

# 3 Presentation of Issues

In the Introductory Session, chaired by *Professor Yang Qinye*, the important issues involved in integrated planning for development of mountain areas were presented by *Dr. T.S. Papola*, Head, MEI Division, ICIMOD, as a background for discussion. He stated that a new approach was needed, primarily because, in past planning exercises at national and local levels, environmental considerations had not been internalised, but had been attended to only in a partial and *ad hoc* manner and because planning had been mostly sectoral in nature without giving adequate attention to integration and inter-sectoral linkages. Integration was needed on three different fronts, i.e., between the environment and development; between infrastructure and economic activities and among different sectors of economic activity; and between human resource development, including the gender dimensions, and the development process. In mountain areas, integration was practical only in area-based planning because of the problems of inaccessibility, diversity of the resource base, and the physical aspects of space. These characteristics of mountain areas warranted a planning approach beyond mere decentralisation; a planning approach that is in a real sense area-based. These characteristics also emphasised the importance of using local institutions and a participatory approach to planning in mountain areas.

The environment-development debate, in the context of mountain areas, was often characterised by two extreme positions: development should be restricted because it impinges upon the environment, or, development cannot be restrained because of the environment. Dr. Papola argued that recognition of the 'trade-off' was required since restricting development was unfair to mountain people, while, at the same time, a development pattern involving indiscriminate exploitation of environmentally-sensitive natural resources was not sustainable. The 'trade-off' involved in a development pattern needed to be assessed in order to make conscious and reasonable decisions. The present practices in this respect, which mainly consisted of environmental impact assessments (EIAs), were inadequate, as they were mostly *ad hoc*, project specific, and used limited time horizons. Assessment of environmental impacts, not only of individual projects and activities but also of those related to them as prerequisites and consequences, in a relatively longer time frame, was needed. An

alternative approach would be to select the structure of development activities that minimised the adverse impact on environment and maximised the economic benefits for local people. This approach would involve: (i) ranking the feasible activities according to their environmental impact (EI); (ii) ranking them according to their economic benefits (EB); and (iii) choosing a structure of activities that minimised EI and maximised EB in totality.

Regarding the selection of development activities, Dr. Papola pointed out that, due to the limited resource base, fragility, environmental sensitivity of many resources, and inaccessibility, a highly diversified structure of activities was not possible in mountain areas. But these areas had a 'niche' or comparative advantage in some activities because of the availability of specific resources not found elsewhere. A lead sector(s) approach based on these activities might be more effective in mountain areas. At the same time, it must be recognised that specialised, lead-sector based development implies production of 'tradeables', and commercialisation. In other words, it would mean moving away from the subsistence food crop centred economy. In order for such a move to be successful, it would need to be supported by adequate arrangements to ensure food security for the mountain people. Dr. Papola also stressed the need to carefully plan and develop the backward and forward linkages around the lead sectors, because linkages as such were not seen to develop on their own in mountain areas due to the disadvantage of location and lack of entrepreneurship.

Linkages between infrastructure, energy, and development of economic activities had crucial significance in general; but they assumed special relevance in a commercially-oriented economy. Two issues were of special significance in the development of infrastructure in mountain areas; one, the adoption of ecologically-sound modes and technologies to minimise risks and hazards and, two, the effective use of infrastructure through integrating the plans for its development with the development of economic activities. In the case of energy development, three aspects needed special focus: one, the development of alternative sources of energy to reduce the use of wood and to check deforestation; two, a greater emphasis on the use of renewable energy sources such as water, solar, and non-wood biomass; and, three, the integration of development planning for energy and economic activities to ensure effective use of the capacity created. Hydel power development, especially in mini- and micro-units, had a great enough potential in many mountain areas not only to meet local consumption and production

requirements, but also to produce power as an 'exportable' commodity. However, necessary organisational, managerial, and ownership arrangements should be made for energy plants to ensure that the benefits of hydropower development for sale become available to the local community.

An important consideration in development, in general, and in development of mountain areas, in particular, was related to the implication of a commercially-oriented development process for equity. Such a process of development, though necessary in the present context, was likely to lead to sharper economic differentiation and inequality in the relatively equitable mountain communities. Those with relatively better access to land resources, education, and information were likely to benefit more than the landless, the uneducated, and the unskilled. Women who had been major producers, though not necessarily equally influential in the subsistence-centred agricultural economy, might become marginalised, even as workers. Adequate attention, therefore, needed to be paid to their needs and potentials in the development of social sectors, e.g., education, training, and health, with a view to enabling them to effectively participate in and benefit from the new development process. It was also important to ensure that the development activities generated more employment so that those with no resources, other than labour, could also share in the development of productive activities.

The kind of integration required in the development approach being proposed, according to Dr. Papola, was best possible in an area-based planning framework. As previously stated, development planning in the mountain areas would, therefore, need to go beyond decentralisation, which most often had merely meant decentralised implementation of policies and decisions originating at the centre. The demarcation of planning units could be based on concepts such as watershed and agroclimatic zones, but adequate attention should be paid to socioeconomic homogeneity and differentiation as well. Also, the implementing administrative units should not be ignored. In other words, a flexible approach, although it would not always conform to the rigorous physical and scientific norms, might have to be adopted, because the area delimited for planning purposes would have to have a combination of physical, socioeconomic, and administrative criteria. Another distinctive feature of area delimitation in mountain areas was altitude, and this needed to be incorporated as a dimension in defining an area as the planning unit. The highland-lowland interaction and resource flows within the defined area, as well as between the area and outside, along with the issue and mechanisms of sharing costs and

benefits, needed to be consciously incorporated into the planning exercise. Further, instead of looking at villages and towns as separate entities, the area planning exercise for mountain regions should adopt the concept of a rural-urban continuum, in which the towns should be seen as centres for markets and services for the development of the entire area.

Finally, in referring to the issues relating to the methodology for integrated planning of environmental and economic development in mountain areas, Dr. Papola emphasised the need for further work on the following aspects.

- Quantitative assessment of environmental impact and economic benefits from different individual activities and the entire structure of activities in a development pattern
- Use of linkage analysis in planning the integrated development of infrastructure, energy, and economic activities
- Assessment of inter-group, interpersonal, and gender dimensions of alternative development patterns and ways of incorporating them into development planning
- Treatment of space in a three-dimensional framework, data requirements and availability, and use of techniques such as GIS in area planning
- Alternative institutional mechanisms in area planning in the mountain regions, possibilities for using local, traditional, and people-centred institutions and practices
- The role of state and state-sponsored planning and the need for and type of interventions that might still be necessary, even in a market-dominated, economic policy framework, for sustainable development in mountain areas

Concluding his presentation, Dr. Papola suggested that the participants critically examine these issues, discuss the ways in which they were being tackled in different countries, and identify the problems that ICIMOD, jointly with national agencies and institutions, could overcome.

Dr. Papola's presentation was followed by a general discussion led by *Dr. R.P. Yadav* and *Professor H. Ramachandran*. Dr. Yadav noted that Dr. Papola's paper and presentation had shown that the issues in mountain development, including the approach to internalising environmental considerations, could be resolved, at least at the conceptual level. The question, however, was that of operationalising them in concrete planning exercises. He said that the paper also suggested methodologies for this purpose. He agreed that the development of mountain areas, with a view to alleviating poverty and raising the living standards of the people, had to be

based on an approach that took them out of the subsistence trap into a niche-based commercially-oriented production pattern. For this purpose, he supported the idea of lead sector based development, which, in his opinion, would also conform to the current economic policy regime which stressed privatisation and globalisation. However, in order to become sustainable, lead sector based development would have to use the diversity in mountain areas as an advantageous factor.

He also urged that more work on the assessment of costs and benefits of environmental protection and ways of sharing them among different groups and communities be carried out. He made a strong plea for the area planning approach and stated that the integrated planning concept could best be operationalised using the concept of 'convergence' in the area, probably at the district level, where institutions and services that needed to be converged for integrated development were already in place. He did not think that the availability of data would pose a serious problem in area planning, because plenty of data were available and more could be conveniently gathered in the very process of planning.

Professor Ramachandran stated that what was being presented as a 'new approach' was, in fact, a 'neglected approach', an approach that was known, but not applied. It was quite evident that choosing appropriate products was a key element to devising a suitable pattern of development in mountain areas. It was also clear that this selection should be based on 'niche'. But it was not certain that the 'niche' criterion would deliver the goods in all cases. One might have to go beyond the static concept of 'niche', it might have to be developed where it was not clearly visible at the moment. He preferred the 'structure of activities' approach to a lead sector approach, as the latter might limit development only to a certain level in many cases.

On the use of environmental criteria, Professor Ramachandran argued that the ranking of activities by environmental impact (EI) and economic benefits (EB) could constitute the necessary elements of an approach, but more cross-cutting considerations would have to be used. In particular, it would be necessary to decide on the selection-rejection criterion and prescribe certain qualifying conditions. Also the inter-generational dimension of environmental and economic criteria would need to be incorporated into decision-making. The question of sharing costs and benefits of environmentally-friendly development was extremely important. In these exercises, he pleaded for an explicit pro-mountain bias.

He accepted the desirability of an area approach in development planning in mountain areas, but he argued that the unit of operation needed to be defined using a matrix of resources and activities. At the same time, the difficulties or ease with which a scientifically defined unit works in an operation were important considerations. The realities of the existing boundaries of administrative units, sectoral lines of administration, and patterns of vertical responsibilities could not be ignored, if integrated area planning was to be a workable proposition.

In the subsequent discussion, several points, mainly relating to practical applicability of an integrated area planning approach, were made. *Mr. V.K. Pandit* said that a new approach or paradigm could not be adopted without giving due attention to the existing one, because the former had to be built upon the latter. Integration could be operationalised administratively in a 'one-window' service approach, and area planning through a 'growth-centre' approach. At the same time, integration could not be achieved by trying to do everything at the same time; sequencing and phasing were essential elements in development planning. He agreed that a move away from a subsistence-centred economy was essential for improving the livelihoods of the mountain people, but he emphasised that food security through a widespread and efficient public distribution system would be a pre-condition for this shift. On decentralisation and area planning, Mr. Pandit referred to the new constitutional provisions in India through which the village *panchayat(s)* had been given powers and responsibilities for planning and development.

*Mr. S.N. Upadhyaya*, speaking in the context of Nepal, said that the issue of human resource development was no doubt important, but, in addition to the gender dimension, it also needed to take account of the multi-ethnicity of population groups in mountain areas. Similarly, the area development approach, while essential, could not be isolated from the national perspective. The resource base of any area needed to be used not only for the development of that area but also for the benefit of the entire nation. Hydro-electricity development was a case in point. Equity considerations were, no doubt, important, and, therefore, mechanisms for sharing the benefits had to be evolved.

*Dr. M.H. Rashid* pointed out that integration had a cost and it was also not methodology-neutral. The time-frame and political considerations were the real factors to be considered. So, he cautioned, it was necessary to be realistic in terms of the degree and type of integration one would like to achieve. According to him, it

was difficult to talk of a mountain 'area', because mountains were 'infinite' in time and space. He pleaded for developing acceptable mechanisms for sharing costs and benefits of mountain environment and development, inter-generationally, inter-regionally, and internationally. Area planning, he thought, was conceptually easy but operationally difficult. Development of a database was costly, therefore one should be selective and rely to a greater extent on anthropological and sociological methods of study.

Rabindra K. Shukya, Member Secretary, National Plan Commission, HMG/Nepal. The next session, in which presentations were made by participants from China, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, was chaired by Mr. V.K. Pandit, Special Secretary, Planning Commission, India. Dr. Pradeep Talachar of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, ICIMOD, was the Facilitator for both sessions.

The presentation on the development experiences in Bangladesh ranged from the historical evolution of integrated planning, in general, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), in particular, presented by Dr. M.H. Rashid, incorporation of environmental aspects in CHT development programmes, presented by Mr. Kazi N. Islam, to the forestry programmes for environment-development integration, presented by Professor A.H. Golam

Dr. Rashid said that Bangladesh had extensive experience with an integrated multi-sectoral approach. Because of cyclones and floods each year, there had always been a need for strong coordination among different sectoral offices such as health, transport, relief and rehabilitation, agriculture and finance.

Referring specifically to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Dr. Rashid stated that the area had been developed by the Government of Bangladesh through the assistance of the Government of India. The area had been developed through the assistance of the Government of India. The area had been developed through the assistance of the Government of India.