

# Fifth Upper Indus Basin Network Regional Strategy Committee meeting

23 February 2022

## SECTION 1

### Key messages

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- The Upper Indus Basin Network (UIBN) can be an excellent example of a thriving river basin approach; it needs to focus on improving its sustainability and strengthening its activities.
- Align the network's focus with country needs and government plans, thereby ensuring buy-in from the governments of UIB countries.
- Explore how ownership and support of the government for their respective country chapters can be improved.
- Explore ways to influence decision makers to support networks and buy-in from Upper Indus Basin (UIB) countries.
- Conduct a five-year progress review of country chapters to identify priority areas and support funding decisions.
- Publish research papers focusing on sustainable issues and practices in high-level journals to influence donors in China.
- Country chapters need to focus on more integration of research outcomes to influence policy-making processes. Research should cater to the needs of the country.
- Set targets and goals for country chapters and increase regional- and country-level collaboration.
- Promote joint research across countries and encourage governments to fund such studies.

## SECTION 2

### Recap of the decisions and actions of the last Regional Strategy Committee meeting –

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**Arun Bhakta Shrestha**, Regional Programme Manager, River Basins and Cryosphere, ICIMOD

The last Regional Strategy Committee (RSC) meeting was held virtually on 27 January 2021. Below are highlights of the discussion points:

#### On the UIBN's sustainability

- It will be crucial for the UIB to receive government support.
- Form a small team at the country level to devise a strategy for the network's sustainability and share the recommendations in the next RSC meeting.
- The UIBN's future action plan needs to consider national needs and priorities.
- Careful assessment of national development and research priorities is needed to devise relevant interventions by the respective county chapter. Such interventions would help the country chapters showcase their potential as think tanks or advisory bodies to concerned government agencies.

## On strengthening the UIBN

- There is potential for the UIBN country chapters to function as a government think tank.
- The Afghanistan chapter shared the possibility of holding discussions about the UIBN with the High Council of Water, Land, and Urban Development for potential collaboration.
- The theory of change (ToC) framework could provide clarity on the future course of action for the country chapters.
- The country chapters' ToCs must align with the Sustainable Development Goals priorities of countries
- The country chapters could potentially be housed in relevant government ministries/ departments, thereby ensuring their sustainability and support to the government.

## On research and collaboration

- Special issue on the Indus Basin published in Science of the Total Environment
- Taking advantage of capacity-building opportunities available within UIBN countries can help country chapters that need such support. The China, India, and Pakistan chapters indicated the available opportunities particularly to help the Afghanistan chapter to capacitate young scientists and professionals working in relevant institutions.
- Bilateral research should gradually expand to all four UIBN countries.
- Research by UIBN members can be more impactful if it considers downstream impacts as well.
- Invite the UIBN chair to country chapter meetings to ensure coordination among the members.

### SECTION 3

## Objectives of the RSC meeting 2022

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**Naim Eqrar**, Chairperson, UIBN

- The RSC should provide strategic direction for the UIBN's sustainability. Past work has catered to policy needs, and that needs to be continued.
- Improve ownership of the country chapters, including sectorial ministry.
- Discussions on issues of shared water among UIBN countries must not take longer than two to three years considering the sensitivity of issues.

### SECTION 4

## Why regional cooperation is important in the UIB context

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**Pema Gyamtsho**, Director General, ICIMOD

- The *HKH assessment* (2019) identifies strengthening regional cooperation as one of six priority action areas.
- There are many transboundary issues where regional collaboration is required. In the case of the UIB, cooperation should include sharing the resources and benefits.
- The UIBN should explore its sustainability and look at strengthening its activities and role. The network can establish stronger upstream and downstream linkages and improve knowledge sharing.
- Transboundary cooperation is required in all river basins, and development partners are willing to support it. The RSC must focus on improving ownership and support to sustain and strengthen the network. It should also focus on advocating science- and practice-based policies.

## SECTION 5

# The UIBN's importance in promoting regional cooperation in the riparian countries

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**Naim Eqrar**, Chair, UIBN

Mountain communities in the UIB are economically disadvantaged and are vulnerable to drought, hazards, and water shortage. To sustain water resources and food production in the basin, member countries need to do quality research and look for the best solutions for water management, hazards, drought, erosion, and soil avalanches. The first step should be for the scientists to become more engaged in fostering evidence-based regional cooperation.

## SECTION 6

# Remarks from RSC members

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**M. Tayib Bromand**, Co-Coordinator, UIBN Afghanistan

- There is more scientific research being conducted on upstream and downstream linkages; however, there are limited studies on upstream and midstream areas.
- Each country has its own research capacity. Bilateral research among each country upstream and downstream is needed.
- Afghanistan needs capacity development as the ongoing political development has displaced researchers, with many discontinuing their research activities. The next step for the country chapter is to encourage such researchers to resume their work.
- Member countries must support Afghanistan with research and monitoring of glacier mass balance, water management, etc.

**Liu Shiyin**, Yunnan University in Kunming, China

To explore funding options in China, UIBN member countries must collaborate and present their most significant recent findings. One excellent example is the joint study that outlines 100 questions for the Indus Basin. We must collaborate on more specific research projects and queries on various topics.

**A.P. Dimri**, Country Chapter Coordinator, India

The country chapters are still not connected and operate independently. A platform that allows access to the information and data needed for research is also necessary, as is the integration of research studies through cooperation between country chapters. One of these activities may be a virtual MS programme offered by ICIMOD under its Himalayan University Consortium.

We need to work on short-, medium-, and long-term plans and bring in capacity building to kickstart regional cooperation.

**Muhammad Ashraf**, Country Chapter Coordinator, Pakistan

Country chapters need to be more active by strengthening their relationships and cooperation with UIB local communities and other organisations. The Pakistan chapter is creating yearly work schedules and successfully conducting our country-level activities, and we need to improve teamwork and knowledge sharing at the regional level.

We need to pay attention to the areas and communities that are rural, dispersed, have few resources, and are most affected by disasters. Creating scientific information is not the solution; best practices must be demonstrated. Since less than 1% of the population lives in the upstream community and the majority lives downstream in the Pakistan part of the UIB, our plans should include an upstream–downstream linking system for benefit sharing.

**Hina Lotia**, Adviser, UIBN Pakistan chapter

We have a nice balance of public and private sector representatives at the UIBN Pakistan chapter. This is still an issue that requires attention from other country chapters. To work on UIBN sustainability, local and regional chapters must create small committees. To plan for the future, we must use ToCs to assess what has worked and what has not.

**David Molden**, International Adviser, UIBN

It took several years for UIBN to develop from its roots in Pakistan. We must enlist the help of significant champions and stakeholders, as was done in the case of the UIBN in Pakistan, to establish upstream and downstream connectivity. Increasing the country's recognition and chapters at the policy level will take time. The other country chapters must follow the example set by the Pakistan chapter to bring in significant actors. Exploring funding opportunities in China would be helpful for regional studies. Moreover, bringing the Himalayan University Consortium into action for the UIBN's growth is an excellent idea.

**Nisar A. Memon**, Adviser, UIBN Pakistan chapter

We need to strengthen the UIBN by using the Pakistan chapter as an example. We are willing to communicate with and learn from other national chapters. To build confidence at the regional level through collaboration, communication with ICIMOD's Board of Governors members is necessary. Regional collaboration is necessary for the management of the region's resources. The country chapters should meet to discuss what can be achieved by the UIBN in 20 years.

**Pema Gyamtsho**, Director General, ICIMOD

Managing the rivers that join and divide us depends on regional collaboration. The Pakistan chapter is a good model, and we must figure out how to help the other national chapters. The best prospective areas of cooperation include wetland, rangeland, and water management, among many other possible areas of action. We are conscious of difficulties and sensitivities, and we must proceed cautiously to address them.

**Neera Shrestha**, Programme Coordinator, Koshi Basin Initiative, ICIMOD

At the country level, the UIBN should serve as a think tank to assist all UIB country governments in upholding their laws and international obligations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. The UIBN platform should support the management of multihazard disaster risk through research and preparedness interventions.

## SECTION 6

# Agenda outline, dates, and venue for the next RSC meeting and RUAM

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- Country chapters will discuss and suggest the plan.
- Next RSC meeting tentatively proposed for July/August 2022 (after 15 August)
- Next RUAM possibly in March 2023, as suggested by a Chinese member

Additional event information and materials are available at:

<https://www.icimod.org/event/regional-annual-meeting-and-strategic-committee-meeting-of-the-upper-indus-basin-network/>

Proceedings compiled by: Chimi Seldon

Rapporteurs: Ajaz Ali, Muhammad Mudassar Maqsood, Chimi Seldon

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**International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development**  
GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal  
T +977 1 5275222 | E [info@icimod.org](mailto:info@icimod.org) | [www.icimod.org](http://www.icimod.org)