

A Changing Role for ICIMOD in Support of Policy Options

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Appropriate policies and accompanying implementation strategies are a key to fulfilling the goals and objectives directed at the well-being of mountain communities and the sustainability of the natural resource base to support them. This applies equally to ICIMOD's vision and approaches focused on mountain areas and communities. The present note summarises the important features and steps characterising ICIMOD's policy support work.

ICIMOD's mandate

Three basic points are relevant to the present discussion. First, policy making is not a mandate of ICIMOD, it is the responsibility of RMC governments and their agencies. ICIMOD's task is to identify, analyse, and suggest relevant options (best practices, processes about specific interventions) for consideration by the RMCs, and adopt or amend them for actual use.

Second, the policy thrust/approach of ICIMOD's work has evolved over time, as ICIMOD itself has evolved since its inception, particularly in terms of approaches and activities to fulfill its mandate.

Third, ICIMOD focuses on policy as a process, where apart from final state legislation on policy issues, different stages with involved provisions and practices along with the supportive institutions which, individually or collectively, help in meeting the policy goals, are emphasised. Depending on the requirements and pressures, the same are often incorporated in the legislative structure of the policy.

These three attributes have influenced ICIMOD's policy related work as it has evolved, based on the Centre's understanding RMC needs and their approaches to mountain development on the one hand, and the Centre's capacities to deliver usable output while working with partners from RMCs on the other.

There is increasing request from national agencies in the region and international organisations for ICIMOD's inputs in policy and programme advisory work on water, climate change, biodiversity, energy, and livelihoods.

By way of a comment on the evolution of the policy thrust in ICIMOD's work, during the early phase of its work (1988-1993) ICIMOD developed what is described as a 'Mountain Perspective Framework' (MPF), an operational framework to assess the extent to which the imperatives of mountain specificities (fragility, inaccessibility, marginality, diversity, among others) are internalised by interventions in mountain areas. Using this framework, ICIMOD in collaboration with national institutions in the RMCs, looked at agricultural development policies and programmes in different countries. It was noted that the RMCs had, by and large, ignored the imperatives of mountain specificities while planning and implementing development interventions in mountain agriculture (covering different land-based activities such as cropping, horticulture, livestock, agro-forestry, among others).

The Centre tried to address this issue through interaction workshops, one-on-one dialogues with people engaged in the policy making processes (such as planning commissions, line agencies of the government, etc.), and dissemination of the findings of these dialogues and consultations through publications, seminars, and workshops. However, it was quickly realised that though relevant, inducing RMCs to reorient public interventions in keeping with the mountain perspective was not going to be easy.

Hence, while continuing its advocacy for the 'mountain perspective framework' through orientation meetings with government agencies and NGOs, the policy thrust of ICIMOD shifted towards on-the-ground practices that incorporate some imperatives of the mountain perspective. Accordingly, ICIMOD looked at best practices and initiatives taking place in one or the other of the RMCs. ICIMOD studied these practices and sensitised those member countries which did not have such initiatives to the new options, including by way of taking government and non-government officials to the sites of these initiatives so that they might see for themselves and replicate these good and best practices. After four years, ICIMOD looked at the extent and process of adoption of successful practices and found mixed success. Two of the reasons behind the limited success were: (i) continued domination of supply-side concerns as against the demand-side factors characterising ICIMOD recommendations, and (ii) the lack of resources as well as lack of continued presence of the officials who initially agreed to implement the new practices or initiatives.

As an additional step to sensitise policy makers to the mountain perspective, or to understand the demand-side perspectives on recommended options, ICIMOD arranged meetings with senior government officials who have had associations with policy decisions as present or past members of national planning commissions and other development agencies. Discussions revealed that the national government's approaches to mountain areas were overshadowed by the overall national perspective rather than by specific concerns for mountain areas. The lesson to be learned here is that ICIMOD should interact at state, county, or lower levels, to sensitise decision makers and implementors of government programmes to the crucial importance and functions of mountain specificities in designing and implementing mountain development components to programme planning. Hence, the Centre's broad outreach approach moved from national (macro entities) to local micro-level agencies.

Following the change in governments in the RMCs (for example, changing dominance by different political parties at different periods), the suggested mountain perspective-based approaches did not have continuity in government support. To address this problem, ICIMOD interacted with and sensitised the 'think-tanks' among different political parties, which are usually more stable than the political parties and their leadership. This was also attempted for a short period. However, as a result of the lack of interest on the part of concerned individuals representing different political parties, this effort did not work. However, in a broader and technical sense, the mountain perspective did get some concern in long-term development documents such as the Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP), the Nepal and India Planning Commissions' 'Action Plan for the Himalayas'. At a micro-level some NGOs also tried to shape local development in keeping with the imperatives of relevant mountain specificities.

In order to jointly address demand- and supply-side concerns while projecting ICIMOD's outputs vis-à-vis RMC policy makers, a more concrete emerging issue, namely the repercussions of economic globalisation for mountain areas and communities, was put as a subject of policy dialogue. Based on a quick exploratory study on this subject in selected areas in China, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, interactive workshops involving public and private sector decision makers and implementers were carried out. A range of risks and opportunities associated with globalisation for

mountain areas/communities were identified and shared with these groups. The participants promised to explore these aspects of mountain interventions further and to act accordingly. This phase ended with the completion of a project on 'Globalisation and Mountains' in 2002. The emerging issues were further projected during donor-supported meetings, where RMC officials also participated. The policy impact of these strategies did not move beyond taking stock of the broad issues and potential consequences of globalisation for mountain areas, although it helped indicate direction of future work in subsequent periods.

Post 2003, new qualitative elements were added to work on the policy dimensions at ICIMOD. An important change in the objective circumstance was a shift in German assistance to ICIMOD from core support to programme support, where policy dimension work and personnel support for it were specifically emphasised. The supply side aspects of policy work were reoriented with the help of identifying and articulating stakeholders' needs, with focus on the evaluation and monitoring aspects of policy work including by involving stakeholders, re-focusing on the interests and concerns of ICIMOD output users and internal capacity building for policy work.

Furthermore, previous work on honeybees, biodiversity conservation, PARDYP (watershed management), community NRM (forestry), sloping agricultural land technologies, glacial lake outburst floods, rural energy systems, GIS-IT-based approaches and methods to understand and promote potential options, reached a stage where their findings formed not only a useful training and advocacy material, but attracted donors and RMC agencies to support, assess, and pick up some of the concrete options or good practices suggested by these initiatives.

These moves complemented ICIMOD's renewed focus on training and sensitisation programmes involving RMC specialists including from governments. In a number of cases, the local governments, donors, and NGOs, picked up the policy and/or programme options suggested by the Centre.

An internal review of past achievements, challenges, and lessons learned helped in identifying emerging issues to enhance the relevance and impact of ICIMOD's policy-related work and to strengthen them. Among other things, it emphasised strengthening links between research and development, as well as the ownership by RMCs; building strategic partnerships and long-term donor support for innovative and impact making outputs usable by policy makers (*ICIMOD:*

Achievements, Challenges and Lessons Learned, 2006).

An important dimension of ICIMOD's contribution to mountain policy processes has been its participation and inputs in mountain-related discourse at the global level. ICIMOD has been contributing to the process of developing a mountain agenda ever since the Rio Conference in 1992, followed by the International Year of Mountains, 2002; World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2003-2005, amongst others. The nature of its involvement and inputs have changed substantially in recent years. Impressed by the approaches and results of ICIMOD work in the areas of poverty and livelihoods (e.g. honeybees; women, water and energy; community-based NRM such as shifting cultivation and community forestry; indigenous resource use systems; global environmental changes and climate change; transboundary biodiversity conservation; medicinal and aromatic plants, natural disaster/hazard management; decentralised renewable energy systems; IT/GIS-based insights and understanding of macro-level/global level dynamics of change), more and more requests for collaboration with ICIMOD and for the use of its approaches are emerging. Besides donor-RMC-NGO supported activities, professional training and information sharing activities have become frequent events in ICIMOD. A number of international agencies such as UNEP, IUCN, The World Bank, FAO, GEF, IFAD, on the one hand and premier national institutions in RMCs on the other are collaborating on the emerging global problems and adaptation strategies. All these, in a way, suggest the greater importance of demand-side rather than just supply-side aspects of ICIMOD's work.

This assessment is further reinforced by increasing requests from national and international agencies for ICIMOD input (presentations) in policy- programme advisory work on subjects dealing with water, climate change, biodiversity, energy, and livelihood systems. ICIMOD's publications in peer-reviewed international journals also indirectly suggest this. ICIMOD is now contributing to regional and global knowledge like CGIAR and other research institutions.

The shift partly implies what one of the RMC member said, "in the past we used to ask, what is ICIMOD? Today we ask: what can ICIMOD do for us?"

Put another way, ICIMOD has slowly moved from a status of 'street vendor projecting/selling its products' to 'a mall/department store or retailer', where people themselves come to enquire and acquire its services/products.