



International Conference on

Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya

Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia

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Nepal President Bhandari calls for collective action

Inaugurating the international conference on 'Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia', the Right Honourable President of Nepal, Bidya Devi Bhandari, said alleviating and mitigating adverse impacts of climate change is critical for the region.

President Bhandari told the audience that ongoing human actions have far-reaching implications for the entire Asian subcontinent, and pose a grave challenge to the women of the region. Climate change has direct implications on livelihood of the people since it affects agriculture systems, water availability, and the natural ecosystem.

President Bhandari said Nepal is committed to combating negative impacts of climate change in line with the United Nations Paris Agreement. In this regard, Nepal has chaired the Least Developed Countries group in international climate change deliberations.

The other critical challenge facing the mountain communities of the HKH region, said the President, is achieving sustainable development. The region faces the dual burden of responding to global warming and climate change, which are increasing the risk of floods, droughts, and landslides.



“The HKH is home to many developing nations and it is imperative that we take collective steps to alleviate the threats of climate change. I expect the conference to deliberate these challenges.”

There is good news, however, President Bhandari said. Climate action has intensified in recent times, and more countries are investing in climate resilience. For example, in Nepal, climate action has become an integral part of its development programs. Some important efforts include the

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Time to change the narrative about mountains

Risky. Vulnerable. Limited. These are the images conjured up by present-day narratives about mountains. Could the narrative, however, be changed in a positive direction?

This was the question David Molden, Director General for the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), posed to more than 300 participants at the international conference on 'Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia'.

Welcoming participants from 26 countries that included practitioners, professionals, policymakers, businesses, journalists, and scientists, Molden expressed his optimism for new economic opportunities for the residents and communities of the HKH.

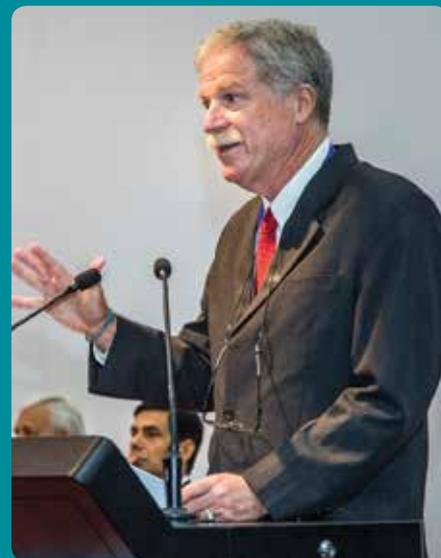
"Mountains are under immense pressure from climate change and a host of other factors like rapid outmigration and dwindling natural resources," he said. "However, what happens in the mountains matters for Asia, and by extension, the world. When we invest our resources for mountain solutions, it is not only mountain people who benefit, but nearly two billion people downstream – a quarter of humanity."

David Molden told the crowd he wanted the conference to change the narrative about mountains to one in which the HKH inspires change, driven by sustainable and resilient mountain societies and ecosystems. This new narrative would also mean giving special attention to the voices of women, youth, and marginalized groups in decision making.

David Molden said resilience is about being prepared for "shocks" that often come in the form of change and disasters. For example, a flood or an earthquake or drying springs can cause unexpected setbacks to people's livelihoods.

"In this context," David Molden said, "to be resilient is to be prepared for such shocks, to be able to recover from shocks, and to bounce forward to a state stronger than before."

The Director General closed his opening speech thanking the European Union and Nepal's Ministry of Population and Environment for supporting the conference.



Media's role in resilience

Media continue to play a critical role in giving voice to the unheard voices in the mountain communities of the Hindu Kush Himalaya, bringing needed attention to mountain issues in local and global forums.

To strengthen their capacity and deepen their knowledge on mountain issues, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) brought together 35 journalists from the eight member countries to participate in a two-day media workshop as a prelude to the international conference on 'Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia'.

At the workshop, journalists learned about innovative storytelling techniques and how to develop story pitches regarding mountain issues. They analysed news stories to identify gaps, and discussed how to report stories that were objective and provided hope. Several participants said journalists should not only report, but also provide innovative solutions through their work.

Other sessions at the workshop offered ideas on networking platforms for cross-country sharing of knowledge and time for sharing experiences related to science communication and environmental reporting.



"Don't tell the story, show it...focus on the forgotten and forsaken."

Kunda Dixit, Editor, Nepali Times



“Half the population being women, they have a strong claim to decision making. Women’s perspectives on issues and solutions will be missed out if they are not part of decision making.”

Gowher Rizvi, Advisor to Prime Minister, Government of Bangladesh



“The global impacts of climate change have not spared this region. The Government of Nepal is committed to alleviating these impacts.”

Mihila Chaudhari, Minister, Ministry of Population and Environment, Govt. of Nepal



“Our economy is deeply interdependent, and working together and supporting each other is important.”

Yeshey Dorji, Minister of Agriculture and Forests, Royal Government of Bhutan



“Climate change impacts are making us vulnerable. Building resilience is enduring stress, adapting, and flourishing in the face of change.”

Prakash Mathema, Secretary, Ministry of Population and Environment, Govt. of Nepal



“Regional cooperation is possible when people-to-people cooperation is enhanced and priorities are addressed.”

Bimala Rai Paudyal, Former Member, National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal



“The least contributors in the global change are facing the brunt the most. So, such mountain countries should have better access to finance and technology.”

Gyan C Acharya, Economic Advisor to Prime Minister of Nepal



“The Himalaya is hotspot for both natural and anthropogenic changes and we are now crossing the threshold and this could be addressed through good science.”

V K Saraswat, Member NITI Aayog, India



“Natural zones do not follow national boundaries, and hence collective actions leading to regional cooperation are needed.”

Veronica Cody, Ambassador, Delegation of the EU to Nepal



“Strengthening the platform for knowledge exchange is vital for regional cooperation.”

Teresa Fogelberg, PAC Member, ICIMOD

Nepal President Bhandari... *(con't from p. 1)*

adoption of the National Adaptation Plan, implementation of adaptation activities at local levels, and climate-responsive budget codes in government. The President also alluded to Nepal’s collaboration with ICIMOD and other stakeholders to pilot climate friendly villages in various parts of the country with the intention of taking this approach to other areas of the country in the coming months.

President Bhandari closed her speech making a strong call for regional and global collaboration to address existing and emerging climate challenges. “This conference provides a useful platform for policymakers, experts, and researchers to identify sustainable mountain development strategies that respond to common challenges and distinct regional features.”



The urgency to build resilience

Recent studies suggest the climate may warm by two degree Celsius by the end of this century, which means mountain communities could expect a 3-4 degree rise, an event that would have dire consequences for people living in the Hindu Kush Himalaya. Indeed, the need to build resilience has never been more urgent.

This was the dominant message from speakers at the inaugural session of 'Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia', an international conference that got underway yesterday at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu.

Ambassador Veronica Cody, Head of the European Union delegation to Nepal, said collective action for regional cooperation is critical to address the multi-faceted impacts of climate change. "It's important to bear in mind that what happens upstream, like what happens on the roof of the world in the Himalaya, has impact downstream."

In this context, the EU has supported Himalica, ICIMOD's initiative on rural livelihoods and climate change adaptation, which is being implemented in five of ICIMOD's eight member countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Bhutan's Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and Chair of the ICIMOD Board, Dasho Rinzin Dorji, stressed on the need for a holistic approach to development. He spoke to the crowd about Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

The Honourable Mithila Chaudhari, Nepal's Minister of Population and Environment, said the impacts of climate change have not spared the region. "The government of Nepal is committed to alleviate the impacts of climate change," she said.

Proposing the vote of thanks, Secretary Prakash Mathema of Nepal's Ministry of Population and Environment, said the conference was an important event in the collective search for solutions to build resilience.



Nand Kishor Agrawal, Conference Convenor and Programme Coordinator (HICAP Initiative), ICIMOD, delivers vote of thanks at the high-level leadership panel

Building natural and social capital in the HKH

In Director General David Molden's inaugural speech yesterday, he called for everyone at the conference to work toward changing the narrative about mountains from a scenario of fragility and limitations to one characterized by opportunity and innovation.

With that charge, the participants at the opening high-level leadership panel yesterday expressed consensus that more effective ecosystem service management and increased participation of women in decision-making, among other things, would be essential to "changing the narrative."

The panelists also stressed that the region is a hotspot for both natural and anthropogenic changes, which can be addressed through good science.

Australian Ambassador to Nepal, Peter Budd, said informed decision-making, evidence-based policy dialogue, and the use of science in cross-basin mechanisms could be a pathway to support adaptation and resilience building in the HKH.

Much of the panel was directed toward reaching out to youth to inspire entrepreneurship through improved education. Sonam Wangchuk, the founding director of the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh, said the younger generation should be equipped with modern-ancestral technology for successful adaptation to change.

Roland Schaefer, Ambassador to Nepal from the Federal Republic of Germany, stressed the need for resilience building to harness the power of social capital in the region: "The [HKH] has a unique brand that signifies trust, reliability, and inherent ability for planning that stems from the deep social [ties] of the mountain communities. This is a strong brand that should be promoted and positioned outside," he said.

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