

# Transforming Mountain Forestry

Bridging transboundary challenges with 21<sup>st</sup> century paradigms for the welfare of mountain people, forests and environment in the Hindu Kush Himalayas

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## Commitment and information crucial for transboundary cooperation

Transboundary cooperation presents a galore of opportunities for the countries in the Hindu Kush Himalayas, according to the speakers at the plenary session 'Bracing up for Transboundary Cooperation in the HKH'.

Profiling a number of areas where countries could come together to reap the benefits of both formal and informal transboundary cooperation, Dr Eklabya Sharma, Director Programme Operations of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), said disaster risk reduction is a critical area of cooperation for the HKH member countries. The countries could also cooperate in the domains of water, food, and energy, mainly through trade, and share information to check cross-border illegal trade in biodiversity and forest products.

In the realm of mountain forestry, countries could jointly manage transboundary landscapes and other contiguous protected areas and biodiversity corridors. Dr Eklabya Sharma gave the example of Kangchenjunga Sacred Landscape jointly managed by Nepal and India. Countries could also come together to promote ecotourism, address human-wildlife conflicts, manage forest fires, and check spread of diseases and invasive species. "However, for this to happen, the countries must agree on complementary policies and promote scientific research, knowledge sharing, and capacity building," he said.



Tint Lwin Thuang



James Anderson

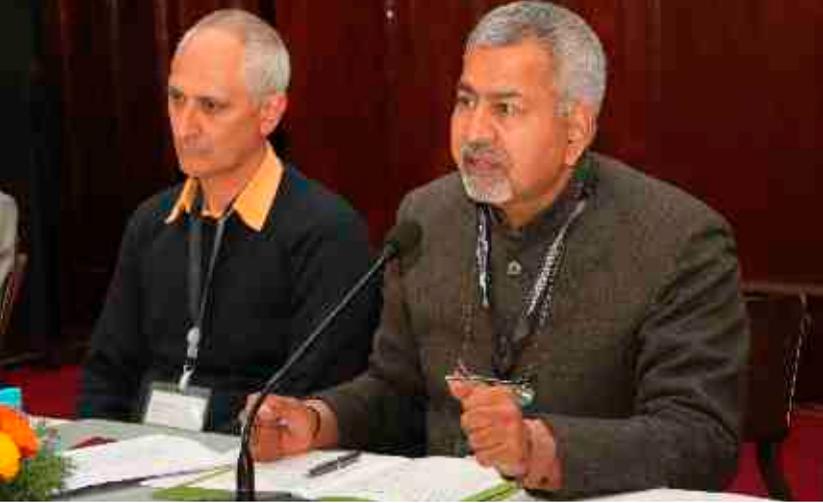
Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of Madhya Pradesh, BMS Rathore, said there is a growing recognition today that without transboundary cooperation cross-border issues cannot be addressed. He stressed on deeper commitment from all stakeholders and new innovative tools to share information between different entities.

"Are we communicating enough?" asked BMS Rathore, adding that proper tools and mechanisms must be put in place across boundaries for developing proper management plans in the HKH for transboundary cooperation to be effective.

Sharing some examples of cooperation the Centre mobilizes among the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, A Udhayan of the SAARC Forestry Centre in Bhutan said it is important to share management plans and protection strategies.

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Rajan Kotru and PP Bhojvaid

## The science is clear and the economic compelling

While acknowledging the need for inter-country cooperation, Kinley Tenzin, Program Director at the Ministry of Agriculture & Forests, Bhutan stressed the need for mainstreaming learning from the projects into bi- and multi-lateral processes and agreements. Without doubt, the science is clear and the economics of transboundary cooperation compelling. It was suggested that ICIMOD is strategically positioned to universalise learning from the transboundary landscape projects into the policy planning process amongst member countries.

Often a case is made of the pristine forests in Bhutan, which are essentially forests that have unbroken canopy cover with high species diversity. "Such forests are exclusive in the region because participatory forestry has neither done justice to the ecosystems nor to the communities dependent on it," quipped Mr A Udhyan of the SAARC Forestry. There is a need to secure forest boundaries to revive and rejuvenate degraded forests in the region.

Dr Gopal Rawat from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun argued the need to educate and train foresters on the ecology of rangelands, scrub lands and intervening spaces between forests. Understanding the harmony between diverse landscapes holds the key to harmonizing forest management in the region. "Unless the colonial forestry mindset is shown the door, transforming mountain forestry may remain a dream," said Dr P P Bhojvaid, Director, FRI, who concluded the session by highlighting the need to capture and negotiate the external factors influencing the mountain forests.

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"Unless the colonial forestry mindset is shown the door, transforming mountain forestry may remain a dream" Dr P P Bhojvaid

Dr Rajan Kotru, Regional Programme Manager, Transboundary Landscapes at ICIMOD, opened the session on "Harmonising Mountain Forest Management in the HKH Region" by mentioning that coherent policy and legal framework for sustainable land-use is essential for forging cooperation across transboundary landscapes. "The need for integrating community science with applied science is imperative," he remarked. There is also a value in exploring and strengthening common cultural threads amongst communities living across borders to highlight the need for cooperation.

## Address challenges to reap benefits of non-timber forest produce

Diverse forest products classified as Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) are an integral part of livelihoods in higher mountains, and while rural households derive 20-40% income from NTFP, millions depend on it for livelihoods in the tropical regions.

This message was at the crux of discussions at the session 'Mountain Forest and NTFP Based Enterprise Development' at the ongoing Transforming Mountain Forestry Symposium at FRI in Dehradun.

The global value of goods derived from non-timber enterprises has been estimated to be worth US\$ 130 billion each year. Surprisingly, NTFP has overcome economic blues by registering a growth rate of 3 to 20% across the mountain regions.

Dr Bhisma Subedi of the Asian Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bio-resources (ANSAB), Nepal, was of the view that commercialization of NTFP alone may not contribute to poverty reduction if other factors like conservation and sustainable harvest are not in place. "Certified forest management and balanced value

chain governance can provide better results," he argued.

Highlighting the ecological significance of bamboo in the Himalayas, Werner Kosemund from International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR), New Delhi, argued for incentivizing bamboo marketing for private players to pep up the trade which is worth US\$37 billion. "Bamboo is a pro-poor natural product and a keystone species supporting biodiversity and ecosystem resilience," remarked Werner Kosemund.

Despite the enormous economic potential of NTFP in the Himalayas, there are a series of challenges. Forester Dr Vinay Tandon, who chaired the session, highlighted ecological, structural, operational, and institutional challenges which act as impediments to the growth of NTFP enterprises. From species conservation to sustainable harvest and from product standardization to enterprise development, the challenges confronting the conversion of NTFP into viable economic enterprises have yet to be systematically resolved.

# Capturing climate change perspectives



Dr Kiran Asher



Adaptive forest management for carbon mitigation was at the heart of discussion on 'Mountain Forest and Climate Change' at one of the parallel sessions yesterday.

Sharing experiences from the Bavarian Alps, Reinhard Monsandl of Germany, talked about the lessons learnt from a long-term experiment on regeneration problems in temperate species. The experiment concluded that managed forest can mitigate more carbon than the unmanaged (no intervention) forest.

Another panelist, Ben Vickers of Food and Agriculture Organization, highlighted the change in silviculture practices in mountain forest area. He emphasised policy interventions and financing for forestry-related activities.

Dr Kiran Asher of the Centre for International Forestry Research said agroforestry systems and forests play an important role in providing or supplementing the livelihoods of smallholders living on slopes.

Smallholders manage these systems in ways that sustain their livelihoods and the biophysical and ecological integrity of these lands, she said.

Through another study in China, Dr Wu Ning established that litter quality can regulate the response to climate. He linked vulnerability to tree density, fragmentation, biodiversity, and elevation. Dr Rajesh Thadani of Centre for Ecology Development and Research emphasized that while drawing any plan on the Hindu Kush Himalayas, one must keep microscale diversity of the region in mind.

To complete the story, Session Chair Prof Christian Koerner cited the example of increase in CO<sub>2</sub> concentration vis-à-vis rise in plant biomass. He said that biomass gathering in a living system is not solely dependent on carbon but on many other nutrients, therefore, there cannot be a linear relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> and growth.

## Old wisdom on biodiversity

Quoting an old Limbu phrase "Ghar o daar ho, ban bhandaar ho", Dr R P Choudhary of RECAST, Nepal, brought to light the traditional wisdom that not only laid emphasis on forests as a 'storehouse' for human 'needs' but reflects the manner in which communities managed and sustained the mountain biodiversity. With 'greed' replacing human 'need', managing forests for biodiversity conservation when a large section of the society still subsists on forest resources for daily needs has become daunting.

Much as conservation agencies in the region would like to implement an ecosystem approach to management and ensure the sustained flow of goods and services from forests, there are wide gaps between policies and practices. One reason has been the confusion created by misclassification of the Himalayan forests as temperate forests. "For better understanding of structure and functioning of forest ecosystems, there is a need to devise a separate classification leaving the latitudinal options," argued Dr S P Singh, an independent researcher on mountain issues.

Comparing biodiversity in the mountains with other regions, Dr Rakesh

Shah, Chairman, Uttarakhand State Biodiversity, emphasized on the three pillars of the Convention on Biological Diversity - Conservation, Sustainable Use, and Equitable Sharing - for sustaining the biodiversity in the mountain regions. The need for inventorization, in-situ and ex-situ conservation, integration of traditional knowledge are cross-cutting areas that merit as much attention.



Dr GS Goraya

Dr GS Goraya, Deputy Director General, Indian Council for Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), lamented the inadequate knowledge of forest botany among foresters. "Abies spectabilis was the original forest but what got planted was A. pindrow," he said. It was a clear case of what is known as Forester's Folly. Land-use change, invasive species, and infrastructure development have contributed to serious loss of biodiversity.

Himachal Pradesh is a case in point. According to Sanjeeva Pandey from Himachal Pradesh, there are as many as 500 species listed 'exotic' in the state for which the government is spending valuable resource for their removal. "There is a dire need for research on the impacts of the exotic species on the ecology of the native vegetation," he said.

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"People must also share on-going findings and research to avoid duplication of work," he said. "In addition to policies and plans in place at institutional levels, there is a need to involve ground level staff and administration, as they are the primary implementers of such agreements and frameworks".

Tint Lwin Thuang of Myanmar said working in border areas is always challenging and it is important to rope in broader audiences like people living along the border areas, the private sector, politicians, and research institutes.

The session chair, James Anderson of World Resources Institute, said in addition to trust building at the official level between countries, there is a need for informal information flow amongst civil societies interacting across boundaries for a holistic and effective transboundary cooperation.



Dhananjay Mohan

## Better prevent than solve

Outlining the historical vis-à-vis contemporary perspectives, the keynote speaker at the session 'Moving from Wildlife Protection to Management: HKH Perspectives', S Sathyakumar of Wild Life Institute of India said human-wildlife tensions are easier to prevent than solve.

He said interventions should include management of attractants, education and awareness, immediate compensation, and wildlife focused interventions which include physical barriers and wildlife deterrents, and avoid negative encounters. S Sathyakumar said traditional methods of keeping wild animals at bay by beating empty metal containers and fencing may be effective protective measures against crop damage by wild animals. Further, increased vigilance may be used for protection against carnivores, he observed.

### FOLLOW the event: #forestHKH

Conference website: [www.icimod.org/tmf](http://www.icimod.org/tmf)

Livestream: [www.icfre.org/](http://www.icfre.org/)

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## #FORESTHKH TWEETS OF THE DAY

### ICIMOD @icimod

Working with media and celebrities could be 1 innovative way to share data with wider audiences, says Tint Lwin Thuang, Myanmar

### yangchen c rinzin @yrcrinzin

forest fire is one area that requires trans-boundary cooperation

### anjarasmussen @anjarasmussen

private sector is an important stakeholder but must take it seriously to be involved Tint Lwin Thuang

### Udayan Mishra @oootheyan

'Need of the hour: awareness, changes in behaviour, co-existence of humans and wildlife' - S. Sathyakumar, WII

The keynote speaker also touched upon causes and symptoms, capture and relocation/removal of problem animals, tracking marked problem animals after release, relief/ex-gratia, and compensation scheme. He said science-based population estimation, monitoring and management of problem animals, and change in behaviors are also important for peaceful human-wildlife existence.

The second keynote speaker, Dr Dhananjai Mohan of Uttarakhand Forest Department, elaborated possible long-term and short-term mitigating strategies. Among the long-term strategies, he stressed on proper land use planning and population monitoring of problem species. In the short-term, he recommended preventive measures like barriers and removal of vegetation, monitoring of problem animals, better vigilance, alternate cropping, and capture or removal of problem animals. "In Uttarakhand, the most important measures have been the delegation of power to divisional level and streamlining the mechanism for fast and rational payment of compensation," he said.

Kunal Satyarthi of Forest Research Institute was of the opinion that relocating and capturing the animals may not help solve the problem. A Bhutanese delegate said there is the issue of sustainability of compensation schemes for want of funds. Another participant said killing animals must be the last option.

## IUFRO facilitates Mountain Forestry Symposium

Greetings from the IUFRO President Professor Mike Wingfield and the IUFRO Executive Director Alexander Buck who wish the conference a successful conclusion. Both regret not being able to personally participate in the conference.

IUFRO through its member institutions, including those in the Hindukush-Himalaya Region, has a long history of research and development work in mountain forests around the globe. IUFRO addresses mountain forest issues through Working Groups active on Mountain Forest Management; Alpine Forest Ecosystems; Torrent, Erosion and Landslide Control; Snow and Avalanches; Watershed Management; and Disaster Documentation and Assessment, etc.

IUFRO wishes to extend fullest cooperation to ICIMOD for enhancing ecological security and economic prosperity of the region.

### For further information contact

Dr Rajan Kotru

[rajan.kotru@icimod.org](mailto:rajan.kotru@icimod.org)

**Daily Brief Team:** Anja Rasmussen, Gopilal Acharya, Sudhirendar Sharma, Udayan Mishra

**Rapporteurs:** Laxmi Dutt Bhatta, YP Singh, Dinesh Kumar, Vineet Kumar, Nawraj Pradhan, Rakesh Kumar, Monica Kaushik, HP Singh, Ishwari Datt Rai, GSC Negi, Manish Bhandari

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International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development  
GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel +977-1-5003222 Email [info@icimod.org](mailto:info@icimod.org) Web [www.icimod.org](http://www.icimod.org)