



International Conference on

# Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya

Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia

3–6 December 2017 ICIMOD, Kathmandu

## Daily Conference Brief

5 December 2017

### Transformative change leaves no one behind

In yesterday's session addressing key challenges and mechanisms for achieving gender-responsive and socially inclusive transformative change, panelists focused on the politics and dynamics that pervade mountain communities. And all agreed with Anne-Charlotte Malm, the Counsellor and Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, when she noted that transformative change would only be possible in the HKH when both women and men shared a commitment to gender equity.

Gender transformative change means having gender parity in all decision-making processes while having equal access to resources. "Transformative change happens when women and minority groups are free to choose what they want, what they wish to be, and the life they wish to lead," said Hari Krishna Upadhyaya of CEAPRED, an ICIMOD partner in Nepal.

Onno Ruhl of the Agha Khan Development Network seconded Upadhyaya's comments, adding that a human-centered implementation approach needs to recognize women as agents of change, and not merely as beneficiaries.



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Anne-Charlotte Malm

Strong social support, including family support, and strong role models are important, especially among younger generation, said Freshta Ibrahimi, a youth representative from Afghanistan. She emphasized that incremental change is not enough. "We need transformative change."

Yankila Sherpa of the Trans Himalayan Environment and Livelihood Programme said: "We need to move beyond mere appeasement to meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making positions. Only when this is accomplished, would women have the power to change things."



"There's a saying in Afghanistan: When you go crazy, go to the mountains. I decided to remain crazy."

Freshta Ibrahimi

### A call for large scale action

Given the amount of attention and research paid to climate change in the two decades, the subject remains a complex issue, particularly with regard to its impacts on the fragile mountain ecosystems of the Hindu Kush Himalaya. Given the challenges at hand, a panel of scientists and policymakers discussed this topic at length in a plenary session at the international conference on 'Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia'.

(con't on p. 4)

## A major leap for HIMAP

A flagship project of ICIMOD – the Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMAP) – received a shot in the arm when a high-level panel endorsed it at a pre-event at the ongoing international conference on ‘Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia’.

The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) inspired HIMAP. The former executive secretary of AMAP, Lars-Otto Reiersen, informed the participants about the role of Arctic science in policy processes.

Recounting the key findings and main messages, HIMAP Coordinator and ICIMOD’s Chief Scientist Water Resources Management, Philippus Wester, said the world is in danger of losing one-third of the HKH ice by 2100, even if average global warming is kept to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

ICIMOD’s Deputy Director General, Eklabya Sharma, said HIMAP aims to assess the current state of knowledge of the HKH region, address critical data gaps, and increase the understanding of various drivers of change and their impacts. To provide a roadmap for action, HIMAP developed nine mountain priorities consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sharma said that in spite of rich natural resources, mountain people continue to live in poverty. Calling for more investments in the mountains, Sharma said the findings of HIMAP will provide a way forward to address mountain poverty in a safe and environmentally balanced approach.



Lars-Otto Reiersen

Another speaker, Asit Biswas of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, lauded HIMAP saying knowledge generation must be followed by synthesis, dissemination, and application if it is to be used.

Yanfen Wang, the Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and ICIMOD Independent Board Member, said the dialogue on HIMAP was a historic event for the HKH. “HIMAP will be an important basis for sustainable mountain development in the HKH,” he said.

HIMAP is currently producing a 16-chapter volume of its findings, organized by topics. An electronic pre-publication version is slated for release by early 2018.

**“HIMAP fills the major scientific gap. However, ICIMOD has to be bold and clear to drive the science-policy interface.”**

**Asun Lera St. Clair, Senior Principal Scientist, DNV GL**

## Reducing poverty to increase resilience

Remoteness, marginality, and fragility are the top mountain specificities that must be addressed in order to reduce poverty in the Hindu Kush Himalaya, the speakers at the parallel session on ‘Ending mountain poverty’ pointed out.

Of the major determinants of mountain poverty, they cited limited access to markets, over-dependence on natural resources, and several other factors related to demography, economics, politics, and culture. Each of these factors, they said, led to a higher rate of multidimensional poverty in the HKH.

RC Sundriyal provided the audience with an example of how inequality in opportunities between mountain and plain areas lead to depopulation of the mountains. For example, in Uttarkhand, there are more than 1,000 ‘ghost villages’ and more than 400 village with less than 10 people – all due to people outmigrating for better work opportunities.

Carolina Adler of MRI pointed out the need for wealth equalizing institutions and a value-based approach in the HKH. She said mountain specificities must be addressed to reduce poverty, build resilience, and close income gaps between the plains and mountains.

The speakers all agreed that a shortage of mountain-specific poverty data makes poverty analysis more challenging. Most HKH countries have adopted poverty reduction approaches at national level without considering sub-national and local contexts. They suggested diversifying livelihood options and opportunities to reduce rural depopulation.

**“Resilient thinking is fundamental for mountain poverty reduction.”**

**Su Yufang**



## Put people in the center

Institutions and policies play a crucial role in building resilience by strengthening people's capacity to absorb and adapt to increasing risk and uncertainty from climate change.

The speakers of the breakout session 'Policy and institutions' said that if institutions and policies are designed in a gender sensitive and socially inclusive way, they can help abolish discriminatory practices, respond better to the needs of all stakeholders, safeguard rights and equal representation, and ensure accountability.



Sunil Ray, Director of ANSIS, India, said communities should be at the center of discourse on climate change adaptation and resilience because local communities are best positioned to recognize the problem and make appropriate decisions.

The formal and informal institutions should be inclusive and promote participation of all stakeholders at local, regional, and global levels. These institutions can promote capacity building, education, and awareness raising according to what is needed in a specific area, and can thus form an important part of resilience building.

ICIMOD's chief policy advisor for NRM, Brij Rathore, said the active partnership of people in social and political fora is essential for redefining and elaborating public policy and governance. "The whole idea of political will is dependent on people's engagement and recognition of the problem," he said.

**"Participation means taking responsibility."**

**U Bo Ni, Director, Forest Department, Myanmar**

## Regional cooperation a must

The relationship and interchange between upstream and downstream communities characterize much of work that occurs in the Hindu Kush Himalaya, as the effects of upstream impacts on downstream areas generate continuous attention from researchers and governments alike.

Nearly all researchers agree that this relationship is of paramount importance to region and requires improved regional cooperation for a sustainable and productive future.

At today's session on regional cooperation, ICIMOD's Golam Rasul said water, energy, and food security of 1.3 billion

## It's all about data

Understanding the importance of data and information sharing, local knowledge and technology, and repackaging of information for various stakeholders is crucial for addressing both environmental and non-environmental stressors in the Hindu Kush Himalaya. This notion was a recurrent theme among the panelists at the session on "Knowledge and technology networks".

ICIMOD's Chi Huyen Truong, the programme coordinator for the Himalayan University Consortium, said promoting regional cooperation requires a common understanding of definitions and concepts related to climate change in the HKH. "Ethical aspects must also be taken into account while collecting data," she said.

Susanne Von Dach of the University of Bern stressed the importance of key messages when communicating research activities. Effective communication includes understanding the target audience and their specific needs, and then choosing the right mode of data delivery.

The speakers all emphasized the need to take into account the target groups in question and their specific requirements to help make right decisions for data delivery. They said an open and honest dialogue will be key to building trust and addressing knowledge gaps in the HKH.



**Chi Huyen Truong**

Ranjan Shrestha of EU delegation in Nepal spoke about the work of the EU in wake of the climate change impacts, and called for stepping up of regional cooperation mechanisms to enhance skills for disaster preparation.

people downstream would be affected if the Himalayan watershed is not managed sustainably.

All the panelists agreed that opportunities for cooperation, particularly in disaster management and regional economic development, must be explored. They reiterated the need for multi-stakeholder engagement for promoting cooperation.

Kate Hayes of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, said regional cooperation takes place most naturally when it is perceived as mutually beneficial. "In this regard, the role of intergovernmental organizations like SAARC and ICIMOD is crucial," she said.

## Share benefits to empower locals

The first Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations calls for eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere. In pursuit of this objective, speakers of the session on “Building economic opportunity and investment” focused on ideas for building up mountain economies to be robust and sustainable.

Sujeev Shakya of the Nepal Economic Forum told the audience, “People in the mountains know how to get out of poverty, but we need to provide catalysts to bring them through.” He added that education and promoting relevant business models would be necessary to spur entrepreneurship and reduce aid dependency in the region. If this could be achieved, he argued, it would be easy to create value in the mountains.

Some speakers raised concerns about scale, aggregating demand, and connecting rural areas with markets. They suggested that farmers need to cooperate to produce a market large enough to drive demand.

Other comments from this session focused on the need for greater technology innovation to be customized to the mountain context because most technological interventions fail if they are implemented unadjusted to a particular area.

One of the speakers pointed out that the large number of ongoing mega infrastructural projects in the HKH exposed communities to environmental threats. He said greater efforts are required to promote benefit sharing that enables local people to capitalize on these opportunities through business development.

## Working with the private sector

For many years, development organizations and the private sector operated in parallel, tending to separate markets, guided by separate philosophies. But in the past two decades, these groups have found novel and unique ways to combine their efforts to the benefit of mountain people. Today’s session on private sector partnership noted the still untapped potential for creating these relationships.

ICIMOD’s Naina Shakya highlighted the Centre’s private sector engagement strategy that emphasized private sector engagement for deeper development impacts, up-scaling of pilots, and long-term sustainability. She referred to the term “Mountainpreneurship” (coined by ICIMOD) as a new idea to develop mountain-based enterprises to uplift the livelihoods of communities, with a focus on women and youth.

Asuncion Lera St. Clair, Senior Principal Scientist of DNV GL, said private sector partnerships required more investigation to ensure that the “economy and business...serve society and the biosphere” at the same time.

Other panelists highlighted business models that engage local farmers in various nodes of value chains, the use of ICT for linking to markets, and contract farming as an effective means for building resilience in the mountains.

## A call for large scale action *(con’t from p. 1)*

The panelists agreed that actions of scale are important for addressing these challenges and complexities. They suggested a number of steps such as strong coherence in policies, plans, and actions; blending of technical and social solutions; and a strong political will. Large scale actions require a system-based thinking for bottom-up policymaking. There must be private sector investment supported by good governance and legal safeguards.

Some successful large scale actions in the region that deserved special mention included the community forestry program in Nepal, the *Swachh Bharat* mission (Clean India Mission) in India, and solar energy projects in Bangladesh. These were all possible with the sustained engagement and ownership of local communities.

The speakers emphasized the necessary elements of adaptation and resilience in the ongoing large scale actions in the region, such as infrastructure development and poverty reduction initiatives. However, doing so, they warned, would require anticipating environmental and socio-economic changes in the future.



**“The main mantra for sustainable large scale action is building social capital and involving communities that address structural issues.”**

**Mona Sherpa, Deputy Country Director,  
HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Nepal**

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