

Terms of Reference

**Independent Quadrennial  
Review of ICIMOD and its  
Medium-Term Action Plan V  
(2023–2026)**

ToR

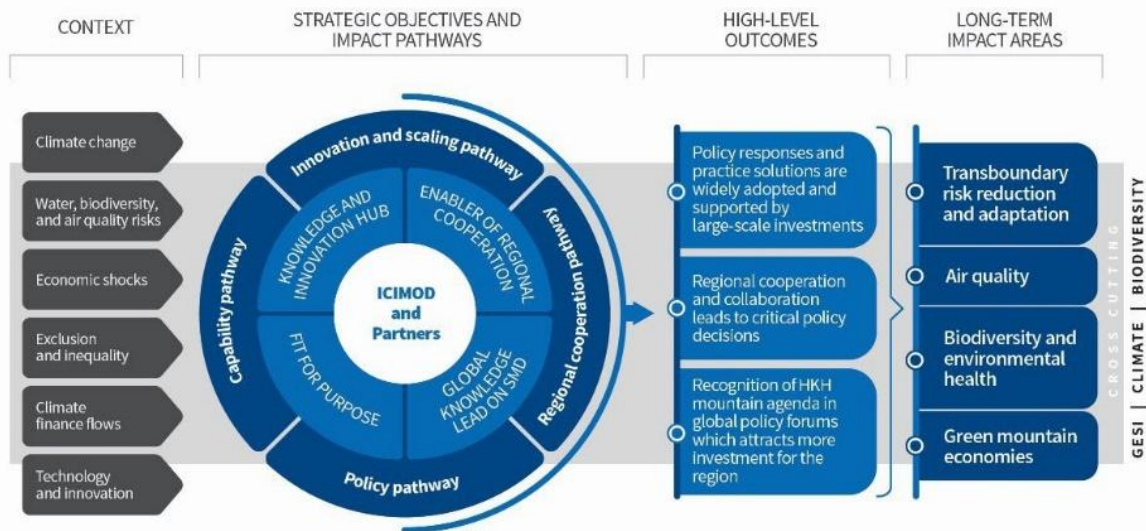
## 1. About ICIMOD

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a leading regional intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Established in 1983, ICIMOD is dedicated to sustainable mountain development and enhancing the resilience of mountain communities in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region. The HKH region spans eight Regional Member Countries (RMCs) - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Sometimes known as the 'third pole', the region is home to the world's largest ice reserves outside of the polar regions, and serves as a vital water tower, sustaining nearly two billion people.

The [ICIMOD Strategy 2030](#) outlines the organisation's long-term vision for a greener, more inclusive and climate-resilient HKH region through its mission to build and share knowledge that enables greener, more inclusive and climate resilient policy, action and investment across the diverse countries and communities of the HKH.

ICIMOD aims to support its RMCs in seizing new and emerging opportunities to address the growing risks related to climate change, biodiversity loss, air pollution, whilst seeking solutions to sustainable energy transitions, and building food and water security in the HKH region. The strategy focuses on strengthening regional cooperation, fostering innovations and scaling, building institutional capabilities and influencing policies at different levels. ICIMOD's Theory of Change (ToC) as outlined in figure 1, presents a structured framework, linking contextual challenges, strategic objectives and impact pathways, cross-cutting areas, High-Level Outcomes (HLOs), and Long-term Impact Areas (LTIAAs). As outlined in the ToC, the ICIMOD Strategy 2030 emphasises collaboration with governments, academic and non-governmental and community-based organisations as well as with international and regional partners.

At the highest level, ICIMOD results are guided by four long-term impact areas (LTIAAs) which represent strategic choices of where we focus our efforts. Our LTIAAs align with key HKH challenges and commitments enshrined internationally and regionally but are also areas where ICIMOD holds comparative advantage. They also serve to align our research and action with our RMCs' commitments and help us prioritise. Figure 1. ICIMOD Theory of Change.



The strategy also outlined three high-level outcomes (HLOs) to realise the LTIAS:

[The Medium-Term Action Plan V \(MTAP V\)](#) translates the ICIMOD [Strategy 2030](#) into plan of action for the period 2023 - 2026. The major focus of MTAP V is to contribute to deliver our specific outcomes (sphere of control) that are framed by three HLOs (sphere of influence) and four LTIAS (sphere of interest).

ICIMOD's diverse portfolio is orchestrated through three Strategic Groups (SGs), namely: Climate and Environmental Risks; Resilient Economies and Landscapes; and Regional Action and Global Advocacy. These are further divided into six Action Areas (AAs), with two under each SG, and eighteen targeted Interventions across these AAs. The HLOs are translated into specific outcomes for each of the six AAs, which are further supported by defined outcome, milestones and targets for each Intervention.

The MTAP-V is anchored in four strategic and interconnected impact pathways: the Policy Pathway, which fosters interactive policy engagement and support across Regional Member Countries (RMCs); the Regional Cooperation Pathway, which enhances collaboration and joint action, leading to critical regional policies and decisions for the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH); the Scaling Pathway, which develops and applies innovative approaches to scale up and scale out solutions, catalysing large-scale investments across the region; and the Capability Pathway, which strengthens institutional and stakeholder capacity to implement sustainable development practices in the HKH. At the programmatic level, the major implementation strategies and activities of MTAP-V are structured around these four pathways, which serve as

the operational foundation for delivering results. These pathways, together with the four strategic objectives contribute to – 1: positioning ICIMOD as a knowledge and innovation hub, 2: serving as an enabler of regional cooperation and collaboration, 3: ICIMOD as a global knowledge leader on sustainable mountain development, and 4: transforming ICIMOD into an agile, fit-for-purpose institution for 2030 - and their corresponding strategic actions collectively define what is required to effectively achieve our Higher-Level Outcomes (HLOs) and Long-Term Impact Areas (LTIAAs) to fulfil our vision and mission.

## **2. Overview of Quadrennial Review (QDR)**

Since its inception, ICIMOD has undergone independent reviews every five years through Quinquennial Reviews (QQRs). To date, six QQRs and one Mid-Term Review were conducted, which played a crucial role in refining ICIMOD's focus in the HKH region, sharpening its strategy, and enhancing its results orientation, efficiency, and effectiveness.

With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set to complete their first cycle in 2030, ICIMOD aligned its [Strategy 2030: Moving Mountains](#) with this global framework by adopting a four-year programme cycle starting with [MTAP V \(2023-2026\)](#) and its [Results Framework](#). As ICIMOD approaches the completion of the implementation of [MTAP V](#) in 2026, commissioning an independent four yearly review - quadrennial review (QDR) of ICIMOD operations and management, and [MTAP V](#) progress is essential.

As mandated by [ICIMOD Evaluation and Impact Assessment Policy \(2024\)](#), the QDR is commissioned by the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) of ICIMOD..

## **3. Objectives of QDR**

The overall objective of the Quadrennial Review (QDR) is to conduct a forward-looking, utilisation focused, learning oriented and methodologically rigorous strategic and institutional assessment of ICIMOD to determine the extent to which it is effectively achieving its intended results amidst rapidly evolving regional and global contexts. The review will also generate actionable insights to strengthen ICIMOD's strategic positioning, institutional relevance, organizational agility and operational effectiveness in shaping its next Medium Term Action Plan. The QDR should also reflect the increasing urgency in the challenges facing the HKH, in particular related to climate change and biodiversity loss.

### **Specific objectives**

1. To assess effectiveness of ICIMOD portfolio and organisational change process in the past

four years to deliver on desired outcomes towards achieving its results.

2. To provide critical insights how ICIMOD can strengthen its (i) governance, (ii) administration, finance and operations, (iii) delivery and partnership models aligned with the forward direction and priorities for the next Mid Term Action Plan.
3. Provide strategic insights into how ICIMOD can use its comparative advantage in best possible manner as a dedicated regional, intergovernmental and mountain focused knowledge and learning centre in the evolving regional and global dynamics.
4. To assess the ICIMOD current funding landscape (RMC Core, Non-RMC Core and Project based) in the context of evolving global geopolitics and shifting priorities and provide strategic insights on how ICIMOD should adapt its funding and strategy and financing of delivery and operations. Assess ways by which ICIMOD could capitalize even more on its status as a regional membership-based organisation and its unique role in promoting the “third pole” concept.
5. To provide a set of recommendations on the adjustments needed in programmatic focus and prioritisation and implementation arrangements, within the institution and with external partners, towards achieving the high-level outcomes for MTAP VI.

#### **4. Scope of work**

The Quadrennial Review (QDR) will build on several relevant evaluations conducted during the recent period (Annex 1.) and cover the MTAP V period from 2023 to mid-2026 and will focus on following aspects:

- ICIMOD’s theory of change, impact pathways and its strategic objectives
- ICIMOD Strategic Groups and their portfolios and its associated outcome targets defined for MTAP V
- ICIMOD Governance, change management process and its achievements towards making ICIMOD a fit for purpose organisation.
- Finance, administration and operations, Living Mountain Lab, communication, MEL and delivery model
- Wider partnership and relations with member countries
- Funding models and financing of delivery modalities

#### **5. Key evaluation questions**

1. How efficiently and effectively has ICIMOD managed its portfolio to deliver desired outcomes

which have resulted in larger outcomes in terms of scaling, policy, capacity and regional cooperation in regional member countries? How this can be improved for the next medium term action plan?

2. How effective are the ICIMOD's finance, administration and operations, MEL and communications mechanisms in supporting strategic decision-making, institutional accountability, growth and pace of delivery, and adaptive management, and how this can be improved for future programme cycles?
3. Are the current ICIMOD governance structures and control mechanisms robust enough i) to provide strategic guidance, ii) to mitigate risks? How this can be improved?
4. How resilient and adaptable is ICIMOD's current funding strategy (RMC Core, Non-RMC Core, and Project-based funding) in responding to evolving global geopolitical dynamics and shifting donor priorities, and what strategic adjustments are necessary to enhance future funding both from regional and global resources – including innovative financing models - and are there any adjustment needed in our institutional financing model?
5. How ICIMOD can best use of its unique role and add value to existing and emerging regional and national initiatives and how can ICIMOD build on these experiences? And how effective have ICIMOD contacts been with neighbouring mountainous regions with comparable challenges, such as Central Asia; and how should these be further strengthened to mutual advantage?
6. How do ICIMOD's areas of focus align with the challenges, commitments, and priorities of each of the RMCs; does the current structure of engagement with RMCs meet the needs of RMCs
7. How do ICIMOD's areas of focus align with the challenges, commitments, and priorities of each of the RMCs and how can ICIMOD enhance Regional Member Country (RMC) ownership and commitment, clarify its role in effectively strengthening RMC capacities, improve its outreach and more strategically leverage intra- and cross-regional collaboration to advance its regional and global mandate?
8. How effective is ICIMOD's current partnership model and how well is ICIMOD able to nurture and document results achieved through working with partners? What improvements in the partnership approach could help enhance the outcomes of ICIMOD partnerships in the future?

9. To what extent crosscutting priorities (GESI, Climate, and Biodiversity) including youth and digital innovations have been integrated into the ICIMOD delivery mechanism and what learning can be drawn for sharpening the focus of integration x-cutting issues in future programming?
10. Assess whether there is sufficient regional and geographic balance among staff, including international staff from non-Regional Member Countries (RMCs). It should also evaluate if ICIMOD staff possess an appropriate mix of competencies, particularly the capability to effectively address cross-cutting issues, including a robust understanding of social and economic sciences. And recommend areas for improvement.
11. To what extent ICIMOD has been able to implement the recommendations of the last QQR?

## 6. Potential Methodology

The QDR is expected to be more than a retrospective assessment; it must be strategic, utilisation-focused, and forward-looking, generating actionable insights that directly feed into the next Medium Term Action Plan design and planning process, which will unfold nearly simultaneously.

The evaluation team is expected to employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data. The selected evaluation team will submit an elaborated innovative methodology and approach including a comprehensive evaluation matrix as part of the inception report. It is important to note that the lead evaluator and team members are expected to travel to Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as other Regional Member Countries (RMCs), to engage with key stakeholders and present the final findings to the ICIMOD Board.

Key methods will include but are not limited to:

- Country and field visits
- Desk review of key evaluations and reviews previously conducted by IEU
- Desk review of portfolio documents and reports
- Key informant interviews with stakeholders
- Surveys to capture quantitative data
- Strategic Foresight
- Contribution analysis
- Participatory sense making
- Case studies for in-depth analysis of key interventions

## 7. Reporting and Supervising

The evaluation will be commissioned by the IEU with strategic inputs from Board and ISG on certain key points. The evaluation team will report to the Chief of Evaluation and Learning of ICIMOD.

## 8. Budget

Proposed budget is up to USD 220k that will include visits to a minimum of four regional member countries (RMCs).

## 9. Evaluators Specification/Competencies

In adherence to ICIMOD's Evaluation Policy 2024, evaluators must be independent of ICIMOD and must not have been involved in the activities covered by the scope of this evaluation.

### 1. Evaluation Expertise

- Proven track record in leading evaluations of regional, global and national organisations with multi-country, regional, or intergovernmental contexts.
- Excellent experience and expertise in forward-looking and strategic reviews, including scenario analysis, organizational learning, and adaptive management.

### 2. Thematic and Regional Knowledge

- Deep understanding of issues critical to sustainable mountain development, climate resilience, transboundary cooperation, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable livelihoods, especially in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region.
- Excellent understanding of the political economy and institutional landscape of HKH region, including the priorities of Regional Member Countries (RMCs).
- Excellent knowledge of evaluating crosscutting themes, particularly Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), Climate and Biodiversity and how to assess their integration and outcomes in programming and institutional processes.

### 3. Institutional and Organizational Review Capability

- Excellent experience and expertise in conducting organizational capacity assessments, including review of change management, human resources, finance, governance, communications, partnerships, and M&E systems.
- Strong ability to assess the fitness-for-purpose of organizational structures and processes in line with strategic goals and regional/global priorities.
- Skills and expertise in analysing institutional agility, comparative advantage, and value addition within regional partnerships and policy influence frameworks.

### 4. Partnership and Political Acumen



- Excellent expertise in assessing partnership modalities and value addition including resource leveraging, multi-stakeholder engagement, and policy engagement in complex governance settings.
- Capacity to evaluate regional collaboration and institutional positioning in multi-country/transboundary contexts.
- Political sensitivity and the ability to navigate inter-governmental relationships, donor dynamics, and regional geopolitics.

## 5. Team Composition and Skills

The evaluation team should ideally comprise of both international and regional experts while keeping gender and diversity in consideration. Team member or member having in-depth experience working in the HKH region, including strong understanding of RMC priorities and political dynamics would be an added advantage.

- **Team Leader / Lead Evaluator:** Senior-level evaluation expert with 15+ years of experience in leading strategic institutional reviews, preferably in intergovernmental or multilateral settings.
- **Institutional Specialist:** Expert in organizational development, governance, HR, finance, and change management.
- **Thematic Specialists:** Subject-matter experts in climate resilience, sustainable development, biodiversity, and/or natural resource management relevant to the HKH context.
- **GESI Specialist:** With demonstrated experience assessing gender and inclusion in institutional and programmatic settings.
- **M&E/Data Analyst:** Skilled in quantitative and qualitative data collection and synthesis, capable of managing large-scale mixed-method evaluations.

**6. Adherence to ICIMOD Evaluation Principles:** the evaluation team must follow the evaluation principles outlined in the [ICIMOD Evaluation and Impact Assessment Policy \(2024\)](#).

## 10. Deliverables

1. Inception Report in an agreed format
2. Draft evaluation report for feedback
3. Final draft evaluation report for final feedback
4. Final Evaluation Report with actionable recommendations
5. Presentation to ICIMOD Board and ISG

## 11. Proposed Timeline

Activity	Timeline
<b>Phase 1 Preparation</b>	<b>April–June 2025</b>
Concept Note and Timeline	March
Board approval of CN and Timeline	Apr
Prepare ToR and reviewed by ESC	May
Feedback on the ToR from ISG and finalise	June

<b>Phase 2 Tendering &amp; Selection Phase</b>	<b>June–Oct 2025</b>
Expression of Interest	June–July
Selection for the proposal stage	Aug
Receive final proposals	Sept
Selection of the final evaluation firm	Oct
<b>Phase 3 Inception Phase</b>	<b>Oct–Dec 2025</b>
Inception Phase	Oct–Nov
Inception Report presentation to the PAC	Dec
<b>Phase 4 implementation &amp; Reporting Phase</b>	<b>Jan–May 2026</b>
Data Collection & Analysis	Jan–Mar
First draft Report Submission to ICIMOD, PAC and ISG	Apr
Second draft report after feedback	Apr
Final draft submitted to the Board for approval	May
Publish the report in ICIMOD website	May

## 12. Evaluators Selection Process

The ICIMOD Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) employs a two-stage selection process for external evaluators: (1) Expression of Interest (EOI) Stage, and (2) Proposal Stage.

### 1. Expression of Interest (EOI) Stage

ICIMOD publicly announces an open call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) from evaluators.

EOIs will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- **Organizational capacity** to conduct the evaluation.
- **Experience and expertise** of the proposed evaluators.
- **Relevant examples** of past evaluations and methodologies employed.
- **Preliminary budget plan.**

### 2. Proposal Stage

Based on the received EOIs, ICIMOD will shortlist 3-5 evaluation firms to submit detailed proposals in a specified format.

Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Clear evidence of the **organizational capacity** to conduct the specific evaluation.
- **Relevant experience and expertise** of the evaluators proposed to conduct the specific evaluation.
- **Innovative and state-of-the-art approaches and methodologies** proposed for conducting the evaluation.

- Comprehensive and detailed **budget plan**, along with necessary documentation related to financial audits.

The selected evaluator is required to develop a comprehensive inception report, which includes a detailed evaluation plan that demonstrates an initial understanding of the evaluation based on secondary data. The report should clearly outline proposed methodologies and tools, detailed timelines, and specific roles and responsibilities. The inception report must be formally approved by the Chief of Evaluation and Learning before implementation commences.

### **ICIMOD's Core Values**

Our core values are integrity, neutrality, relevance, inclusiveness, openness, and ambition. These values are an expression of our culture and are central to the guiding beliefs and principles of our work and behaviour. Our core values will lie at the heart of ICIMOD operations and delivery. They will underpin everything we do and frame how we work with our partners. They reflect our founding intentions and the balances we seek to hold, while equipping ourselves for the future.

### **Diversity, equity, inclusion, and safeguarding**

ICIMOD's bidders/consultant selection process is based on the qualifications and competence of the applicants. As an employer, ICIMOD is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and offers equal opportunities to applicants from all backgrounds and walks of life, including but not limited to gender, age, national origin, religion, race, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or social status. ICIMOD strongly encourages applications from all eligible applicants, especially women, from all parts of the HKH region.

ICIMOD is dedicated to establishing and upholding a safe and nurturing work environment, where all its employees can participate fully and meaningfully without fear of violence, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Any type of abuse or harassment, including sexual misconduct [including child abuse], by our staff, representatives, or stakeholders is not condoned or tolerated.

## **Annex 1. List of reviews and evaluation conducted**

1. Last QQR Report and management response
2. External evaluation of ICIMOD Capacity building approaches and outcomes.
3. Independent evaluation of HUC and SANDEE, covering the entire region. The Board reviewed the recommendations alongside the management response.
4. External learning review of the 'Nibuwa-Tankhuwa Watershed Management Plan Development and Implementation' (Nepal-focused, under AAA).
5. External an end-of-project evaluation of the 'Green, Resilient Agricultural Ecosystems (GRAPE-FA2) Project' (Nepal-focused, under AAC).
6. Ex-post evaluation of the 'Dhungetar Pilot Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Demonstration Project' (Nepal-focused).

## **Annex 2: Indicative sub-questions that may help development of an evaluation matrix**

- To what extent has ICIMOD effectively achieved its strategic objectives, areas of change, and priority actions outlined in Strategy 2030?
- How well has ICIMOD responded to external factors (policy, climate, socio-economic shifts, and RMC priorities) while maintaining its leadership in the HKH region?
- To what extent has ICIMOD implemented the recommendations of the 6th QQR 2022?
- What are the key strategic lessons learnt from MTAP V that can inform the development of the next MTAP?
- How effective are the current structures and arrangements of ICIMOD's Board of Governors, its committees, and the ISG in providing strategic governance and ensuring the sustainability of ICIMOD in the face of regional and global changes?
- To what extent have ICIMOD's management mechanisms – including the Directorate, finance, administration, MEL and HR – been effective in supporting the delivery of results?
- What has been the strategic contribution of leveraged funds to ICIMOD's programmatic outcomes and institutional sustainability?
- What factors contribute to the effectiveness of these partnerships, and how can ICIMOD further strengthen or adapt its partnership approach for future impact?
- To what extent has ICIMOD effectively and sustainably delivered its intended outcomes, and how well are its portfolios aligned with institutional priorities?
- To what extent is MTAP V aligned with regional priorities and ICIMOD's Strategy 2030?
- How effective are ICIMOD's partnership and resource mobilisation strategies in ensuring long-term institutional sustainability and impact?
- How well designed is ICIMOD's present monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system and is it delivering to monitor, evaluate, and demonstrate its contributions in the region and globally?
- How effectively is ICIMOD's communication strategy implemented to amplify its work and achieve desired results?
- What are the key strengths, areas for improvement, and critical lessons from ICIMOD's experience to enhance future programming and impact?

- How well does ICIMOD complement regional and transboundary issues, and what unique value does it add to addressing these issues in the HKH region?
- What key complementarities and synergies exist between ICIMOD's donor-funded programmes and its Strategic Results Framework, and how effectively are these leveraged?
- To what extent do ICIMOD's RMCs demonstrate ownership and commitment to its mission and initiatives?
- How effectively has ICIMOD engaged and strengthened collaboration with key stakeholders – including RMC governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), universities, research institutions, and the private sector – to advance its mission and scale up its approaches, results, and innovations?
- How does ICIMOD's core funding from select donors compare to donor-funded programmes in terms of advantages, challenges, and strategic implications for long-term sustainability?
- What are the current and emerging funding scenarios for ICIMOD, and what strategic recommendations can enhance its long-term financial sustainability to continuously deliver its mandate in the HKH region?
- To what extent do RMCs demonstrate financial ownership of ICIMOD, and how aligned is their contribution with ICIMOD's RMC funding strategy?