

Universities of Five Nations Unite to Form a Consortium

Kathmandu, March 27

Five Vice Chancellors and other high level representatives of Universities in five countries - Afghanistan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan - and from five major regional and European organisations interested in university development (Asian Institute of Technology, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, ITC-Netherlands, International Development Research Centre, Canada, and ICIMOD) announced the launching of the Himalayan University Consortium on Sunday at a meeting held at the Headquarters of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Kathmandu.

According to a press release issued by the ICIMOD, the meeting was organised by ICIMOD, with support from International Development Research Centre, Canada and **the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), India.**

Discussion at the meeting focused on the forging of a strong alliance for teaching, research, training, and policy advocacy, as well as specifically on ways of supporting the development of Kabul University, statement added. "All universities in the region are interested in having a greater focus on mountain specific aspects and topics in university curricula. New curricula and academic and non-academic degree and diploma courses will help universities to increase their effectiveness, reach, and relevance to mountain society at large. By working together on a curriculum and setting up a robust system for exchange of students and faculty universities and other institutions will be able to maximise the use of their own resources and profit from their combined experience and knowledge."

By building mountain specific approaches into university curricula, the organisations hope to develop a cadre of trained professionals able to promote the mountain agenda and support sustainable development of the greater Himalayan mountain region, which extends from Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west; through Nepal, China, and Bhutan; to India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar in the east, release said.

According to ICIMOD, the broad-based Himalayan University Consortium launched at the meeting will be open to universities and other institutions in the greater Himalayan region, as well as those located elsewhere but engaged in sustainable mountain development initiatives in the region. The institutions represented at the meeting will form the Founding Members of the new consortium. The consortium will have multiple roles including development of a postgraduate fellowship programme among member universities and institutions, mountain-focused curriculum development, exchange of faculty, knowledge networking, policy advocacy, and promoting the concept and practice of sustainable, mountain, development in the region and elsewhere.

The first activities of the Consortium are focused on ways of accessing resources to build the capacity of Kabul University and thus help to rebuild and develop its Faculties of Agriculture, Science and others in order to support the long-term development of Afghanistan. After years of disturbance, Afghanistan's major university is now faced with the challenge of building the capacity of its faculty as well as its students in order to become a dynamic, creative and responsible partner in the growth and development process of the country. It is hoped that the Himalayan University Consortium will lead to the creation of a strong regional platform that will not only help to meet short-term needs, but also to build a long-term knowledge and learning resource and multiple joint learning opportunities.