

HOW TO SAVE THE FRAGILE HINDU-KUSH BELT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

A [comprehensive assessment](#) of the Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) region by Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has said that a 1.5°C rise in global temperature over pre-industrial levels will spell doom for the fragile ecology of the region. The report, which deals with climate change, biodiversity, energy, cryosphere (frozen water), water, food security, air pollution, disaster and resilience, poverty, adaptation, and gender and migration, is significant because the HKH region covers 4.2 million square km across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. The region is home to 10 major river basins and four of 36 global biodiversity hot spots. Nearly 1.65 billion people living in the downstream areas of these river basins benefit directly and indirectly from its resources, says the report. The region directly sustains the livelihood of 240 million people living in the Himalayan region. “This is the climate crisis you haven’t heard of,” said Philippus Wester of ICIMOD, who led the assessment. “Global warming is on track to transform the frigid mountain peaks to bare rocks in a little less than a century. It’s the projected reductions in pre-monsoon river flows and changes in monsoon that will hit hardest,” he added. The report is alarming and calls for serious introspection by the eight countries because this transboundary problem must have transboundary solutions.

The region is undergoing rapid changes driven by stressors such as climate change and human conflicts, and factors like globalisation, infrastructure development, migration, tourism, and urbanisation. The outcome of the interplay of these complex drivers of change is challenging to predict but will have major consequences, not just in the region but across the world. Such excessive demands on fragile ecosystems will also diminish their capacity and so there is a need to promote their sustainable development and also attach an economic value to the services they provide to people who depend on them. But that doesn’t happen because such services are intangible and do not have an explicit market value. Fortunately, economists are looking at the ecosystems as capital assets and working on their valuation methods. This is an evolving science, but policymakers must start looking at economic valuation of ecosystems seriously.

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