

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

WORKING GROUPS

The Workshop identified issues for further discussion on the basis of the presentations in the preliminary session and by participants under three broad headings: (i) Products of Women-Run Enterprises; (ii) Marketing; and (iii) Institutions, Policies and Programme Interventions. Three Working Groups were formed to discuss these issues in detail and formulate recommendations. The conclusions and recommendations from the Working Groups are summarised in the following.

Products of Women-Run Enterprises in Mountain Areas

The main questions posed and considered under this theme were as follow. Are there specific product lines on which women entrepreneurs are concentrating? Are they reasonably remunerative? What other possible product lines are there, and what are the ways to diversify women's enterprises into more dynamic product lines? How can productivity and returns be improved in the existing product lines?

The group found that women entrepreneurs mostly concentrated on certain specific product lines, the more important among them being: woollen products, weaving/handloom products, herbal products, bee-keeping, dairy products, fruit farming, vegetable farming, floriculture, *papad* making, small-scale lodges, restaurants/tea-stalls, natural fibre-based products, and bamboo products. This represents a wide range of product lines with varying scope for dynamic expansion and widening markets. In themselves, these product lines are not necessarily less remunerative than those in which enterprises run by men specialise, but in general they offer only small returns to individual entrepreneurs because the size of the operations is small.

Women-run enterprises face problems in both enlarging the scale of production and improving productivity and returns. The main factors restricting the former are the limited availability and often dispersed location of raw materials, the lack of access to capital and credit, and the lack of appropriate market information and market linkages. Thus the group made the following recommendations.

- Improved access to credit
- Developing cooperatives and other forms of organizations of enterprises run by women entrepreneurs, especially in similar product lines
- Support for market research for diversifying products
- Facilitating information sharing through meetings and workshops and exchange visits
- Documentation of, and incentives for, regeneration of the mountain natural resources on which many enterprises are based

The major constraints to raising productivity and returns on women-run enterprises were identified as lack of skills and technology, quality control, suitable energy inputs, and lack of information about markets and the prevalence of exploitative marketing channels. The group recommended the following.

- Well-focussed skill and entrepreneurship development training for groups of women entrepreneurs based on product lines
- Support for upgrading technologies
- Development of appropriate energy
- Collective marketing of products

In addition, some products faced special problems and, therefore, required specific measures.

Weaving enterprises were suffering from a lack of new designs, and therefore required help in developing designs and patterns in accordance with market demand.

Herbal products' enterprises suffered not only from the dispersed location of raw materials, but also from the general scarcity of such materials, often created by unrealistic laws and regulations restricting their use. Instead of a general ban on use, the regulatory regime should allow use with incentives for regeneration.

Floriculture enterprises had difficulty in acquiring greenhouses and polyhouses and needed constant monitoring. Linking with larger marketing organizations might make it possible to procure the equipment and services more easily.

In the case of dairy enterprises, insurance for animals and veterinary services were identified among the major requirements needed to improve the risk-bearing capacity of farmers and yield and returns.

The Group felt that ICIMOD could help by documentation, facilitating information sharing, identifying experts and support agencies, and providing advisory services to the governments and other institutions concerned.

Marketing

The Working Group on Marketing dealt with the questions of how seriously markets and marketing act as constraints for women entrepreneurs in mountain areas? what are the different ways of improving access to markets and ensuring remunerative prices? and what steps do entrepreneurs and their organizations need to take to improve markets and marketing for their products?

The group unanimously reached the conclusion that marketing is a major problem in most cases. The main factors contributing to this problem were the small production scale, limited access to information, distance to markets, lack of knowledge about and skills on marketing, and lack of quality control.

The participants noted various forms and channels of marketing in vogue and found that systematic linkages with larger marketing organizations, be they government sponsored, privately run, or project/programme sponsored, have helped improve the situation. The sustainability of these arrangements, however, can only be ensured when they are backed by entrepreneurs' own organizations. The participants and their organizations can help women entrepreneurs at the local level by providing advisory services and training. They should help entrepreneurs form producers' organizations based on products and services. Besides working as suppliers of raw materials and support groups for value-added production, these organizations would also engage in marketing. The group found that self-managed collective organizations were the most effective at reaching out to larger markets, maintaining prices, and reducing risks.

The group felt that ICIMOD could render technical assistance to build up knowledge and skills. It could help women entrepreneurs and their organizations to increase their knowledge by providing access to information, facilitating experience sharing, organizing study tours, assisting in organizing trade fairs, conducting market research, and facilitating the formation of networks. Skills could be enhanced by providing training in business and marketing, for which ICIMOD could also provide small grants. ICIMOD could help shape government policies and programmes and help to establish linkages with donors. At the policy level, ICIMOD and women entrepreneurs' organizations can join together in advocacy for more favourable policies.

Institutional Arrangements, Policies and Programme Interventions

The Group on institutional arrangements, policies and programme interventions covered a large number of issues under three major headings: (i) specific conditions,

constraints and needs of women entrepreneurs in mountain areas; (ii) rights, access to, and control over assets and resources; and (iii) existing policies and on-going programmes in relation to the specific requirements of women entrepreneurs, particularly in the areas of credit, skill, and entrepreneurship development and access to technology, inputs, and support services.

The group noted the following problems related to the specific conditions and needs of women entrepreneurs in mountain areas. First, the lack of physical and social mobility and education pose constraints to mountain women in accessing knowledge and skills about products, markets, and technology. Second, mountain women have limited access to productive assets, including capital, as a result of the prevailing socio-legal regimes of ownership and control. Third, they are generally not aware of their own potential and opportunities because of their suppressed and subordinate condition in the family and society. Fourth, there is a general lack of gender sensitivity in policies and programmes, and thus women are generally not able to take advantage of their positive elements.

The issue of rights and access to, and control over, assets and resources is highly critical and important. It is imperative that women are able to exercise equal rights over family property and assets. This will automatically increase their confidence, self-esteem, and decision-making power; ensure their position in society; and add to their future security. In the specific context of starting and running enterprises, it will provide collateral, if required, to enable them to access credit and capital.

The group suggested that the laws of inheritance be examined thoroughly and should be rectified where found detrimental to women. Representatives of women should be equal participants in this review. Further, awareness of the laws and their implementation should be ensured by different stakeholders.

The group made the following observations and recommendations on the question of the extent to which ongoing policies and programmes cater to the requirements of women entrepreneurs in mountain areas in respect of (a) credit, (b) skill and entrepreneurship development, (c) access to technology, and (d) other inputs and support services.

Credit

- The credit facilities available to women are in places insufficient, meagre, or non-existent. Credit should be available for women entrepreneurs on soft and sufficiently flexible terms.
- Group collateral should be accepted for an interim period until assets are created that can be mortgaged.
- Loan procedures and formalities should be simplified and reduced to the minimum in order to ensure timely disbursement according to need.

Skill and Entrepreneurship Development

- Training programmes should be based on needs.
- Ongoing programmes need to be examined in order to ensure that they are women-focussed.
- Apart from technical skills, training in business, administrative, and financial management and leadership should be imparted to women entrepreneurs with a particular focus on women in mountain areas..

Access to Technology

- All existing technologies have been male-focussed. A radical change is needed from the development stage onwards in order to have technologies that are women-friendly and women-specific.
- Access to technology or technology transfer is often expensive. It should be made more economical and accessible to women, since mountain women entrepreneurs are mostly micro-entrepreneurs.

Other Inputs and Support ServicesGeneral

- Urban to rural networking is essential in order to organize marketing outlets.
- Facilities for non-formal education should be developed, including adult literacy programmes targeting women.
- Support institutions such as the Chambers of Commerce, Trade, and Industry and Export Promotion Bureaus should be gender-sensitised.
- Changes and amendments are required in the policies of the central banks to ensure greater access to credit by women.
- Development agencies and enterprises should emphasise vocational training for women.
- There is a need for a sustainable information and communication system at national and regional levels on emerging opportunities suitable for women and for special windows for women to introduce their enterprises through the media and other communication channels.
- The government should encourage the development of eco-friendly tourism programmes and the setting up of small-scale resorts in mountain areas which women could run.
- Various inputs should be given through organizations with access to grass roots' women.
- A separate cell for women's entrepreneurship development should be set up at the district level, managed by women, providing all facilities such as financial and technical support.

- Irrespective of the employment status of the spouse, the other partner should be free to take up any entrepreneurial or other gainful employment.
- All enterprises should be required to set up day care centres/nurseries/crèches for the children of women workers.
- Insurance services should be provided to cover the risk of women's enterprises.
- Information should be encouraged on linkages between micro- and macro-groups for marketing.
- Transportation facilities should be developed in mountain areas to promote efficient marketing of the products of mountain enterprises.

The group suggested the following in respect of the role that organizations of women entrepreneurs and others could play in the promotion of enterprises among women.

- Strengthening local, regional, national, and international networking
- Demand-based capacity building
- Advocacy with all agencies concerned and follow-up to ensure that suggestions are implemented
- Formulating specific programmes related to women entrepreneurs
- Monitoring and evaluation

The group called upon the governments to strengthen the efficient functioning of infrastructure and support systems in mountain areas with the participation of local entrepreneurs. It also stressed the need for a well coordinated system for transfer of technology, knowhow, and forward linkages in the provision of inputs and marketing, as well as proper implementation of national policies on financial and non-financial services in mountain areas. A national policy for preferential treatment in marketing support, including purchase and price preference for items manufactured by women entrepreneurs, could be considered. Larger investment in mountain areas by the private sector could also help to provide a better climate and support for the development of women's entrepreneurship.

The group felt that ICIMOD could help by providing training, workshops, and a database; facilitating the exhibition of products; coordinating with different institutions to gain their support for mountain women entrepreneurs in the region, both on a national and an international scale; encouraging joint ventures among mountain entrepreneurs of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region by providing technical assistance and other guidance within its mandate; organizing and supporting study tours in the HKH region for mountain women entrepreneurs, to assist them to interact better and learn from each other's experience and successes; publicising developments in women's entrepreneurship; and organizing and promoting professional women's associations.