

Message from the Director General

International Day for Biological Diversity 2016

Mainstreaming Biodiversity; Sustaining People and their Livelihoods **22 May 2016**



Each year, the International Day for Biological Diversity provides us with a wonderful opportunity to recognize the pivotal role of biodiversity to life on earth and human well-being. This year's theme, "Mainstreaming Biodiversity; Sustaining People and their Livelihoods", reflects the importance of biodiversity in sustaining livelihoods of communities, by providing food, fuel, shelter, and medicines, among others. It underpins all those ecosystem functions and benefits of biodiversity to human well-being, not only in terms of our economies, but also for our health, food security, prevention of natural hazards, and our cultural roots.

The world's poor, particularly in rural areas, depend on biological resources for as much as 90% of their needs, including food, fuel, medicine and shelter. 70% of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend directly on biological diversity for their livelihoods. Biodiversity serves as an important source of food and income to rural households. In the economic sector, 40% of the global economy is based on biological products and processes. This includes economic sectors that drive development, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, pharmaceuticals, and tourism.

The Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region located at the convergence of three global biodiversity hotspots: the Himalayas, Indo-Burma, and mountains of Southwest China – is one of the richest places on earth in terms of biodiversity. The region's biodiversity is the basis of ecosystem goods and services that contribute to the region's economic growth and is a key to sustaining livelihoods and industries that support more than 200 million people in the mountains and up to 1.3 billion people in downstream river basins and benefits the global community. The region is high in agricultural biodiversity holding the key to future food security of the world. However, as elsewhere in the world, from habitat loss and overexploitation to wildlife crime and climate change, a whole host of very real and damaging threats is facing the region's incredible biodiversity. It is affecting peoples' livelihoods and sustainable development in all areas of activity, including economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism, among others.

The theme this year strikes a particular chord with ICIMOD. The ICIMOD, a regional knowledge, learning and enabling centre serving the eight regional member countries of the HKH-Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan, is uniquely positioned to advance and promote biodiversity, and all of its values, in ways that are vital for building resilient societies in the HKH. Addressing regional and global issues of biodiversity loss,

including habitat degradation and fragmentation, overexploitation and climate change together with enhanced livelihoods, equity, and social and environmental security lies at the core of ICIMOD's work and feeds into the organization's mission of 'sustainable and resilient mountain development for improved and equitable livelihoods.'

ICIMOD has been advocating for biodiversity conservation and its sustainable management in the HKH region for decades now. Through various conservation and development programmes, including transboundary landscape conservation and development initiatives, adaptation to change, and river basins programmes, it has been an important vehicle for promoting biodiversity conservation for sustainable livelihoods and more equitable natural resource governance in the region. Activities under the programmes encourage adoption of conservation linked livelihood options that enable participatory conservation at the landscape level together with integrated regional socio-economic development. For example, community-linked conservation activities based on the available biodiversity by enhancing agroforestry, organic farming, beekeeping, and medicinal and aromatic plant cultivation which on one hand minimize pressure on natural resources and on the other hand provide opportunities for economic development.

As a regional intergovernmental organization dedicated to conservation and sustainable development in the HKH, ICIMOD is committed to playing a crucial role in addressing challenges in biodiversity conservation in the Himalayas and leveraging emerging opportunities to benefit the people of the region. We are committed to generating knowledge to improve our understanding and designing, customizing, and promoting conservation based livelihood improvement approaches, and ensuring that the information is put to use by people, policy makers and practitioners.

On the occasion on 2016 International Day for Biological Diversity, we would like to urge people in the HKH region to play their part in conserving the biodiversity in the mountains as we have all shared the benefits that the biodiversity and its ecosystem services provide for our wellbeing. The global community should join hands with mountain people in their efforts. Let's make collaborative efforts at the local, regional, and global levels to ensure that the wellbeing of local communities is protected and the rich biodiversity of the region is conserved for generations to come.

With best wishes on the International Day of Biological Diversity.

David Molden