

Objective and Scope of the Study

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The basic objective of this paper is to examine the special circumstances of mountain environments and identify the distinct features which should guide development and implementation strategy in the provision of a broad range of agricultural support services to small farmers. The paper will document the response of traditional farming systems to the mountain environment and study how these small farming communities adapt to the special conditions in mountain regions. The production and consumption pattern in these areas will define the range of agricultural support services that are crucial for these subsistence farmers.

The specific range of services that will be covered in this paper include input supply (credit, fertilizer, seeds, etc.), extension training, and marketing. The delivery mechanisms by which these services are made accessible to small farmers will be included in this review since these issues gain added significance in mountain regions due to the inadequate nature of the physical and marketing infrastructures. Secluded communities are often more resilient in the use of traditional institutions when other more formal structures are unavailable. This study will examine these traditional systems in their management of production systems and their interrelationship with indigenous and external agricultural support services.

This paper will also outline the role of the Government and the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector in responding to the special development needs of the mountain areas. The case study of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), a development programme which has distinguished itself in the mountain areas of Northern Pakistan, will be outlined. This development programme has successfully demonstrated that a flexible approach which recognises the special constraints and potentiality of mountain regions can be a precursor to rapid and equitable economic growth.

This paper is based on field experiences in the mountain areas of Gilgit, Baltistan, and Chitral and draws heavily from the conceptual model development by AKRSP in designing a programme of institutional development, credit and savings, input supply, extension training, and marketing. The policy framework and the broad recommendations suggested in the report also combine the experience of development practitioners in establishing a marketing system and infrastructure in some African and Asian countries. The latter experience was incorporated on the understanding that the mountain regions of the Himalaya-Karakorum-Hindu Kush share common features with other developing countries.

Organisation of the Paper

This paper is divided into three main sections. The first section outlines some aspects of the nature and development of traditional support systems in mountain environments. This section covers the special potential and constraints of mountain areas and highlights some of the special issues in mountain production and consumption systems. In particular, this section discusses issues in the context of poor accessibility, resource fragility, land scarcity, and other features of mountain areas. Government policy and NGO programmes in the mountain regions of Pakistan are also briefly mentioned in this section.

The second section presents a case study of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and describes, in some detail, aspects of its institutional model, delivery system, marketing strategy, extension training, and input supply system. This section helps in understanding how sustainability, equitability, and growth can be combined in the development of diverse and highly sensitive agro-ecological systems. This programme has been described by a recent World Bank evaluation team as one of the most successful examples of a development programme and it provides an excellent conceptual framework for designing effective development strategies and policy options for the development of high mountain areas.

The third and final section gives a summary and conclusion and describes the issues which are important in the provision of agricultural support services in high mountain valleys. This section derives effective principles for the development of strategies which are relevant for high mountain areas and identifies effective policy options.