

Message from the Director General

Celebrating the International Day for Biological Diversity

22 May 2014
Kathmandu, Nepal

As the world conservation community enters the fourth year of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (2011–2020), it is time to retrospect, introspect, and set new targets. On the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity, we would like to celebrate our achievements and reinforce our commitments for biodiversity conservation. This day also provides an opportunity to raise awareness about biodiversity conservation both in the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region and across the world.

Located at the confluence of three global biodiversity hotspots (the Himalayas, Indo-Burma, and mountains of Southwest China), the Hindu Kush Himalayan region is known for its astounding biological diversity. The rich biodiversity of the HKH provides direct ecosystem services to more than 200 million people in the mountains and to 1.3 billion people in the downstream river basins, making a significant contribution to global goods and services. These ecosystem services include provisioning services, such as food, water, timber, fiber, genetic resources, and medicines; regulating services, such as regulation of climate, water and soil quality, and pollination; cultural services, such as recreational, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits; and supporting services, such as soil formation and nutrient cycling. The countries in this region have demarcated nearly 39% of the geographical area as ‘protected area networks.’ However, many of these areas are surrounded by human habitations and local communities that depend on biomass. Such areas are facing ‘island syndromes’ and park–people conflicts. This calls for a much more holistic approach to conservation, one that addresses the ecosystems of larger landscapes across administrative and political boundaries. ICIMOD’s Transboundary Landscape Programme is based on such an approach. It gives us great satisfaction that national governments and conservation agencies in the region have recognized the value of this approach.

The UN General Assembly has marked 2014 as the ‘International Year of Small Island Developing States’. Accordingly, the United Nations is focusing on the theme ‘Island Biodiversity’ for this year. Due to their isolation, islands harbor a unique array of biodiversity, and many island species are endemic, i.e., they are found nowhere else on Earth. Islands thus make a substantial contribution to global biodiversity. However, they are extremely vulnerable to loss of species diversity. The Hindu Kush Himalayan region contains different kinds of habitat islands formed as a result of fragmentation and degradation. They offer plenty of scope for generating scientific knowledge about the patterns, processes, and biological consequences of environmental changes on islands. In the face of climate change, isolation poses another threat to biodiversity in the HKH region. As temperatures rise, plant and animal species found at lower elevations are likely to migrate to higher altitudes. However, species that occur at high elevations are confined to their ‘islands’ and are hence more susceptible to loss and extinction. There is a need to identify such species and work for their protection.

ICIMOD facilitates the exchange of knowledge and serves as a regional knowledge hub for the biodiversity of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. Through the HKH Conservation Portal, we provide free access to

David Molden, Ph.D.
Director General



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primary data and information on biodiversity in the HKH region. We believe that by sharing knowledge about biodiversity and socioeconomic issues, we can better understand drivers of change, and thereby develop effective programmes for conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits. It is hoped that ICIMOD's Transboundary Landscape Programme will bring together a wide range of conservation and development partners and enable them to share good practices in transboundary biodiversity management, connectivity and corridors linking protected areas, indigenous and traditional knowledge, and conservation-oriented livelihoods. Together, these elements can help advance the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Programme of Work on Mountain Biodiversity.

Throughout the UN Decade on Biodiversity, ICIMOD will remain committed to working with our regional member countries and our partners for biodiversity conservation in the HKH region. We hope that our efforts will benefit both present and future generations.

With best wishes on the International Day for Biological Diversity.

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Khumaltar, Lalitpur, Nepal
TEL +977-1-5003222 EMAIL info@icimod.org
FAX +977-1-5003299 WEB www.icimod.org

अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय एकीकृत पर्वतीय विकास केन्द्र
कैम्याङ्गुमागुनसुंदिगुंनद अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय एकीकृत पर्वतीय विकास केन्द्र
國際山地綜合發展中心
अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय एकीकृत पर्वतीय विकास केन्द्र

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