



Sustainable Agriculture
and Rural Development
MOUNTAIN POLICY PROJECT



International Centre for
Integrated Mountain Development

SARD-M Policy Assessments in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas

The greater Himalayan region sustains approximately **150 million people** and has major impacts on the lives of three times as many people living on the plains and in the river basins below. Not only the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayan region is also **the poorest and most complex**. Despite its rich cultural and biological diversity, the majority of people in this vast mountain region are **abysmally poor and vulnerable to environmental, social and economic threats**. Such threats have allowed for discontent and conflict to simmer, erupting into on-going violence in several areas.

Bhutan, China, India and Nepal

- **Bhutan:** Agriculture forms the main source of livelihood for 79% of Bhutanese who have depended for centuries on natural resources for their livelihoods, culture and well-being. However, increasing population, commercialization and rapid globalization have triggered a transformation in social values, local institutions and traditional perceptions towards the use and management of resources. Bhutan adopted a "middle path approach to development" gradually leading to the concept of "Gross National Happiness" that focuses on sustainable and equitable development, preservation and promotion of Bhutanese culture, environmental conservation and promotion of good governance.
- **China (Sichuan):** Mountainous areas account for 70% of China's land area and are inhabited by more than half of its population. Compared to the rural plains and lowlands, mountainous areas are generally marginalized from the development process. With the increasing disparities between urban and rural areas, the rural mountain areas are suffering from low productivity and efficiency in agricultural production, poor social services, and low per capita income. In the past decades, enormous efforts, supported by a range of policies, have been made to address these problems, known as San Nong Issues, but the results have been limited.
- **India (Sikkim):** Sikkim is a small State constituting 0.22 percent of India's land area. Its population is mostly rural (89%). Amongst the Indian Himalayan States, Sikkim has the highest percentage of people below the poverty line (36.6%) and the highest percentage of undernourished people (57%). The sloping lands are three to four times less efficient than the plains in meeting the caloric and protein needs of their populations. The State and Central Governments have undertaken a number of measures to address problems associated with inaccessibility, fragility, and marginality. Sikkim is also taking up measures to harness its mountains' comparative advantages (cultural and biological diversity, niche markets, and human capital).
- **Nepal:** Landlocked and mountainous, Nepal has remained one of the poorest countries in the world. A majority of the people still live in rural areas and the country is characterized by extreme inequality in almost all aspects of development, rapid population growth, a fragile environment, chronic poverty and escalating insurgency. Agriculture contributes about 40% of the gross domestic product and employs 60% of the labour force. Those in need of special attention in terms of human development are children, women, *dalits* (untouchables), ethnic minorities (many of whom live in mountain areas), marginal subsistence farmers, agricultural labourers and the urban poor.



Diverse entry points of HKH policy assessments

Specific sectors or subjects covered by development interventions were identified in the four countries, through which the country's policies, institutions and processes for SARD-focused interventions and priorities could be assessed. Based on discussions with the researchers, the following policy topics were chosen as entry points: **Bhutan – Land Use Policies for SARD; China, Sichuan – Agricultural and Rural Development Policies for Mountain Areas; India, Sikkim – Horticulture as a Driver of Rural Development; and Nepal – The Agricultural Perspective Plan.**

Some similarities between the four countries

Positive aspects

- The past rigidities, lack of coordination and decentralization are diminishing and the use of participatory processes that integrate environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions of change is gradually picking up. This signals an **important beginning in more clearly and effectively incorporating SARD-M principles, i.e. cross-sectoral, integrated, multistakeholder and participatory policy formulation and implementation**, in agricultural and rural development policies.
- **Since the macro-level approach** to SARD-M, with all its positive attributes, has **some operational limitations**, it is increasingly supplemented by **micro-level initiatives**, which help to encourage community involvement and ensure focus on a bottom-up approach.

Gaps

- Practically all the countries have neglected **mountain specificities** in the design and implementation of development interventions.
- Due to past practices and backgrounds, principles of the **SARD-M framework** are still not fully addressed.
- Despite a visible degree of awareness of the importance of involving primary stakeholders in planning, designing, and implementing interventions and the need for a cross-sectoral approach, the assessments reveal a continuing **weakness in the capacities** to act upon this awareness, partly due to the past practices and systems of priority setting and integration of relevant activities and decisions.
- **Gaps** still exist **between planning and implementation** of interventions.
- A more systematic approach to policy and programme is needed to overcome the ad hocism that exists in the shaping and timing of interventions.
- Many of the countries demonstrate a **low degree of inter-agency coordination** in development planning and implementation.

Recommendations of the Project Regional Workshop

The important - at times overlapping - concerns and suggestions that found frequent mention in the assessments and during the SARD-M Project Regional Workshop in the HKH, attended by senior policy makers, representatives of civil society, international organizations and some bilateral development agencies, are listed below.

Policies

1. Use Gross National Happiness as promoted in Bhutan, a concept of development that shares similar features to the SARD-M approach, as a possible path for SARD-M once it is put into a concrete usable form.
2. Introduce a more systematic approach to policy formulation using an integrated framework for SARD-M policy-programme formulation / promotion / evaluation, rather than depending on largely ad-hoc approaches.
3. Promote awareness, understanding and use of the mountain perspective framework as a tool for designing and implementing SARD-M policies, and for identifying priority areas and groups.
4. Give higher priority to human resource development, equity and women's issues to make SARD-M policies more inclusive.

5. Develop effective and equitable market links (especially with the lowland economy) to ensure developmental gains for mountain people.
6. Focus greater attention on the less-explored issue of supplementing macro approaches with micro-level initiatives and their up-scaling.

Institutions

7. Enhance capacities and coordination of public sectoral agencies/departments dealing with SARD policy making and implementation as an important requirement for SARD-M.
8. Empower mountain people through education, strengthening bargaining capacities and needed autonomy to enhance SARD-M.
9. Reduce duplication and turf-wars through functional coordination and complementarities between different agencies including government departments.

Processes

10. Create a comprehensive database and analytical studies to assist sound and integrated policy making for SARD-M.
11. Enhance interactions between stakeholders at different levels to better balance top-down and bottom-up approaches and processes required to promote SARD-M.
12. Reform institutions to enhance local participation in policy making/ implementation, implying genuine decentralization.
13. Upgrade local/grassroots level awareness and capacity building to improve involvement of local stakeholders/communities in policy-programme formulation and implementation through a bottom-up approach.
14. Rationalise resource allocation and investment priorities for mountains vis-à-vis lowland economies, with clear understanding of mountain specificities.
15. Improve resource mobilization to reduce donor-dependency and harness public-private complementarities in promoting SARD-M.
16. Strengthen mutual sharing and systematic synthesis of past development/policy intervention experiences and build the future approaches based on successful experiences to make the SARD-M approach more dynamic and effective.

Proposals for Follow-up Activities

The country reports as well as the regional workshop deliberations identified a range of follow-up actions at regional and national levels. The workshop participants prioritized these activities to be taken up as follows:

At the national level

Bhutan

- Conduct further studies on land markets, taxation and administration systems as an essential input towards developing and implementing a more holistic land use policy and an equitable land reform agenda.
- Assess the capacity building needs of elected officials and local governments and develop and implement a training programme.



China – Sichuan Province

- Conduct a study to assess policy making and implementation processes in the Hengduan ranges.
- Conduct a Sichuan provincial level consultation workshop (with participation from central government agencies) to discuss the findings of the assessment.

India – Sikkim State

- Identify and document successful horticulture-related enterprises and establish cooperatives and groups for up-scaling production and marketing.
- Conduct a study to assess land tenure, inheritance and fragmentation issues and propose options for their resolution.
- Conduct a detailed feasibility study for 'going organic', which is the adopted policy of the state, identifying potential products as well as measures to tackle constraints and barriers.

Nepal

- Study the opportunities for adopting organic farming under the framework of the Agricultural Perspective Plan.
- Study the impact of the removal of fertiliser subsidies with particular reference to the implications for food security.

At the regional level

- Build stakeholders' capacity at different levels of government in policy processes including formulation, analysis, negotiation and advocacy;
- Identify and put into operation methodologies/approaches for policy formulation that integrate micro-level issues and concerns into macro-level policies;
- Conduct more in-depth institutional analyses in all four countries to identify mechanisms to make policy development and advocacy more inclusive;
- Empower mountain people in the identification of problems and issues and in negotiating skills;
- Sensitise local government officials, elected bodies, civil societies, lobby groups and farmers' cooperatives in understanding and promoting good SARD policies and practices;
- Establish mechanisms for experience sharing in the region particularly in the replication of successful enterprises based on niche mountain products;
- Facilitate south-south exchange of expertise in various mountain development fields and enterprises;
- Establish a virtual network for sharing experiences, views and concerns on mountain issues;
- Build the future approaches based on successful experiences to make the SARD-M approach more dynamic and effective.

Contact Information



▲ Regional Focal Point

Contact: Kamal Banskota

Address:
ICIMOD
G.P.O. Box 3226, Khumaltar
Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: (+977) 1 500-3222

Fax: (+977) 1 500-3299, 500-3277

E-mail: kbanskota@icimod.org.np

Website: <http://www.icimod.org>

▲ SARD-M Team

Contact: Jean Gault or Takashi Takahatake

Address:
Economic and Social Development Department
Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations (FAO)
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy

Phone: (+39) 06 570-54204

Fax: (+39) 06 570-52004

E-mail: takashi.takahatake@fao.org,

jean.gault@fao.org

Website: www.fao.org/sard/sard-m