

Mountain People Adapting to Change

**Solutions Beyond Boundaries Bridging
Science, Policy, and Practice**

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Dr Govind Raj Pokharel inaugurates International Conference on Adaptation

Inaugurating the international conference on 'Mountain People Adapting to Change: Solutions beyond Boundaries Bridging Science, Policy, and Practice', Chief Guest Dr Govind Raj Pokharel, Vice Chair of Nepal's National Planning Commission, said that addressing the challenges arising from climate change is extremely critical for mountains.

Dr Govind Raj Pokharel emphasized that the countries of the Hindu Kush Himalayas must share experiences and knowledge and seek to integrate adaptation into development plans in order to enhance the adaptive capacity of the mountain people.

Citing the Government of Nepal's goal to reduce absolute poverty from the current rate of 23%, the Chief Guest said doing so would be a major challenge if the country doesn't address disasters induced by climate change and other factors.

"Nepal will be losing a significant part of its GDP due to flood, glacial lake outburst flood, and landslides that damage infrastructures and properties, and cost human lives," he said, adding that Nepal's target of graduating from the group of the Least Developed Countries and becoming a middle-



income country by 2030 will be seriously challenged by the adverse impacts of climate change.

Dr Govind Raj Pokharel said taking the private sector onboard the adaptation discourse for continued investments in the mountains is crucial. Climate change and related issues are often seen as areas for environmentalists, governments, and NGOs to deal with, he said. However, roping in the private sector to mobilize investment, insurance, and finance is important.

The Chief Guest, who is also the member of the ICIMOD Board of Governors, said that by organizing such an international event ICIMOD already fulfilled two important institutional mandates, that of sharing knowledge and enhancing regional cooperation.





“We must develop transformative knowledge”

Can we dare to cross boundaries - between disciplines, between policy and practice, and between countries - to develop transformative knowledge?

This was the question Dr David Molden, Director General of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), posed to more than 250 participants at the opening of the international conference on ‘Mountain People Adapting to Change: Solutions beyond Boundaries Bridging Science, Policy, and Practice’ in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Dr David Molden said it is time to move beyond the description of the problem to find solutions that would bring about positive and transformative change. He pointed out that mountain people are experiencing change at an unprecedented rate, and the fragile mountain ecosystems, already experiencing significant poverty rates, are highly vulnerable to climate change. This is further compounded by air pollution, floods and droughts, and a range of socio-economic transformations including globalization, market forces, and urbanization.

“However, change brings opportunities,” he said, adding “it is through knowledge, ideas, innovation, partnerships, and sharing that we make a difference.”

ICIMOD’s Director General pointed out the concern raised by the authors of the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) AR5 that the HKH region is data deficient. However, these knowledge gaps were being filled and people from the region are generating the good science to move forward.

“It is important to bring the message of the mountains to the global community,” he stated, adding that the results of the Conference would feed into various global processes like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr David Molden emphasized that the Conference should address the issue of how to move science-based evidence into policy, and how this knowledge could be made more useful for action. Outlining a four-tier process, he said the first step would be to develop new understandings and ideas that can help in the process of adapting to change.

“Second, we must find ways to ensure that knowledge products are effectively used in policy and practice; third, this event (the Conference) will help to enhance networks and communities of practice,” he stated. “And finally, the messages we develop here will also be the ones we can take to the global community.”

Broader coalition emphasized

Welcoming an unprecedented gathering of political leaders, scientists, policymakers, grassroots workers, practitioners, and journalists, the co-organizer of the international conference on ‘Mountain People Adapting to Change’, Dr Krishna Chandra Paudel, Secretary of Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment (MOSTE), Government of Nepal, said the outcome of the event must contribute to the global climate change agenda.

Dr Krishna Chandra Paudel emphasized that climate change does not recognize political boundaries, and therefore, the knowledge and experiences shared by countries in the HKH region as well as countries from outside the region would be extremely crucial for developing newer understanding, partnerships, and broader regional cooperation to develop and implement adaptation plans.

“Mountains suffer the most from climate change, conflicts, poverty, over-exploitation of resources, and loss of biodiversity”

The Secretary encouraged ICIMOD to support its regional member states in the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process by sharing knowledge and piloting climate change adaptation activities at the community level. “ICIMOD and MOSTE have been partnering for a long time, and this partnership for strategic cooperation for promoting the mountain agenda will continue in areas of mutual interest,” he said.

Dr Krishna Chandra Paudel urged the Conference participants to deliberate on all the important aspects of adaptation issues in the mountains and contribute to the common goal of putting mountain agenda in the global discourse. He also hoped the outcomes of the Conference would contribute to the climate change agenda of the upcoming summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in Kathmandu.

Knowledge must result in action

The first high level leadership panel of the ongoing international conference on 'Mountain People Adapting to Change' stressed on the need for knowledge to result into concrete policies and actions in the mountains.

The panel, moderated by Director General Dr David Molden of ICIMOD, agreed there is clearly a demand for increased knowledge and science to plug the gap, and mechanisms for science to enter policies still need to be enhanced.

"Data and information are required to update adaptation action plans, and we will require scientific knowledge for this. If data is inadequate, then the policies will be inadequate," said a member of Bhutan's Upper House, Jigmi Rinzin.

Clarifying the roles of institutions for coordination at the national and sub-national levels, moving from sectoral to integrative and holistic thinking, and strengthening the capacities of institutions right down to the district level were



"Success in the HKH region depends on unprecedented levels of international cooperation"
Christiana Figueres, UNFCCC



"Mountains matter for everybody. For mountain countries, adaptation is our lifeline"
Krishna Chandra Paudel, Nepal



"Empowerment means providing the tools for local people to participate actively in their development. Opportunities lie in developing high-value mountain products and value chains"
Malik Shakhir Bashir Awan, Pakistan



noted as some steps that needed to be taken. If adaptation policies are to respond effectively to the local conditions, the science also needs to be tailored to specific local contexts within the region.

The panel stressed that while governments can help facilitate change, the crucial drivers for adaptation need to be the local communities themselves. Development needs to be people-centered, and local voices must be heard. Generating a strong, unified mountain voice through regional and international cooperation without losing sight of the local needs was also emphasized.

Networking among regional member countries and beyond is key for sharing and up-scaling best practices. Further, reviving the Mountain Initiative and the possible development of a Himalayan Council were also noted as promising vehicles for creating that unified and strong voice.

"In Bangladesh the mountain agenda must be reflected in the national agenda"
N B Kishore Tripura, Bangladesh



"We must strengthen networking not just within the Hindu Kush Himalayas but across the globe"
Jigmi Rinzin, Bhutan



"We may be data deficient, but we are not knowledge deficient"
Anil K Sinha, India



Mountains deserve more global attention

Outlining the adaptation issues in the Hindu Kush Himalayas at the international conference on 'Mountain People Adapting to Change: Solutions Beyond Boundaries Bridging Science, Policy and Practice', Director Programme Operations of ICIMOD, Dr Eklabya Sharma, said as much as mountains are hotspots of biodiversity they are also the hotspots of change.



“Mountain-specific policies are required to address the issues and tackle the challenges”

He pointed out that mountains around the world provide 40% of global goods and services, and closer to home, the HKH is a treasure house of natural endowment and cultural heritage with four

of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots. The ice reserves of the HKH could irrigate all of Asia for three years, and South Asia for five to six years. The region has rich agrobiodiversity, and is a melting pot of cultural heritage, ethnic diversity, and sacredness with more than 1,000 living languages.

“And yet, mountains haven't received enough attention both in global agendas and investments,” said Dr Eklabya Sharma. “It is through Conferences like these we must seek to draw the attention of the global community on the issues of Sustainable Mountain Development and Adaptation to Change.”

Mountain poverty, compensation for ecosystem services, and the need for increased investment for sustainable development are some major issues that need urgent attention in the HKH region. The major drivers of change were climate change, land use and land cover change, infrastructure development, globalization and urbanization, and out-migration.

The other major challenge facing the region, according to Dr Eklabya Sharma, was the knowledge gap and data deficit, also pointed out by the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) reports. To address this, ICIMOD has started some regional

initiatives like the river basin and transboundary landscape management approaches. ICIMOD has also embarked on a programme called 'Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme', a kind of mini-IPCC assessment with the regional focus targeting policymakers.

He added that both ecosystem- and community-based adaptations are important, and National Adaptation Plans should be targeted for linking and converging these approaches for successful adaptation strategies.



Nand Kishor Agrawal, Conference Convenor and Programme Coordinator (HICAP Initiative), ICIMOD, delivers vote of thanks

Participants enjoying themselves in ICIMOD's Knowledge Park at Godavari



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