

# Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability in the Hindu Kush Himalayas

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THREE DECADES  
FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE

## President of Nepal Inaugurates International Conference on Poverty and Vulnerability

Inaugurating the international conference on 'Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability in the Hindu Kush Himalayas: Forging Regional Partnerships to Enable Transformative Change', President of Nepal, Rt. Honourable Dr Ram Baran Yadav, said mountain environmental and developmental issues are transboundary in nature, and call for both regional and international cooperation.

President Yadav said that despite being rich in biodiversity and traditional knowledge, the Himalayan region is also the place of extreme poverty and deprivation. "The challenge of climate change further increases the burden for mountain people," he said. "Several studies, including some by ICIMOD, have shown that the climate change trends are faster in the mountains than in the plain areas."

President Yadav said the pace at which the climate is reportedly changing makes it difficult for mountain people to cope with, and sometimes puts the mountain communities at a serious disadvantage. He urged the participants to contribute thoughts and ideas to find ways and means to



Dr Ram Baran Yadav lights the auspicious *panas* (lamp)

address the challenges faced by the mountain regions of the world, particularly the developing countries.

He also appreciated the mountain knowledge generated by ICIMOD. "The research studies and knowledge generated by ICIMOD gives the Government of Nepal, and other Himalayan countries, evidence-based knowledge to initiate correct action and also to pursue the agenda of sustainable mountain development at the global forum," President Yadav said.

## Time for practical solutions: ICIMOD DG

Welcoming an unprecedented gathering of international and regional scientists, policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and representatives of governments, international development agencies, and non-government organizations, ICIMOD's Director General Dr David Molden said time has now come to develop practical solutions to the issues facing the Hindu Kush Himalayas.

Dr Molden said the participants of the Conference must therefore put their minds and hearts together to address the issues of poverty and vulnerability. He said the Conference must develop practical solutions and help define the post-2015 Development Agenda so that it is relevant for mountains and people.

The Director General recalled to the gathering the founding of ICIMOD 30 years ago by the governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

The government of Nepal and UNESCO played a key role, he said, and given this background, it is entirely appropriate that the Conference is being co-organized with the Planning Commission of Nepal.

"In 1983, by an Act of Parliament, ICIMOD was formed, and our vision today is that men, women, and children of the Hindu Kush Himalayas enjoy improved wellbeing in a healthy mountain environment," he said.

Dr Molden said the Conference will strengthen regional cooperation "as we from across the HKH region and the globe work together to solve one of the biggest challenges of our times."

The Director General thanked the Federal Republic of Germany, the Mountain partnership and World Bank, and ICIMOD's core funders including the regional member countries and Austria, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.



# Addressing inequality critical: Phrang Roy

A glacial retreat in the Himalayas will have a particularly disastrous impact on the poor and vulnerable communities, cautioned the Conference keynote speaker, Phrang Roy, Chair of North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society, India.



“Let this Conference emphasize a novel process of enquiry that recognizes vulnerable people as knowledge holders, change agents, and co-creators of innovations and not merely as recipients of our technical assistance, loans, and grants”

Citing examples of several recent disasters in the region, he said the worst affected have always been the people who live in the margins.

“The severe impacts of global warming and our technical solutions always grab our attention and the headlines,” he said. “Unfortunately, the socio-economic challenges

of climate change that expose the marginalized to greater vulnerabilities and which actually create conflicts and weaken macro-economic performances seldom make headline news. I hope this Conference will embolden us to acknowledge that technocratic fixes, important as they are, are not enough to address vulnerability of the poor in an era of increasing climate change challenges.”

Phrang Roy said that one daunting poverty and vulnerability challenge for the Himalayan region is the unequal access to resources between communities and within communities. Citing the renowned economist Joseph Stiglitz, he said inequality fuels exclusion mechanisms that the powerful manipulate to the detriment of the marginalized. “We need to find ways to overcome inequality so that people can improve their livelihoods and enhance their wellbeing and happiness,” he said.

Phrang Roy also warned that situation will be direr for women. “Women are vulnerable because they have unequal access to resources,” he said. “And with more and more men in many poor households migrating for better incomes, the feminization of the labour force in many Himalayan countries will become even more pronounced.”

Through the Conference, he urged ICIMOD to tell the world that the vulnerability of the poor of this region must be addressed locally, nationally, and internationally if the world is to achieve the future we all want to realize.



# Mountains must be protected

The high level policy panel dwelled on the issues of the criticality of the sustainable mountain development for the national development goals in the HKH countries. The panelists univocally agreed that mountains cannot be seen only as a source of resources for the plain areas but also need to be provided sufficient resources for protection of environmental fragility and development.



The panel agreed that the eco-fragility of the young Himalayas must be considered while planning the development of hydropower. While focus on GDP by developing hydropower is important, it is important not to lose sight of local perception, disparity, seismicity, and biodiversity.



“It is crucial to deepen the bond between democracy and development for sustainability by empowering local people, particularly women which should be the new agenda for the growth of the world. The voice for equality and sustainable development has to come from the people.” **Dr Mihir Shah, Planning Commission, India**

“Share of development for mountain areas depends on political voices and choices of the mountain people but we cannot afford to ignore mountains as they provide services that are critical to the development of downstream.” **Said Badashah Bukhari, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**



“The Government of China has taken concrete steps to balance the disparity between Western Mountain and Eastern Coast through the dissemination of knowledge, infrastructure, environment protection, and disaster risk reduction.” **Prof Wei Fangquiang, Chengdu INH, CAS, China**

“We must look at the alternative energy sources. Even one bulb can make a huge difference to a Nepali household, especially the women.” **Shoko Noda, UNDP Nepal**



“We deeply believe that one of the reasons of conflict in Afghanistan is the poverty in the mountain areas. Sustainable development of mountain areas will reduce poverty and will lead to conflict reduction in the country.” **Javid Ahmad Qaem, Ministry of Agriculture, Afghanistan**

“Stability of the mountain region is critical to the stability of Nepal as a country and the fact that the voice for political change in Nepal historically started in the mountain areas.” **Dr Rabindra K Shakya, Planning Commission, Nepal**



# Conference to address a host of issues

ICIMOD's Director Programme Operations Dr Eklabya Sharma highlighted the major issues the Conference would address in the next three days. He also talked about the expected outcomes.

Giving a broad outline of the HKH context, Dr Sharma said people in hills and mountains are poorer by 5% than the country average, and the determinants of poverty are



**“We hope the Conference will provide opportunities for fruitful discussions and help draw future agenda for reducing poverty and addressing vulnerability of mountains and downstream”**

different in mountains. The HKH region is extremely rich in biodiversity, and yet some of the world's poorest live in the region. Mountains are also seeing increasing out-migration of men, leaving behind women, children, and the old.

Dr Sharma said the Conference will therefore address these issues by crystallizing science-based evidence for policy planning and action, moving beyond pilots to scaling up, and by fostering regional partnership to transformative change.

He said more than 200 participants from 19 countries are attending the Conference. “We hope the Conference will provide opportunities for fruitful discussions and help draw future agenda for reducing poverty and addressing vulnerability in mountains and downstream,” he said.

The expected outputs of the Conference, Dr Sharma said, would include recommendations, a conference report, and publication of a selection of papers in a peer-reviewed journal.

“The Conference will result in an outcome document as a mountain specific input for the consultation process for the formulation of the post-2015 Development Agenda,” he said. “We will also see the formation of a forum for addressing poverty and vulnerability in the HKH region.”



Dr Dhrupad Choudhury, Conference Convenor and Regional Programme Manager, ICIMOD delivers vote of thanks

Roland Streurer, Country Director, GIZ Nepal, thanks the ICIMOD support group for their contribution to the Conference



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