

## **6. Conclusions and Looking Beyond: An Agenda for Action**

The HKH region is the major mountain ecosystem in the world. It is also home to more than 120 million people, comprised of numerous ethnic groups and spreading over eight countries. Besides, the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is also the watershed area for all of South Asia and parts of South East Asia where more than a billion people live. Therefore, the well-being of the HKH people and the sustainable management of the HKH ecosystem is a concern of the region as well as the global community. Being a complex eco-social system, the sustainable management and development of the HKH region, to bring about positive changes in the lives of its inhabitants, will require a truly multidisciplinary and systemic approach. A Social Science Perspective can add substantively to the existing richness of mountain research, policy, and project development and other activities currently underway in the region, by adding the systemic perspectives of putting people at the centre of all thinking and planned changes. This can come about by recognising the interdependence of social and eco-

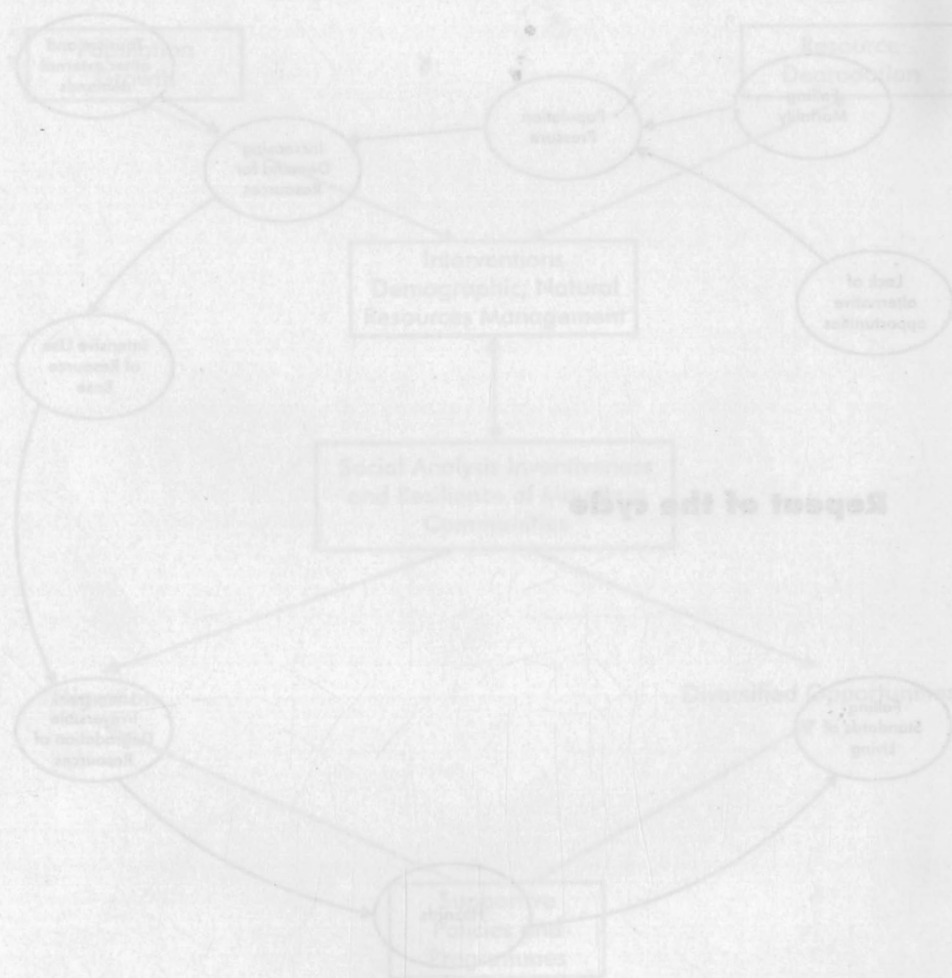
conomic (including cultural and institutional) and biological and physical factors in the sustainable management of such complex eco-social systems. The recognition of this interdependence paves the way for a discussion on the Social and Cultural Agenda necessary for mountain research and development. An array of existing approaches and tools of social analysis has been discussed in this paper. Based on their generic features, a stronger social analytical component can be added to all the ICIMOD and other agency-specific activities in the region. To that, a new mountain perspective must be added. The 'New Mountain Perspective' builds upon earlier approaches, such as the Mountain Specificities, but also goes beyond, i.e., by putting human beings at the centre of planning. The new perspective, therefore, calls for a fresh look at human potentials in the face of adverse physical conditions. This potential can and should be harnessed to embark upon a path of sustainable development that is socially (and culturally) sound and economically feasible. The hamlets and locales of the HKH region, however remote, are being affected by these changes. Although the changes may not often bring the desired improvements in the quality of life of mountain people, nor are they able to support the maintenance of the fragile ecosystem, nonetheless we can expect changes to sweep across the region (Shrestha 1993), because change is eternal and inevitable.

In the process of choosing a holistic framework of analysis for the sustainable development of HKH areas, contentious issues will arise – devising appropriate measures to benefit the inhabitants and their physical surroundings; mainstreaming versus protecting and nurturing identities of minority groups; striking a balance between increasing income and ecological sustainability; area-based planning versus national and regional interest; and so on and so forth. But planners must remain steadfast in protecting the interests; of the mountains through a commitment to the mountain perspective, as too much is at stake. The Annexes (1-3) provide some illustrative views and matrices showing the Mountain Vulnerability Cycle, a new Mountain Perspective, and the role of social science in current ICIMOD activities.

The issues facing poverty, social development, and environmental management in the HKH areas pose the greatest challenge for the countries of the region. Over the years, ICIMOD has carefully studied the issues and has come up with identifying, and to some extent experimenting with, activities that can address the issues facing the future comprehensively. Based on the mountain specificities and their specific niche, strategies to overcome the odds against sound and sustainable development in the HKH have been put forward by ICIMOD. The 'Agenda for the Future' contains strategies to deal with the poverty and vulnerability of mountain communities, recognising their comparative advantages and strengths (Sharma 1993). Additionally, an agenda for action needs to place special emphasis on social and human development of HKH communities, as the current experience and wisdom suggest that economic growth and social-human development should never be put into separate boxes. An objective but empathic understanding of the people and their choices and their ways of life

must accompany all planning and strategic action plans. The Social Science Perspective and tools must guide this understanding and follow up with strategic choices in the best interests of the mountain communities, as well as in the best interests of the nation states they inhabit.

From Self-contained Hamlets to Regional and Global Integration



- Lack of supportive policies, regulations, and incentives for sustainable use of mountain natural resources
- Inadequate policy response development interventions based on one-size-fits-all research