



An Interview with Dr. David Molden

Director General, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Nepal

Dr. David Molden granted an interview to Mr. Jeewan P. Thanju, Editor-in-Chief of HYDRO Nepal Journal. Excerpts from the interview:

Dr. Molden, HYDRO Nepal welcomes you as Director General of ICIMOD. What do you perceive the challenges and opportunities of Hindu-Kush-Himalayan (HKH) mountain region? What will be your focus area to lead the ICIMOD?

The Hindu-Kush Himalayan Region faces unprecedented challenges today, including persistent poverty, climate and environmental change, loss of ecosystem services, and outmigration. On the other hand, important opportunities can be realised from changes that are happening, and through better natural resources management.

To address these, ICIMOD will focus on livelihoods and the environment. I see an important agenda ahead where we need to work with people, communities, and governments to help adapt to change. Here our focus is on the poor and on marginalised groups and women, with a recognition of the unique conditions found in mountains. A second agenda item, necessary for adaptive management, is to fill key knowledge gaps about livelihoods, ecosystems, and their value, about the cryosphere, and about natural resource management. When doing so, we will work with partners to build skills and institutional capacity to generate, analyse, and share such knowledge.

A key niche for ICIMOD is in its regional approach. We have eight member countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Our work often crosses boundaries, and we seek inter-regional knowledge exchange and cooperation to deal with issues concerning ecosystems, river basins, and governance. In addition, the issues faced by this region are of global concern – water, energy, conflict – and we need to place mountain issues on the global agenda.

Due to remoteness in most parts, the people of the high mountains of the HKH region face great hardship such as lack of income generating sources, lack of medical facilities, etc. despite rich in resources; what is your opinion in overcoming the obstacles and move ahead for the prosperity of the mountain people?

It is important to recognise that mountain people and mountain ecosystems offer solutions to local, regional, and global problems. Unique ecosystems offer mountain people a role in the development of niche products such as medicinal plants, high-value agriculture, and ecotourism. Improved forestry and watershed management have regional impacts. The water from the Himalayas serves 1.3 billion people downstream, where food and energy security are of grave concern. However, mountain people remain

undercompensated for the services they provide. Our role is to help scale up solutions for the benefit of mountain people and people downstream.

Climate change is real and the Himalayan Region is facing above average warming up, which is mostly the result of the industrialized nations, but the consequences will be faced by the people of this region? What ICIMOD is doing in this regard?

We have to take the message of the mountains to the rest of the world. Many of the overwhelming problems, such as glacier and snow melt and black carbon, are generated outside the mountains. The people of the world have a responsibility to create an environment to help mountain people to adapt – and it will be to the whole world's advantage. ICIMOD is delivering the message in several ways. For example, we helped facilitate a very successful Mountain Day during the climate change meetings at UNFCCC COP 17 in Durban, South Africa in December. Our new scientific reports on glacier and snow melt and climate change received global attention. The international media are an important avenue to get the message across. We are also working in the framework of Rio+20 to ensure that the mountain agenda gets the attention of the global community.

Many people perceive ICIMOD as producer of many reports and books on mountains. Does ICIMOD have some action plan to for alleviating poverty in the region?

Our approach is to support the generation of evidence-based solutions, then to find a way for these to get translated into action. The generation and documentation of knowledge is thus critical, especially in a region where there are tremendous knowledge gaps. More important, but less visible, is ICIMOD's substantial work to ensure that the messages are taken to communities and policy makers. For example, one focus of ICIMOD's work has been on 'value chains' – to help producers get goods to market and receive equitable benefits and help local communities benefit from tourism; to help people sustainably manage watersheds for more income; and to help realise the value of ecosystem services and making sure the benefit reaches the poor. For example, ICIMOD together with national partners piloted the first ever Forest Carbon Trust Fund in Nepal, which provided rewards to local communities for conserving their forests; the compensation was based not only on the amount of carbon in the forests, but also on social and economic factors such as the number of poor and Dalit households. And we have assisted India in developing government policy specific to mountains. Poverty is central to ICIMOD's work, and our action plan is to link

everything we do to issues of poverty. Some work is directly concerned with poverty, for example, the value chain work. In other work, such as the melting glaciers, the link is less direct, but this issue is also related to poverty.

ICIMOD actively participated in the Durban Conference and observed Mountain day. How do you assess the outcome of the Durban?

For me personally, Mountain Day was the highlight of Durban. I believe we were able to lift the profile of mountains in the climate change talks. Plus the ICIMOD reports on glaciers, snow melt, and climate change in the Himalayas received widespread attention. Overall though, I am quite disappointed in the pace of progress on the climate change agenda even though some small steps were made.

There is large political difference in the countries of the HKH region, and it is very difficult to get inter-governmental cooperation. How ICIMOD plans navigate to overcome this weakness in its plans/ programs?

Regional cooperation is difficult, but it is essential to overcome some of the issues of poverty, food, water, energy, and biodiversity. We have to work on it. Our regional programmes offer a way to promote collaboration to solve some of the major ecosystem and water problems. For example, one of our programmes, the Kailash Sacred Landscape Initiative, covers China, India and Nepal to conserve ecosystems in an important cultural landscape important to all three countries. We find that professionals enjoy and really thrive on cooperation. ICIMOD provides

ample training, also with a regional perspective. Recently we hosted a regional media training to bring out the findings from a conference on green economy. Sometimes we bring in people from different countries to focus on a particular problem within one country. We find that people across the region face similar environmental problems, and that there are a variety of solutions across the region to be shared. Of course we keep government officials informed about our activities, and through our partnerships we do provide findings to government officials. All of these are important steps for regional cooperation.

In other sectors, there is hue and cry over the climate change on food security etc.; however, the hydropower sector (developers) in Nepal is oblivious of climate change. Is it not very serious?

Many development activities relating to energy and food security are essential even without climate change. Climate change makes developments in these areas more urgent as they are important for adaptation. Of course solutions must be developed that are environmentally and socially sound.

Will you like to give some messages to stakeholders through this journal?

Journals like Hydro Nepal play an important role to document knowledge relevant to development. It is important for professionals active in the region to support this knowledge generation and sharing effort.

Thank you, Dr. Molden. We wish you a very successful tenure at ICIMOD.

MELAMCHI WATER SUPPLY PROJECT

Project Objective

Alleviate the chronic shortage of water in Kathmandu Valley on a sustainable long term basis and Improve the health and well-being of the people in Kathmandu Valley.

Project Output – Delivery of 170 million liters of water per day after the completion of project work

Accessory Works:

Access Road Construction – The construction of 17.7 Km long main access road from Melamchi Pul Bazaar to Timbu and Lamidanda Melamchi Pul Bazaar upgrading road – 22.2 Km completed. Four adit access roads completed . Altogether 62 Km road has been constructed /upgraded.

The Social Upliftment Program and Environmental Management Program is ongoing in the project project affected 14 VDCs of Melamchi Valley and 5 VDCs of Mandan Valley.

Main Components of Project/ Current Status

a) Tunnel and Head Works: -

The Contract was signed on 19 February 2009 with China Railway 15 Bureau Group Cooperation & China CMIC JV for the construction of Head works and tunnel. The total length of tunnel is 27.52 Km. Out of this 1320m is adit tunnel and 26.2 Km is water tunnel. By January 18, 2012 altogether 3519m of tunnel has been excavated.

b) Water Treatment Plant: Notice for prequalification of Contractor's for Construction of 85 MLD Capacity Water Treatment Plant at Sundarijal has been published on 2nd January, 2012.

