

BOOK REVIEW

His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Ministry of Population and Environment, 1999. *Environmental Planning and Management of the Kathmandu Valley*. Kathmandu: HMG, Ministry of Population and Environment, pp.211 + x; messages, maps, annexes, paperback (price not quoted).

This book deserves attention for various reasons. First, Kathmandu Valley or "*Nepal khaldo*" is the heart of the kingdom of Nepal. Nepalese revere its unique cultural and politico-administrative identity. This book reminds the histogenesis of the Valley, raises concerns about its changing face and identifies components responsible for its changing face. In addition, it also outlines the actions and actors to better manage the overall environment of the Valley. Second, it takes a holistic view of Kathmandu Valley, includes both urban and rural spaces and takes into consideration of rural resource base that contribute to the quality of urban growth. This is in contrast to apparent urban biases and the neglect of rural resource base in the earlier studies. Likewise, the inclusion of thematic areas such as public health, agriculture, population and institutions as separate Chapters are welcome since these themes have been treated as taken for granted in more than 45 documents commissioned and published for the development of Kathmandu Valley. Third, this book clearly demonstrates the felt need for considering Kathmandu Valley as one development unit and the necessity of an institution with authority to handle programs and actions holistically.

The book consists of thirteen Chapters contributed by separate authors. Whereas the first Chapter provides the background and methodology, rest of the 12 Chapters are thematic. They discuss twelve important issues of Kathmandu Valley that need to be understood properly and necessary actions taken on time. Each Chapter is self-contained and there is very limited cross-reference to the chapters. In general, each Chapter follow a standard format: existing situation of the resources, their use/utilization; current policies, programs, interventions; major issues and problems; and recommended policies and action plans. The depth of analysis of contents in the Chapters is balanced although some Chapters are longer than the others.

The first Chapter introduces the theme of the book. It provides the background justifying the need for this document, and points out the problems associated with industrialization, natural and cultural resources, infrastructure, and pollution in a nutshell. Noting the past efforts, it then specifies the objectives and methodology of the study. It primarily makes a point that the overall growth of Kathmandu Valley needs to be regulated. The past attempts and studies in the Valley followed fragmented approach and were deficient in participatory attitude. Hence, in order to regulate the growth of Kathmandu there is a need to take a holistic approach taking Kathmandu Valley as a whole rather than urban area only.

The second Chapter deals with the land use. It discusses land use situation in Kathmandu Valley under three main categories namely agriculture, forest, urban and other uses. Information from LRMP 1984 and Land Use Map 1996 from topographical survey office are used as the main sources for describing existing situation as well as for discussion on change. It basically states that the current land use practice in Kathmandu Valley primarily in urban area is unregulated and unscientific. The loss of prime agricultural land for urban purpose and the depletion of forest resources are the main problems. The needs for land use zoning and enforcing the implementation of this zoning code are the main recommendations. Six policy recommendations are made and their time frame to act range from immediate through 2-3 years to 2- 5 years.

The third Chapter deals with forest resources. Following the same sequence it discusses the existing status of the resource and its utilization, current policies and programmes, major issues and problems, and finally the recommended actions. It points out that the per capita forest area in the Valley i.e., 0.04 ha is seven times lower than the required ratio of 0.28 ha to

provide the basic needs to the rural population and protect the environment. Lack of comprehensive management plan, absence of defined policy for urban area and weak institutional coordination are identified as major issues related to forest resources. There is some overlap with the Chapter on land use perhaps understandably.

The fourth Chapter is on water resources and the one that in constant short supply in Kathmandu Valley. The description of existing situation covers surface water, groundwater and spouts, spring water and ponds. Municipal water supply is dealt with separately. It specifies "the problem [short supply] seems to lie more in distribution management than in the actual water supply" (pp.34). It also warns the likely continuation of the thirst of Kathmandu Valley even after the completion of high profile Melamchi Water Supply Project in 2011 stating that water supply situation might still run at an approximate 30 percent deficit. Furthermore, the excessive groundwater extraction has reinforced the groundwater level falling at an average rate of 2.5 m per year recently. The recommended actions include source protection, collection schemes, quality enhancement, water use regulation and improvement of management through a single institution.

Chapter five discusses agriculture in the Valley. The discussion of existing agriculture situation focuses on the production environment, production systems, agricultural biodiversity and support system. Several important problems and issues are raised including lack of clearly defined strategies, agriculture not considered as an integral part of tourism and cultural heritage, undue emphasis on non-renewable agricultural inputs, poor understanding of market demand and deficient marketing. Regulating use of agro-chemicals, diversification of agriculture, development of break of bulk point for vegetable and fruit handling storage and processing outside the Valley, and promotion of environmentally friendly agriculture are some of the main recommendations. One may argue that recommendation could have been categorized into those for peri-urban and those for rural areas given many chapters arguing for strong land use zoning.

Culture and heritage, one of Kathmandu's historical identities is the main focus of Chapter six. As usual, it presents the status of historical and cultural sites followed by heritage preservation, rehabilitation and management policies and programmes, problems and issues and the recommended actions for culture and heritage conservation and development. Deterioration of monuments, sites including world heritage sites and misuse of cultural resources of the Valley are stated as main problems and issues. It also raises a concern of non-inclusion of such elements in the school curricula. A number of actions are suggested to conserve, rehabilitate, and enhance the monument and heritage sites. Promotion of cultural tourism, involvement of community, better linkages between department of archaeology and the Tourism Department [Board], establishment of *Guthi* Management Committee to replace *Guthi Sansthan* are some of the recommended actions. However, it falls short of how replacement would significantly improve the efficiency of *Guthi Sanathan*.

Chapter seven describes the urban growth. The current status of urban growth is addressed in the progression of settlement pattern in the past, urban development trends, infrastructure and facilities, the environment, and land development. A number of specific issues such as land use plan, institutional coordination, environmental pollution, neglect of agriculture are raised. However, the main issue i.e., unregulated urban growth in the Valley remains as taken for granted. The list of policies and actions to be undertaken are quite long and relate a time frame of immediate to 10-15 years. Many recommended actions such as regional urban development go beyond the confinement of Kathmandu Valley.

Chapter eight deals with industry in terms of status of industrial growth (including industrial districts and major industries), trends, problems and issues, policies and programmes and the recommended actions. Unplanned and rapid industrialization is demonstrated as the main issue. Land use zoning, relocation and regulation of industries, efficient land use policy, proper management of industrial waste, development of pollution and quality control mechanisms are actions recommended in order to maintain industrial growth and preserve the environment of the Valley.

Population that is often taken for granted is the focus of Chapter nine. Building upon description of population growth and distribution in the Valley it analyses Valley population in the national context and presents the estimates up to 2016. It states that during the last 20 years Kathmandu Valley especially the urban areas and adjoining VDCs have witnessed a phenomenal rate of growth with in-migration playing a significant role. Migration, both the internal and international plus high internal growth rates are noted as the main issues. Recommended actions largely focus on regulating increasingly high rate of migration to the Valley, improvement of family planning programmes supported by promotion of 2 children per family scheme and development of coordinating mechanism to deal with conflict between implicit and explicit population policies.

Chapter ten deals with tourism. The status of tourism sites, assets and tourist arrivals in the Valley, infrastructure plus institutional arrangement are well discussed. National tourism policies and the issues are taken account of, since there are no Kathmandu Valley specific tourism policies. It points out "although Kathmandu Valley is growing as a metropolis, the local people have no facilities for recreation and outdoor activities except for a few picnic spots whereas facilities for international tourists have over developed and are under utilized (pp.131)." The recommendations follow the formats of earlier Chapters. Expansion of tourist and recreation sites, development and promotion of marketing strategy for tourism products, classification of tourism and promotion of varying strategies and establishment of Valley-wide institution to promote tourism in the Valley are notable features of recommendations.

Chapter eleven concentrates on public health. It states that the Valley faces a number of serious health hazards since air, water as well as land is highly polluted there in the Valley. The average sanitation level in Kathmandu is low. Gastro-intestinal diseases, hepatitis, skin diseases, acute respiratory infectious diseases, hearing losses and many other diseases are on the rise in Kathmandu. Environmental health education programme, improvement in sanitation and public health, surveillance and monitoring, reduction on pollution level and integration of environment into development are some of the recommendations noted in the Chapter.

Institutional development i.e., Chapter twelve, deals with existing institutions such as the government, semi-government, financial, educational, non-governmental and residential diplomatic missions and donor agencies in the Valley. Too many institutions, inadequate logistic support, confusing mandates and jurisdiction, centralized power and authority are identified as the main problems and issues related to institutional development in the Valley. Since a large number of government, semi-government, private institutions as well as I/NGOs are concentrated in the Valley and many have mandates to work outside the valley, the main recommendation is regulating the growth of institutions based on their mandates. It recommends that for planning, governing and servicing the Valley, the Kathmandu Valley Metropolitan Authority (KVMA) be instituted and it should regulate urbanization and use of resources in the Valley as a single geographical entity.

The final Chapter is on legislation. It reviews the existing legislations that govern the growth and development of Kathmandu Valley under seven headings namely environmental protection, urban growth and development, cultural heritage conservation, natural resource use, public health, land use and tax laws. Weak enforcement of legal instruments, norms, and codes and weak enforcement mechanism with overlapping jurisdiction of institutions are illustrated as the major issues and problems. Enacting a new Cultural Heritage Conservation Fund Act and amendments on several existing acts related to Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, Land, Water Resource Use and Conservation, Industry, Waste Management and Pollution Control, Forest Area Conservation and Use, and Motor Vehicles are recommended.

For being a centre of "power" and the concentration of political, administrative, medical and educational institutions as well as international organizations, Kathmandu has unremittingly attracted many people both temporarily and permanently. This raises the concern of Kathmandu's future. In this context a publication such as this is a very welcome item. The book covers major issues and problems that contemporary Kathmandu Valley faces. All

thirteen Chapters are well written despite varying length and list of at times, too many recommended actions. All of them explicitly or implicitly express the need to consider Kathmandu Valley not solely as a physical entity but as a single development unit or region. The cover photo is very attractive and the taskforce members deserve commendation.

Despite wide coverage, in-depth analysis and practical recommendations, this book is not devoid of limitations. The most striking one is the missing list of acronyms used in the text. The readers certainly feel this gap since so many acronyms are used especially on identifying responsible institutions for the specified actions on 12 out of 13 Chapters. More importantly, to make a wise guess also some of the institutions mentioned in the books are already renamed or do not exist anymore e.g. MEC, MHPP, MLJ, MTCA. Similarly, the quality of some of the maps could have been improved despite colourful presentation. Colour maps are attractive but often they capture readers' attentions to other things than the objective i.e., title. Map 10.1 (pp.100) draws readers' attention to other items than the title suggests. Map 4.2 (pp. 33) is problematic: while many legends do not correspond to the map, there are also two symbols for the same item. Map 6.1 (p.62) has the similar problem.

The references used in the Chapters could have been made complete. Gautam and Rao 1991, EPC 1994 (p.83); Mathema, Joshi and Shah 1992 (p.79), Pyakuryal 1993 (p.105), Sharma 1986 (p.140), Tiwari 1992 (p. 151) Pandey et.al 1984 (p.141) are a few example of missing references. Technically this book is a bit unusual. The readers would not know until they complete all thirteen Chapters that individual authors contributed these Chapters. The authors' name could have been spelled out in the respective Chapters or somewhere before the Chapters begin rather than relegating at an obscure end. Likewise, the very first statement of the book (p. iii): "this document has been reviewed and updated by a task force..." is rather ambiguous. A clear statement such as "this document is a revised and updated version of "Regulating Growth of Kathmandu Valley" would have been better appreciated since no document of the current title existed for updating or revision.

This book is an example of use of "fashionable jargons" by giving new label to the old product. The messages in the document clearly demonstrate this. The messages (pp. v, vi) note that that the National Planning Commission (NPC) primarily conceived this policy document as "*Limits to Growth of Kathmandu*" in 1994 and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) submitted the draft to the government. In the final version it got a new title "*Regulating Growth: Kathmandu Valley*" and included 12 separate annexes giving details of the issues covered in Chapters II to XIII. Ultimately, when a new taskforce was formed for editorial review and publication, it got a new cover: *Environmental Planning and Management of the Kathmandu Valley*. The taskforce has nowhere mentioned why they saw the new title better fit except saying "the title of the document, *Regulating the Growth of Kathmandu* was replaced by *Environmental Planning and Management of Kathmandu Valley* and has now been updated (pp. iv)". Whereas the six objectives starting from "to regulate the growth of the Kathmandu Valley" (pp.3) remain the same, all thematic Chapters focus more on regulating overall growth of Kathmandu Valley in their respective issues than anything else. Moreover, the final paragraph of the message from IUCN Country Director (p. vi) reads: "This is the latest policy document for regulating the growth of Kathmandu Valley".

On the whole, it is a very useful document containing robust regional account. From policy perspectives, it can be a good example for other regional studies to follow. In practical terms, the recommendations and action plans are little too ambitious but it seems like deliberately made so to draw the attention of relevant agencies if Kathmandu Valley has to be developed and managed in a regulated way. With this document academicians are likely to be motivated to find detailed versions and explanations of the issues covered whereas for the planners and implementers there is more than enough to sort out from the set of recommendations and translate them into actions.

Bhim Prasad Subedi,

Central Department of Geography,
T. U., Kirtipur, Kathmandu, NEPAL