

## Why the Hindu Kush Himalaya matters



**As the 'water tower of Asia', the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) mountains are the source of 10 major river systems and provide vital ecosystem goods and services to more than 1.4 billion people. The region includes four global biodiversity hotspots, 488 protected areas, 330 important bird areas, and 60 global eco-regions. Rangelands cover more than 60 per cent of the region's territory. However the region is home to more than 40 per cent of the world's poor people and faces extreme vulnerability and risks due to climate and global change. Progressive warming at higher altitudes has been three to five times the global average; this warming has resulted in increased snow and glacial melt and increased frequency of extreme events such as devastating floods and droughts which have exacerbated problems of poverty and food insecurity.**

### Key Messages

1. Good environmental governance of the Hindu Kush Himalayas can address issues of poverty, equity, and environmental integrity.
2. Enhancing social, ecological, and economic security will require creation of green jobs, green infrastructures, and green growth strategies.
3. Mechanisms such as payment for ecosystem services are needed to empower mountain communities and provide incentives for them to maintain ecosystem goods and services.
4. Strengthening national and regional institutions can facilitate upstream – downstream exchanges, regional cooperation, and sharing of knowledge and best practices.
5. Public-private-civil society partnership can increase investment in mountains and promote good governance and social and gender equity.

### How can the Hindu Kush Himalayas contribute to sustainable development?

The HKH mountains abound with diverse natural resources. They provide valuable ecosystem goods and services including water, food, energy, biodiversity, and hydrological regulating functions to support the livelihoods of people living upstream and downstream. Mountain ecosystem goods and services support the livelihoods of more than 210 million mountain inhabitants.

Case studies carried out in the HKH suggest that the people of the region can contribute to global sustainable development goals by embracing clean energy, community-based management of natural resources, ecotourism, organic farming, and integrated watershed management to enhance and sustain the productivity of ecosystem goods and services. However, promotion of these solutions requires mountain-focused policies and strategies that take into account mountain specificities – fragility, marginality, inaccessibility and adaptability – and involve the primary stakeholders in deciding priorities and implementing interventions.

To put the strategies into action would require increased investment by national and global agencies in creating green jobs through green infrastructure projects. Institutional reforms and enabling policies, supported by regional cooperation and knowledge sharing, are also needed to create incentives for integrated agriculture and natural resource management and to promote enterprise development. A development approach that incorporates the traditional knowledge of mountain people in the context of the green economy and institutional framework – and not a global agenda decided without their participation – can assist in overcoming some of the persistent challenges such as poverty and inequity faced in the region.



## Policy action for the Hindu Kush Himalaya – and the future we want



Women milking Yaks, Tibet (Nabin Baral)

Sustainable mountain development in the HKH region should not only be about mountains; it should address entire river basins. It should focus on actions that can ensure that mountains continue to supply the ecosystem goods and services that are critical to promote green economy in both upstream and downstream communities. Natural resource shortages and inequitable distribution of benefits from them are emerging as major reasons for social conflicts. Thus the adoption of a mountain perspective in addressing national and regional issues is more than a matter of choice. It has become imperative that all countries pursue green development pathways and good governance approaches. The following are some of the recommended policy actions for the HKH region in the context of the Rio+20 agenda.

**Invest in building mountain ecosystem infrastructure:** Mountain countries must invest in green projects and reform policies to provide incentives to sectors that offer opportunities for sustainable green growth – agri-

culture, natural resources, and local enterprise development – and must promote the use of sound technologies in the highlands.

**Enhance environmental governance to drive a green economy:** Green economy in the region has to be founded on a strong natural resource base – water, biodiversity, forests, and clean energy sources. These resources need to be managed as public goods using principles of good governance and equity, and involving local communities in accounting for the full value of the ecosystem goods and services.

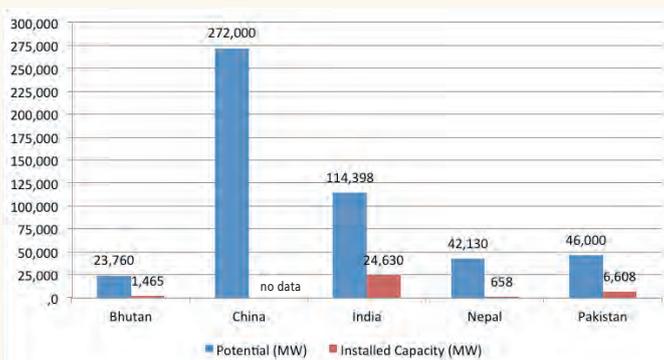
**Reform policies and strengthen implementation mechanisms:** Policies that provide incentives to use natural resources sustainably, allocate environmental costs and benefits equitably, and promote equity and justice are vital to promote sustainable mountain development in the HKH region.

**Promote public-private-civil society partnerships:** The private sector can play an important role in the development of the HKH region. Incentives should be provided for green initiatives and other innovative financing ventures applying corporate social responsibility principles.

**Consolidate diverse funding mechanisms for integrated development in mountains:** Consolidating financing mechanisms in climate change, biodiversity, and MDG sectors is necessary to adequately fund conservation, adaptation, and the sustainable development needs of mountain countries.

**Strengthen institutions:** National and regional institutions need to be strengthened to facilitate upstream-downstream economic and knowledge exchange, trans-boundary cooperation, and capacity building.

### Hydropower potential and use in the HKH region



Source: HYDRO NEPAL Issue No. 10 January, Kathmandu Nepal, 2011

**Promote regional cooperation:** Regional cooperation is the key to promoting green economy and good environmental governance to enhance access to markets, finance, and technology transfer.

**Reformulate the mountain agenda:** Rio+20 needs to develop a new mountain agenda that reinforces the spirit of Agenda 21 while emphasizing the balance among the environmental, economic, and social pillars of sustainable mountain development.