

Growth, Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Resource Management in the Mountain Areas of South Asia edited by Mahesh Banskota, Trilok S. Papola and Jürgen Richter. Feldafing: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung / ZEL, 2000. ISBN 3-934068-36-7. 590 p. [Proceedings of a conference organised by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), Kathmandu, and the German Foundation for International Development, Feldafing].

Reviewed by David Seddon

This substantial (5 Parts, 20 Chapters and 590 pages) volume is a collection of essays based on the proceedings of the international conference on Growth, Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Resource Management in the Mountain Areas of South Asia that was held in Kathmandu from 31 January to 4 February 2000. It provides a panoramic view of the current state of thinking on a wide range of issues associated with the theme of the conference, and the constituent chapters range from regional overview to country and programme case study.

The first chapter provides a general overview, by the editors, of the issues and options for the mountain areas of South Asia as a whole, based on the proceedings of the conference. It summarises the main issues raised by the various papers and highlights the options and recommendations made in the detailed thematic discussions on different sectors and aspects of development; it also presents the main conclusions reached and recommendations made by the Conference. Despite some hopeful signs, the main emphasis was on ‘concerns and constraints’ and on ‘the widespread evidence of threats to the livelihoods of mountain people and to the mountain environment, as well as lack of adequate recognition of, and appropriate policies and interventions for dealing with these threats’ (p. 51). A number of specific recommendations was made, and it was explicitly suggested that participants should take a lead in their respective countries and organizations in promoting these recommendations and, thereby, the design and implementation of appropriate and sensitive programmes for effective and sustainable development in mountain areas.

The second chapter is a wide-ranging review, by Mahesh Banskota, the Deputy Director General of ICIMOD (the host institution for the conference), of the environmental, economic and social options available with respect to the Hindu-Kush Himalayas in general, drawing attention both to the common issues and concerns of the region and to its heterogeneity. Banskota emphasises five priorities for the region as a whole: developing new opportunities where available; improving communications, transport and services; supporting human resource development; promoting the regeneration of mountain resources; and increasing the capacity of local communities to take the lead in development initiatives (pp. 98-9).

There then follow six relatively general discussions of the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, by Mizanur Rahman Shelley (pp.107-35), in Bhutan, by Choki Lhamu, John Jigme Rhodes and D.B. Rai (pp. 137-70), in the Himalayan Mountain Region of India, by B.K. Joshi (pp. 171-94), in Nepal, by Hari K. Upadhyaya (pp. 195-223), in the mountain areas of Pakistan, by Shahid Zia (pp. 225-46), and in the Hindukush Himalaya and the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau region, by Yan Ruizhen (pp. 247-57). Together with Chapter 2, these provide a regional and sub-regional overview of issues and concerns.

Part III is focused on 'Economic Opportunities and Options', and consists of five chapters, on mountain agriculture in the Hindukush Himalaya, by Pradeep M. Tulachan (pp. 259-74), on agricultural development, growth and poverty in India's mountain region, by Ramesh Chand (pp. 275-92), on commercialisation of natural resources ... the case of forest products, by Madhav B. Karki (pp. 293-320), on enterprise development in the Hindukush Himalaya, by T.S. Papola (pp.321-48), and on tourism ('a regional overview and the experience of Nepal'), by Pitamber Sharma (pp. 349-76).

Part IV consists of four chapters on land systems and natural resource management. Michael Kirk writes, broadly and in comparative vein, on innovative land and resource policy in an Asian context (pp. 377-405), Devendra Chapagain considers land systems in the hills and mountains of Nepal (pp. 407-32), B P Maithani, changing land relations in the Indian Eastern Himalayas (pp. 433-44), and Anupam Bhatia, participatory forest management as 'a promising mechanism for poverty alleviation in the mountain areas of South Asia' (pp. 445-84). Part V concludes the collection, with a set of three chapters on access, equity and linkages. Hermann Kreutzmann discusses the role of transport networks and urban settlements (pp. 485-513), Meena Acharya considers the economic opportunities for mountain women of South Asia, with particular reference to Nepal (pp. 515-40), and N.S. Jodha, examines the role of highland-lowland links in the context of rapid globalisation (pp. 541-70).

This is an interesting and even a useful collection, but with a strong emphasis on the descriptive, the technical and the promotional. The view is very much, however, from 'outside' and, if the phrase can be used with regard to mountain environments, 'top-down' – a lowlander's perspective, perhaps? There is some consideration of the deep-seated and pervasive political, economic and political-economic structural forces working, nationally, regionally and globally, against the effective implementation of the programme which most of the contributors to this volume would claim to seek and support – namely the sustainable development of mountain areas in collaboration with the indigenous men and women who struggle to survive in these difficult and challenging environments. But there is less consideration of how, in reality, these structural biases might be effectively undermined, or indeed of the variety of ways in which mountain people, particularly the very poor and disadvantaged are themselves responding – through mass emigration, insurgency,

and a myriad of other, less dramatic survival strategies and initiatives for change. Now that would have been really interesting...