

Poverty & environment

The fine links that matter

Why environmental concerns have to be integrated into poverty reduction strategies

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Poverty reduction and environmental preservation have always featured as two primary objectives of all development plans. But the two are seldom addressed in an integrated manner.

All five-year plans so far have addressed the two separately, with separate policies, programs, and budgets. This, however, shouldn't be the case, say experts now, because the two are closely interrelated.

According to the research and evaluation document on poverty environment mainstreaming, the linkage between poverty and environment can be conceptualized in terms of their relationship to livelihoods, resilience to environmental risks, health, and economic development.

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) hand-book on mainstreaming poverty-environment linkages into development planning defines poverty environment mainstreaming as an iterative process of integrating poverty-environment linkages into policymaking, budgeting and implementation processes at the national, sector, and sub-national levels.

The process involves acknowledging and establishing the linkage between poverty and environment and addressing the two in an integrated manner in policies, plans and budgets. In other words, it is about viewing the environment as a productive resource for all aspects of development and using it sustainably.

The environment provides a range of ecosystem goods and services on which the livelihoods of the poor depend. The condition of environmental resources and access to use and own these resources have significant bearings on people's livelihoods.

In Bhutan poverty is a rural phenomenon. It is estimated that 23.2% of the population lives under the poverty line (Nu 1,096 a person a month), and about 6% of the population (37,200 people) live

under the food poverty line (Nu 688 a person a month).

Approximately 70% of the Bhutanese population depends on crop agriculture, livestock rearing, and renewable natural resources for their livelihoods, and hence the dependence is more pronounced in rural areas.

Given the heavy dependence on the environment as a source of livelihood, the poor are more vulnerable to natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, climate change and other environmental threats.

Bhutan's heavy dependence on hydropower and agriculture makes it vulnerable to changes in the environment brought about by events related to development and climate change. This makes the rural poor who depend directly on crops and livestock the most vulnerable section of the population.

And poor health contributes to poverty and poverty perpetuates poor health. Improving the health of the poor enables them to move out of poverty. The poor health of individuals (particularly bread-earners) and households affects their welfare and even leads to their breakdown as economic units. The health of the environment accounts for a significant portion of health risks to the poor people.

With more than 50% of the wealth of Bhutan coming from its natural capital, it is clear that the socio-economic growth of the country is contingent upon the capacity of its natural resources to meet its growing needs, hence efforts have to be made in sustainably using the natural resources.

Further, with RNR sector contributing to about 20% of the GDP, and providing livelihoods to more than 70% of the population, the role of the environment in poverty reduction cannot be undermined.

Therefore, the challenge would be to consider the linkages between these mutually reinforcing objectives, and integrate them in plans, policies, and

programs at all levels.

The 10th Plan document states that environmental conservation imperatives will be increasingly challenged by the need to balance it judiciously against the urgency of sustaining and improving rural livelihoods and ameliorating poverty.

However, most expressions of intent (at the policy level) to preserve the environment do not necessarily translate visibly into actions at program or project levels. It is also evident almost all efforts go towards the mitigation of adverse impacts on the environment at the time of project implementation and rarely during the planning stages.

The GNH Commission is responsible for the formulation of overall development strategies and programs at the central as well as the local levels, while the National Environment Commission is mandated to look after all issues related to the environment. And the agriculture ministry is responsible for formulating plans and strategies for the sustainable utilization of natural resources.

However, the difference between environment mainstreaming and poverty environment mainstreaming is a gray area. One may draw parallels and infer that the two processes are similar, but environment mainstreaming would in the strictest sense focus only on integrating environmental concerns into policies, plans, or programs, and there would be no focus on the poverty aspects.

This may give rise to outcomes similar to those derived from poverty-environment mainstreaming, only if the policies, plans, and programs are formulated to address poverty. In most developing countries this would be the case if the environmental concerns are integrated into their poverty reduction strategy papers, or development plans and programs with poverty reduction objectives.

Tourism Council of Bhutan

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Request for Proposal

The Tourism Council of Bhutan would like to invite proposals for content writing and designing brochures/collaterals for various products including contents for the tourism website.

Eastern, Western, Southern and Central circuit, Folk Festival, Takin Festival, Nomad Festival, Masutaki Festival, Merak Sakten Trek and Royal Manas National Park.

For detailed Terms of Reference and background documents please contact Ms. Thinley Wangmo, Marketing and Promotion Division, TCB or visit our website at www.tourism.gov.bt. Proposals should reach the TCB latest by **15th April, 2010**.

Joint Director

MPD, TCB