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ICIMOD Quinquennial Review

Executive Summary

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Date // 17 September 2021

Review Process

Review Purpose and Timing

The ICIMOD Quinquennial Review (QQR) has been designed, as per the Terms of Reference to 'provide both accountability to the Board of Governors (BOG), ICIMOD Support Group (ISG), regional partners and mountain communities at large, and to strengthen ICIMOD's functioning based on the conclusion and recommendations of the review'. The review covers the Medium-Term Action Plan: IV period 2018 – 2022 and:

1. Assesses the performance of ICIMOD based on its approved Strategy and Results Framework in terms of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of results
2. Provides recommendations on how ICIMOD can improve its Strategy and Results Framework and to support the thinking and design of the next Medium Term Action Plan (MTAPV)

The QQR conducted by an independent team from IOD PARC[1] focused on examining past and current performance and organisational effectiveness whilst considering alternative options within the Hindu Kush-Himalaya context and changing global priorities, for the purpose of ICIMOD's next MTAP. The QQR commenced on 10th May and was completed at the end of September 2021. The QQR took place virtually due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Defining the QQR Approach and Tools Used

IOD PARC's approach to the QQR combined three inquiry areas across the inception, inquiry and reporting phases:

1. Examination of ICIMOD's o**rganisational effectiveness**
2. **Robust analysis of results and impacts** achieved to date
3. **Analysis of the ICIMOD in an operational and regional context**

These three inquiry areas were linked to the QQR review questions focused on the OECD-DAC criteria. Four areas received additional attention during the inquiry phase: Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI), Partnerships, Knowledge Management and Communication (KMC), and the MTAPIV 'Operational Matrix', linking Regional Programmes and Themes. The team used a unified set of tools such as Interviews with ICIMOD BOG/ISG/Senior staff, partners and organisations; online surveys tailored to staff and Partners in a targeted manner; document analysis from ICIMOD and beyond; 'Sense Making' meetings with key stakeholders held virtually; and a virtual analysis session.

Management of the QQR

The QQR team had weekly meetings with various members of the ICIMOD Support Group (UK, Norway, Sweden), as well as the head of SPME as a liaison with ICIMOD, who were overseeing the QQR. The IOD PARC team presented initial findings to the ISG on 23rd July with the first draft report submitted on 4th August. A presentation to the ICIMOD Programme Management Committee was made on 9th August. The comments received were used to prepare a revised draft (this document) submitted on 20th August. The QQR was presented to the Board and the ISG on 6th September and discussed with ISG (8th September) and Programme Advisory Committee (9th September). Based on comments received a final report was prepared and submitted on 17th September.

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[1] www.iodparc.com

Key Findings

Context

The HKH region has several geopolitical hotspots particularly in high mountain areas, and some HKH countries have suffered extended political instability over the last 30 years. In a geopolitically challenging region, ICIMOD's importance as a neutral convener on a variety of sustainable mountain development issues has continued to grow. ICIMOD is also uniquely positioned to promote regional cooperation in a region where other regional institutions and platforms have not performed well. ICIMOD's regional reputation as a science organisation and its continued effort to expand knowledge services have further strengthened its comparative advantage. In the short-term it faces the challenge of maintaining fund flows and ground-level effectiveness with the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting operating space and donor budgets. With the Call to Action in place, it has now developed a promising platform to further build its regional cooperation portfolio and assert its policy presence within the region. To achieve this in the next 5-7 years, ICIMOD must deepen its relationship with counter-part agencies in the RMCs, understand their policy processes more deeply, and expand its funding sources.

Organisational Effectiveness

Under MTAPIV, ICIMOD's consolidated list of partners shows a total of 119 unique partners and 144 partnership arrangements with a mix of strategy, policy, knowledge, research, and implementation partners that are spread out across the RMCs. There is a need to consider more carefully the relationship with the RMCs and the ability to work collegiately with strategic partners especially regarding scaling up, ensuring sustainability of capacity and monitoring processes, and achieving impact for mountain communities.

Overall, ICIMOD is a well-functioning organisation with core strength, coherence, and stability across its different functional areas. It is now operating (partly through its own success) in an environment and context that demands a higher bar in organisational effectiveness. **Moving into the MTAPV period ICIMOD needs to reset some specific aspects of its strategy, structure, systems, and organisational culture and to ensure that it is equipped to reach the 'higher bar' of performance that the framing of the Call to Action demands and the global community is looking for in the region.** Central to this will be re-shaping the organisation; protecting the core strength and providing the space and capacity for agility in ways that support ICIMOD's comparative advantage across different types of initiative areas to be more purposefully deployed.

Results and Impact

The current structure of ICIMOD (based on the MTAPIV operational matrix) has a structure of six Regional Programmes and four Thematic Areas. Not all the regional programmes have the same operational characteristics, with three being more 'on the ground' and three being more data monitoring and management focused. Whilst the current Strategic Results Framework, Medium Term Action Plan IV (MTAPIV), and website give primacy to Regional Programme (RP) discussions, ICIMOD staff highlight the challenge of the current approach for Thematic Inputs (and Knowledge Management and Communication results). The RP focused structure does not draw out easily how results are achieved, methodological challenges, or the multi-disciplinary nature of much of the work. However, the QQR does find that generally, and despite Covid-19 the existing SRF is generally track. Two areas which will require attention in 2022 are a focus on policy work and the publication of disaggregated data at Strategic Result level (where available).

Over the time of the MTAPIV, ICIMOD has **increased its attention to the issue of impact measurement**, however further attention is required around setting initiative baselines (more

than context analysis) and the overall process – and resources – to enable 'proof of concept' work alongside broader understanding of institutional influence and impacts.

ICIMOD has a positive track record on capacity building, but more recent work has shown, for example SWaRMA, that a broader process approach is required. This would help to ensure sustainability and build a wider cohort of specialists available for ICIMOD and RMC institutions. Building a **capacity enhancement and joint learning approach** could also enable greater embedding of key skills over the long term.

The current SRF indicates that ICIMOD is a 'Knowledge Hub', whereby both internal and external knowledge management are key priorities. These should be **linked to input from the RMCs in the co-design of strategic research questions (for MTAPV based on the CtA) and demand led research, therefore a heavier focus on ICIMOD as a *Regional Mountain Knowledge Service*** could see a refocus on joint learning and aid an increased institutional responsiveness with a greater focus on RMC ownership of intergovernmental organisation. Demand led research should not compromise the independence of the science nor stop ICIMOD undertaking new research, including work that may be classed as 'horizon scanning', work on new tools/methodologies and analysis of the utility of new data sources. It is the quality of the science and hence independence of the evidence produced that would make ICIMOD a 'Knowledge Centre of Choice'

GESI

The review finds that while ICIMOD has a strong commitment to gender mainstreaming and has made significant progress in integrating gender, **a more systematic integration of gender and social inclusion is needed at strategic, institutional, and programmatic level.**

In the context of Covid-19 and its impacts in the HKH region, issues of GESI are front and centre, and as part of the strategy MTAPV planning process it is an opportune time for ICIMOD to explore how it can engage/support RMCs more strategically and purposefully on these issues. **The HKH Call to Action fully acknowledges gender and social inclusion** and draws attention to the need for policies and actions that support greater gender equality and social inclusion in the mountain regions. The paucity of disaggregated data on GESI is a key gap identified by ICIMOD in the HKH region; data that could be critical in helping governments design more effective interventions in the mountain regions. **The QQR acknowledges that social inclusion is a complex, challenging and often politically sensitive issue in the HKH region**. In this context, a key starting point for ICIMOD is to **understand the critical social inclusion and exclusion issues that mountain communities are facing across the 8 RMCs and how these relate to/intersect with ICIMOD's core areas and themes of work**.

The QQR acknowledges that while social inclusion, poverty reduction and alleviation, health etc., are not a core mandate for ICIMOD, **tracking data and monitoring trends in these areas can be a critical contribution as part of wider social-economic monitoring in the HKH.** The QQR work indicates that the findings for the Gender Audit and its recommendations are valid and should be considered as areas for immediate attention.

Review Matrix Summary

OECD-DAC Criteria	Summary Statement	Evidence Quality
Relevance	Quality of scientific work high (less on social science). Areas of work highly relevant. Gender Inclusion receiving attention, limited data on Social Inclusion.	Medium - High
Coherence	Covid-19 paper well received and first lockdown actions highly appreciated. Future analysis of Covid-19 and ICIMOD areas of work	Medium - High

	are less clear. ICIMOD's neutrality is vital to its work, including the HKH CtA.	
Effectiveness	SRF on track despite Covid-19. Structure doesn't enable thematic / KMC / Partner contributions to be easily identified. Institutionally admin heavy with perceived lack of transparency and donor driven.	High
Efficiency	Focus on gender is high but transformative change is limited. Social inclusion is weak and may take time. The Matrix structure is not working well and is perceived as admin heavy and lacking in transparency. Value for money broadly OK but needs to consider more carefully where its value lies.	High
Impact	Increased attention regarding initiative impacts though less so at institutional level. KMC strategy etc., is out of date and internal knowledge management still weak. Need to differentiate relationship with RMCs from wider partnerships so that appropriate processes are in place to enable understanding of the impact pathways and levels of influence.	Medium - High
Sustainability	ICIMOD has seen increase in funding from RMCs and into Core. Ministerial Declaration on CtA is a major step forward, forward management required. A business unit/funding strategy for private sector and for 'vertical funding to ensure ability to attract suitable funding in line with ICIMOD's neutrality and core principles' required.	Medium

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary: The IOD PARC QQR team feels that the focus on the HKH-Assessment and Ministerial process has been and will continue to be a significant opportunity for ICIMOD and the RMCs. The ongoing process will aid the RMCs in their stated objectives of meeting the SDGs and other international commitments through the application of evidence produced and curated by ICIMOD as the regional intergovernmental body, to context specific Sustainable Mountain Development.

However: Whilst ICIMOD has 'arrived' it now needs to change and further modernise its systems, processes, and functions so that it can keep pace with growing demand for its services/functions as a regional intergovernmental organisation of the HKH in the context of a rapidly evolving, operating, and funding context. The operating context is likely to see a period of rapid change not least due to post Covid-19 recovery but also with respect to climate change, biodiversity, and opportunity investment in livelihood development. These changes are the subject of the recommendations flagged below.

For Strategy and MTAPV Development

MTAPV: 1	Design operating model and management structure for ICIMOD to deliver 'Knowledge Service' (including Ministerial Mountain Summit Secretariat) through portfolio of work
MTAPV: 2	Creating a dedicated business development unit
MTAPV: 3	Strengthening country presence in RMCs
MTAPV: 4	Strategic Results Framework Revised Design for MTAPV
MTAPV: 5	Integrate Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) as a core operating principle for ICIMOD
MTAPV: 6	Develop a Centre of Excellence on Systematic Review for issues affecting the HKH

For Remaining Period of MTAPIV

MTAPIV: 1	Tighten publication processes: dates, languages, glossaries, and web-management
MTAPIV: 2	Update key strategies for use in MTAPV design and operationalisation
MTAPIV: 3	Policy / Decision making ecosystem in the 8 RMCs