

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

Leveraging the prospects and potential of OECMs for transboundary cooperation in the Hindu Kush Himalaya

Co-organised by International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HAC for N & P)

KEY MESSAGES

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) provide opportunities to recognize the efforts and rights of diverse stakeholders including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), encompass a diversity of conservation categories, create sharing and learning opportunities, and promote conservation cooperation among countries at a regional level.

There are several opportunities for regional cooperation and transboundary OECMs across the eastern, central and western Himalayas of the Hindu Kush Himalaya region.

Some of the barriers and challenges include conflicts and contestations, at national and community levels, limited awareness about OECMs, and limited recognition of efforts by IPLCs in conservation.

A regional organization like ICIMOD can play an important role in advancing the OECM agenda in regional and global forums and in bridging the science-policy-practice interface. ICIMOD can also provide a platform for regional alliances, fundraising, capacity building, and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

Collaboration with the CBD Secretariat and other global partners remains crucial for advancing policy and practice enablers in the region, maintaining alignment with the interests of the CBD.

SECTION I

Background

ICIMOD, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HAC for N & P) jointly organized a regional consultation on “Leveraging the prospects and potential of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) for transboundary cooperation in the Hindu Kush Himalaya” on 01 August 2024 at ICIMOD Headquarters, Kathmandu, Nepal. Around 70 participants from 14 countries representing governments of Hindu Kush Himalayan and South Asian countries, youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and representatives of community-based organisations contributed to the workshop.

The workshop was graced by Honourable Ain Bahadur Shahi Thakuri, Minister of Forests and Environment, Government of Nepal. He congratulated ICIMOD for leading the South Asia workshop and reiterated the Ministry’s support to ICIMOD for achieving its mission of sustainable mountain development in the region.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted during the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022 as per CBD/COP/DEC/15/4, is a global framework to achieve the 2050 vision of a world living in harmony with nature (CBD, 2022). The framework aims to catalyse, enable, and galvanize urgent and

transformative actions to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. This implies putting nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet by conserving and sustainably using biodiversity and ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources. The KMGBF has four goals and 23 action-oriented global targets for 2030 (CBD, 2022).

Action Target 3 calls to ensure and enable at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) by 2030, recognizing Indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

OECMs have been regarded important to achieve Target 3 of the GBF. OECMs are defined as “A geographically defined area other than Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values” (CBD, 2010). OECMs are areas other than protected areas which are managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term biodiversity conservation.

Many areas outside protected areas are rich in biodiversity and could be transboundary in nature. Transboundary Conservation Cooperation in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (TCC-HKH) is an effort between ICIMOD and SCBD under Peace and Biodiversity Dialogue Initiative (PBDI) to identify transboundary areas rich in biodiversity outside of protected areas, explore the potential of such areas as OECMs, and initiate regional dialogue for transboundary cooperation. The main objective of the TCC-HKH is to strengthen regional cooperation among the countries and stakeholders, including organisations and networks working for conservation in the region, by identifying and promoting transboundary OECMs in the region, advocate for policy uptake, and establish a regional OECM network.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The workshop aimed to support the governments, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, youth networks, non-governmental and community-based organisations in co-identifying and discussing the potential transboundary OECMs in the HKH. It aimed to explore the opportunities, challenges, and possibilities for transboundary OECMs in the region.

SECTION II

Proceedings

SESSION I: INTRODUCTION AND CASE STUDY FROM THE REGION

The workshop, moderated by Ms Kunzang of ICIMOD, was kicked off by Ms Srabani Roy. Ms Roy welcomed the participants from 14 countries and gave a background about the TCC project and the objective of the workshop. Dr Bandana Shakya highlighted ICIMOD's work in restoring and regenerating landscapes in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region. She particularly emphasized the need to formally incentivize the conservation efforts of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This was followed by a technical presentation by Dr Sunita Chaudhary on “Key Biodiversity Areas as potential OECMs in the HKH”. There are a total of 102 transboundary KBAs outside the protected areas network in the region. These KBAs are situated along the borders with neighbouring countries and are rich in biodiversity. India has the highest number of these KBAs (46), followed by China (32), Myanmar (15), Bangladesh (3), Bhutan (2), Pakistan (2) Nepal (1) and Afghanistan (1). The major habitat types in these KBAs are forest, grassland, shrubland, agriculture and wetlands. Around 66 KBAs are managed by the government, followed by seven KBAs jointly managed by community and government, four managed by communities, and two by the private sector. While the management of the remaining KBAs still needs to be explored.

Case studies from the Eastern Himalaya: There were two case studies from the Eastern Himalaya. The first was on the community-based conservation approach for red panda in eastern Nepal, where the Panchthar-Illam-Taplejung (PIT) corridor was envisioned for conservation of the species and its habitat. The case study highlighted the restoration efforts by Red Panda Network Nepal (RPN) and the local communities.

The second entitled 'Monastery Forests in West Sikkim as Potential Transboundary OECM' was presented by Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE). The case study highlighted the importance of such monastery forests for biodiversity conservation and their potential as OECMs in India. Preliminary discussions with the monastery heads, the Forests and Environment Department of Government of Sikkim, and Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee are ongoing for exploring the potential of monastery forests as OECM.

Case study from Far-Eastern Himalaya: The case study from Nagaland focused on community conserved areas (CCAs) which showcased the efforts of communities in conserving biodiversity-rich areas. The case study highlighted the traditional practices and their contribution to conservation and sustainable management of resources. The need to balance conservation and livelihood was highlighted. The presentation highlighted the need for greater clarity on how benefits can flow back to communities engaged in conservation.

The case study from Myanmar focused on Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) covered aspects such as herbal conservation areas, localized rules and regulations, and the diverse traditional knowledge and practices under ICCA. In particular, it showcased the potential for a Naga sub-landscape as potential transboundary OECM, which is a key transboundary corridor between Hukaung Tiger Reserve (MM) and Namdapha TR/NP (IN) and a major connectivity landscape between the Northern Mountain Forest Complex (NMFC) and the Chin Hills. Myanmar is working with the local communities to co-manage the resources and balance people's needs with conservation outcomes.

Case study from western and central Himalaya: Two case studies were presented from the western and central Himalaya. The first from China highlighted the need to conserve biodiversity-rich areas outside of the current protected areas network. OECMs have the potential to achieve conservation of reptiles and other small vertebrates and invertebrates and recognise community efforts to conserve species and biodiversity-rich areas. Some locals volunteer as community rangers for conservation of bird and mammal species.

The case from Nepal was about the Limi valley of far-western Nepal and its potential as OECM. This biologically and culturally rich area is composed of 80% of pastureland and is home to iconic species such as Wild Yak, Tibetan Wolf, and Snow Leopard. The area has its

own indigenous management system for conservation based on Buddhism. The division of responsibilities for tax collection, and other decisions are made by the community themselves through their indigenous resource management systems. The valley has limited accessibility and lacks connectivity to markets.

SESSION II: GROUP WORK ON CO-IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING TRANSBOUNDARY OECMS IN THE HINDU KUSH HIMALAYA

Group 1: Far-Eastern Himalaya (Bangladesh, China, Myanmar)

The Far-Eastern Himalaya is rich in cultural and biological diversity. However, the region is also affected by conflict. There is also insufficient data on protected areas and other conservation areas. Issues of outmigration and loss of traditional knowledge are also significant. However, the cultural affinities and access to free movement of the IPLCs can help to minimize the conflicts among the communities. Furthermore, awareness and incentives can help in the conservation of traditional ecological knowledge to conserve forests, manage conflicts among the communities, and mitigate human-wildlife conflict.

Group 2: Eastern Himalaya (Bhutan, India, Nepal)

Wildlife management and illegal trade of natural resources are the major conservation issues in the region. The area has experienced displacement of indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs) during the designation of PAs and many therefore have a negative perception towards protected areas. Thus, OECMs could be perceived as another form of PA creation and this can be a challenge. There is a need for an awareness-raising campaigns on OECMs during assessment and implementation. There should be good coordination at the inter and intra-government levels. Sharing best practices among practitioners about OECM guidelines can help in overcoming the negative perceptions about OECMs in the region. Furthermore, recognition of the IPLCs should be the prior task and IPLCs should be consented for implementing the OECMs. The group identified the following transboundary corridors: Birpur-Koshi Tappu (India-Nepal), Naxalbari-Bahundangi (India-Nepal), monastery forests in Sikkim (India), Panchthar-Illam-Taplejung (PIT) corridor, and KBAs of Samtse District (Bhutan).

Group 3: Central Himalaya (China, India, Nepal)

The Central Himalaya is affected by border disputes. There is also a lack of awareness about OECMs, and they could be perceived as another example of fortress conservation. Research and documentation of traditional and indigenous communities and their knowledge are required for OECMs. Furthermore, transboundary communication and consultation are required with support from regional organisations like ICIMOD for transboundary collaboration. The group identified the following corridors: Basanta-Dudhwa (India-Nepal), Kailash Sacred Landscape, Thal Kedar (India), Terai Arc landscape (TAL), Dharma-Byas-Chaudas, Pulan-Limi Valley, Mansarovar, Laljhadi-Mohana-Dudhwa, Gwalek-Kedar Religious Forest, Brahmadev (Nepal).

Group 4: Western Himalaya (Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan)

The region is rich in biocultural value and biological diversity. The group identified six transboundary conservation priority sites: Kilik/Mintaka (China-Pakistan), Brughul (Afghanistan-Pakistan), Wakhan (Afghanistan-China-Pakistan), Taftan (Iran-Pakistan), Khyber Agency (Afghanistan-Pakistan) and Khunjerab National Park (China-Pakistan). However, there are challenges. Limited transboundary governance

mechanisms, lack of data, and limited resources are some of the challenges. Therefore, building transboundary cooperation and incentivizing communities with equitable benefit sharing are key for building trust and initiating cooperation for transboundary OECMs.

Group 5: Marine

(Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka)

The group raised the issue of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and remoteness to intervene in such areas for transboundary cooperation. Furthermore, identification and division of responsibilities among management authorities are lacking. The issue can be resolved by increasing coordination among the neighbouring countries, raising awareness about the concept of OECMs, and providing financial and technical support from the international community that could help in negotiation and mediation.

SESSION III: REGIONAL ALLIANCE FOR OECMs

A World Cafe with four groups was organised to discuss the regional alliance for OECMs in the HKH. The key questions were related to the need for the regional alliance, its potential role, and the priority areas of focus for the Alliance.

Question	Discussion
Group 1: What could a regional alliance for OECMs look like?	A regional alliance should be voluntary and include multiple stakeholders in coordination with I/NGOs or Inter-governmental organizations like ICIMOD.
Group 2: What is the potential role of such an Alliance?	• Technical support including monitoring and developing guidelines • Providing a platform for coordination, cooperation, and conflict resolution • Research, documentation, and publication • Ensuring good governance mechanism • Capacity building through workshops, communication and raising awareness • Exchange of best practices and fund raising
Group 3: What could be the priority work areas of the Alliance?	• Knowledge and capacity building: This includes research and documentation of the Indigenous and traditional knowledge, and capacity building of all the stakeholders involved. • Ensuring the rights of IPLCs, youth, girls and persons with disabilities and involving them in the implementation process of OECM. • Right-based financial management and resource mobilization on OECM. • Facilitate a common platform for sharing best practices for conservation and implementation of OECM. • Coordination and enabling partners to regulate the illegal wildlife trade. • Help in ensuring the nations strengthen their financial capacity in the process of implementation of OECM.
Group 4: What would be the governance mechanism for the Alliance?	• Regional alliances like SAARC, SACEP, SAWEN, or ICIMOD could deliver opportunities for regional alliances, fundraising, capacity building, and knowledge-sharing platforms. And these should be governed by a collaborative effort of all the participating nations.

SESSION IV: CLOSING SESSION

The closing session was graced by the Honourable Minister, Mr Ain Bahadur Shahi Thakuri from the Ministry of Forests and Environment, Government of Nepal. The Minister highlighted the biodiversity richness of the HKH region and expressed concern about the environmental challenges in the region. He stressed on the need for innovative approaches, strong partnerships, and regional cooperation through transboundary OECMs. He also highlighted the diverse representation of stakeholders, including youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and marginalized groups in the consultation. He reiterated the Government of Nepal's support for regional cooperation and ICIMOD's vision for a greener, inclusive, and climate-resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya. He also underlined the need for continued collaboration, resource mobilization, and the integration of traditional knowledge in conservation efforts.

Dr Bandana Shakya, Action Area Coordinator at ICIMOD, moderated the closing session and highlighted the role of intergovernmental organizations like ICIMOD in promoting OECM as a means to acknowledge the contributions of IPLCs to nature conservation. Dr Shakya also emphasized the importance of government practices involving IPLCs being inclusive, participatory, and respectful of their rights and traditional knowledge, ensuring equitable management and recognition of their contributions to biodiversity conservation.

In his closing remarks, Dr Pema Gyamtsho, Director General, ICIMOD, noted that the Earth is facing a triple planetary crisis and the countries of the region are experiencing increased risk from climate-induced disasters. As an intergovernmental organisation, ICIMOD is always committed to sharing knowledge and facilitating national and international cooperation. OECMs represents a unique opportunity for transboundary cooperation for the conservation of biodiversity. This needs cooperation and collaboration at local, national, regional and international levels for the conservation of biodiversity along with cultural diversity.

REMARKS FROM COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

Bangladesh: M.S Kamruzzaman from Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh highlighted the importance of participatory approach, capacity building and financing for effectively managing PAs and reiterated Bangladesh's commitment

to sharing good practices for conservation and implementation in the coming days. Pakistan: Ms Sadia Munawar from the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Coordination, Government of Pakistan noted that the workshop was beneficial to Pakistan in moving forward and achieving Target 3 of KMGBF. This workshop was able to identify gaps and challenges in implementing OECMs in the HKH region. India: Dr R.S. Rawat, Director of Research at Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Government of India highlighted that the PAs and OECMs are important tools in addressing the issue of the biodiversity crisis. These tools will play an important role in achieving the Target 3 of KM GBF. CBD Secretariat: Mr Q"apaj Conde Choque from the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD) emphasized that OECM is the recognition of the Indigenous People in achieving target 3 of KMGBF. Effective cooperation relies on the government's interest in engaging youth and communities. The government should include all the stakeholders in the process of making decisions on developing plans and projects for conservation. HAC for NP: Ms Juliana Echeverri from the HAC for N & P highlighted the need for collaborative efforts to achieve the Target 3 among neighbouring countries. The HAC is committed to providing tools and instruments to measure the effectiveness of PAs and OECMs and other expertise needed for achieving Target 3. Youth and women representative: Ms Meenal Tatpati reiterated that Target 23 of KM GBF talks about the gender perspective and on ensuring gender equality and a gender-responsive approach to biodiversity action. However, there are gaps in addressing the full range of gender issues in the target. There is also the militarization of PAs that has resulted in sexual violence and other human rights violations. The territory of Indigenous Peoples also overlaps with PAs and this system has failed to recognize women, girls, youths and other affected peoples.

Women and Indigenous People Representative: Ms Mamta Kujur emphasized that the Indigenous knowledge (IK) is inherited over generations, just like how birds don't learn how to make beautiful nests from texts and others. Likewise, IK is a boon of nature that people learn with many hits and trials and by transfer to the next generation. Thus, while working for the conservation of biodiversity, the last persons involved in conservation should not get displaced.

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ICIMOD and its regional member countries gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland for core and programme funding, and Australia, Canada's International Development Research Centre, the European Union, Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the World Bank for project funding.

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