

Message from the Director General

## Celebrating the International Day for Biological Diversity

22 May 2013  
Kathmandu, Nepal



We all know that water is essential for life and is a basic requirement for the health and wellbeing of humans, ecosystems, and the natural processes upon which all living beings depend. What is perplexing is that, given this knowledge, why we do not take better care of water, and by extension, better care of mountains as the source of water.

The United Nations have rightly selected the theme of 'Water and Biodiversity' to celebrate the [International Day for Biological Diversity](#). This theme is complemented by this year's designation as the [UN International Year of Water Cooperation](#), which underlines the need to work together to protect important water resources. For ICIMOD, the relevance of both of these themes can be found in the myriad of biodiversity found along and within the major rivers flowing through the Hindu Kush Himalayas.

The [Hindu Kush Himalayan \(HKH\)](#) mountain systems are a source of ten of the largest rivers of Asia and their numerous tributaries. These systems provide the people of the region with water, food, power, and jobs and are at the heart of the region's rich cultural traditions. The rivers shape the landscape and its ecosystems and play an important role in both sheltering and sustaining biodiversity. Likewise, the biodiversity of healthy ecosystems play an important role in storing, circulating, and purifying water. Biodiversity can also help us combat water-related stresses such as drought, desertification, erosion, and flood. It is important to be aware of this fundamental interconnectedness when thinking about effective water resource management and biodiversity conservation in mountainous regions.

The Hindu Kush Himalayan region, including the Tibetan Plateau and the Pamirs, functions as a complex interaction of atmospheric, cryospheric, hydrological, geological, and environmental processes that bear special significance for the Earth's biodiversity, climate, and water cycles. The region plays a prominent role in the Asian monsoon system, which sustains one of the largest populations on earth. The ecosystem services from the river basins of the Hindu Kush Himalayas also form the basis for a substantial portion of the region's economy.

What can we do to better take care of our mountains and water supplies? Part of the answer is easy, and we can all play a part. Let us resolve to use water sparingly and wisely, not to pollute, and to share clean water with our neighbours.

The other part of the answer is more complicated, as there are complex links between water and ecosystems, especially when people use waters for food, drinking, and energy. There are strong links between upstream and downstream users, but the impact of changes in water use upstream on downstream users is often hard to predict and communicate. Many of the rivers originating in the region cross boundaries between countries, requiring special consideration. The policies, institutions, and incentives that govern water use need to take into consideration better information on these issues.

ICIMOD and its partners are working to unravel these complexities and make sure the information is put to use by mountain people, policy makers and practitioners. ICIMOD works on watershed management strategies that support both people and the environment and promotes an ecosystem-wide approach to sustain biodiversity services from forests, wetlands, and rangelands. We try to understand how climate change is influencing glaciers, snow, monsoons, and permafrost to see what it means for the great rivers

of Asia. We are working with governments and communities to develop solutions so that we can meet the needs of the people of the region and the environment.

This year, as ICIMOD joins the world in celebrating a day to increase awareness of the significance of water and biodiversity, we urge the people in the HKH region to play their part in conserving and reusing water and preserving the biodiversity around them. This will help maintain the water balance in ecosystems across the region, benefiting the array of life these diverse ecosystems sustain.

ICIMOD hopes that by enhancing understanding of the complex and undeniable links between water and biodiversity, people across the Hindu Kush Himalayan region are motivated to consider biodiversity as a resource not just for people's livelihoods and wellbeing, but also as a resource that helps ensure the continued provision of water throughout the region.

With best wishes for a happy International Day for Biological Diversity.

[David Molden](#)

