

3. Mountain Specificities and Poverty Implications

In the context of this paper's theme, the implications of the mountain specificities described above can be stated in terms of poverty-generating conditions as well as obstructions to poverty alleviation. These conditions and observations are at three interrelated levels which, on the basis of past human experience, can be considered as preconditions for the economic betterment of the people. They are given below.

- (i) Conditions reflecting **potential** or usage capacities of the natural resource base (e.g., physical production possibilities, range and quality of production options).
- (ii) Circumstances or factors that condition the **harnessing** or management of production potential (e.g., technologies, human skills, infrastructure and other support systems, capital investment).
- (iii) The circumstances that determine the nature, scope, and **opportunities for exchange** activities which are an integral part of the gainful harnessing of resource potential in an open and interlinked economic system (e.g., infrastructure, physical and market linkages, terms of exchange).

Poverty alleviation also presupposes **access to the gains** resulting from satisfaction of the above preconditions. A juxtaposition of the preconditions for gainful economic activities (reducing poverty) and the operational implications of mountain conditions (specificities) can reveal the complexity of factors and processes underlying poverty in mountain areas. These are given in Table 1.

In the light of the description of mountain specificities and their implications in the preceding section, it is not necessary to elaborate on Table 1. However, it should be reiterated that inaccessibility, fragility, and marginality, in their respective ways, tend to obstruct the fulfillment of most of the preconditions for poverty alleviation in the field of primary production, harnessing of resource - 'niche', and trade and exchange. At the same time, diversity and 'niche' offer some scope for fulfilling the aforesaid preconditions for poverty-alleviating activities.

Table 1: Poverty-reducing Processes and Mountain Specificities

Usual preconditions associated with poverty reduction processes (1)		Mountain specificities favouring (F) or obstructing (x) preconditions (1)				
		Inaccessibility	Fragility	Marginality	Diversity	'Niche'
(A)	Primary Production Level					
o	Overall physical production possibilities	x	x	x	F	F
o	High productivity/high payoff options	x	x	x	F	F
o	Resource use intensification and input absorption capacities		x	x	F	F
(B)	Harnessing Resource 'Niche'					
o	Infrastructural logistics	x	x			
o	Investable surplus and relevant transferable technologies		x	x	x	
o	Gains of scale and specialisation			x	x	F
(C)	Trade and Exchange Links					
o	Physical infrastructure and market integration	x	x			
o	Surplus production and processing	x	x	x		
o	Favourable terms of trade	x		x		
o	Transferability of external experiences	x	x		x	
(D)	Easy and Equal Access to Gains from (A to C)	x		x	x	

- a. Most of the mountain specificities have both biophysical and socioeconomic cultural dimensions which affect the above preconditions in different ways. The table gives a summary view.

Stated differently, the biophysical conditions of mountain habitats create various objective circumstances that not only impose structural constraints on production possibilities but also shape the pattern of human responses, some of which may generate and accentuate poverty conditions. To elaborate on this we reflect on both the traditional human coping strategies and present day development interventions in mountain areas. In doing so, rather than focussing on individual measures, we comment on their thrusts and approaches. Some of these are summarised in Table 2. However, before elaborating on them the following should be stated.

Table 2: Poverty-generating Circumstances in Mountain Areas

Traditional Coping Strategies and the Conventional Development Interventions

Poverty-generating/promoting circumstances	Traditional coping strategies	Development interventions
<p>A. <u>Primary production level</u></p> <p>Limited and low productivity options; low carrying capacity resources (low use intensity, low input absorption), limited non-farm activities</p>	<p>Subsistence-oriented activities; option maximisation through resource upgrading (e.g., terracing), diversified interlinked activities; low cost, local resource-centred input use; focus on self-provisioning, recycling, collective sharing, combining land intensive and land extensive activities</p>	<p>Selective upgrading of resources; resource use intensification with new technologies, subsidies; narrow specialisation ignoring imperatives of diversity, fragility, etc while promoting productivity; disregarding regenerative processes, recycling, totality of production systems; high level of subsidisation</p>
<p>B. <u>Constraints to harnessing resource potential</u></p> <p>Limited opportunities for surplus generation and reinvestment, product processing; infrastructural difficulties, technological gaps, capital scarcity</p>	<p>Subsistence-oriented, labour-intensive activities; need-based limited harnessing of 'niche'; resource recycling; folk technologies suited to resource capacities; self-provisioning oriented semi-closed system</p>	<p>Through external support, development of infrastructure, large-scale harnessing of 'niche' by ignoring local needs; extractive pattern of resource use, ignoring side effects of large-scale operations; limited local opportunities; creating a dual sector economy</p>
<p>C. <u>Exchange Links</u></p> <p>Limited tradeable surplus, processing, marketing; unfavorable terms of trade; limited transferability of external experiences, lack of information for outsiders</p>	<p>Focus on self-provisioning and petty trading; external linkages through transhumance and migration, limited need-based exchange, dependence on agronomy, ethno-engineering</p>	<p>Physical and market integration; discardment of traditional approaches; over-extraction and unfavourable terms of exchange; subsidisation of production / consumption, increased dependency; domination of external market forces</p>

Undoubtedly, when compared with the prime land situation (i.e., areas with fertile land, right topography, adequate moisture, and available infrastructural facilities), the mountain situation described above may appear to be relatively inferior. However, if the history of prosperous communities in mountain areas and the latter's present day contributions to mainstream (plains/urban) economies in the developing countries is any indicator, poverty need not be the unavoidable consequence of mountain specificities. The latter offers a complex of constraints and opportunities which if properly managed, may convert mountain areas

into poverty-free regions. Failure to relieve poverty should, therefore, be attributed to man-made circumstances rather than to the inherent limitations of mountain habitats. Seen from this perspective **"mountains plead non-guilty"** for the poverty of their inhabitants. This is elaborated upon in the following discussion.