

REVISITING MOUNTAIN PERSPECTIVE: REASONS AND CHALLENGES (?)

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I. INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this detailed note is to clarify a number of issues relating to conceptualization/development and advocacy for adoption of Mountain Perspective Framework (MP) by ICIMOD and its collaborating partners, particularly its member countries from the Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) region. The current E-discussion on the subject was instigated by Dr. Sudhiredar Sharma (in **CLIMATE HIMALAYA, 26 Jan. 2012**), who questioned the existing formulation of MP and calls for its revision and rewriting to make it relevant and flawless. I responded to his assessment (in **CLIMATE HIMALAYA, 21 Feb. 2012**) and also indicated the on-going changes in mountain specificities effecting changes in MP Framework. I also very specifically indicated that Sharma's assessment of MP is highly skewed/partial and imbalanced and reflects his significant ignorance (or unfamiliarity/non-reading) of all the work pleaded or conducted under MP Framework, despite his close links with discourse on Himalayan region.

This is revealed by the fact that he deliberately picks up only three apparently negatively sounding/ oriented mountain specificities namely; limited accessibility (using term remoteness), fragility, and marginality and deliberately discards/ ignores more positively oriented mountain specificities ie. diversity and mountain niche (mountain development wise) different operational attributes of mountain specificities such as inter-linkages between different bio-physical as well as socio economic attributes (ie. historically evolved institutions and practices to ensure adaptations to both positive and negative implications of mountain specificities., as foundations and key ingredients of mountain perspective. Furthermore, a number of the above mentioned mountain specificities are visible in both biophysical and socio economic contexts of mountain areas. It should also be mentioned that the extent of different mountain specificities and their inter-linkages do vary within and between different mountain areas, and they are not static but do change depending on the functioning of nature – society interaction patterns and their positive or negative consequences. Because of the above mentioned attributes, mountain specificities can be treated as foundations of Mountain Perspective. However, despite recognition and consideration of multiple and interlinked dimensions and issues focused by MP frame work, Dr. Sharma calls it narrowly focused and he intends to promote a new approach based on just three mountain specificities and only their biophysical attributes and yet seems to treat the same as -more broadly focused approach(?)ty

Besides his above assessment, Dr. Sharma treats the existing formulation of MP obsolete or outdated and misleading to be useful for the future. For no explicit reasons, Dr. Sharma treats MP as a static phenomenon rather than dynamic. The latter happens because over time the attributes/complexions of different mountain specificities keep on changing due to operational dynamics of nature- society interactions (involving mountains), calling for changes in approaches and priority issues to be addressed by interventions driven by MP. Based on closer field observations and field studies (particularly at micro levels) on changing mountain area, realities have confirmed the essence of

changing situation of mountains and their people resulting from changing complexions of different mountain specificities. Some examples of such changing situation are indicated in a document written by Jodha as a part of ICIMOD preparations for Rio+20 conference. (Yet to be published, the document is entitled 'HKH MOUNTAIN SYSTEMS: PROCESS OF CHANGE, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES' (2011).

II. Changes in the attributes of mountain specificities making MP - a dynamic process/framework to address changing mountain problems and issues

The appropriate responses to changing attributes of mountain specificities, in terms of approaches and designs of development interventions in fact drive or shape the dynamics of MP as the following examples would indicate. Side by side these examples negate Dr. Sharma's assessment of MP, that it is static, outdated and useless in the changing contexts. Reality is that MP is a broad conceptual Frame work that provides contexts for designing and implementing interventions to help mountains and people in these areas. In the dynamic framework, when the contexts shift (due to changing features and imperatives of mountain specificities resulting from nature –society interactions over a time period), the human responses/ interventions need revision, which do happen as the following examples show. The examples relate to some mountain specificities, their positive or negative changes (as products of nature society interaction dynamics), their consequences and resource users' responses- covering the period of recent decades or more.

a) Improved accessibility and communication facilities/systems: The discussion on changes in attributes or complexes of mountain specificities and their implication can begin with inaccessibility or limited accessibility as a mountain specificity. Though as yet Inadequate and unequal, but increased road networks, transport links and spread of other communication facilities (including internet) are a part of current reality of HKH region. Their related impacts reflected by enhanced local level capacities, education and skills as well as information flows are also the part of the change. Finally these changes are leading to mountain communities' economic and other links going beyond the traditionally isolated, semi-closed locations. This has raised the scope and opportunities for mountain communities to participate in the wider, external contexts of development activities. Besides, enhanced facilitation of information flows (unlike in the past) between the macro-level and micro-level entities to learn and jointly act against major challenges faced by mountains and low lands including several natural disasters and challenges (Including impacts of climate change, conservation of bio-diversity, technical and institutional steps against poverty, food insecurity and negative side effects of economic globalization etc.; several examples from different HKH countries have been noticed in this respect). The final result of the above changes would be the enlarged economic horizon of mountain communities, their increased visibility and potential for participatory interventions involving both macro and micro level entities. This finally would help in reconciling macro and micro level perception regarding socio-economic marginality as a mountain specificity.

responsible for different constraints at local community levels in the past as elaborated below..

To sum up:

To the extent awareness and information availability is a first step toward preparing different stake holders for hitherto unknown but promising activities, the above mentioned change can contribute towards transformation of mountain communities and areas to meet new challenges including adaptations to climate change, promotion of green economy, using incentives designed at macro levels and operated at micro levels as under REDD or REDD ++ etc.(dealing with reducing deforestation/emission, land degradation through inappropriate usage etc.).

b) *Biophysical marginality/fragility:* The marginal and less fertile, sloppy lands unsuited to high intensity, high productivity usage, were treated as inferior land resources in the past. In the changed circumstances due to recognition of their contributions to ecological services (e.g. home of specific components of biodiversity), potential carbon sinks, spaces for specific conservation measures, off season testing of cultivars for dry and warmer regions etc. on the one hand and emerging locations for eco-tourism and medicinal herbs etc. on the other. Accordingly, such areas are no more inferior possessions of mountain people. Community mobilization and group action for their protection and sustainable high pay-off usage are increasingly explored and promoted. They are very much a part of focused policy-program interventions at local, national and global levels. This change links quite well to R & D and other interventions planned for future, including currently focused promotion of “green economy” in mountain areas. Side by side it can help in better recognition and assessment of traditional measures directed to promote combination of production and conservation practices through two-way adaptation strategies historically evolved by mountain communities.

c) *Socio-economic marginality:* Though not to an equal extent, the socio-economically marginal rural communities and other poorer section of mountain population have been better recognized, supported and empowered to an extent in the recent decades. Spread and impacts of rural education; formal training facilities along with the impacts of improved accessibility, information flows, and niche centred occupational groupings have helped to “de-marginalize” the marginal communities. The implications of the above include enhanced awareness, capacities, and voice to the traditionally voiceless groups. This makes the mountain communities more aware and capable to identify and participate in several macro-level initiatives with roots at micro levels, including through group formation to undertake hitherto unknown initiatives. Scattered success stories of group formation or federating arrangements to undertake activities including protection of community forestry, domestication of herbal plants, collective water harvesting/storage tanks for community irrigation, micro hydro power production units, solar power usage systems, rope ways and minor roads (donkey tracks) linking the highways or market centres etc., formation of self help groups and, enhanced focus on schooling of children etc. have been seen in many villages. Most of them are usually initiated and supported by NGOs, donors and government agencies. Having initiated at small scale such steps have been

mainstreamed in many areas. Ranging from peaceful protests for “rights and resources” to emerging insurgencies in some mountain areas also reflect the dimensions of de-marginalization of mountain communities in some areas. Growth and effectiveness of self –help groups for and by the marginal groups is another indicator of demarginalisation of the marginal sections of mountain communities

d) *Natural resource diversity and mountain niche:* Mountain development planners on their own or in association with market agencies have always focused on exploitation of niche resources and opportunity in mountain areas. However, the micro-level dimension of niche (including resource-diversities harnessed by local communities, generating high return opportunities) rarely received their adequate attention. The pattern initiated during the colonial rule (focused on forest/ timber, fresh water flows, minerals and spots suited to tourism, market towns and defense planning etc. (assessed and planned by macro level government agencies) continued during the post colonial period. Micro level assessments/actions primarily remained as the domains of local communities and rarely got serious attention of the government except when colonial and post-colonial rulers of mountain areas patronized commercial activities such as tea gardens, hydro power production [units](#) etc. In the changed context when, mountain communities helped by increased information flows, external exposure and other general people-centred programmes etc, have started building external links and collaborative enterprises, the situation is gradually changing. The changed situation at local levels fits well with initiatives conceived and planned at macro-levels. This also helps in reducing the historical/ traditional disconnects between macro level (policy/planning level) and micro -level (community and local level) perceptions and treatment of mountain specificities and communities’ adaptations to the same. To a significant extent this has helped in encouraging bottom up approach to development unlike in the past. One of the promising initiatives in this context is trans- boundary arrangements by different countries to protect/ promote bio diversity, community based water harvesting, greening of selected landscapes, eco-tourism etc. involving local communities, some government agencies, donors and NGOs.

-The implied human capital development (due to enhanced external links and exposure as well as information flows and de-marginalization of mountain communities in several areas induced the planners to promote and support mountain specificity-sensitive development interventions in the villages. This seems to slowly replace or supplement the usual generalized, administrative units-focused, top down interventions often borrowed from the plain areas for mountain communities (eg. inappropriately intensive land use as under the green revolution strategy in a number of mountain areas). The new possibilities rooted in new approaches relating to protection and harnessing of niche and other natural resources based opportunities have potential to encourage: complementarities between bottom up and top down development approaches, participatory development processes and concern for and action on situation specific diversification, which generally escaped the attention of higher level decision makers earlier. It may also help in sharing benefits of economic globalization with safeguards against unequal high land low land economic links unfavorable to mountain areas and communities.

The above discussion briefly indicated the changes in complexes of different mountain specificities and their imperatives as well as their impacts in terms of reducing gaps between micro and macro level perceptions and perspectives on mountain specificities. This change has potential to influence the culture and practice of development thinking customized to specific situations of mountain areas. More importantly, there are many more changes in mountain specificities (Jodha 2011), which if properly understood can offer more opportunities and challenges to expand and alter the thoughts and actions to help mountain areas and people, using the MP-Framework. These experiences have been studied and documented by ICIMOD and other institutions as reported through some of the references given at the end of this write up. Accordingly, Dr. Sharma's pleading for re-writing mountain perspective would amount to knocking at an open door.

However, even while advancing the thoughts and operational aspects of MP-framework, the centrality of mountain specificities has to be kept in mind. Equally important is to recognize that MP-Framework is not a static but a dynamic phenomenon. A number of other aspects such as inter-linkages between different mountain specificities, their intra mountain variability and changes in their imperatives resulting from shifting extent and type of nature- society interactions (including through technological and institutional advances) are integral part of the dynamic processes indicated above. Shifting focus and contents of research by ICIMOD and various mountain research Institutes in different countries would illustrate this.

III. ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATIONS (Responses to Dr. KN Vajpai's concerns)

Compared to a few others, who seemed to endorse the views of Dr. Sharma on mountain perspective and need for its rewriting, Dr. Vajpai's concerns were narrated in more systematic and better focused way (Climate Himalaya 27/2/12). The parts of his concerns (eg. inappropriateness of confining MP to only three mountain specificities; elaboration on MP as a dynamic rather than a static Framework etc. have already been addressed above. In the following discussion we deal with the specific questions he has raised (with some unavoidable repetition though).

Question 1: Do mountain areas suffer from the same extent of fragility, inaccessibility and marginality and their negative consequences?

No. As the discussion under section II indicated, both biophysical and socio economic dimensions of the mountain specificities have changed to different degrees in different areas, though their improved accessibility and enhanced external links are still unequal, adversely affecting the terms of interactions between high lands and low lands. Besides the physical links, the communication links through

E- technologies are more wide spread and have helped mountain people even in more remote areas. This has also helped in reducing socio-economic marginality and vulnerability etc. The gains of these changes (with a significant extent of variations) are also harnessed by mountain communities and downstream society. But this change has many side effects such as highland lowland market links becoming less favourable to mountain areas; harnessing and availability of mountain niche resources and products in place of being supply determined (and sustainable) in the past, are now becoming

increasingly demand driven due to unregulated drive of market forces, adversely affecting the sustainable and diversified resource use; locally evolved and enforced institutional arrangement for sustainable resource use are increasingly replaced by formal arrangements by state and the market forces including the globalization process. Understanding the alternative approaches for solutions to such problems need probes and actions through understanding and interpretation of MP Framework/ mountain specificities in the changing contexts.

Similar situations apply to social marginality etc. With the positive changes (eg. increased earning options and culture of competition), the societal differentiation has happened in many fast growing/urbanizing mountain areas-. MP Framework could be suitably used for exploring the solutions to such new generation of problems. All this calls for fresh look at MP in dynamic context. Identification and replications of some success stories of mountain area development (as observed in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Ladakh in India, AKRSP sponsored initiatives in Chitral in Pakistan, non dry Parts of Bhutan, eastern parts of Nepal specially districts such as Morang, Mustang, Dholkha, Ilam etc. and several areas of West Sichuan in China such as Chengdu, Kunming, Ninnang etc.), can help in this regard. One may call it a fresh look at MP, but the centrality of mountain specificities, particularly their shifting contexts is a key factor here, which provides structural and operational Framework for reorienting decisions and actions under MP- sensitive development approaches.

Question 2. Is there no need for having a fresh look in to the on-going approach of mountain development based on mountain perspective? MP Framework was promoted nearly 20 years ago and what impact it had on mountain development? The Discourse here would be that what went wrong in terms of the circumstances, actors and decision making?

This is a most important question. This could be responded in different parts. First of all MP has been evolved as an operational Framework based on field level situations observed particularly at micro levels (initially relating to mountain agriculture and natural resource management by the rural communities and subsequently extended to cover other aspects including mountain development policies in the Hindu Kush- Himalayas. Then the observed and documented situations from different HKH countries were juxtaposed with the public documents relating to (or administratively guiding-?) the micro level processes of farming systems and resource management processes and practices in diverse mountain areas. The findings in most cases, reflected wide differences between farmers' approaches and practices and the public measures promoted/ advocated by the relevant public agencies including agricultural extension departments and development planning units. Guided by such gaps, the enquiries in to the situation of other sectors/areas were focused. They included areas such as infrastructural development, R&D, interventions in poverty and employment situations, community welfare interventions, market and enterprise diversification, sectoral and general development approaches and policies etc. Detailed enquiries using local experts, interactions with villagers at village/community levels were carried out in different countries. THE RESULTS GENERALLY INDICATED: MISSING MOUNTAIN PERSPECTIVES IN DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS.

Under most of the documents and discussions with responsible development agencies, we were stuck by their use of the term “mountain”-. It had been largely used as “a prefix” for activity/plan for mountain areas but very little in terms of elements of mountain perspective Framework to distinguish their formal interventions/activities from generalized development approaches, indicating public agencies’ visible ignorance or indifference towards and disregard of mountain specificities constituting the MP-Framework. There were some cases where consciously or subconsciously the public decision makers customized the interventions to mountain conditions at micro levels. They included the interventions designed and promoted by some NGOs, universities etc. in partnership with the local communities or enlightened government officials.

To address the above problem, i.e. to sensitize the policy makers to mountain perspective, direct interactions with the mountain planning or decision making agencies were organized in different countries. Separate consultative dialogues were organized for the experts who worked as senior policy advisors for the governments on mountain development and planning. They saw a lot of potential opportunities for helping integrated mountain development through use of MP Framework, but in actual application of the concepts and contents of MP-Framework, very few cases were mentioned, where some NGO/ voluntary groups partnered with government in small scale initiatives and effectively used the imperatives of particular mountain specificities. In conclusion, the policy makers, neither fully understood nor promoted the use of MP despite praising its potential for use. As one of the senior policy makers for mountain areas from India, quite realistically put the essence of the current situation by saying: at this stage mountain perspective Framework is like DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY GIVEN IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION. Accordingly, “Provisions comprising Directive Principles shall not be enforced by any court (agency?)---- but the principles laid down therein are never-the-less fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the state to apply these principles in making laws. With appropriate substitution of different words in this para, the essence of this statement can be applied to the current situation of use of MP Framework in state policies and programmes for mountain development. The realistically identified needs or pressure of demands/ circumstances can force or induce the governments to use the imperatives of mountain perspective for mountain development. This should partly clarify the situation reflected under question no. 2 and the future work focused on MP Framework should concentrate on this aspect.

Question 3.-Extent of administrative sensitivity: indicators?

There are a few other indicators responsible for government’s (till recently) passive approach/ attitude towards micro –level problems in mountain areas. The first indicator in this regard can be termed as MACRO-MICRO DISCONNECTS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE GAPS:

Put differently, an important reason behind the above described situation is the persistent gaps between the macro level (policy level) and micro level (community level) perceptions and perspective on mountain specificities that guide their respective approach and action under development interventions in mountains (Jodha 2011). As mentioned earlier, policy makers, through various regional surveys, expert reports etc, know mountain specificities too well. And that has guided their

policies and interventions directed to extraction/harnessing of niche resources of mountains for the state at large. But the documents and expert assessments guiding the above, rarely bothered to capture or high light the operationally relevant micro level situations on the mountain specificities and how communities have adapted to them-. Some writings by learned scholars particularly geographers, anthropologists, historians etc. as seen in the District Gazetteers for some areas are exceptions). But these writings and the messages they carried sounded rather abstract and poetic to most of the mountain policy makers and planners, with their bureaucratic or technocratic background and orientation.

This pattern was also a product of generally top down approach to development including mountain development, which generally bypassed the ground realities in most cases. Some mountain specificities such as limited accessibility, socio- economic marginality (manifested through the general voiceless-ness of poor rural communities) also contributed to the (uninformed or poorly informed) macro level decision makers' indifference towards the micro level processes and their usable rationale, for designing diversified interventions as required by micro level diversities of mountain conditions.

Equally important reason for the above disregard of micro level situation by public agencies has been the functional fragmentation of official machinery responsible for mountain development. While different mountain specificities have different interlinked imperatives, the public agencies dealing with them generally have separate mandates focused on individual mountain specificities. With well known lack of effective coordination, the visions and expertise about one mountain specificity rarely help the management of imperatives of other linked mountain specificities. The reviews and assessments of the situation by FAO, ICIMOD and experts from selected HKH countries, under the initiative called SARD-M (sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions) -also confirmed this gap. Project based rather than integrated programme-focused approach to area development also contributes to the above gaps.

4. Question 4: *Other inter-linked Issues and concerns (eg. Sustainability prospects etc.)*

(A)THE SHIFTING SCENARIOS

What has been stated above is slowly becoming part of the history. The situations are gradually (though unequally) changing in many mountain areas. Details on the same were mentioned under section (II) above. The important factors behind the same as mentioned above are: increased understanding of macro-micro perspectives on mountain specificities; changing attributes of different mountain specificities; and more importantly national to global level recognition of uniqueness and importance of mountains in addressing the emerging problems and crises faced by the humanity such as: impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, emerging water and energy shortage, increasing poverty, unemployment, and hunger in many parts of HKH, side effects of market led transformation and global changes affecting the quality of development in many mountain areas. Appropriate management and sustainable use of mountain resources is expected to offer potential solutions to some of the above problems. Hence, the global focus on sustainable

management and development of mountain resources, as planned to be highlighted during Rio+20. However, despite the above positively oriented perceived changes with central place for mountains, some emerging or persisting problems should also be recognized and addressed using some lead lines from better understanding of MP Framework.

The past studies in HKH (particularly at micro levels) attributed negative trends in declining mountain resource health, productivity and their socio economic consequences to the missing MP of interventions in most of the mountain areas. At the same time in the recent period due to changes in nature society interaction dynamics (covering technologies, human capacities, a variety of institutional and technological innovations etc.) have taken place, exchanged and used by some mountain communities and others. This has helped reduce the extent of unsustainability trends in many areas. We commented on their underlying factors and processes while indicating the missing MP of development or resource management interventions under sections 2 and 3 above.

Since the sustainability or unsustainability prospects associated with any intervention/ programme largely depends on specific attributes of nature- society interaction dynamics, it may not be difficult to capture some indicative negative possibilities/ consequences of major thrusts characterizing the current focus of mountain development in HKH. The purpose of such sobering note is to guard against the negative prospects, through using the imperatives of different mountain specificities. Following Jodha (2011) we precisely list the issues as persisting warning signals to be guarded against.

(B) The persisting or potentially emerging warning signals in HKH Region

Lest the preceding discussion on potential role of changing attributes of mountain specificities in facilitating of mountain development with MP and addressing the emerging challenges to HKH mountain regions, is termed as “a journey through optimism”, it should be mentioned that the changing dynamics of nature- society interactions (partly promoted by past mountain development process without MP) has many more strong drivers causing the potentially negative changes faced by HKH today. They may need other remedial steps to complement the efforts for reorientation of mountain development approaches, using MP. The important amongst these mega changes/ challenges are as follows:

- a) Rising role and impacts of market forces operating effectively through the process of economic globalization. Their central concern being ‘profit’, market forces are not sensitive enough to environmental and social issues in mountain areas. The key challenge is how to make globalization or market processes sensitive to emerging mountain problems including over extraction of niche, and integrating approaches to initiatives such as green economy, REDD etc.
- b) Differentiation/ disintegration of mountain communities’ collective stake in natural resources, resulting from side effects of public intervention and market driven processes. This obstructs both the collective concerns and group action for natural resource management and mainstreaming of scattered successful initiatives such as community forestry, collective water

management, domestication of rapidly disappearing herbal species, balancing economic and ecological concerns etc.

- c) Problems linked to food insecurity, unemployment and migration etc. resulting from the side effects of market and formal development interventions such as (i) emphasis on agro-biological niche harnessing, disregarding diversities of food systems; (ii) unfavorable terms of trade under the rising highland- lowland economic links; (iii) rising economic gaps between rich and poor leading to unemployment and continuous migration of youth leading to shortage of work force in rural areas..
- d) Sustained action promoting ownership of new initiatives for rehabilitating degraded mountain landscapes through macro-level global/ national initiatives. These initiatives to address the global concerns (e.g. climate change) are often insensitive to the concerns and capacities and needs of mountain communities as less attended aspects. Scale issues relating to the above initiatives call for greater attention to them compared to what is currently done.-

The purpose of the above listing is to suggest the need for widening the scope of efforts directed to help mountain areas and communities. Even, the small-scale successful initiatives in this respect can help in altering the future thinking on facing the current problems faced by mountain areas and people. Innovative use of MP Framework , can help identify some options in this respect.

IV. PROCESS OF EVOLUTION/ DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN PERSPECTIVE FRAMEWORK

This section IV of this write up, by nature of its contents is like an Annexure, briefly describing the method or process that helped us in evolving, developing and using the MP Framework. To my mind, outlining of MP Framework through closer observation and understanding of its underlying mountain specificities and their interlinked imperatives is not a big theoretical advancement.

INSTEAD CONCEPTUALISATION OF MP - FRAMEWORK IS MORE AN OPERATIONNALLY FOCUSED COMMON SENSE-. To elaborate on this I would digress in to some background information leading to conceptualization and on ground confirmation of MP. My own research background (or initial ignorance about mountain areas) significantly contributed to this. -This as an important aspect of the process leading to conception and evolution of MP Framework.. A comment on the same, therefore, may not be out of place here.

Accordingly, before joining ICIMOD as, Head of Mountain Farming Systems Division in 1986, for nearly 20 years, I worked as field oriented researcher in arid and semi-arid plains of India as well as East and West African countries. I never visited mountain areas even as a tourist. My work in the above dry tropical regions covered farmers' short and long term production cum resource management strategies, weather (climate) variability induced risks and poverty, eco-system –social system links based survival strategies of the rural communities, gaps and complementarities between indigenous practices and modern agricultural science based options, rural commons and their collective management and parallel processes of desertification and pauperization of drought prone areas and finally gaps between public policy/ programme interventions and the indigenous approaches and survival measures evolved by the communities.

Mountains – an unknown world for me:- My joining ICIMOD as a Head of Mountain Farming Systems Division, where most of my colleagues were either born in mountain areas or had worked in mountain regions, was a sort of irony of the situation. Most of my work in dry plains mentioned above was of little concern or interest to most of them. Besides creating some hidden sense of inferiority complex for me, this situation also induced me to do something quite different and more relevant to mountain areas compared to what existing staff and periodically visiting experts at ICIMOD were planning/ doing. Hence, rather than groping in the dark or completely getting lost in the massive scholarly literature by various mountain researchers/ experts, I undertook (during first two years) well focused travels largely in the rural areas of mountain regions of Nepal, India, Bhutan, Pakistan and China. Besides observing and understanding local agricultural situations (as that was my mandate), we also had discussions with local level knowledgeable, field workers and farmers. I travelled (with my colleagues) to different mountain areas but with “Tropical Dry land (plains)- Glasses on my mental eyes (!)”, which facilitated, and helped me to understand and internalize the form and extent of differences characterizing mountains vis a vis plains and their (recognized or unrecognized) implications. With this the seeds of MP sprouted in my mind. The academic validity and support to my approach was initially provided by THINKING LIKE A MOUNTAIN (Robert E. Rhoades in *ILEIA Newsletter,4(1), Leusden, The Netherlands 1988*). This learning or understanding was further enriched by collected research papers by different mountain scholars/ experts from different countries, edited by N.J.R. Allen et.al.(1988), entitled “HUMAN IMPACTS ON MOUNTAINS” and various papers published in different issues of Mountain Research and Development.

The learning from academic sources was supplemented by interactions with teachers and students besides the local level public officials as well as the farmers who accompanied us to field visits. The central thrust of these visits and interactions was on capturing and understanding the inter location and inter group differences in the farming systems and resource- management practices in the studied regions. Based mainly on the above, the first draft of the write up on MP, created some excitement among my colleagues, but the reaction of established mountain experts/ scholars was not very encouraging. Naturally, it was not so easy for many of them to initially and instantly accept, the fact that **CONCEPTUALISATION OF MP** was done by someone, having worked in mountain areas for just 2-3 years, which they did not do despite their long association and research in mountain areas.

One of the colleagues described this situation as manifestation of the essence of the saying “**-NEARER THE CHURCH: FARTHER FROM THE GOD**”.

In due course specially after the first International Conference organized by ICIMOD (in 1992), MP-Framework did receive enhanced recognition and acceptance in the professional circles and field agencies including NGOs, some local government agencies and a few donors-. Based on the above conference two volumes were published, covering different facets of mountains and mountain communities. (The volumes edited by N.S. Jodha, M.Banskota and T. Partap. published in 1992, they were entitled:(vol.1) **SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN AGRICULTURE: PERSPECTIVE AND ISSUES** and (vol. 2) **MOUNTAIN FARMERS’ STRATEGIES AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**. These two volumes (covering about 800 pages) provided the Framework, evidence and illustrations of how to look at mountain systems as well as mountain development interventions and their consequence through

the lens of MP. Subsequently MP Framework became more popular and looked at (if not used sufficiently) by policy makers, NGOs, donors and communities in many countries including in Asia and Latin America. Application of MP covered many more issues and subjects beyond agriculture including globalisation, impacts and adaptations to climate change, high land low land links, mountain commons, rural- urban linkages, success stories of mountain development with mountain perspective etc.

Subsequent activities relating to MP Framework included different training programmes for different national or international agencies, interactions with relevant groups at research and development agencies such as the World Bank, FAO, UNEP, different CGIAR Centers as well as Planning Commissions/ ministries in some of the HKH countries. The post IYM (International Year of Mountains.....) period saw increased awareness about MP Framework in many countries due to enhanced interactions between mountain focused agencies. However, in spite of fairly visible recognition and appreciation of MP-Framework and its potential usability for amending the approaches to mountain development, its on the ground applications are still quite limited and the reasons behind this is discussed in the preceding section while responding to Dr. Vajpai's concerns about impacts of MP advocacy on mountain development policies and programmes. (Section III).

(V) Important reading material

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