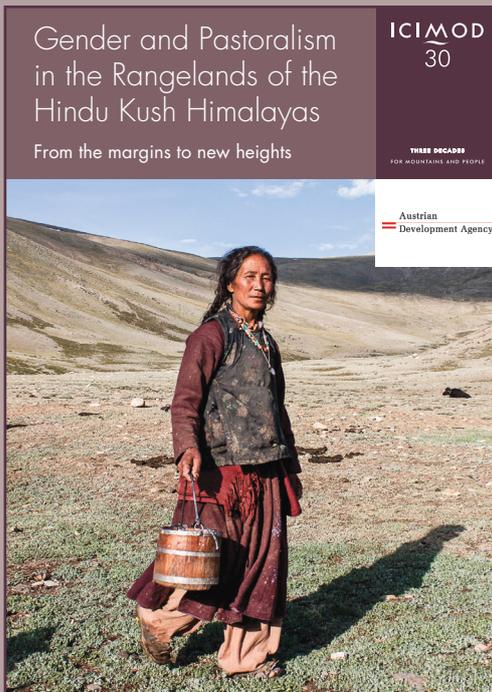


# Gender and Pastoralism in the Rangelands of the Hindu Kush Himalayas

## From the margins to new heights

Austrian  
Development Agency



Rangelands are one of the most important ecosystems in the mountain regions of the Hindu Kush Himalayas. While millions of pastoral men and women directly rely on critical natural resources and sacred landscapes of the Hindu Kush Himalayas to sustain their livelihoods and rich cultures, more than 1.3 billion people living downstream are impacted by the way environments are sustained and conserved in the long-term.

Both women and men have critical knowledge about sustaining mountain rangelands; however, their roles, access and decision-making power over rangeland resources differ by gender. These differences shape gendered experiences and constraints in the ownership and management of natural resources such as land, livestock, and pastures, which have important implications on the sustainability of the environment. In the Hindu Kush Himalayas, there are critical gaps in our knowledge of the gender dimensions of rangeland management and pastoral livelihoods, which leads to inappropriate development interventions and incomplete socioecological understanding.

This publication aims to contribute to filling gaps in knowledge about this emerging area of research through the synthesis and analysis of five case studies carried out in Bhutan, China, and Nepal. It begins with an overview of the conceptual framework and methodological approach and concludes with recommendations towards the sustainable and equitable management of rangelands and the development of pastoral livelihoods. The study focuses on the dynamics between gender and the management of natural resources, including gender divisions of labour, control and ownership of property, access to resources, and the impacts of climate change and gender and governance, including competing interests, decision making, gender-based violence, and access to institutions, development resources and trainings.

## Research findings

- Pastoral women work more hours in a day than pastoral men in sustaining pastoral livelihoods and in areas such as animal husbandry, mountain agriculture, household work, and the collection and use of water, fuel, food, and other natural resources. As a case study from Nepal illustrates, women work on average 17 hours a day, compared to who men spend only 12 hours involved in the multiple daily tasks that characterize pastoral lives.
- Women's roles and responsibilities are numerous and gruelling in everyday pastoral livelihood activities, while men's roles tend to be limited to their involvement in herding, wage labour, and the marketing of animal products and cash crops in the case study sites.
- Women's participation in community and local governance is limited by patriarchal discourses, biases, and norms that define gender roles, and hence the needs of women remain under-represented.
- Natural resources from rangelands meet only 11 per cent of the total demand for energy required by pastoral households. Women have to walk increasingly greater distances to collect fuelwood, water, and animal dung due to diminishing environmental conditions in rangelands and the drying up of water resources near their seasonal settlements and homesteads.
- Development services such as trainings, credit provision, and livestock extension that exclusively target men limit women's participation and minimize the potential for meaningful development impact.

## Key conclusions

- Differences in access to and control over critical resources such as animals, land, and income by men and women reflect gender power relations in rangeland areas. Women in patrilineal communities have limited access, ownership, and control over critical assets such as land and livestock.
- Skewed and unequal gender divisions of labour often characterize pastoral livelihoods, disadvantaging women in terms of heavy workloads that negatively impact their health and work-life balance and limit their access and participation in community development and governance institutions.
- As droughts have become more frequent in recent years, water sources in rangelands have become scarce and the quality of water has declined. Women in all the case study sites reported increased shortages of water, which means that collecting water has become more difficult and arduous in terms of increased time, effort, and personal energy required, and also results in adverse effects on their health and wellbeing.
- Customary and statutory institutions undervalue women's agency, knowledge, and decision making power in rangeland governance and policies, thereby undermining the goal of inclusive and representative governance.
- In comparison to pastoral men, women in the case study areas are at the margins of development interventions and their voices and needs remain unheard. They continue to have limited access to development resources, trainings, extension services, credit, and inputs. Hence, development efforts aimed at supporting pastoralism are unable to have meaningful and equitable impact.

## Recommendations

- Identify and promote gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate rangeland management technologies and development practices that create economic and decision-making opportunities and decrease the workloads of pastoral women.
- Ensure greater gender analysis and integration in research and analysis of rangelands and pastoral livelihoods in order to fill urgent gaps in knowledge and encourage gender-positive development.
- Strengthen gender integration and focus in rangeland policies, strategies, and programme implementation to ensure greater impact of conservation and development efforts, as well as the expansion of women's security and tenure over land and property.
- Raise awareness and document the agency, knowledge, and capacities of pastoral women in managing critical rangeland resources and adapting to climate and other drivers of change, which are critical for sustaining the environment.
- Strengthen pastoral women's access to development services such as trainings and employment through affirmative action (e.g., women's scholarships, quotas, gender-sensitive policies, dedicated gender desks in local governance offices, etc.) in order to ensure equitable and sustainable mountain development.

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