

## Collaborative Research Priorities

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One of the outcomes of the Workshop was identification of priority research issues in off - farm employment generation. To facilitate contribution by the participants, a tentative agenda of research was presented at the beginning of the Workshop. The premise was put forward that a better understanding of the issues and factors involved in generating off - farm employment necessitated that any action programme be preceded by careful evaluation and research work.

The Workshop succeeded in highlighting many critical areas of importance which require further investigation. The mountain areas have been experiencing significant structural changes. Population growth and distribution are undergoing major changes in the Region. There are indications of growing biotic pressures, resulting from a disequilibrium between demand and availability of natural resources. Because of the relatively strong interlinkages between different activities and the environment, it is important to understand the role of each variable in an overall equation of environmental conservation and development.

The issue of labour demand in mountain economies has not been explored. While at one extreme there is the problem of disaggregation beyond the conventional census categories, at the other extreme is the problem of conceptually and empirically understanding what is essentially a single integrated system so far as rural household activities such as producing, transporting, and marketing are concerned.

The development of towns and urban centres has been relatively limited in mountain areas due to their inaccessibility. This has constrained the potential for specialisation, marketing, and expansion of trading and exchange networks, perpetuating subsistence pocket economies and a highly dispersed system of settlement. Understanding the development of urban functions in hill towns and their effects on rural areas is an important development question. Other issues are related to effective public interventions for promoting mutually beneficial rural - urban linkages necessary for generating income and employment for the rapidly increasing hill population, likely to move into urban areas in increasing numbers in the future. From the viewpoint of the potential of public policy to enhance mountain household incomes, what are the key aspects of the trade, portering, and commercial finance networks of the Region? At what specific points can government intervention assist? Consideration may be given to transport, credit, and pricing policies.

Similarly, with respect to manufacturing, what are the key constraints to development of mountain manufacturing? ( Consideration might be given to : power supplies, skilled labour, transport and markets, etc.). How can the manufacturing industry be used to stimulate small - scale ancillaries, component subcontractors, etc.? What are the priority areas of research and what government policies are most relevant to stimulating industry in the mountains?

Certain areas of the Region have long been major beneficiaries from organised tourism, trekking, and mountaineering, as well as religious pilgrimages. Other areas are just beginning to embark on active policies to encourage tourism, and it is to be expected that in the future, many more will become tourist attractions. How can tourism be expanded, while minimising deleterious effects on rural areas and maximising local multiplier effects (in terms of stimulating local agriculture and horticulture to supply foods, beverages, handicrafts, textiles, and trade promotion)? What government policies are most relevant in achieving these aims? Are there important areas of research in assessing the impact of tourism on off - farm employment ? What environmental and cultural effects do tourism, trekking, mountaineering, and pilgrimages have ? Governments will undoubtedly make major investments to protect, manage, and develop environmental resources in these hills. How can these investments be made so that they do not become environmental projects alone but also important sources of employment and income ?

There are also important questions in the field of human resource development, particularly the scarcity of technical manpower in general and specifically in rural areas. With women comprising half of the active labour force of the hills with an equally significant contribution to off - farm activities, it is urgent to find effective mechanisms for increasing their productivity and reducing their drudgery.

Increasing demand for energy is an inevitable result of development. The hill areas are experiencing major supply bottlenecks in conventional sources of energy like firewood, and at the same time, inaccessibility and costs prohibit large - scale importation of external energy inputs. In the context of employment generation, what are the difficulties posed by energy constraints ?

Many of these issues and questions are interrelated. Prioritising the list of issues has not been easy due to differences in conditions, policies, and programmes in the Region. Thus, in identifying the key areas of focus, emphasis has been on selecting those issues interrelated with many areas and institutions, and the common links in different sectoral programmes that are not ordinarily examined by any one agency. Obviously no list, no matter how comprehensive, can incorporate all problems or reflect all priorities. The list of issues presented below attempts to incorporate some of those most frequently emphasised in the Workshop.

- **Trade and Marketing Strategies**, in the context of hill development, related to every major issue of off - farm activities and particularly

significant for the development of informal sector off - farm activities.

- **Rural - Urban Linkages : Role of Towns**, important for future concentration of development forces which would play a vital role in achieving rural development, and which is a presently neglected area in most programmes for integrated rural development projects.
- **Remote Area Development**, focusing on the role of accessibility improvements and inter - sectoral linkages between infrastructure development and other production activities in relatively inaccessible areas in the mountains.
- **Technical Manpower Development** for upgrading the quality of the labour force, particularly for the technical skills required in urban areas. There are undoubtedly large gaps even in rural areas, but this is a matter of priority in terms of the available opportunities.
- **Energy and Employment** for understanding the relations between energy and employment and the development of more comprehensive energy plans that have positive effects upon employment generation in the hills and also reduce the growing energy - related pressures of development on the forests in these mountains.
- **Environmental Rehabilitation Programmes and their Employment Potentials** as areas of increasing investment in these hills in the future, and planning of these programmes to address the problems of providing large - scale employment for the hill people.
- **Employment Effects of Tourism** as a sector with great potential for development, having important employment effects both in rural and urban areas, about which little is known in terms of how policies can enhance employment.
- **Women and Off - Farm Activities : Enhancements of Productivity** studies focusing on how programmes can be developed that can enhance their productivity, which activities should be selected, what type of supporting services are required, etc. ?
- **Long - Term Perspectives of Mountain Development**, in order to highlight the critical choices and policies necessary for integrated mountain development.

ICIMOD's contribution consists of developing better understanding of these important issues that span different institutions, areas, and regions. Although not directly involved in the formulation and the implementation of policies and programmes, through carefully planned collaborative exercises the Centre can highlight relevant experiences, and promote efforts for regional cooperation.