

## CONFIDENTIAL

### Recommendations by Program Advisory Committee PAC on HUC's future course of action

Kathmandu, December 6, 2024

#### 1. Introduction

During the ICIMOD PAC meeting on 5th and 6th December, the independent board members of the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) held a meeting to deliberate on the situation of the Himalayan University Consortium. After a presentation by Prof Dr Shah, and a careful study of the relevant documents and reports, such as the External Evaluation Report and the Joint Taskforce Paper, and a thorough discussion, the members of the PAC unanimously agreed on a set of observations and recommendations.

Taking into consideration:

1. that the HUC is overall highly valued as a platform that connects universities and researchers, that provides capacity building, skills, and training on topics relevant to sustainable mountain development and creates networks and linkages between researchers and academics within the HKH region and between the global north and south, as is also noted in the external evaluation;
2. that PAC appreciates all the good work done by HUC over the past seventeen years;
3. that PAC acknowledges that ICIMOD has been hosting the HUC program from the outset in 2007, for a period of more than seventeen years.
4. that PAC strongly believes that it is high time for HUC to stand on its own feet;
5. that PAC welcomes the fact that HUC has expressed its desire to become an independent legal entity;
6. that PAC supports the vision of a strong and flourishing independent Himalaya University Consortium, working closely in partnership with ICIMOD, to their mutual benefit and support, towards a resilient and prosperous Hindu Kush Himalaya Region;
7. that in addition, PAC noted that HUC was conceived as a university network consortium, which was intended to be independently hosted, preferably by one of the member universities, after an initial startup period hosted at ICIMOD;
8. that PAC appreciates the long-lasting support by ICIMOD to HUC, both financially as well as institutionally; and that PAC also noted that in spite of the achievements there was a lack of clarity in HUC's governance, roles and accountability, with as a consequence potential risk of duplication and lack of accountability;
9. and that therefore PAC considers it urgent that a decision on its independence is taken in the immediate future, in order for HUC to further evolve and become a truly thriving network consortium.

## **2. PAC Recommendations**

The PAC strongly recommends the following:

1. that HUC becomes a fully independent organization which can cooperate with ICIMOD in partnership in an equal and mutually beneficial relationship.
2. That in order to achieve full legal independence, PAC proposes a transition in phases, from the current institutional arrangement under full hosting by ICIMOD, to full independence, with the following steps:
  - a. ICIMOD invites the HUC General Assembly - as the highest HUC governance body - at their next meeting in February to make a decision on becoming legally independent.
  - b. as the General Assembly takes the decision to become legally independent, PAC recommends that HUC will be provided support by ICIMOD during the transition process.

The transition process would consist of two phases.

A first short term phase until June 30, 2025, to carry out concrete steps towards independence. During this period, ICIMOD would continue its current hosting facilities. This would enable HUC to initiate the process of identifying and agreeing with an organization (university or other) to host HUC or initiate the legal registration process.

In late June 2025, the ICIMOD management will commission an independent review to assess the progress made towards independence of HUC. The PAC will provide guidance to this independent review. If the review concludes that there have been concrete steps taken in HUC's path to independence, ICIMOD will support this process further including the handing over of accountabilities and responsibilities. This will be the second phase of the transition. The terms of arrangement of the second phase will be decided by ICIMOD management which will also include the funding contribution.

Concrete Steps by June 2025 implies, that another organization has agreed formally (through a letter of agreement) to host HUC during the transition and to take over the responsibilities and risks (with ICIMOD continuing to make funding contributions); or HUC has managed to make strong progress on legal registration and there is a documented progress that indicates certainty that legal registration will be completed within six months of the June date.

If the review concludes that there is no concrete progress made till the end of phase 1 i.e. June 30, 2025, HUC is not ready to exist as an independent organization. In order to not lose the strategic value of HUC, PAC recommends in that case the integration of HUC as a network initiative in SG3, AAE. This will imply that HUC will no longer have external governance structures and reporting lines.

### **3. Operational Arrangements**

In order to operationalize these recommendations:

1. the PAC recommends the ICIMOD management to arrange an acting HUC Secretariat Lead and an acting Program Associate till June 2025, to ensure that the HUC programmatic work moves on uninterrupted. This is an interim arrangement where there will be no change in the positioning and internal reporting lines of HUC.
2. The contract of the existing consultant can be extended till the end of June 2025. ICIMOD will approve the ToR and the consultant will support the two acting staff in HUC Secretariat as well as support the HUC Governance as required.
3. To ensure that all decision-making processes are free of any conflict of interest, the PAC recommends that ICIMOD management should refrain being part of HUC's governing bodies during this period of transition.
4. The PAC appreciates the work of the Joint Task Force and finds that no further deliberations are required from the Joint Task Force.

Program Advisory Committee of the ICIMOD Board of Governors

Kathmandu, 6 December 2024