

Strengthening the Role of Women in the Transboundary Landscapes of the Hindu Kush Himalayan Region

Building resilience to shocks and vulnerabilities

Background

The Transboundary Landscapes of the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region are characterised by shared ecological, hydrological, historical, cultural and socioeconomic features that spread across country borders. The Regional Programme on Transboundary Landscapes within the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has identified six transboundary landscapes across the HKH region and has been actively engaging with the communities on conservation, management of ecosystem services and livelihood promotion.

Trade has always been an engine for economic growth and poverty reduction. Historically, cross-border trade (both formal and informal) flourished among the member countries of the transboundary landscapes. Trade in services, particularly tourism/hospitality, is another sector wherein transboundary landscapes have an advantage due to the presence of national parks, wild life sanctuaries, religious/sacred places, religious and cultural sites. It is be noted that trade and tourism are two sectors that have faced significant impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. The repercussions would have severely affected the vulnerable communities in these fragile ecosystems.

This holds particularly true for the women who have to meet the day to day expenses as men migrated to far off places in search of better livelihoods.¹ Women engagement in economic activities range from farming, collecting forest produce, handicrafts, tourism related services and micro/nano enterprises.² Frequent exposure to climatic shocks, geo political tensions, inadequate institutional support for technical and financial assistance has enhanced the vulnerability of women in transboundary landscapes. The COVID-19 pandemic adds to these problems.

In this context, CUTS International³ is undertaking an explorative study in the four transboundary landscapes

of HKH region to understand formal and informal trade in the transboundary landscapes with special focus on the nature of engagement of women in trade at local, national and cross-border levels. The four transboundary landscapes within the scope of the study are:

- Hindu Kush Karakoram Pamir Landscape
- Kailash Sacred Landscape
- Kangchenjunga Landscape
- Far Eastern Himalaya

Goal and Objectives

The goal is to strengthen women's roles in trade – both in terms of access and benefits – within ICIMOD's Transboundary Landscapes, with particular emphasis on building their resilience to shocks and vulnerabilities. The duration is of five months, i.e. from August-December, 2020.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- Understanding the formal and informal trade happening in the transboundary landscapes with special focus on the engagement of women;
- Identifying shocks and vulnerabilities, including the impact of the COVID-19; and
- Exploring opportunities to enhance their resilience to shocks and vulnerabilities.

Strengthen women's roles in trade – both in terms of access and benefits – within ICIMOD's Transboundary Landscapes, with particular emphasis on building their resilience to shocks and vulnerabilities

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Activities and Methodology

The project will be undertaken in a consortium approach with CUTS partners across China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The activities involve desk and field research.

Based on desk review, a questionnaire for **field research** will be prepared with both closed and open-ended questions. The respondents will be entrepreneurs involved in local, national, international, and cross-border trade in both the informal and formal sectors particularly in agriculture, nature-based produce, handicrafts, tourism, etc. The survey will be in line with the objectives of the project. The selection of respondents for the survey will be based on the snowballing technique.

Apart from individual/household surveys, Key Informative Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will also be conducted with relevant stakeholders, such as civil society organisations (CSOs) working with women entrepreneurs, business associations, networks, local government bodies, etc.

CUTS will organise a webinar comprising of women entrepreneurs, policymakers, chamber of commerce and industry representatives, CSOs working with women

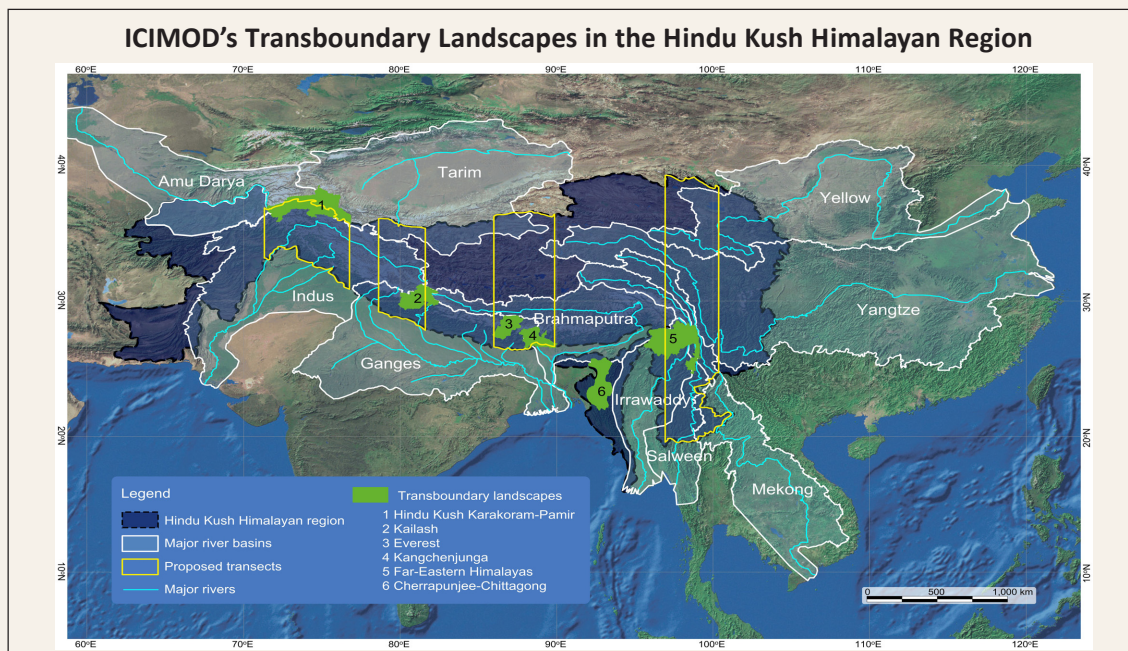
entrepreneurs, business associations and media houses. The key recommendations on building their resilience to shocks and vulnerabilities will be validated during the webinar.

Outputs

- A **consolidated research report** on capturing the key findings from all the four transboundary landscapes. It will capture best practices from formal and informal sectors and come up with key recommendations to build the resilience of women traders in the transboundary landscapes
- A separate **report of the webinar**
- A **network of women traders** in the HKH region

Outcomes

This project is envisaged to be the Phase I of a three-phase programme of building the resilience of women traders in transboundary landscapes of the HKH region. As such, the outputs of phase-I would enable to initiate the site-level planning in selected landscapes and design specific interventions to build the resilience of women engaged in economic activities. The network initiated will act as a platform to deliberate on experiences/good practices as a learning platform.



Endnotes

- 1 <https://lib.icimod.org/record/34904>
- 2 <https://www.fdc.org.au/copy-of-role-of-women-in-economic-i>
- 3 <https://cuts-international.org/>