

Area Planning: Delimitation of A Planning Unit

A critical issue that has been debated for a long time is the level — macro, regional, and area—at which the planning could best achieve integration of the various aspects described above. It should be noted that planning exercises at different levels cannot be independent of each other, and integration is needed at each level, although its nature and content would be different at macro-, meso-, and micro-level. Thus, mountain specificities need to be taken into account in their entirety at national and regional planning level. The mountain perspective should be the guiding principle in planning, in wholly, or predominantly, mountainous countries and regions. But, even in countries where only a part of the geographical territory is mountainous, national and regional planning strategies should leave enough scope for a distinct approach to the development of such regions. For example, a development strategy that primarily relies on, and a policy framework which favours, irrigated monocropping for agricultural development; large-scale, metal-based heavy manufacturing for industrial development; and large thermal-and large dam-based hydro-electric plants for power development, probably has nothing to offer for the develop-

ment of mountain areas. These approaches may be necessary to attain certain national goals, but national plans should also leave scope and resources for different strategies for the development of the regions that cannot effectively participate in and benefit from the development processes based on them. And mountain regions are such regions.

The fact that mountain areas require a distinct approach to development suggests that mere decentralisation of planning is likely to prove inadequate for these areas. Decentralised planning, most often, has only meant the decentralisation of implementation of a centrally determined strategy. While such an approach may prove useful in the plains, where there is a relatively even distribution of natural resource endowments and spatial continuity, in mountain areas with their highly diverse and heterogeneous resource bases and spatial discontinuities caused by altitude, slope, and relief, 'autonomy' in planning in a real sense is required. In other words, plans for development of mountain regions have to be evolved on an area basis, so that they can take into account the specificities of resource base and achieve better integration between resources and activities, among activities, and between environment and development.

What spatial unit should be demarcated and adopted as the area suitable for integrated planning in mountain regions? The issue has been debated for a long time, although not necessarily in the context of mountain regions. In a decentralised planning approach, administrative units such as districts, *taluka(s)*, blocks, villages, and so on have been used. And it is argued that, since these units are not necessarily coterminous with resource base areas, they are not always suitable for an area planning approach. The argument becomes more forceful in the case of hill and mountain regions where the variability of the terrain and the heterogeneity of the resource base render a linear and administrative demarcation quite unsuitable for development planning. Therefore, resource-based concepts, such as agroclimatic zones, sub-zones, and watersheds, have been advocated as more suitable planning units. These concepts have a lot of appeal for regional and area planners and could certainly be fruitfully employed in development planning for mountain regions. Yet, their limitations should be kept in mind and necessary modifications considered in their application.

A watershed is a natural geo-hydrological unit incorporating the area from which all surface water flows out naturally through a single channel. It is a naturally-defined unit of planning and development and may be demarcated more extensively as a macro-watershed or less extensively as a micro-watershed, according to need. At the same time, based on a one-dimensional concept, it may not completely account for the resources and potential of the demarcated area; and, being a purely physical concept, may also not incorporate sociocultural and economic homogeneity and diversity within and among demarcated areas. Agroclimatic zonation involves a larger number of variables within the broad area of natural resources, soil type, climate, temperature and rainfall regime, and captive water resources and is amenable to a broad or more disaggregated division of space by using value ranges of variables. The use of multiple criteria for demarcation in this approach can, however, lead to methodological problems insofar as different variables may not fall into the same range as stipulated for defining a zone.

Both concepts, based as they are primarily on natural conditions and resources, do not take into account man-made developments in an area, e.g., physical and social infrastructure, farming patterns and systems, and other economic activities. The areas being considered are not unexploited, and the existing levels of development become a crucial base for further development. Furthermore, both these concepts may provide a reasonable basis for planning for agricultural development and allied activities but would prove inadequate for planning development of other activities. Lastly, unless demarcation, on the basis of these approaches, by and large coincides with administratively-determined planning units, or unless the latter are modified to conform to the former, there are likely to be problems in the allocation of public funds for implementation of integrated plans for development of different areas. It is, therefore, necessary that the geo-hydrological and natural resource characteristics are supplemented by a sufficient level of infrastructural development and an economic activity base for defining areas as planning units. Administrative convenience in implementing a plan should also be considered, and areas may be differently defined, combining administrative boundaries and resource bases and development characteristics. In a district with relatively homogeneous agroclimatic features and a well-developed infrastructure, the entire district could be a planning unit. In another, more varied, situation, a watershed, macro- or micro-, could become an area planning unit without any implementation problems insofar as the area falls within a single administrative implementation unit, e.g., a district or a block. It is also important to recognise that a planning unit is not a rigid category, sacrosanct for all purposes. In fact, in planning different activities and services, different units would be necessary and relevant. Here, the concept and techniques of multi-level planning need to be introduced along with those of area planning.

Another important consideration for area development planning in mountain areas is the differentiation of areas by altitude, as the problems and potentials of development vary significantly between the high mountains and middle mountains, on the one hand, and between mountain regions and the lower hills, on the other. At the same time, the issue of **highland-lowland interaction**, not only in terms of water resource flows, silting, and soil erosion and the effects of environmental degradation in the high mountains on the life and economy of the lower hills and foothills but also in terms of the contribution of the uplands through outflow of resources, both natural and human, needs to be considered in an integrated framework. On the economic front, this aspect would also include issues such as terms of trade and sharing of costs and benefits of environmental protection and regeneration between the people living in the uplands and those in the lowlands.

Similarly, factors such as **rural-urban linkages** and planning and development of urban settlements assume critical importance in integrated regional and area planning in mountain areas. Unlike in the plains, urban centres in the mountains are not only few and far between but also, for the most part, very small and cannot qualify as urban in a social and economic sense; the fact being that governments so designate them in their population censuses. They are not industrial and commercial centres but rather administrative towns and/or centres for the retail sale of consumer goods to villagers and tourists. At the same time, they could become important as sources of consumer products and production inputs as well as pro-

viding links with the outer world for the commercial and market-oriented development of mountain villages. They, therefore, need to be integrated into the 'area' concept along with the villages, because they are hardly 'urban' and because they need to be developed as **market and service centres** for the overall development of the area. Separation of rural and urban areas for development planning would not only be futile but could also, in fact, prove to be counter-productive in mountain areas.