



Interlink

Feedback from EU community

FP funding made a common project possible for scientists who wanted to establish cooperation

You have been part of an INCO project in the scope of the last European Framework Program, FP6. What was the project about? Which countries or regions were part of the project?

The primary aim of ASSESS-HKH was to develop tools and standardised methodologies to evaluate the ecological quality of rivers of the Hindu Kush- Himalayan region using benthic macroinvertebrates as bioindicators. Besides four European partners from Austria, Germany and Czech Republic, the ASSESS-HKH consortium included six Asian partners from the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, i. e. country partners from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and the international organization ICIMOD located in Kathmandu, Nepal.

How did you choose your INCO partners? Was the integration process easy?

The Austrian co-ordinating institution – BOKU – has developed a long-term cooperation with Kathmandu University (KU) in Nepal. Several students made their thesis at BOKU in the field of water related research. One of them, Dr. Subodh Sharma is now Professor at KU and invited Prof. Moog from BOKU to a workshop with the existing HKH FRIEND initiative, run by ICIMOD. During this workshop, representatives from several institutions working on water issues were participating. One outcome of the workshop was the common agreement to establish co-operation and to look for funds to develop assessment systems for river quality. BOKU found a suitable call in FP6 and made a proposal for a project to develop methods for ecological status assessment of rivers in the HKH region. Asian partners were found via personal contacts mainly via KU and ICIMOD. The proposal text was written by BOKU and partners commented on the project needs and proposed outcome. The administrative process was very time consuming, as none of the Asian partners had experiences with EU-funded projects. It was also a long procedure to convince the administrations of the diverse institutes to agree to the project. The European partners were known to the co-ordinator from previous EU project co-operations.

What were the main benefits/drawbacks of such cooperation for your project?

The ASSESS-HKH project was a story of success during its runtime as all scientific goals were reached. The co-operation of Asian and European scientists contributed remarkably to knowledge transfer and capacity building for Asian partner. It provides a valuable



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background for further monitoring activities and promotes studies on bio-indication in rivers of the HKH region. The ASSESS-HKH project can be regarded as a pilot study for the HKH region in the field of river water quality monitoring with bio-indicators, as biological water quality assessment in the Asian partner countries was carried out for the first time. In the field of implementing the project results, several activities beyond the project have already been undertaken or are in progress (e.g. Pakistan and Bhutan explore the possibilities to establish regular water quality monitoring, and a “Benthological Society of the Hind Kush-Himalayan Region” has been established which promotes research in aquatic ecology). No major problems occurred in the project. Among the minor problems, there were for example delays in hiring personnel, unavailability of gears and less pre-existing know-how than expected. The problems were solved by extended advice and capacity-building from European partners and assistance in procurement by the Regional Team Leader from KU. From the administrative perspective some problems occurred due to nescience of EU administration and funding. This was solved by extensive support from the project manager.

Would you consider working on a European INCO project again? On which topic?

From the scientific perspective a further cooperation with the partners would be interesting, for instance to refine the methods, to cover more river types in the HKH region and / or to extend the studies to regions adjacent to countries covered so far. As the administrative time and effort for the ASSESS HKH project was so huge, co-operation with a smaller consortium or with single partners would be preferred.