

Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability in the Hindu Kush Himalayas

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Inclusive growth emphasized

The former Director General of ICIMOD and Session Chair, Dr Andreas Schild, welcomed the participants to the opening plenary session 'Defining the Contours of a Sustainable Mountain Development Agenda'. He said issues of poverty and vulnerability are important for ICIMOD, the Regional Member Countries, and the donor community.

Dr Mihir Shah, Member, Planning Commission of India, said issues of development, democratization, and markets are closely linked, but there are inherent dilemmas as to who makes decisions and who gets benefits from development? To resolve this, India's 12th Five-Year Plan has given unprecedented emphasis on inclusive growth, location-specific solutions, and democratic decentralization through flagship programs like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

Dr R S Tolia, NTPC Chair, Centre for Public Policy, Doon University, India, said the emphasis on 'more inclusive' growth in India's 12th Five-Year Plan is seen as a greater opportunity for the mountain people. He cautioned against assuming one common mountain agenda.

"There is not one mountain agenda, but mountains of agenda for the mountains"

Dr R S Tolia

The Regional Economist of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Dr Ganesh Thapa, said IFAD has two types of targeting



strategies – geographical targeting and community-based targeting. Targeting poor people is even more difficult in societies with large inequality and there is always a risk of benefit capture, but it can be reduced with good understanding of poverty processes.

"Mountain poverty is unique, and multi dimensional poverty measures have to capture mountain-specific poverty"

Atiq-ur Rahman, Planning and Development Commission, Pakistan

Dr Bruno Messerli of Bern University in Switzerland chaired the parallel session on 'Environmental Sustainability: Harnessing Mountains Goods and Services for Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability - Ensuring inclusive development and environmental sustainability'.

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Land is indigenous people's destiny

There are several local, national, and international laws for the protection of indigenous communities, but many of them have not directly addressed and improved the condition of the communities.

This is how Prof Sanjoy Hazarika of India who chaired the panel on 'Inclusive Social Development: the Challenges for Including the Excluded – Indigenous Communities and

“Grafting indigenous knowledge with modern knowledge will be very rewarding”

Izhar Hunzai, Pakistan

Marginalized Groups' initiated one of the parallel sessions yesterday. He said indigenous communities had figured extensively in previous sessions since they were the poorest in terms of access to basic social and economic services.

The keynote speaker for the session and Chair of North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (India), Phrang Roy, emphasized that land was the source of survival for indigenous people. Land determined their present and future.



“For indigenous people, social development is about their ability to sustain a functioning ecosystem,” he said. “They fully understand the complexity of nature and its resilience, and their accumulated knowledge from generations of interactions have been recorded in stories, mythologies, and teachings.”

Phrang Roy added that indigenous communities strongly desired to “live under their own worldview, on their own lands, and under their faith.” He added that ‘prior consent’ was crucial to future development with regard to infrastructure.

Opportunities that come with migration must be harnessed

The parallel session on 'Labour Migration and Remittances: Challenges and Opportunities for Driving Sustainable Mountain Development' reported that labour migration has been a historical phenomenon in the mountain areas across the HKH region. However, a very little of what migrant workers send back home is channelled into entrepreneurial activities.

“Not every individual can be an entrepreneur,” said the thematic keynote speaker of the session, Dr Chowdhury R Abrar of Bangladesh. “The financial institutions in Bangladesh have focused on the big investors and had little to offer to small investor.”

Dr Ganesh Gurung of Nepal asked if viable investment opportunities have been provided to the returnees. “The answer is no,” he said, adding that government and non-government institutions require to suggest a broad range of feasible and customized opportunities to the returnees.

Sporadic examples on community responses to labour shortage and feminization of mountain agriculture from across the region need to be documented for shared learning across the Himalayan region, pointed out Anmol Jain of India.



On a positive note, Dr Judy Oglethorpe of WWF-Nepal, said young women today make a new breed of emerging community leaders. “As more young men migrate to destinations abroad, young women are being encouraged to take up leadership role in the community forest management with active support from the village elders,” she said.

Panellists agreed that access to information, new skills, life skills, financial literacy, reintegration plans for returnees, cost saving technologies, and support in entrepreneurial opportunities could transform migration into a choice rather than a challenge for rural mountain communities.

Strong platform for women suggested

The parallel session on 'Inclusive Social Development: the Challenges for Including the Excluded – Gender Dimensions' discussed approaches, practical ideas, and methodologies to make development truly inclusive.

“I was once requested for a meeting by my male colleagues to discuss the issue of women and development. When I mentioned that women are in a difficult position, my colleagues differed and said: ‘Development is in a difficult position. We cannot deliver our goal when 50% of the population is not playing the field!’ It took a long and sustained effort to sensitize men on why women were not playing!”

Dr Margaret Catley-Carlson

The key question discussed was: How can gender considerations be accounted in times of rapid change, both in terms of physical changes (climate change, urbanization, infrastructure, land use changes, etc.) as well as the changing aspirations and identities of mountain people and women?

The panel, chaired by Dr Margaret Catley-Carlson, Member of ICIMOD Board of Governors and Programme Advisory Committee, agreed that there is a 'disconnect' in



knowledge of mountain issues between people living in the plains and those in the mountains. One suggestion to bridge this gap was bring women together in collectives and give them a platform to voice their own issues.

The panel agreed that to accelerate progress, women must be given a collective voice and listening mechanisms within policy-making process must be built. It also agreed that data, particularly demographic data, must be made available to guide suitable strategies for diverse set of women including young women, women in reproductive age, women farmers, employed women, and others. The panel said appropriate attention must be paid to gender budgeting to support implementation of plans.

The GESI approach, which gives priority to identification of key barriers for women's participation and ways of overcoming and systematically addressing them, was given as a concrete example of successful inclusion of women in development.

Development, adaptation, L+D must be seen together

The vulnerable and the marginalized populations have the least capacity to respond to climate change, reported the session on 'Managing Climate Change'. The panel discussed whether mainstreaming adaptation or loss and damage (L+D) should be the priority for the HKH.

It was agreed adaptation should now become a priority, especially while addressing poverty, since coping with change seems the best way out.

“It will be a mistake to think that developing countries need adaptation and developed countries need mitigation because this dichotomy limits us in seeking solutions and in realizing the links between development, adaptation, and mitigation,” said the session chair, Asuncion Lera St-Clair of CICERO, Norway. “The most important thing is



that we become creative in addressing adaptation for the poor mountain communities.”

L+D is a new terminology that is gaining importance in the UNFCCC negotiations and is based on the premises

that adaptation as described by NAPAs and NAPS alone is not sufficient as there are limits to adaptation. There is a residual part in adaptation which cannot be adapted due to many reasons such as finance, technology, capacity, nature of the impact, etc. and therefore the need to address the cost of loss and damage, in the same principle of insurance finance.

“There is an urgent need for countries to work towards establishing common understanding and for research centers like ICIMOD to generate science-based information and empirical studies on L+D” **Batu Krishna Upreti, Vice-Chair, LDC Expert Group, Nepal**

Under the UNFCCC agreements, the need to integrate development with adaptation, or making development climate resilient has been duly acknowledged. Adaptation needs require increased and scaled-up

finance in addition to capacity development at multiple levels, but at the same time unlike mitigation interventions where there is a baseline to estimate the payment, baseline for adaptation and L+D is much more complicated to assess.

The session highlighted the need to find new and creative ways to approach development, adaptation, and L+D as they are all interlinked and are not mutually exclusive.



Science and policy-making must converge

The policy panel on ‘Translating Science to Policy and Practice for Reducing Development Disparities’ agreed there is widespread consensus that salient and credible sustainable mountain development science is necessary and important for shaping policies and practices for reducing development disparities, addressing poverty, and reducing vulnerabilities. It is also key for promoting mountain development priorities in national development agendas.

Chaired by Dr Lynn Bennet, a visiting scientist at ICIMOD, the panel pointed out that the voice of science is often not heard strongly enough at the policy level, in part because science does not speak with one voice and frequently raises more questions than that it answers. Science must not appear in some isolated bubble from where it is then delivered to policymakers for making decisions.

Actually, science rarely brings about direct change at government levels, as governments mainly respond to voters, so perhaps the target of science should be voters. Use of scenarios, visuals, and social media are much more powerful in communication with policymakers rather than big scientific reports.

Scientific research that is accurate and responsible must be translated into messages that policymakers can use.

One important recommendation the panel made for translating science into policy was to create a platform for science and policymakers to meet and co-design research agendas and policies. The panel acknowledged the difficulty of setting research priorities for policy-making, especially on multidimensional issues like poverty.

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