



Sustainable Agriculture
and Rural Development
MOUNTAIN POLICY PROJECT



SARD-M project: Progress of the first three years (Summary)

1. Background

The SARD-M project liaises between Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) and Mountain issues. The project recalls the importance of these issues - both discussed at the Rio Conference in 1992 - and identifies the many challenges of Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain regions (SARD-M), and calls for coherent policies, instruments and programmes. Indeed about 270 million mountain people lack food security, of whom 135 million are chronically hungry.

As the United Nations lead agency on both sustainable agriculture and rural development and mountain issues, FAO, with support from the French and Swiss (and Japanese) governments, prepared a five-year multi-donor project on SARD-M: this is a unique opportunity for all concerned stakeholders – governments, the international community and civil society – to develop joint initiatives in favour of sustainable development.

2. Objectives of SARD-M project

The SARD-M project aims to facilitate the design, implementation and evaluation of new policies for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain regions. The project also takes into consideration the essential linkages between mountain and lowland populations.

The program has three specific objectives:

- To raise awareness among policy-makers, the international community and civil society, on the role and value of mountain ecosystems and the need for SARD-M specific policies, legislations and institutions.
- To build national capacity to promote SARD-M policies and instruments, adopting a participatory approach to decision making.
- To support in-country implementation of SARD-M policies – by facilitating the mobilization of the necessary human, institutional and financial resources.

SARD-M works i) with the Adelboden Group as an advisor: the group is made up of different stakeholders (civil society, governments and international organizations) from all regions of the world, ii) on the orientations and decisions of the project's steering committee, iii) with the FAO Interdepartmental Working Group on Mountains as an advisor , iiiii) and with Regional Focal Points : they are the central pivots of the project, liaising with all partners and related projects, linking global and national dimensions – in (Africa) Asia, Europe, (Central America), South America, the Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East –.

3. Outputs: rapid policy assessments

Rapid assessments were conducted (2005-2007) to provide an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various policies related to SARD-M. They also provided recommendations and proposals for follow-up activities that could assist in improving the situation in the country where the analysis was conducted. The assessments were not aimed at conducting an in-depth analysis of policies in a specific sector, but at providing more of a cross sectoral picture. The overall goal is to stimulate thought and actions from all concerned stakeholders at the country and regional levels, so as to improve policy, institutions and processes for SARD-M.

Because the subject area of SARD is so vast and because the SARD-M policy assessments had to be conducted in a variety of countries and contexts, it was deemed important to develop a general framework that would ensure that each of the assessments examined a common set of issues.

Key characteristics of the SARD-M policy approach and assessments include:

- 1) **Sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD):** Agriculture and rural development are sustainable when they are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just and culturally appropriate. SARD addresses not only agriculture but also natural resources, the environment, health, as well as social, institutional and economic sectors.
- 2) **Policies, institutions, and processes:** The SARD-M policy assessments place a particular emphasis on examining the processes and institutions that are involved in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies.
- 3) **Mountain specificities:** Mountain regions have specificities that provide potentials for products and activities that have a comparative advantage. The assessments examine how the various potentialities and diversities can be harnessed to promote sustainable development.
- 4) **Participatory and qualitative approach:** The analyses are qualitative in nature and utilize a participatory approach at every step of the process. Multi-stakeholder workshops at decentralised and/or national levels are also held to gather information and opinions. Based on the outputs of the country assessments, regional workshops are organized.

The SARD-M policy assessments also examine the relevant economic, social, environmental and institutional policies related to the entry point and to other related issues to bring about a cross-sectoral understanding. They have been led in the following countries (2005-2007):

- **Asia:** Bhutan, China (Sichuan), India (Sikkim), Nepal
- **Latin America:** Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua
- **Europe and Mediterranean Basin:** Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Albania, Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Lebanon, Morocco

4. Main findings (2005-2007)

The main commonalities regarding policies, institutions and processes for SARD-M that were mentioned in the regional syntheses are listed below.

Policies

Lack of strategies for sustainable development in mountain regions

The development of policies for sustainable development requires a **long-term vision** and a **holistic approach**. For the most part, policies tend to be developed on a short-term basis and there are a general lack of strategies and integrated approach to policies. Even when policy frameworks for sustainable development or SARD exist, specific strategies or approaches for mountain regions have not been developed.

Political stability was also mentioned as an issue in a couple of regions. If a country experiences frequent changes in government, it is difficult to have coherent policies as the vision and priorities of government plans and programmes can change.

Little consideration of mountain specificities in policies for SARD partly due to low awareness of the importance of mountains

The specificities of mountains are often not taken into consideration during the design and implementation of policies.

The failure to take into account mountain specificities in policies can be associated with the low level of awareness of policy and decision makers regarding the importance and significance of mountain regions, its people and to its neighbours. At the same time, there is a general lack of awareness by local people, civil society and decision-makers of existing policies affecting mountain resources.

The key question to be addressed in the countries is whether it is necessary to have a specific policy for mountains or whether important aspects of them should be incorporated into present and future policies of relevance to SARD-M. There is a greater tendency to try to incorporate mountain issues into national policies.

Policies supporting value-added production and services in mountain regions essential for sustainable agriculture and rural development

Policies were criticized for their weak focus on mountain livelihood issues. A strong need was felt for policies that promoted **diversification and integration of economic activities**, such as ecotourism, mountain quality products, value-added production, etc. Such activities can also contribute to the valorisation of the cultural heritage of mountain populations.

However, upland areas which are typically difficult to access have a harder time in accessing markets in lowland and urban areas. Improved access to markets and services found in these areas as well as the promotion of public-private partnerships were seen to be important to improve the socio-economic condition of mountain populations.

Institutions

Inadequate institutional capacities for participatory SARD-M policy formulation and implementation

The issue of **capacity building** was something that came out strongly. This issue is particularly important for institutions in mountain regions, which tend to be more isolated and marginalized from the national development and policy processes.



Weak coordination of institutions at the national level

Better coordination is needed to achieve a greater complementarity and coherence between policies developed in various sectors related to SARD-M.

Need for cooperation at the transnational level

Mountain ranges often act as natural borders and are therefore typically shared between countries. The need to strengthen transnational institutional coordination is thus an issue of concern.

Processes

Inadequate knowledge management, exchange of information and networking regarding mountain regions

One of the major problems identified regarding policy processes for SARD-M is that there is a **lack of basic information and data about mountains**. While socio-economic data exists at the national level, it is often not aggregated to take into account mountain regions. Having access to better organization of data and creation of databases to facilitate access to information is seen as important to help policymakers make informed decisions taking into account mountain specificities. Improving communication of mountain areas data can also contribute to raise awareness of the issues facing the people of these regions and facilitate advocacy and lobbying by civil society.

Limited participation in policy formulation

The formulation of policies tends to be conducted in a top-down manner with a **weak participation of local populations and diverse stakeholders at all levels**. Mountain populations tend to be less aware of their rights and have weaker capacities of advocacy and skills to participate in policy formulation.

Weak monitoring and evaluation of policies

Weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of the impacts that policies have in mountain regions and of the policy implementation processes are a general issue of concern.

While this issue can be seen as a problem for SARD policies in general, the issue becomes more problematic in mountain regions. Policies which are poorly adapted to the bio-physical conditions of mountain areas can have highly negative impacts on the environment and livelihoods of mountain populations.

Key principles for improved policy packages and institutional processes for SARD in Mountain regions

Based on the interregional commonalities, the following key interrelated and interdependent principles can be identified as being important for the development of improved policy packages and institutional processes for SARD-M.

Policies	Institutions	Processes
Development of sustainable agriculture and rural development strategies which integrates into policies the specificities of mountain regions	Adaptation of institutional capacities to facilitate participatory SARD-M policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Knowledge management, exchange of information and networking regarding mountain regions
Raising awareness of mountain specificities	Coordination of institutions at the national level through appropriate institutional arrangements	Participation in policy formulation
Development of policies that support value-added production and services in mountain regions essential for sustainable mountain development	Cooperation at the transnational level through appropriate institutional arrangements	Monitoring and evaluation of policies

The recommendations and key messages on policies, institutions and processes for SARD-M included in the Statement of the Adelboden Group released on 3 October 2007 highly converge with the above principles.¹

5. Key issues for the future

The following outlines the key issues of importance identified in the SARD-M policy assessment reports and discussions held during regional workshops, which mountain stakeholders feel are important to address in more detail in the future.

Valorisation of positive externalities, such as environmental externalities (Andes; Carpathians)

Sustainable development of mountain areas ensures adequate supplies of water, environmental stability, conservation of biodiversity, rural-urban population balance, specific products and culture, etc. The goods and services that mountains provide are often not taken into account by the market and are known as positive externalities.

External economic and environmental pressures will lead to radical change in the distinctive characteristics and values of mountains unless appropriate policies are in place to ensure the continued supply of externalities. **Positive externalities can help communities survive; without communities many of the positive externalities will not survive.**

The valorisation of positive externalities, through mechanisms such as payments for environmental services, is therefore an issue that requires further examination and action.

Rural-urban migration (Mediterranean region; Hindu Kush-Himalayas)

As young and working age people tend to migrate to urban areas to find employment, the women, children and elderly tend to be left behind. This leads to the "feminization of agriculture" and

¹ See the full document in the SARD-M Project website: <http://www.fao.org/sard/en/sardm/about/651/index.html>

"hollowization of rural areas". Rural urban migrations generate more and stronger pressures on urban infrastructure and can lead to chaotic urban sprawl.

However migration can also have positive effects for sustainable mountain development by alleviating population pressures on the land and resources and by providing an opportunity for mountain households to earn income through employment in urban areas.

Gender and equity issues (Hindu Kush Himalaya; Mediterranean region)

In theory SARD-M policies should take gender and equity issues into consideration, but they tend to get sidetracked partly due to narrow growth-oriented focus of the interventions. Mountain populations in general tend to have a weaker voice and capacities which can marginalize them from development and policy processes, thus generating or reinforcing inequity.

Cultural heritage of mountain regions (Andes; Hindu Kush-Himalaya; Mediterranean region)

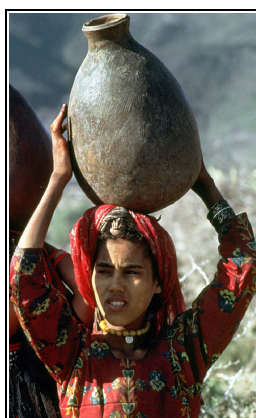
With contemporary globalization, distinct patterns of change are today visible in the mountain regions. This results in a rapid transformation in social values and traditional perceptions that threatens the diverse and unique cultural heritage of mountains. Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage refer to a whole way of life from which a social order is communicated. Their traditional knowledge, systems and practices are well-adapted to mountain environments and can serve as an appropriate basis for sustainable natural resources management. They have potentials to achieve SARD in mountain regions through activities such as the production of handicrafts, maintenance of remarkable sites and landscapes that can be the basis for economic valorisation.

For more information:

Interregional analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of policies, institutions and processes for SARD in mountain regions

<http://www.fao.org/sard/common/ecg/3003/en/SARDMinterregionalanalysisE.pdf>

Contact Information



▲ SARD-M Team

Contact: Jean Gault

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: jean.gault@fao.org

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

March 2009