clarity on a possible framework. While the participants did touch upon other factors that would contribute to cooperative activities, the need for a governing body was made clear. As outlined in the SDG 6 report titled "Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation", "Establishing some form of institutional coordination is critical to ensuring that the arrangements for transboundary water cooperation are implemented effectively." (UN 2018.) Thus, in order to replicate this approach in the HKH, it would be essential to:

- Firstly, focus on the level of linkages between the participating countries as well as the various communities that take part in this framework. The approaches have to be varied since some problems require a unidirectional approach, while some others have to be tackled multidirectionally. A review of some immediate issues in the region would give a clue as to the type of interactions that are required. This factor is of such vital importance that the UN considers a "joint body, mechanism or commission" as a key criterion for determining whether or not an agreement or an arrangement is operational (Ibid.).
  - Secondly, the various stakeholders from communities and governments should be included. This would impact livelihoods as well as widen the ambit of impacts on other sectors such as health and education. In interacting with the government sector, it has to be ensured that the local governments too are taken into consideration. This can be done by building the capabilities of people in landscapes/river basins so that they can identify common points of interest, technologies, markets and other mechanisms which would guarantee greater integration. As one group suggested, a blueprint could be prepared that outlines strategies for livelihood enhancement. For this, case studies on best practices, along with funding mechanisms and the use of scalable technologies, should be considered.
3. A clear communications strategy encompassing science and the partnership dividends generated by institutions in the HKH is an important point of reference for policymakers. Such a strategy, if backed up by credible data, knowledge, and information, contributes strategically to the decision-making processes, and can facilitate the involvement of civil society in data generation, management, and dissemination.

There is richness in the information that is being produced in the HKH. While the participants emphasized on political commitment, it was also found that technical support plays a vital role wherein data and information are accessed easily. As acknowledged by many at the workshop, the release of a landmark report like the “Hindu Kush Himalaya Monitoring and Assessment Programme” (HIMAP), coordinated by ICIMOD, is a long-term science-policy initiative. The topics of the HIMAP report range from biodiversity, disaster-risk reduction, and adaptation, to gender and environmental governance while also carrying out a thorough assessment of climate change impacts on the natural resource bodies in the HKH. For example, a chapter focuses on future scenarios and adaptive pathways in the HKH towards the end of the century. One of these scenarios draws attention to “two potential pathways for the HKH – large-scale sustainable development investment with regional cooperation, and bottom-up investment with local and national cooperation” (Wester et al., 2019).

The participants stated that such findings are crucial in building strategic political alliances. As one member pointed out, such information can be taken forward to influence business practices. It was pointed out that mapping of assets that are prone to risk in the HKH can not only create awareness, but also lead to the opening up of alternative and creative intervention and investment avenues. For this purpose, it was emphasized that the inclusion of the private sector is essential – companies and other private-sector entities can undertake risk-exposure studies as well as map out assets.

### Action Areas

It was recommended that along with political commitment, it is essential to share and access data and information resources in order to ensure the availability of robust and timely data during the decision-making process. The formation of a working group was mooted which could look at win-win situations and success stories on information sharing, and these can be replicated at the regional, national and multinational levels.

- For example, during the workshop, successful stories of transboundary cooperation were cited – such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). The ICPDR arranges a yearly event called the Danube Day, where member countries jointly celebrate the river basin and the services it provides. These celebrations see communities interacting at riverside meetings, while educational events are also held for schoolchildren (ICPDR 2018). It was mentioned that success stories from the HKH also need to be replicated – a Bhutanese delegate cited the example of an Indo-Bhutan collaborative effort in conserving wildlife in the Manas National Park, Assam, India. This collaborative exercise has resulted in an increase in the number of wildlife in the Manas sanctuary. The place, known as the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area, is now regarded as a “model for international conservation” (Ghosh 2018).

Along with this, the other key areas of focus that came under discussions were:

- The need for participatory research action involving multidisciplinary teams in order to enhance the capacity of the local communities
- Designating and developing technical expertise for joint research and for the building up of a knowledge base.
- A mapping of both risk-prone businesses and assets. This will influence future investment opportunities, a necessary prerequisite in a region where the resources are becoming finite. Such a transboundary cooperative exercise is sure to yield positive results. The mapping will also contribute to the discourse of scenario planning involving the research community and the civil society.



# Looking Forward

## From Theory to Collaborative Practice

The need for collaboration in transboundary landscapes and river basins is to fulfil the vision of a progressive and prosperous HKH. This requires a merger of two approaches – epistemological and practical. This also means learning from successful models such as the Manas National Park. Furthermore, a synergistic approach can only be achieved by establishing linkages: in practice, through the establishment of cross-country working groups; and in theory, through the exploration of various multidirectional approaches that are required to tackle the unique problems of the HKH.

To turn this vision into reality, there ought to be deep political commitment, along with clear technical support within a regional framework. Utilising “...globally available technologies and knowledge...” (Wester et al. 2019) could be of use. In support of the political process, there should be the formalization of a technical body that builds on findings from research initiatives such as HIMAP which lays out the “cost of non-action” – this would cover the expected impacts on ecosystems. Simultaneously, a sociocultural and economic evaluation should be carried out. This would also include mapping and gathering of the evidence of benefits in strategic transboundary cooperation.

Activities would still need to focus on large-scale multidisciplinary research initiatives. Although the impetus for such a measure exists in the HKH, moving from a space of theoretical understanding to concrete actions on the ground requires more coordination. Efforts in sharing water resources between countries, or managing of human–wildlife conflicts, call for a slightly different approach. As discussed in some of the groups, such an engagement requires governance that looks at adaptive and iterative solutions on the ground. As mentioned before, a “water-alone” or “landscape-alone” approach is limited in its capacity. The realization of associated benefits would also mean that some cases would require that the centrepiece of attention be not on humans, but rather on conservation of ecosystems and waterbodies. As acknowledged by the participants, this requires a tremendous level of political will.



# Areas of Collaboration – Low-hanging Fruits?

The participants at the workshop suggested that in order to kick-start such a process, the strategy should be focused on the low-hanging fruits. It is essential that realistic and smaller goals are set in place. Set against a realistic time frame, the process would be refined by bringing the relevant actors to the table, whether from academia or other spheres. A combination of these actors could help in establishing a community of diverse stakeholders wherein learning becomes a shared activity.



Furthermore, as suggested during one of the sessions, this community of practitioners would set a precedent to encouraging ownership at all levels of government. This will be supported by the number of opportunities that are already emerging in the HKH with regard to potential collaborative areas. Along with an increase in the availability of water resources, trade potential, community-based institutions and non-farm-based livelihoods are emerging as some key areas of focus.

## Action Priorities

The inclusion of the private sector is crucial, especially in the context of the developing countries of the HKH. The need to include the private sector within the framework results from the fact that the valuation done by private companies of assets could translate into a working partnership. In this partnership, research would “guide” investors to park funds in exposed/at-risk assets. As suggested by an expert during the forum, a list of top 20 companies/corporates could be prepared; the responsibility of these companies would be to map HKH assets and identify opportunities for investment. These linkages with the private sector can feed into joint-research initiatives as well.

Above all, a successful transdisciplinary and transboundary effort would entail the recognition of the tremendous number of opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. There are many countries in the HKH with strong technological sectors within their economies that can contribute positively to this collaborative effort. However, this would require a combination of small steps as well as extensive scenario mapping which recognizes critical areas. The prioritization of areas such as power, communication and infrastructure in the river-basin landscape needs to be a process, as one participant put it, whereby “both bottom-up and top-down approaches” are adopted. In addition, this new framework needs to embrace creativity in order to accommodate the divergent views among countries and communities. Looking forward, this indeed is the right time for a call to action in the entire HKH region.

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# Annexure 1: Concept Note



## BRIDGING BOUNDARIES

Strengthening Regional Cooperation  
Across Transboundary River Basins and  
Landscapes in the Hindu Kush Himalaya  
(HKH Transboundary Cooperation – 2018)

15–16 November 2018, Kathmandu, Nepal

ICIMOD

FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE



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## 1. Objectives

The consultative workshop will help strengthen existing transboundary mechanisms and networks to support the social, economic, and environmental pillars of sustainable development. In doing so, it will explore possibilities for further regional cooperation. Specifically, the consultation workshop aims to:

1. Understand key challenges and opportunities in relation to transboundary cooperation for sustainable management of landscapes and river basins, particularly in areas of climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, water-energy-food security, development opportunities, and biodiversity conservation.
2. Identify priority actions for mainstreaming regional cooperation through approaches that enhance upstream-downstream relationships and integrate communities and ecosystems across boundaries.
3. Identify opportunities that regional and global frameworks and agreements provide to better synergize transboundary landscape and river basin approaches for regional cooperation and sustainable development in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH).
4. Understand policy influencing mechanisms for addressing emerging challenges and identify opportunities for bringing policy evidences from community to regional and global fora.

During the event, researchers will discuss the state of scientific knowledge on river basin and landscape management. Practitioners, policy makers, experts, and natural resource governance specialists will look at good practices and policy concerns related to functional institutional mechanisms that enable regional cooperation (e.g. for managing disasters, habitat fragmentation, poverty, adaptation, and mitigation). The workshop will also prioritize actions to implement recommendations made by the Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMAP) Science Policy Forum held prior to this event on 14 November.

## 2. Expected Outputs

ICIMOD and its regional partners will explore opportunities to strengthen regional cooperation. The workshop will:

- Explore common priority actions to strengthen regional cooperation in the HKH.
- Identify possible areas of synergy between river basin and transboundary landscape approaches to deliver greater impacts in influencing better regional cooperation in the HKH.
- Strengthen networking of regional member countries (RMCs) on the subject of regional cooperation through existing institutional mechanisms and explore new mechanisms.

- Explore further policy, science and practice aspects that can help promote agreements and ownership for innovations to be tested for upscaling/outscaling in future.
- Draw attention of the global and regional institutions, and donors towards HKH's experience of transboundary cooperation and the opportunities it presents for greater regional cooperation.

### 3. Who will participate?

This International Consultation Workshop will provide a forum for sharing cross-continental best practices between donors, lawmakers, civil servants, regional think tanks, market actors, and civil society. The participants will share experiences and lessons learned in the context of river basin management, cross-border landscape approach, and regional cooperation. While researchers will discuss the state of scientific knowledge with regard to river basin and landscape management, practitioners, policy makers, experts, and natural resource governance specialists will look at good practices and policy concerns with respect to functional institutional mechanisms for regional cooperation. The expected number of external participants is around 100. Close to 20 senior professionals from ICIMOD will form the core group.

### 4. Event Location

The proposed international event will take place at the ICIMOD headquarters in Kathmandu so that focused discussions can be organized involving ICIMOD professionals and resource persons from all eight regional member countries.



## 5. Format

The interactive workshop will comprise presentations on international experiences, selected thematic presentations and experiences from the HKH region. The workshop will also include panel discussions and group-work based brainstorming sessions moderated by experienced professionals. These sessions will help distil knowledge and experiences and pave the way for forward-looking actions. The first day's discussions will focus on common key questions related to four specific objectives. On the second day, the groups will converge to deliver common priority actions on taking forward transboundary cooperation in the HKH and strengthening regional cooperation. The policy-practice-science recommendations will be incorporated the proceedings and disseminated widely. The conference design/format will be prepared in collaboration with key stakeholders such as focal ministries and key partners. A market place will also be organized during the two-day event where participants/institutions can present their knowledge products.

## 6. Event Partners

The event is supported by The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Oxfam through Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA); the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia; and the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF). Three ICIMOD regional programmes: Transboundary Landscapes, River Basins, and Mountain Knowledge and Action Networks will jointly organize the workshop.

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## 7. Background

The HKH is well known for its cultural, biological, aesthetic, and geo-hydrological values. It comprises a vast complex of hills, valleys, plateaus, and mountains and contains some of the world's tallest peaks, and more than 60,000 km<sup>2</sup> of glaciers and 760,000 km<sup>2</sup> of snow cover. These snow and ice reserves represent a massive store of freshwater, providing resources for energy, tourism, and food production, among many other regional needs. The region's 10 major river basins— the Amu Darya, Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Salween, Tarim, Yangtze, and Yellow—connect upstream and downstream areas in terms of trade, culture, communication, and resource management. Over 39% of the region falls under protected areas, and four of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots are located in the

HKH region. The region harbours a wide range of ecosystems which provide numerous services in terms of climate regulation, as well as the provisioning of water, food, and biodiversity (Chettri et al. 2008; Sharma et al. 2010), directly and indirectly to 1.9 billion people throughout Asia, including 240 million people who live in the mountains and hills of the HKH region.

International experiences show that improved sustainable development outcomes could be achieved with shared management of HKH resources. Regional collaboration around shared resources could lead to better management given the magnitude of challenges, particularly in countries highly exposed and susceptible to natural hazards and climate change impacts. Globally, several fora and efforts – such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), and by GIZ – are underway at regional scales. These efforts value the future of life on Earth and share a vision of a world where transboundary cooperation fosters trust among sovereign nations to overcome ideological, political, cultural, and historical barriers; tackle conflicts over natural resources; reduce migration pressures; and promote human wellbeing. Initiatives such as TROSA promote transboundary cooperation at the community level.

ICIMOD has been engaging with river basin and transboundary landscape management approaches to work across borders and achieve shared goals. The Centre's river basin approach takes into account a range of concerns – monitoring and assessment of water resources, water-induced disaster risk management, and climate change impacts and resilience building with a particular focus on the poor and vulnerable. Our engagements in river basins have shown that integrated water resource management and nexus approaches are essential. The management and sustainable use of water and land resources for livelihoods, the impacts on environment, and the pressing need for disaster risk reduction and management of water related hazards in river basins must be taken into consideration. Approaches to address upstream-downstream linkages as well as the links between natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods have ramifications for the prosperity and stability of the entire region and beyond.

There are many examples of landscape level transboundary conservation initiatives in HKH. These initiatives have been implemented in the Terai Arc Landscape, the Kangchenjunga Landscape, the Sacred Himalayan Landscape, and the Kailash Sacred Landscape in India and Nepal. Most of these landscapes are home to the last remaining natural forests, alluvial grasslands, and subtropical deciduous forests in the

Himalaya, and these extend beyond country borders. Based on past learning, and in order to make transboundary cooperation work in the future, the focus needs to be on the following:

1. Increase capacity of managers and community workers to effectively manage landscapes and river basins
2. Establish a science-based knowledge foundation by accurately generating information on water governance and biological resources for informed decision making.
3. Create sustainable funding mechanisms to manage transboundary conservation and development at scale.
4. Distribute the benefits of balanced development in ways that reach the poorest and most disadvantaged communities.

Existing institutional mechanisms to deliver outcome-oriented transboundary cooperation are still being put in place and strengthened. Given the experience of ICIMOD in last decade or so it is also generally recognized that transboundary cooperation needs to go beyond the notion of cooperation through treaties to a more dynamic view of transboundary cooperation as an on-going and non-linear process in which state and non-state actors establish, challenge, modify and legitimize multi-layered governance structures.



## 8. Rationale

The River Basins and Cryosphere, and Transboundary Landscape programmes at ICIMOD have redefined conservation and development perspectives through multi-stakeholder engagements. They have facilitated the formation of regional cooperation frameworks and South-South dialogue Regional Cooperation Frameworks and South-South dialogues – e.g. Upper Indus Basin Network, Koshi DRR Knowledge Hub, Intergovernmental Steering Committees, and National Coordination Committees. These are essential to forging of collective new solutions for mitigating governance deficits, adding value at scale while securing ecosystem services, and finally enhancing both social and ecological resilience. Lessons from our efforts underline common challenges such as human-wildlife conflict, illegal wildlife and non-timber forest product (NTFP) trade, too much and too little water and temporal and spatial dimensions tagged to these, energy and other benefit sharing, and navigation. Issues that have transboundary dimensions present opportunities for cooperation beyond national boundaries to generate and share knowledge, and co-design and implement management plans. Though bilateral treaties and cross-border mechanisms do exist between countries that share physical borders as well as social, ecological, and economic concerns, they have been found to be inadequate when it comes to dealing with the complexity of challenges mentioned above.

Though the River Basins Initiative has worked at multiple scales – from community (catchment) to sub-basin and basin scales – on transboundary issues, more needs to be done to establish linkages between spatial scales in terms of understanding processes and developing solutions. The focus, among other things, is on fostering regional and basin-level dialogue which can build bases for regional cooperation and the sharing of critical information. In the present context, a river basin approach is expected to address multifaceted problems of management, particularly trade-offs between competing interests and values. While an integrated approach is key to both river basin and transboundary landscape approaches, these are often implemented in isolation. Greater benefits can be achieved if synergy can be drawn between these two approaches.

HIMAP, which is coordinated by ICIMOD, is a platform for long-term collaboration and coordination engaging a broad and diverse group of more than 350 leading researchers, practitioners, think-tanks and policy specialists working in the HKH. In this context, ICIMOD is organizing a high-level HKH Science-Policy Forum on 14 November to explore possible ways to take forward the findings of the first comprehensive assessment to influence policy and the decision making process (<http://hi-map.org/>). Hence, the international consultative workshop, Bridging Boundaries: Strengthening Regional Cooperation Across Transboundary River Basins and Landscapes in the Hindu Kush Himalaya provides a timely opportunity to envision possible mechanisms to implement HIMAP recommendations, contributing to priority actions for the enhancement of regional cooperation.

## Programme Agenda

Date/Day/Time	Topic	Method	Responsible Person(s)
14 <sup>th</sup> November	Arrival of participants and check-in (at Hotel Himalaya/hotel Radisson airport pick up by the hotel)		
15 <sup>th</sup> November	<b>DAY 1: Pick up at 08:00 AM @Hotel Radisson and 08:15 AM @Hotel Himalaya from the hotel lobby</b>		
09:00– 09:30	Registration of participants		
<b>Setting the scene</b>			
09:30–09:40	<b>Welcome remarks</b>		David Molden, ICIMOD
09:40–09:55	<b>Experiences of cooperation in River Basins and Cryosphere</b>	Presentation	Arun B Shrestha ICIMOD
09:55–10:10	<b>Experiences of cooperation in Transboundary Landscapes</b>	Presentation	Rajan Kotru ICIMOD
10:10–10:30	<b>Key messages: HKH Science Policy Forum</b> (held on 14 November 2018)	Presentation	Philippus Wester ICIMOD
Moderator: Kanchan Shrestha      Rapporteurs: Ajaz Ali and Swapnil Chaudhari			
10:30–11:00	GROUP PHOTO AND TEA/COFFEE BREAK		
11:00–11:40	<b>Signifying transboundary cooperation from local to global development targets</b>  Rapporteurs: Nisha Wagle and Binaya Pasakhala	Moderators: Srijana Joshi Rijal	Seerp Wigboldus, GLF (10 min)  Jyotiraj Patra, TROSA (10 min)  Kovács Péter, ICPDR (10 min)
11:40–13:00	Working Session I: <b>Transboundary cooperation in the HKH</b> Overall moderation by Philippus Wester and Maja Vasilijević (formation of 6 groups to address the specific questions; 6 group moderators) <b>Key questions:</b> a) Does transboundary cooperation matter? b) What are the lessons learnt for effective transboundary collaboration? c) How can it be adapted to the HKH region to harness emerging opportunities?  <b>Group presentations on the key messages</b> Session Anchor: Santosh Nepal Rapporteurs: Binu Maharjan and Pratikshya Kandel		

13:00–13:45	LUNCH BREAK					
13:45–15:15	<p>Working Session II: <b>Synergising river basins and landscapes approaches</b></p> <p>Overall moderation by <i>Mandakini Surie and Chanda Gurung</i> (formation of 6 groups to address the specific questions; 6 group moderators)</p> <p><b>Key questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How can we synergise river basin and landscape approach to achieve ecosystem and water security and serve economic and cultural needs of the people at the transboundary scale?</li> <li>b) How do we enhance lives and livelihoods – what has worked and what has not?</li> <li>c) Identifying ways to sustain ongoing momentum, what new efforts can be made?</li> </ul> <p><b>Group presentations on the key messages</b></p> <p><i>Session Anchor: Neera Shrestha Pradhan</i> <i>Rapporteurs: Saurav Pradhananga and Sunayana Basnet</i></p>					
15:15–15:35	TEA/COFFEE BREAK					
15:35–17:00	<p>Panel Discussion I: <b>Perspectives from HKH regional member countries</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Best practices for trans-boundary cooperation – triggering change</li> <li>b) How do we establish regional-, national-, and local-level linkages?</li> <li>c) What type of capacities and external support need to be updated or supported?</li> </ul> <p><b>Summing up on the key messages</b></p> <p><i>Session Anchor: Yi Shaoliang</i> <i>Rapporteurs: Dipankar Shakya and Basant Pant</i></p> </td> <td style="width: 20%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>Moderator: Eklabya Sharma, ICIMOD</i></p> </td> <td style="width: 30%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Afghanistan Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan</p> </td> </tr> </table>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Best practices for trans-boundary cooperation – triggering change</li> <li>b) How do we establish regional-, national-, and local-level linkages?</li> <li>c) What type of capacities and external support need to be updated or supported?</li> </ul> <p><b>Summing up on the key messages</b></p> <p><i>Session Anchor: Yi Shaoliang</i> <i>Rapporteurs: Dipankar Shakya and Basant Pant</i></p>	<p><i>Moderator: Eklabya Sharma, ICIMOD</i></p>	<p>Afghanistan Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan</p>
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18:00–20:00	Reception Dinner at Hotel Radisson and Book Launch					

Date/Day/ Time	Topic	Method	Responsible Person(s)
<b>16<sup>th</sup> November</b> <b>Day 2: Pick up at 08:00 AM @Hotel Radisson and 08:15 AM @Hotel Himalaya from the hotel lobby</b>			
09:30–09:40	Recap of key messages: Day 1	Presentation	<i>Rajan Kotru and Arun Shrestha</i>
09:40–11:00	<b>Panel discussion II: Perspectives from the Strategic Partners</b>		
	<p>a) Avenues where strategic partners would like to support transboundary cooperation</p> <p>b) Areas for improvement – process and practice changes</p> <p><b>Summing up on the key messages</b></p> <p><b>Session Anchor:</b> <i>Mandira Shrestha</i></p> <p><b>Rapporteurs:</b> <i>Sunita Ranabhat and Serena Amatya</i></p>	<p><b>Moderator:</b> <i>David Molden, ICIMOD</i></p>	<p><i>Mandakini Suri, DFAT</i></p> <p><i>Shantanu Mitra, DFID</i></p> <p><i>Claudia Hiepe, BMZ</i></p> <p><i>Debra Tan, China Water Risk</i></p> <p><i>Yuka Makina, FAO/Mountain Partnership</i></p> <p><i>Maja Vasiljevič IUCN</i></p> <p><i>Solveig Andresen, Norway</i></p>
11:00–11:20	TEA/COFFEE BREAK		
11:20–13:00	<b>Working Session III: Understanding and developing policy mechanisms for transboundary cooperation</b>		
	<p>Overall moderation by <i>Brij Rathore</i> and <i>Nand Kishor Agrawal</i> (formation of 6 groups to address specific questions; 6 group moderators)</p> <p><b>Key questions:</b></p> <p>a) How do we strengthen institutional mechanisms for improved cooperation?</p> <p>b) How do we sharpen stakeholder dialogue and interfaces?</p> <p>c) What are the ways to enable policies and government facets?</p> <p><b>Group presentations on the key messages</b></p> <p><b>Session Anchor:</b> <i>Clemens Kunze</i></p> <p><b>Rapporteurs:</b> <i>Nisha Wagle and Jagriti Chand</i></p>		
13:00–13:45	LUNCH BREAK		

13:45–15:15	<p>Working Session IV: <b>The way forward: solutions for river basin and landscapes integration</b></p> <p>Overall moderation by <i>Bandana Shakya</i> and <i>Sheelagh O'Reilly</i> (formation of 6 groups to address the specific questions; 6 group moderators)</p> <p><b>Key discussion points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Identify priority actions for mainstreaming regional cooperation through approaches that enhance upstream-downstream relationships</li> <li>b) Identify common priority actions to integrate people and ecosystems across boundaries</li> <li>c) Identify possible synergy arenas between river basin and transboundary landscape approaches to deliver greater impacts in influencing regional cooperation in the HKH</li> </ul> <p><b>Group presentations on the key messages</b></p> <p><i>Session Anchors: Swapnil Chaudhari, Ghulam Ali and Nishikant Gupta</i>  <i>Rapporteurs: Smita Ghimire and Deepa Basnet</i></p>		
15:15–15:35	TEA/COFFEE BREAK		
15:35–16:30	<b>Interaction with poster presenters</b>	Market Place/ Posters/ AV Display/ Installations	ICIMOD and participants
16:30–17:00	Closing ceremony		
16:30–16:45	<b>Summary</b>	Remarks	<i>Arun B Shrestha,</i> ICIMOD  <i>Rajan Kotru,</i> ICIMOD
16:45–17:00	<b>Closing remarks</b>		<i>Eklabya Sharma,</i> ICIMOD

## Annexure 2: List of Participants

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