ICIMOD COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

2024–2030

CONTENTS

This strategy has been produced at the request of the Senior Management Committee of International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and was co-produced with staff at the centre. It was presented for feedback from ICIMOD's Independent Support Group in Spring 2024, with revisions following detailed inputs in November. It is designed to serve as the founding document for nested communications strategies within ICIMOD's structure of the Strategic Group, Action Area, Intervention, and bilateral project level, and subsequent communications strategies for the organisation.

ICIMOD COMMUNICATIONS, AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2030
AUDIENCE-FIRST

ICIMOD's COMMUNICATIONS GOAL

Accelerate global awareness of the critical issues facing millions across the HKH region and drive urgently needed action towards inclusive and climate-resilient development, by sharing scientific expertise and the experiences of diverse communities of the HKH.

Communications is crucial to achieving ICIMOD's mission "to build and share knowledge that drives regional policy and action and attracts investment that enables the diverse countries and communities of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) to transition to greener, more inclusive, and climate resilient development". Greater and better use of creative and digital communications tools and approaches, including in the creation, brokering, communication, and uptake of knowledge, are key routes to deliver our Strategic Group, Action Area, and Intervention milestones and targets, especially through two major focus areas outlined in our Strategy 2030, namely, our key areas of strength and our impact pathways.

OUR KEY AREAS OF STRENGTH ARE (P5 STRATEGY 2030):

1. Delivering regional, national, and sub-national information on key trends, events, risks, situation analyses, and research syntheses

2. Identifying, investigating, and exchange of learning about proven and actionable solutions

3. Supporting policy and decision-makers through policy and scenario analyses, inputs, and engagement in various policy and institutional processes

4. Developing skills and capacity on facilitating knowledge transfer across and between regional member countries

OUR IMPACT PATHWAYS ARE (P11 STRATEGY 2030)

1. **Innovation and scaling:** co-designed and co-created research, evidence, and innovation collaborations to scale the uptake of solutions.

2. **Regional cooperation:** dialogues, mechanisms, protocols for collective action on the HKH

3. **Policy:** support (monitoring, analysis, advice) to regional member countries

4. **Capability:** understanding, awareness, skills, capabilities of institutions, partners, communities.

While ICIMOD has long excelled at producing high-quality synthesis reports and applied research, with an overarching goal of providing thought leadership from the region, given the escalating crises facing people and nature in the HKH region, and an increasingly dynamic and competitive communications and policy landscape in our region and around the world, our communications approach must be more focused and strategic, as well as agile, adaptive, and responsive. Every communications product we deliver needs to reach a precisely targeted audience, generate the maximum impact, and be assessed. We must do more to leverage our role as a platform for expertise and knowledge that exists across the region, especially by tapping into affiliate networks such as HUC and Sandee, and make more of ICIMOD's formidable role increasing the scientific and national, regional, and local decision-making capacities by championing talented scholars, researchers, policy experts and officials.

OUR COMMUNICATIONS
PRINCIPLES

This communications strategy is guided by the following key principles, which are communications-specific adaptations from the Core Values in our Strategy 2030. These principles exist to guide our work, behaviour, decisions, and implementation, and we seek to give equal weight to each principle

To be bold, quick, proactive, and responsive, without compromising our apolitical status. Our Strategy 2030 requires we take a much stronger and bolder approach to public positioning and external communication. We have the knowledge, the mandate, the expertise, and a responsibility to speak up and be honest brokers on the behalf of mountains, people, and nature in global, regional, and national fora, during major disasters, and during decisions affecting our region. We commit to balance this bolder positioning with a commitment to being scrupulously cross-party and will take steps to mitigate any risks to our neutrality vis-à-vis our regional member countries.

To be science-driven in our communications, and evidence driven in tracking the impact of our communications, using analytics for learning and review. We will collect and share data and knowledge on media, social media, publications, and web analytics via quarterly reports, commission insight and analysis of target audiences, and surveys of user needs and brand perception. We will formulate targets for all areas of change and track our progress.

To balance urgency with agency. Research shows that large numbers of policymakers and the public are aware of and worried about climate change, nature loss, and declining air quality, but to drive action, this awareness must point to solutions. ICIMOD co-develops and co-evaluates solutions shaped by North-South and South-South exchange of knowledge and experiences: we must give greater prominence in our communications to showcasing not just the issues, but also the solutions.

To place diversity and inclusivity at the heart of all our communications. Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, persons with disabilities, and socially excluded groups are a key audience for our interventions and as a knowledge organization we need to do more to collaborate with them and understand their issues, thereby strengthening the effectiveness and increasing the impact of our influencing, programmes, and plans. As well as providing opportunities for them to participate and engage across our creation of knowledge, we will set targets for the coverage we give to these groups and actively target investments, tools, and programmes to bolster their agency and visibility with national governments, and in regional and global processes.

To recognise that humanising, localising, and visualising content underpins motivation and action. In communications, a human face outperforms every other message, a local story always generates the most interest. We will constantly look for ways to bring our knowledge, information, and insights to life in the most compelling ways: through human stories, local stories, and data visualisations and graphics. We will also harness 'the power of eight': increasing our relevance at the country level by striving for equal representation from all our regional member countries, making communications material available in more regional member country languages where practical, and establishing a network of ambassadors, content creators and public affairs experts across the region.

To map actors and nurture transformational communications partnerships. The pace, scale, and immediacy of the polycrisis is prompting ever more organisations to move into our domains. Communications, Strategic Groups and Country Focal Persons shall regularly map key actors, potential champions, media partnerships, and power, to deepen and strengthen existing and forge new alliances at the country level, regionally and globally in key focal areas, tapping into big overarching themes such as food and water.

To embrace digital meaningfully. ICIMOD must target our resources where they will deliver tangible outcomes and most impact: while there remains a hugely important role for flagship synthesis assessments, and high-quality peer-review articles in major journals, with audiences overwhelmingly online, our investments of time and resource in the former must be balanced with a much greater emphasis on the development of digital materials to support the delivery of our milestones. We commit to strengthening our digital infrastructure, content, reach and capacity, and to devoting more resource to communicating our knowledge online including data, audio-visual content, infographics, and data visualisation.

To set minimum delivery standards and work in the open. We will set and automate minimum standards for the turnaround of communications advice/support, products, especially our technical and general publications work. We will set out to instil a culture of working in the open across ICIMOD to increase our transparency, accountability, and engagement, and shall encourage and empower experts to publish early research findings, and key takeaways of flagship engagements, visits, field trips and from meetings, workshops and conferences.

COMMUNICATIONS **OBJECTIVES** 2030

These three objectives are designed to support ICIMOD's Strategic Groups, Action Areas, and Interventions to meet results targets, and boost outcomes and impacts at the highest level.

1. To **elevate awareness** of the escalating socio-economic, climate and environmental crisis in the Hindu Kush Himalaya, triggering and supporting urgent action on science, policy, and practice, especially regional and multi-country.

2. To **reach decision makers** (local, national, regional, and global) with timely, accurate and compelling evidence to inform policy, implementation and dialogue.

3. To **reaffirm and grow** ICIMOD's reach, dialogue and collaboration , particularly with regional member country governments and publics to create demand for progressive policies, action, and investment.

COMMUNICATIONS AT ICIMOD
PROGRESS TO DATE

The process of restructuring our communications to achieve greater policy impact has already started: since the start of this Medium Term Action Plan , we have embedded communications across the organisation, we have begun the transformation our editorial processes, and we have piloted global media campaigns to great success and hugely grown our visibility.

This strategy goes further. It recognises that robust evidence alone is not enough to affect policy change, action, and investment; rather, we must meet audiences where they are at, through channels they are already using, and via spokespeople they trust. It recognises that change is not linear, and so it is critical that we leverage our networks and decentralise our communications so that they are rooted in local and national contexts.

It seeks to do more to make visible and to better leverage the unique and substantial contributions that ICIMOD already plays as a trusted knowledge-broker in a geopolitically sensitive region, and to spotlight our partners in governments, implementing partners, and communities on the ground.

To deliver on our Principles and Objectives, we have identified **5 strategic focus areas for action and change** where we will deploy our resources to increase our impact, and to deliver ICIMOD's mission 2030, including putting our **audiences first**; sustaining vigorous **media coverage**; strengthening **country-level communications**; building **creative alliances**; and **tracking our impact**, protecting our **brand**, and streamlining our **operations**.

WHAT WOULD
SUCCESS LOOK LIKE BY 2030?

Our data, evidence and knowledge are being used by decision makers (local, national, global) to drive solutions and policy agendas

We have built awareness amongst key stakeholders via our country communication hubs

We have connected to new audiences through our print and digital outputs, via our extensive media coverage (local, national and global), and through influencer/goodwill ambassador outreach

We have co-created compelling new narratives with partners and networks that resonate with target audiences.

Our reputation and credibility have grown, our brand is well recognised.

Our development partners are fully informed of our work and their continued support is assured.

BACKGROUND

ICIMOD's mission is to build and share knowledge that drives regional policy and action and attracts investment that enables the diverse countries and communities of the HKH to transition to greener, more inclusive, and climate resilient development.

¹ICIMOD Governance

ICIMOD was established in 1983 to provide all countries of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region with the scientific knowledge and qualified personnel needed for the implementation of ecologically sound development[1].

For 40 years, the Centre has been the primary co-creator of knowledge about the Hindu Kush Himalaya, and our researchers, professional and technical staff and scientists and communications unit have focussed on the publication of knowledge products, on convening partners from universities, governments, and civil society to co-produce and share knowledge, build capacity, and to bridge the gap between science and policy.

Working at this interface of science, policy, advocacy, and implementation remains our core mission, and all our communications, engagement and advocacy must ensure continued recognition for ICIMOD as the primary credible, neutral, and apolitical knowledge-broker about this region.

ESCALATING CHALLENGES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The HKH region is now facing acute and potentially irreversible threats from biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution, which are compounding existing poverty and inequalities. The need for transboundary collaboration, progressive policy, and multi-stakeholder collaboration has never been more urgent.

The knowledge we provide must be **of the utmost relevance and respond to the needs of our regional member countries**. ICIMOD must be more focussed than ever on the production of **policy-relevant and actionable knowledge products and evidence for use in decision-making, and on promoting our findings among key audiences**.

At the same time growing awareness of and concern about climate and environmental risks coupled with changes in technology use and media consumption is creating **potential new audiences, new caucuses, and new routes to bring about policy change**, action, and investment.

Communications can support ICIMOD Strategic Groups to capitalise on key trends — such as the advent of powerful civil society movements, unprecedented media interest in our subjects and in Global South perspectives, and new entrants to our sphere of operations – to increase our capacity to drive change and accelerate action.

This multi-year strategy (2024–2030) sets out how we will leverage our advantages – our unique mandate, reach, reputation, role, people, and supporter base – through a gearshift in our communications framed by 2023-26 results commitments and via a collaborative assessment of our communications objectives, audiences, channels, and tools together with Strategic Group colleagues.

This external change requires a radical internal shift. **In resource: we must spend at least as much time and energy setting out to change the issues we work on as we spend on understanding them, supported by a significant uptick in spending on communications and influencing**. And in positioning: programmes must recognise and embrace communications as a key ICIMOD lever of change, and communications, engagement and advocacy must be integrated into all Strategic Group, Action Area, and Intervention workstreams' plans.

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At this moment, scientists and researchers need to go direct to policymakers with much more frequency. The occasional conference is not enough. We need to establish more pathways to power.

—Bob Sandford
United Nations University

COMMUNICATIONS
AT ICIMOD

The Communications Unit is the key decision-making body and production house for what, when, and how ICIMOD communicates. It is a multidisciplinary team, bringing together copy, video, picture editors, designers, media experts, and web experts. Led by the Head of Communications, reporting to the Deputy Director General, the unit oversees and provides services including publications, design, planning and delivery of campaigns, digital content, media work, stakeholder and internal communications, branding, and merchandise; plus, the development of communications skills, talent, principles, standards, and digital infrastructure and content libraries (both digital publications and audio-visual content). Communications experts work across the entire organisation and support the delivery of all three Strategic Groups and six Action Areas.

How has ICIMOD's communications already changed?

In 2023, ICIMOD started a process of restructuring, auditing, and recruitment to streamline staffing and business processes and to bring hardware and software resources up to international standards to boost efficiency and delivery. It has also committed to two major decentralisation pushes: firstly, decentralising communications, so that communications staff now sit within Strategic Groups, and secondly, stepping up our capacity to campaign and influence within the region by hiring regional communications talent. The first decentralisation phase is already completed, the second will begin this MTAP. (See MTAP commitments, at annex.)

1. DECENTRALISING COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN ICIMOD

From 2023, the central unit has been reorganised, with Senior Communications Officers now embedded within Strategic Groups and advising and reporting directly to Strategic Group Leads with a co-supervisory line to the Head of Communications. Communications Officers at the Strategic Group Level report to these Senior Communications Officers. This decentralised structure is designed to increase the impact of our communications and engagement by ensuring plans are developed with increased granularity of workstreams' objectives, audiences, contexts, trends, risks, and opportunities. It is Senior Communications Officers' and Communications Officers' role to advocate for, and design and deliver campaigns that make greater and better use of communications; and to support, advise and ensure Interventions have the right tools, processes, and communications objectives factored into their plans with the Head of Communications and central unit providing advice, quality assurance, and guidance. Nested communications strategies for each Strategic Group are to be developed at updated at least annually.

ICIMOD'S COMMUNICATIONS
'STRATEGY ON A PAGE'

GOAL

BUILD AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE THAT DRIVES REGIONAL POLICY AND ACTION AND ATTRACTS INVESTMENTS THAT ENABLES THE DIVERSE COUNTRIES AND COMMUNITIES OF THE HKH TO TRANSITION TO GREENER, MORE INCLUSIVE AND CLIMATE RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT

OBJECTIVES

1 Elevate awareness of the escalating socio-economic, climate and environmental crisis in the HKH, triggering and supporting urgent action on science, policy, and practice, especially regional and multi-country.

2 Reach decision makers (local, national and global) with timely, accurate and compelling evidence to inform policy, implementation and dialogue

3 Reaffirm and grow ICIMOD's reach, particularly within regional member country governments and publics to create demand for progressive policies, action and investment.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
PLANS AND TACTICS

PUTTING AUDIENCES FIRST	SUSTAINING MEDIA COVERAGE	STRENGTHENING COUNTRY-LEVEL COMMUNICATIONS	BUILDING CREATIVE ALLIANCES	TRACKING IMPACT, PROTECTING BRAND, STREAMLINING OPERATIONS
Understanding our target audience – re-balance from publication to engagement	Build strong personal relationships with key journalists	Build relevance and comms capacity in RMCs	Broaden existing strong network to include comms and outreach e.g. UN.	Define milestones and targets which align with 2023-2026 Results Framework
Sharpening the quality, impact, salience of our outputs	Ensure quality, relevance and timeliness of research	Increase resources for translating regional information to national	Approach potential new allies, especially humanitarian, business and civil society	Co-support / co-lead ICIMOD annual progress reporting
Ensuring message impact – develop overarching suite of key messages, enabling message discipline	Develop and promote expert spokesperson list	Celebrate regional leadership on climate and nature	Approach chambers of commerce or city mayors	Monitor online mentions of ICIMOD to understand audience perceptions
Diversifying and improving our digital communications	Proactively promote the voices of indigenous and local knowledge holders	Leverage diplomatic power of Regional Member Countries	Make our knowledge more accessible to broader ecosystem of organisations focused on global warming and nature loss	Use insights to activate brand strategy, driving awareness and engagement
Auditing SEO	Offer media training for staff and regional member countries	Energise our base in Nepal and Bhutan	Support Strategic Groups to identify promising partners	Streamline infrastructure and operations
Transforming our visual communications	Develop flagship journalism training programme	Build influence in Pakistan and Bangladesh	Build alliances with influencers and goodwill ambassadors	Overhaul intranet
Ensuring ongoing engagement				Focus on personal storytelling to enhance fundraising efforts

COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES

Bold, quick, proactive, responsive, honest broker (sensitive to geopolitics)
Balance urgency with agency
Place diversity and inclusivity at the heart
Humanise, localise, visualise

Map actors and nurture transformational communications partnerships
Embrace digital meaningfully: commit resource online
Evidence driven, using analytics for learning and review
Set minimum delivery standards and work in the open

2. DECENTRALISING COMMUNICATIONS REGIONALLY

ICIMOD is a regional organisation. Brokering regional knowledge; increasing awareness of the need and uptake of transboundary solutions; and advocating on behalf of the region are our key strengths, as well as the key sphere of operation of Strategic Group 3. However, policymakers and populations identify, plan and resource locally and nationally, so we must step up local and national-level communications and advocacy efforts, and connect our portfolio to national priorities, policies and plans. Even when our implementation is through partners, we need country-level presence, and our experience and voice in the rooms where decisions are being taken. Communications plans and content and campaigns must be rooted in local contexts and champion representatives from across the region. Achieving this will require ICIMOD to establish a regional network of ambassadors, and public affairs and communications professionals. This plurality of voices and languages reflects ICIMOD's commitment to inclusion.

3. ONE WINDOW POLICY

While we embrace a decentralised approach to communications, recognizing the diverse contexts and audiences within our region, we uphold a one-window policy for media engagement. This means that colleagues engaging with the media are provided with briefings to ensure alignment with strategic priorities and institutional messages; that the most relevant spokespeople are identified to engage with journalists, screened for diversity; and all media is tracked and recorded to ensure ongoing engagement and institutional memory. The policy ensures that all communication activities align with our overarching objectives and are executed with precision and consistency across Strategic Groups and regional contexts. It promotes accountability, strategic alignment, and inclusivity in our external communications efforts. A social media and content strategy is being developed in coordination with other Strategic Groups and in line with ICIMODs communication plan.

LEARNING FROM SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

ICIMOD's work is about supporting progressive agendas to take hold. This requires building demand around issues, investment, and new modalities and agendas. We must therefore be much more explicit about planning our communications – explicitly drawing on the tools and tactics developed in campaigning. As Chris Rose, in How to Win Campaigns, explains: a communications campaign is a planned sequence of communications and interactions that uses a compelling narrative over time to bring about a certain outcome, or result. Campaigns, as academia, draw on argument, research, education, and publishing, but spend greater energy on showing a solution to a compelling problem, motivating action, and mobilising support. It is possible to campaign without being policy-prescriptive or jeopardising our neutrality. All ICIMOD's communications should follow the logic of a campaign, guided by clarity about what we want to achieve and how each specific piece of communications work advances that objective. Our Planning and Budgeting Guidelines for all staff makes a certain range of core communications components compulsory for all teams, while signalling advantageous tools and approaches teams might consider, e.g., lobbying, letter-writing, thought leadership, issue-mapping, and audience insight or market research. Our Strategic Communications Planning tool supports teams to first identify objectives before selecting audiences, message, channel, and calls to action.

ICIMOD's Audiences

Targeting products to specific audiences is key to the success of our Interventions, and the Communications Unit will work with Strategic Groups, down to the component level as necessary, to develop bespoke guides to target audiences. In the meantime, the table below serves as a generic sweep of ICIMOD targets Choosing specific targets, audiences and products will be done through analysis of each impact pathway.

AUDIENCE	FUNCTION
Decision-makers and officials in national governments, especially ministries of environment, energy, water resources, industry, planning, finance, forests, agriculture, hydromet, local authorities and the scientific advisers of policymakers.	ICIMOD's primary function is to provide evidence and technical knowledge, advice and data to governments to inform policies and/or encourage the adoption of plans and actions. It also seeks to build capable institutions – in communications terms, this might mean, for instance, working to ensure governments' Early Warning For All initiatives respond to the unique needs of differently-abled groups.
United Nations agencies especially UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, WMO, WHO, WFP, FAO, UN Women, UNHCR, and processes, UNFCCC, CBD, IPCC and IPBES	Global processes are the key audience for our findings and agencies are primary targets for transformative partnerships, funding, and dissemination of knowledge about risks and solutions, policy and finance needs in the HKH.
Country-level practitioners or implementation partners.	Organisations and groups on the ground that could benefit from our tools and approaches, that are pioneering solutions we should champion/support to scale.

AUDIENCE	FUNCTION
Publics in our regional member countries, existing or target donor countries, high-emitting countries	In common with bodies such as the UNFCCC and the IPCC, ICIMOD must do more to translate the knowledge we hold into formats that general publics can understand in order to create the public support for policy-decisions in particular impact pathways. Publics are the key way to influence policy.
Major development funders – private and public major development banks, climate finance institutions.	Data-driven reports, moral and economic arguments, and investment-ready organisations to influence the flow and quality of finance for just transitions
Ambassadors and development experts in existing or target donor foreign/aid departments, especially Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Australia, UK.	Regional forward operating bases for ICIMOD's donors or target funders, their evaluation and recommendations on ICIMOD's delivery and competence is vital in sustaining our funding base and to influence the finance for just transitions in HKH as above
Regional and global climate and environmental media	The route to broader audiences and the public at large
Indigenous and local knowledge holders, conservation, non-governmental and humanitarian organisations	As stakeholders, advocates, knowledge holders, and implementing partners in particular impact pathways
Global scientific networks, research institutions and publishers	To share our research findings, especially when linked to a particular impact pathway to bring about change, .

OUR **STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS**
OF ACTION AND CHANGE

To deliver on our principles and objectives, we have identified **5 key areas of action and change** where we will deploy our resources to advance all our communications commitments and 2030 targets.

1. Putting audiences first across our portfolio

    A.   Understanding our target audience

    B.   Sharpening the quality, impact, salience of our outputs (presentations, publications, outreach, etc)

    C.   Ensuring message impact

    D.   Diversifying and improving our digital communications

    E.   Transforming how we communicate visually

    F.   Ensuring ongoing engagement

2. Sustaining vigorous media coverage in our region and globally

3. Strengthening our country-level communications

4. Building creative alliances

5. Tracking our impact, building and protecting our brand, and streamlining our operations

1. PUTTING AUDIENCES FIRST ACROSS OUR PORTFOLIO

A) Understanding our target audience

In common with many knowledge organizations, ICIMOD's work is overly supply-driven. This urgently needs to change, supported by clearly identifying specific key audiences for the delivery of our results targets through specific impact pathways, and establishing how to motivate them. This may include a greater number of public events, networks, and person-to-person communication, and dedicating more resources

to influencing decisions and thinking, rather than publishing, including setting out to establish much more active and sustained engagement with elected officials, their advisers and the bodies that influence them, such as think tanks. Communications Unit will establish a roster of consultants to provide key advisory support to Strategic Groups, e.g. power mapping, to identify players, processes, and forces; audience insight and market research to understand target audiences' beliefs and behaviours; and external public affairs support to support advocacy with specific industries, sectors, or parliamentary committees.

B) Sharpening the quality, impact, salience of our outputs (presentations, publications, outreach).

While there is a non-linear relationship between research and policy, scientific publishing remains crucial and in 2023, ICIMOD revamped our key editorial oversight panel, the Publications and Outreach Panel – thereby creating for the first time a body to screen publication proposals in advance of drafting: to ensure these are strategic, anchored in our results framework, and interdisciplinary. It also provides scope for the new oversight panel to initiate and commission flagship reports and assessments — with the panel supported by an overhauled digital request dashboard[2]. We have created new planning tools to help teams to select the right communication approach to reach their objective, encouraging teams to think digital-first wherever possible, and are introducing project management systems to allow for quality assurance, collaboration and sign off. We will seek to offer teams guidance and training in routes in reach policymakers and policy influencing tools – including power mapping, and briefings.

C) Ensuring message impact

The quality and relevance of ICIMOD's communications outputs affects our impact, credibility and brand. ICIMOD is taking steps to revamp our production of knowledge products (KPs), including:

- Revamping our key editorial oversight group, the Publications and Outreach Panel, which along with managing quality assurance, will also initiate and commission ICIMOD flagship reports and assessments
- Encouraging a digital-first approach, with more emphasis on KPs such as technical blogs, infographics and data platforms, videos and podcasts, and more use of social media to report on meetings and visits.
- Creating new planning tools to help operational teams define the communications objectives and audiences that will best contribute to their impact pathway and select the most effective communications approach and products.
- Screening non-urgent KPs at planning stage, before they are drafted
- Developing guidance and templates to support the production of shorter, clearer KPs such as Convening Papers and Perspectives.
- Revising KP quality criteria and the quality assessment process
- Supporting the above with a new digital platform and management dashboard.

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[2]The publications request processing system is being overhauled to improve functionality and user experience.

D) Diversifying and improving our digital communications

Consistency, clarity, and repetition of messaging is crucial in today's fragmented communications and media environment. ICIMOD's Communications Unit will work across the institute to develop an overarching suite of key messages on each of our Strategic Groups, Action Areas, and Interventions. Key messages consist of key, approved points of information, narrative, and examples we want to repeat to audiences so that they hear, understand, and remember the crux of an issue or argument no matter where they find us – on our owned channels, in earned media, or in a speech or presentation. They will be used in communications and media for rapid and wide dissemination and uptake of a topic and are the basis for all communications collateral: press releases, web copy, social media content, presentations, speeches, and negotiation and discussion points. They are used to enable message discipline both within and beyond the organisation and are designed to ensure accuracy and political neutrality of an organisation's statements. We have already embarked on the process of creating these messages for each intervention, with first drafts to be complete in early of 2025 . These documents shall be revisited as frequently as is necessary, as knowledge evolves, however changes will need to be agreed upon by Head of Communications and Intervention Managers and above.

E) Transform our visual communications

Our strategy commits us to the transformation of the website into a knowledge hub and, with audiences overwhelmingly online, the web should be our primary repository for knowledge sharing . The major priority for the communications unit, therefore, is the revamping of the website back-end and front design following iterative, user-centred, test-driven processes to improve user experience, incorporate the work and needs of ICIMOD's Innovation and Digital Technology, Regional Information Service, ICIMOD Results Dashboard, Planning, Monitoring and Reporting team and Evaluation Unit , and to ensure layouts are easy to modify by in-house web staff.

To reach our target audiences we must pitch our content accordingly– and break material into bitesize nuggets, using videos, explainers, and data-visualisation. We must also recognise our power to set the agenda, by amplifying the voices of the communities impacted, and shining a light on underreported areas. We should embrace new ways to connect with wider audiences – e.g., through health, and food, mainstream topics that resonate with publics, and get cut-through for the themes we work on . We should also work closely with partner communities and local organizations, arm them with facts, and give them greater access than ever to our resources and platforms, so that we empower them to become advocates for needed changes.

We will ensure that information on our ICIMOD.org domain is available in our regional member countries, and share more audio-visual content – films and audio.

We will conduct an audit on search engine optimisation (SEO); with this information we will be able to improve our website to increase our visibility in Google and other search engines whenever users search for keywords associated with ICIMOD expertise, the HKH region, the services we provide, and the KPs we produce.

Web tech will be streamlined to configure the server for speed and user-experience, including being optimized for mobile. Additionally, proper file management, security, information privacy will be introduced, and backup, and backup restore will be streamlined. Accessibility will be improved with the introduction of a new cross-site search engine to help users navigate to the content they need across ICIMOD's multiple different portals, and web design will follow the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative protocol around semantics, colours, size, and types of fonts to ensure the differently abled have access . We will pilot how paid search impacts our traffic in order to produce the evidence for its possible wider adoption.

F) Ensuring ongoing engagement

From nature reserves of dizzying biodiversity to some of the world's most holy and famous rivers, from majestic ridges and peaks, and rangelands of unrivalled significance for wildlife, people, and spirituality, our region holds some of Earth's most iconic and striking settings and cultures. We need to let this scenery, and its people, and cultures, take much more prominence in our communications – people only protect what they love, and they only love what they know. But we are currently failing to document our region visually, and therefore failing to leverage the extraordinary advantage that being positioned in this region affords us.

In 2023, the Communications Unit conducted a thorough audit of our audio-visual content assets/picture library and found glaring gaps in our stills and moving image library including droughts, heatwaves, floods, landslides (see Annex). These are key assets that are needed for campaigns, annual reports, publications, and media drives. There is a clear need to strengthen our archive and invest in its searchability. We will work with teams to map content needs and then commission audiovisual content.

The Internet completely upended journalism's business model: the news bureau, of old, has been long dead. To get coverage, you need to be in the business of spoon-feeding journalists the content they need to tell a story.

—Aruna Chandrasekhar
Carbon Brief.

As well as publicizing and celebrating our landscape through visual storytelling, we must make more prominent our specialists and our mountain communities – another unique selling point for ICIMOD's work in a sector that is increasingly aware that it has skewed towards White /Global North perspectives and agency. We must invest in content-gathering equipment (podcasting, webinar hosting, press conference hosting and filmmaking studio) so we can build the profile of these groups, increase their leverage, and share their insights and expertise to wider audiences through bite-size video marketing and audio formats, e.g. podcasts, and flex this investment to build the capacity and profile of key spokespeople from the region – whether party negotiators, Indigenous peoples, or heads of community organisations. We need to also ensure our knowledge is translated into other shareable content formats – infographics and data visualisation. We should ambitiously set out to make prominent actionable, policy-relevant research, our workforce, the region's landscapes and people , and ensure we have the resources to do this effectively.

2. SUSTAIN VIGOROUS MEDIA COVERAGE IN OUR REGION AND RUN BREAKTHROUGH GLOBAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS.

News media is crucial in shaping policy agendas, fostering public discourse and motivating change[3]. It is through news media that most people[4] get information, and we are now in the privileged position of having journalists increasingly approach us for stories. However, to sustain this hugely valuable conduit to primary audiences we need to continue to invest, building strong personal relationships with key journalists, and stimulating both the supply of and demand for stories on and spokespeople from our region.[5] On the supply side, as well as ensuring the quality, relevance and timeliness of our research, we shall develop and promote a public-facing expert spokespersons list, ensuring greater visibility for our staff, RMC partners, and members of the HUC and SANDEE networks. We shall also set out to leverage our platform by proactively recruiting Indigenous and local knowledge holders for this list; and potentially offer media training to staff and spokespeople from our regional member countries as needed.

 On the demand side, with more than one third of respondents to a landmark IPSOS survey believing that news media are doing 'too little' to report and share information about climate change, we shall also step up our journalist training programmes. To date, ICIMOD has successfully delivered numerous journalism training workshops, but we have embarked on this endeavour in an ad-hoc and short-term fashion. With media such a key, long-term, ally in achieving our mission and vision, we have initiated discussions with key partners including UNESCO, which holds the mandate for journalism in the UN system, and World Bank, which successfully runs a Climate Media Forum to outline a campaign and work programme to increase the calibre and prestige and range of climate and environmental journalism within the HKH – providing a key forum for Interventions and Strategic Groups to build understanding and increase media coverage of opportunities and issues specific to their results delivery.

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[3]The 2023 Ipsos, Reuters Institute for Study of Journalism, University of Oxford and Oxford Climate Journalism Network survey on climate change media

[4]This data is representative of online and possibly more politically active audiences and may not represent the older/offline/least affluent

[5]An IPSOS survey of 2023 climate change media consumption, including India, Pakistan, UK and USA, found that:
- Online and TV news are the most used sources of climate change news
- Scientists, activists, and international institutions are most trusted primary sources of climate information: with scientists eliciting most trust of all groups – 73%
- Most respondents expressed interest in solutions-oriented climate news

> To work with media, create events: '*the nutrients of news*.' Plan campaigns as a series of events. Events can be news. Your opinion, or the existence of an issue, isn't,

—Chris Rose
Author, How to Win Campaigns

3. STRENGTHEN RELEVANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF OUR COMMUNICATIONS TO OUR RMCS

It is urgent we build our relevance in regional member countries. While regional assessments and trends are vital for the HKH, and our regional status and analysis of transboundary issues is our comparative advantage, and we must continue to emphasise the need for transboundary action, we must increase the resources we focus on translating regional information/assessments to the national level. Evidence on the consequences of changes in the region for food, water, and energy security at the national level, including, losses to the economy, etc. would attract more political buy-in for targeted interventions, especially from larger RMCs.

In 2023, with the recruitment of ICIMOD's first ever China Communications Officer we prototyped ways to, and demonstrated the value of, building up country-level communications. Digital products, services and tools will lead   the continued expansion of these country-level communications, with our main ICIMOD.org website overhaul ensuring content on our work is available in our regional member countries' official languages in 2025 (Chinese and Bangladesh-language websites already exist). We will explore ways to translate content using AI services; and work with country focal persons to determine priority areas for expansion.

ICIMOD will do more to support the results targets of Action Areas A and F, by celebrating leadership played by regional actors in climate and environmental action to create a positive feedback loop and sustain action, ensuring credit is fully provided to the country – for instance the role Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh are playing in terms of setting Quantifiable Emissions Reductions Targets and not making these a condition of finance.

We will also seek to offer communications capacity-building to diverse actors in our regional member countries, where appropriate: from implementation partners to government negotiators to academic networks, community organizers, and media.

INDIA AND CHINA—GLOBAL POWERS WITH HUGE INFLUENCE OVER THE FATE OF MOUNTAINS AND INTEREST IN MOUNTAIN RESOURCES.

China and India are the only two ICIMOD regional member countries to fall within the top five global economies, to be among 20 countries responsible for nearly 90% of CO_2 emissions from new oil and gas 2023-2050, and they are also leading the world on

Of ICIMOD's regional member countries four qualify as 'Least Developed Countries' – Afghanistan and Myanmar, and Bangladesh and Nepal (both due to graduate 2026). LDC status is conferred on countries with a per capita income of less than US$1,025, nutrition, health, education and adult literacy needs, and economic vulnerability.

renewable energy[6]. Both countries are hugely mountainous – making up a third of both China and India. The impact of the decisions made by policymakers of both nations in the next decade cannot be overstated. China has made real strides on air pollution and led the way in the electrification of cars: demonstrating how 'policy done right can drive technological disruption'[7]. Meanwhile, India is predicted to be among the first to experience temperatures deemed "too hot for humans"[8]. On World Environment Day 2022, India launched Mission Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE) Movement, with an aim to replace the 'use-and-dispose' economy. Mission LiFE's aim is three-fold: through behavioural change, crowdsourcing of scalable solutions, and leveraging relevant and culturally appropriate practices in India. China and India are the only countries from the region having observer status in the Arctic Council. Their involvement allows broader international cooperation on mountain issues.

The communications strategy supports, reinforces, and expands Action Area F's work to leverage the leadership of India and China at global fora for increasing the international focus on the HKH and mountain water resources.

NEPAL AND BHUTAN—ALMOST 100% MOUNTAIN ECONOMIES, GRADUATING FROM LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRY STATUS

Bhutan, having diversified away from an entirely agricultural economy, graduated from Least Developed Country status in 2023. It holds vast hydropower resources. As the world's first carbon negative country, it has contributed the least to climate change but faces many of its adverse impacts. As well as being carbon negative, its contribution to water, food, and renewable energy security of downstream communities cannot be overstated. In Nepal, a country of 30 million people, 6 million people live below the poverty line. Nepal has been a leader in community forestry in the region, with a total of 2.24M hectares of forest area transferred to 22,266 community forest user groups, involving some 14.45 million people. Both countries continue to play powerful roles as advocates for mountain issues – and are effectively ICIMOD's 'base': champions and supporters of our work and messaging. Energising this base is a key goal of Action Area F, with ICIMOD's communications supporting, reinforcing, and expanding.

[6]https://www.iea.org/news/renewable-power-on-course-to-shatter-more-records-as-countries-around-the-world-speed-up-deployment
[7]Rathi, Akshat: Green Capitalism
[8]https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/record-heat-waves-push-india-closer-to-limit-of-human-survival/articleshow/99033530.cms?from=mdr

PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH—GLOBAL ADVOCACY BEHEMOTHS, WITH MAJOR EXPOSURE TO CRYOSPHERE LOSS AND SEA-LEVEL RISE.

Bangladesh has a population of 170 million people. It is the sixth most disaster-affected country in the world. Projections suggest the country will see tens of millions of climate refugees because of climate-driven sea-level rise within the next decades. The largest delta in the world, declines in flow, floods, and water scarcity from its network of 230 major rivers threatens the country's biodiversity, food, economies, and development. SERVIR has long collaborated with government ministries and departments to promote regional data and information sharing, and ICIMOD is implementing a springshed management initiative in the Chattogram Hill Tracts region (which makes up one tenth of Bangladesh's land surface, contains 60% of its forests, and has a population of 1.5 million). But it is important for ICIMOD to be more ambitious and visible in its engagement with Bangladesh – proactively looking for ways to share knowledge on for instance, river basins and delta management, on air quality, DRR, and on the preserving wetland1 and charland2 ecosystems by leveraging our knowledge, human capital, and data.

Pakistan has a population of 231 million people and has over 13,000 glaciers, including some of the longest on earth, and a 1,100km coastline – making it doubly exposed to the impacts of rising temperatures on Earth's frozen zones. Its economy is dominated by agriculture, with three-quarters of Pakistan's labour force work in farming. Nine out of the country's ten largest cities are situated within 50 km or less of the Indus, and the river is the largest carrier of waste to the Arabian Sea, threatening marine ecosystems. Pakistan is hugely exposed to the economic consequences of too much too little water, as the floods of 2023 showed, while the country is facing the worst economic crisis in a generation. Reports warn the country is on the brink of a severe and lasting groundwater crisis.

Both countries have a hugely powerful advocacy voice in global fora – especially but not limited to Adaptation needs and Loss and Damage funding – and stepping up our engagement and building our influence and public affairs power in both zones should be a key plank of our regional communications strategy, working across Strategic Groups and particularly with Strategic Group 3.

AFGHANISTAN AND MYANMAR—POLICY CONSTRAINTS, MORAL IMPERATIVE.

Severe operational constraints due to lack of international recognition for political regimes makes it hard to impossible to currently deliver ICIMOD's work within Afghanistan and Myanmar, and there are challenges getting funds into Afghanistan. However, with the circumstances creating these constraints only compounding the climate vulnerability of populations here, and contexts changing rapidly, with e.g. the World Bank just stepping up its activities in Afghanistan, ICIMOD should create an internal expert working group to monitor ground realities. Promising approaches might include the gathering of content and dissemination of knowledge about both territories, support for diaspora academics, and advocacy on issues of water and food security and biodiversity loss. It is important to acknowledge that communication is a route for ICIMOD to maintain relations with civil society (including aid organisations and content creators) that will increase the speed at which the Centre will be able to implement projects on the ground when situations allow. Noting donor sensitivities, it is recommended a sub-group from the Programme Advisory Committee to consult on donor sensitivities and disaggregation of funding. In Afghanistan alone, 23 million face acute food insecurity, and the country is routinely in the top five of most climate vulnerable lists. Through our networks, such as SANDEE and HUC, and several organisations within our partnership network, such as the Red Cross, and possible target partners such as Turquoise Mountain Foundation, we could leverage communications to build content and nurture/maintain spokespeople, promote science and circular economies/resilience.

4. BUILDING CREATIVE ALLIANCES

ICIMOD has wide networks of influence in its partners, including those within the UN system, civil society, academia, in delivery, in our Independent Support Group, and in our donor and diplomatic networks. We rarely if ever work with these groups on communications: and greater emphasis should be made on communications within these existing partnerships.

We will be proactive in seeking to widen existing partnerships to include communications and outreach, especially with organizations such as Futerra, the International Institute for Environment and Development, and Development Alternatives, and in approaching powerful new potential allies, looking beyond our traditional base. Humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, for example, are just some of the organisations that have expanded their programmatic focus in recent years, and are increasingly operating in fields of work – such as climate resilience – that ICIMOD has traditionally led. Working on a sector or pollutant specific basis, ICIMOD might also approach chambers of commerce and city mayors. An ever-expanding, ever more powerful ecosystem of organisations and individuals has sprung up in response to temperature rise and nature loss; we must make our knowledge more accessible to such audiences so they too can play their fullest part, and communications will support Strategic Groups to embark on annual power-mapping to identify promising partners to elevate the scale of and solutions to the crisis in this region.

Building creative alliance with influencers and goodwill ambassadors is very integral to amplify our voice and enhance our brand as well as visibility.

5. TRACKING OUR IMPACT, BUILDING AND PROTECTING OUR BRAND, AND STREAMLINING OUR OPERATIONS.

We will ensure a robust approach to monitoring and evaluating communications work. This requires first defining milestones and targets which align with the 2023-2026 Results Framework, meaning that the Communications Unit will have their own targets (preliminary draft below), but will also support the definition of communications-related milestones within the Interventions. We will collect and analyse progress against these measures alongside the monitoring work of the Strategic Groups.

We will co-support/co-lead the process of ICIMOD Annual Progress Reporting, in close collaboration with the Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Units of ICIMOD.

Building and sustaining our brand is imperative in order to sustain funding for ICIMOD, and for our region. We will work with organisations like Brandwatch to monitor mentions of ICIMOD online to understand customer perceptions and sentiment. Findings and insights can be used to activate a brand strategy that drives positive brand awareness and engagement. https://www.brandwatch.com/use-cases/brand-management/

We will share any lessons learned from such processes to inform and improve future communications plans. We will integrate lessons learned into future comms work (including through perception surveys and focus groups). We will also streamline our infrastructure and operations. The Intranet will be overhauled to improve user experience, quality and relevance of content, and increase use.

WHAT DOES **SUCCESS LOOK LIKE** BY 2030 ?

Our data, evidence and knowledge are being used by decision makers (local, national, global) to drive solutions and policy agendas

We have built awareness amongst new stakeholders via our eight country communication hubs

We have connected to new audiences through our print and digital outputs, and via our extensive media coverage (local, national and global)

We have co-created compelling new narratives with partners and networks that resonate with target audiences.

We have organised successful campaigns

Our reputation has grown, our brand is well recognised.

OBJECTIVE 2	TACTICS / PRIORITIES	KPIs
To elevate awareness of the escalating socio-economic and environmental crisis in the HKH championing policy innovations and community-led solutions	Sharpening quality of our publications Building supply / demand with media Ensuring message consistency Expanding our visual and digital comms	• Media coverage of publications in target markets • Number of under-represented communities are featured in our communication outputs • Number of followers on socials • Number of new allies / partners supporting comms • Extent to which our campaign assets (e.g. photos, hashtags, quotes, etc.) are being used by different stakeholder groups • Extent to which campaigns have attracted transboundary coverage. • New partners supporting our comms work and producing donor driven comms
OBJECTIVE 2	TACTICS / PRIORITIES	KPIs
To reach decision makers (local, national and global) with timely, accurate and compelling evidence to inform policy and dialogue.	Sharpening quality our publications Strengthening in country communications Expanding our visual and digital comms Sharpening our messages	• Extent our messaging is used in policy documentation and framing • Uptake of our spokespeople in the press / quoted by other organisations. • Number of in-country communicators in RMCs • Number of hits our digital policy content is attracting • Lead time for key publications has been reduced • Number of journalists trained
OBJECTIVE 3	TACTICS / PRIORITIES	KPIs
To reaffirm and grow ICIMOD's reach, particularly within regional member country governments and publics to create demand for progressive policy.	Strengthening in country communications Expanding media coverage Improving the quality of our publications	• Increase in searches for ICIMOD (currently between 30 - 70 / day) during key campaign moments • Hits on websites in target markets / countries • Increase in our followings on socials in target markets / countries

FIVE-YEAR SMART GOALS

FIVE-YEAR SMART GOALS

Twitter following has reached 25k

Linked-In reached 10k followers

Insta reached 20k followers

Facebook has reached 50k followers

25% increase in media mentions in mainstream and regional press

25% increase in hits to ICIMOD website and downloaded publications

New and additional partnerships with CSO allies and media amplifiers have been established

The challenges we face in this region will require a huge shift in how do we things. [But] climate change and the environment are not at the top of the national agenda, not major election issues, because people are not demanding that. In a sense, it is insane. But that is the reality, which is why it is extremely important that the very useful work that ICIMOD is doing on the science side, the research results that are coming out, have to be translated into language which ordinary people can understand and appreciate. You must be able to have a strategy of translating the science into fairly simple, compelling messages, which makes sense to ordinary people… to make sure that [for instance, in India] people in Delhi understand that link with the mountains. Sometimes they think, 'oh, this is the Himalayan states', when in fact, the maximum impact will be on the half a billion people who live [downstream]. [It will only be by] educating not only communities but the other end of the spectrum, also educating political leaderships that you can have a mobilization that can actually deliver the results that you want.

—Shyam Saran
former Climate Change Envoy to the Prime Minister of India