



## **HKH-Innovation Challenge for Entrepreneurs (HKH-ICE)**

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## BACKGROUND

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region, spanning eight countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan—holds the largest ice reserves outside the polar regions, and is home to four global biodiversity hotspots. This vast region supports the livelihoods of 240 million people in the mountains and another 1.65 billion downstream through its ecosystem services, including water from ten major Asian river systems. However, this region is highly vulnerable to climate change, environmental degradation, and socio-economic challenges, which are exacerbating resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and rural distress. Addressing these challenges is essential for sustaining the region's people and ecosystems.

The HKH Innovation Challenge seeks to catalyse entrepreneurial solutions that address critical ecological, market, and value chain challenges in the region. By focusing on technological, financial, and social innovations, this challenge aims to promote sustainable mountain livelihoods, enhance climate adaptation, and strengthen resilience in the HKH region. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to develop innovations in areas such as resilient agriculture, water security, and sustainable tourism, with a special focus on leveraging local knowledge and creating scalable solutions. The challenge provides an opportunity for local innovators to bring forward novel approaches that not only mitigate climate risks but also foster economic growth and biodiversity conservation.

The HKH region's rich diversity of biological, cultural, and other resources—such as a young workforce, social and natural capital—offers a great potential that remains underutilised. The diverse plant life and indigenous knowledge of medicinal and nutritional uses, along with opportunities in organic farming, ecotourism, and forest-based enterprises, remain largely untapped. With the right investment and support, these resources could drive improved livelihoods, sustainable economic growth, and stronger environmental conservation.

We are looking for innovative entrepreneurs, who can design impactful solutions addressing the unique challenges of the HKH region. Winners will be connected with potential funders/donors, receive a tailored mentoring programme, communications support, and capacity-building opportunities, alongside access to a network of regional and global experts. The challenge encourages bold and transformative ideas that promote resilience, preserve ecosystems, and create sustainable economic opportunities for local communities. Subject matter experts will facilitate a leadership academy for the winning entrants. Winners will receive a cash prize ranging from USD 5,000 to 25,000 to further develop and scale their solutions over nine months.

## About GRP and ICIMOD

The [Global Resilience Partnership](#) (GRP) advances resilience through identifying and scaling on the ground innovation, generating and sharing knowledge, and shaping policy. Resilience underpins sustainable development in an increasingly unpredictable world. We envisage an inclusive world in harmony with nature, that is better prepared to cope

with shocks, adapt to change, and transform – all within planetary boundaries. GRP is made up of 80+ organisations that have joined forces to work towards this vision.

The [International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development](#) (ICIMOD) is an intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre, dedicated to serving the people of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region. Representing eight regional member countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan—ICIMOD works to improve livelihoods, protect mountain ecosystems, and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the HKH. By fostering regional cooperation and generating actionable knowledge, ICIMOD helps communities adapt to climate change, seize new opportunities, and build resilience. ICIMOD actively promotes Nature-based Solutions, conservation stewardship, and innovation in green livelihoods and enterprises. The organisation believes that targeted investments in climate resilience, innovative ideas, and robust policies can empower mountain communities and stakeholders to effectively address their challenges. To read more, click [here](#).

## HKH-Innovation Challenge for Entrepreneurs (ICE)

We are calling for proposals from for-profit organisations, local entrepreneurs, and innovators - who are ready to bring forward innovative business solutions in the Hindu Kush Himalaya. Both experienced implementers as well as emerging entrepreneurs from **Bhutan, Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts only), India (Himalayan states only) and Nepal** are encouraged to apply. Although the challenge is designed as a competition, the long-term purpose is not to pick winners, but to develop many scalable business solutions and initiatives to address the critical challenges faced by mountain ecosystems and communities.

The HKH-ICE seeks scalable, innovative solutions that tackle ecological, market, and value chain challenges, particularly in resilient agriculture, water security, and sustainable tourism. Proposals should focus on enhancing resilience to those most vulnerable to (climate) shocks and stresses, promoting gender equity, and preserving biodiversity, while driving sustainable livelihoods and economic growth. This initiative prioritises locally led innovations that leverage the HKH region's natural and social capital in an ecologically sustainable manner.

The Innovation Challenge will launch on 7 November 2024 with an open call for proposals via GRP and ICIMOD's websites and social media. A special launch event will be held at COP29. Applicants must submit their proposals by 23:59 GMT on 29 November. The shortlisted Challenge winners will be contacted early 2025, and successful candidates will receive tailored funding, mentorship, and support to scale their solutions.

We will rigorously assess all entries to the Challenge based on criteria including viability, innovativeness, scale of impact and equity. Final Winners will be selected and announced in March 2025 and receive prizes ranging from USD 5,000 to 25,000 for 9 months of implementation. More details on eligibility, selection criteria, and timelines can be found in the Challenge FAQs (see Annex).



## Challenge Implementation

Selected projects will receive customised support to maximise their potential for impact, scalability and further funding. The Challenge's winners will benefit from a programme of tailored mentoring, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), communications and leadership support to make their project more scalable and impactful. They will also be connected to potential investors and partners from across ICIMOD and GRP networks.

### Mentoring and incubation

The finalists of the HKH -ICE will receive up to 24 hours of tailored mentoring support (8 hours per month) up to March 2025, provided by GRP and ICIMOD. This mentoring phase will focus on refining their projects and ensuring they are well-prepared for successful implementation. Up to 10 finalist projects will be awarded prizes between USD 5,000-25,000 by March 2025, which will support their scaling and implementation over 9 months up to December 2025. The finalist projects will continue to receive mentoring support (4 hours per month), through December 2025, and will be required to report progress to ICIMOD and GRP.

The awarding of funding will be contingent upon the successful completion of the Leadership Academy and Due Diligence process. ICIMOD and GRP draw on a pool of experts and consultants to provide the support required. Throughout the incubation process, we use a framework that takes the projects through a Value Chain Driven Viability Analysis and a Resilience and Scaling assessment,<sup>1</sup> and then work with the initiative to concurrently develop and deliver a work plan and an action plan.

We use a proven framework to analyse and develop the relevant prescription for any given initiative. This framework has been distilled from several existing and overlapping business tools and models for mapping context, testing viability, customer appropriateness, and soundness of an idea. Throughout this process, there is a learning focus, examining what has been suboptimal in analysis, planning as well as execution.

### Leadership Academy

The HKH Challenge places a strong emphasis on leadership development as a key factor in ensuring the successful implementation of the proposed solutions. Winners will participate in a Leadership Academy designed to help both individuals and groups navigate the complexities of their projects, as well as their personal and professional lives. This Academy will be based on executive management development practices from leading business schools, focusing on both conscious and subconscious dynamics that affect leadership. Through case studies, exercises, and real-life examples drawn from the participants themselves, the Academy will offer a unique learning experience that sharpens critical thinking, fosters teamwork under pressure, and develops the resilience needed for effective leadership in uncertain environments.

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<sup>1</sup> The Value Chain Driven Viability Analysis looks at the existing and potential viability of the solution within the frame of context, problem addressed and internal functions. The Resilience and Scaling assessment looks at what the potential for building resilience is as well as how scalable that model is.

## **Resource/Investment Mobilisation**

Part of the support package offered to winners is the facilitation of resources / investment mobilisation through ongoing networking activities with potential partners and investors. GRP and ICIMOD will help finalists prepare for a pitching event where they can present their ideas to potential funders, either in person or via video. Throughout the challenge, participants will receive support aimed at improving the viability of their projects, with a particular focus on understanding the core problems they aim to solve and refining the strategies to address these challenges. This preparation ensures that winners are well-equipped to present their projects and attract the necessary resources for scaling.

## **Communications support**

A promotional campaign will be developed to support the Challenge and its objectives, using key communications channels and platforms likely to reach potential participants in the private sector, civil society and academia. There will also be communications support for the winners. Winners will be supported to promote their achievement through a social media toolkit that they themselves can deploy through their own channels. Over the time that the Innovation Challenge winners receive support, their stories and journeys will be integrated into overall GRP and ICIMOD communications.

## **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) support**

Monitoring, evaluation and learning support will be provided, including direct support through an online helpdesk. Throughout the mentoring process the assigned mentors and sector experts will fill in Mentoring memos. The learning distilled informs the mentoring process and will feed back into direct support to winners.





## ANNEX: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

### 1. How do I apply?

Go to [www.globalresiliencepartnership.org](http://www.globalresiliencepartnership.org) or [www.icimod.org](http://www.icimod.org) and fill in the proposal template. When you have completed it, submit it before the deadline. Make sure you read and respond to all the questions, and that you understand the eligibility and assessment criteria.

### 2. What are the competition timelines?

- The Challenge opens on 7 November 2024.
- The deadline for submissions is **29 November 2024 at 23:59 hrs (GMT)**. The Challenge will close at this time.
- Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be contacted in January 2025.
- Successful applicants will be provided support to further develop their projects during January to March 2025.
- Winners will be announced and contracted by 31 March 2025.
- Mentoring, communications and MEL support will be provided during 2025.
- The Leadership Academy will take place in March 2025.

### 3. What are the eligibility criteria?

To be eligible an application must meet the following criteria:

- ✓ The solution must contribute to building climate resilience in the most vulnerable communities and ecosystems within the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region.
- ✓ The Challenge is open to **for-profit** organisations only.
- ✓ Be located in the HKH region, specifically Bhutan, Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill tract only), India (Himalayan states only), and Nepal.
- ✓ The team has proven experience implementing innovative business solutions for resilience in mountain ecosystems and communities in the Hindu Kush Himalaya.
- ✓ Gender, equity, human rights and biodiversity considerations are included.
- ✓ The solution does no harm (i.e., has no negative impacts on communities or ecosystems it is designed to build resilience in).

GRP and ICIMOD will notify all applicants about the results of the assessment phase. Non-selected ideas may still be considered for alternative promotion within the GRP and ICIMOD network (e.g., matchmaking with other partners better suited for supporting them).

### 4. What are eligible countries and regions?

Eligible countries are Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Please refer to the table below for specific regions that are eligible for implementation:

Bangladesh	Chittagong Hill Tracts
Bhutan	Entire territory
India	Indian Himalayan Region
Nepal	Entire territory

## 5. What are the assessment criteria?

Eligible concept notes will be assessed by two assessors according to a set of marking criteria, with justifications provided where necessary. Out of these up to 15 submissions will be selected as finalists, depending on the number and quality of the applications. Eligible submissions will be evaluated across these evaluation criteria (the maximum score is 100):

### Evaluation criteria

#### Innovativeness (0-15)

How innovative is the proposed innovation? Innovation, for the purposes of this call, is defined as ideas that address an existing challenge in a manner that adds value, is sustainable and is practically implementable. Scoring as per below (continuous scale from 0-15):

- The innovation is completely new and new to the sector – unheard of until this submission (15)
- The innovation is new on the continent and new to the sector on the continent – it exists elsewhere but has not been tested on the continent or context it is proposed for (10)
- The innovation is new in the country – it exists in other places and neighbouring countries, but not in the proposed country or context (5)
- It is not innovative by the above metrics (0)

#### Potential for impact (0-15)

Does the proposed solution show potential for improving the resilience of the most vulnerable people and places? How will the solution contribute to the transformation to resilient and sustainable mountain development? Does it show potential for long term impact? Either by itself or as part of something? Is the route to impact clearly described and realistic? Scoring as per below (continuous scale from 0-15):

- Very strong conservation efforts backed by science and high potential for social impact (15)
- Medium conservation efforts and potential for social impact (10)
- Some potential for environmental conservation and social impact (5)
- No potential for environmental or social benefits (0)

#### Equity (0-15)

How does the project specifically address improving gender, equity and human rights? Is special consideration given to excluded groups and communities (women, girls, indigenous groups, people with disabilities, etc.) or low-income populations. Outline how women, children and other vulnerable groups will benefit. Scoring as per below (continuous scale from 0-15):

- Gender transformative. Very strong benefits and involvement of marginalised groups (15)
- Gender sensitive. Attention to equity and integration of gender considerations (10)
- Some benefits for and involvement of excluded groups (5)



- No consideration for excluded and marginalised groups (0)

### **Scalability (0-15)**

Is the project considered scalable? Does it have a potentially scalable model? Is the product or service in question likely to attract sufficient interest and demand among stakeholders? Scoring as per below (continuous scale from 0-15.):

- Easily scalable and replicable (15)
- Potentially scalable and replicable (10)
- Low scalability and replicability (5)
- No scalability and replicability (0)

### **Profitability and Sustainability (0-15)**

Is the project considered profitable? Does it have a clear path to becoming a sustainable solution and support for the sector? Does it have a clear exit strategy, can it connect with funders, what is the scope for policy engagement? Scoring as per below (continuous scale from 0-15.):

- High sustainability and profitability potential for supporting the viable development of the sector (15)
- Good sustainability and profitability potential for supporting the viable development of the sector (10)
- Challenging sustainability and profitability potential for supporting the viable development of the sector (5)
- No sustainability and profitability potential for supporting the viable development of the sector (0)

### **Team Composition / Organisation (0-15)**

Is the team composition relevant for developing the idea further? Do they have relevant experience, skill sets and in-depth knowledge? Do they have the right networks? Is there a clear ownership of the idea? Note: It is not necessary to have a full team envisaged for implementation at time of applying. Scoring as per below (continuous scale from 0-15):

- Strong and relevant experience in conservation experience (15)
- Medium conservation and business experience (10)
- Low conservation or business experience (5)
- No conservation or business experience (0)

### **Risk (0-10)**

What are the risks, both long and short term, to successful project implementation? How are these analysed and how will these be mitigated? Any project with a high risk of doing harm (environmental / social) is ineligible. (NB: Inverse scoring: 10 = low risk, 0 = high risk):

- Low risk (10)
- Medium risk (5)
- High risk (0)

## **6. How does the selection process work?**

First, all applications are screened for eligibility. All eligible applications are then reviewed and assessed. Each eligible application is reviewed by two separate reviewers, one of which is a reference marker. The reference marker reviews all applications. If there is a difference in total marks on any eligible application between any two reviewers of 25 points or more that application is flagged for review and discussed by the assessors. The outcome of that review determines the final score of that application. The assessment review is evaluated against the assessment criteria, with a maximum of 100 points awarded. All applications with a score above 60 will be shortlisted. Out of these up to 10 submissions will be selected as winners, at the discretion of the selection committee. The selection committee is composed of GRP and ICIMOD staff.

#### 7. What will the winners win?

The Challenge winners will receive a programme of tailored mentoring, communications and MEL support and will be connected to potential partners and/or investors. In addition to this there will be prizes ranging from USD 5,000 to 25,000 for winning projects to further develop and scale their solutions. This will be awarded in March 2025 after the initial three month mentoring period and a Leadership Academy, to be used for implementation and scaling over the following 9 months (April to December 2025).

#### 8. Who is providing the mentoring and subject matter expertise?

We recognise that no one knows your innovation better than you do. Our mentors and subject matter experts are highly experienced in mentoring and coaching and are trained to help you further develop your idea. Each mentor has years of experience in this field and comes from diverse backgrounds, ranging from successful entrepreneurs with a proven track record of innovating and scaling, to academics and researchers. Importantly, we will also draw on **regional expertise** from the Hindu Kush Himalaya, engaging mentors who have a deep understanding of the local context. These regional experts will provide culturally relevant guidance, ensuring that your solutions are tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities in the region. The mentors will work together in a structured approach to deliver optimal support to each winner, combining their global and regional insights to enhance your project's success.

#### 9. What do we expect from you?

If you are selected as a winner and receive support, we expect you to fully engage with the process and the mentors assigned to you. If you have any questions or concerns, you can bring these up by sending a message to [challenge@globalresiliencepartnership.org](mailto:challenge@globalresiliencepartnership.org) (including HKH Challenge in the subject line).

#### 10. Will there be a chance to ask clarification questions?

You can send a message to [challenge@globalresiliencepartnership.org](mailto:challenge@globalresiliencepartnership.org) to ask questions in advance. Additionally, we will be hosting a webinar to provide guidance and support, ensuring a smoother application process for all applicants.

#### 11. Who do I contact for more information?

If you have further questions on the Challenge please contact us at: [challenge@globalresiliencepartnership.org](mailto:challenge@globalresiliencepartnership.org) - we will do our best to respond to all inquiries within three working days.

## 12. What solutions will we consider?

Innovative solutions in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) context emphasise the conservation and sustainable management of the region's unique biodiversity and natural resources, providing critical ecosystem services while avoiding further degradation and restoring ecosystems when needed. It also promotes sustainable practices such as waste management and fosters a circular economy.

In the HKH, solutions should not only mitigate harm but actively contribute to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem restoration. These solutions should help communities cope with, recover from, and thrive in the face of climate uncertainty. Examples include financial innovations for forest conservation, sustainable mountain agriculture, mountain niche products and services, community-led biodiversity protection, improved watershed management, and ecotourism models that balance economic benefits with ecological preservation.

Innovative and scalable initiatives that address ecological, market, and value chain challenges in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region. Eligible initiatives can focus on:

- Resilient Agriculture Innovations for Nature: Solutions that reduce the vulnerability of mountain agriculture to climate impacts, enhance biodiversity, improve rural incomes, and create market linkages for high-value niche products and non-timber forest products (NTFPs).
- Water Security and Resilience: Initiatives that address water scarcity, improve water management and services, and mitigate the effects of glacial melt, floods, droughts, and urbanisation.
- Climate-Resilient Sustainable Tourism: Models that promote sustainable ecotourism, benefiting local communities while preserving and restoring fragile mountain ecosystems.

