

# 5 Emerging Priorities and Issues

Drawing upon the presentations and experiences of different countries, *Dr. Pitamber Sharma* of ICIMOD highlighted the emerging priorities and questions that required further discussion, particularly in the Working Groups. Dr. Sharma presented the priorities and issues under six broad themes.

## 1. Unit of Planning

The basic purpose of the exercise for delimiting the planning area was to integrate socioeconomic and administrative criteria, so that the defined area provided the appropriate context for integration. A practical approach would be to search for and achieve conceptual unity within a given administrative unit. For, delimitation by itself might not be a major problem. What was more important was to develop a broader perspective and evolve a process of convergent planning.

Some important substantive issues raised relating to integrated area planning were as follow.

One, should the plan be comprehensive covering all sectors and aspects, or indicative, defining main directions and approaches? The data requirements of the two approaches would obviously be quite different; and, therefore, the related question would be whether to build a comprehensive database before planning or to plan with limited data.

Second, should area planning form the basis of macro-planning so that all planning is area based, should it be selective, i.e., only for certain areas identified for their specificities, thus supplementing the overall macro-planning that is practised in all areas?

Third, what are the lessons of integrated (rural) development programmes, in terms of methods, mechanisms, and the degree of integration attempted and achieved? How would an integrated programme approach differ from an integrated area approach?

## 2. Macro-economic Policies and Mountain Development

There was a lurking and well-founded suspicion that the policies of liberalisation and globalisation being currently followed by the

countries of the HKH region might not be exactly beneficial for the development of the mountain areas and people. Economic development patterns, based primarily on private initiative and markets, were likely to bypass mountain areas which offered little advantage, either in resources or demand, to private entrepreneurs for profitable ventures. Yet, a move away from a subsistence-centred to a specialisation-based market-oriented economy was necessary. And such a move, in order to be successful, would require state support and incentives in various ways. Important areas of state action in this respect would be the provision of food security and physical and social infrastructure. Public investments, even in directly productive sectors, could be necessary in some cases to work as a catalyst to development. Subsidies were not a very well-liked concept in the new economic policy regime, but it must be admitted that all successful cases had an element of subsidy. In the case of mountain areas, the question of subsidy could more rationally be seen as a mechanism for compensation for the use, by others and/or non-use by local people, of mountain resources. Research and development efforts in respect of products and technologies suitable for mountain areas were essential — mountain development was a 'knowledge-intensive' activity. And the local private enterprises could not be expected to invest in these activities; the state would have to take the initiative. In the context of globalisation-aimed commercial use of local resources, it would also be necessary that the control over these resources and benefits flowing from their use be regulated to favour the mountain people.

It was, therefore, important that the implications of economic liberalisation on mountain development be carefully examined and the role of the state should be clearly specified in respect of mountain development. Similarly, the role of donors and aid agencies in shaping the development of mountain areas needed to be closely examined to ensure that the aid was utilised in the best interests for the long-term development of mountain people.

### 3. Operationalising Integration

Integration was, in any case, a difficult task, even more so in the existing conditions of sectorally-oriented development administration. Thus, a conceptually elegant integrated plan could often be converted into fragmented sectoral projects and programmes, in practice. Here, integration or lack of it, was primarily a function of a mind set: a plan could be sectorally divided, yet could be integrated, i.e., if integration was seriously viewed by sectoral planners and administrators. In this sense, integration was not a concept but a 'process' with institutional implications, a process that responded to the problems as they arose. The practical approach to integration,

therefore, needed to be flexible; one need not insist on complete integration of all aspects as a precondition, but various elements could be integrated over time, along with execution of the plan and programmes.

The basic issues that needed to be clarified beforehand, however, were: 'what' needed to be integrated and 'how'. Integration had a cost; therefore, it was important to be specific. For example, the linkages between the plan and projects needed to be clearly defined. An operational agency for integration needed to be specified in terms of whether it should be from among the participating agencies, one that played an important sectoral role, or another, trans-sectoral government agency? Or, should the task of integration be undertaken by an outside agency, i.e., an NGO? Whichever agency is to be made primarily responsible for the purpose, it must be recognised that integration might not be achieved unless it is to be taken as a shared and collective task by all the agencies involved.

#### **4. A Comparative Advantage Based Lead-Sector Approach**

In view of the limited resource base and problems of inaccessibility and fragility, the development pattern of mountain economies could not be too diversified. Therefore, it was necessary to identify resources and activities that had a 'comparative advantage' in specific mountain areas and promote them as lead sectors. It must, however, be recognised that a lead sector might not have just one activity. Firstly, it could be more than one activity that offered the 'niche' and, therefore, multiple activities could form a lead sector; and, secondly, any lead sector would be comprised of interrelated activities.

The basic issues in identifying and developing lead sectors were: (i) the requirements of the physical and social infrastructure to solve the problems of inaccessibility, limited local markets, and lack of appropriate institutions for production and marketing arrangements; (ii) the choice between basic 'niche' based activities alone and a structure of activities supporting each other, even though each of these activities might not have the resource-based 'niche'; (iii) the requirements for human resource development in order to support lead sector based, commercially-oriented development, including skill formation and entrepreneurship, (iv) the question of sustainability of the lead sector in terms of resources (renewable or non-renewable) used for its development, defining sustainable resource use practices and narrow specialisation *vis-a-vis* diversification for sustainable development; and (v) the phenomenon of a spontaneous lead sector' (e.g., poppy growing in Myanmar) and its socioeconomic implications.



## 5. Institutional Arrangements

Obviously, integrated environmental and economic planning for development in mountain areas depended on institutional arrangements at the area level, with an appropriate mechanism for linkages with other higher – regional and national – levels, as well as for the integration of economic and environmental concerns. It was important to examine how far existing arrangements met these requirements and how best to strengthen them or create new institutions for this purpose.

Many mountain areas had endogenously evolved traditional institutions which had served as social mechanisms for collective responsibility and action in the interests of local communities, as perceived by them. How could these institutions be made to serve modern needs? or how could modern institutions be adapted to the particular sociocultural context? were issues that needed serious consideration. At another level, the question of sharing responsibilities by recognising the strength of the government, local civic bodies, and non-government organisations was also of crucial importance for evolving an appropriate institutional arrangement for development.

## 6. Methodological Issues

Taking into consideration the objectives and various necessary conditions and mechanisms for integrated development in mountain areas, Dr. Sharma posed the following methodological issues for the planning exercise.

- Internalisation of environmental accounting in area-based development planning
- Use of environmental impact analysis or other tools to assess cumulative environmental impacts and synergetic effects of individual development activities
- Approaches and methods to integrate concerns regarding the status of environmental resources and the status of households, and mechanisms for 'mediation' with regard to control over resources, land and other productive assets, and decision-making
- Identification of actors and processes in participatory area development planning
- Criteria and yardsticks for assessing development in the mountains, defining 'success', and internalising the 'mountain bias'
- Methods of integrating agroclimatic zonation with the area as a planning unit