

Introduction

Slow growth in productive employment constitutes a major challenge for the countries in the Hindu Kush - Himalaya Region. The rapidly increasing population, reduced cultivated area per family, deteriorating hill environments, lack of appropriate technologies, and generally difficult conditions of access and communication are some of the limiting factors to the growth of productive employment, and consequent eradication of poverty. If present trends in population growth continue, the twin problems of unemployment and poverty are likely to deteriorate further, despite recent development programmes being implemented in mountain areas.

The issue of employment generation in the hills is to be perceived in the context of the increasing inability of conventional land - based activities to productively absorb the growing number of job seekers. The need for rapid development of off - land employment opportunities in the Hindu Kush - Himalaya has been underscored by ICIMOD's reviews and workshops conducted in various specialised fields. While work in the Watershed Management Programme has indicated increasing pressures on watersheds from growing populations and changing hill farming conditions, the Rural Energy Programme has highlighted pressures on land in terms of large - scale deforestation and persisting reliance on fuelwood. A third view has emerged from work focused on Rural - Urban Linkages : the forces of urban development will become increasingly significant in the expansion of off -land employment opportunities in mountain regions. While further work is necessary in all of these subjects a common conclusion from the three previous workshops has been that employment generating activities in the hills should be increasingly directed away from dependency on land.

The purpose of the Off - Farm Employment Generation Work Programme over the past year has been to conduct state - of - the - art reviews, and identify major issues for the Region. There have been many off - farm employment activities in the development plans of different governments in the Region. What impact has there been on generating non - agricultural jobs in these hills ? How have programmes differed from country to country ? Based upon these reviews, this Workshop on off - farm employment, inviting experts active in mountain development, was organised to discuss and exchange field experiences.

This workshop report presents key issues underlying the need for productive employment generation in the hills. It discusses the issues of rapid population growth, and the consequent increases in labour supply, and the growing pressures on land - based resources in the context of off - farm employment generation and integrated mountain development. The next section focuses on the workshop discussions. This is followed by a brief presentation of the research priorities emerging from the Workshop. The last section of this report provides summaries of the background papers dealing with off - farm issues in countries of the Hindu Kush - Himalaya Region.

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