



Message from the Director General

Celebrating International Day for Biological Diversity (IBD): Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992 ushered in a new approach for the way we plan, deliver, and monitor sustainable development in the mountains. The CBD brought special attention upon biological diversity, stressing that the concept applied to much more than species and their ecosystems: Biological diversity is key to people's relationships with food, water, energy and the environment.

The expanded understanding of biological diversity informs our work in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), where the lives of mountain people are closely linked with the availability and diversity of natural resources. International Biodiversity Day reminds us of the importance of this relationship.

Promoting tourism in parts of the HKH has emerged as a promising avenue for development, but one that requires careful attention to the landscapes in which communities hope to attract increasing numbers of travelers. While the increased tourist visits will raise income levels and economic opportunity, communities will be challenged to accommodate that visitors sustainably, which is to say, with minimal impact on the resources and environment, including biological diversity.

Striking this balance between promoting tourism while protecting the environment is more difficult than it may appear at first. On one hand, the HKH landscape draws more and more visitors every year, and it behooves us to promote this sector as it can address some concerns about poverty alleviation among mountain communities. On the other hand, the CBD encourages countries to convert more and more land to secure our biological heritage, which might effectively slow or limit tourism-based growth in these areas.

Through our numerous transboundary programmes, such as the Kailash Sacred Landscape Conversation and Development Initiative, ICIMOD has gained much experience in maintaining this balance between development and conversation, bringing dividends to the remotest and poorest communities, but in a manner that ensures that resources and cultural formations will be kept intact for the foreseeable future. This work requires considerable collaboration among local communities, tour operators, government agencies, and local stakeholders.

In the Kailash region, which extends over parts of China, India and Nepal, more than one million visitors are expected to arrive in this area to celebrate the "Year of the Horse." They may walk koras (circuits) around Mt. Kailash or take purifying swims in the waters of Lake Manasarovar. Each of these visitors will increase the amount of money spent in the areas, but also augment stress on the environment through an intensified demand for food, water, sanitation, and lodging.

For these reasons, ICIMOD is working hard with stakeholders in Kailash and other transboundary areas to devise "win-win" solutions to accommodate this change in remote and environmentally sensitive areas of the HKH. In Kailash, we recently developed "awareness materials" for tour operators and supporting agencies to promote responsible tourism in the area. We also help local communities design infrastructure – such as waste collection and disposal - to minimize the environmental impact of increased traffic.

In early May this year at a policy-Dialogue Bhutan, India and Nepal governments agreed to cooperate on development of tourism in Kangchenjunga Landscape. ICIMOD is facilitating regional cooperation among three countries on conservation and development of this landscape.

On this International Biodiversity Day, we recognize the need to promote development in ways that assuage the effects of poverty while maintaining a careful and holistic view of biocultural needs and challenges. We renew our pledge to work toward this goal throughout the HKH, where biodiversity and human inhabitation can mature in harmony, promoting sustainable growth and equitable development for all.

With best wishes on the International Day for Biological Diversity.

David Molden

