

Addressing Poverty and Vulnerability in the Hindu Kush Himalayas

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Partnership and common purpose crucial

Discussing the enablers for defining policy action for scaling up of good practices, the third policy panel agreed that more work has to be done if national governments are to take mountain issues seriously.

Session Chair Phrang Roy highlighted that mountain environmental and development issues have a transboundary dimension that needs to be taken into account when defining policy action. "While many continue to see mountains as primarily a source and an asset for the lowlands, through developing evidence-based policies it will be possible to bring a change in this attitude," he said.

He said bonding development with democracy is the prime development enabler, in which the role of women as agents of change is crucial and needs to be recognized and promoted.

Phrang Roy underlined the need to build a common ground for the region. When governments don't see mountains as a priority area, it must be institutions like ICIMOD who must shoulder the responsibility to develop a platform where this sense of a common ground can flourish.

Prof Sanjoy Hazarika said ideas and innovations that can be institutionalized must be emphasized. He stressed on the significance of interdependence, interdisciplinary approach, partnership, and inclusiveness. "Governments and institutions must talk to each other to work together so that we create an enabling atmosphere for partnerships," he said, adding that voices of the most vulnerable sections like women must be heard.

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THREE DECADES
FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE



Dr Malik Zahoor Ahmed of Pakistan said government-to-government connections are important, but even more important is the people-to-people contact.

Javid Ahmed Qaem of Afghanistan said social infrastructures like roads and health care are crucial. So is community-based natural resource management and women empowerment. He said ICIMOD must expand its engagement in Afghanistan.

Dr Manfred Haebig of GIZ, India, said despite the many ideas floated around during conferences and meetings nothing really seems to be happening in reality. This, he said, is because we are weak at scaling up things and don't seem to easily garner consensus among stakeholders.

"We must rethink our relationship with the private sector, and focus on the business case if we want real up-scaling," he said. "We must promote entrepreneurship and better inclusiveness through redistribution of taxpayers' money."

Some members of the audience said mountains often fail to get the attention they deserve, and some national policies don't even mention the mountains.

They said the 30th anniversary is the right time for ICIMOD to help the member countries to make action plans and specific programmes such as domestic energy and fresh produce.

Innovation requires 'learning by doing'

How can communities be supported to adapt to rapid change and take advantage of new opportunities for livelihood improvement? This was the central question discussed at the plenary session titled 'What Fosters Community Innovations? Good practices from across the region highlighting actors and factors'.

Presenting insightful examples and emerging lessons from projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, India, and Nepal, the panel said innovations at the community level should help realize inclusive and sustainable development at the grassroots. Supporting community mobilisation for adopting innovations is important and this requires bottom up participatory planning through continuous dialogue and diagnostic processes in which the community takes the lead.

A holistic approach that integrates ecology with economy as well as equity and social justice was found to be the key principle for success in all the examples. The panel agreed that effective innovation requires 'learning by doing' and access to appropriate knowledge, technology, and skill development opportunities within a supportive policy environment. Social and institutional capital and platforms for sharing experiences and adapting development discourse to changing aspirations of the community are key factors in effective innovation.

The key actors are government and financial institutions (including donor agencies), intermediary knowledge and delivery organizations, and local institutions. Visionary leaders in these organisations are pivotal in helping catalyze change. Most importantly, the panel identified local communities, in particular women (in the context of feminization of poverty and outmigration of men), lead farmers, and youth as key agents of change.

A call for inclusive economy

Creating enabling environment for all at the macro-level, especially for people who are far away in the mountains and other marginalized sections including the youth was seen as an urgent intervention by the panelists who discussed 'Inclusive Economic Development - Potential Macro-economic Approaches for Mountain Development' on 2 December 2013.

Speakers called for an inclusive and green economy and for the integration of mountains into the SDGs. The panelists said the complexity of mountain systems requires complex solutions ranging from processing of products, exploiting niche products, and exploring new markets including PES, conservation, and eco-tourism.

Session Chair Jeffrey Campbell said that instead of single strategy, bundled baskets of complex solutions should be aimed at as an institutional approach. "In this way small-scale players will become the private sector of the future," he said.

Dr Hermann Kreutzmann of Germany said the niches have to be identified first. "Mountains are a transition zone for goods, for knowledge, and for people. They are at the interface of South Asia," he said.



The panel concluded that it is vital to provide space to local and community-based organizations to develop and manage their innovations so that they grow and learn from their mistakes, and continue to adapt and improvise. Proactive policies and safeguards to ensure social and environmental justice as well as providing greater agency to women and marginalized groups are critical elements in this process.

Engaging private sector

Seeking to understand the role and explore the potential of sustainable business practices, a dialogue forum agreed that engaging private sector as responsible partners in inclusive development of the HKH region would create meaningful impact on poverty reduction.

The forum, moderated by Leena Wockeck, Executive Director CSR Asia, gave the private sector the platform to express their views about how businesses perceive sustainable development. The private sector participants said it is important for development agencies to speak their language and for the businesses to learn the development language to deepen the engagement.

New business models for sustainable development where the private sector makes profit and also contributes to inclusive growth will have to be explored. In this regard, ICIMOD's initiative to include businesses in a dialogue forum at the conference on poverty and vulnerability was much appreciated and seen as a positive step in engaging the new development partner – the private sector. However, continuing this dialogue would be key.

ICIMOD's Director Programmes Operations Dr Eklabya Sharma outlined the overall engagement of ICIMOD with private sector in the HKH region.

Hemant Dabadi of Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce and Industry said businesses today are looking at long-term sustainability which is an opportunity for business and sustainable development to come together.

Ashok Nair of Reuters Market Light India said that for a successful model of business and development, synergies are must.



Insights from regional member countries

The session provided a platform for sharing of experiences of national initiatives and finding a common ground for sustainable mountain development.

Bangladesh: While the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has significantly improved after the 1997 Peace Treaty, the challenge of reducing poverty among the communities living on the hills is still a huge task. The panel was informed that the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs together with the local government is promoting new approaches to poverty reduction, such as high value horticulture and commercial agricultural production. Access to markets and infrastructure are still major bottlenecks.

India: There is the need to strengthen public private and community partnerships. As isolated projects did not show relevant impacts, the government introduced the Integrated Basin Development Programme (IBDP) as a framework.

Focus on ICIMOD's regional experiences

Value chain was the central discussion point at the plenary session 'Approaches at Local Levels and Upscaling Initiatives – ICIMOD's Experiences from the Region'. Session Chair Dr Margaret Catley-Carlson said value chain approach to development projects provide the opportunity to make both vertical and horizontal impacts. She suggested that value chain framework must be adapted by different countries in the HKH region according to their local needs and conditions.

Referring to a video on value chain projects implemented by ICIMOD and GIZ in collaboration with the local forest department in the state of Uttarakhand in India, Dr Catley-Carlson said ICIMOD value chain project provides an example of up-scaling and providing linkages to farmers and communities with better information and markets.

Discussing the role of beekeeping for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods of mountain communities, ICIMOD's Uma Pratap and Harish K Sharma of Y S Parmar University, Solan, India, said beekeeping doesn't require big investment, and provides substantial support to the livelihoods of landless poor communities.



Nepal: While poverty in Nepal is declining by about 2% annually, the country is still facing a high disparity in poverty incidence between mountains (42%) and Terai (31%). With the institution of Poverty Alleviation Fund, the government is promoting a participatory approach based on social mobilization and community empowerment. The Fund currently covers 40 of the 75 districts. The challenge is to increase the coverage and ensure sustainability.

Pakistan: With the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Pakistan is running its largest social protection initiative for the poor in the country. About five million women benefit from BISP through unconditional cash transfers. Other components of the programme include health insurances and micro finance for small businesses. Women have therefore become agents of change and drivers of sustainable livelihood.



Beekeeping also helps in promoting managed pollination of apple orchards.

ICIMOD's Dr Dhrupad Choudhury and Augustus Suting of Integrated Basin Development Programme, Government of Meghalaya, India, said livestock is a vital investment and a hedging strategy for mountain communities. Livestock helps them derive livelihood means throughout the year, while helping gain bulk cash in times of need through animal sales. However, they do face the big risk of epidemics, and to deal with these risks, ICIMOD along with its partners promoted the strategy of master trainers development for veterinary services in Meghalaya combined with access to medicines and improved breeding practices.

APAN workshop discusses communication approaches

A side event jointly organized by ICIMOD and Asia Pacific Adaptation Network (APAN) sought to identify effective communication approaches to support climate change adaptation policy and action in the Hindu Kush Himalayas. It recommended approaches to strengthen science-policy-practice interfacing.

Welcoming the participants to the workshop, Anja Moller Rasmussen, Senior Manager, Knowledge Management and Communication, ICIMOD, stressed on the need to strengthen communication, networks, and break knowledge silos in adaptation to change.

Session Chair Dr Jian Liu of UNEP stressed that such platforms bring knowledge brokers and development communication experts together so that they can appraise each other of ongoing seminal works in the region.

Dr Eklabya Sharma, DPO, ICIMOD, called on the participants to draw up a set of recommendations on how to strengthen communication approaches in view of science-policy practices.

“Adaptation is living with change, change is not new, and people have been adapting to change,” he said. “However, the rate of change is rather unnerving. Therefore, communicating with an effective integrated approach for planned adaptation is of utmost importance.”

Mozaharul Alam (Babu) of UNEP ROAP underscored that Science-Policy-Practice is a very important nexus, and communication plays an important role in connecting the three actors. Failing to consider communication, while addressing scientific knowledge



brought forward by scientists, would be like treating a patient without proper diagnoses, he said.

Dr Paul Desankar, Manager, Adaptation Programme, UNFCCC, emphasized that science is already there, but the challenge lies in using it for policy formulations and in reaching out to the most vulnerable communities.

At a guided discussion on science-policy-practice interfacing and communication needs and recommendations, participants reached the following conclusions:

- There is need for science communicators who can package the complicated scientific messages for the lay audience.
- Scientists must have direct communication with policymakers.
- Communication is a two way traffic – we need to connect with audiences well and people’s voices need to be heard.
- Dialogues between policymakers and scientists should be initiated through the policy section of government agencies as there are people mandated for policy drafting.

Roster of Women Professionals and Gender Experts

During the closing plenary at 14:30, David Molden, ICIMOD Director General will inaugurate a webpage www.icimod.org/gender/wgem/roster

ICIMOD is floating this website to prepare a roster for women professionals and gender experts who can register on this website.

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