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POLICY ORIENTED WORK AT ICIMOD

Introduction

In the generic sense, policy is normally understood as the norms, guidelines and procedures determined by context specific decision makers (at different levels) to identify choices as well as decisions and ways and support structures to implement the same. Umpteen examples including rural development policies, wildlife protection policies, resource conservation policies (and their associated procedures) will illustrate this.

This paper briefly describes the operationally relevant approaches to understand policy processes and then discusses ICIMOD's approach towards facilitating the policy-programme interventions for sustainable mountain development and the new challenges and approaches to promote policies for NRM in the HKH region.

ICIMOD and its Facilitative Role in Mountain Development Policies

ICIMOD with its mountain specific mandate, is one of the few agencies contributing towards identification and dissemination of policy-programme options for sustainable mountain development in HKH region. However, the Centre's focus has been largely on policy as a process rather than a final product, which is the prerogative of the users of ICIMOD's output. ICIMOD has attempted to facilitate policy-programme promotions for sustainable mountain development mainly through communication and interactions with various groups associated with policy-programme formulation and implementation at different levels and in different contexts. The activities underlying the policy-programme advocacy messages included: problem-focussed research, synthesis and repackaging of information collected from different mountain areas and dissemination of policy-programme messages through various means to generate awareness and concern for mountain development issues and subject based cross country exchange of experiences. This is complemented by issue specific workshops and small group meetings involving different stakeholders, capacity building through training, field demonstrations and inter-country visits of professionals associated with policy programme activities. However, despite efforts through the above activities, ICIMOD's past work did not have explicit, long-term systematic focus on policy issues. The policy advocacy being a part of activities carried out in project mode of work at the Centre, this was quite unavoidable.

The major high lights of the past policy related work at ICIMOD, particularly the gaps and lessons, are summarized below.

Assessment of ICIMOD'S Past Experience

The following discussion builds upon the evidence and understanding reported by an earlier exercise (see Jodha, 1998 for details)[1]. The assessment exercise tried to look at over a dozen major programmes/projects of ICIMOD, to identify the policy facilitating contributions of ICIMOD and its collaborating partner institutions in different countries of HKH. This exercise was a part of spadework to promote sensitivity of ICIMOD professionals/projects towards the policy

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1 N.S. Jodha (1998). ICIMOD's Impact/Facilitative Role in Policy Process. MEI Division

concerns of their work and to see how far ICIMOD outputs has been used in policy-programmes interventions in its member countries.

While talking of the above assessment exercise, it may be reiterated that from the very beginning, ICIMOD has looked at policy as a process involving different stages and activities rather than single phenomenon such as specific legislation or state order on specific issues etc[2]. out of multiple stages and activities characterizing the policy as a process. Furthermore, the focus on process aspect often revealed inseparability of policy and programme, where the later more sharply manifested the specific policy concern in concrete action context. Besides, under the above exercise ICIMOD tried to look at the use of ICIMOD output at the various stages of policy-programme interventions by government agencies and others (e.g., NGOs, donors). Furthermore, due to project mode of ICIMOD activities generating usable output, most of the policy-programme interventions were largely small or micro-level interventions.

Stages in Policy-Process:

a. In keeping with the already alluded steps in policy evolution, generation or enhancement of awareness and sensitisation about options/ approaches relating to specific policy-programme interventions is an important stage in policy process.
b. Application and use of ICIMOD output for capacity building, training etc. relating to specific policy-programme interventions.
c. Demonstration/pilot testing of ICIMOD output to initiate or strengthen specific programmes.
d. Planning/preparation/designing of specific policy-programme interventions based on ICIMOD outputs.
e. Policy-programme implementation/decision/action involving ICIMOD output or its experience-based advisory input.

Uses and Users of ICIMOD's Policy Related Outputs

As mentioned earlier, user of ICIMOD output included government as well as other agencies (e.g. donors, NGOs, etc.) engaged in promoting specific development interventions. The ICIMOD output utilized by different agencies included components such as: policy-briefs, handouts or guide books relating to procedures and approaches to handle specific development issues; technological and institutional practices; training modules and advocacy methods; community mobilization and participatory methods, etc. Table 1 summarises the number of users of ICIMOD output at different stages of different interventions. Since 1997, this picture has significantly changed in terms of increased and varied use of ICIMOD outputs by different agencies. More details about type and intervention stage at which ICIMOD output was used are presented under Table 2.

However, further analysis of the information on the policy-programme use of ICIMOD output reveals more important lessons in terms of supply side and demand side factors influencing the use of ICIMOD output in development interventions. Their understanding could help in designing the future strategies for promoting policy-facilitating role of ICIMOD.

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[2] The only exception to process focused policy work was on mountain perspective based framework to examine policy interventions in mountain areas. The message of this work was directly addressed to high level policy-planning agencies, some of whom did consider and use in it in reorienting selected policy-programme interventions in mountain areas.

Factors Facilitating Use of ICIMOD Outputs

Based on the 13 projects/programmes analysed in detail, the supply side factors and demand side factors promoting policy-programme use of ICIMOD output can be assessed. On the supply side (i.e., ICIMOD's side), important facilitative factors and circumstances promoting use of ICIMOD's output in policy-programme interventions according to relative (higher to lower) roles were:

i. Intensive dialogue, advocacy, interactions, focussed meetings and a variety of follow-up activities;
ii. Backup support of research and knowledge synthesis relating to output/options presented to the policy/decision makers;
iii. Capacity building of partner institutions through demonstration, training etc.; and
iv. Effective dissemination strategies involving films, printed material (including policy-briefs), focussed workshops, interaction, meetings etc.

On the demand side (i.e., policy-programme planners' side), the more important facilitative factors/circumstances included:

i. Strong convergence or match between requirements of concerned interventions and the attributes of the policy-programme options recommended by ICIMOD;
ii. Government commitment, cooperation and support in promoting the identified options; and
iii. Size, scale and nature of recommended options and local capacities, skills and understating to adopt the options.

To sum up the assessment: solid knowledge and information base, commitment and support of policy-programme agencies, match between recipients' needs and the attribute of suggested policy options and effective communication, interaction and support mobilisation strategies are key factors to promote policy makers' concerns and responses to options identified by ICIMOD work.

Renewed Focus on Policy Centred Work

In ICIMOD's Strategic Plan (2003-2007), policy developed and advocacy aspects works have been accorded very high priorities. To begin with the Natural Resource Management (NRM) has been identified as the key window to evolve and implement a systematic approach to policy work with strong emphasis on participatory and demand driven elements.

The Centre in its policy focused work directed at NRM is attempting to address the gaps identified in the past work and build upon its past success. Accordingly, under the new GTZ supported programme, there is a special thrust on making policy-advocacy work highly demand driven by (i) involving the partner institution in identification of policy-programme options and (ii) greater sensitivity and understanding of needs of the collaborating partners looking for relevant policy-programme options and approaches.

Besides, through developing a long term policy-advocacy strategy, the center has strongly focused on building its internal capacities and concerns for policy dimensions of its integrated programmes and action initiatives. It should be stated that in more systematic work covering

policy and institutional aspect of NRM, both "product" and "process" aspects of policies will need to be addressed. ICIMOD proposes to follow a new sharpened approach to policy-programme interventions as illustrated by the case of natural resources, particularly the resources which benefits poor and marginal communities.

Mapping of Existing Policies and Policy Gaps

According to the first approach the existing policies about the above subjects are reviewed in terms of their thrusts and component. In particular "policy" as a product will be seen in terms of its operational context i.e. the extent to which it realistically accommodates and addresses the factors and circumstances which crucially influence the management of natural resources i.e. protection, conservation and sustainable usage. This will help in understanding the gaps and possible ways to address them.

For example, how far and in what manner specific existing policy addresses the issues of

(a) increasing population pressure on given natural resources;
(b) transition from subsistence to commercial orientation of NR based activities;
(c) changing role and status of common property resource and their management system,
(d) customary rights and community institutions dealing with specific natural resources
(e) conflicts and convergence between conservation and consumption (production activities involving natural resources) related policies
(f) conflicts and complementarities between different policies involving NR based and other economic activities
(g) addressing the NRM issues emanating from economic globalisation and global environmental change

Mapping of Policy Making and Advocacy Institutions

To complement the `policy mapping' involving focus on the above and other aspects, ICIMOD plans to have `institutional mapping' related to NRM. They may include:

a. Institutional structures and arrangement responsible for identification and adoption of given NRM policies.
b. Formal structures, mandate and coordinated functioning of agencies dealing with research and development; planning and implementation of specific NRM policies;
c. Role and involvement of stakeholders in evolution and implementation of policies
d. Links between traditional institutions and the present ones dealing with policies and norms guiding NRM
e. Extent and nature of `processes' leading to policy options and their adoption

Process Mapping or Development of a Road Map for Policy Making and Advocacy

For every policy there is a explicit or otherwise process dimension, represented by actions and interaction at different stages of a policy life cycle. The above-mentioned components of policy mapping and institutional mapping, in fact help indicate the above stages and steps. The quality of policy as a product depends on effective and coordinated attention to various stages such as information, knowledge base, awareness and decision-making, establishment of institutions to convert decisions into operational steps and implement them.

Several actors/stakeholders institutions are involved in planning and conduct of relevant activities at different stages described above. Similarly, several circumstances/factors ranging

from a crisis and protests to inducement by opportunities (e.g. donor support, social mobilization etc.) activate and facilitate the role of different actors at various stages.

Under ICIMOD's process oriented approach to policy work, the Centre in collaboration with the partners would focus on information generation to decision facilitating stages of work. In these stage-by-stage activities leading to generation of policy options, ICIMOD will work in collaboration with the partner institutions.

The crucial indicative steps or stages to identify/evolve policy-programme interventions are:

a) Review of existing policies and identification of gaps in the light of emerging challenges
b) Information generation/collection on relevant variables, their structures and functions as well as interactions
c) Analysis and synthesis of the information/data to convert them into usable knowledge policy options and approaches communicable to help those engaged in policy making
d) Dissemination and advocacy of policy options to relevant decision makers
e) Arriving at decisions on policy-programme options based on knowledge generated through above process – manifested by operational guidelines and their support systems
f) Identification/establishment of institutional managements – i.e. responsible authority and procedures to promote and implement the decision i.e. policy options
g) Post implementation activities such as review and assessment of operational conduct and impacts of the policies; their further revision and amendments.

Mapping of Policy Impacts and Outcomes

The adoption of a new policy on a particular natural resource should result in significant benefits to communities in terms of their access to this resource and thereby enhancing their livelihood and in significantly improving the condition of the resource and its environment in general. These impacts should be evaluated in both temporal and spatial terms so that necessary amendments could be made to the policy being adopted. Elements of such an impact map would include:

a) The number of households/communities adopting the policy
b) The quantity of the resource used and socio-economic benefits availed by the community or household
c) The area and condition of the particular resource following adoption of the policy
d) The rate of increase or decrease in the productivity of the particular resource
e) The general condition of the ecosystem within which the particular natural resource exists.

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