

HMG'S ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

There are five main aims of HMG's environmental policy:

- To manage efficiently and sustainably natural and physical resources
- To balance development efforts and environmental conservation for sustainable fulfillment of the basic needs of the people.
- To safeguard national heritage
- To mitigate the adverse environmental impacts of development projects and human actions.
- To integrate environment and development through appropriate institutions, adequate legislation and economic incentives, and sufficient public resources.

The NEPAP is organized around these five policy objectives. The document is divided into the following five chapters:

1. Sustainable Management of Natural Resources

The proper management of Nepal's land, forest and water resources is essential to guarantee and enhance the continued productivity of the country's agriculture, on which the vast majority of the population depend.

Sustained growth in the agricultural sector is critical for feeding the growing number of people in Nepal, and for generating a sufficient surplus to support other economic sectors, such as manufacturing; however, growth in the agricultural sector has been stagnant. One of the principal reasons for this low growth in agriculture is low crop yields that are, in turn affected by deteriorating soil fertility and quality of agricultural land.

Appropriate policies therefore need to be improved to improve soil fertility and to raise agricultural productivity. Proper soil fertility management through optimal utilization of locally available biomass, rehabilitation of lower potential agricultural lands, adoption of environmentally compatible farming practices, and a reorientation of research and extension to reflect greater responsiveness to the local needs and to sustainable production and consumption alternatives, as well as improved management of live stock and rangelands are some of the key policies.

Forest and Rangeland Management

Deforestation and forest degradation have seriously reduced the availability of timber, fuel wood, leaf litter, fodder and forage. This has not only depressed the incomes of those who traditionally depend on the direct extraction and utilization of these products, but has contributed to soil erosion and fertility loss, damaged ecosystems, degraded watersheds and other adverse environmental effects.

Proper policies to improve the management of forest and rangelands include adoption of a national land use plan based on appropriate resources use in different agro ecological zones, formulation of the national energy policy that emphasizes increased energy use efficiency and development of alternative sources, better integration of related sectors such as agriculture, livestock and soil conservation, and greater participation of local communities and the private sector in the management of forests and rangelands.

Implementation of the above policies will be made effective through a number of actions, including: simplification of the rules governing the allocation of forest for private, lease hold and community management; promotion of agro-forestry, silvi-pastoral and range land management system to expand income and employment opportunities; adoption of the long term land use plan and a system of zoning to better manage natural resources; institutionalization of a necessary legal reforms and; and forestry research and extension geared to increased community participation.

Water Resource Management

Nepal's vast water resource potentials remain largely untapped, particularly for energy generation. Yet erosion and sedimentation have emerged as serious problems in many water shed areas. Watersheds, which comprise over two-thirds of the country's land area, have experienced degradation due primarily to inappropriate farming practices and devegetation. Protection of Nepal's watersheds is essential to prevent further degradation from human-induced actions. In this regards, low cost vegetative and cultural measures, that recognize the needs of farmer, have a better chance of success in preventing erosion and conserving soil than high-cost civil works programmes where the farmer has little involvement.

2. Population, Health and Poverty

The proper management of land, forests and water is essential to provide the basic food, fodder and fuel requirements of the Nepali people. However, with almost half the population living in poverty, there is also need to improve the health status of the population by providing adequate supplies of clean water, improved sanitation and by satisfying the unmet demand for family planning services.

Population

The large sizes of Nepal's population relative to the resources base, and its high growth rate are at the root of many environmental problems in Nepal. The agricultural land base in some area is reaching to the saturation point, and the labour force is expanding faster than off-farm jobs. As a consequence, poverty is increasing. Measures to curb population growth are therefore critical to the success of any development and environmental programmes

The main aim of HMG's population strategy is to reduce the rate of population growth through a decrease in the fertility rate. There is considerable evidence that the demand for family planning services is not being adequately met. Primary health care services are also not reaching those who most need them resulting in high rates of infant and maternal mortality.

Through a series of programmes aimed at improving the delivery of family planning and maternal and child health care services, accompanied by a targeted information, education and communication campaign, it is hope the population growth rate will be reduced. These direct measures will be complemented by measures to enhance the status of women, for example through encouraging greater enrollment of girls in schools and adult literacy programmes.

Health and Sanitation

The health status of the population in the Nepali is generally poor. The lack of potable water and sanitation, safe food supplies and medical facilities are major contributing factors to the poor state of health. The lack of clean water in particular is imposing a high cost on the economy in terms of its impacts on human health and productivity. The country's rapidly growing population is also placing a stress on available water resources.

A number of policy initiatives are required to correct the problems associated with water supply and sanitation. These include decentralization of drinking water supply and sanitation activities to local bodies and the private sector, maintenance of safe standards in drinking water supplies, increased investment in sanitation, rationalization of water tariffs, and reform of the legal, regulatory and institutional arrangements.

Recommended actions in this regards are: instituting a system of regular monitoring of water pollution at the main sources of urban areas, overhauling the existing of water distribution system in partnership with the private sector, adoption of a water tariff structure based on the costs of supply, increased investment in sanitation, and involving local communities and the private sector in the maintenance and management of water supply schemes.

Poverty Alleviation

Almost half of Nepal's population lives below the poverty line. It is hoped that many of the strategies aimed at improving natural resource management and providing basic health care service will be benefit to the poor. However, there is also a need for programmes to be targeted at the poor.

HMG's poverty alleviation policy emphasizes the need for increased off-farm employment, a proper spatial balance in the implementation of development programmes, and increased female education. These policies need to be backed up by the provision of the environmentally-sound infrastructure project guided by economic benefits, the creation of environment conducive to sending girls to school, and measures promoting the birth spacing and discouraging early marriage.

3. Safeguarding National Heritage

Nepal is well known for its natural and cultural heritage. In recent years, however, these resources have been degraded. Conflicts have arisen between local resident and authorities in areas surrounding some of the designated protected areas and national parks. Areas adjacent to cultural and historical monuments and religious shrines have been threatened by a continuous process of encroachment, poor maintenance and sanitary degradation. Areas along the most popular trekking and mountaineering routes are being threatened by growing congestion, accumulation of solid wastes and deforestation.

Policy intervention and actions plans are urgently needed in the areas, preserving biodiversity inside as well as outside the protected areas, improving the relationship between the local communities and park management, demarcating the core areas inside parks for strict conservation and buffer areas for sustainable resources management, promoting tourism in conformity with resources conservation and environmental protection, and involving local bodies and private organizations in the preservation and maintenance of natural and cultural heritages resources.

HMG has already taken action to deal with some of these issues. Recently approved legislation permits some revenue-sharing and encourages a greater degree of local participation.

4. Mitigating Adverse Environment Impacts

The impacts of urbanization and industrialization are beginning to cause serious environmental problems in some areas of Nepal. Also, many development projects, particularly large infrastructure project, can have adverse environmental impacts. Steps must be taken to foresee and correct these environmental issues before they inflict high cost on Nepal's people and its economy.

Urban and Industrial Development

Environmental conditions have deteriorated rapidly in the Katmandu valley and some other towns, particularly in the terai. Rapidly expanding, unplanned urban settlements have generated a range of environmental problems affecting human health and welfare. Air and water pollution has worsened due to inadequate sewerage, improper disposal of solid waste s, industrial effluents and discharges, and emissions from motor vehicles. The provision of infrastructure and utility services has been inadequate, exacerbating the situation further.

The current trend of urban sprawl and industrial expansion in and around densely populated areas is unsustainable and poses as serious threat to clean environment.

Policies and actions to remedy the environmental problems associated with urban growth and industrial development, and to prevent similar consequences from happening in future include defining and implementing appropriate zoning regulations, setting of standards for air and water pollution and their enforcement through a carefully designed package of incentives and regulations, and the clear designation of responsible institutions for providing infrastructure and utility services.

Local bodies and the private sector will have to be involved to a much greater extent in the provision and maintenance of infrastructure services. Capacities of the local bodies and the private sector will have to be enhanced. In view of the particular issue affecting urban and industrial expansion in the Kathmandu valley, a separate action plan needs to be developed and implemented for this area.

Infrastructure Development

Roads, irrigation, hydroelectric and other infrastructure projects have the potential for imposing significant environmental costs if they are not properly designed and implemented. For example, irrigation systems have suffered from problems of poor design and construction, and inadequate maintenance and management, creating a series environmental problem, including insufficient surface drainage that causes water logging. Improper design and construction of roads can lead to landslides, and many of Nepal's hydroelectric projects suffer from high rates of sedimentation, resulting from attention being paid to protecting upstream watersheds.

Measures to mitigate these problems vary considerably. The use of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a recent innovation that can help identify adverse environmental impacts and propose remedial actions. HMG has adopted the principles of making EIA obligatory for certain types of projects.

Greater involvement of local people is a prerequisite for improving design and implementation. For example, in the case of irrigation, HMG is committed to hand over the responsibility for the operation and management of the small- and medium-sized irrigation schemes to user groups. It is recognized that direct government involvement is best restricted to provide technical assistance and training rather than to attempt to provide the entire irrigation service.

5. Legislation, Institution, Education and Public Resources

Environmental issues are varied and complex. It is not possible to address all issues and to solve all problems at the same time. Resources are scarce and institutional capacities are limited. To implement the policies and actions outlined in the NEPAP effectively, a series of supportive measures are needed in the areas of institution building, economy policy, legal and regulatory provisions, and public resource allocation.

There is a wide range of institutional arrangements available for improving environmental management. In keeping with the importance attached to the process of decentralization by HMG, the NEPAP supports giving a greater role to local agencies, including user groups and non-government organization, as well as to the private sectors.

Public-sector agencies at various levels will play a critical role in the process of decentralized decision-making, serving as the promoter, facilitator and guarantor of enabling mechanism for local bodies. Village and local level groups will be made the principal vehicle to plan, implement and monitor local level development and environmental activities. NGOs will be encouraged to play an active role in this process.

In some sector there is a need to enact basic legislation. In others there is a greater need for developing mechanism to implement existing law. Economic incentives, rather than centralized regulation, often offer an opportunity to encourage environmentally friendly actions and discourage environmentally damaging ones in a cost effective manner.

Current efforts to perform the public resource management system will be continued, with a greater emphasis being placed on project quality and the development of mechanism to enable local level organizations to mobilize and command greater access to resources. Adequate funds will be made available for undertaking necessary mitigatory measures against environmentally damaging impacts.

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Further Prospects

The NEPAP represents another step in continuing process to integrate environmental concerns into the development process. It emphasizes the need to develop appropriate policies and recommends a set of actions to achieve these policies. However, in order to implement the recommends actions, it is needed to develop more detailed sector-specific programmes and projects.

With the assistance of relevant line ministers, other government agencies and the donor community, HMG is now moving to the next phase to prepare a time-bound, full-costed, prioritized implementation plan.