

SARD and... mountain regions

Although mountain people are more exposed than others to poverty, hunger, social or political marginalization, and conflicts, existing policies for sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD) do not address their needs or potentials.

SARD in mountain regions is also important for lowland areas because it ensures adequate water supplies, environmental stability, biodiversity conservation, rural-urban population balance, sources of valuable agricultural products and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Did you know?¹

- Some 720 million people, 12 percent of the world's population, live in mountain regions.
- Of these mountain people, 80 percent live below the poverty line: 270 million are food-insecure and about 135 million are chronically hungry.
- Mountains are home to many indigenous populations, among whom poverty is widespread.
- Mountains cover 22 percent of global land surface.
- Mountain areas provide freshwater to half of the world's population.



Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD)

Agriculture and rural development are sustainable when they are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate, humane and based on a scientific approach.

Rural development policy must aim to meet the nutritional and other human needs of present and future generations; and maintain, and where possible, enhance the productive and regenerative capacity of the natural resource base. It must also provide for the durable employment of those generations, reduce their vulnerability and strengthen their self-reliance.

Why is action needed?

- Mountain people are among the world's poorest and hungriest.
- Mountains are crucial to human life. They provide freshwater to half of humanity and are storehouses of the genetic diversity that helps feed the world, as well as of valuable commodities. However, fragile mountain ecosystems are under threat from climate change, globalization and population dynamics, which can lead to overexploitation or land abandonment and environmental degradation.
- Making agriculture sustainable in mountain regions is a prerequisite for protecting the mountain environment, promoting the rural economy and mountain people's livelihoods, and assuring the provision of environmental services to the rest of the world.
- Sustainability in mountains contributes to lowlands: economically, through commodities and products; socially, through preservation of cultural heritage and landscapes; and environmentally, through the provision of water, biodiversity, climate regulation and other goods and services. It also helps to prevent natural disasters such as silting, floods and water shortage, through sustainable land management practices.
- Global trends such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, migration and

globalization have a disproportionate impact on mountains and require better multi-stakeholder processes to define appropriate actions for governments and civil society.

What are the policy goals?

To address these complex issues, there is need for improved policy and institutional processes that:

- ensure that the constraints, diversity, potentials and other specificities² of mountain regions are integrated into SARD strategies and policies;
- raise public awareness of the specificities of mountain regions, upstream-downstream interactions and the importance of mountains for national, regional and global well-being;
- support infrastructure and value-added production and services in mountain regions, as these are essential for sustainable mountain livelihoods and development;
- establish appropriate institutional arrangements to coordinate relevant institutions at the national and transnational levels;
- promote knowledge management, exchange of information and networking regarding mountain regions.





goods they provide are undervalued and may gradually diminish.

Rural–urban migration

Migration can help to alleviate pressures on mountain lands and resources and provide opportunities for earning income through employment in urban areas and remittances. Migration also places pressure on urban infrastructure and services, however, and contributes to urban poverty and unemployment. As it is often young, working-age men who migrate, women, children and the elderly tend to be left behind. This leads to the “feminization of agriculture” and a dismantling of rural communities.

Gender and equity issues

Mountain populations tend to have weaker capacities to engage in development and policy processes and are sometimes – intentionally or unintentionally – excluded, thus generating or reinforcing inequities. In particular, few policies are sensitive to gender issues, even though women play a significant role in mountain societies by maintaining families, land and livelihoods.

Cultural heritage

Mountain people have their own knowledge and cultural heritage that are integral to their ways of life and to the systems and practices that have evolved and been adapted to mountain environments. Mountain people can capitalize on their cultural heritage to achieve SARD in mountain regions by producing handicrafts, maintaining sites and landscapes of interest, and deriving other economic value for goods and services that are built on cultural traditions.

What are the policy options?

Mountain areas are characterized by immense variations among and within ecological zones. There is also diversity in the economic, social, cultural and institutional make-up of mountain areas.

To ensure that the diverse needs of mountain people and regions are addressed, policies and integrated policy packages, institutions and processes promoting SARD in mountain regions are needed, as outlined in the following.

The policy issues

Mountain regions tend to be inaccessible, fragile and marginal, and face a variety of other constraints to their development. However, the diversity of their cultures, resource bases and environmental conditions create the potential for mountain products and services to have a comparative advantage over those from other regions.

Policies for value-added production and services

Policies that promote diversification and integration of economic activities, such as ecotourism, quality mountain products and other value-added production, are essential for sustainable mountain development. Existing policies rarely address the livelihoods diversity and vulnerability of mountain people, however, resulting in mountain communities and vulnerable groups having unequal access

to opportunities. One reason for this is policy-makers’ limited awareness of the importance of mountain regions and their people. Mountain people, civil society and decision-makers are also generally unaware of existing policies affecting mountain resources.

Provision of goods and services by mountain regions: positive externalities

Mountains provide a wide range of goods and services that are essential for the rest of society, creating interdependencies between upland and lowland areas. However, markets and national institutional and policy frameworks for agriculture and rural development often ignore lowlands’ dependency on and interlinkages with mountain areas. As a result, the cultural diversity and livelihoods of mountain communities, the natural resources they steward and the public

The SARD-M Project³ and the Adelboden Group

The multi-stakeholder project for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions (SARD-M) aims to support the rural livelihoods of mountain people by facilitating the design, review, implementation and evaluation of policy packages and institutional processes that promote SARD in mountain regions at the global, regional and national levels. The project benefited from the advice of the Adelboden Group, a multi-stakeholder platform for discussion of policies and policy instruments, exchange of experience, and preparation of initiatives for sustainable development in mountain areas. The Adelboden Group adopted a statement⁴ in 2007 (whose issues and recommendations are reflected in this brief), and members have committed to promoting the SARD-M approach to mountain development.

Policies

Develop strategies for sustainable development in mountain regions

- Policies for fragile mountain environments require a long-term vision and a holistic approach that seeks to balance the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development.
- Even when policy frameworks for sustainable development or SARD exist, specific strategies or approaches for mountain regions also need to be developed.

Raise awareness of mountain specificities

- Mountain specificities need to be considered in the design and implementation of national policies, as those designed for lowland regions are not necessarily compatible.
- Policy-makers need to consider whether a specific policy for mountains is needed in their country or whether important options for mountain regions should be incorporated into present and future agriculture and rural development policies in general. Although both approaches are used, the tendency is to incorporate mountain issues into national policies.

Support value-added production and services in mountain regions

Upland areas typically have difficult access to markets in lowland and urban areas. Policy-makers should work to improve mountain people's access to lowland and urban markets and services. They should also promote public-private partnerships to improve the socio-economic conditions of mountain populations.

Institutions

Build institutional capacities to facilitate participatory policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

As institutions in mountain regions tend to be isolated and marginalized from national development and policy processes, the capacities of government staff and local stakeholders need to be strengthened to implement programmes effectively.

What are positive externalities?

Positive externalities are the goods and services that mountains provide and that are not taken into account in the market. Policies and new market mechanisms that support the remuneration of mountain communities for the valuable goods and services they provide to lowland regions can help to ensure the survival of not only mountain communities, but also the survival of these goods and services.

Mountain goods and services (positive externalities)	Mechanisms for remunerating mountain communities
Water quality, soil protection	Payments for reforestation and sustainable agriculture practices
Natural hazard prevention and protection	Payments for tree planting
Conservation of cultural heritage	Tourism, agritourism, sale of quality products

Capacity building and awareness raising are needed in developing and using appropriate participatory methods and tools to enhance consideration of mountain people's needs, monitor and evaluate mountain policies and programmes, and support decentralization and local development.

Establish appropriate institutional arrangements to facilitate coordination and cooperation among institutions

- At the national level: To transcend sectoral differences in policies, a coordinated and cross-sectoral institutional framework is needed to ensure complementarity and coherence among, and appropriate application of, policies in mountain regions.
- At the transnational level: Mountains often act as natural borders. Mountain areas in one country can also be major sources of, for example, water for

another country further downstream. Regional policies and institutional frameworks, including conventions, are needed to address the interlinkages effectively and equitably. Such policies should ensure that adequate attention and resources are allocated to capacity development of the institutions responsible for transnational coordination of mountain zones and resources.

Processes

Promote knowledge management, information exchange and networking

- Policies and programmes should incorporate research that helps to fill the gap in basic information and data about mountain regions. Socio-economic data at the national level are often not disaggregated for mountain zones, making it difficult for policy-makers to consider



Tools and resources

FAO-EUROMONTANA. 2007. *Positive mountain externalities: valorisation through policies and Markets*. Rome, SARD-M Project:
<http://www.fao.org/sard/en/sardm/Communi/2900/index.html>

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UNDESA. 2002. *Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: managing sustainable development in the New Millennium*. Background Paper No. 13 (DESA/DSD/PC2/BP13). United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA): http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/nsds_guidance.pdf

mountain specificities in policies. Better communication of mountain data and research can also help to raise awareness about the issues facing mountain people, and facilitate advocacy and lobbying by civil society on their behalf. Policy-makers should support programmes that help to develop and maintain databases on local and indigenous knowledge, potentials of mountain areas, inventories of local institutions dealing with mountain issues, policies, programmes and projects being implemented, and the state of rural mountain families.

- To facilitate the exchange of policies, knowledge and experiences related to agriculture and rural development in mountain regions, policy-makers should also promote the exchange of information and networking within and among countries, through national and regional platforms.

Foster participation in policy formulation

To ensure that SARD policies are adapted to the specificities of mountain regions, policy processes need to be developed that encourage the participation of mountain communities and key stakeholders at all levels. As mountain populations are frequently unaware of their rights and have historically had little exposure to policy processes, programmes

and resources may be required to build their capacities and skills for advocacy and participation in policy formulation.

Monitor and evaluate policies

Both general and mountain-specific SARD policies need to be monitored and their impacts evaluated. Policies that are poorly adapted to the biophysical conditions of mountain areas can have highly negative impacts on the environment and the livelihoods of mountain populations.

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References

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¹ **FAO.** 2004. *The challenge of sustainable mountain development*, press release, 28 April 2004. Rome.

² **FAO and ICIMOD.** 2006. *Assessment of SARD-M policies in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas: summary*. Rome, SARD-M Project.

³ **FAO.** Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions Project (SARD-M) GCP/GLO/136/ MUL, funded by Switzerland, France and Japan, 2005-2009.

⁴ **Adelboden Group.** 2007. Statement of the Adelboden Group on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions (SARD-M). Rome, 3 October 2007.

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The “SARD and...” Policy Briefs are designed to encourage and assist governments in developing and implementing policies to achieve sustainable agriculture and rural development.

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