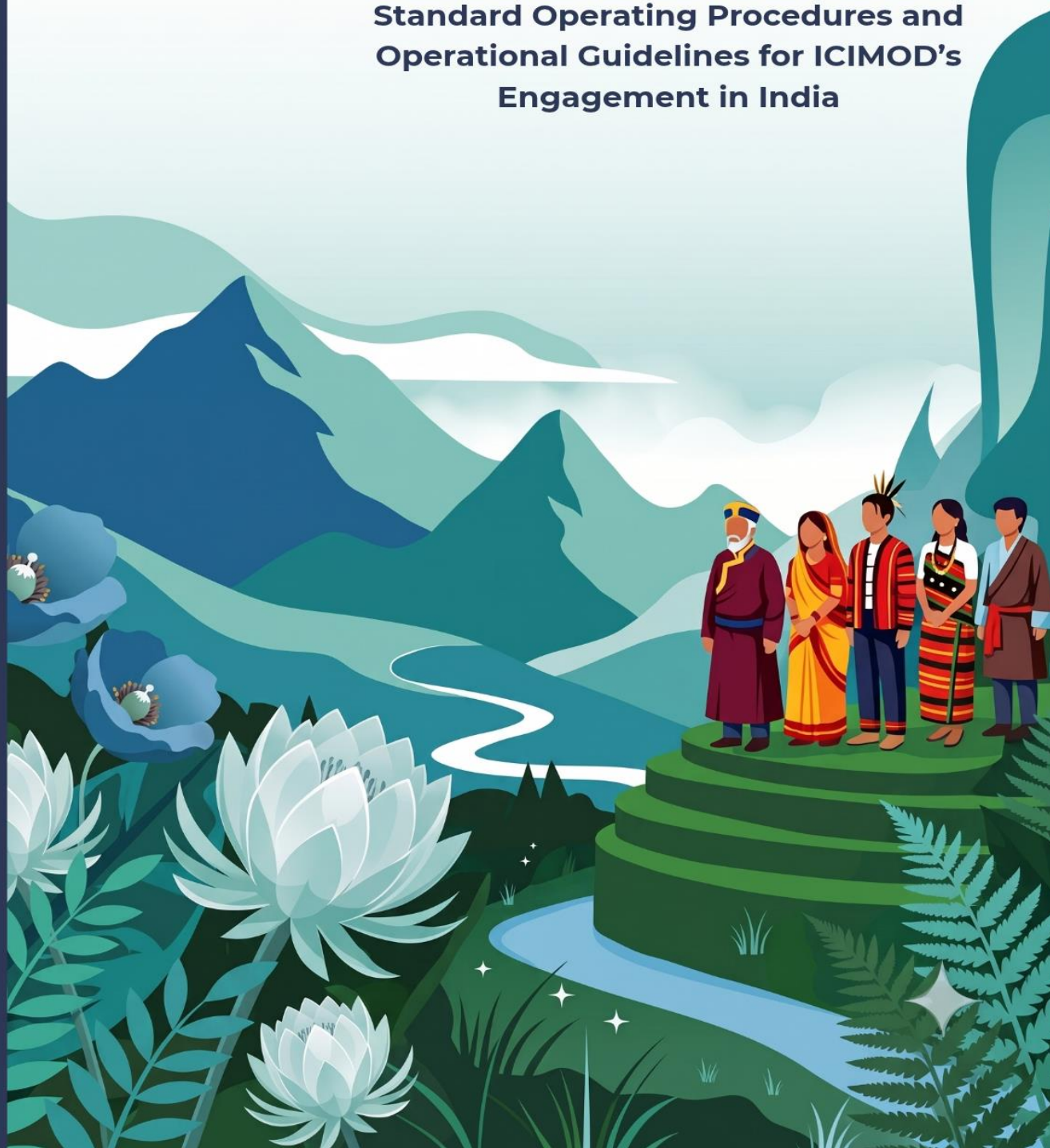




ICIMOD

Standard Operating Procedures and Operational Guidelines for ICIMOD's Engagement in India



About

India is a founding member of International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), along with seven other regional member countries. Since its inception, India has partnered with ICIMOD to help achieve ICIMOD's major objectives which seeks to build and share knowledge to drives regional policy and action and attracts investment. This in turn will enable the diverse countries and communities of the Hindu Kush Himalaya to transition to greener, more inclusive and climate resilient development.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change acts as the Nodal Ministry for ICIMOD in India. The incumbent Secretary of the Ministry formally represents India on the ICIMOD Board of Governors, which is the highest governing and decision-making body of ICIMOD. G. B Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment, Almora - an autonomous institute of the Ministry, serves as the lead institute for facilitation and coordination of ICIMOD's activities in India.

This document outlines the Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines for the approval, planning, funding, implementation, monitoring and review of all activities undertaken by ICIMOD in India. It also details the institutional arrangements for co-ordinating all ICIMOD-related activities in India.

The procedures and guidelines detailed in this document will govern all activities undertaken by various Ministries, Departments, Organizations, Institutes and other Implementing Agencies which seek to work in collaboration with ICIMOD in India.

Standard Operating Procedures and Operational Guidelines for ICIMOD's Engagement in India

1. Purpose

This note outlines the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines for the planning, approval, funding, implementation, monitoring and review of all activities undertaken in India by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), irrespective of the source of funding, so as to ensure alignment with national priorities and the applicable statutory and regulatory framework. This is also in alignment with Para 2 under clause 3 of the MoU signed between the G. B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (GBPNIHE) and ICIMOD on June 19, 2018. These guidelines may be revised or modified from time to time, as may be required. The operating procedures for both India funded programme and other specific donor funded projects are explained hereunder as follows:

2. Institutional Arrangement

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) shall act as the Nodal Ministry for all ICIMOD activities in India.
- GBPNIHE shall act as the Nodal Coordinating Authority on behalf of MoEF&CC. All engagements/proposals with partners shall be submitted to MoEF&CC via GBPNIHE.
- An ICIMOD Cell shall be established at GBPNIHE and shall serve as the central coordinating unit for managing the entire project lifecycle.
- The Cell will function under the overall guidance of the Joint Secretary, MoEF&CC, under the supervision of the Director, GBPNIHE and day-to-day coordination by a designated Nodal Officer of GBPNIHE.
- Funds for operation of ICIMOD Cell in GBPNIHE shall be made available by MoEF&CC from the budgetary provision allocated by Department of Expenditure as programmatic funding support for projects implemented by ICIMOD in India.

3. Project Development and Implementation Mechanism for ICIMOD-India projects

Step 1: Identification of Priority Areas

- Priority areas shall be identified by MoEF&CC, drawing upon inputs from Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) State Governments, domain experts and other relevant stakeholders, as may be required. The identified priority areas shall be in line with the ICIMOD's Long-term Strategy, Medium Term Action Plan (MTAP) outcome targets, which in turn shall be formulated by ICIMOD after country-level consultations with Regional Member Countries.

Step 2: Development of proposals

- In line with the priority areas communicated under Step 1, ICIMOD will develop project proposals and also propose the implementation partners from the suggested list (**Annexure 1**), in consultation with MoEF&CC through GBPNIHE. ICIMOD will inform about the project concept to MoEF&CC through GBPNIHE.
- A complete project proposal, with objectives, methodologies, expected outcomes, timelines, budget requirements and details of the proposed implementation partners, shall be submitted by ICIMOD to the ICIMOD Cell at GBPNIHE for further processing in accordance with Step 3 below.

Step 3: Approval of proposals

The approval process under this Step shall apply to all projects proposed to be undertaken by ICIMOD in India, irrespective of the source of funding. Each proposal received by the ICIMOD Cell shall undergo a structured, three-stage evaluation by GBPNIHE, drawing upon domain experts as may be required:

Stage 1 — Screening and Scrutiny: The ICIMOD Cell shall conduct an initial review to assess the proposal in terms of eligibility, thematic relevance, completeness of documentation and compliance with these SOPs.

Stage 2 — Scientific and Technical Review: Proposals that pass the screening stage will be forwarded to the Scientific and Technical

Committee (STC) of GBPNIHE. The STC shall undertake a detailed evaluation of the scientific merit, methodological soundness, feasibility, innovation and potential impact of the proposal. ICIMOD shall, present the proposal before the Committee and respond to queries.

Stage 3 — Final Approval: Proposals recommended by the STC shall be placed before an Approval Committee chaired by the Secretary, MoEF&CC, the relevant implementing agencies and a representative of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of the rank of Joint Secretary. The Joint Secretary (Mountain Division), MoEF&CC shall function as the Convenor of the Approval Committee. ICIMOD shall also present the proposal before the Committee and respond to queries. The decision of the Approval Committee shall be communicated to ICIMOD by the GBPNIHE/ ICIMOD Cell.

Clarification — Routine activities like technical discussions, consultations, workshops, field visits etc, necessary for implementation of the approved project shall not attract approval under the above three-stage approval process. However, all the activities conducted by ICIMOD in India should be informed to MoEF&CC through GBPNIHE on a quarterly/half yearly basis.

Step 4: Funding for the proposals

- The approved proposals will be communicated to ICIMOD for funding either from programmatic funds supported by India, or may be taken up by ICIMOD with appropriate funding agencies.
- Once funding is finalized, for implementing agencies in India, ICIMOD shall share the complete work plan, along with the schedule of anticipated fund releases, with the ICIMOD Cell.
- The ICIMOD Cell shall, in turn, disburse the funds to the implementing agency/ agencies in accordance with the approved work plan, project milestones and the Government of India (GoI) financial rules as per guidelines at **Annexure 2**.
- For donor funded or regional projects not funded by programmatic funding from India, the funds will be transferred to implementation agencies directly from ICIMOD as per its own methodology, only after the project has been approved under Step 3 of these SOPs, with an intimation to GBPNIHE and MoEF&CC.

Further:

- Where any State Government, Central Government agency or Ministry or their institutions or bodies wishes to undertake a project with ICIMOD in a specific area, the request shall be communicated to MoEF&CC through the ICIMOD Cell of GBPNIHE. ICIMOD shall not undertake any proposal directly from the above-mentioned institutions, departments or Ministries. In case of ICIMOD Cell receiving request directly from any State Government, Central Government Agency or Ministry or their institutions or bodies, the same may be intimated through GBPNIHE to MoEF&CC before developing the proposal. Such projects shall be taken up by ICIMOD only upon due approval as laid down in the SOP.
- Where any external funding agency or other entity proposes to fund a specific area or project, the proposal shall be developed by ICIMOD and routed through the ICIMOD Cell at GBPNIHE for its examination and requisite subsequent approval in accordance with this SOP. In all such cases, the routing of the proposal through GBPNIHE and MoEF&CC shall be mandatory and no project shall be implemented on the basis of direct correspondence between any other Central Government Ministries / State Government agency / department / authority / funding agency and the implementing partner.
- Further, all projects being taken up by ICIMOD directly for implementation in India through any foreign funding/ multilateral agencies/ lending banks etc., shall be developed only after it has been scrutinised and due approval taken as per the aforesaid SOP.

Step 5: Project Implementation

- Prior to commencement of activities, a Letter of Agreement (LoA) shall be signed between ICIMOD, and the project implementing partner. ICIMOD shall keep GBPNIHE informed during all stages of signing any LoA. A standardized LoA template, together with a data-sharing agreement, shall be developed by GBPNIHE and shared with ICIMOD for use across all projects.
- Following execution of the LoA, the implementing agencies will initiate project activities as per the approved work plan and intimate GBPNIHE through the ICIMOD Cell.
- GBPNIHE shall, through the ICIMOD Cell, provide facilitation support, including inter-Ministerial and inter-agency coordination under overall

guidance of MoEF&CC, to address administrative or coordination challenges during implementation.

- Implementing agencies shall adhere to the applicable Government of India financial rules, including audit and reporting requirements to the ICIMOD Cell at regular intervals, as required by MoEF&CC. The agencies will also adhere to the applicable donor rules and compliance requirements.
- For working with the State Government, Central Government agency or Ministry, a letter of Intent (LoI) shall be signed between the ICIMOD and the State Government, Central Government agency or Ministry following the approval process in Step 3. A standardized LoI template, together with a data-sharing agreement, shall be developed by GBPNIHE and shared with ICIMOD for use across all such engagements.

Step 6: Monitoring

- The ICIMOD Cell shall undertake monitoring of ongoing projects jointly with ICIMOD at regular intervals as prescribed in the project proposal, to provide near-continuous oversight of project execution.
- The monitoring shall track project progress against agreed milestones, the quality and timeliness of deliverables, utilization of funds and any operational difficulties encountered by the implementing agencies.
- The ICIMOD Cell shall submit consolidated monitoring reports to MoEF&CC, through the Director, GBPNIHE, on a quarterly/ half yearly basis and shall flag any matter requiring immediate administrative or policy intervention.

Step 7: Mid-Term Review

- A Mid-Term Review of each project shall be conducted by the Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) of GBPNIHE, at the approximate mid-point of the project cycle. ICIMOD Cell will facilitate/coordinate such reviews, including the site visits of STC, if required.
- The Mid-Term Review shall assess overall project health, including alignment with the approved scope and objectives, the quality of outputs and outcomes achieved up to that stage and any significant deviations from the original plan.

- Based on its findings, the STC shall, where required, recommend mid-course corrections to ensure that the project achieves its intended objectives. The results and recommendations of the mid-term review shall be transmitted by the ICIMOD Cell to MoEF&CC and ICIMOD for incorporation and implementation. If there are any financial implications of more than 20 per cent, then Approval Committee's approval will be required.

Step 8: Reporting

- Progress will be tracked through the routine monitoring at Step 6 above, supplemented by bi-annual review meetings, standardized reporting formats and digital monitoring systems maintained by the ICIMOD Cell.
- End-term evaluations of each project shall be conducted at the close of the project cycle, including external evaluations where considered necessary by MoEF&CC.
- Periodic and final reports shall be submitted to MoEF&CC through GBPNIHE, in such format as may be prescribed by MoEF&CC from time to time.
- Copy of this Periodic status report of projects shall also be shared with MEA and the Embassy of India in Kathmandu by ICIMOD Cell.

Step 9: Data Management and Knowledge Sharing

- All project data, outputs and deliverables shall be deposited with the ICIMOD Cell and archived in the designated repository of the Central Database Management Agency (CDMA) at GBPNIHE.
- The ICIMOD Cell shall function as a knowledge hub, fostering collaboration, policy dialogue and structured data-sharing among stakeholders.
- All data sharing within India and externally shall be undertaken strictly in accordance with the extant Government of India guidelines/frameworks and ICIMOD's data policy, Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable (FAIR)/ open-access principles, regional knowledge sharing role and donor requirements on data governance.

4. Role of ICIMOD Cell

The ICIMOD Cell at GBPNIHE shall serve as the central coordination unit for all ICIMOD-related activities in India. The functions of the Cell shall, inter alia, include:

- i. Acting as the single point of interface between ICIMOD, the implementing partners, GBPNIHE and MoEF&CC and processing all proposals, communications and approvals contemplated under these SOPs;
- ii. Supporting project preparation and where required liaise with State Governments, line Ministries and funding agencies;
- iii. Carrying out regular monitoring, periodic reporting and verification of on-going projects in coordination with ICIMOD and submitting consolidated monitoring reports to MoEF&CC through the Director, GBPNIHE;
- iv. Managing all project data and deliverables, ensuring secure storage in the CDMA repository and overseeing compliant data-sharing in accordance with applicable GoI and ICIMOD guidelines; and
- v. Ensuring overall compliance with these SOPs, the applicable financial rules and statutory requirements and disseminating knowledge, outputs and lessons generated under ICIMOD-supported projects.
- vi. Keeping oversight of compliance for each project in coordination with ICIMOD and shall bring any material deviation or risk to the notice of MoEF&CC at the earliest, for appropriate corrective action.

5. Statutory and Regulatory Compliance

All ICIMOD-supported activities and projects undertaken in India, irrespective of the source of funding, shall be undertaken in conformity with the applicable statutory and regulatory framework of the Government of India.

- i. Where any foreign contribution or external assistance is received by an Indian implementing institution under an ICIMOD-supported project, full compliance with FCRA provisions and other statutory requirements shall be ensured by the implementing agency.
- ii. Where a project or proposal involves the mandate of, or has implications for, other Central Ministries or Departments, it shall be routed through MoEF&CC, which shall secure the necessary inter-Ministerial concurrence and ensure alignment of the proposal with relevant national missions, programmes and regional priorities.
- iii. The ICIMOD Cell, under the supervision of the Director, GBPNIHE, shall keep oversight of compliance for each project in coordination with ICIMOD and shall bring any material deviation or risk to the notice of MoEF&CC at the earliest, for appropriate corrective action.

Annexure 1

Suggestive List of Implementation Partners

Sectors	Lead/Associate Institutions
Biodiversity & ecosystem services	G. B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (GBPNIHE) Botanical Survey of India (BSI) Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)
Forestry	Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun
Water resources	GBPNIHE National Institute of Hydrology
Air pollution	Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) GBPNIHE
Waste management	GBPNIHE
Wetlands & grasslands	GBPNIHE
Natural hazards & disaster risk reduction	National Disaster Management Authority Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee-ICARS GBPNIHE
Glaciology	Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG)
Livelihood & socio-economic issues	GBPNIHE
Agriculture	ICAR

Note: Other institutions/organizations may be engaged based on the specific R&D needs and jointly decided by ICIMOD and GBPNIHE based on due approval of MoEF&CC.

Annexure 2

Guidelines for Disbursement of Funds

1. ICIMOD Cell at GBPNIHE shall maintain separate savings bank account linked to the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) for accurate financial reporting and compliance.
2. Implementing agencies in India shall also maintain separate savings bank accounts linked to the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) of each project for accurate financial reporting and compliance.
3. All releases shall be made in accordance with the General Financial Rules of the Government of India and related instructions.
4. Submission of all financial documents as required by the financial management system of Government of India as well as ICIMOD, like Project Progress Report, audited Utilization Certificate (UC) and Expenditure Statement (ES), etc. are mandatory for consideration of release of any further instalments.
5. These guidelines are indicative and are subject to changes based on directions issued from time to time.

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