

Evaluation of SARD-M policies in Latin America

The Andean Cordillera is the world's most extensive mountain range stretching over more than 8500 km, and covering a total area of 3.8 million km². The socio-economic and institutional changes that have taken place there in recent decades have increased the pressure on its natural resources, weakened the internal social organisation and provoked a "cultural erosion" of Andean society (the rural households and communities), highlighting the constraints of mountain zones and weakening the abilities of the local people to overcome them. Most of the people are very poor, and are vulnerable to social, economic and environmental threats (which are tending to expand). These threats have been a source of discontent, and have caused outbreaks of conflict, resulting in unabated violence in some areas.

Three countries have been chosen, as a representative sample, to provide a picture of the state of agricultural and rural development policies in the Andean mountains: Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. Their total population is over 82 million, and together they cover more than 3 million km², and since they drain into the Amazon and Orinoco basins, they influence the lives of far more numerous communities downstream of them.

Colombia, Ecuador, Peru: the current situation

Surveys have been conducted in several representative mountain regions, producing results that are often very close. Firstly, the poverty levels are seriously high: some 40% of the local people live on less than one dollar/day (less than three dollars/day in Ecuador). Farms are very small: depending on the country, only 10% of the farm owners have more than 3-5 ha and their livelihoods are equally precarious because about one-half of all the farmers have no title deeds to their lands.

This poverty was also reflected in school attendance rates: many people had dropped out of primary school (50% in Colombia, and 87% in Ecuador), although the situation would appear to be less serious in Peru (only 12%).

These regions are very rich in natural resources, particularly water, but they suffer from pollution, soil erosion and sometimes deforestation problems, which are potential sources of conflict.

The mountain regions are isolated, not only geographically but also in the sense that 90% of the people interviewed felt that the State ignored them (the figure was slightly lower in Ecuador). These people do not even know of the existence of any laws or rules, and where they do, they do not know what they are. It therefore emerges that the citizens' institutional commitment is limited: over one-half of the people do not even know whether any "official organisations" exist for them. Information on markets is therefore negligible, marketing facilities are inadequate, and credit policy and agricultural assistance is very limited.

An entry point for policy evaluation

Water was identified by the local populations as an issue of extreme importance. The assessments therefore focused attention on "integrated natural resource management policies for SARD" as the analysis entry point. The assessments not only identified the major water-related policies and institutions, but also examined the main agricultural development, environmental management and forest policies.

The results of the three case studies

Over the past 20 years the governments of these three countries have demonstrated their **readiness to step up investment in rural zones** in the fields of education, health care and infrastructure development. But both the statistics and the findings of the surveys confirm that, given the degree to which these communities have been left to their own devices, **the impact is not yet visible, and rural poverty conditions are still prevalent**, and in some cases they have worsened. Intervention by the institutions is inefficient and ineffective, and internal contradictions sometimes emerge between different areas of activity. In the Andean countries no such category as "mountains" exists as a specific object of agricultural or natural resource policy, but every country has enacted wide-ranging legislation and exercises institutional powers over the development and management of these territories. There is a tendency to view these ecosystems purely from a biophysical point of view. In all three countries, most of the territories lie in protected areas, and increasingly acknowledged is being given to their importance as generators of water and biodiversity. Even though they suffer from various ecosystem sustainability issues: logging, increased crop production, increased livestock production, the negative impact of reservoirs/dams and roads, fires, plant and animal extractive activities and the negative repercussions of mining and quarrying, the planting of exotic forest species and the impetus given to uncontrolled tourism.

1. Insufficient governance:

It often appears that the political decisions are not appropriate, nor welcomed; in particular, laws or norms are not being complied with, either because of the citizens' lack of knowledge, or because of the inadequacy of the decisions taken. The surveys showed the following, *inter alia*:

- There is no real long-term planning.
- Policies give priority to improving productivity, particularly of exportable goods.
- Rural development policies are sectoral and run from the centre; lip service is paid to participation, but it is not permitted when decisions are taken; although some functions are being decentralised, there is little decentralisation of resources.
- The high degree of public mistrust in the State exists at all levels.
- General rules and strategies are being implemented without considering the heterogeneity of different regions, ethnic groups, small and large producers or gender-related conditions.
- There is a low level of compliance with rules, because they do not meet the needs, and are either unknown or not taken on board.
- The results are poor and there is little impact assessment.

2. Unsustainable development:

Economic development is a top priority, but the implementation of this priority is done in a particular way, detrimental to a real sustainable development.

- In practice the sustainability of renewable sustainable resources is not valorised; there are clashes between agricultural policies and natural resources (such as water, expanding arable lands and competitiveness).
- Natural resources are becoming increasingly degraded.
- Deforestation is a recurrent theme, and there is no clear view of the prospects or rules for resolving this problem. This obviously leads to a serious loss of biodiversity in all three countries.
- There is soil loss, caused by erosion and sedimentation problems, and soil contamination due to excessive pesticide-use.
- There is evident water loss, in terms of water levels, rainfall and water quality according to the data recorded on all three countries. This problem has a greater impact on the lower part of the catchment areas.

Positive influences on rural development and sustainable resource-use

- Climate, species and crop diversity as potential for driving development; there is still abundant water availability; good infrastructure exists (linking small farmers to the markets).
- Wide-ranging institutional oversight of the agricultural, livestock and environmental sectors.
- Decentralisation.
- The greater stability of provincial and cantonal governments than the central government.

Negative influences on rural development and sustainable resource-use

- The lack of long-term central government policies for the sector; the high level of mistrust in relations between central government and the rural population; the low level of participation by the rural people in framing policies and strategies.
- The governments' weak negotiating capacity with international organizations.
- Small farmers' low skill levels in all areas.
- Discrimination and marginalization of poor groups, particularly the indigenous and mestizo small farmers; rising poverty and exclusion levels; the predominance of a smallholding-based structure, low schooling levels among small farmers and indigenous people, and a high level of functional illiteracy.
- Poor familiarity and compliance with the rules governing the sector; the enforcement of penalties is uneven and mostly affects the poorest people.
- High level of conflict between certain players, and little interaction between different players.
- Poor valorisation of woodlands, their resources and the services they generate.
- Little information is available on market opportunities, technological alternatives, rights and duties.

Recommendations

In the case studies a number of recommendations were made based both on the interviews and the discussion of the findings of the surveys with farmers, officials and the other social stakeholders in the watersheds. At the workshop in Lima at the end of March 2007, these recommendations were retained and others were incorporated:

Policies

1. Designing policies with a medium- and long-term vision, and with a territorial development approach, and not only a sectoral development approach, designed to reduce poverty, improve the quality of life, reduce exclusion and achieve greater equitability.
2. Designing policies to back up decentralisation in mountain areas.
3. Introducing monetary and non-monetary incentives, and clarifying the penalties and sanctions.
4. Generating policies which contribute to improving participation and encouraging communal organisation.

Institutions

5. Encouraging institutional coordination and integration at the national, regional and local levels.
6. Replacing the current sectoral approach taken by the institutions with a broader vision which coincides with the rural territorial development plans.

Processes

7. Supporting participatory planning.
8. Putting in place mechanisms to strengthen local government action for sustainable natural resource management and rural development; designing mechanisms to foster a balance between top-down and bottom-up measures.



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9. Establishing and/or improving skill training, technical assistance and information access both for the rural population and for officials and technicians.
10. Empowering communities to exercise citizenship.
11. Supporting environmental education programmes, plateau management, reforestation and watershed management.
12. Improving transport, marketing and communications infrastructure.

Proposed follow-up activities

These recommendations can be implemented in terms of two approaches, to support:

1) Decentralisation:

- Reviving the national "mountains" groups in Ecuador and Peru, and if possible in other Andean countries, and facilitating links between them.
- Developing policy notes to facilitate decision-taking by these groups.
- Disseminating SARD-M information through info Andina and its partners.
- Co-operating with the Andean Community in giving prominence to regionwide issues.

2) Mountain development territorial approaches:

- Conducting a regional-level analysis of the conclusions drawn by the watershed management survey.
- Researching models to promote integrated mechanisms to optimise and strengthen links between towns and the rural world.
- Initiating studies into migration.
- Surveying changes in land use.
- Beginning a census of Environmental Services Payment measures in the Andes.

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