

# Final recommendations of the PAC to the ICIMOD Directorate regarding the Himalayan University Consortium process

August 18, 2025

## Background

On August 6, 2025, the PAC met virtually to make a final decision and agree on a set of recommendations to the ICIMOD leadership regarding the way forward on the position and placing of the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC).

These recommendations follow an independent review of the HUC conducted by ICIMOD in 2024 (*HUC Evaluation Report, March 2024*), the recommendations of the PAC on the way forward for the HUC (*PAC Recommendations, December 2024*), including a set of Phase 1 transition goals, and the Independent Review of HUC with respect to the Phase 1 transition goals (*Independent Review, June 2025*). After about a year of PAC following the HUC, starting with the 2024 external evaluation; followed by a formal invitation to issue PAC's advice on the future of HUC (see attached documents: HUC Evaluation Report (March 2024); PAC Recommendations (December 2024); Independent Review (June 2025))).<sup>1</sup>

the PAC has now come to a decision on what it considers the right way forward for HUC. First and foremost, this is based on the original mission and vision of HUC and its objective, to establish a network of universities in the Hindu Kush Himalaya, in collaboration with academic, research, and knowledge exchange institutions both within and outside the region, to engage leading professionals who can undertake high-quality research, teaching, and knowledge dissemination. Acknowledging the knowledge, capacity, and resource gaps faced by many universities in the region, and the lack of mountain-focused research and curriculums in the region, HUC has since its

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<sup>1</sup> The outcome of the independent external review in summary: The review went through the Independent Evaluation Unit. The independent reviewer chosen was Dorendra B. Thapa. The outcome of the review is clear, and can be summarised as follows (quote from reviewer executive summary):

“This independent review assesses the progress of the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC) towards its independence during Phase 1 (January 1 to June 30, 2025), as advised by the Board of Governors' Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) of ICIMOD. This review's primary objective was to determine if HUC had secured a formal agreement with a new host organization or demonstrated significant, documented progress on legal registration with a clear path to completion.

**Hosting Arrangement:** HUC did not secure a formal hosting agreement with another organization by the end of Phase 1. While institutions like the Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) expressed interest, no binding offers or signed agreements materialized. Furthermore, national universities in Nepal (Kathmandu University and Tribhuvan University), initially considered, declined to host HUC due to their institutional limitations, rather suggested that HUC be hosted by an international or intergovernmental organization.

**Legal Registration:** HUC did not achieve legal registration within the designated timeframe. No registration application was submitted, nor were key milestones achieved within Phase 1. A legal firm advised that establishing HUC as an intergovernmental organization (IGO) in Nepal would be a lengthy and complex process, estimated to take 18-24 months.

inception played a key role to address these gaps with a significant focus on engaging researchers and academics in the region and building their capacities and skills to undertake high quality mountain-specific research (adapted from ‘Evaluation of the HUC’, March 2024).

In the light of these objectives, and the outcomes reported and responses made to the PAC recommendations of December 2024, the PAC’s final advice on this matter is the following:

1. Since the HUC did not secure a formal hosting agreement with another organisation by the end of transition Phase 1 (end of June 2025), or achieve legal registration within the designated timeframe, and given the fact that the coordination between the HUC Steering Committee and the ICIMOD-based HUC Secretariat remained a challenge, with key decisions often made without ICIMOD-based HUC Secretariat consultation - despite ICIMOD's continued financial and logistical support - HUC should with immediate effect – without further delay- be integrated into ICIMOD’s Regional Action and Global Advocacy Strategic Group (SG3). This means aligning and integrating HUC's activities under ICIMOD’s Action Areas and their Interventions under MTAP V and in the development of MTAP VI, thereby ensuring continuity of HUC activities in an uninterrupted way and ensuring alignment with ICIMOD's institutional priorities.
2. There should be a clear communication from ICIMOD, to inform all concerned on the decision, in particular ISG; but also members of the outgoing Steering Committee and other bodies and individuals, acknowledging and thanking all of them for their contributions and explaining the way forward. In addition, PAC recommends that a senior ICIMOD staff member is made available to liaise with parties and answer any questions raised, in particular in the coming months of integration into SG3 at ICIMOD.
3. ICIMOD is requested to ensure that the members of the HUC network are cherished and the network is nurtured. Relationships with member institutions and individual actors that have played a role in the past few years should be dealt with in such a way that a positive, supportive, and constructive work, trust, and collaborative climate is (re-)established, to the benefit of all.
4. ICIMOD needs to consider establishing some kind of external HUC advisory body that would replace the “old” Steering Committee. ICIMOD based HUC will serve as a network within ICIMOD similar to SANDEE; and the potential advisory body should be constituted as an advisory body through a formal and transparent process.
5. Further planning and operational matters are ICIMOD managerial matters, and the PAC will limit itself to strategic advice if and when relevant. ICIMOD leadership can request support from PAC – for example by inviting 1 – 2 PAC

members for advice. PAC looks forward to receiving a HUC workplan, with a clarification on staff and financial resources committed to HUC.

6. It is up to ICIMOD management to determine and decide if and when it will set up a process of identifying an external potential new host organization for HUC in the future, in line with the original mission of HUC and in line with ICIMOD's strategy. Given the fact that the ICIMOD hosting of HUC was originally meant to be temporary, ICIMOD may want to continue the process of seeking alternative hosting arrangement e.g. with a university in Nepal or in one of the other Regional Member Countries. ICIMOD may in case that this materializes consider a long-term agreement with the new host to continue supporting the Consortium. Independently of hosting arrangements, PAC considers HUC as a valuable network for ICIMOD in future research collaboration on mountain issues.
7. The Steering Committee and all former and present 'external' HUC governance structures must be dissolved, accounts closed and any other external reporting lines should be eliminated to streamline HUC into and under ICIMOD's governance and management structures.
8. Not only is the continuation and set up of any non-ICIMOD governance bodies and positions non-legally based, because until HUC becomes fully legally autonomous ICIMOD retains full legal responsibility for it, as the legal opinion of 5<sup>th</sup> August 2025<sup>2</sup> shows; but it is also confusing and potentially damaging for the reputation of the institutional members of HUC and of ICIMOD. This would ensure that any potential confusion on governance processes is mitigated and avoided, thereby ensuring procedural clarity and support for the reputation and standing of the institutional members of HUC and of ICIMOD.
9. Social media and other external messaging about HUC, in any other form than through ICIMOD, are not acceptable and should be stopped. For example, access to the [huc.secretariat@gmail.com](mailto:huc.secretariat@gmail.com) email account and five related social media accounts has been established without consultation with or the consent of ICIMOD. Legal advice confirms that this is unauthorized appropriation. Access to and management of these accounts must be returned to ICIMOD immediately.

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<sup>2</sup> This advice states: 'HUC is presently structured and operates as a programme under ICIMOD. ICIMOD is an autonomous international organization with privileges and immunities, legally recognized under the ICIMOD Act, 1983 and thus due to its unique status ICIMOD may create and manage programs within its operational scope without additional registration. ICIMOD, therefore, retains full legal responsibility for all programmes established under its institutional framework, including HUC, until such time as formal and legal autonomy is achieved by HUC.'

- 10.** PAC welcomes the initiative of the ISG chair to host a festive event to celebrate the re-start of HUC in December, in the week of the PAC meeting and SANDEE conference.