the five themes of CMW

Natural Resources and the Environment

The current situation

Women are the primary resource managers in many mountain regions, and have an intimate knowledge of their complex and diverse mountain environments. They often know the use and proper management of hundreds of indigenous species for food, fodder, fuel, medicine, and use in micro-enterprises. In recent years, however, environmental degradation, poor resource management, and increased migration of men to the plains have added to the already high rate of food insecurity and to the workload of women in the remote, mountainous regions of the world. Furthermore, non-local interests – including extractive industries – profit from mountain resources, like timber, minerals, and hydropower, but seldom reinvest any of the revenues locally. This has devastating effects on women, as they are the most dependent on common property resources. In most parts of the South, women do not have rights to the land they work. Although mountain women are increasingly integrated at all levels in the use, management, and conservation of natural resources, they have, despite numerous policy commitments, had only limited success in gaining access and rights to, and participation in, decision-making processes over the resources they maintain and manage.

The process of formulating appropriate policies and instruments for mountain development is complex and varied, and even more so when it comes to issues of natural resources and the environment which involve many components. A strong research and policy analysis is required to support and facilitate development activities and ensure that meaningful and coherent results can be achieved.

A focus on mountain women is central to the attainment of sustainable development and food security, the fight against marginalisation, and biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management.

Issues, research and policy needs, and recommended actions

• **Traditional rights versus statutory laws**

Mountain communities have their own customary laws and traditions to guide them in almost all aspects of life, including natural resource use

and management. Although in some cases such laws have been codified, in many cases national and international laws – based on plains needs – have superseded these traditional laws. The lack of acknowledgement or respect for traditional laws deprives mountain people of their real status and prevents their using the knowledge they have to protect and use the resources on which they rely. The rights and obligations of mountain communities over resources such as land, fresh water, forests, and even minerals needs to be legally defined. Equally care must be exercised, traditional laws and customs are not necessarily gender fair (Jamir 2002).

- **Recognition of mountain women's roles and services**

Mountain women have heavier farming workloads than men, share livestock tasks, and have additional domestic responsibilities. The harsh environment, steep slopes, and long distances to be covered make tasks arduous, and the increasing tendency for men to migrate for work is increasing women's workloads. But there is a general lack of appreciation of women's role and skills in environmental management; they are not mentioned in local or national policies or international agreements, and are often left out of decision-making and training. Women's perspectives, needs, and knowledge are often ignored.

- **The role of women in conflict resolution**

Women play an important role both in the family and within the community as peace makers. The skills of women in resolution and prevention of environmental conflicts should be acknowledged and used.

- **The need for disaggregated data**

Women play an important role in agricultural and natural resource management and in ensuring food and livelihood security. Yet, programmes and policies related to agriculture, forestry, natural resource management, and rural enterprises do not always take women's roles sufficiently into account. Gender-disaggregated data are a crucial prerequisite to the formulation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes aimed at enhancing the role of women; gender awareness needs to be raised among both users and producers of databases, and data requirements need to be redefined.

"We don't need to be taught about fodder and fuelwood. We learn about that from the time we learn to walk and carry a small load. Teach us to read and write."

Woman from Simla, Nepal, 1993

- **Education and training**

Mountain children often live far from schools, and even where local schools exist the education provided is seldom practical and does not include local-specific information. Girls are doubly disadvantaged as they are needed at home for domestic work. Indigenous and practical knowledge should be included in the formal education systems, with

recognised curricula and qualifications. Local communities and institutions should be given opportunities to help in education planning and curriculum development. Institutions and agencies should take the specific concerns and needs of mountain women into account when developing learning modules.

Educational and skill development programmes for women should incorporate managerial and technical skills; encompass occupations thought of as men's domain; and focus on the development of public communication, leadership, and strategic planning skills as well as confidence building. Environment education should be increased to provide an informed basis for decision-making.

Poles Apart

Decision-making opportunities for women ranged from almost nil in Afghanistan, where women do not even decide what food to prepare for dinner; to central and western Bhutan, where women dictate if and how men can work for others or even lend tools.

Gurung (1999)

- **Compensate for environmental services**
Mountain resources are often developed and exploited with external intervention and investment; the profits are rarely reinvested locally. Discussions are needed at a political level on the question of fair compensation to mountain communities for their stewardship and protection of natural resources (particularly water) and services that support growth and prosperity elsewhere.

- **Property and use rights**
The important role of women in resource management often contrasts sharply with their limited rights of ownership and access to resources, information, and other facilities. Most women cannot, for example, use land as security to obtain credit, funding, or loans to invest in farms or develop enterprises. When women and men can secure tenure or usufruct rights to natural resources, their full participation in management and decision-making can be ensured (Warren and Hambly 1992).

- **Women and decision-making**
In most mountain areas, women are little involved in the planning and execution of policies or in formal decision-making processes. When women are not involved in planning, and when insufficient attention is paid to tenure and user rights, natural resource management projects can actually increase women's workload. Women need to be informed about their rights and involved in decision-making and the development of plans for sustainable resource management, and provided with training so that they can overcome the fear of participating. They must be given a voice and their specific concerns addressed when formulating policy initiatives and partnerships.

- **Access to information**

Access to information about businesses, markets, and other livelihoods that recognise, utilise, and support the diversity of mountain environments, needs to be facilitated. Capacity-building activities and platforms for the sharing of experiences and information with others should be encouraged.

- **Enabling participation**

Women are often hindered from participating in negotiation processes because of lack of time or because the system does not permit them to. Farm and household work and childcare are a major time constraint and may prevent women accessing services like literacy classes or health programmes, or participating in decision-making bodies. Cultural and social norms and traditions can also hinder participation. Men's domination in almost all formal and non-formal institutions is a further disincentive.

Mobility Empowers

Facilitating mobility can help women gain greater control over their own lives by increasing their access to markets and their exposure to education, training, and information, and by offering them more opportunities for political participation. By reducing the burden of transport, women's productivity and income can be increased and their assets enhanced.

- **Privatisation of resources**

Research needs to be encouraged on how the current trend of globalisation, and the increasing privatisation of resources on which mountain communities depend, impact mountain women. National and international policy-makers, including development and donor agencies, must recognise and mitigate the impact of increasing privatisation of resources on mountain communities, particularly on women.

- **Migration**

The migration of men from mountain communities to other areas for seasonal employment and/or cash wages is a common feature of many mountain communities. The women left behind are generally already over-burdened; once the men leave, the women become heads of households for long periods. They have to maintain the farm and household as well as look after business.

- **The impact of legislation**

Local communities need to become more aware of international and national legislation and conventions that can positively (and negatively)

affect their lives and environment. The impact of legislation and conventions on local communities needs to be analysed and studied.

- **Livelihoods versus conservation**

Keeping natural resources like forests and water sources aside purely for conservation, can lead to conflicts between the resource users and conservation officials. Such closures affect the poor disproportionately, and increase the workload for women, who have to travel further to obtain basic resources like water, fuelwood, or fodder. Such disempowerment of local communities can also lead to rapid depletion of resources as the sense of 'ownership' is lost.

- **Tourism**

Tourism is the world's fastest growing industry and mountain regions have become prime tourist destinations. But in many cases, tourism has driven mountain people from their homes, exploited the resources on which they survive, denied them drinking water, and displaced them from traditional occupations. The mountain women are the most affected as they are the most dependent on the natural resources. The local community must be allowed to decide how and what sort of tourism it wants, and should be empowered to grant (and refuse) operational licenses to tour operators. Community-based tourism should be promoted in mountain areas, initiated and operated by local providers in harmony with their traditional culture and land management approach. This approach provides a means of maintaining local control and ownership whilst ensuring the conservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources.

- **A women-specific approach versus gender mainstreaming**

Although gender mainstreaming is important in development projects and in aspects of governance, women-focused projects can be useful in situations in which women lack a voice, and can help participants build confidence, social capital, and skills.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

"To counterbalance high out-migration, primarily of men, successful integrated mountain development requires innovative economic and political policies. In Cuba, the government constituted a Ministry of Mountains to look into ways of reducing migration. The government invested money not only in basic infrastructures like hospitals and schools but also in recreation. Employment opportunities were thus created for the younger generation. This helped in reducing migration and shows that if there is a political will, the problem can be overcome."

Rosalaura Romeo, CMW participant from FAO, Italy

Conclusion

The role of mountain women merits special appreciation and consideration in development and conservation policy. Livelihoods in mountains have deteriorated in many places. Poverty is widespread. The gap between knowledge and action, between information and implementation has widened. In order to better address the issues relevant to mountain women, it is necessary to understand the status of women compared to men and to strengthen women's roles in natural resource management. This requires that relevant information is made available. Proper education, facilitation, information, and opportunities need to be specially provided to mountain women. The 'hidden perspectives' and voices of mountain women must be heard in districts and national capitals to ensure that planners do not design inappropriate programmes and policies. Mountain women are the bedrock of their homes and of the communities upon which mountain survival and development depend (ICIMOD 1998).

Health and Well-being

The current situation

Possession of good health and well-being are crucial for all mountain people, and especially women who must be in a fit state to grow and process the crops needed to feed the family and to cope with all the daily needs of their household. However, in many regions mountain people have limited or no access to primary health-care facilities, especially the women as they are less likely to be able to travel to a distant centre for treatment. Health and well-being are central to survival and sustainability; successful interventions in these areas could dramatically improve the lives of mountain women. There is little information and data available on the health and well-being of specifically mountain communities; and planners are not motivated to redress problems that are not quantified. There is a growing recognition that the causes and complexities of health issues need to be analysed more carefully. More research and policy analysis and development are needed.

Policy-makers and practitioners need to look at the issue of women's health from a wider perspective than specific issues or diseases, and not focus on health delivery systems as the sole instrument of change. Health issues should be integrated in other sectoral intervention programmes. Interventions in policy, advocacy, research, and implementation should be addressed through collaborative efforts at the community, public sector, and private/ NGO sector levels. Some generic points are summarised below.

Issues, research and policy needs, and recommended actions

• Lack of access to health-care services

Women in mountain areas have limited access to quality health care services and infrastructure. Some of the pertinent factors are affordability, limited physical access, lack of trained personnel, and inability to be absent from daily work. Social and cultural pressures can also limit access. Appropriate management systems need to be established at national, district, and village levels for more efficient and cost-effective delivery of services. Referral centres need to be better equipped and staffed appropriately for efficient delivery. The budgetary allocations for programmes to improve the health of mountain women and their families should be increased, and greater investments made in related programmes like provision of safe drinking water, hygiene education, and technologies that directly affect health. Private sector involvement in health care in mountain areas should be encouraged. Corporate companies played a vital role in the Roll Back Malaria initiatives in five African countries, and have partnered with UNAIDS, for example, to work on marketing and distributing education and health materials (WHO 2002).

Health professionals, and particularly women, should be trained in the issues of community needs, gender equity, and violence, in addition to more technical subjects, taking into consideration the cultural context of the mountains. Incentives should be provided for health professionals to work in remote mountain areas, and local midwives should be trained to help reduce maternal deaths and illness.

The struggle for health in a mountainous area never ends. One bit of negligence can tip the precarious balance between well-being and illness, even between life and death.
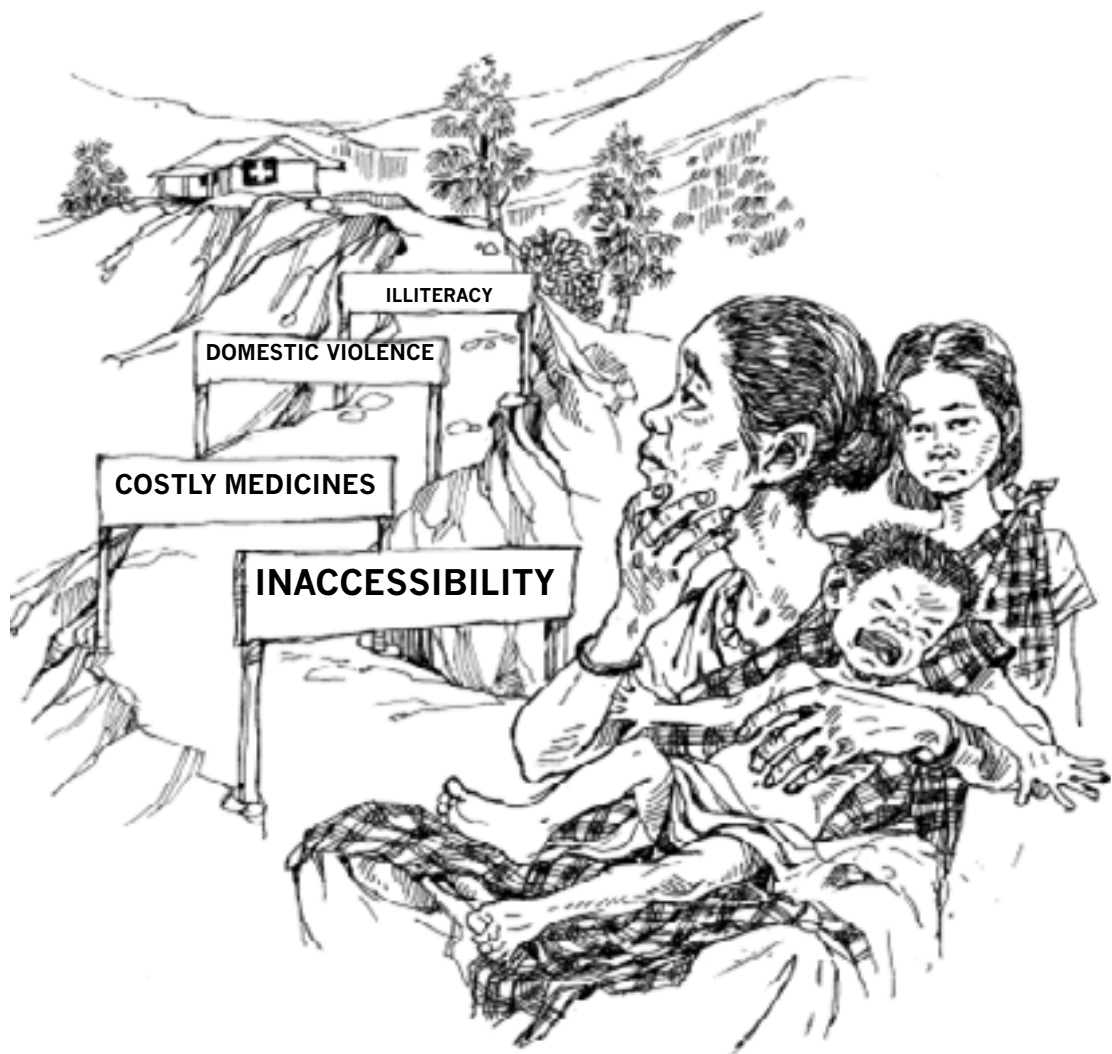   Rural Health Development Project of Dolakha and Ramechap Districts, Nepal 2000

• The need to recognise complexities

The wider complexities and root causes of gender and location differentials in health and health care are not adequately understood. The inequitably high physical workload of mountain women has been highlighted as a major health problem. The relationship between work and health status should be researched more intensely. The root causes of problems need to be tackled. Technologies to reduce the physical burden of mountain women need to be designed, improved, tested, and disseminated using women's knowledge.

• Gaps in reproductive health services

Many women in mountain areas struggle to have control over their reproductive life. Low levels of knowledge and information limit the ability to make informed decisions, and lack of local access to services

INACCESSIBILITY

COSTLY MEDICINES

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

ILLITERACY

Mainstreaming Gender Issues

Gender issues should be mainstreamed and women's voices integrated into public policies and programmes. Gender mainstreaming programmes should include:

- participation in all programme stages;
- employment in management positions;
- equal access to funding for service delivery;
- priority to women for capacity building;
- development of indicators to achieve gender equity goals;
- inclusion of sex disaggregated data and statistics in reports;
- special incentives for women health workers;
- provision of crèche facilities in health centres; and
- gender training to promote awareness and facilitate better implementation

Usmani -CMW participant from India

limits the ability to implement decisions made. The rise of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections, misconceived religious beliefs, high fertility rates, abortion, pregnancy complications, and weak health service facilities are among the causes of the high rate of women's mortality.

• Mental trauma and stress

Domestic violence, ethnic and political conflicts, and the absence of proper health-care facilities aggravate mental trauma and stress in mountain women. In many conflict zones, women not only have to deal with the violence committed against their families and communities but are often used as targets and as a means to humiliate men.

• Traditional medical practices and knowledge

Most mountain people rely on traditional medicinal practices, but the potential of local wisdom for curative care and health promotion has not yet been harnessed in the modern medical services. Traditional medicines and knowledge related to women need to be researched seriously. This will help documentation, prevent knowledge loss, and provide a basis for including traditional practices in health services. Traditional and local knowledge needs to be incorporated into the policies and programmes of the public and private sectors. Local, indigenous knowledge systems need to be linked with the modern health approach.

• Women's education and information

Illiteracy and lack of access to health-related information affects women more than men. Girls are less likely to go to school, and more likely to be married early and to suffer from taboos surrounding sexuality. Education should be encouraged as a means of empowering

women. Educated women delay marriage, prefer fewer children, are more likely to adopt contraceptive methods, and understand their rights better. National and regional forums and other mechanisms need to be developed to increase grass roots' women's participation, and provide a forum through which they can update their knowledge and advocate common interests and concerns related to health.

- **Need for gender-sensitive policies and programmes based on improved information**

Gender-insensitive policies and programmes can mean that women's special health needs are not addressed, for example problems arising from differences in nutrition, morbidity, and access to health care. Learning more about the communities and their sociocultural realities is crucial. It will only be possible to analyse and understand, and thus plan to redress, mountain women's health issues properly when disaggregated data become available, particularly at a regional level.

The impact of health policies on mountain women needs to be analysed and the cost effectiveness of programmes for women's well-being assessed. Health programmes and policies that are focused on mountain area needs should be developed and implemented, and education and counselling initiatives should be enhanced. Policies and programmes must take into account the gender disparities within different socioeconomic layers. A special focus is needed on low-income families who are often the farthest removed from access to services.

- **Male migration and the HIV/AIDS situation**

Not only do women have to work harder when men are absent, returning men can bring back diseases like HIV/AIDS. This has become a major concern in many remote areas as it affects not only women, but also the whole family. More factual data is needed on the HIV/AIDS situation in mountain regions. Studies and research are needed to examine the real scenarios and address the problems.

I talk with my husband about health now. He is beginning to understand and wants to participate. I tell him he must understand better than anyone else about these things – women don't have children alone.

A woman of Peru

- **Strategies to integrate men**

Strategies need to be developed and integrated for creating awareness and involvement of men in health initiatives. In Afghanistan, male health workers were trained to teach the women in their families (who were not allowed out in public).

- **Promote innovative approaches**

Innovative approaches like health micro-insurance schemes and other community-based approaches should be promoted. In some south-east Asian countries, institutional mechanisms such as the establishment of a women's police desk, regulations governing police investigations, standardised investigation kits, and one-stop crisis centres provide a positive step towards supporting women victims of violence (UNFPA 2002).

Conclusion

Increased investment in the health and well-being of women should have a high priority; families, communities, and in the long run national economies, all benefit when women are healthy. A greater impact can be achieved if health issues are also integrated into programmes in other sectors.

Entrepreneurship

The current situation

On average mountain woman are estimated to work about 11 hours a day, yet few can truly be called entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, many mountain women not only lack formal education but also operate in areas where the market is restricted and the potential for profit low. Many women entrepreneurs in the mountains remain on the periphery of the macro economy. But small businesses can provide an important route to independence and economic security.

There is little information or data available on the enterprises of mountain women, or even men. Mountain communities are rarely treated as a separate group and it is difficult to obtain the economic and social data needed to help formulate appropriate action plans. Governments can help women's enterprises grow through gender-sensitive policies, legislation, and action, and non-government organisations have a major role to play as catalysts in the process.

Issues, research and policy needs, and recommended actions

- **Access to markets**

Mountain entrepreneurs, may lack physical access to and limited information about markets, and transport costs are high. Small-sized, dispersed production units can lead to high transaction costs per unit of output. The remoteness of mountain communities often makes the sale of bulky goods economically unviable. Mountain products and

marketing strategies should be developed taking into account market access and potential, intermediaries set up to market goods and services with a reasonable commission, and networks created among producers and service providers. Governments and other agencies need to identify market linkages for mountain products that acknowledge the cultural and biological diversities of local communities. Trade networks need to be established and relationships developed with trading partners to conduct fair trade.

- **Information and training**

Women need to be given access to the knowledge and skills needed to plan, operate, and manage an enterprise so that they can sustain their enterprises with the returns. Initiatives should be encouraged that support the development of appropriate training tools and training programmes for mountain women. The training should focus on the conditions in mountain regions and help promote skills, quality management, and business development, including accounting systems. Best practices among mountain communities should be documented and disseminated

- **Organisational support**

Mountain women in many countries are 'first generation' entrepreneurs. The most important activity to support the development of entrepreneurship among mountain women is the creation of support groups that facilitate collective sourcing of raw materials, production, and marketing.

Encourage and Provide Micro-credit

The Royal Government of Bhutan has made provision for giving micro-credit to the landless under a group guarantee lending and savings scheme (GGLS). Nearly half of the GGLS beneficiaries are women entrepreneurs. Loans are also available to individuals with mortgageable security like land. The Bhutan Development Finance Corporation (BDFC) provides finance and consultancy for business enterprises from cottage scale to large industries.

- **Access to credit**

Lack of access to capital resources and credit poses a significant constraint to women starting an enterprise. Soft loans, credit facilities for raw materials, and incentives to upgrade technology can give a jump-start to entrepreneurship.

- **Infrastructure**

Access to raw materials, production technology, market information, and markets is essential. The infrastructure necessary to support enterprise development, like roads, transport, energy sources, and communications, needs to be developed.

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Grasping the Opportunity: Mountain Tourism

Karma Doma Sherpa does not speak good English yet she does good business. She is the wife of a trekking guide. Trekkers often enquired about a place to spend the night before their trek, and although Karma only had a three-roomed house without running water or electricity she sacrificed one room to accommodate trekkers and went out at night to fetch water. That was 10 years ago. Today, she is the proud owner of an 11-room lodge and employs a cook. Her husband helps her and also brings in guests. Together, they now have enough money to send their children to a good school and on to higher education.

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- **Tourism**

Tourism should be promoted in such a way that it benefits the local people. In the mountains, where income and employment opportunities are scarce, tourism can provide a useful source of income.

- **Policy and participation**

The comparative advantages of mountain areas are often not exploited. The resources locally available to mountain communities are not properly documented or understood by development planners and need to be researched. Factors and circumstances identified in success stories, and products that have demonstrated sustainable growth patterns, should be incorporated when developing policy and programme interventions for mountain areas.

Planners need to recognise and acknowledge the hurdles that women entrepreneurs face, including lack of mobility and education, and the effects of cultural norms. Governments should open up their policies and encourage local private enterprises. Gender-sensitive policies should be encouraged through support groups, networks, and trading alliances so that mountain women have control over the resource base, incomes, and access to markets. Policies need to be formulated that support mainstream gender issues and acknowledge that women are capable of entrepreneurship. Mountain women should be involved in policy-making at local, regional, and national level and given equal opportunities to participate in decision-making and selection of enterprises.

- **Gender imbalances**

In many mountain communities, women do most of the hard work, but it is usually the men who assume management roles. Support systems are needed for mountain woman entrepreneurs.

- **Intellectual property rights and biogenetic resources**

Many mountain products are unique, but they are generally not protected by patents or certification. The potential value of a weaving design evolved through generations, for example, is lost by mass

product replication by agencies external to the mountain communities. Awareness should be raised about the value of, and need to create, good business practices to protect the knowledge, biogenetic resources, diversity, designs, and products of mountain women.

Peru: A Stitch in Time

In Peru, a group of women organised a 'mother's club' to look after their health needs during the difficult time in the late eighties when the activities of the Shining Path severely disrupted normal life. Spurred on by the difficulties of travelling to town to shop, these same women decided to become self-sufficient, and generate income, by making clothes. They clubbed together to buy one sewing machine and materials, and held a one-week crash course in sewing for 20 members. Now ten members have their own sewing machine, clothes no longer need to be bought from the far away town, members have a small income, and profits are being used for reinvestment.

Conclusion

Success stories in different mountain regions have shown that women can successfully manage enterprises. Governments, multi-lateral aid agencies, and NGOs have major roles to play in support and promotion. Women-run or owned enterprises are often small and less capital intensive, partly as a result of lack of skills, training, credit, and confidence. The current processes of trade liberalisation and globalisation are a threat to these small initiatives, but can also provide opportunities if state and other mechanisms help them overcome key structural and infrastructural constraints. Social, institutional, and legal mechanisms need to be evolved and strengthened to improve women's access to and control over the resources needed to start enterprises, as well as to improve the benefits resulting from their efforts.

Political, Legal and Human Rights

The current situation

Rights control virtually all human activities in civil society and cut across all areas of social life. Rights safeguard, guarantee, and ensure access to land, health, educational services, information, quality of life, and development. Rights can be categorised broadly into political, legal, and human rights. Mountain communities across the globe are often deprived of many rights, and often it is the women and the

Issues That Need Attention

- Land rights and tenure systems.
- Human rights of women in conflict situations
- Health rights and access to health
- Educational rights
- Political rights and the right to make decisions
- The right of access to information
- Economic, social and cultural rights
- The right to development

CMW participants from the political, legal, and human rights group

poorest who are affected most. At present, the specific challenges for the development of mountain regions are rarely reflected or protected in national policies. Favourable policies and stronger policy commitments are amongst the most pressing needs for mountain women and mountain development in general. This includes stronger policy commitments on issues of health and well-being, education, and the capacity building of mountain women and their communities; a policy focus on improving access to services, economic infrastructure, and activities; and support for local institutions and reforms.

It is important that mountain women and men are recognised as equal partners in development. Women need to be represented in decision-making processes at all levels; strategies are needed to ensure recognition of local institutions and the rights of local communities to natural resources. Networks and platforms should be established to give mountain women a voice.

Mountain women have rights, the right to information on health and livelihoods, on events affecting their lives, and on opportunities to participate. These rights need to be guaranteed and addressed not only through women-specific policies, laws, and institutional arrangements, but also by giving and translating such decisions into actions.

Issues, research and policy needs, and recommended actions

• Impact of changing socio-political equations

The adaptation of neo-liberal policies across the world has had grave consequences for mountain communities everywhere. Many mountain countries, especially in the developing world, were unprepared, socially, culturally, economically, and politically, for such rapid forces of change. The policies compelled many governments to shift their priorities, which often resulted in denial of the civil and political rights of mountain communities. Similarly, the forces of globalisation have also greatly altered donor policies and priorities in recent years. This has no doubt had an immense impact on mountain people as a whole. Despite

all these changes, the basic needs of most mountain women and their communities have remained unchanged.

- **Need for appropriate policies**

Mountain women have their own specific needs and issues. In order to ensure their position as equal partners, mountain women must be given the power to advocate their rights and interests. It is therefore essential to integrate mountain-specific policies within the policy-making framework of each nation or region.

- **Women's involvement in advocacy and decision-making bodies**

Women have an important role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns, but they remain on the periphery when it comes to decision-making. Mountain women's representation should be ensured in decision-making bodies at all levels, and in all spheres of governments or bodies including the UN agencies, donors, lawmakers, political parties, national institutions, governments, and traditional leaders. Formation of mountain women's committees should be supported and facilitated to help in bringing women issues to the fore. Gender-sensitisation programmes should be promoted for governments, academia, private sector institutions, and law enforcement agencies.

Bhutan's Enabling Environment

Bhutan appears to be a success story. The government is consciously focused on gender-based equity issues. It ratified CEDAW in 1991 and has enacted appropriate laws in consonance with the convention. Representation of women in positions of decision-making is steadily increasing without benefit from any reservation or quota system. Development initiatives are aimed specifically at women to enhance the quality of education and other specifics. Several factors have enabled this environment including the following.

- *Gender equity is grounded in Bhutanese religion and traditions*
- *Political commitment to address the gaps*
- *Bhutan has enacted the CEDAW convention as law*
- *Holistic approach to health and education*
- *Equitable land ownership pattern*
- *Strong family structure*

Kunzang Namgyel, CMW participant from Bhutan

- **Ownership of resources**

Although women may have access to land, forest, and animals, they rarely have formal ownership of these resources. This is more evident in developing countries where women's rights are often linked with their marital status. The lack of ownership limits women's access to other resources and information. They cannot use land as security to obtain loans (Wymann von Dach 2002). Even in many matrilineal societies, women inherit the ancestral property but have no say in its manage-

ment; the maternal uncles or other men take the decisions and control and manage the resources. Research is needed on the potential impact of reductions in gender inequality on the distribution of productive assets such as land and forests.

• **Governance and governments**
Mountain regions require basic structure and support systems to bring about good governance. Unfortunately this is lacking in most mountain countries. Mountains generally encompass a variety of ecosystems, whereas government policies and programmes tend to be generic and/or insensitive to specific needs. Grass roots' level institutions must be empowered and their capacities developed with the active participation of women. The political frameworks must also encourage initiatives by local communities. 'Governance' is about a process that includes formal government but also embraces a wider notion of all those agencies that play a role in the control of individuals and groups in society, for example private companies, NGOs, religious organisations, and kinship and family groups (Funnell 2001).

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Development in mountain communities is difficult while battles are raging. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), says, "As we begin commemorating the International Year of Mountains, conflict may be the single greatest obstacle to achieving our goals. Without peace, we cannot reduce poverty. Without peace, we cannot ensure secure food supplies. Without peace, we cannot even consider sustainable development."

FAO 2001

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• **Mountain women and conflict situations**
It is no coincidence that 23 of the world's 27 major conflicts in 1999 were in mountain areas. To these can be added the numerous undeclared wars and internal conflicts that go unreported. The impact on women and children as innocent victims of armed conflict is hardly reported or recognised by the media, government agencies, and political bodies. In many mountain regions, men out-migrate for better opportunities or because they get recruited into armies. This leaves the women as heads of household, a role they must fulfil along with their other responsibilities. In conflict situations, women often find themselves victims of the worst forms of human rights abuses and can be internally displaced within their own countries. But women are not just victims; they can and do play a crucial role in peace building and conflict resolution.

• **Lack of awareness of legal rights and policies**
Some countries have laws and policies meant to develop and protect the rights of mountain communities, but there is little awareness of these laws. Mountain people lack access to information and are often not even aware of policies and legislation that affect them. Many

> *When repression is strong, men retreat because they are too vulnerable, whereas women come out in their traditional roles, as nurturers and as protectors of the community. It is an empowering experience. It is the women who negotiate with the security forces and the administration. It is both women's importance and weakness that gives them the right to access the powerful and say, "Give me justice".*
>
> Rita Manchanda

statutes meant for development of mountain regions remain unheard of and unimplemented.

• **Lack of mountain-specific laws and policies**

Many of the policies and laws that directly or indirectly recognise the importance of mountain resources were developed by and from a downstream perspective that fails to take into consideration mountain specificities or to consider the specific challenges of mountain development. Unfortunately, development policies in many countries have undermined mountain livelihoods rather than bolstering them, and have left mountain communities enmeshed in interlocked webs of growing populations, declining resources, and increasing poverty and environmental degradation. The challenges are varied and the approaches to them need to be varied too. Governments and traditional bodies should be encouraged to support research on mountain-specific policies and laws for mountain women. Such studies should also analyse the impacts of international instruments like the Thimphu and Bishkek declarations. When formulating policy initiatives and partnerships, policy-makers must give women a voice and make special efforts to address their specific concerns.

• **Conflicts between customary and statutory laws**

Disputes between customary laws and statutory laws occur frequently and are often politically sensitive, more so when it comes to defining the rights and obligations over natural resource management and use, especially between local mountain communities and downstream users or agencies. In most mountain countries, economic development policies have led to the expropriation of customary land rights and their redistribution to a range of vested commercial interests. Despite the role of indigenous mountain communities in maintaining or owning the land as ancestral property, such communities in many parts of the world have never been granted property rights to the natural resources. Moreover, because rights to land, forests, freshwater, or minerals are generally defined in a country's legal system, the traditional rights are often not defendable in court. For many mountain communities, their way of life and how they manage their resources depends wholly on their age-old traditions and customary laws. Research is needed on customary law compared with statutory law, specifically on issues related to women. Embedded in the customary laws is an extremely

strong sense of duty to the community. Policy and law-makers must harness the wisdom, confidence, and customs of local communities when formulating laws for mountain development. In addition to this, the stake of the communities, especially women, vis-à-vis, rights and access to natural resources, must be recognised and respected.

- **Researching how to address root causes**

The connection between human rights and legal and economic issues needs to be investigated. Approaches for addressing the root causes of gender inequity and socio-cultural disparities should be developed taking into account the complexities of issues and cultures in mountain regions.

- **Legal and human rights**

There is an urgent need to study and understand the rights status of women, especially mountain women. These rights include rights to property, health, and education; socioeconomic and political rights; the right to development; and even the right of access to information. Civil society needs to be encouraged to lobby governments to ratify and implement international conventions such as CEDAW through donors, advocacy groups, and NGOs. Campaigns for policies that advocate 'gender budgeting' from donor agencies, governments, and NGOs, should be encouraged. A situation analysis should be made of women affected by armed conflicts, and women's organisations should be encouraged to work as peace builders through the donor community, governments, and NGOs. Existing gender-fair laws need to be enforced – facilitated by government enforcement agencies, advocacy groups, and individual activists. Human rights pertaining to women should be integrated into all levels of education and public campaigns adopted by donor agencies, governments, and other institutions. Experiential learning and sharing of success stories among mountain women should be initiated and encouraged through networks and alliances.

Political Marginalisation of Mountain Communities

Mountain communities have often been politically marginalised, excluded from the centres of politics, power, and decision-making. Physical distance and poor communication may make political participation more difficult, but simple lack of political will to include highland populations in national affairs has often been the main factor.

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Conclusion

In many developing countries, development policies have actually undermined small-scale agriculture rather than aided it, and have left mountain women and their farming communities enmeshed in inter-locked webs of growing populations, declining resources, and increasing poverty and environmental degradation. The dynamics of economic,

Creating an Enabling Policy Environment: A Key Role for Governments

Often, sustainable development of mountain areas can be achieved through initiatives undertaken by civil society and the private sector, including commercial cooperation. However, national policies and instruments are important for creating an enabling environment, including an adequate legal and regulatory framework. Providing such an environment must be one of the aims of national policy initiatives for mountain development.

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political, social, and demographic pressures have caused much damage in mountain regions. This has often been aggravated by inappropriate institutional settings, including governance. Mountain regions require a different approach to development than lowlands. Unfortunately the national legislation and policies of many countries do not adequately address the special needs and concerns of mountains and their communities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop new legal and policy frameworks at international, national, and decentralised levels.

Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

The current situation

Over the centuries, many traditional cultures have developed beliefs and practices that preserve mountain environments; these approaches often provide a sounder and more enduring basis for conservation and development than measures based solely on economic, legal, or scientific considerations. However, 'modernisation' and influences of the 'outside' world have affected mountain communities and their traditional knowledge systems. The traditional channels of passing knowledge from one generation to another have either been diluted or are not practised. Indigenous knowledge is in danger of being lost because of a lack of proper documentation and research. Very little information exists about mountain women, their status, gender relations, and issues concerning their culture and indigenous knowledge systems. However, of late there has been a growing recognition that much can be learned from the ways that mountain women traditionally manage their social and natural environments.

The gaps between the policy goals and local realities include policies designed outside the community which are inappropriate in the local context, and which ignore the daily activities of men and women. Frequently, policy directives come without funds, so they become little more than expressions of intent noted on official documents. On the other hand, there is an absence of relevant data or research materials on mountain women that can be accessed by law makers or development agencies.

Careful analysis of the roles and responsibilities of mountain women, their access to and control over resources, and their culture and indigenous knowledge systems is a prerequisite for enhancing sustainable development in mountain areas. Mountain people, both women and men, have to be given a more important voice, as well as opportunities to take part in decision-making at local, regional, and international levels.

Issues, research and policy needs, and recommended actions

- **Promotion of indigenous arts and crafts**

Arts and crafts express the beliefs and practices of cultures. The crafts industry is one in which women play a predominant role, and many mountain women are talented artists who continue to use traditional

knowledge transmitted from mother to daughter. Despite the lack of good markets, these women manage to bring in a modest revenue that helps meet household and medical needs. The knowledge and skill base of indigenous arts and crafts is fast depleting and there is an urgent need for programmes that support and train mountain women in these activities, and promote marketing. Creativity needs to be encouraged in traditional arts and handicrafts. A support mechanism should be formulated to reward individual, collective, and community traditional knowledge.

• **Alliances between different institutions**
Partnerships should be built amongst governments, NGOs, public and private bodies, and women's groups, in order to train mountain women in self-empowerment. NGOs, government agencies, and private companies can also play a key role in providing training facilities to women and access to outside markets for traditional products.

• **Indigenous and formal knowledge**
The knowledge of indigenous people, especially in mountain regions, is immense and it is this very knowledge system that has sustained them and the mountains throughout the ages. However, much of this knowledge has neither been tapped nor researched and there is a gap between the traditional and scientific schools of thought. Traditional knowledge must be incorporated or blended into 'modern' scientific knowledge systems, and educationalists and researchers must find ways to incorporate and blend traditional and cultural education into curricula at all levels and to involve indigenous women and men as teachers and trainers. Strong support is needed for value addition to grass roots' innovations and the generation of sustainable technologies through the integration of indigenous and 'modern' knowledge systems. Programmes of sustainable mountain development can draw on traditional and modern cultures to ground their conservation efforts in deeply held values and beliefs that will make them more understandable and enduring.

• **Loss of indigenous knowledge**
Mountain women have a great wealth of knowledge that is passed orally from one generation to another. Mountain communities, especially women, have used their traditional knowledge and practices to protect the environment and conserve diversity (both biological and cultural) in a variety of ways. In many communities, women are the safe keepers of agro-biodiversity and they possess immense knowledge about the food resources and seed banks of their community. Much of this knowledge has never been researched or documented and is in danger of being lost forever as those entrusted with its keeping die and the younger generation either migrate to other developed areas or have less interest – as has already happened in most plains areas. This loss is not only detrimental to the survival of the cultures and traditions of the mountain communities but to society at large. In a time of increasing homogenisation, cultural and indigenous knowledge needs protection and perpetuation.

Documenting Knowledge: Now or Never

Mountain women are not only familiar with local plant and animal species but many also understand the ecological interactions of various components better than most formally trained natural scientists. They know which varieties of their crops are resistant to common plant diseases and pests, which are more productive, which taste better or have a better flavour, and which have a ritual or religious significance. They are responsible for collecting, selecting, and storing seeds. Over centuries they have used their deep understanding of the characteristics and value of different crops to sustain and enhance certain traits, and even to develop new varieties. As the family's primary health-care givers, women also possess considerable knowledge about the medicinal properties of different plants. Unless immediate steps are taken to research and document this valuable knowledge, it will be lost forever.

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- **Cultural division of roles**

In many traditional mountain communities, gender allocation of roles for men and women influences all aspects of life. The gendered division of labour often allocates women a heavier workload than men. Women share agricultural and livestock tasks with men, and have the additional burden of household and child care responsibilities.

- **Role in decision-making**

Women in mountain regions, like their counterparts in the lowlands, are usually in charge of bringing up children and responsible for domestic activities. Men have the economic control and make decisions. It is rare to see women attending public meetings; even though they are directly involved in the use and management of natural resources, including farming and livestock rearing, they have no ownership over these resources. These situations are either deeply rooted in culture and traditions or result from lack of education, poor health, or policies that are not women-friendly. Research is required on the cultural and institutional factors that are barriers to women's effective participation in household and community-level decision-making processes and access to resources.

- **Research and documentation**

Documentation and sensitisation are required to foster and integrate new trends and developments that can keep mountain systems alive and provide opportunities to find optimal solutions to local problems. Participatory research programmes are needed to explore indigenous cultures and religious knowledge systems, especially involving women and mountain communities, and to record the specific ways of owning, using, and maintaining diverse natural resources. Women must retain ownership over the knowledge they generate.

      celebrating mountain women

- **Patenting rights and sharing of benefits**

Documentation of indigenous knowledge is important, but official registration of this knowledge is equally necessary to prevent misappropriation and ensure communities' access to the benefits. The intellectual rights of people with knowledge of the use of herbs and plants and those that provide genetic source material need attention. Many policies and laws relating to patenting rights and indigenous knowledge are ambiguous, which aids the process of 'mainstreaming' the rights of control over community resources and knowledge. Governments and NGOs must develop a process to implement instruments for protecting the intellectual property rights of mountain women.

- **Disseminate knowledge**

Programmes, ecological indicators, and scientific criteria to value traditional knowledge need to be created and disseminated using various modes of outreach, including information communication technology. Language barriers should be considered and multi-lingual translation and various modes of dissemination and sharing of knowledge need to be ensured to enable women's voices to express and share their experiences directly.

Protecting Innovations in the Andes of Bolivia

The Agro-ecology Programme of the University of Cochabamba (AGRUCO) in Bolivia developed a simple methodology to document local technologies and innovation in the form of handbills. To date, around 1000 handbills have been produced. Community authorities watch over them as part of their 'cultural heritage'. Innovations that have been documented in the collection of 'Andean technologies' cannot be patented by foreign multinational firms.

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- **Impact of globalisation**

Globalisation has proved to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, women are increasingly recognised as major players in development. On the other, notions of cultural specificity have come to the fore in ways related to gender relations and the appropriate conduct of women. The relative isolation of many mountain communities has allowed them to retain traditional cultures and their ways of life. However the advent of modernisation and the entry of various communication channels have opened even the most isolated communities to the outside world. This influence has resulted in diminishing interest in traditional culture and knowledge systems, especially among the younger generation.

- **Impact of tourism**

Tourism is a natural source of income for many mountain communities but it needs to be managed in culturally appropriate ways. The commercialisation of tourism has had adverse impacts on mountain

communities and their cultures. Local ceremonies with deep meaning for local people are easily reduced to superficial shows for visitors. While tourism might have benefited some economically, the intermingling of locals with 'outsiders' has in many cases adversely affected local cultures and traditions. Sustainable tourism must respect and enhance the integrity of cultures and environments.

- **Cultural discrimination**

Culture is an important consideration when dealing with mountain communities and peoples. However, not all aspects of tradition and culture are positive or gender sensitive, and many such norms adversely impact on the lives of mountain women. Cultural and institutional factors can also be barriers to women's effective participation. Problematic aspects should be identified and positive changes brought about. Education programmes should be developed to raise levels of awareness about cultural practices that are detrimental to women. Efforts are needed to encourage positive interpretations of cultures and religions to advance gender equality.

- **The need for appropriate policies**

The value of cultural diversity needs to be recognised. Policy-makers and donor agencies must increase support for cultural diversity and reflect this in sectoral policies in areas such as agriculture, livestock, forestry, health, and education.

- **Networks for knowledge sharing**

Networks need to be established to enable mountain women to share experiences and learn through exchange. Creativity should be sought out, stimulated, shared, and sustained by establishing symbiotic linkages among local innovators, investors, research and development institutions and experts, entrepreneurs, project planners, policy-makers, and other civil society actors. ICT should not be seen as a hurdle for high mountain areas simply because of the high investment costs and dependence on sophisticated technology. Research is needed to see how it can be best exploited, even for remote communities. Based on the findings, networks should be established that will facilitate sharing of knowledge, experiences, and learning among mountain women using ICT and other pathways.

- **Research needs**

There is an immediate need to research into and identify entry points to mainstream strategies and processes for equitable distribution of mountain resources at both policy and practical levels. There is a vast knowledge gap in terms of data relating to mountain people's ways of life and mountain resources. There is a need for critical examination of the history of cultures and its relevance to contemporary times.

- **The need to analyse impact**

There is a need for longitudinal studies on the long-term effects of various measures and programmes that make use of culture and religion in sustainable mountain development. For example, do local people and communities take better care of seedlings planted in religious ceremonies and refrain from cutting them down when the trees are fully grown?

Conclusion

Around the world from the Andes to the Himalayas, mountain cultures and indigenous knowledge systems are inextricably intertwined with the landscape, each influencing and shaping the other in complex ways. Programmes of sustainable mountain development need to recognise that mountain women are an integral part of the environment and that their diverse ways of life need to be sustained and developed along with biodiversity and natural resources. Mountain women continue to be the custodians of local knowledge and practices. They remind us that there are many ways of seeing the environment and many reasons for valuing and protecting the world in which we live. It is time that the importance and value of indigenous knowledge held by women be reconsidered, and social and cultural barriers faced by women understood. The fast pace of development in many mountain areas, accompanied by a quick erosion of local values, traditions, and knowledge, are a trend for general concern. Programmes and projects in mountain areas must aim to search for and promote local value systems that empower women and help overcome those aspects of 'culture' that disempower and constrain mountain women from participating more actively in mountain development efforts.