

Creation of ICIMOD and its Expected Role in addressing Regional Environmental and Developmental Challenges

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As ICIMOD prepares itself to celebrate its 25th Anniversary in 2008 ; India, one of its eight Regional Members, sets up a Task Force in May, 2008 ‘for analyzing the problems of Hill States and Hill Areas in order to develop proposal for development of the region’. This Task Force constituted by India’s Planning Commission has been given a set of six Terms of Reference to capture and identify the ‘Issues, Concerns and Problems of Hill States and Hill Areas’. The author of this article received an invitation to contribute his suggestions and comments, from the ‘partner institution of ICIMOD in India’, for incorporation in a document purported to be a ‘broad outline of the draft base paper’ for consideration of the aforesaid Task Force ¹.

These two parallel events i.e. celebration of the Silver Jubilee by the ICIMOD and setting up a Task Force by India to analyze the problems of Hill States and Hill Areas, obviously beg, and provoke, the question – ‘Has ICIMOD succeeded in rendering itself irrelevant to the HKH region ?’. If not, what role ICIMOD is likely to play in the making and shaping of this Task Force Report ? Is this Task Force and its Report, as and when it comes, likely to have any significance for ICIMOD, both in regard to its Strategic Framework and the Mid-Term Action Plan 2008-12 (MTAP II) ? Is there a coherence in the planning processes of the Indian Mountain States and ICIMOD, say for the next five years ? Finally, more specifically, does ICIMOD involve itself in similar and related undertakings with, or in, any of its RMCs ; and if not, why not ?

The queries which have been paraphrased above could as well be asked about any one of the eight Regional Member Countries (RMCs) of this august institution and the replies which might be offered in each case are arguably going to be specific to the RMC concerned, so geo-politically diverse unquestionably is the turf ICIMOD traverses in this region. Even so, in securing answers to one RMC- specific situation one might hope to see some light at the end of the tunnel. In this short essay through a time-line

comparison of the various planning processes which have already been completed by ICIMOD, and India ; for its mountain states so far, an attempt would be made to analyze and assess the extent to which it would really be possible for ICIMOD to address the ‘regional (read Indian) expectations’ in the realms of ‘environmental’ and ‘developmental challenges’.

India, Indian Mountains and ICIMOD

More synchronized planning needed

Taking ICIMOD first, post - IVth QQR, at the macro-level, its new Strategic Framework, Responding to the Challenges of Global Change : Enhancing Resilience and Supporting Adaptation of Mountain Communities, is now in place. The Framework focuses on three strategic programmes on (i) Environmental Change and Ecosystem Services (ECES), (ii) Integrated Water and Hazard Management (IWHM), and (iii) Sustainable Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction (SLPR), supported by a cross-cutting (iv) Integrated Knowledge Management approach. The Framework and these Strategic Programmes set ICIMOD’s course for the next five years and the Strategy enlists five strategic goals.

These five strategic goals envisage (i) RMCs’ mainstreaming in their water, ecosystem services and poverty reduction programmes ‘ICIMOD’s knowledge and technical expertise and their wide use’, (ii) value addition and impacting through ‘close collaboration with the national partners through long-term regional research’ and ‘scaling up of programmes’, (iii) regional and global utilization of ‘ICIMOD’s trans-boundary approach, experience, practices and know-how’, (iv) ‘benefiting RMC partners through (their) capacity building and knowledge sharing’ with what ‘ICIMOD is (itself) pro-actively learning and gaining in terms of knowledge and good practices (from whichever source, including the RMCs themselves), and (v) establishment of a ‘vibrant knowledge management and information sharing network’ resulting out of ICIMOD’s ‘support in strengthening key RMC institutions to better address water, ecosystem services, and livelihood related issues in the region’.

Broken-down into strategic outputs, the consolidated MTAP II is guided by the Strategic Framework, and is based on the directives of the Board of Governors and the ICIMOD Support Group and the recommendations of the Fourth QQR (2006). Draft plan has been discussed in national and regional

consultations held in all eight ICIMOD member countries, as well as in regional consultations organized at ICIMOD. Among key recommendations made during the consultations ICIMOD was expected to (i) scaling up of its pilot projects, (ii) development of partnership with centers of excellence, (iii) close engagement with national strategic partners from the planning phase onwards, to avoid duplication, (iv) address climate change related impacts, especially expected water shortages and the degradation of environment services, and (v) focus on high value products, their marketing and value addition, and influence value chains. At the end of it all the MTAP II boils down to ‘13 strategic outputs and indicators to assess results at the end of five years’². Planning for the next five year was broadly approved by the Programme Advisory Committee plus two special invitees (PAC +) in its 9-12 June, 2007 meeting, which suggested ‘some reworking of the poverty thrust, given its critical importance to the RMCs’ and focus ‘on meeting the expectations and priorities of the RMCs and international donors’³.

Indian scenario

The Eleventh Five Year Plan of India (hereafter Eleventh Plan) 2007-12, (with an outlay 120 % higher than the Tenth Plan, at INR 36, 44, 718 crores) was approved by the National Development Council on 19th December 2007.(ICIMOD and Indian Five Year Plans, both end in 2012, in December and March, respectively). The Indian Plan addresses itself to the challenge of making growth both ‘faster and more inclusive’ and, its vision and strategy, has been summarized in just two words ‘Inclusive Growth’⁴. ICIMOD’s Strategic Framework and Mid Term Action Plan II with its ‘13 strategic outputs and output indicators to assess results’ seem to have no direct bearing either with the Indian development Vision and Strategy (Inclusive Growth) or ‘27 national or 13 sub-national monitorable targets’. Why this disconnect and how it impacts on rendering ICIMOD and its ‘strategic programmes’ irrelevant for the mountain regions of India ?. The preceding analysis has shown that time-sequencing of ICIMOD’s MTAP planning has not factored in the Indian planning time – frame. There is no evidence in the ICIMOD literature to suggest if it has taken any notice of the time-frames and priorities of any of its other RMC’s planning processes, either. How could ICIMOD plan in isolation, for the HKH region, without taking into account any of the priorities reflected in the plan documents of its constituent RMCs, irrespective of the plan process followed by the individual RMCs concerned ? This in my view is the basis reason for the

‘disconnect’ which has been alluded to. It follows that ICIMOD continues to remain more, if not exclusively, sensitive to the planning time-frames and processes of its support-group and the donors’.

‘Misplaced’ or ‘Missing’ Nodality ?

Next to this major lacuna is the issue of selecting the right anchor / nodal agency for ICIMOD in the constituent RMCs, an issue which hitherto has not been given any serious thought at all. Out of the eight RMCs, excepting the Peoples’ Republic of China, the ‘nodality’ of ICIMOD is anchored in one Ministry or the other i.e. directly with the Government. The point to ponder, both for the ICIMOD and the RMCs is, is the present ‘nodality’ appropriate or is there a need for a change in view of the Strategic Framework of ICIMOD vis a vis the Strategy of the RMC concerned ? The choice of focus is clearly between ‘environment’ and ‘development’, as subjects / themes. For the RMCs it is not very relevant if it is Ministry ‘X’ or Ministry ‘Y’ which anchors ICIMOD, but for ICIMOD obviously it makes a world of difference when it comes to ‘impacting’ its interventions in the host RMC. ICIMOD Board of Governors need to immediately give this issue the serious thought that it highly deserves. Providing ‘the best fit’ anchoring to ICIMOD in all RMCs is the best gift the Board of Governors could think of giving to ICIMOD on its 25th Anniversary, as it is entirely up to them, individually and collectively !

ICIMOD’s interventions are obviously going to be directed at the Indian Mountain States, where do we find them in the Indian scheme of things ? Indian plan document admits that India has ‘learnt how to bring about growth, but we have yet to achieve comparable success in inclusiveness. Poverty, whether we look at it narrowly in terms of the population below consumption based poverty line or more broadly in terms of population without access to essential services...our people have a right to expect that the evidently increased economic capabilities of our economy are translated into accelerating progress in these dimensions also.’ The above demarcates the band-width of ‘development’ in so far as Indian development interventions and plan-resources for realization of the development goals are concerned.

The Eleventh Plan is geared to build on the achievements of the Tenth Plan ,which was a period of ‘extensive review of environmental processes and law’, by integrating ‘environmental considerations into policy making in

all sectors of the economy - infrastructure, transport, water supply, sanitation, industry, agriculture, and anti-poverty programmes.' Initiatives short-listed by the Indian planners to integrate environmental concerns into planning and development activities include, (i) 'making environment a concurrent subject in the Indian Constitution (presently it is a residual subject), since regulation and enforcement in this area cannot be handled by the Central Government alone and the responsibility of maintaining the environment rests at all levels of government' ; (ii) 'setting up an independent statutory body on sustainable development with the specific responsibility of guiding government policies and programmes for making them more socially and environmentally sustainable, and to monitor and evaluate their outcomes', (iii) 'restructuring of State Pollution Control Boards into statutory Environment Protection Authorities with the mandate of developing regulations, standards and upgraded facilities for enforcing compliance' and such like issues.

Has ICIMOD's strategic programme of ECES taken note of these requirements of India and could these be covered by the 'strategic outputs and indicators' listed for ECES in the MTAP II ? If answers to some of these is in the affirmative, then ICIMOD is certainly 'in business' ⁵. It is only through a pro-active servicing of such 'identified demands' of the RMCs which is going to demonstrate that ICIMOD is now ready 'to do ground-breaking work'. Besides a considerable amount of 'ground-breaking work' an equally sizeable number of 'door-opening assignments' appear over-due, an onerous legacy of 'misplaced' anchoring in RMCs. No wonder the last QQR panel found itself repeatedly undertaking the 'door-opening' exercise on behalf of ICIMOD ! These are the tests which the new Framework is now required to pass and these are the themes where ICIMOD must bring on board its strategic and cooperation partners in India.

Given the band-widths of 'development' and 'environment and climate change' one wonders if the present 'nodality' anchored in the Ministry of Environment and Forests vis a vis ICIMOD is appropriate as the major thrust of the current Indian Plan is going to be 'Inclusive Growth' and not 'Environment' ?

But, is the present 'nodality' for ICIMOD in India (in the Ministry of Environment and Forests) simply a case of 'Misplaced' nodality or that of a 'Missing' one, in so far as its mountain states are concerned ? This is the third major issue which we need to examine at this important juncture.

Bridging Regional Imbalances

The objective of India's Eleventh Plan, as stated, is a 'faster and more inclusive growth' and each of the 13 chapters in its Eleventh Plan deals with what the Plan proposes to do to achieve this dual objective. The Plan acknowledges 'widening income differentials between more developed and relatively poorer States' as a matter of serious concern. In this segment of the Plan the 11 Indian Mountain States (all Special Category States) are contrasted both against each other and against the other 17 Non-Special Category States, with the progress in their growth rates in State Domestic Product during the past three Plans. The Plan seeks to target the slower growing States, and the backward areas within these States, for higher levels of public investment that will enable the backlog in physical and social infrastructure to be addressed.

From the point of view of the Indian mountain states the second segment related to the North Eastern region (NER) of the country, forming an area of low per capita income and major growth requirements, holds greater significance. The NER offers itself as an excellent case study for ICIMOD where besides recognizing the eight North Eastern States as Special Category States a slew of measures have been taken for its development, which inter - alia cover, (i) 'policy changes' as 'New Initiatives for the North Eastern Region' e.g. 'earmarking 10% of the Plan budgets of the Central Ministries / departments for development of NER', (ii) 'Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLPCR)', (iii) 'setting up of Ministry of Development for North Eastern Region' in 2001 'to coordinate and give impetus to the Centre's development efforts', (iv) 'transfer of NLPCR to DoNER from Planning Commission', and (v) 'establishment of North Eastern Council to act as an advisory body in respect of socio-economic development and balanced development of the eight states' etc..⁶.

Ministry of Mountain Development

Just as in the NER the mountain states 'though rich in development potential in terms of human capital and natural resources, lack in adequate physical infrastructure' impeding their growth, in other mountain states of India also 'the primary sector has remained largely stagnant, the secondary has been handicapped due to variety of reasons' the planning exercise has resulted mainly in the expansion of the tertiary sector'. Is it not the universal

experience all over the HKH and if the answer to this query is in the affirmative the NER case study needs to be taken up by ICIMOD and it ought to assess for itself the extent to which its three 'strategic programmes' and the '13 strategic outputs and indicators' have any relevance for the eight NER mountain States ? The quantitative magnitude of coherence between its '13 strategic outputs' to the priorities of NER would be a clear indicator of ICIMOD's relevance for the NER mountain states of India.

Given the unique role for the over-all development of as many as 8 mountain states, out of a total 11, why the Ministry of DoNER cannot be made host/anchor for ICIMOD' in place of MoEF, as the latter seems less qualified to mainstream 'Inclusive Growth' in the backward mountain states of India, begs an answer ? To do so, the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region could be upgraded into the Ministry of Mountain Development by simply adding the 3 remaining Indian mountain states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and the J & K, without incurring any additional expenditure at all, as all these remaining states also fall under the 'Special Category States' status, and are like the NER states, enjoying the benefit of 'special industrial incentive package'. The 'policy changes' which have been tried and tested successfully in the NER mountain states could be selectively and gradually applied to the remaining three mountain states and in turn the NER states could also benefit from the experiences and best practices of the new entrants to the fold.

This incidentally has also been one of the major recommendations of a Task Force on the Mountain Eco-systems, for the Environment and Forest sector, constituted by the Planning Commission for the Eleventh Five Year Plan. Besides establishing a Ministry of Mountain Development this Task Force has also suggested (i) 'mainstreaming of FRDC types of Administrative structures', (ii) 'Back-stopping of Ministry of Mountain Development by R&D institutions located in the IHR region', (iii) 'following ICAR Regional Committee system for identifying R&D issues of States', and (iv) 'Effective addressing of mountain poverty' etc.. These recommendations deserve examination by and support of ICIMOD, as well⁷.

With the global importance of mountains being increasingly recognized a study undertaken of the mountain areas of the 15 countries of European Union (EU), the 10 acceding countries, the two accession countries of Norway and Switzerland has also arrived at the same conclusion; that is, there exists an urgent need 'to recognize the great diversity that characterizes

these areas, at all scales. Natural, economic, and social handicaps exist, but not everywhere or to the same extent'. It points out that 'in the context of globalization, mountain areas face three contradicting challenges: to turn into 'open museums' or areas for recreation and protected nature for industrialized societies, to be regarded as regions to be economically exploited, or even over-exploited; and abandoned.'

This study while recognizing 'the European dimension of mountain regions and expectations from mountain actors' found 'the need for an EU policy specifically directed to the mountain areas and distinct from other structural policies...not unequivocal.' The study observes that structural problems could generally be addressed through the classical objectives of regional policies and through the programming approach of the Structural Funds. Its most important conclusion is that "co-ordinated mountain policies would involve a large number of different sectors, and therefore remain a national responsibility. Any future EU mountain policy must respect the principle of subsidiarity. Given the great variety in national approaches to mountain issues, there will be much to gain from international comparative studies of the implementation of policies and measures and systematic dissemination of experiences between regions and countries." ⁸. ICIMOD would do well to share the diverse set of 'experience in implementation of policies and measures' of its constituent RMCs first by securing better insights into them itself, and this would be possible only through a most appropriate nodality / anchor in each of them, and not through sectoral Ministries, as presently.

Such a gigantic task is obviously beyond a Ministry responsible for just a sector, as is the case in India (MoEF), and the same must be entrusted to a Ministry which could effectively co-ordinate functioning of a large number of different sectors in a spirit of 'national responsibility'. This underscores the necessity of a Ministry of Mountain Development for effectively co-ordinating the work of various sectors and the Indian Mountain States. Such a Ministry would obviously be the nodal Ministry for ICIMOD, various institutions handling sectoral policies having a bearing on mountain regions and all the Indian mountain States. Development of mountains has to be a 'national responsibility', as the European study has clearly emphasized, and sooner it is realized better it would be for the country with a large area under mountainous regions. Sectoral approach to mountain development must be abandoned immediately and the 'integrated approach' embraced.

RMC 'immersion' of ICIMOD

The Fourth QQR has laid emphasis on 'Regional Ownership'. The Programme Advisory Committee plus (PAC +) while supporting ICIMOD's new Strategic Framework have again emphasized that it should give ICIMOD 'a strategic chance to do ground breaking work' in a number of areas and in particular 'to focus on meeting the expectations and priorities of the RMCs'. It is therefore suggested :

(a) that on the lines of what has been undertaken briefly, with reference to one of the RMCs (India) above, if a similar exercises could be quickly commenced with regard to the medium term Plans of the remaining seven RMCs (as most of them undertake 'central planning' exercise, more or less on the lines of India), what would emerge from it is likely to be not only more 'RMC-needed' but also 'RMC-supported and financed' as well, enabling ICIMOD to take its first steps towards becoming "RMC-owned" in real terms,

(b) harmonize the outcomes of (a) above with those 13 'strategic outputs and output indicators' which constitute the MTAP II, abandoning those which do not past muster this 'RMC-test' as it were, and

(c) closely examine the present 'nodal' institution of each RMC and negotiate anchoring of ICIMOD 'nodality' in an institution/set-up which addresses the largest number of development indicators of the 'RMC – strategy' for the mountain regions of that country in the medium term. Appropriate nodality of ICIMOD in the RMCs is far more crucial than the monetary contributions they make individually or collectively..

This exercise would in the main address some of the Key Issues which were raised by the last QQR Panel of ICIMOD relating to issues like - 'understanding of priorities and policies of RMCs', 'a regional approach in contrast to a one-to-one interaction', 'non harnessing of RMC funds', 'long term financial sustainability' and 'weak regional ownership'. Here, it would be worth recalling the concluding remarks of the Fourth QQR Panel :

'Continuing and improving on the existing strengths will not be sufficient for ICIMOD's future development. The need to change is recommended not just for the sake of sustainability because it is rather considered a question of institutional survival. ICIMOD has

to become more meaningful otherwise the donors will discontinue funding and the RMC will not adopt the institution.’⁹.

In conclusion : Back to GBPHIED

As the task of developing a Draft of the Base Paper on ‘Issues, Concerns and Problems of Hill States and Hill Areas’ has been entrusted to GBPHIED, which is presently the nodal institution for ICIMOD in India, it is naturally expected that not only this Base paper would substantially reflect what ICIMOD has on offer on its 25th Anniversary for the Indian mountain states but also serve ‘as a documentary evidence’ of the fact that ICIMOD has finally come of age and is today recognized by the Indian Planning Commission, and the Indian Mountain States, as a unique ‘regional intergovernmental organization’ dedicated to the ‘improvement of the environmental conditions of the HKH region and livelihoods of poor mountain people’. It is only through the evidence of such ‘official RMC documents’ that the credibility of ICIMOD’s claims of ‘impacting’ and ‘upscaling’ would get validated and become acceptable to its various stakeholders, especially those who are destined to inhabit the HKH mountains.

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Notes and References:

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