

Introduction

At the heart of the rural energy concern lies a paradox. In the last ten years, the importance of energy's role for rural development and environmental management has been amply emphasised, and is now well recognised. Yet adequate action programmes to overcome pressing problems have not been forthcoming, and the impact on enhancement of the rural quality of life has been marginal at best. This is evident not only in the severely limited allocation of financial resources and other efforts for rural energy development, but also in local people's hesitation to readily accept suggested solutions and approaches.

I argue in this paper that a fundamental shift in the paradigm of planning and implementation is necessary for effecting desired changes. For viable alternatives to be implemented, it is necessary to reflect seriously on existing politico-administrative structures, and research and development frameworks, as well as socio - organisational set-ups in the rural areas. Structural changes cannot be brought about overnight. There are, however, ample opportunities in countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalaya Region for creative initiatives. Reactivation of decentralisation is a case in point. Pradhan (1985) has rightly argued that in spite of limitations and constraints in Nepal, for instance, "the seriousness with which HMG/N [His Majesty's Government of Nepal] is implementing the decentralisation process gives some indication of HMG's commitment to rural development." The challenge is to make this political commitment instrumental in mobilising sectoral agencies who, as Pradhan says, "have not yet demonstrated a serious commitment." Similar arguments can be made for other countries in the Region.

At another level, there are indications that villagers, who are the primary beneficiaries of planning and implementation efforts, are experiencing so much pressure for survival that they are preparing themselves for major shifts in lifestyles. Frustrations and distrust notwithstanding, their capabilities can be strengthened for the transition. The task is by no means simple, but alternative approaches for action programmes are essential if the status quo is to be transformed.

One other contention of this paper is that the energy crisis in the mountains is not, as popularly believed, linked solely with the environmental problems caused by fuelwood

shortage and deforestation. While this is undoubtedly an important dimension, it is also crucial to recognise that the "crisis" is intricately intertwined with the severe shortage of energy inputs that constrain such rural development activities as: (1) increasing agricultural productivity, (2) pumping drinking and irrigation water, (3) promoting small-scale industries for extra-farm income generation, and (4) introducing time-saving techniques to reduce present workloads and particularly those of women. Energy planning makes sense only if these broader concepts are considered and thus integrated with mountain development.

This paper is organised into the following parts :

- o Why Decentralised Energy Planning and Management?
- o Examples of Decentralised Efforts from Selected Countries
- o Towards a Framework
- o Questions for Reflection
- o Conclusions