

IX.A.2. Multi-criteria Analysis as a Tool to Investigate Compatibility between Conservation & Development: A Case of Mathar Forest Protection Committee

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Promoting better quality of life today means taking into account the environment, the well being of the population, recreational spaces and cultural activities. Planners are often hampered by a lack of valid information and methodological support in the field, which is a mosaic of economic, cultural, social and natural factors that define a highly interrelated reality. However, thorough knowledge of these diverse factors and their integration is the necessary condition for the establishment of sound policies of development.

During recent years, diverse investigations have focused on general conditions of forest dwellers residing well inside the forests. As per forest policy 1988, Forest Protection Committees (FPC) have been constituted in order to implement conservation of natural resources and well beings of local populations simultaneously. It is aimed to explore the possibility of implementing conservation strategies that are compatible with human needs, landscape preservation and sustainable economic development. The study is taken as a case of Mathar FPC under Obedullahganj forest division of MP. It is forest village and fully dependent on forest for all activities. It is surrounded by sanctuary "Ratapani" from three sides and natural forest from other fourth side.

Three different evaluation techniques are applied, namely multi-criteria weighted, discordance analysis and a qualitative procedure. They are used to compare three alternative plans for the socio-economic development of Mathar FPC. There plans lie between extreme alternatives: total protection of natural resources and maximising economic development. The three plans are compared in terms of their real or potential effect on some important aspects of the present condition of the village. These aspects (which are known as criteria in MCA terminology) are taken and all of them refer to characteristics for which quantifiable data are available. The plans are compared to each other on the basis of 10 criteria such as flora, fauna, water, employment, heritage, immigration, health care, primary health sector, building and accessibility that reflect the socio-economic and environmental perception of Mathar's inhabitants.

The approach used in this study seems particularly fruitful because of its flexibility : it offers decision-makers the chance to manage heterogeneous data and information that is not easily quantifiable. Such 'soft' information helps to evaluate environmental conditions more precisely, and to make a less damaging choice among alternative development plans.