

Himalayan Universities Link to Protect Mountains

Five Vice Chancellors and other high level representatives of Universities in five countries (Afghanistan, China, India, Nepal, 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 25 March 2007 at a meeting held at the Headquarters of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Khumaltar, Kathmandu, and 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. 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.

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.

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Notes to Editors

ICIMOD is an international independent Mountain Learning and Knowledge Centre serving eight regional countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas and the global mountain community. Founded in 1983, ICIMOD is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, and brings together a partnership of regional member countries, over 300 institutions within and outside the region, and donors with a commitment for development action to secure the future of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

ICIMOD builds institutional capacities and facilitates the development of mountain policy and regional cooperation through its four main functions as a multi-disciplinary documentation centre; focal point for problem solving by research; focal point for training; and consultative centre on sustainable mountain development.

The ICIMOD Overall Strategic Plan (2003-2007) has identified the following six integrated programmes - Natural Resource Management (NRM); Agriculture and Rural Income Diversification (ARID); Water, Hazards, and Environmental Management (WHEM); Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance (CEGG); Policy and Partnership (PP); and Information and Knowledge Management (IKM).

ICIMOD Member Countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

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