International Mountain Day

Dear Friends, Today is the International Mountain Day (11 December) and I am pleased to share with you the Message from our Director General, Dr. Andreas Schild on this occasion. It is also available at http://www.icimod.org/?page=1678. You are welcome to share it among your networks members and others who may be interested in the message.

To mark this event, the Award Ceremony of the 'Promoting Herbal Gardens in Schools - Best Herbal Gardens' competition, a culmination of six months' effort of promoting herbal gardens in 15 schools in Kathmandu, was successfully conducted yesterday at ICIMOD. More information on this later. In the mean time, you are welcome to read about it at http://www.icimod.org/?page=1128. Wishing you all great success in observing this important Day!

Best wishes, Nira

===== Message from the ICIMOD Director General, Dr. Andreas Schild

Celebrating International Mountain Day 11 December 2010

International Mountain Day, celebrated on December 11, gives us an opportunity to reflect on the relevance of mountains for the world. This year the International Mountain Day theme focuses on indigenous peoples and other minorities living in the mountains. The purpose is both to highlight the threats and challenges faced by these communities, and to acknowledge the invaluable knowledge they have and the contributions they can make towards overcoming global challenges of poverty and loss of diversity in a rapidly changing world.

A majority of the world's indigenous women and men live in mountain regions, many on the margins of society and facing poverty and exclusion. The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region has some of the highest diversity of indigenous peoples and other minorities in the world. An ICIMOD report identified more than 600 living languages in the Himalayas, 400 spoken by less than 100,000 people. According to current forecasts, ninety per cent of all languages could disappear within 100 years. The loss of these languages not only erodes an essential component of a group's identity, it is also a loss to heritage for all humankind. The UN General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007, marking an important step in international efforts to preserve the identity of indigenous peoples. However, implementation has a different speed and different levels of commitment in different countries.

In agricultural terms, mountains are often considered 'marginal lands', unsuitable for modern commercial farming which focuses on cultivation of single crop varieties for large markets. Indigenous mountain people and other mountain communities continue to use traditional practices and techniques including sophisticated terracing systems, water transportation and irrigation schemes, and a combination of pasture, forestry and farming practices. Indigenous women and men serve as custodians of this traditional knowledge on how to farm under difficult mountain conditions, and how to conserve important reservoirs of agricultural biodiversity. They sustainably farm a wide variety of crops that are adapted to a range of different elevations, slope conditions, and micro-climates, and this knowledge will be of great, if as yet little noticed, value in the world's efforts to adapt to climate and other drivers of change.

The autonomous adaptation practiced by mountain communities consists of community-based interventions that address underlying causes of vulnerability and...
reduce the risk of possible adverse impacts of climate change by building upon the existing rich indigenous knowledge base on adaptation to environmental change and helping to strengthen the resilience of the communities. Women especially play a critical role in gendered indigenous knowledge. Their roles and expertise have yet to be acknowledged, but has great potential for adapting to multiple drivers of change. Indigenous mountain communities are connected to the land, the environment, and natural resources in ways that are often inextricably intertwined and therefore expressed in spiritual and socio-cultural terms. Respecting this worldview, and preserving the languages, music, artwork, folk tales, culture, meanings, and myths that express it, is critical for the survival of indigenous communities in mountain areas. This 'intangible heritage' also enriches the global community, providing inspiration and insights for realising a more sustainable relationship between humankind and the environment. The involvement of indigenous mountain communities is an important prerequisite for sustainable mountain development. Therefore, as governments work toward addressing mountain development priorities, it is critical that they live up to their commitments outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We hope that this year's International Mountain Day will help to increase awareness of the central role of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples for mountain development, and to motivate all citizens, policy makers, and development actors to recognise the importance of their contribution to sustainable development. We trust that the Day will encourage organisations to invite indigenous and traditional mountain communities to participate actively in national and international efforts to understand and adapt to the multiple drivers of change, including climate change, in the mountains of the world. More details on the IMD are available at [http://www.fao.org/mnts/en/](http://www.fao.org/mnts/en/) With best wishes, Andreas Schild [cid:image002.jpg@01CB9866.2589DFF0] Nira Gurung (Ms), Communications Officer International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development GPO Box 3226, Khumaltar, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal. Tel +977-1-5003222 Direct Line 5003310 Ext 115 Fax +977-1-5003277 Web www.icimod.org< [http://www.icimod.org](http://www.icimod.org)}