

Development of a regional statistical database for the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region

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22.02.2010

Last week the first regional workshop has been held on the development of a regional statistical database for the Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) region organized by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu. ICIMOD is an independent knowledge centre serving the eight countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan) and the global mountain community. Founded in 1983, ICIMOD's primary objective is to promote the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations.

Representatives from research, ministries and national statistical offices (NSO) of the member countries as well as from ADB, World Bank, FAO and GTZ exchanged knowledge, experiences and views on a regional database including hydro-climatological, socio-economic and environmental/biodiversity data. Topics were parameters of the statistical database framework like data exchange policies, intellectual property rights, accessibility and metadata. Besides thematic working groups the representatives have also worked in country groups for each member state and formulated country specific suggestions on further steps incorporating the national setting.

Pakistan was represented by the Chief Commissioner of the Population Census Organization, the Director Statistics of the State Bank of Pakistan and the Chief Statistical Officer and the Statistical Officer of the regional office Balochistan of the Federal Bureau of Statistics. This Pakistan group has developed the following suggestions for Pakistan: 1. The participants strongly agree with the idea of having a regional database for HKH region with ICIMOD. 2. They generally agree with the list of indicators identified in the working groups. This list however should be finalized after thoroughly reviewed by the concerned statistical organizations/departments at individual country level. 3. The database should also be based on the general indicators for which data will be provided by the member countries and will be made available for public use. The second part of the database will contain linkages for data which is partially available at individual country level. 4. For data provision a formal MOU needs to be signed between ICIMOD and Government of Pakistan. 5. As decided in the break-out session, the focal point for provision of data will be the Federal Bureau of Statistics. For the time being, State Bank of Pakistan will coordinate with ICIMOD until the establishment of the focal point in Federal Bureau of Statistics. 6. (Potential) need for capacity development either by GTZ project 'Support to Federal Bureau of Statistics' or ICIMOD directly may be assessed at a later stage.

HKH glaciers are the water resource of 10 major river systems of the Himalayas, their melting seriously affects more than 210 million people living in Hindu Kush-Himalaya region. HKH is very important for Pakistan since more than 40 million people are living in this area within the borders of Pakistan. Glaciers also play an important role in determining slope stability, ecology, erosion processes, and surface waters. Rapid thawing of permafrost and decrease in depths of frozen soil has threatened many hundreds settlements downstream. The decrease in snow and rainfall has reduced productivity of grasslands in colder regions, which is projected to decline further and shift upwards. Reduction in nature's water storage capacity in the form of snow and ice imposes even more serious difficulties on mountain people and their livelihoods. The once self sufficient people of this region faces dire economic poverty and diminishing production from subsistence agriculture, population growth and chronic unemployment which drive many people away from the mountain areas to the already overpopulated urban areas of the region and to labor-demanding areas of the Middle-East. Therefore the Pakistani delegation appreciates the efforts made by and is looking forward to further cooperation with ICIMOD and the other regional member countries.