

PROCEEDINGS OF THE OUTREACH EVENT ON

Mountain biodiversity and the Sustainable Development Goals

22 DECEMBER 2022

SECTION 1

Introduction

On 22 December 2022, an outreach event on mountain biodiversity and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was organised in Jhapa, Nepal. The goal was to share key national- and subnational-level research findings – based on household surveys – with the local government on issues such as the status of and trends in household-level well-being and socioeconomic priorities. The event aimed to receive feedback and also sought an appraisal of the research results, particularly at the subnational level; it also attempted to identify the opportunities that lay in store in terms of taking coherent measures related to biodiversity-friendly development interventions at the local and national levels.

The outreach event was part of a four-year research project – ‘[Mountain biodiversity and the Sustainable Development Goals: Knowledge for synergistic action](#)’ – of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the University of Bern's Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA), and research partners from Bolivia and Tanzania.

SECTION 2

About the research project

The research project was carried out from 2019–2022. Its purpose was to understand the specific challenges associated with the sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity (SDG 15) in the context of competing development goals, limited resources, and complex governance structures in Bolivia, Tanzania, and Nepal. The project was cross-scale in nature, investigating global, national, and subnational linkages between biodiversity, ecosystem services, and well-being; it was also multidisciplinary in its scope, involving ecological, social, and policy assessments. In addition, it made a comparative assessment of subnational and national results.

In this project, ICIMOD was responsible for national- and subnational-level investigations for Nepal with the objectives of generating evidence on the linkages between [biodiversity and the SDGs](#) and [identifying the co-benefits of SDG 15 and other SDGs for Nepal](#). For the subnational-level investigations, the following places were chosen: Bahundangi (Jhapa District) and Yamphudin (Taplejung District); and the Ramsar site of Mai Pokhari (Ilam District).

Key messages/ takeaways

- Biodiversity and ecosystem services contribute significantly to the achievement of SDGs in Nepal but they are on a decline across the country.
- To protect biodiversity and to ensure that Nepal's diverse natural resources and habitats can continue to support the country's people and wildlife for generations to come, it is important for policymakers and planners to consider the long-term impacts of development actions and balance the needs of nature and humans.
- There are significant trade-offs between the interventions aimed at achieving certain SDGs (related to food security, access to energy, and infrastructure development) and the interventions of conservation-specific SDGs. These trade-offs are a result of uncoordinated efforts from different tiers of the government to improve socioeconomic indicators without considering the interactive effect of one SDG on another.
- Improving the mechanism of policy coordination between the different tiers of the government in Nepal and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different government sectors and community-based organisations can help address the issue of trade-offs to achieve effective conservation and development outcomes.
- The mandatory allocation of a certain proportion of the budget to biodiversity conservation, preferably through community-based interventions, can be a powerful policy pathway for local biodiversity development.
- There is a need for comprehensive research on Nepal's cryosphere and grassland ecosystems where a significant portion of its mountain communities reside; these communities are vulnerable to the effects of global changes, particularly those related to climate and land use.
- The establishment of local governments provides an opportunity to solve conservation-related conflicts by involving local

communities. For example, the responsibility of providing compensation to the victims of human-wildlife conflicts could be transferred to the local governments who can work in coordination with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC). This could solve the issue of delayed compensations and make compensation more accessible to the rural communities.

- The exploitation of nature in recent times has been built upon a flawed understanding of what progress really means; it has now become necessary to redefine progress in terms of the sustainability quotient and align it with the limits of growth. In the case of Nepal, this can be done by building a roadmap tailored to the country's needs which lays emphasis on the sustainable use and promotion of its rich and unique natural and cultural resources.

SECTION 4

Expert's views

Nakul Chettri, Regional Programme Manager, Transboundary Landscapes, ICIMOD, delivered the opening remarks. He expressed concern over the dwindling state of ecosystems all over the world and in Nepal, and went on to describe its repercussions on human well-being and on the national and international commitments pledged by Nepal, including the SDGs. He hoped that the outreach event would shed light on the issues and concerns surrounding biodiversity in Nepal, thereby prompting discussions on site-specific challenges and identification of opportunities for biodiversity conservation in the three locations where the research was conducted.

Graham Prescott, Scientific Coordinator of the project, University of Bern, through a prerecorded video, emphasised the importance of mountain biodiversity and its significance to the mountain communities living in developing nations like Nepal. He also stressed upon the potential that mountain biodiversity has to contribute to long-term human well-being. He hoped the event would help local, provincial, and federal stakeholders understand the importance of biodiversity for Nepal's developmental aspirations and use this understanding in policy discussions. He also hoped that the research project would go on to highlight the biodiversity, culture, and community livelihoods of the study sites in international contexts.

Biraj Adhikari, Research Fellow, ICIMOD, delivered a detailed presentation on: the introduction of the SDGs, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the key findings of the research. He informed that a review of literature on ecosystem services, and the SDGs in Nepal revealed that they contribute to the achievement of 12 SDGs directly and four SDGs indirectly, but are also declining across the country. He stated that interviews with over 60 professionals revealed that the interventions for achieving certain SDGs – those related to infrastructure development (SDG 9) and energy access (SDG 7) – have led to trade-offs in the area of biodiversity conservation. He went on to say that these observations tallied with the findings of the household surveys conducted across the three sites which largely pointed out that the impact of hydropower infrastructure, haphazard road construction, and agricultural intensification have led to negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems. In order to address these trade-offs, he said it was important to improve policy coordination and clarify the roles and responsibilities of different government sectors and community-based organisations in a collective bid to achieve effective conservation and development outcomes in Nepal.

Shisir Chamlagain, Journalist, Global Television HD, stated that site-specific issues should be given priority over global challenges such as climate change. He said that some urgent issues required attention in the case of Bahundangi. These, he said, would involve a detailed investigation into matters such as: changes in agricultural techniques and its consequences, and the linkages between riverbed mining, groundwater levels, and loss of groundwater-recharge areas due to urbanisation.

Mani Kumar Syangbo, Chair, Rong Rural Municipality, proposed certain policy pathways for biodiversity-friendly development in Nepal; these included getting the local governments to allocate a certain percentage of their budget to biodiversity conservation, developing a strategic platform for local governments to pool their resources and work collectively on conservation, limiting riverbed mining to specific areas to minimise its negative impacts, and assessing the sustainability of construction materials for National Pride Projects.

Rabin Koirala, former Member of Parliament and Chief Guest of the event, pointed out that there was a lack of information on high-altitude biodiversity, the cryosphere, permafrost, zoonotic diseases, and grassland ecosystems, and urged ICIMOD to address these gaps in its current and future research activities.

Suvash Kumar Sharma, Assistant Forest Officer, Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE), made a presentation on forestland and its uses. He also cited relevant laws and regulations related to the role of the local governments in environmental assessments and the procedures involved in the same.

Reena Darji and **Binayak Subedi**, the enumerators who were involved in the household data collection during the research period, stated that they learnt much from the local communities they surveyed and understood why the documentation of local perceptions on biodiversity was necessary for the identification of site-specific problems in order to find pathways to solve them. Both expressed their gratitude for the opportunity that allowed them to better understand the synergy between biodiversity and human well-being.

Shankar Luitel, Green Generation Nepal, and **Arjun Karki**, Chair, Mechinagar-4, expressed their concern about the lack of long-term commitment by the government to compensate the human–elephant conflict victims in Bahundangi. They also pointed to the need for amending the policy related to compensation. In this regard, Suvash Kumar Sharma from MoFE made a commitment to coordinating with Green Generation Nepal and local governments to make sure that compensations related to human–elephant conflicts were dealt with effectively.

Leela Bhattarai, Vice Chairperson, Province 1 Homestay Network, underlined the importance of involving all the relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. She also said that it was important to integrate conservation and ecotourism. On the issue of empowering women in the ecotourism sector, she requested the local representatives to work together to provide more opportunities for women. She also urged ICIMOD to continue with its support and assistance to capacity-building activities in the fields of ecotourism and biodiversity conservation.

Purna Loksam, Vice Chair, Province 1 Planning Commission, delivered the closing remarks by expressing his appreciation for the comprehensive research and presentations on the SDGs, biodiversity and conservation, and their relevance to Nepal. He also stressed upon the importance of having knowledge-sharing platforms as a means to disseminate information to the relevant stakeholders on issues related to biodiversity and conservation; such platforms, he said, would enable biodiversity and conservation themes to gain traction at the policy level.

Way forward

The outreach event identified these follow-up steps to be taken up by ICIMOD:

- Incorporation of the suggestions from the participants into the research methodology and findings so as to give a more complete picture of the issues and concerns surrounding biodiversity and conservation in Nepal
- Preparation of a policy brief on the role of biodiversity in achieving SDGs in Nepal, with support from all the participants present at the outreach event
- Handover of the ward-level data collected from all the three sites to the local government



ICIMOD gratefully acknowledges the support of its core donors: the Governments of Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Sweden, and Switzerland.

© ICIMOD 2023

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal
T +977 1 5275222 | E info@icimod.org | www.icimod.org