



Celebrating Mountain Women

about the organisations



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Celebrating Mountain Women

a report on a global gathering in Bhutan, October 2002

Compiled by

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foreword

The year 2002, formally declared the 'International Year of Mountains' by the United Nations, was an important year for mountain people and mountain issues. It was an equally important year for us at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), as it provided us with many unique opportunities to highlight the issues of mountain people and their environment. One such opportunity was the organisation of the global gathering 'Celebrating Mountain Women' (CMW), the only global event in the Year that focused on women. The gathering brought together approximately 250 women and men from 35 countries to celebrate the drive and spirit of mountain women, to discuss critical issues at hand, and search for new ways forward.

This global gathering was an attempt to recognise and draw the world's attention to mountain women's immense contribution to sustaining life in harsh and fragile environments; to their roles, responsibilities, and rights as the nurturers of their families and communities; and to their stewardship of mountain ecosystems. It was a chance to admire and appreciate mountain women's resilience and drive, their arduous labour, and their willingness to adapt to a changing milieu by taking on entrepreneurial activities to catch up with monetised economies whilst still preserving their old traditions and cultures for future generations. Women are the reservoirs of indigenous knowledge, and it is they who in the face of change and new challenges, struggle to keep themselves, their families, and their communities intact. As men out-migrate in ever-increasing numbers, life and living in the mountains is becoming harder by the day for the young, the old, and for women.

The gathering created a space for learning: mountain women were able to share their experiences, exchange knowledge, and bring to light gender issues from different areas of the world. Viable and compelling lessons were shared, applicable across different regions where degraded upland environments and threatened food security affect livelihoods. Gaps in knowledge were identified and further research recommended to facilitate concrete action. Finally, working group sessions looked at ways of creating opportunities for mountain women to be recognised as 'agents of change'. The recommendations were incorporated in the Thimphu Declaration, which was later presented at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in Kyrgyzstan.

As part of the celebrations, we put together various informal activities and events that exemplified mountain women's important and varying roles in their society including a show of the mountain costumes that display aspects of culture and tradition and are a living testimony to women's exceptional talent and enduring spirit. There were exhibition stalls displaying an eclectic collection of arts, crafts, ceramics, clothing,

food, herbs and spices, and other products produced by mountain women, and highlighting the scope of mountain women's innovation, talent, and entrepreneurial skills. The human relationships that were established were perhaps the most inspiring result of the CMW gathering. We would like to thank each and every participant who helped make this event happen, and hope that this overview is of help in bringing to life the memories of the conference.

I would also like to put on record how grateful both ICIMOD and mountain women are to those whose generous financial assistance helped make CMW possible: the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome; the Overseas Development Assistance of the Government of Japan (ODA) (through a grant to IFAD); the United Nations Development Fund for Women, South Asia Regional Office (UNIFEM-SARO), New Delhi, India; the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Berne, Switzerland; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), The Netherlands; the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Rome; and the Austrian Development Cooperation in Bhutan (ACB). We are also grateful to the Mountain Forum and The Mountain Institute, who made significant in-kind support to the organisation of this major event. Above all we are grateful to the Royal Government of Bhutan for their generous hosting of the event and extensive organisational support which were decisive in turning the dream into reality. Finally, the global organising and steering committees, who guided the process throughout the year, are among the many whom we should thank for standing together with ICIMOD as a team in order to make CMW a success.

ICIMOD is pleased to be able to make this contribution to advancing the cause of mountain women. We hope that this report will help in bringing mountain women's issues to the fore, and in stimulating a change in the way women and their concerns are included in policy and decision-making processes. It should prove of interest to all those interested in sustainable mountain development in general, and the perspectives of mountain women in particular.

J. Gabriel Campbell
Director General
ICIMOD

executive summary

This publication summarises the background, discussions, findings, and outcomes of the global gathering 'Celebrating Mountain Women' held in Bhutan in October 2002 as one of the activities within the International Year of Mountains (IYM) 2002.

Women all over the world continue to struggle to be accepted as equals, to have their values recognised as relevant, and to overcome the multiple burdens of home and employment. Mountain women are further challenged as they belong to societies that are already marginalised and often cut off from the mainstream of society. Women living in the mountain regions of the world make major contributions to both their local and national economies, but more often than not these remain unrecognised or unaccounted for. Women are the main producers of food crops and the managers of common property resources, and have principal responsibility for assuring food security; they are responsible for children's health and education and for maintaining cultural continuity, and are sources of an enormous amount of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. When men migrate, mountain women's workload and responsibilities increase further. Yet national policies and data rarely reflect these ground realities. There is little documentation of the contributions made by women, or of the changing gender relations in mountain regions.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) proposed hosting an international gathering of mountain women during IYM 2002 to highlight the role of women in sustainable mountain development. It was the only global IYM event that focused on women. The gathering was planned as a 'pinnacle' event in a process whereby mountain women's networks could grow, be strengthened, and contribute to more sensitive policies and practices that empower mountain women and communities in innovative ways. A large group of partners and donors joined together to plan and facilitate the gathering and translate the proposal into a reality. 'Celebrating Mountain Women' brought together some 250 mountain men and women from 35 countries to celebrate the achievements of mountain women, discuss critical issues, and map the way forward. The participants included representatives of mountain women's formal and informal groups, key academics and resource persons from different mountain regions, women entrepreneurs, local political leaders, media representatives, policymakers and planners, and donors.

CMW was an effort to put mountain women centre-stage, and to mainstream their reality into the year-long IYM discussions and their culmination at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (BGMS), and into the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 2002, in order to promote a major paradigm shift. The gathering drafted and endorsed the 'Thimphu Declaration', which was presented at the BGMS where it

provided the basis for the launch of the 'Global Mountain Women's Partnership' – a programme to translate the demands of mountain women into action post-CMW and post-IYM.

The summary presented here is compiled mainly from two documents: the internal report of the global gathering, 'Advancing the Mountain Women's Agenda', prepared by ICIMOD as a record for participants, donors, and other interested parties; and a resource book 'Her Way Forward' prepared for ICIMOD by The Missing Link, which brings together the main materials from the thematic sessions. The publication is divided into three chapters followed by a bibliography. The first and last chapters describe the background and organisation, and the various materials produced. The central chapter looks at the issues and research and policy needs, followed by recommended actions identified for the five major themes of CMW: natural resources and the environment; health and well-being; entrepreneurship; political, legal, and human rights; and culture and indigenous knowledge. Two annexes provide details of the programme and the participants.

acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who have continued to raise the question of women's issues, and drawn attention to the particular challenges faced by mountain women, undeterred by lack of response or interest. In particular the early ideas that led to the meeting can be traced back to a book published by ICIMOD in 1999 – *Searching for Women's Voices in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas* edited by Jeanette Gurung – which was based on fact-finding studies conducted by researchers in the regional member countries of ICIMOD. Two quotes summarise much about the concerns voiced: “In mountain regions, as in the world over, women, as a class, are more undernourished, more under-compensated for their labour, and are more under-represented in formal decision-making bodies than men, as a class.” “What is clearly missing is a description of their situation told by mountain women themselves”. We owe a debt to all the women and men who contributed to this and other similarly thought provoking publications.

CMW was made possible by generous grants made available by various agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); the South Asia Regional Office of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM-SARO), New Delhi, India; the Government of Japan; the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Bern; the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), The Netherlands; and the Austrian Coordination Bureau, Bhutan (ACB). The organisational and outreach support from the Mountain Forum and The Mountain Institute were also extremely valuable.

Planning and preparation for CMW was a long and arduous process. It would not have been successful without the support of the members of the global Steering Committee, in particular Anita Anand who represented the Asia and Pacific Region. The logistical and organisational efforts of the ICIMOD support staff, in particular Ojaswi Josse the Assistant Coordinator, were decisive inputs that contributed to the success of the meeting.

We owe our deep gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan for its warm welcome and the committed support provided to ICIMOD to organise CMW in Bhutan, and in particular for the untiring assistance of Ms. Deki Pema of the Ministry of Agriculture. Overall, I am deeply obliged to one and all in Bhutan and to those in my office, ICIMOD.

The welcoming, closing, and keynote speakers all contributed greatly to setting the tone for the event and leaving participants with an inspiring message. Coming from a senior, well-known, and reputed woman professional, Ms. Irene Santiago's powerful,

inspiring and moving Keynote Address, in which she wished “power to mountain women”, was more than ideal for achieving the right note to start the celebrations. HRH Ashi Chhimi Yangzom Wangchuck’s Closing Address was a most gracious and warm message from a young mountain woman herself, urging commitment from the global community and the CMW gathering to take the Thimphu Declaration forward beyond 2002.

Last and most important, thank you participants of CMW, who were there among us despite the hazards and endless challenges of international travel and adjustments in personal lives as mothers, daughters, wives and farmers. Thank you for being there to make CMW 2002 a reality, a success and memorable! And thanks too to the countless mountain women who could not join us this time, but whose lives symbolise the joy, the hope, the creativity, and the belief that will guide mountain women and men people to a better future.

Phuntshok C. Tshering
Coordinator

acronyms and abbreviations

ACB	- Austrian Coordination Bureau, Bhutan
BGMS	- Bishkek Global Mountain Summit
CEDAW	- Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMW	- Celebrating Mountain Women
FAO	- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GMWP	- Global Mountain Women's Partnership
HIV	- human immunodeficiency virus
HKH	- Hindu Kush-Himalayas
ICCO	- Inter Church Cooperation Organization
ICT	- information and communication technology
IFAD	- International Fund for Agricultural Development
IYM	- International Year of Mountains
NGO	- non-government organisation
ODA	- Overseas Development Assistance (Japanese Government)
RGoB	- Royal Government of Bhutan
SARO	- South Asia Regional Office
SDC	- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sida	- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNFPA	- United Nation's Fund for Population Activities
UNIFEM	- United Nation's Development Fund for Women

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Foreword

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