



# Themes from Celebrating Mountain Women

Editors  
Govind Kelkar  
Phuntshok Tshering



International Centre for  
Integrated Mountain Development

# About ICIMOD

The **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development** (ICIMOD) is an independent 'Mountain Learning and Knowledge Centre' serving the eight countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas – Afghanistan , Bangladesh , Bhutan , China , India , Myanmar , Nepal , and Pakistan  – and the global mountain community. Founded in 1983, ICIMOD is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, and brings together a partnership of regional member countries, partner institutions, and donors with a commitment for development action to secure a better future for the people and environment of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. The primary objective of the Centre is to promote the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations.

Themes from  
**Celebrating  
Mountain Women**

Editors  
**Govind Kelkar and Phuntshok Tshering**

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development  
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# Editorial Note

References included in the original text have not been given with the extended abstracts, only the introductory chapter retains them. Full texts and references are available in a CD ROM of the full CMW proceedings. Those interested may contact the Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance (CEGG) Programme - ICIMOD.

# Acknowledgements

"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". "...it is clear that state structures are dominated by patriarchal interests that have worked to the detriment of women"

These are some excerpts from ICIMOD's publication - Searching for Women's Voices in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas edited by J.D.Gurung, (1999) which was based on Fact Finding Studies conducted by researchers in the regional member countries of ICIMOD. The book was published as a first attempt to reach out and examine women's situations and perspectives on national and international policies and mountain development in general.

Against this background, ICIMOD and the Mountain Forum agreed to host and organise an international conference for mountain women as part of its plans for celebrating IYM 2002, and this resulted in the historic gathering in Bhutan, from 1-4 October 2002 of 250 mountain women and men from 35 countries around the globe, called 'Celebrating Mountain Women' (CMW)

CMW was one of the first global conferences to make mountain women its only agenda. Some of the outputs: audio, video, and print proceedings, briefs, and a resource kit are testimonies of the voices of mountain women from all over the globe. In the end it was a simple, fun-filled, heart-warming gathering with a lot of life, energy, and colour that made it special and memorable. It was organised around five major themes: Natural Resources and Environment; Health and Well-being; Entrepreneurship; Legal, Political and Human Rights; and Culture and Indigenous Knowledge. There were serious discussions when it came to research in all the five theme areas and, in addition, to sharing what we knew already, critical issues and gaps were identified to be addressed in the future, post CMW.

The enthusiasm with which a core group of students of development research and senior researchers responded to our request and call for papers on mountain women in all five themes was most encouraging. While a few undertook special assignments to pull together what we required, others sent us work they had already pursued in their respective professions. Overall we received close to 44 papers out of which 39 were closest to the topic of the conference and its themes and were selected to be shared at CMW and some to be later compiled for this publication. We are most grateful to all our authors and, through this publication, we would like to encourage you to pursue your research agenda on mountain women much more vigorously. Some of our authors couldn't attend CMW for various reasons but most of you did. From among those who attended, we also had the privilege of getting their willing services to facilitate and rapport on the respective sessions. Thank you for your help !

Without Dr. Govind Kelkar and her excellent team, comprised of Ms. Krishna Kakad and Ms. Sadhna Jha, the basic sorting, typing, formatting, editing, selection, and compilation of these papers would have been a mammoth's task for the CMW Secretariat. The team handled the responsibility most ably and willingly despite many difficulties.

The documenting and editing team led by Mr. Amba Jamir and his creative and 'roving' reporters and artists put in many intense hours to help us come out with other innovative products such as the Conference Briefs and the Resource Kit. The Conference Briefs and the Resource Kit provide the gist of all the exchanges that took place at CMW and capture the essence, colour, and excitement of the gathering. In contrast this book of extended abstracts of technical papers provides a background to the whole CMW and it is but one of the products designed, edited, and re-formatted at ICIMOD with the support of the Information Management, Communications and Outreach programme.

Thank you all for helping make CMW 2002 a reality and memory !

Phuntshok Chhoden Tshering  
for CMW 2002, ICIMOD

# Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AKHS	Aga Khan Health Services
AKRSP	Aga Khan Rural Support Programme
BDFC	Bhutan Development Finance Corporation
BMNP	Bale Mountains' National Park
CADC	Certification of ancestral domain claims
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development of England and Wales
CBFM	community-based forest management
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHW	community health worker
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMW	Celebrating Mountain Women
CRC	Constitution Review Committee
DANIDA	Danish Agency for Development Assistance
DFID-ODA	Department for International Development–Overseas Development Administration
DGIS	The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Assistance Programme
DMTs	Decision-making tools
DOT	Department of Tourism
DUV	direct use value
EOC	emergency obstetrics care
EPC-MTI	Entrepreneurship Promotion Centre – Ministry of Trade and Industry
EWCO	Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organisation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FD	Forest Department
FFR	forest-based food resources
FODE/UNICEF	Friends of the Don East/United Nations' Children Fund
FPAP	Family Planning Association of Pakistan
G/WID	Gender/Women in Development
GDP	gross domestic product
GHNP	Great Himalayan National Park
GOI	Government of India
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ICC	indigenous cultural community
ICDP	integrated conservation and development project
ICMR	Indian Council of Medical Research



ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent
IEC	information, education, and communication
IUD	intra uterine device
IUV	indirect use value
JFM	joint forest management
LGC	local government code
LIUCP	Low Income Upland Community Project
LPM	League of Peace Missionaries
LSMS	living standards measurement study
MAIFC	market alternative individual function cost method
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MFI	micro finance institutions
MICS	multiple indicator cluster surveys
MISR	multiple indicator survey results
MISR/MWLE	Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment/Uganda
MMR	maternal mortality rate
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
NCA	national commission on agriculture
NGOs	non-government organisations
NFE	non-formal education
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NTFPs	non-timber forest products
NUV	non-use value
NWAB	National Women's Association of Bhutan
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OB/GYN	Obstetrics and gynaecology
OPD	outpatients' department
OV	option value
PAR	performance appraisal review
PDS	public distribution system
PIP	Parks in Peril project
PNG	Papua New Guinea
POA	programme of action
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
R&D	research and demonstration
RH	reproductive health
RMB	rembini yuan (Chinese currency)
RPR	rapid plasma reagin (a screening test for syphilis)

RTIs	reproductive tract infections
SAHARA	Society for Scientific Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas
SANAMA	Samahan-ng Mga Nagkakaisang Alangan Mangyan, Indonesia
SC	Shilpakars
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SFD	state forest department
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
STDs	sexually transmitted diseases
TBA	traditional birth attendants
TEV	total economic value
TFR	total fertility rate
UNAC	Upland NGO Assistance Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Family Planning Association
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UV	use value
VDC	Village Development Committee
VLOs	village-level institutions
VF	Vesico vaginal fistula
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIDTECH	Women in Development Technical Assistance
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

# Contents

Editorial Note  
Forward  
Acknowledgements  
Abbreviations

## Part 1: Gender Roles and Relations

<b>Women of the mountains: gender roles, relations, responsibilities and rights</b>	<b>3</b>
– Govind Kelkar and Phuntshok Tshering	
<b>Gender relations, livelihoods and supply of eco-system services: a study of Lashi Watershed, Yunnan, China</b>	<b>17</b>
– Yu Xiaogang	
<b>Gender and management of mountain resources in Africa: a participatory research</b>	<b>21</b>
– Esther L. Njiro	
<b>Sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation case study of Kullu District, HP, India</b>	<b>25</b>
– Vinay Tandon	
<b>Gender-sensitive study of perceptions and practices in and around Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia</b>	<b>29</b>
– Fiona Flintan	
<b>Tourism and forest management in Mosuo Matrilineal Society, Yunnan, China</b>	<b>35</b>
– He Zhonghua	
<b>Engendering economic valuation of forests</b>	<b>39</b>
– Pierre Walter and Gadsaraporn Wannitikul	

## Part 2: Natural Resources and Environment

<b>Participation of women in joint forest management in India</b>	<b>45</b>
– Pratima S. Jattan	
<b>Role of mountain women in the management of sustainable eco-systems</b>	<b>51</b>
– Chhaya Kunwar	
<b>National income from an eco-feminine perspective</b>	<b>55</b>
– Pushpalata Rawat	

<b>Development strategies for Qiang women in Eruo Village, Sichuan Province, China</b>	59
– Zuo Wenxia and Li Junlin	
<b>Devolution of forest management and the Alangan Mangyan women</b>	63
– Merlyne M. Paunlagui	
<b>Working with community-based conservation with a gender focus: a guide</b>	69
– Mary Hill Rojas	
<b>Improved labour-saving options for mountain women</b>	75
– Pampa Mukherjee	

## Part 3: Health and Well-being

<b>Health and well-being of women in mountain areas of the Asia Pacific region</b>	81
– Ritu Bhatia	
<b>Afghanistan country profile: reproductive health</b>	87
– Farah Usmani	
<b>Old laws and morals in the beautiful mountains of Albania</b>	93
– Xhi Xhi Xhenis	
<b>Decentralised food security systems and women: an examination of sustainable food security arrangements in Chhattisgarh</b>	97
– Ilina Sen	
<b>Status of women's health and well-being in Northern Pakistan</b>	103
– Fareeha Ummar	
<b>Economic role and its impact on mountain women's strategies for the future</b>	107
– Jatinder Kishtwaria	

## Part 4: Entrepreneurship

<b>Development of a strategy for the promotion of mountain women's entrepreneurship</b>	115
– Edited by Phuntshok Tshering	
<b>Women and work: an exploration into the lives of trading women</b>	121
– Tiplut Nongbri	
<b>A study on three womens' enterprises in the high altitudes of Uttaraanchal – India</b>	127
– Malika Virdi	

<b>Organising unorganised mountain women: a case study of gender tourism in the Garhwal Himalayas, Uttarakhand</b>	133
– Mondira Dutta	
<b>Mountain women's entrepreneurship in Slovenian policies and practices</b>	139
– Patricia Verbole	
<b>Women, forests and markets: researching poverty alleviation through commercialisation of forest resources in Mexico and Bolivia</b>	145
– Elaine Marshall and Kate Schreckenbach	

## **Part 5: Political, Legal and Human Rights**

<b>Land in Latin America: the gender asset gap</b>	153
– Magdalena León	
<b>Women's rights to land in the Kyrgyz Republic</b>	159
– Renée Giovarelli, Chinara Aidarbekova, Jennifer Duncan, Kathryn Rasmussen, Anara Tabysheva	
<b>Patterns and trends of women's participation in land markets in Uganda</b>	165
– Abby Sebina-Zziwa, Richard Kibombo, Herbert Kamussime	
<b>Social norms and the educational needs of women in Central Asia</b>	169
– Nuria R. Ismagilova	

## **Part 6: Culture and Indigenous Knowledge**

<b>Gender roles in Colombian mountain areas</b>	175
– Angela Castellanos	
<b>The cradle of life: symbolism of Naxi's Suda</b>	181
– Xi Yuhua	
<b>Indigenous Asia, knowledge, technology and gender relations' discursive invisibility</b>	185
– Navjot Altaf	
<b>True stories of Dangi innovations from South Gujarat, India</b>	191
– Tisha Srivastava	
<b>Matriliney in a patriarchal mould</b>	197
– Patricia Mukhim	
<b>The impact of tourism on gender relations among communities living near Mt. Kinabalu, Sabah</b>	201
– Paul Porodong	

<b>Rural women of Mongolia</b>	207
– Amarsanaa Darurisen	
<b>Gender relations and housing in matrilineal and patriarchal communities</b>	211
– Girija Shrestha	
<b>Gender relations and forest management in indigenous mountain communities</b>	217
– Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan	
<b>Women of the mountains: from silence to recognition</b>	223
– Michela Zucca	

## **Part 7: Annex**

<b>The Thimphu Declaration</b>	231
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1

# Gender Roles and Relations







# **Women of the mountains: gender roles, relations, responsibilities and rights**

**Govind Kelkar and Phuntshok Tshering**

Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW), the global conference on mountain women, was held in Paro, Bhutan, from 1-4 October 2002 to celebrate the International Year of Mountains. CMW was organised around five theme areas; viz, i) Natural Resources and Environment, ii) Entrepreneurship, iii) Health and Well-being, iv) Political, Legal, and Human Rights, and v) Culture and Indigenous Knowledge. The five themes were examined and presented within the framework of Policy, Practice and Research to bring out relevant issues, gaps, and best practices to help define the way forward.

Based on 43 papers, prepared, submitted, and presented at the conference, this chapter attempts to present an overview of gender roles, relations, responsibilities, and rights vis-à-vis resources in the mountain regions. We looked at the women's roles and changes in gender relations. While we began with a broad set of enquiries, throughout the review of the papers we refined our approach and analysis in order to explain women's contributions to upland economies and changing gender relations through the voices of mountain women and men. Further, we attempt to do something more than deconstructing scholarship on mountain societies by simply retelling women's stories about their struggle for livelihood and resistance to androcentric dominance.

## **The Making of Gender Relations**

Gender relations are complex, dynamic and socially embedded, having many interlocked dimensions. Social and cultural traditions of women's exclusion from community management confers authority and prestige on men. Women may often exercise considerable influence in certain areas of community life, but it is men who hold virtually all formal and informal positions of power and decision-making under patrilineal systems. In some matrilineal systems, women have direct power in terms of maintaining lineage, have rights over

ancestral property, and hence have more effective control. They have knowledge of rituals and are often the spiritual heads of the community. For example, the Syiem Sad among the Khasis of North East India and the Bobolizan among the Rungus in Sabah, Malaysia. Under these circumstances, women enjoy privileges similar to those accorded to men in patrilineal societies. Women's role in the upkeep of the family, community, and the tribe as a whole is central and respected. Gender relations are more egalitarian wherein male members often assist women in carrying out some domestic and reproductive responsibilities. Women enjoy considerable space within the household and the community to make decisions about resource use based on their role in production, their special knowledge of forests, and their place in cultural and religious life. Unfortunately, maintaining this position of power is difficult, particularly in the face of pressures from the state in favour of institutionalising patriarchy and its norms.

The centralisation of forest management by states weakened an important source of women's power in matrilineal societies. When forests were under local control, women played an important role in forest-based production, and enjoyed a high status based on their knowledge of forest flora and fauna. Women also played a central role in religious rituals with strong ties to the forest. While women certainly continued to use forests after centralisation, they often had to do so clandestinely and in short visits. In addition, many forests were changed into monocropping area that provided few of the resources that women controlled historically. With limited access to a much altered forest, women's ability to fend off forces of patriarchy was reduced.

Among most patrilineal societies, women's major responsibility in reproduction and/or income-earning does not necessarily lead to social empowerment or gender equality within the household. For example, in the more male-dominated society of Enzong village (a mixed Naxi and Han village, 8 km from the town of Lijiang) women have no right to forests, land, or trees, all of which are inherited from father to son, and forest distribution is carried out on the basis of the (male) head of household. A woman, after marriage, acquires access to her husband's forest. Furthermore, women are allowed neither to climb trees nor to cut trunks even if these are needed for house construction. Spirits were supposed to reside in trees and a menstruating woman might pollute the tree and thus bring down the wrath of the forest spirit.

In rural Nepal, among the Tamang community, the past few decades have seen a decrease in number and influence of women shamans who possess traditional knowledge and spiritual powers. Nepal's mainstream religion is Hinduism which gives women a subordinate position. Tamangs are ethnic minorities among whom women enjoy a better position. However, to be modernised and accepted by the mainstream as equals meant applying Hindu standards of socialisation. Hence, women who possessed such knowledge (shamans) were thought of as 'witches'; women's dignity was reduced within the family; and the burden of household duties was increased. In some cases the family would restrain the woman from working as a shaman, due to fear



of social ostracism. As the film viewed at CMW also showed, many such women were harassed and beaten, becoming mentally unsound.

Male domination in the mainstream Han political system of China introduced and imposed a new perception that it is men who control both social knowledge and family resources. Both the Han and the Tibetan Lamaism became the feature of the male dominant gender system. In traditional Mosuo society, Lamaism was the singlemost powerful challenger to the Mosuo matrilineal ideology and gender constructs. While the Han Chinese bureaucracy tried to 'civilise' the Mosuo largely through administrative measures, and without much success, Lamaism took a much more subtle approach and transformed the Mosuo conception about maleness and femaleness. During the early 1990s, it was observed that a household having more than two sons would have to give at least one to be a Lama (Kelkar and Nathan 2003). The Lama mostly lived in the upper part of the house and did not do any kind of physical labour, not even cooking for himself. His food was prepared by his sister or mother or brother and sent to him in the upper chamber.

State-sponsored colonisation by the dominant religio-cultural regimes like Hinduism, Christianity, Lama Buddhism, and Confucianism are noted as having had a destructive effect on indigenous egalitarian gender relations. They disordered the position of women to make them subordinate to men and reinforced their exclusion from political participation, spiritual life, and community decision-making. Among the Naxi of China, for example, the matrilineal system was abolished and replaced by a mainstream Han Chinese patrilineal inheritance system; marriage for love was discouraged and replaced by arranged marriage; and the Confucian values of a woman being subordinate to her husband, father, and son were promoted. The effect of these measures was to deny women opportunities to participate as full members of the mountain community.

For many 'closed' mountain dwellers, the major agency of change in their local cultural system and gender relations came through colonial education of the younger generation. Missionary or religious schooling, later followed by public and secular schooling, were the limited means and sources of modern education. During the expansion of Christianity among the Rungus in Sabah in Malaysia, from 1952-59, as Porodong noted in his paper, the missionaries would directly deal with the village headman, which left out the 'bobolizan' (a woman priest and healer, who used to hold absolute power in the community) who could not then assess the consequences of the external forces on their traditional religion and social system. Further, the missionaries set up primary schools, farm schools, and home science schools, in addition to dispensaries for free medical and health care. 'Home science' schools systematically channelled women into domesticity, denying them their original role in productive and political life and limiting the future of the role. Free health care undermined the role of the 'bobolizan' as a healer, and consequently her social status and political power. The impact of these new interventions such as modern schooling on the old values, principles, and gender relations was

inevitably strong, subtle, and irreversible by most standards. It silenced and suppressed the traditionally acknowledged women decision-makers, the indigenous ways of knowing, and their language and rituals for knowing. In the name of western/modern knowledge, development and a 'civilised culture,' male power emerged and the hierarchy of gender relations.

Notwithstanding the above, as a result of gender mainstreaming and gender sensitising efforts, some changes did occur in traditional institutions in South and South East Asia. A significant change, however, is noted in Latin American countries, with the recent adoption of policy measures in the context of the dual-headed household. Such a measure has greatly strengthened women's position within the family, as assets acquired during marriage will be jointly owned and managed by the woman and man, both of whom are recognised as heads of the same household.

### From Silence to Recognition

To describe mountain women as silent observers of the male appropriation of traditional power and resources oversimplifies both women's voices of resistance and the range of ways in which they have expressed resistance. There are mountain women who would speak publicly about the growing male dominance and control of resources, even as they challenged central control over the forests they depend on. Women continue their struggle on two fronts – against state-sponsored patriarchy that deprived them of their basic rights to natural resources which give them power and authority traditionally and the growing influence of patriarchal ways and norms that suffocate them at home.

Of course, many women are silent but would speak if power inequalities and inequities in rights to resources did not obstruct them. Some choose not to speak publicly but instead exercise informal resistance in what James Scott describes as 'off stage defiance' (1985, p. 23) 'infrapolitics of subordinate groups....a wide variety of low profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (1990, p. 19). There are also women who keep quiet and show nothing but compliance to male dominance; this is a result of fear of insult and physical assault. Gender-based domination is a complex issue.

In the case of women, relations of domination have typically been both personal and community-based; joint reproduction in the family and home without any control over resources has meant that 'imagining an entirely separate existence for the women as a subordinated group requires a more radical step than it has for poor peasants, working class or slaves' (ibid.). It is not surprising, then, that women do not publicly speak out against their oppression and subordination, since like any other subordinated group, they may be socialised into accepting a view of their position and interest as prescribed from above, in maintaining the male hierarchy in gender relations.

Yet, many of the women we spoke with recognised the need to struggle on two fronts. First, against the social authority of men and women's exclusion from



participation and decision-making in the organisation of their community. Second, against the encroachment of the state on forests and other productive resources of their communities. Mountain women expressed anxiety about the diminishing land rights of women, as it is critical for their survival given the growing feminisation of mountain agriculture. In the Asian, African and Latin American highlands, as increasing numbers of men and boys leave their communities as economic migrants – some to war and others never to return – women, girls, and widows must fend for themselves and the family. In the absence of proper legal rights to land and other property many women are helpless and cannot explore the avenues of credit and agricultural technologies to improve and increase productivity.

A study of the Alps (Zucca 2002) points to the interesting phenomenon of women's historical revolt against their subordination: women's response to centuries of repression against their "being treated like goats" was to flee from the priests, the villages, the fathers, the brothers and the husbands. In recent years, however, a new economic concept of 'the identity-economy' has begun to take shape. Many women have decided to revive traditional economic practices (animal breeding, handicrafts, harvesting and transforming of herbs, hospitality) making use of new methods, combining them together in a global perspective and managing them by means of the latest, state-of-the-art methods of communication. This has resulted in the rebirth of entire valleys.

In Colombia since 1998 it has been required by law to reserve 30% of senior executive and judicial positions for women (Angela Castellanos). Similar laws have been passed in countries of South Asia; 33% of seats in local government to be kept for women and 33% in Panchayat Raj local governments in India.

## **The Gender Asset Gap**

The gender asset gap with respect to ownership of land and trees is significant. In some countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, women can become landowners, but only in marginal numbers (20 to 25%). Moreover, there is ample evidence that, when both boys and girls inherit land, boys always inherit more land and of better quality. Gender socialisation that women do not need greater amounts of land than necessary to meet household food security, combined with the peasant household logic of concentrating land in the male line, has been a powerful factor even in the bilateral inheritance practices of Latin America.

Women's inequality in land ownership is largely related to the male preference in inheritance, male privilege in marriage (i.e., patrilocality, cooking, cleaning, and rearing of children and caring for dependents as the women's duties), male bias in community and state programmes in land distribution as well as gender bias in the land market. Such disparities in productive resources disallow women from participating in enhancing their capabilities, which further limits them from contributing to higher living standards for their families.



Despite subscribing to the concepts of gender equality and equity as part of the strategy for poverty reduction, women in most countries have continued to be largely excluded from State distribution of land and other productive assets, in addition to familial biases. State and market policies are largely guided by legal, cultural, structural, and institutional factors that define women as dependants on the male head of the household. Such predicaments perpetuate the existing gender division of labour that already views men's work as productive and women's work as 'duties', non-work (or reproductive) or at best 'temporary work'. It is assumed "that by benefiting rural households all members within them would benefit as well. Here we highlight the legal and cultural mechanisms of exclusion although all these factors are inter-related and have as their basis patriarchal ideologies embedded in concepts of masculinity and femininity." Notwithstanding, women's property rights were reported to be much stronger in Uganda and Kyrgyzstan as well as in most Latin American countries in contrast to South Asian countries.

A significant advance in favour of gender equality is a recent policy change which contains explicit mechanisms of inclusion: provisions for the mandatory joint adjudication and titling of land to couples and/or that give priority to woman household heads or specific groups of women (Deere and Leon 2001). Such a joint titling legislation has now been established in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Brazil. Joint titling represents an advance for gender equality for it establishes explicitly that property rights are vested in both the man and woman who constitute a couple. Dual-headed households in most of Latin America have both wife and husband legally representing the household and jointly managing the household assets.

Rural women value land the most among assets as land ownership offers livelihood security for minimum food requirements for the family, social security, and self confidence. The general value of owning assets that women can rent, sharecrop, etc and the bargaining power assets give them in negotiating their say in household decisions and in combating their subordination are well expressed in the statements of two landless women from rural Bangladesh: "If you have assets, everyone loves you," Kalpana, an articulate village woman. "If we have sampotti (property/assets), our samman (dignity/prestige) will be permanent. Samman is closely linked with sampotti," says Gul Akhtar, who has recently acquired 15 decimals of agricultural land. "When we have assets in our names, we will be respected and will have social and familial dignity. But this will not be easy. Our men do not easily agree to control of assets by women."

### ***Natural resources and women***

A case to be considered is the devolution of forest management in several mountain states. The process of devolution has failed to address the question of gender inequities and social inequalities and, therefore, in many forest societies resulted in promoting the interests of local elites by accumulating income and power under their control. Women were systematically excluded from ownership, control, and institutional management of forests and other



resources, which impaired even their limited access. Even in Nepal where User Group Committees of community forests are encouraged to let women participate and hold office, male dominance in decision-making is normal and 'tokenism' the way. Hence, mountain societies have experienced widening socioeconomic disparities and deepening gender inequalities. Three major constraints in the development of mountain peoples relate to (a) interventions from outside which have by and large been extractive, (b) the mountain peoples' own fragile production structures, further threatened by these extractive external relations, and (c) weakening institutional mechanisms. Women are worst affected as they have little or no say in community affairs and their contact with the outside world is minimal; and when they do come into contact with external factors, these are usually exploitative.

Despite all the rhetoric about joint management of forests and despite their very strong dependence on forest food resources, women and men have very little control over the way forest resources are used. Nevertheless, inclusion of women in forest decision-making does make a difference to the administration of local management and to gender relations.

### ***Women decide...***

In the Bajawand Block Committee in Bastar, Central India, with a membership of 3,000 covering 25 villages, the woman President, Kalavati, introduced a major change in the tendu leaf collection cards – now they have the name of women, who are the primary collectors, on them, rather than those of the male heads of household. As a result the membership of women in the cooperative has increased from just 10 to 90%. As a result, women are better able to control the income from tendu leaf sales and have more influence over the cooperative's decisions on sale conditions and tendu leaf management. The new norms, though still problematic in their functioning, do open opportunities to regain some of the lost control of women over forests and over their own livelihoods.

Policy-making concerning development of mountain women is far removed from the reality of indigenous societies. A number of women pointed out the lack of adequate recognition of women's role in Joint Forest Management of other natural resources. Several papers indicated two pillars as the backbone of mountain economy: forests and women. Devolution has failed to create an impact on the political capacity of women.

### ***Well-being of mountain women***

Mountain areas in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region have some of the highest infant mortality rates and deaths during childbirth in the world. Gender was found to be the most significant determinant of malnutrition among children. Shortage of water and inadequate sanitation cause many diseases among mountain women and men. These are coupled with poor health infrastructure, high illiteracy rates among women, and gender-based violence, e.g. 'honour killing', persecution of witches, and trafficking of women.

A number of papers from South Asia made explicit and implicit reference to poor provision of schooling for mountain women and girls. Some strategies suggested to overcome gender-insensitive cultural norms included securing approval of community leaders (usually all men); creating an educational environment sensitive to cultural norms (free of gender stereotyping; gender responsive technology and science text books); and employing women staff: teachers and trainers. It was also suggested that in building or strengthening capabilities (healthcare, education, employment / self-employment) attention should be given to the personal conditioning and position of women and girls over the institutional and cultural norms. The presence and implementation of supportive legislation for women's right to education and asset security empower them to take decisions.

### ***Economic empowerment***

Discussions about entrepreneurship among mountain women began with the case of Bhutan, appreciating the largely matrilineal pattern of inheritance in the country. By and large women have a better status in Bhutanese society, however, their weakness, as anywhere else, lies in the burden of household responsibilities, lack of mobility, lack of training, skills, and exposure to markets.

In another matrilineal society (the Khasi in Meghalaya) women frequently find themselves at the mercy of more powerful traders who control the movement of goods in the market. Also, in many cases a lucrative business of a woman is passed on into male hands because of the marginalisation of the daughters from production. With some exceptions, in a wool-based enterprise in Uttaranchal in India, as mountain communities move into the monetary economy, subsistence roles are developed and women's status becomes increasingly eroded with marketing processes and structures. Women as self-employed or owning a business are more concentrated in retail trade and services. There is, however, some change in this trend. Women are becoming financially independent, seeking inclusion in the labour market and control over the products of their labour.

In East Khasi Hill villages in March 2000, it was reported that, in many cases, in recent years, Khadduh (the youngest daughter who has the obligation to provide support and succour to all members of the family) has begun to assert her claims to full management and ownership rights over parental property. Conditions for such a claim came up when the uncle (the mother's brother) or the brother of a Khadduh stealthily but unsuccessfully signed away the family land and/or trees for his personal benefit. Women's engagement in income generation/employment, when the opportunity cost of women's labour is recognised and she brings in money, is welcomed and men reportedly are willing to share housework and the care of dependents and children.

### ***Tourism and gender relations***

Studies that have followed the growth of the tourism industry have focused upon the motivations of tourists. Relatively little attention has been paid to





human institutions and understanding of gender relations in the communities that receive tourists. For women in the receiving communities, the economics of tourism are seen in sex tourism: “female bodies are a tourist commodity” (Bolles, p 78). While sex tourism is an emerging phenomenon in Yunnan and does need examination to check the growing trade in women’s bodies, it is, however, only one of many roles women play in the tourism industry. The tourism industry has also provided various decent livelihood opportunities for women. In addition to having the sole responsibility for rearing and financially supporting their children and other dependents, Mosuo and Naxi women work as hosts, tourist workers, housekeepers, boat rowers, craft and snack vendors, small entrepreneurs, and managers of cottages, guest houses, and night clubs.

Tourism means a higher level of income, though not necessarily for all. The satisfaction of needs through consumption is possible because of the higher income. A new system of production, like tourism “means disruption, but it also means survival and much more” (Goody 1998, 197). Survival, as we will see below, is not only on a material level but also on a cultural level, as cultural practices become means of earning an income.

The embedded violence of trade in women’s bodies does raise the question: What has been done to change women’s gender identity of subordination, including that of sexual subordination? Have the progressive, gender-sensitive policies attempted to use the threat point to dismantle patriarchal powers and structures that deny poor, rural and indigenous women control over their lives?

Women’s movements in the south as well as the north seem to be divided over the issue of sex work and the sex trade. We do not wish to discuss these here. We, however, would like to say that the only way to understand this particular form of trade in women’s bodies is to understand this practice as an aspect of masculine domination. The masculine domination legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding entitlement to women’s sexual services in the biological nature of man. We know by now, largely as a result of feminist analysis, that the inculcating of such masculinity in men’s bodies is a social construct. We are faced with the challenge to institutionalised strategies to efface the masculine power and “turn the strength of the strong against them” (Bourdieu 2001).

### ***Culture and indigenous knowledge***

Mountain women’s work and knowledge is central to the use, conservation, and management of natural resources, especially water. There is a growing trend towards acknowledging the role of women in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water. Women as producers of food, educators of children, and protectors of family health and ecosystems are most directly concerned with water and health care. Women usually perform the bulk of tasks involved in agricultural production and maintenance of trees. But in planning and management of projects in the community choice of technology, maintenance of natural resources, as well as indigenous local organisations, there are few examples of the effective involvement of women.

Women have extensive knowledge about the nutritional and medicinal properties of plants, roots, and trees, including a wide knowledge of edible plants not normally used, but which are of central importance in coping with shortages during climatic disasters. Existing forms of development, however, have introduced a process of devaluation and marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and skills, which in turn are likely to lead to a gradual eclipse of this knowledge.

Development and erosion of knowledge systems are subject to social, economic, and political forces that facilitate the consolidation, circulation, and transmission of particular forms of knowledge while eroding others. The introduction of mainstream development programmes into mountain communities has reportedly resulted not only in the loss of land, but, also, more significantly, in the decimation of their unique knowledge, culture, and identity and in the decline of women's social position. However, the realisation of an ecological crisis and the problem of sustainability have brought about limitations in the systems of knowledge on which the present development has been based. This has had a number of consequences, with regard to both the sources of knowledge and the methods of enquiry.

This analysis is based on the premise that gender differentiation is inherent in all knowledge systems as a dynamic and therefore varying entity. Production of knowledge in both its traditional and modern forms has increasingly come to be controlled by men. Male control over knowledge production and knowledge systems is crucial in the subordination and marginalisation of women.

There are two processes operating to complement each other: first, women come to be excluded from production of knowledge and, second, whatever knowledge women do possess (largely a result of their natural resource management and health care activities) is not acknowledged or given legitimacy.

Significantly, in the promotion of cultural relativism, ethnicity has been used to defuse women's demands for equity and empowerment in the home and outside. The denial of distinct forms of gender relations and making sense of things in the mountain communities are a form of ethnocentrism. The scientific basis of these practices needs to be uncovered, so that the reasons for a practice are known (Chambers 1989). Often the practices and decision-making rules are turned into rituals and various sanctions are invoked to justify their practice.

The conference participants explicitly stated their opposition to the use of cultural values for reinforcing rather than eradicating discrimination against women. While understanding cultural practices requires a knowledge and understanding of that culture, it does not follow that one has to accept the philosophical basis of that culture in order to be able to appreciate the value of the practice.



The failure to include questions of social justice (whether between different countries in the global order, or between groups in a society, or between the genders) leads to only partial and therefore distorted scientific accounts and policies. Incorporating such social issues into setting the agenda for and carrying out scientific research and its technological applications will require, as Harding (1993) argues, the development of “stronger standards of objectivity.”

Concern with questions of sustainability has led to increased attention to the knowledge of indigenous peoples and their possible applications. However, we have to address the questions of the gender and social hierarchies developed in these indigenous systems of knowledge in order that they might serve the purpose of a counterpoint (rather than to romanticise all aspects of indigenous communities) to the present systems of gender and social hierarchies. Addressing questions about the elimination of gender and other social hierarchies is part of sustainable development.

## **Conclusion: Policy Intervention, Research and Action Gaps**

Whether formally or informally, directly or indirectly, establishing new norms requires political struggle. Mountain communities have gone through protracted struggle to establish patriarchal norms. Simultaneously, and often in the same communities, there are struggles to overcome these patriarchal norms. External agencies too have a substantial role to play in bringing about democratic functioning of the home and society. What is necessary to note is the dialectical relationship between internal struggle and external enabling rules and decisions.

**The conference discussion highlighted the following priority areas of concern for the way forward.**

- Mountain women’s rights, including human political, economic, property, environmental, health, cultural, intellectual and other rights, and need for adequate training in claiming these rights
- Promotion of gender equitable laws, policies, and programmes that facilitate participation of mountain women in the management of natural resources and secure access to the ecosystem goods and services
- Promotion and strengthening of equitable representation of mountain women in all decision-making bodies, and advocating their participation in politics, negotiation, and decision-making processes at all levels, including in conflict prevention and resolution
- Need to focus on reproductive and sexual health problems, including HIV/AIDS, and encourage involvement of men in prevention of these problems; eradication of trafficking of women and children in poor mountain areas; eradication of domestic violence; and promotion of social programmes aiming to overcome violent cultural practices

- Need for research and dissemination on mountain women's indigenous knowledge in cultural and religious systems, natural resource use, traditional farming and conservation techniques, and health practices
- Economic valuation of mountain women's work in management of natural resources as well as promotion of ethical businesses in mountain areas, related training programmes, as well as social services to meet the needs of mountain women
- Promotion of physical and social infrastructure (roads, electricity, telecommunications, markets, health care, schools, etc.) that are sensitive and responsive to women's needs and enhancement of income generation and entrepreneurship among mountain women, reducing their workloads and improving the quality of their lives
- Effects of Tourism on mountain women (and men) and strategies for strengthening women's local knowledge and practices in conservation of resources and women's equality and dignity
- The dual-headed household and its impact on women's empowerment / agency development, productivity, and development in general
- Culture and institutional factors that are barriers to women's effective participation – a number of papers talk about 'cruelty of social norms' regarding mountain women in central and South Asia, denying women access to education and resources like land and community decision-making. How structural changes are/can be brought about by addressing cultural/social constraints on women's inclusion. Further, much work is needed on positive interpretation of cultures and religions to advance gender equality.
- Need for gender budgets and increased budgetary allocation for mountain women's initiatives to make mountain development sustainable and meaningful to women.

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# **Gender relations, livelihoods and supply of eco-system services: a study of Lashi Watershed, Yunnan, China**

Yu Xiaogang

## **Summary**

This paper is about a study in a watershed (Lashi Lake- a wetland area) close to Lijiang Dayan, Yunnan, the world cultural heritage site in southwestern China. In particular it is about gender relations and livelihoods from the ecosystem of the watershed managed historically by the Naxi (94%) and Yi (4%) ethnic groups. These ethnic groups constitute 18,000 people in 3,250 households who have managed quite well with a subsistence agricultural system, characterised by a variety of crops (rice, wheat and maize in the valley and potatoes and buckwheat in the uplands). Agricultural produce is subsidised by fish from the lake, animal husbandry, and agro-forestry; and timber provided a substantial contribution to cash incomes until a ban on logging was introduced in 1998. Non-Timber Forest Products include many varieties of mushrooms, including the expensive *songrong* variety, and, in the wetland area, 11 kinds of medicinal plants. Some households own small-scale food-processing mills and the local government offers incentives for developing eco-tourism.

Overall per capita income is just above the poverty line, but 1,800 people in the valley basin, 300 people inhabiting the wetlands, and 500 people in the mountain area live below the poverty line and rely on food aid from the government. The focus of the paper is of a Naxi community of 1,500 people in three fishing villages.

The wetland area, in particular, has an abundance of species, some of which are of the rare, endangered variety. Direct benefits come from fishing, wetland agriculture and use of aquatic plants for food, fodder, medicine and fertiliser. The lake is also used for irrigation and transport and as a tourist destination.



The paper is a collection of case studies carried out in these villages through group discussions with women and two individual discussions about women in wetland agriculture and men in the fishing occupation. These are typical since women are generally responsible for wetland agriculture and men for fishing. The text carries the reader through the spatial traditional management system and the villagers' perspective on their total environment. Classifications include soil types, based on the frequency (or infrequency) of flooding and collective and individual household cultivation. In this classification system used by the author, land types 1-4 are used collectively, 5-6 are common pastureland in winter and used for fish spawning in spring (these are free of tax). In the household responsibility system, the state allocated land types 1-5 to each household based on the number of family members. Types 1-4 were registered and taxed with a limit of about 3 mu\* per person being allocated.



Basically, this paper is descriptive and goes into details of different case studies carried out in the wetland area. The author is at pains to describe the impact of the wetlands being declared used for eco-system services such as water for the town (a cultural heritage site) and downstream agriculture and the bird sanctuary. The fisher folk are experiencing increased unemployment, particularly as the fact that the wetlands have been made into a bird sanctuary has led to a ban on fishing. Hence there are obvious conflicts between the villagers' need to earn a living and wildlife conservation. The paper describes how girls and women are working cheap in the tourism service sector and the older women as cheap farm labour. The Lashi women have to face a dual-edged sword. On the one hand there is not as much fishing opportunity as in the past, and some women who sold exotic fish species cannot make a living out of it any more; and, on the other hand, the men believe that fishing is a male activity any way and not suitable for women. The men believe that, notwithstanding the flooding of the farmlands, there are other income-earning opportunities for women such as making handicrafts, tourism, and collection of non-timber forest products. It is also quite obvious that fish resources are limited and men fear that, if women fish, the few resources there are will be over-exploited. The women believe that before the dam was built women did fish for the smaller fish and to collect aquatic plants. Women marketed the fish in any case and used the wetland for a variety of purposes.

However, these gender-focused arguments would seem to be somewhat nullified by the over-riding fact that the government constructed a trans-watershed supply project to improve ecological services and supply 18.28 million cubic metres of water annually to Lijiang valley – irrigating 65,000 mu of arid land and providing 10.78million cubic metres of water to Lijiang town, a world cultural heritage site. The project includes a three-kilometre long tunnel through the mountains and eight kilometres of elevated water channels and a dam. Lashi wetland has thus been converted into a man-made and

\* Chinese measurement of land area (15 mu = 1 ha)



controlled lake which is administered by the Hydraulic and Electricity Bureau of Lijiang County. Large amounts of agricultural land were submerged and the government compensated the local people for this at the rate of approximately three dollars per head; barely sufficient to cover the loss of livelihood.



The Lashi wetlands' case is a typical example of cases of conservation for selected sectors; in this case, it is tourism because of the world cultural heritage site nearby. The provincial wetland nature reserve established in 1998 has no doubt boosted tourism and brought in revenue for the state and county. However, fishing bans were enforced through force of arms, migratory birds destroyed crops and the local people have been increasingly marginalised – politically and economically. Women suffered more from these changes since they were mainly engaged in agriculture. Attempts to participate in fishing led to gender conflict. Unless the local people themselves are allowed to use the wetland resources in a sustainable manner then chances are that the wetlands will become degraded and conflicts over resources will ensue. As is evident, there is almost complete distrust of the government on the part of the local people, and such distrust does not encourage activities likely to aid conservation of the wetland environment.

## Conclusion

The author carried out a traditional investigation into the roles played by men and women in the wetlands, and how women crossing over into the outside male sphere of fishing was seen as a challenge to men's masculinity and social position; thus seen negatively by men and society as a whole. This investigation was carried out against the background of a fish market and fish resources that have been limited by changes induced by government. On the other hand, the author posited that these outside forces were transforming a traditional masculine culture and women are being seen as talented people who can earn cash income in a variety of ways because of their knowledge of the market – a traditional one since previously they took part in the fishing culture as assistants to men. The author states that traditionally Naxi women did have a high social status, and this had been negatively impacted over the last 300 years by the Chinese culture.

No matter, the overall picture is one of a community under siege and in great need to find assured means of improving economic and social security. This can only be realised if the Naxi have control over the wetland resources. It can be argued that a community will not destroy an environment that provides their sustenance. The author suggests a payment system for water and other ecosystem services and control over the natural resources being given to the local community. The author also advocates establishment of local community-based organisations to promote natural resource management. Such organisations can then address the ban on fishing in the reserve and

control over other natural resources such as forest products. A shift to high-input agriculture on the little cultivable land available is also advocated.

Overall the author points out that the overall livelihood system and the position of women were adversely affected by watershed development. There is a conflict between conservation and the traditional livelihood system. When agricultural land was flooded, women moved into fishing – and this had an impact on the perceived 'correct roles' in the society. There is a suggestion that this shift in terms of gender equality may not be as disruptive a change as it is perceived to be by men, but merely a resumption of the status quo ante. What is obviously the case, however, is that conservation activities that do not involve the people who are indigenous to the proposed conservation area not only impact gender roles but have a negative impact on whole communities if they are not balanced against the traditional cultural and economic interests of the people and their future needs.





# **Gender and management of mountain resources in Africa: a participatory research**

Esther L. Njiro

## **Summary**

This paper describes a study that looked at the way in which participatory research methods could be used to elicit knowledge of the environment from women and men in two mountain communities: the Atharaka of Eastern Kenya on the slopes of Mount Kenya and the Vhavenda of the Soutpansberg branch of the Drakensburg Mountains in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Both of these are communities with rapid population increases and intense cultivation of steep slopes and hilltops.

The author has a number of definitions which have to be taken into consideration in the context of the work carried out. In this paper community was defined as a unique living entity and, like its people, continuously changing physically and psychologically. Communities have a continuous relationship with women and men as well as the environment and with other communities. In developing a community, participation of all the interested and affected parties is very important.

Community participation is a means of ensuring sustainable ways to meet people's needs and improve the quality of their lives. Community participation refers to people's active engagement in decisions and activities that affect their lives. It emphasises equity and paying special attention to the most vulnerable people in society. On the other hand, if people are prepared to participate, it can be a learning process and can empower communities to manage their own environments to meet their basic needs. In the context of this study, community development is essentially a process in which the community is assisted to help itself. It is, in a way, empowerment at its best as it deals with meeting the concrete needs of the community as a whole. Every

member of the community has to play a role in the development of the community, hence the need for empowerment and capacity building of all people at grass roots' level.

Sustainable development is seen as two concepts coming together: sustainability and development. Sustainability is seen to be frequently linked to development which, according to the literature, can be simply the achievement of a set of aspirations of a group or society. It is mainly based on seeking those attributes that the society thinks are worth pursuing, but such attributes differ from one society to another. Sustainability, on the other hand, is seen to mean the desire to maintain the achievement of such development aspirations over time. Commitment is seen to be an urgent requisite to this concept, as per the call of the Brundtland Report.

*"Sustainable development implies an end point, something we can or have achieved. In reality, it is problematic in the sense that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve sustainable development in our current world systems. It is a pathway or direction that we need to move along so as to achieve greater balance between social, economic, and ecological environments. Furthermore, it is about applying the goals and principles of sustainable development so that people can achieve a better quality of life while protecting the integrity of ecosystems. Generally it is about improving what people are doing while at the same time seeking to transform society so that the way we perform different daily activities in the world that is socially and ecologically just. Of course, this will require a radical transformation in the way we do things."*

It is within the framework of these definitions that the research looked at issues of natural resource management in the two communities. Methods used in the field work were participatory rural appraisal (PRA), using respondents as participant observers in a method that is already well known. In this way they were able to state the problem from their own point of view, possible causes and desirable solutions considering the costs, time benefits, and the future strategies needed to solve the problems. The entry point was the goal of food security and the issues of conservation are seen as leading to a goal of food security.

This paper is interesting in that it, to a certain extent, looks at aspects of indigenous knowledge. The author is at pains to discuss drought and to record the indigenous signs the Atharaka took to mean that drought was on its way: and these include the movement of bees from forest to grassland; the sounds and movements of birds; frogs croaking in dry ponds; trees that don't flower unless it is about to rain; and the direction of the sun's rays: all of these show an intense attunement to the environment of the Atharaka.



The paper examines in some detail the procurement and use of natural resources as it relates to both the Atharaka and the Vhavenda and gender distinctions are made in terms of both knowledge and usage.



In terms of the most precious natural resource – land – an overview of land tenure and the shortage of resources is given. The paper examines how colonialism and apartheid forced villages on to sloping land in mountain areas. At both sites traditional land-use rights were maintained, and these were under the informal control of the chieftains and their clans. As with the Oromiya in the paper by Flintan on page 12, the Atharaka trace their descent from a common ancestor, and land ownership is strictly through clan membership. It is interesting to note the use of common blood lines to maintain land ownership within the group, and it is usually men who control this. Such social solidarity leads to communal responsibility for others of the clan and for the natural resources collectively owned. The author believes that customary land tenure has maintained egalitarianism among the Atharaka and Vhavenda as no single person had too much control over the means of production. However, since it is usually men who control land ownership, it is a moot point how egalitarian it can be. It is discussed how privatisation of land has led to land scarcity because land-use patterns change from communal grazing to crop farming and land is fragmented into economically unviable parcels; and, of course, once more, as in most mountain areas, this has led to the farming of sloping, marginal land. It has led also to a change in indigenous patterns of cultivation.

Both areas studied, however, do not have homogeneous soil profiles, in that some soils are suitable for crops, others are sandy and permeable, and others are clayey and drainage is difficult. Soil erosion is exacerbated by sometimes intense and sometimes sparse precipitation and overgrazing. So we have a group of factors in natural resource management: those related to outside interventions caused by colonialism, those related to traditional land-use rights, those related to nature and human practices and yet others related to the nature of the soil (land itself).

Notwithstanding, since shifting cultivation is practised, there is quite a variety of crops; and these include varieties of tubers, fruit, cereals, pulses, and cash crops such as cotton, sunflowers, tobacco, and sisal (hemp). Cropping patterns depend upon the individual farmer and are determined according to the resources available. Indigenous knowledge concerning crop mixes was found to be strong and a wide range of crops ripening at different times is planted by the Atharaka in particular – thus spreading the food availability period over as long a range of time as possible.

## Conclusion

Natural resource management must be a model delivery system not a mere field for eliciting information from respondents. The communities studied are frustrated by researchers who leave them empty-handed after extracting information from them. Another cause for frustration is conservationists who insist on environmental integrity without taking into consideration the needs of the people.





# **Sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation case study of Kullu District, HP, India**

Vinay Tandon

## **Summary**

This paper describes one approach by an organisation working in the eco-development zone of the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, to empower rural poor women. The organisation is known as Society for Scientific Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas (SAHARA), and basically the approach used was that of savings and credit groups for women from the scheduled castes.

It is a high mountain area where typically the livelihood options are rainfed agriculture, free range livestock, and non-timber forest products (NTFPs, mainly herbs), besides using the forests for fuelwood and timber. At most there are two crops yearly, providing grain for 3-4 months and agriculture is low-yield subsistence, hence there is a heavy dependency on the park for daily wage labour and on the forests for NTFPs and other produce.

There are 141 villages covering an area of 265 sq.km. The villages are home to 12,000 people of 11 panchayats or administrative areas. The scheduled castes account for 31% of the total population. In numerical terms there are 2,836 literate men and 1,091 literate women, the total being a little under a third of the population. The scheduled castes present the lowest levels of literacy, school dropout rates are high among them, and they are excluded from access to common property resources. Widows and deserted women are commonly lumped into the poorest categories and coverage from government programmes to assist widows and women-headed households is also poor.

The author comments that government interventions and programmes by and large ignored social differentiation in the villages and most beneficiaries from government schemes are the better off and more vocal and resourceful.



SAHARA targeted scheduled caste women for a Savings and Credit intervention, because of the historical discrimination against them that is more pervasive in remote mountain societies. The author cites their dwellings kept on the periphery of villages, with little land, and she also cites that despite reserved seats for scheduled castes in elections they are often prevented from voting by the upper castes. Scheduled caste women do not take part in the popular and often cited 'mahila mandals' because of discrimination against them. Hence SAHARA targeted scheduled caste women first, followed by other poor women, and organised women's savings and credit groups.

Organisation was in a systematic manner following household surveys to assess economic status. Information thus gathered was complemented with records from government sources and those from other organisations. Hence the poorest families were selected and the women organised into groups. No group had more than 10 members and groups were allotted according to location. The groups were of same caste women where possible. In the event of mixed caste groups, if they worked for over two years they were continued, as this was taken as an indicator of change. If they did not work, then they were reconstituted.

Groups were formed in late 1999 and each member was asked to save one rupee a day. Gradually six groups began to save two rupees a day. One literate member from each group was chosen as the animator. The animator was trained to keep accounts and records, and in return she receives an honorarium for each meeting.

Sixteen members from these groups contested ward elections and seven were elected. (Nov. 2000). This makes a great change from the norm in which scheduled caste groups were ignored by government surveys and prevented from voting.

Groups were able to take production loans and most groups started vermi-composting pits as the Park provides a ready market for vermi-compost. A fraction of the sales from this compost go to SAHARA, as agreed by the groups, to help make it financially viable. Longer-term income-generating projects include high-value medicinal plants – for which specific production areas were selected and agreed upon in different panchayats – apricot seed sales, oil extraction, and hemp-based handicrafts.

The acceptance of SAHARA was rooted in the fact that most of the staff of this community-based organisation originate from and live in the villages in which they work. This overcame the biggest obstacle to capacity building – the fact that most training material and resource people in government and big NGO projects use English. Even Hindi is difficult for some Kullu people.





The Park provided a market for vermi-compost, although marketing support to other income-generating activities remains a concern. Women are also engaged by the Park to work in the nurseries, but, after the introduction of the project, it was agreed that the first preference for daily wage work would go to members of the groups.

## Conclusion

Efforts to reduce poverty need to be properly targeted for them to be effective. By carefully surveying and selecting groups it is only a matter of time before they save sufficient money to finance most of their household and production requirements. Since this is their own money, it is very carefully spent. Dependence on outside capital or continued government funding is thus greatly diminished. Suitable, usually traditional or local resource-based, income-generating activities, the products from which are easily marketed, are essential to increase income and livelihood opportunities. Government back up with daily wage work in the park was important in this case. Suitable policy changes can direct much of this work to the poorest and not only provide more income but also a chance to save more.

Women's Saving & Credit groups formed at the panchayat ward level make their presence felt even in remote areas with mostly illiterate populations. This is seen in the election of group members to positions in the panchayat during the last election in the area. Groups also greatly facilitate collective articulation of women's interests and concerns at the village and panchayat levels. The establishment of medicinal plant production areas exclusively by and for women's groups with the agreement of the panchayats is a case in point.

The author stated that overall there was a perceptible change in attitude among the men of households where women brought in money either through daily wages or from income-generating activities. She stated that women members reported willingness on the part of husbands or other family members to share household work and facilitate their attending meetings, longer duration exposure visits, and to take up more activities that bring in income and improve livelihood opportunities.







# **Gender-sensitive study of perceptions and practices in and around Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia**

Fiona Flintan

## **Summary**

This report describes the findings of one in a series of studies which aim to assess the linkages between the issues of 'gender'. These studies aim to assess the linkages between gender issues and a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) 'integrated conservation and development project' (ICDP) set in the Bale Mountains' National Park (BMNP), Ethiopia. The project is funded by the Netherlands' government (DGIS), and is one of seven international projects which form the Tropical Forest Portfolio, coordinated by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International, Geneva, and managed by WWF Ethiopia.

The project was still in its early stages when the report was written. Since its inception in 1998, its immediate objectives have been to: firstly, strengthen the institutional capacity of the institutions involved in the management of Ethiopia's important protected areas, with an emphasis on forests. This is to be achieved through support to the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organisation (EWCO) and the Oromiya State Regional Bureau of Agriculture (the department responsible for the management of the protected areas in the region). Secondly its objective is to conserve and manage sustainable forest and wildlife resources in the BMNP and the adjacent Mena-Angetu National Forest Protection Area through the adoption of improved and sustainable community-based natural resource management practices, with a focus on the four 'woredas' (or districts) which overlap the Park and/or 2-3 pilot villages.

Initially emphasis was to be placed on the first objective – thus laying a solid foundation for the rest of the project. The author, however, stated that the second objective involving the local communities and their natural resource

use was in actual fact the part that her study was particularly interested in, as it is in this area that gender issues and problems are most likely to occur. Hence we have a pilot study with a set of objectives of its own.

*'To gather background information on the local, political, historical, economic, cultural and social context within which the Bale Mountains' National Park and the DGIS-WWF supported project are set*

*To establish [sic] (assess) gender roles within households (including the decision-making processes), differing degrees of mobility between men and women and the presence of formal and/or informal means of support and/or social gatherings; and in particular an understanding of the position of women in the local community and the household was emphasised.*

*To assess the degree of pressure on natural resources in and around the Park from the local people and their livestock*

*To understand current livelihood practices in and around the Park and assess the possibilities for future expansion of such practices and/or suggest alternatives*

*To assess the current perceptions and views of the Park (and conservation practices in general) including the presence of costs and/or benefits to the local communities due to the presence of the Park'*

It was within this framework of objectives that the work was couched. In particular, it was considered to be of most value if the research described in this paper obtained a better understanding of the local socioeconomic, political, cultural, and environmental context in which the project was to be set. Thus emphasis was placed on gender issues, focusing on gender roles and differences in mobility, social organisation, current livelihood practices, and perceptions/views of the Park and 'conservation'. Through understanding these differences and gender 'domains' it was anticipated that areas of intervention would be highlighted, thus offering some direction and ways forward for the project, to take account of its objective of addressing gender issues and including marginal groups such as women. Hence the following questions were to be answered.

*'How do gender differences influence perceptions and use of biodiversity and its conservation in relation to particular livelihood strategies in local communities?*

*To what degree does gender influence the participation of members of a local community in the planning, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation of ICDPs and why?*



*What effect might the exclusion of marginalised groups, such as women, have on the successful implementation of ICDPs?*

*How might these exclusions be resolved, so that women, the communities, and biodiversity conservation benefit?*

The research took place in four villages – Gojera, Karari, Gofingria and Soba – all of which are close to the one town – Dinsho – situated on the northern unfenced boundaries of BMNP. The research involved semi-structured interviews with village/town inhabitants and/or key informants; a survey of women traders in the market place; and the use of Rapid Rural Appraisal techniques such as mobility/resource mapping and transect walks. The paper as a whole describes the villages briefly, not always under the same headings, and gives questionnaires, village maps, and respondents. (All of these can be found on the CDROM giving the CMW papers in their entirety.)



## Findings

The town and villages are currently undergoing a process of change and ‘modernisation’, with Dinsho slowly growing in prosperity and size. This is reflected in the recent input to the provision of services in the town, such as a new market and the community-supported project to supply mains electricity. Both traditional and modern systems of governance run concurrently, and religion and culture still play an important role in influencing people’s lives. The majority of the local community are Muslim and Oromo. (Editorial comment: The Oromiya who are the main group in the area apparently take their descent from a common ancestor, and it is around this belief that a strong animist worship – Oromo – has evolved, seemingly eclipsed in some areas by Muslim and Christian worship. Muslims and Christians do not get on well and will not eat together.)

The local communities (Gojera, Karari, Gofingria, and Soba) live in a relatively harsh and often unpredictable environment. Local services are few and those that exist are poorly resourced. Agriculture is mainly subsistence barley farming, supplemented by vegetable growing, semi-nomadic pastoralism, and the diversification of livelihoods. The grazing of cattle and collection of fuelwood from inside the Park’s boundaries are illegal, yet they occur on a regular basis. The increasing population of both people and cattle in recent years has added to the pressure on the Park and its natural resources. This is particularly the case for the village of Gofingria.

Women and girls are marginalised groups in the society. Substantial gender inequities exist in schooling, health care, and institutional support. There are always seemingly valid reasons, obviously mostly dependent on female stereotypes: girls marry young, need to help in the home, are weaker than boys, sexually at risk, and so on. The poverty of the area also means that girls

do not receive preference over boys for education, and the lack of job opportunities is weighted against women. Women are mainly responsible for the household and men for agriculture. However, women often work on the land as well, but, despite this, gender stereotype roles are encouraged by local institutions. In addition, women's mobility is severely restrained and there is little formal support for their organisation or ways to challenge the inequities they experience. Informally, the self-help groups, or 'iddir', that have been established appear to offer an opportunity for providing 'space' to promote women's interests.

The BMNP was established in 1970, and since this time it has had a profound effect on the lives of those living in both Dinsho and the surrounding villages. During the time of the Derg or Communist regime (1974-91), many households were expelled from the Park, and, today, attempts are being made to force similar evictions. This has encouraged a very negative view of the Park within the local communities and has added to their insecurity.

Indeed, the majority of the local communities see no benefit from the Park, yet incur costs from the damage to crops by wild animals and restrictions on the use of natural resources in the Park. Some of the local population, living in the villages close to the Park, do obtain benefits from it through employment as scouts or within the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Project, and through the hiring of horses and as guides for tourists. In addition some awareness of the importance of the Park in protecting the local environment and biodiversity was perceived.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is suggested that there are a number of areas that could be targeted by the WWF project for future intervention. These include the promotion of the growing of indigenous trees, trees for fuelwood, and trees for building materials; support for the provision of local services in the villages; support through a micro-credit system; tourism; and the promotion of better relations between the Park and the local communities. It was suggested that the market in wild herbs could be made more efficient and commercially viable, and the same suggestion was made for flowers since the Park had a wide range of 'spectacular' flowers. The leaner on these suggestions was that they would have to be controlled so that they were economically and environmentally sustainable. It was suggested that greater promotion of women's employment in the Park and in the businesses and projects connected to it was needed.

More specifically, in relation to women and the establishment of projects that target them, there are a number of existing institutions that already provide a good basis for moves forward. Firstly, the presence of supportive legislation, secondly the existence of self-help groups in some areas, and thirdly the



beginnings of community support for increased gender equity. In addition suggestions for projects are made, focusing on diversification of women's livelihoods. These range from handicrafts, honey, and butter making to sustainable enterprises based on the planting of fruit trees and the collection of wild herbs and flowers (see above). However, it is stressed that, if such projects are to be instigated, WWF must be cautious not to add excessively to women's daily workloads and to promote unwanted gender-stereotypical roles. This would mean that projects would have to blend into the working day so that women could accommodate projects.



Finally, it is suggested that the most appropriate of the villages studied for targeting by WWF as a pilot village for the project on conservation and development would be Karari. Reasons for this include its geographical situation, the already existing support in the village, the need for services in the village – particularly in education, the degree of diversification already existing in livelihoods that could be developed further, and the need for resolving present conflicts with the Park, particularly those related to damage by wild animals.









# **Tourism and forest management in Mosuo Matrilineal Society, Yunnan, China**

He Zhonghua

## **Summary**

This paper claims to detail the gender division of labour and how it has been affected by tourism development, changes in forest use regulation and ownership among the Mosuo people of two villages: Luoshui and Zhengbo. The paper commences with a fairly comprehensive description of the sites and the traditional matrilineal marriage system. Briefly Luoshui and Zhengbo are on the Yongning plateau, Ninglang county, in Yunnan province. The plateau is the site for Lugu Lake, which is a tourist attraction, being one of the few deep lakes on the plateau free of pollution. It was listed as a Grade II National Protection Zone in 1989, and this is a factor in the growth of tourism in the area.

The Mosuo had a typical feudal system before 1949 with a nobility, rank and file, and slaves. This system was headed by a feudal lord and amongst these feudal lords the system was patriarchal, which was and is not the case for the Mosuo in general as their system is matriarchal. The Mosuo practice a system of 'visiting' marriage known as 'axia'. When a couple falls in love the man visits at night-the woman remains with her own family and, if children of the union are born, they remain with the woman and the maternal uncle is the guardian, whereas their father is the guardian of his sister's children. The maternal uncle is then responsible for their education and they receive only occasional gifts from their natural father. The Mosuo perceive this custom as maintaining equality between the genders; and, indeed, maintenance of this system seems to have limited outside interference. The changes after 1949 saw a reluctant and gradual end of feudalism in the area, but not of the matrilineal system. There were some forced marriages during the cultural revolution leading to a double marriage system. The current onset of tourism

has led to instances of people from patriarchal families wishing to practice 'axia'. This is particularly the case with Luoshui village which is benefiting from tourism. Zhengbo, on the other hand, is not taking the same advantage of tourism and is more persistent in following its traditional way of life. Notwithstanding, 90% of Mosuo households still practise the matrilineal system.

The author goes to great lengths to describe the Mosuo system and its religious practices. The traditions of the Mosuo are paradoxical in that, whereas the matriarchal marriage customs promote equality of the sexes, the religious system establishes male supremacy, according a status higher than that of women by promoting active worship and involvement of men in religious practices whereas women play a spectator and 'handmaid' role. The text deals first with Luoshui and then with Zhengbo, examining the traditional system and its survival, tourism, and forestry. The survival of the traditional system in the case of Luoshui is intertwined with the advent of tourism.

In terms of tourism per se, there are physical reasons why **Luoshui** is prospering from tourism and Zhengbo is not. Luoshui is in the protected zone, by Lugu Lake, and living among well-protected forests; Zhengbo is not living in the protected zone and the environment is poor and deteriorating due to deforestation for subsistence purposes.

- The paper describes the prosperity that has come to Luoshui in terms of transportation, communications, housing, and tourism infrastructure. Hotels are run by brother-sister
- teams, with women running the day-to-day guest relations and the men looking after the business side. By and large, however, decisions are made by the family as a whole.
- The interesting aspects of Mosuo traditions is that, notwithstanding the matrilineal marriage system, the division of labour is that of men working in the fields and women doing the housework; and thus men take care of public affairs. Despite the claim for gender equality, women are still confined to the 'inside' sphere of activities and men look after the 'outside'. Tourism has brought about changes in that women's and men's roles are not clearly delineated in many areas of tourist service. Some changes are coming from the outside; for example, the insistence that women have places on village committees.

In terms of forest use, before 1956 the patriarchal chieftain owned the forest and controlled its use. A system of holy hills prohibited use of certain spots; and holy hills included water resource areas, scenic areas, and cemeteries. The religion itself, 'daba', has strong animist elements and checks and balances were in place to punish those who violated forest rules. At the same time the matrilineal system itself means that new houses are needed only infrequently, but this changed with the onset of tourism. At one and the same time subsistence-based consumption changed to commercial consumption



and the forests were taken over by the state. This has resulted in the government having to close the hillsides for afforestation. Today, with an increase of incomes from tourism, in Luoshui village, at least, demands on the forest have decreased through realisation of their value for tourism. Luoshui itself had a period of social forestry through a Ford Foundation project, by 1994, however, tourism took over and the project closed. Hence today in Luoshui there are serious problems in terms of timber consumption with the onset of tourism and gradual changes in the matrilineal system. Changes too have taken place in the gender balance. Women have been excluded or unrecognised in terms of their knowledge of forestry, the accent is on 'technology' and men receive training for agroforestry activities previously undertaken by women. The net result is that men do not use the training and women continue to do the work. The authors also report the advent of the sex trade in the area with the onset of tourism!



**Zhengbo** does not have the advantages of Luoshui in terms of tourism. It is on the edge of the Yongning plateau and consists of three villages: the upper, middle and lower. Changes occurred here after 1949 in that, although Zhengbo was originally Mosuo, Han and Zhuang people moved in. The upper village now has Mosuo and Zhuang inhabitants and the middle and lower are exclusively Mosuo; the Han have built a new village. Mosuo influences prevail over these other ethnic groups in all but the matrilineal marriage system.

Zhengbo is fortunate in that the soil is fertile and it retains its traditional agricultural practices with animal husbandry as a subsidiary activity. It is an important rice producer and has substantial maize crops. It has a typical subsistence mix of buckwheat, highland barley, and beans with mushrooms and medicinal herbs being sold for cash. Livestock kept are pigs, cows, and horses. Zhengbo is a subsistence agricultural economy and has no significant commercial opportunities. As a result, the traditional gender roles and division of labour, as described in the opening passages, are maintained in Zhengbo, men perceive women as working harder than men. Control and distribution of family resources are equal, and the family as a whole comes together to make major financial decisions. The Zhuang who live among the Mosuo have a patrilineal system, with the provision of adopting the son-in-law into the family if there is no son. In terms of management of family affairs, that falls to the most qualified family member no matter which gender. Although they do not intermarry normally, some 'marriages' have taken place with the Mosuo as the old system of parents arranging marriages is breaking down.

The Mosuo of Zhengbo have retained their traditional system in terms of agriculture and marriage customs and tourism is not an issue. On the other hand, deforestation is a problem as the traditional norms in forest management practised during the feudal period have disappeared, along with their checks and balances. There is, however, a realisation of the problem and the women of Zhengbo play the greater role in voluntary afforestation (80%

of participants are women) according to the local forest department. Women also make up 40% of the participants when fighting forest fires and have a greater awareness of the problems of deforestation.

Following state ownership, the Mosuo community were given specific hills for forest supplies which they were to care for collectively, but, given the daily consumption of firewood and the distances (20km round trip) of the collectively owned forest areas, villagers tend to cut wood illegally from state-owned forests. With 104 houses in the village, firewood consumption is enormous. Added to the problem of deforestation is that of frequent and fierce flooding, as Zhengbo is located in the lower valley of two rivers. Two-thirds of the fields are inundated when floods occur. Domestic animals also add their impact to the degrading forest land, so it is obvious that the farming economy is under great threat. In short, the standard of living in Zhengbo is quite poor, especially when compared with Luoshui.

## Conclusion

Although the deforestation and environmental degradation of the environment in Zhengbo is obvious, it is clear that the deterioration in Luoshui is displaced to areas further away. Luoshui has opportunities to use other types of fuel, Zhengbo, because of the subsistence economy and lack of cash, is hard put to find alternatives.

It is clear that forest ownership is an issue and also non-farm income-generating opportunities for subsistence agricultural communities. Economic development and a diversity of opportunities are essential for ecological conservation. On the other hand, such opportunities can also degrade the social environment; and this is witnessed by the advent of prostitution in Luoshui. Perhaps such an advent has also been encouraged by misinterpretation of the matrilineal system as permissiveness in sexual mores by outsiders (ed.)

In tracing the history of forest ownership in the area, the authors note that stability of forest ownership is important for maintenance of forests and that Luoshui is an exception because of its being in an area where they can get rich returns despite ownership of the forest being taken over by the state. In this respect it is clear that ownership of forests becomes an issue when people have no other options but to rely on the forests. Villagers are deprived of forest resources in Zhengbo but they need firewood. This is clearly a case in which the state has an obligation to intervene for the benefit of the villagers; it is not ownership per se that is an issue, but ownership for what purpose.

The authors conclude that the matrilineal system is helpful for forest protection and they advocate "gender equality in social relations and women's adequate participation in community and forest management decisions."





# **Engendering economic valuation of forests**

Pierre Walter and Gadsaraporn Wannitikul

## **Summary**

This paper discusses the fairly recent trend of economic valuation of the environment, which has now been widely adopted as a development approach even by mainstream development agencies such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Danish Agency for Development Assistance (DANIDA), Department for International Development–Overseas Development Administration (DFID-ODA), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and World Bank (WB).

This particular approach has made previously unvalued environmental resources, and particularly those taken to be ‘free goods’, visible, whereas previously they were not taken into consideration in national accounting. The paper argues that, although agencies now promote environmental accounting, nevertheless economic accounting continues to be blind to gender concerns. Economic valuation of the environment is viewed as a gender neutral undertaking and the field is slow to understand gender as an analytical framework.

The paper takes a look at the main tools for economic evaluation and at ways in which they can be made more gender sensitive by introducing gender analysis to environmental economics. The paper begins by discussing total economic value (TEV), a basic organising concept in economic valuation of environmental resources. TEV is comprised of a use value (UV) and non-use value (NUV), and use values are then divided into direct use value (DUV),



indirect use value (IUV), and option value (OV). Plus the TEV will be a combination of all of these. DUV directly contributes to production or consumption: timber, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), recreation, ecotourism, medicinal plants, education, plant genetics, and habitat. IUVs are the 'unseens' - nutrient cycles, soil protection, water cycles, oxygen recycling, etc, and option values are what natural resources could possibly be used for in the future, such as bequest value which relates to preservation for future use. Non-use value is the aesthetic and cultural things intrinsic to natural resources. In brief, that is the new perspective.

The paper goes on to give a brief on standard gender analysis and its tools as a means of overcoming biases that are strongly anti-female. A brief description of the Harvard analytical framework is given. The brief then follows the sequence of the paper itself in touching on the different economic values assigned to the environment and looking at ways to engender these.

How is gender brought into economic valuation? The text looks at the Harvard Framework, and in particular at gender division of labour and access and control over resources and benefits. Basically this leads in research to the construction of an activity profile as a simple matrix of productive, reproductive, and community work (paid and unpaid) by whom it is carried out, and the implications of the division of labour – is the status quo maintained, for example, or is it challenged? Access and Control Profiles look at resources and who owns what? who uses it? and who decides? Women for example often have access, but do not decide how something is used because they do not own it.

The text continues to discuss direct use values and the standard techniques of economic valuation for tropical forests. Some detail is gone into, but only to come to the conclusion that there is no recognition in valuation techniques of gender division of labour. Fuel collection for example merely values the wood collected, not taking into account the labour of the women collecting. It is clear that were a household to pay for fuelwood collection, a rather higher value would be derived. It is argued that timber alone is valued, rather than other forest products, because commercial exploitation of timber is a male occupation, and it is women who collect other-non-valued forest products. Yet, it is pointed out that other forest products must have some value because otherwise why would so many forests become nature reserves?

The text then examines the problems inherent in assigning economic value to forests. The concerns discussed are women's unpaid labour and how compensation for environmental services could work against the desired outcome, e.g. if women were paid to reduce fuelwood collection, this may well have no impact on preserving forest resources if women have no control on how household money is spent. Many of these arguments are well documented in the literature.



### 1. Gendered Accounting

If trees are more valued for fuel, fodder, and food than for timber, they will provide more benefit to women. But if women's access to the trees is restricted, and their labour in collecting firewood given no value, trees may be sold off for firewood, while women continue collecting fuelwood for subsistence needs. On the other hand, if women have control over how many trees are planted and used for fuel, their location, and use, then a valuation of the trees for fuelwood would give an accurate representation of their worth to women. Questions of who owns, uses, and controls the trees thus become as important as determining their economic value.

### 2. Barter -Exchange

In primarily non-market economies the 'barter-exchange' approach is used. Bolivian forest communities calculate the economic value of wild fruits and fuelwood in terms of salt, a market commodity whose price is well-established. There might be important valuation differences between men and women and these have to be taken into consideration.

### 3. Gender Analysis of Resource Valuation

In households in the developing world, research has shown that women accord a greater value to improved water services more than men do. Similar results can be found in women's valuation of environmental problems like the severe air pollution caused by indoor cooking (Subba 1999), polluted drinking water, and deforestation. This means that economic values of services or degradation change when women's perspectives are taken into account.

A discussion of contingent valuation studies is presented and the difficulties of carrying out market research, with all its accompanying value systems, in non-market economies are broached. Among the difficulties cited are mistrust of government and the seasonality of resource use, among the potentials is cited use of such approaches in participatory rural appraisal (PAR). The box below gives different ways of approaching contingent valuation.

In addition to economic values of environmental resources there are also recreational and cultural values. In non-market economies time for travel and distance are often not taken into account because travel is by foot. Yet, in market economies, costs of travel and methods of transport can be aggregated to give a total economic value for a natural resource used for recreation. Other examples of this are the value of clean air and the scenery which are brought into housing prices in market economies, yet given no value in non-market economies.

The paper also discusses indirect use values such as watershed protection and erosion control provided by forests calculated against fertiliser costs to replace lost nutrients, decline in crop yields, and labour costs incurred in the transport of soil back to its original plot. The paper suggests that environmental service valuation is seen as gender neutral, and this results in services of particular importance to women remaining hidden, such as services supporting certain plant species, fuelwood, and other non-timber forest products. This is often because women place importance on resources that meet family needs and men place importance on those which are of commercial value.

## Conclusion

The discussion concludes by covering option values and, in this area in particular, it is deemed that gender analysis is lacking. The authors' conclusion is that

'from a gender perspective, there are clear problems, both theoretical and methodological, with all the valuation techniques described. As a basic premise, the idea that forest and livelihood can be reduced to monetary values is in itself alienating and in some ways self-destructive. If all tropical forest resources – including their aesthetic and cultural dimensions – are looked upon as commodities, valued on the bank scale, weighted by money, then all forests have the potential to be bought and sold to those with abundant capital. All of nature becomes a market commodity. Since forest-dependent communities, usually on the subsistence margins of the market place, seldom have the economic power to purchase the forest resources upon which they depend for survival, it might be in their best interests not to allow the valuation, and hence commoditisation, of forest resources. Clearly, engendering economic valuation of forest resources is a key concern here.'







2

Natural Resources and Environment





# **Participation of women in joint forest management in India**

Pratima S. Jattan

## **Summary**

This paper purports to discuss the role of women in joint forest management (JFM) in India. In actual fact, only a small proportion of the paper discussed women in particular in relation to joint forest management. By and large it is a historical perspective of forest management, leading up to the present day and the introduction of JFM. The different sections are briefly covered below.

About 97% of the forests in India are owned by the government. The importance of the forests is for environmental conservation, sustained agricultural production, and also as an important source of forest products that are crucial for the subsistence needs of a largely rural population. About 100 million people live in and around forests and for another 275 million people the forests are an important source of livelihood. They constitute an integral part of the social life of the tribal people and others living in the forest areas. In some parts of India, about 80% of the forest dwellers depend entirely on forests for sustenance needs and about 30% of the dietary needs and 30-60% of the livelihood needs of tribal people depend on forest areas. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) collected from forests are estimated to provide 50% of the income for 30% of the rural population. Employment generated through forestry is in the order of 475 million person days; and women constitute about half of the labour force used in forest plantation activities. All of this is in addition to the importance of forests in meeting fodder and energy requirements. Forests also play an important role in rural health care because of the medicinal plants they provide. In addition to all of this, forests play an extremely important role in environmental conservation in terms of water cycles, soil conservation, climate, and so forth. Hence the degradation of the forests in India is of great concern to many parties.

The author examines how restrictions imposed by the Forest Department (FD) to save forests from degradation conflicted with the interests of local populations dependent on forests to meet subsistence needs. Whichever ownership and management of forests rested with the FD, the local people remained interested only in the exploitation of forest resources and not in their regeneration and sustainable development. This led to the realisation that conservation and proper management of forests needed the active participation of the local people and steps were taken to involve them. This approach became known as joint forest management (JFM), and it was implemented as a result of the National Forest Policy 1988. In 1990 a JFM programme was launched and women constituted the most important group in its implementation. Since women were the ones actively involved in gathering from the forest, and were most familiar with their products, it was realised that sustainable forest management was not possible without women's active participation.

The paper stresses the role of women in forestry at this juncture. It is re-emphasised that women spend more time collecting forest produce and to meet family needs than men, and that men are more interested in the commercial value of forests. About a third of all poor women in India are directly involved in forestry and related occupations. The author argues that this is the reason why it is women who have been at the forefront of movements like the Chipko Andolan.

Forest policies, it is stated, are nevertheless gender blind and only in the national forest policy of 1988 is their contribution recognised, as it provided for the creation of a massive people's movement to meet its objectives.

The rest of the paper deals mainly with forestry and the stages of forest policy in India. The goal of the 1988 policy was to keep a third of the land under forests—two thirds in mountain areas, whereas only 23.3% of the land is actually classified as forest and of that part of it is devoid of tree cover – 76.5 million ha have a crown density >10%), accounting for 19.1% of the country only.

The author dates the reasons for forest degradation and people's alienation back to 1894 when the rights and privileges of users were restricted and reserve forests established to increase government revenue. Rights of access were leading to such areas being used as common property resources. These forest laws were a focus of rebellion during the struggle for home rule and forests were set on fire, leading to further degradation.

Even after independence, the forest policy of 1952 deemed that the use of forest produce for domestic and agricultural needs should not be permitted at the cost of national interests.



All these are seen as having a negative impact on women. Degradation of forests means longer and more arduous journeys for fuel and fodder, and even water. Today the potential production of non-timber forest products is thought to be four times the current production given proper management.

In 1976 the social forestry programme introduced, following the recommendations of the national commission on agriculture (NCA), marked the beginning of people's involvement in forest management. Social forestry became the order of the day, and it is this concept that led to joint forest management (JFM) in the 1988 policy leading to the guidelines of 1990.

The provisions of national forest policy relevant to participatory management are given in the box below (Box 1) and the JFM guidelines issued in 1990 are given in Box 2.

In pursuance of these guidelines, state governments issued resolutions for implementation of JFM and quite a lot of progress has been made. One of the specifications of JFM was that it was about the protection of degraded forests, not forests in good condition.

#### Box 1

- i) The principal aim of forest management must be to ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance and the derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinated to this principal aim and forests should not be looked upon as a source of revenue;
- ii) minor forest produce should be protected and its production should be enhanced;
- iii) local people holding customary rights and concessions in forests should be motivated to identify themselves with protection and development of forests from which they derive benefits; and
- iv) domestic requirements of tribals and other poor living within and near forests should be the first charge on forest produce.

#### Box 2

The guidelines stated that

- i) the JFM programme should be implemented under an arrangement between voluntary agencies, the village community (beneficiaries), and the state forest department (SFD),
- ii) no ownership or lease rights over the forests should be given to the beneficiaries or voluntary agencies,
- iii) the beneficiaries should be entitled to a share in usufructs subject to conditions prescribed by SFD,
- iv) access to forest and usufruct benefits should be only to the beneficiaries who are organised into a village institution,
- v) the beneficiaries should be given usufructs like grass, lops and tops, MFP, and, if they successfully protect the forests, they may be given a portion of the proceeds from the sale of trees,
- vi) areas to be selected for JFM should be free from claims of any person who may not be a beneficiary,
- vii) the selected site should be worked in accordance with a duly approved working scheme,
- viii) the JFM area will be properly protected,
- ix) no agriculture should be permitted on forest land,
- x) along with other trees, beneficiaries may be allowed to plant fruit trees, and
- xi) the benefit of people's participation should go to the village communities and not to commercial or other interests.

Notwithstanding, the term 'degraded' is loosely defined: for example, in Karnataka, 25% of the forests were defined as degraded.

The author continues with a description of village-level organisation of joint forest management. The responsibilities of the village-level organisation and the corresponding duties of the Forest Department are given briefly in Box 3.

### Box 3

The duties and responsibilities of a VLO include the following:

- i) maintenance of the details, including nomination forms, of beneficiaries;
- ii) ensuring the active participation of the members in the protection and management of forests;
- iii) protection of the JFM area from grazing, fire, encroachment, and illicit felling;
- iv) informing the Forest Department (FD) of any trespass or violation of rules and to assist the FD in apprehending offenders;
- v) resolving inter- and intra-village conflicts;
- vi) ensuring equitable distribution of usufructs among beneficiaries;
- vii) to ensure that usufruct rights allowed by the government are not misused by members; and
- viii) preparation of a micro-plan for the JFM area with the assistance of the FD.

In return the responsibilities of the FD are as follow.

- i) to provide assistance in forming the VLO and the managing / executive committee;
- ii) to provide technical and administrative support to JFM;
- iii) to allocate forest areas, provide funds, and to ensure that the work connected with the rehabilitation, management, and harvesting of forests is carried out in a timely and proper fashion;
- iv) to ensure that the terms of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between the FD and VLO are not violated;
- v) to arrange harvesting and sale of forest produce where sale proceeds are to be shared with the beneficiaries; and
- vi) training and reorientation of the FD staff to handle JFM work and also to arrange training for VLO members in matters relevant to JFM.

## Conclusion

There are now 11 million ha under JFM in India and its popularity is growing.

JFM groups are organised along the lines of self-help groups and there is a provision for a village development fund to meet forest conservation needs. Nonetheless, and despite government provisions concerning how many women should be included in decision-making bodies of the VLO, the question remains whether women have really benefited or not? The popular opinion is that women have greatly benefited from collection of NTFPs; for example it is cited that, in Madhya Pradesh alone, the value of NTFPs collected by women was valued at \$700 million annually, but the fact remains that collectors get a very small percentage of the sale price, so it is certainly





not women who realise that value – most of the profit goes to middlemen. Other examples are given by the author and it is pointed out that, since women receive an unfair share of the income from NTFPs and since women are known to have a better record for re-investing incomes into families than men, special efforts are needed to help women establish processing units for NTFPs. The inputs envisaged are related to technical knowhow, financing, and marketing.



On the whole the participation of women in JFM, especially in decision-making, is viewed as unsatisfactory. This is attributed to the predominance of men in decision-making roles and the fact that women are constrained by social customs-many village women still follow a purdah system and don't mix with men. They shy away from meetings or, if they do attend, they huddle together in one corner. In their turn, even when questions are put to women, the men take it upon themselves to answer, or at one extreme, the men don't even inform the women about meetings. As a result, many women are not convinced about the efficacy of JFM. The author suggests involving women from the very beginning or holding separate meetings for women 'to get their views'.

This latter suggestion seems not to be the way to go. From an outsiders' perspective, it is very clear that women have a different approach entirely to forest management than men. While women see forest management as a prerequisite to sustainable and continual availability of non timber forest products, not only for adding value and generating income but for the well-being of the family, men principally focus on the cash crop aspects of commercial forestry. The only way to reach a satisfactory compromise and ensure the success of JFM is to bring women in on an equal footing with men. This seems not to have happened.







# **Role of mountain women in the management of sustainable eco-systems**

Chhaya Kunwar

## **Summary**

This paper from India by Chaya Kunwar begins with a statement from the World Rio Conference in Environmental Development in 1992. "Women have a vital role in environmental management and development."

Their full participation is therefore essential to achieving sustainable development and the author puts forward that women are at the forefront when it comes to protection and preservation of resources. The paper itself concentrates on forest management and forest movements in which women were the major movers. Reasons for this are well known in the literature: they are closer to nature than men and ergo they are better managers of the ecosystem. Much of the first part tells us what we already know about the closeness of mountain women to the forests that provide fodder, fuelwood, and food. An example is given of a woman giving birth in the forest (Chamoli) and naming her daughter Boni Devi- Ban Devi- and this, of course is common for Hindus in the HKH region and dates back to the time of the Upanishads when forests were thought to be inhabited by goddesses. Of course, this is romanticised today because not all supernatural forest dwellers were thought to be good.

The striking part of this story from Chamoli of course is that it pinpoints the sad reality that many mountain women are carrying out arduous and laborious work right up to the time before delivery.

It is argued that the impact of environmental degradation is greater on women than on men: it increases the distances they have to travel to gather the resources they need, and, of course, increases the burden since the loads

have to be carried further and for longer before reaching home. The author estimates that on average a mountain woman will walk 3-4,000km a year to gather the essentials of fuel, fodder, and water.

What is the answer to this complex dependency pattern in which women know what is needed, but also realise how mismanagement is making it less possible to gather what is needed?

It is argued that women's intricate knowledge of natural resources and their uses make them the best managers, if given the opportunity to manage. In this respect, the author discusses the role of the Chipko movement and Mahila Mandals in India in bringing village women into the forefront of forest management.

Examples of successful forest management from the villages are given and one of these examples is given in Box 1.

#### Box 1

Here is an example of the collective strength of the Mahila Mandal Dal of Bachhair village. The women of Bachhair were concerned about the dwindling forest because they realised that once the forest was destroyed they would be the worst sufferers. The Sarpanch (Head of the Forest) was a corrupt man who would encourage outsiders to fell the trees for his own private gain. One day the Sarpanch sold off a large tract of forest to an outside contractor who lost no time in felling the trees, hence the women became determined to remove the Sarpanch. They filed a complaint against him with the Sub-Divisional Magistrate. The village women created so much pressure that the Sarpanch had to resign. A woman Sarpanch was elected for the first time in the history of Uttarakhand. The women of Bacchair then framed their own rules and regulations to protect the forest and share the benefits among members. A guard was hired to keep watch over the forest. The women themselves also kept watch the whole night on occasions when illegal tree fellers were in the area. An annual afforestation drive was launched and soon the whole area was covered with dense forest. In addition to protecting their community forest, the women of Bachhair protected the government-owned forest. When a fire broke out in the government forest the women rushed to the spot and fearlessly brought the fire under control. Due to the remarkable work of the Mahila Manga Dal of Bachhair in the field of Natural Resource Management, it was one of the recipients of the Indira Priya Darshini Vriksh Mitra award given by the late Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, in 1984. Inspired by the Mahila Mangal Dal of Bachhair, women in other villages also began to follow in their footsteps.

### Conclusion

The author calls for recognition of these women's groups, for their legal status as managers of natural resources within their own communities. The logic for this argument is that it gives women the right to be heard in terms of policy formulation. The author questions the need for government to establish different mechanisms for forest management when women are taking care of them well. Two further examples are given from Uttarakhand- the maiti tree-



a sapling raised in the woman's home village and replanted at the time of marriage in the husband's village, and raksha bandhan or tying a traditional protective bracelet around each tree as a raksha sutra, a sign that it is under women's protection. As awareness-raising techniques these are excellent examples, but the author is quite right to argue for legal status of women's forest management groups and their access to policy-making fora.

Other suggestions are that women should be recognised as 'main workers'. This concept is a call to translate the contributions of women, who often do not work for cash, into monetary terms so that their contributions are recognised. Another call is for leadership training in ecosystem management for women. In this respect women's lack of access to information about policies and technical information is stressed. This is a real challenge for communications at village level.

The author concludes by stating that *"there is also a need to establish a Mountain Women's Forum at International Level which will provide a common platform for women from every region of the world to exchange and share views, ideas, issues, problems, and priorities and to learn from others' experiences."*







# **National income from an eco-feminine perspective**

Pushpalata Rawat

## **Summary**

This is one more paper in the natural resource management papers offered that comes from the Uttaranchal experience. When the state was formed, the expectations were high that women, who had played an instrumental role in lobbying for its formation, would find a voice and play an instrumental role in the state's affairs, especially in relation to forest policy and management.

The importance of forests in the economy of hill states needs no emphasis here and is well recorded in the literature. The importance of women in the management of forests also is well recorded and acknowledged by governments and communities, although this is never corroborated in national statistics, neither are attempts made to engender these statistics put together by both national and state governments, nor do they have an ecological perspective: the combined perspective being termed eco-feminine.

The lack is focused by the author by citing the rise in female foeticide, witnessed by the unfavourable ratio of girls to boys in the zero to 6 age group in the 2001 census: women from the most remote villages who would not travel to the city for the sake of their own health, when subjected to family pressure, travel to hospitals for ultrasound tests. The author blames a society that gives no value to the productivity of women. Hence, the author fixes the role of women in forest management to their status in the community; and the argument is that, if the contribution of women were to be properly recorded in the national income, it would have a positive impact on women's status.

Uttaranchal only has natural resources as a basis for development revenue and approximately 65% of the land is under forest cover. Notwithstanding no

value is given to the intangible services forests provide and the role they play in communal, cultural lore. The fear is always there that the state will plant economic trees for their timber value and ignore the species that provide so much in terms of livelihood and sustainability to farming families; and also that non-timber forest products will be degraded along with a concomitant degradation of soils and water-retaining properties on forest lands. The author finds much to be desired in the commoditisation attitudes of the National Income Committee, which focuses on capital formation, production, and consumption, hence seeing income as the premium sign of economic growth. Hence the parameters devised cater only to the monetised sector and the contribution of women, as well as forests, to national income are always recorded as negligible.

The text continues by arguing for a different method of valuing services from women and forests so that their true contribution to national income can be calculated.

The author bases her argument on the case of child care; for example, when a woman looks after her own child it does not appear in national income statistics as a contribution, but, if the child is admitted to a crèche, the payment to the crèche automatically becomes a part of national income statistics. The author continues by arguing that household farms are normally, due to male outmigration, tended by women, hence if one examined the whole range of women's work, one can logically conclude that women contribute a great deal to national income. The author provides a calendar of agricultural activities that carry through from January to December, and they include the collection of fuelwood and fodder, soil preparation, rice planting, wheat harvest, animal husbandry, weeding, transplantation, rice harvest, and so forth right through until the fields are prepared for wheat planting in November and December. This is indeed an argument that has been put forward since the early 70s and international women's year.

The text then pursues the argument of environmental services for forests, as an example of accounting in the quality (or intangible services) that forests contribute. Normally forests are only valued in terms of standing biomass. Here the author suggests other parameters such as production of oxygen, soil conservation, water recycling, and so forth. Forests cover 65% of land in the state of Uttaranchal, so there is indeed an argument for the kind of accounting that would bring forest contribution on to a more realistic scale, rather than treating the intangible services as free goods, hence producing the almost unbelievable figure of 1% as the contribution of the forestry sector to the gross national product. Services such as grazing, manure, fuel, small timber, lumber, and environmental and recreational benefits are omitted from the accounting process. On the other hand, mining and quarrying are treated separately and their contributions accounted in the industrial sector. There is bound to be a





neglect of the forests when the impression given by national accounting mechanisms is that 65% of the state capital only produces 1% of its product! The same can be argued for women's contributions, many of which are taken for granted and not valued; and therefore treated as free labour.

## Conclusion

One can see that within the eco-feminine perspective, forests are female. Like the women of the state who contributed so much to the quest for state autonomy, the forests are sidelined and for women and forests it is left to self-help groups run by women, without legal recognition or proper legal rights, to care for this most productive sector.









# **Development strategies for Qiang women in Eruo Village, Sichuan Province, China<sup>1</sup>**

Zuo Wenxia and Li Junlin

## **Summary**

This paper describes the interfaces between Qiang women in Eruo village and natural resources. The text discusses the problems, faced by them and the causes of such problems. It seeks to determine development strategies for the Qiang women of Eruo village in order to improve livelihoods, the environment, and conservation practices.

The Qiang are a minority ethnic group inhabiting the valleys of the Mianjing River in Sichuan Province. Of the two populations (198 and 252), 194 and 209 (1996 figures) of them respectively live in remote highland areas which are the repositories of mountain forests and the major source of the Yangtze River. Forty years ago the forest covered 42% of the land area, today it covers nine per cent, resulting in a loss of biodiversity. Eruo village itself is 190km from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, and altitudes range from 2,150-3,200masl. The demographic statistics give us a clear idea of the enormous odds these villagers face: total population 147:78 male, 69 female; flatland two ha, forest 443ha-216ha government forest and 47ha village owned; forest slope > 25°. Potatoes, corn, millet and soybeans are the staple crops and potatoes are used in exchange for rice. There is electricity, but it is used exclusively for illumination. A simple road was completed in 2001 connecting the village with the town of Mao county an hour away, and there is a village primary school, but it is in a rented room and the education level is low – there are only three grades. Teachers are not willing to come to the village because salaries are too low, and a middle school graduate is the teacher. Boys do go to the township school, five kilometres away, but girls usually stop going to

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<sup>1</sup> A small grant for this research was given by the Ford Foundation.

school at Grade 3. Men migrate out in search of wage labour in the township and women take care of the agricultural activities and forest management. (It is stated here that most families can't afford a TV, significant pertaining to the indicators of prosperity). Management and maintenance of infrastructure are carried out by men and they attend public meetings and groups, women provide the labour. However in terms of family activities and the household, women make the decisions and organise activities: most of the work carried out by women is given no monetary value. There is no hospital at all and severe illnesses necessitate a trip to the town. Men in this village were previously employed as loggers at about 20-25 RMB a day, but after the inception of the Forest Protection programme (2000 AD), they have begun to migrate out in search of labouring jobs. Obviously, since 2000, family incomes have been adversely impacted by logging bans and incomes of between 1,500-3,000 RMB per year have dropped to 1,000-2,500 RMB per year. To bolster its forest policy, the government has provided subsidies: cereal 100kg, seedlings worth 50 RMB, and cash 50 RMB. These subsidies are limited to five years and alternative income strategies are crucial.



#### Practical and Strategic Needs

Needs	Men	Women
Practical Needs	1. To build a good house	1. Enough food for the family
	2. To own a colour T V, telephone	2. Enough money to buy clothes for the family
	3. A good road	3. Expand numbers of domestic livestock
Strategic Needs	1. Higher education for children	1. Training on practical technology
	2. Training on practical technology	2. Family chores shared by men and women
	3. Travel to other places in China	3. Decision-making authority

The author analyses this chart in terms of women's needs being more family oriented.

The author uses tables to compare men's work with women's. Not surprisingly it shows that women do most of the physical work, but are not involved in income-generating activities outside the village or gathering commercial timber. This predictably places most of the economic power in men's hands. Men are the representatives in public meetings and make the decisions regarding involvement in community work, whereas women contribute their labour. The table given on practical and strategic needs (above) shows a difference in men's perspectives and women's; women's needs being more family oriented.

There are a number of possibilities for income generation for the women of this village; however they appear to have remained undeveloped and

unexploited. Some of these are discussed in the following passage, along with pertinent, general recommendations given by the author in her concluding passages.

Women in this ethnic group have a great deal of knowledge about medicinal plants and herbal medicines. These are currently used for family consumption. From May to October each year they collect edible mushrooms and dry them for family consumption the year round. They are very careful about fuelwood selection, so that the ecosystem is not degraded. In addition it is they who look after the kitchen gardens, which they manage along agroforestry lines, and there are possibilities for cash crops, such as tea, because women have experience in growing, processing and selling.



This village, as is the case with other villages in China, is managed under the contract responsibility system of 1981. Although the forests are national forest, each family gets a plot with accompanying rights to manage and use it. Insofar as this is state governed, women have the same access rights as men.

The problems that prevent these opportunities being exploited include lack of marketing information. All activities focus on and within the village, few people come in and agricultural extension agents are sorely needed. The potato variety has never been improved in the past 30 years and production is low. However, the biggest problem for Quiang women is their own traditional attitude. They believe women shouldn't come into community life as it is seen as a man's prerogative. Girls aren't educated because they will marry, hence education is a waste of money. All of these are familiar traditional concepts the world over. Hence there is no training for women and, even if women did want to become involved in income generating activities, they can't get guarantees for bank loans.

## Conclusion

In such an inward-looking society, what can be done? The author recommends the following interventions.

- Establishment of a women's organisation in the village with democratically elected representatives
- Establishment of a market information channel
  - Practical training courses
  - Conscientiousisation of women to change their outmoded attitudes
  - Provision of micro-credit.





# **Devolution of forest management and the Alangan Mangyan women**

Merlyne M. Paunlagui

## **Summary**

This paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 presents employment of women in the agricultural and rural sectors. Section 2 briefly discusses the study site, Barangay Paitan, while Section 3 traces the evolution of forest management in Paitan. The productive and reproductive roles of women are discussed in Section 4. Section 5 presents the impact of devolution on women's political, social, and economic well-being. The final section summarises the findings and presents the recommendations. This summary seeks to cover the salient points and the commentary focuses on Forest Management and Rural Women's Employment.

It is essential to the understanding of the author's perspective to know that her definition of devolution goes beyond the local government definition or local government code (LGC) that pertains in the Philippines. It is based on a wider definition found in the literature and is taken to mean the shift of power away from the State to local communities and by means of which effective resource management is a result of proximity to the source of decisions. Hence the study examines whether the State propelled devolution policy has empowered women politically and brought about social and economic improvements.

The study took place among the Alangan people of Paitan, an area in the lower foothills of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, where the area slopes steeply into the Halcon mountain range. Figure 1 gives the location of the study area. The area has a high infant mortality rate, attributed by women to the young age at which girls are married, but which is compounded by the lack of basic health services and poor hygiene. Superstition promotes reliance on traditional health practices. Living accommodation is a one-roomed hut,





Figure 1: Map of Luzon, The Philippines

raised off the ground on stilts, and made of bamboo and cogon grass. Common crops are coffee, bananas, and coconuts, although other crops are grown; pigs, goats, and poultry are common livestock. This brief will cover first the findings on the evolution of forest management, rural women's employment, and, finally, the impact of state-promoted devolution in the Philippines.

### **Forest Management**

The area has a strong church presence and the Roman Catholic church has been active in the area since the 1950s. It was this presence that brought the Alangan together into a settlement, helped with introduction of new crops, health services, education participation in the market economy, and so forth. Although the Alangan complied to all this, the basis of this compliance was that they continue with their tribal laws and traditions. The church was also instrumental in helping the Alangan understand the state requirements for devolution in terms of forest and land resources. Nevertheless the tribal laws prevailed and thus, in Paitan, there has been a *de facto* devolution running concomitantly with the *de jure* devolution introduced by the state. The researcher sees this as one reason for the adjustments the Alangan made and their opening up of spaces for forest and forest resource management. A brief



**Plate 1: An Alangan Mangyan house**

history of the process is given in Box 1. Plate 1 is a picture of a typical dwelling.

#### **Box 1: History of forest management in Paitan**

Before 1950, state intervention consisted of surveying forest boundaries, and part of the ancestral domain became a reservation, subdividing ancestral land. The Bureau of Lands issued land patents, to non-Mangyans mainly, by 1955. The local people protested and in the 1980s, the government granted Forest Occupancy Permits with individual stewardship contracts for 25 years to Paitan residents. In 1987, the SANAMA (Samahan ng Mga Nagkakaisang Alangan Mangyan, Inc.) was organised and registered as a legal entity, recognised by the government. It engaged in reforestation, established a rattan plantation, and awarded rattan cutting licenses. In 1990, SANAMA applied for and received a Community Forest Stewardship Agreement under Integrated Social Forestry provisions. As an Indigenous Cultural Community (ICC), the Alangan applied for and received a Certification of Ancestral Domain Claims (CADC) in 1997. Two years later, they applied for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain. At the time of the research, they were still waiting to hear about the status of their application.

### ***Rural Women's Employment***

As in most Asian countries, in the Philippines as a whole, women in the agricultural and rural sectors are heavily involved as unpaid family workers. From 1998 to 2001, the proportion of women working in this category was more than twice that of men employed in the agriculture, forestry, and fishery sector. But, as in other Asian countries, women's work is not considered productive because they receive no payment.

There is a marked division of labour in what is known in the literature as reproductive work: reproductive work refers to household activities, and here it is seen that women bear a disproportionate amount of the load for fuel and fodder collection cooking, child care, and health care. Women contribute equally (compared with men) in terms of farm work, but weeding, harvesting,

drying, storing, and marketing are predominantly looked after by women. Besides the crops already mentioned, there are varieties of crops for subsistence (cassava, yam, and upland rice for example) and different varieties of fruit (banana and rambutan, for example) Crops grown for purely commercial purposes are strictly looked after by men. Traditionally they are swidden farmers, but following the introduction of a church mission in the 1950s there is more settled agriculture in terms of practice.

The women are industrious and make plates out of vines and various types of rattan basketwork for fruit marketing and for gift items. In the 1990s they also began to make certain items of furniture and the nuns (Servants of the Holy Spirit) running the local missionary have taught them beadwork for small jewellery items. The nuns have also taught them food processing.

It is by and large a subsistence economy and women are not heavily clothed or adorned, wearing simple skirts and wrap-around blouses made from pounded leaves. Nevertheless the women are looking at different economic options and introducing new products to exchange for cash in the wider market.

## Conclusion

By and large the state-initiated devolution had no impact on women per se. As an ethnic group, however, the general solidarity among the Alangan and other Mangyan tribes enabled them to establish a legitimate presence in traditional tribal areas. So, insofar as government and church interventions enabled women's capacities there has been a certain amount of human resource development. But there has been no change in the political empowerment of women, and by that no positive influences on their economic or social well-being. The marginal changes that have occurred have been brought about by the church mission and NGO groups (the Upland NGO Assistance Committee-UNAC) in the area; and these had been assisting them prior to government interventions. In terms of economics, the one glimmer is a 25-year rattan concession granted by the government which enables the production of handicrafts. Training is carried out in a Livelihood Centre which is part of a Low Income Upland Community Project (LIUCP) that takes care of infrastructural projects mainly (suspension bridges, rural access roads, bridges, and so on), but the main training given for women was dress-making, and attendance was negligible. Hence there are really no specific programmes targeting women.

Reasons for poor impact include the pertinent fact that devolution was applied across the board, and no adjustments were made to the special characteristics of different areas. In other areas where devolution occurred women were very visible in reforestation, but these women received incentives and compensation for their labour. The Alangan, on the other hand, are very





ethno-centred and cling to their traditional mechanisms, which are male dominated. In order to improve the situation, the author recommends the following.

1. Gender-disaggregated data pertaining to forests should be collected and analysed to determine the needs, attitudes, aspirations, and perceptions of both men and women before formulating, planning, and executing forestry programmes.
2. Women's access to education, extension, training, credit and appropriate technology should be improved.

Women should have access to information as well as education to improve their knowledge, skills, and opportunities for making decisions affecting their development and welfare.





# **Working with community-based conservation with a gender focus: a guide**

Mary Hill Rojas

## **Summary**

This paper described the process used to give community conservation initiatives a gender focus. The author was contracted as part of an evaluation team for the Parks in Peril (PIP) project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project was funded by the Office of Women in Development (G/WID) through the Women in Development Technical Assistance (WIDTECH) Project. The WIDTECH Project provides technical assistance and training on gender issues to USAID bureaus and missions.

The Parks in Peril Project, in turn, is a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy and USAID. The evaluation included field visits to seven protected areas in Mexico (La Encrucijada, El Ocote, and Sian Ka'an), Ecuador (Machalilla), Peru (Bahuaja Sonene), Costa Rica (Talamanca), Guatemala (Sierra de Las Minas) and discussions with headquarters' staff at USAID and The Nature Conservancy in Washington, D.C.

The team was *"to assess the overall performance of PIP against the programme's purpose and results outlined in the USAID Results Framework."* The strategic objective of the programme is the *"protection of selected Latin American and Caribbean parks and reserves important to conserve the hemisphere's biological diversity."*

The purpose of the evaluation was not to evaluate the individual sites but to evaluate the PIP Project overall. Therefore, observations during particular site visits were used as examples illustrating broader issues. The guide given in this paper uses examples from the site visits that were used to build on the results

of the evaluation and recommend ways in which the PIP project could “*easily, efficiently, and equitably*” integrate gender into their work.

The guide starts from the premise that gender considerations are important for community-based conservation and should be integral to the policies and programmes that support conservation. It presents six steps for use by the personnel of protected areas and their community partners and others working in the field of community conservation, as well as for those working in this area in institutions and at policy-making levels.

The Guide: The bulk of the text is taken up by the guide itself, which is not reproduced in its entirety here, merely a brief overview of the contents.<sup>1</sup> The author recommends use of the guide as a short workshop on gender or as separate components. Facilitators are needed to lead the conceptual discussions about gender and conservation included in each step. The stated goal is not to transmit authoritative knowledge, but to share information through structured group activities, and build up understanding by wider group discussions and interactive exercises. The whole six steps (see below), it seems, can be completed in 3-4 hours, depending of course on the size of groups.

A brief description of the separate steps and their contents, contained in the guide, is given below.

### 1. Develop a rationale for gender

This step contains sections on a conceptual discussion, approach, and an exercise. Basically the conceptual discussion gives the reasons why gender issues are important in conservation and discusses the under-representation of women at local, institutional, and policy levels. It is presented that involving the whole community lies at the very heart of success or failure and bound in with a reserves long-term viability. The health of the reserve is related to the alleviation of hunger and poverty in a conservation area surrounded by borderlands that are poor.

The argument is for a community-based approach that encourages environmental decision-making, leadership, and participation from all-inclusive strategies for conservation and resource management, understanding of gender in terms of access to environmental activities and addressal of economic, social, and legal constraints. The usefulness of gender analysis as a conservation tool is also presented by drawing on traditional stereotypes and the need to redefine roles. An example is given of the cost of exclusion of women by drawing on the study of a mangrove ecosystem in the Gulf of Fonseca. An exercise for small groups concludes this section.

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<sup>1</sup> Those interested in using this guide who were not participants at the Conference on Celebrating Mountain Women should contact [distri@icimod.org.np](mailto:distri@icimod.org.np)



## 2. Deconstruct terms to understand gender roles and relations

This section discusses terminology. It consists of a conceptual discussion and an exercise.

The conceptual discussion covers how language conjures up images of specific genders, when in fact the image can be erroneous. Because of the propensity of most languages to conjure up male images for certain words, women's role in agricultural and conservation work remains invisible.

The exercise is based on asking participants what women particularly, but also men, do during various times of the year or during a typical day. Examples are taken from a variety of activities: brazil nut collection, gold mining, fishing, herb cultivation and collection, crop cultivation and processing, gardening, livestock rearing, fruit collection, water and fuelwood collection. One specific example of iguana farming (seen exclusively as men's work) is given to demonstrate how, if looked at carefully, women can be seen to contribute a great deal to so-called men's work.

### Highlight women as PIP participants

The conceptual discussion in this section focuses on the importance of making women visible in a number of different, important roles.

- i) As wives and mothers they are important not only to women but to society as a whole, hence too to conservation. An example is given of women's roles in this respect.
- ii) As leaders and professionals, and these are given from throughout the PIP project, especially where women are important as role models for other women.

Suggestions are also made concerning how to break down stereotypes and the exercise involves taking stereotypical presentations and coming up with ways to change these.

### Build on women's individual and group experience

The conceptual discussion here is focused on integrating women into activities rather than addressing them separately, and the reasons for such an approach. At the same time the author accepts that additional efforts directed only at women are necessary sometimes because of traditional taboos prohibiting men and women working together. Patterns of women working in groups separately from men emerged from the PIP sites and these are given as examples here.

Such groups include a livestock raising and marketing group; a sewing and baking group; and this latter group also included activities in market gardening and scholarships for further schooling.

The exercise picks up on the debate about whether there should be women's components or is it better to fully integrate women into the activities? do women have competitive advantages in value adding? are such activities sustainable without subsidies?

The second pattern is of women as pioneers and this involves a case about a fisherwoman who became a tour guide. The exercise is mainly brainstorming to come up with names of women pioneers within the community.

The third pattern is a women's component of an already established organisation. The case is that of a union of rural people and the attempts of the union staff to integrate women and to be gender sensitive, yet at the same time establishing a separate women's component with a woman extension agent. The exercise in this case involves an institutional analysis of different organisations to look at gender aspects.

### 3. Remove barriers to participation

This section focuses on the importance of empowerment. A citation is given from Rosa Barrantes of the Instituto de Saber, Peru.

*"If there were a policy where women could participate with their own voice and with decision-making powers it would be possible to confront many of the great problems that affect the environment."*

This particular section lists a rationale for the importance of women's participation in conservation efforts and it includes their leadership, often invisible, organisational capacities; skill in management of natural resources; role as primary care givers; and judicious use of assets (financial and other).

Women did not participate, however, for various reasons and the barriers seen were language, not mobile outside the community and home, absence from public meetings, young age at marriage, failure of staff to contact women, male chauvinism, jealousy of women leaders, not included in training, seen as just housewives, and no value given to the work they do. Many of these of course are related to stereotyping and the concept of what women will or will not do. Such concepts are often culture specific. One way of overcoming barriers is to bring in expertise from the many women's organisations working with gender and women's issues.

The exercise involved brainstorming to come up with suggestions for overcoming barriers.

### 4. Work across sectors

Apart from the community-based approach, it is important to involve the mechanisms of governance and democracy. This section mainly deals with that. The issue of education in terms of illiteracy, and apart from that the issue



in terms of awareness of women, (compared with men) about environmental problems. It was deemed that education was a sine qua non for environmental protection and for narrowing the gap between men and women and their participation in the same.

In terms of democracy and governance it is perceived that conservation of biodiversity is dependent on local-level solutions, and hence the importance of involving the community without whose support and participation conservation is not possible. On the other hand, it is proposed that community approaches can often act against women's interests as there is a tendency worldwide for poor representation of women politically at all levels. Methods of overcoming this, based on the fact that women are more comfortable talking to other women, are given for the PIP sites.

An important point raised is that the PIP sites have in some areas a post conflict situation, as states move to more democratic forms of representation and governance. The irony of how war can give women public space is given, citing the examples of Rigoberta Menchu and Rosalina Tuyuc in Gutaemala.

The exercise in this section is small group discussion about the role of education and of participatory processes.

## Conclusion

The author concludes by stating the reasons for the guide as a response to one of the recommendations of the evaluation to, "document the PIP experience with gender."

The perception is that by completing this process and the exercises given, the PIP staff will understand the value of participatory methods and the value attention to gender can bring to conservation. She states the following.

Having completed the training, participants will be able to:

- develop a rationale for their institution for the inclusion of gender in community conservation;
- analyse women's and men's roles and their relationship to the management of natural resources;
- highlight the accomplishments of both women and men in organisational documents and environmental education materials;
- analyse women's groups and their potential contribution to conservation;
- articulate the importance of women's participation in conservation efforts and the barriers they face to participation, and implement ways to remove the barriers; and
- promote cross-sectoral work in education and democracy and governance as a means of addressing environmental issues.

This exercise seems to contain the tools to help participants succeed in all of the above.







# **Improved labour-saving options for mountain women**

Pampa Mukherjee

## **Summary**

The study described in this paper looked at the activities of women in the mountains of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh and available and viable options for reducing drudgery through a review of literature on the two topics of labour-saving options and income generation. The structure of economic activities, organisation of work, and technologies used in activities in which women are involved.

Women's work is arduous with long working hours, and the intention behind a thorough review of the literature was to find options that would help in reducing workloads, eliminating drudgery, and coming up with economic activities that are alternatives to traditional farm labour. The author focused on the following.

1. Organisation of work: home-based or site-based; household and non-household; farm and off-farm etc
2. Productive or unproductive: does it entail additional income-generating avenues?
3. The type of technology (i.e. manual or mechanical) used by women and the extent to which it saves time and labour
4. Small-scale economic activities and drudgery-reducing technologies promoted
5. The nature of changes or impacts if any brought about by different work patterns/technologies
6. The extent to which options can be replicated or upscaled

The geographical area covered in the study included the hilly regions of India in general and Uttarakhand – the hilly region of Uttar Pradesh and the state

of Himachal Pradesh in particular. The scope of the review was quite wide, as all mountain areas were considered, but only NGOs and institutions in the geographical areas given were actually listed (as resource organisations?). Sources of literature were libraries, private collections, and authors themselves. Field visits and personal interviews as well as structured questionnaires were used. Email discussions were also a feature of the research.

The first section lists books, articles, and project reports along with abstracts; the second section is an inventory of organisations working in labour-saving options in the mountains in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh; and the third section deals with important or core issues and ideas emerging from the survey of literature and from the detailed discussions with activists and experts.

In summation the study was useful in three ways: it identified useful documents; it identified organisations; and it identified crucial issues in the search for labour-saving options for mountain women.

### ***Issues and Ideas on Improved Labour Saving Options for Mountain Women***

Issues in women's work are linked to the geography, topography, environment (social as well as physical) and politics in mountain areas; all of which are factors that have long marginalised mountain people. Workloads are extremely heavy (in terms of both calories expended and time consumed); and in turn this leads to health problems, particularly for women on whose shoulders a great deal of the onerous work falls. The text divides women's work into sections to identify labour-saving options. The findings for each section are briefly given here.

#### **Agriculture**

In Uttarakhand there is widespread male migration so the women are responsible for the family farms. As in most mountain areas the topography is steep, but here the rainfall is high too (1200-1600mm) and the soil type ranges from sandy to sandy loam and does not hold water for long, resulting in the decline of soil moisture that affects the production of agricultural crops. A traditional mechanism to counter this problem is the addition of large quantities of farmyard manure to the fields. This involves a forbidding range of activities from collecting litter from the forest to spreading it in decomposed form in the field. And women do this in addition to all other agricultural and domestic activities. A series of technologies are listed to reduce the labour and time involved in agricultural work: rainwater harvesting, mulching, kuhl renovation, improved agricultural implements, better and closer grain mills.

In addition floriculture and fruit and vegetable growing, particularly vegetable seed production, are seen as possible income-generating activities for



women. For both of these, water-harvesting tanks and improved composting methods are recommended.

### **Animal Husbandry**

Animal husbandry is a traditional area of work for women. The author recommends special training for women in improved techniques for raising livestock. Such courses could be supported in extension by revolving loans to purchase livestock; improving local livestock breeds; provision of good veterinary care; dairy technologies and stall feeding; and use of medicinal plants for livestock to supplement veterinary care, as well as para veterinary care.

Although farming and animal husbandry are major sectors, the text also discusses the use of primary forest resources and home-making. Forest resources are important because collection of fuelwood and fodder takes up an inordinate amount of time (on average seven hours a day in winter and nine hours a day in summer) because of the long distances covered (sometimes as much as 30km) and the loads carried (20-50kg).

In the case of fuelwood and fodder collection, afforestation and grassland improvement around villages are recommended. Fodder grasses on terraced risers and silage arrangements would also improve women's lot. Most of these could be improved grasses.

The crucial factor in home-making is water supply, not just for drinking but for cooking, washing clothes, cleaning homes, and so on. Improved water harvesting technologies, for example, rainwater harvesting, are proposed as well as recharging groundwater resources and water-lifting technologies.

Improved energy devices, e.g., improved cooking stoves which act in two ways: fuel consumption, is reduced and, secondly, indoor air pollution is reduced. Introduction of appropriate architectural technology, blending the traditional with the modern to reduce fuel consumption for heating purposes.

There are a number of improved utensils that conserve energy, decrease smoke; and there are also alternative energy sources such as biogas. It is not clear to what extent these are being used.

Women's health is touched on briefly. Obviously many of the issues impact on women's health. Sanitary toilets are essential as is clean water.

Improved gender-sensitive technologies can reduce women's labour in the mountains. In the context of income generation, there are a number of options suitable for women and in which they have a comparative advantage: fruit processing; medicinal plant cultivation and processing; beekeeping; off-

season vegetable cash crops; basket and furniture making; and aromatic oils, ornamental flowers and plants. Obviously to kick start such endeavours, credit groups need to be established.

## Conclusion

Need-based policies and programmes are an essential component for such interventions.

Things are changing in the economy and there is infrastructural growth. However, the male outmigration and unchanging social system with its gender biases and increase in women's work loads as a result of male outmigration places women in a disadvantageous situation. Something is needed at the level of policy and law-making; attitudinal change is equally as important as economic and infrastructural change and, indeed, one rarely takes place without the other. All of the alternative technologies and labour-saving options discussed need inputs, and women, who are poor, can least afford them. Technologies also need to be adapted to different locations. Women need access to resources to bring about change in their condition. They need land ownership and access to as many resources as men. Women's participation and empowerment to participate in community organisations established by the government are essential, and the social system does not lend itself to giving women a voice. Hence these are issues not only for researchers but for policy-makers and law-givers also.





3

Health and Well-being









# **Health and well-being of women in mountain areas of the Asia Pacific region**

Ritu Bhatia

## **Summary**

This paper looks at the low status of women across the Asia Pacific region, although there are variations from one region to another. In Nepal, up to 80% of women of childbearing age are anaemic, suffering from a lack of iron, vitamin A, protein, and iodine. In Burma, mountain women have the lowest levels of income, highest illiteracy rates, and no access to basic health, education, and social services. Gender oppression occurs in the form of violence and physical abuse, extreme work and health stresses, and the culture of giving women all the responsibility of household and farm labour without giving them any rights to land or the household economy. The hardships with which women live contribute significantly to their vulnerability to disease and ill health. Violence involving sexual assault can carry the risk of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV) infection, unwanted pregnancies, and other sexual and reproductive health problems. In remote areas with sparse health facilities, the risks of childbearing are high for women.

Studies show that the workload of mountain women has been increasing along with environmental degradation. The backbreaking chores of carrying water, fodder, and fuelwood up and down steep mountain slopes continue. Male outmigration, as families search for ways to sustain their lives and farmlands during scarcity, worsens the situation.

In fact, women have the power to improve or devastate their environments and the impact of environmental degeneration is also felt most by them. In Vietnam, for instance, women account for 50% of the mountain people and more than 60% of the country's workforce. They also participate, either

directly or indirectly, in serious forest devastation to make way for more fields for cultivation. The loss of forest acreage has meant even harder work for women, as they are responsible for fetching firewood from the forests not only for daily cooking and fuel during winter but also for selling or bartering for food. The shortage of water and inadequate sanitation, partly caused by women, bring many diseases among mountain populations, such as skin disease, cholera, dysentery, and gynaecological diseases, not to mention the greater burden of work as women must spend more time collecting water for drinking and cooking.

Despite the recognition of the universal right to sexual and reproductive health by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (POA), and the reaffirmation of that at subsequent international forums, the woman's role in the family remains rigid in much of Asia. The man is considered the head of the family and controls sexuality and reproduction. Thus, pregnancy and childbirth is often forced on young married women too quickly and too often. This is shown by the average total fertility rate (TFR) in some countries: The TFR in Nepal, for example, is 4.6 children, although the desired family size is 2.9 children.

The Cairo POA declared education as an important means of empowering women. Educated women marry later, want fewer children, are more likely to adopt effective methods of contraception, and understand the overall importance of their reproductive rights. The disparity between boys and girls in receiving education, however, slows the spread of awareness. The ultimate preference for sons over daughters results in an education gender gap, evident most notably in Pakistan, where the gender gap score (based on an average of primary and secondary enrolment rates) is 36%. Further, given the lack of sex education, women do not have the knowledge to make decisions regarding their own reproductive and sexual lives. One alarming consequence is the widespread growth of HIV/AIDS, estimated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be spreading faster in Asia than in any other part of the world.

It is the lack of services that most detrimentally affects women's health and reproductive rights because of the lack of easy access to modern medical centres, the absence of such facilities in nearby locations, or the physical barrier posed by the country's rugged terrain and the lack of adequate transportation facilities. In the urban areas of Nepal, 81% of the people have access to health service facilities with doctors, while only 47.3% of the rural people have such access. Although the government has made important strides in expanding its network of health facilities, health coverage, and specifically reproductive health (RH) services, are inadequate.

In China, the poorer northwest and southwest provinces show higher mortality rates because people lack or have limited access to health services: the



maternal mortality rate in rural areas is 76 per hundred thousand, compared to 39 per hundred thousand in urban areas. The cost of medical care has skyrocketed and few rural families can afford basic medical care. Many skilled medical workers have fled rural areas for more lucrative work in the cities. Health service systems in Thailand have shifted from traditional cures to modern medical and health services. While the shortage of doctors is critical in rural areas, this is showing signs of improvement in the aftermath of the economic crisis.

Of all the statistics monitored by WHO, maternal mortality is the one with the largest discrepancy between developed and developing nations. The highest rates of maternal mortality in Asia are in Bhutan and Nepal, followed by Papua New Guinea and Bangladesh. Most maternal deaths could be effectively prevented if women had access to good quality affordable care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the post-partum period. Only half the births in developing countries are in the presence of a skilled attendant. Maternal illness is very high among young women. Pregnancy-related complications are the main causes of death for girls aged 15-19, who are almost twice as likely to die from childbirth as women in their 20s.

Increased medical attention, including more hospital births, is assumed to improve the health and survival rate of mothers and their newborn children. In Papua New Guinea (PNG) women continue to die at an alarming rate despite the focus on maternal and child health by missionary health workers, the national government, and international aid agencies. In Pakistan, 25,000 women die every year from avoidable pregnancy-related causes and a much larger number are left with temporary or chronic post-pregnancy illnesses. In Asia as a whole, 20-25% of maternal deaths are attributed to poorly performed abortions. Burma has an maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 580 per 10,000 live births, in the wake of induced abortions conducted clandestinely and in unsanitary conditions. In Nepal, the number of maternal deaths due to unsafe abortions accounts for 50% of all maternal deaths.

In a number of countries, abortion is either illegal or only permitted in certain circumstances, thus poor reproductive health results from unsafe abortion. Young women are particularly at risk because of unsafe abortions in countries where the medical system will not give reproductive health care to unmarried women. In many traditional societies, women are forced by custom to stay within their homes, as men cannot attend to them in health centres outside. Providing women-centred health services is one solution. In Pakistan, the problem is being dealt with by increasing the number of female health-care providers through the development of women health professionals. The concept of 'lady health visitors,' basic health care workers with a mandate to provide out-reach services, maternal and child health care has worked successfully in some rural districts.

The impact of involving women as health care providers in Tibet is demonstrated by the dramatic improvement in maternal and infant mortality rates. Seven hospitals for women and children have been set up, since which time the hospital delivery rate has gone up by 50%. Most staff at the Shannan Prefecture Hospital are Tibetans and women. Before the establishment of the hospital in 1985, the infant mortality rate was 142.3 per thousand and the pregnant and lying-in women's death rate was 78.8 per ten thousand in Nedong County. The hospital's new health system has reduced the infant mortality rate to 30.26 per thousand and the pregnant and lying-in women's death rate to 56.2 per ten thousand in 1989.

Laurence Laumonier-Ickx is a French doctor who, in 1981, journeyed to the Panjshir valley of north-eastern Afghanistan to establish a hospital and develop health services for the men, women, and children by training people from the valley. Laurence began educating the women on how to treat a fever and the importance of rehydrating the child suffering from diarrhoea. The women were quick to accept Laurence's teachings and apply them in their homes, despite them being contradictory to the knowledge inherited from their mothers. Working for Management Sciences for Health to implement the U.S. Government-funded Afghanistan Health Sector Support Project, she suggested that a family planning component be added to the training of basic health workers. The male health workers were used to serve as the conduit of information for the women. Laurence's team trained the health workers to use schools for carrying health messages home. Laurence believes that humanitarian assistance can be effective provided it is undertaken with "with sensibility, respect, and involving as much as possible those who have experienced Afghanistan before."

Since the 1975 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, governments have increasingly called for an end to violence against women. Such violence continues to be widespread, and taking different forms – including rape, domestic violence, honour killings, and trafficking – exacts a heavy toll on the mental and physical health of women. This pervasive phenomenon is being increasingly recognised as a public health concern and a serious violation of basic human rights. Fear of speaking out inhibits discussion and constrains the health choices and life opportunities of many.

In the state of Himachal Pradesh in India, women have started talking openly about the adverse effects of alcoholism among men on the family. From the beginning of the 1980s, the Himachal government began relying more and more on excise revenue from liquor sales as a means of increasing its income. Happy homes have been converted into places of violence and abuse. Because a man's income is now squandered away on alcohol, women are forced to take on more paid work in addition to their already substantial work burden.



Even while an HIV/AIDS component has been added to some reproductive health programmes, the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, is on the rise among rural women in Asia. Poverty, subordination, and the lack of education and health care facilities increase women's vulnerability to infection. Each year at least 10,000 girls and women enter Thailand from poorer neighbouring countries and end up in commercial sex work. The incidence of HIV/AIDS in rural Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia has been on the rise since the late 1990s, also due to reverse migration of men who had migrated from the country to the city during the economic boom and were forced to return home due to unemployment during the economic crisis of the late 90s. Another country experiencing a growing HIV epidemic is Papua New Guinea where the male/female ratio for HIV/AIDS cases is 1:1.

## Conclusion

The author recommends the key priority areas for action that would transform the health and well-being of mountain women:

- Access to adequate nutrition, clean water, and basic health care.
- Involvement of women's groups in decision-making at the national and community levels.
- Carrying out of baseline surveys and studies of knowledge, attitude and practice regarding the health and nutrition of women especially related to the impact of environmental degradation.
- Strengthening preventative and curative health services.
- Programmes for women should be directed at reducing the long distances that they walk to obtain fuel and fodder and minimising their risk of physical injury.
- More research on the relationship between human rights, legal and economic issues, and the public health dimensions of violence. Legal and judicial institutions need to provide adequate safeguards with regard to violence against women with specific legislation on different forms of violence.
- Policies that promote social justice, women's empowerment, and reproductive rights need to be formulated and integrated into the projects and policies of development agencies.
- An environment protection strategy should be planned in conjunction with a socio-economic development strategy.
- Provision of concrete incentives to encourage and maintain attendance of women at school and non-formal education programmes, including health education and training in primary, home, and maternal health care.
- An array of local approaches, informed by lessons learned from other places, should be supported by the right policies at higher levels.







# **Afghanistan country profile: reproductive health**

Farah Usmani

## **Summary**

Two decades of conflict and human displacement, compounded by three years of drought, together with a history of discrimination against women from policies of controlling authorities, have severely affected Afghanistan's health sector, with women being hit the hardest. Since the 1996 UNDP Human Development Report, which placed Afghanistan 169th out of 175 countries on the Human Development Index, Afghanistan's status has not appeared in subsequent reports due to lack of data. Unconfirmed reports indicate very high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality. Women's health is extremely poor due to malnutrition, frequent pregnancies without basic care or trained delivery assistance, and lack of access to information or services. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief profile on the Reproductive Health situation in Afghanistan to facilitate policy and programming. It points out that family planning is not a problem when there is access to primary health-care services. The reluctance to adopt family planning is partly due to child survival issues. Thus, services to stop children from dying are urgently needed.

Malnutrition of women, which negatively affects pregnancies and deliveries as well as the health of children, is not only caused by food scarcity linked to the conflict and the drought, but is also related to traditional preferences for males which make women reduce their own food allowance in favour of men and children. With regard to mental health, the overall state of women's mental health is poor with more than 70% of women exposed to the Taliban's policies meeting the criteria for major depression. The poor health situation is aggravated by the lack of basic health services and resources, particularly in rural areas; the strict segregation of medical staff; and the small number of trained women doctors, nurses and midwives that remained in the country.



As many as 16,000 Afghan mothers die each year and many more thousands suffer permanent disabilities as a consequence of childbirth. Given the extremely high fertility rate of 7-9 births per married woman in a lifetime, 1 in 12 women can expect to die as a consequence of childbirth. Pregnancy complications are believed to be the most acute health need, with haemorrhage and abortion as the common causes of maternal mortality. Overall, nearly 90% of deliveries take place at home, of which only 9% are attended by trained traditional birth attendants (TBAs). There have been reports of women delivering their babies as well as cutting the cord on their own.

The national coverage for antenatal care has been estimated between 8% to 12%; 64% of women in the southeastern region and 41% in the eastern region do not receive any prenatal care. More than half of the women with recent births in the east of Afghanistan are protected against tetanus. Those with some education are more likely to be protected against tetanus compared to those with no education at 55%. Fifty-five per cent of pregnant women in the southeastern region and 91% of pregnant women in the eastern region were anaemic. In the same group, 83% of non-pregnant women in the southeastern region and 95% of non-pregnant women in the eastern region were found to be anaemic.

The total fertility rate per woman is 6.9 and the contraceptive prevalence rate [1972-73] data for Afghanistan is given as 2%. A random sample survey of 472 women out of 134,000 in 12 refugee camps in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) found 10% contraceptive use [18] and 48% unmet need [22% for spacing and 26% to stop childbearing]. In a survey of Afghan refugee women, injectable contraception was most common at 68%, oral contraceptive pills at 17%, intra uterine devices (IUDs) at 2%, and 12% included natural and other methods. The records from the outpatients department (OPD) for Obstetrics and Gynaecology for January 2002 showed that, of the 900 clients served by the clinic during the month, 70 were for family planning services. The clinic doctors reported that, during the Taliban regime, they were completing a format for husbands' consent before providing any contraceptive method to women, but the practice has been discontinued now.

Ovulation suppression due to lactation is the major factor in spacing births in Afghanistan today. The highest level of contraception appears to be caused by lactational amenorrhoea (22%), which has not been included in either modern or traditional methods of contraception in the survey. *Coitus interruptus* [withdrawal] has always played an important role in family planning in Islam. A Population Council survey quotes data demonstrating that *coitus interruptus* can be more acceptable and have a higher continuation rate than most other methods. The limited literature on this method suggests that its failure rate is about the same as that of condoms.



There are no data on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Reproductive tract infections (RTIs) are likely to be relatively high among poor women without access to clinical care. In 2000, the International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent (ICRC) performed 1000 RPR tests for syphilis among Afghan refugees and all were negative. Regarding HIV, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) said that 10 years back 3 HIV/AIDS cases were detected in Kabul under the Global Programme on AIDS support to blood banks. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is thought to be very low and ICRC found none in screening about 5,000 units of blood recently. The risk factors for HIV/AIDS remain significant though, given people's mobility and returning migrants

In this patriarchal society, girls marry at a very early age; 54% of girls under the age of 18 were reported to be married. High-risk pregnancies combined with malnutrition and a lack of antenatal care is a deadly combination for young women and girls. There is no information about any specific adolescent reproductive health (RH) programmes in the country. The draft Health Policy document of MoPH has identified the critical needs of this vulnerable group and includes that in reproductive health *"appropriate services to adolescents and to young adults will be provided."*

There is no data analysis of common gynaecological problems, but doctors in Rabia Balkhi and the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) centres and hospitals cite abortions (incomplete, threatened, missed); menstrual disorders, pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility (mostly secondary) appear to be the common gynaecological problems seen among outpatient clients. The current abortion regulation in Afghanistan by the Inspection and Regulations department of the MoPH provides for medical termination of pregnancy on health grounds after certification from three doctors. Surgical procedures for vesico vaginal fistula (VVF)/prolapsed repair do not appear to be regularly performed at the referral hospitals visited.

The civil war and militarisation of society led to an increase in the number of abductions of young girls and women by the fighters, but exact numbers are hard to come by as families are reluctant to report cases of abductions due to the social stigma attached to a daughter or sister kidnapped or sold for sex. Families of girls and young women were reportedly forced to marry them or give large sums of money instead. Often, families married off young girls at an earlier age in order to use the bride price for their survival.

Afghanistan has 17 national, 9 regional, 34 provincial and 41 district hospitals; the peripheral network consists of 365 basic health centres and 357 health posts. A significant number, 50 of the 330 districts (average population 72,000) has no health facility at all. Only 11 of the 33 provinces have any capacity to deliver emergency obstetric care, public or private. Only 35% of the districts have any reproductive health services, and 84% of health facilities are either operated or supported by non-government organisations (NGOs).

Issues related to health facilities discussed during the visits to several hospitals (Malalai, Rabia Balkhi, Saidabad/Wardak province, Karte Se, Avicenna, Attaturk, Noor, Kabul Mental) and health centres/NGO clinics during the mission include:

- need for infrastructure rehabilitation, redeployment of excess staff concentrated in Kabul
- community involvement in hospital maintenance, need to prevent duplication of support for equipment and others
- training of staff in the use of new equipment being provided
- underutilisation of hospital services
- strengthening blood banking
- physical and financial access to the hospitals for emergency obstetric care (EOC)
- quality and safe delivery services due to paucity of equipment/training, drugs
- lack of service delivery protocols for referral
- community awareness on service/provider availability
- paucity of female providers
- differential incentives/salaries issues
- need for communication / information, education and communication (IEC) materials others.

A large number of small and large NGO partners are active in the health sector service delivery in Afghanistan, including international and local NGOs. Most NGOs focus on primary health care (38%); some focus on specialised services such as rehabilitation of war victims; tuberculosis, nutrition others. Some operate government health facilities, others have constructed their own health facilities. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) is one of the large NGOs and has 168 clinics in 137 districts in the country, of which 54 have an MCH component.

In 1998, there were 187 private clinics, with doctors working at least part-time. The number of pharmacies in 1998 was 2,598. There is potential for utilising these for social marketing of reproductive health products such as safe delivery kits, sanitary napkins, and other RH products. The supply of drugs to the private market is poorly regulated and quality is uneven, however. Other problems included poly-pharmacy and over-prescription, and an absence of standards for prescription. Mission discussions with Afghans suggest that, in the current sociocultural context, it may perhaps be more appropriate to institute demand generation activities through health centres with interpersonal counselling than a marketing campaign.

Estimates of total human resources inside Afghanistan indicate that there are about 17,856 public sector health care providers, made up of 3,906 physicians, 2,564 mid-level professionals, 4,993 nurses and technicians, and 6,123 community health workers and birth attendants. There is an urban bias



in the distribution of human resources. Another critical issue is the critical shortage of female health workers, particularly skilled birth attendants, midwives, and nurses.

The number of female doctors in Afghanistan is currently not available. A number of female doctors not specialised in OB/GYN are experienced in the delivery of reproductive health services. Higher medical education started in Afghanistan in 1932, when only boys enrolled in Kabul Medical Faculty. In 1957, a separate school of medicine was opened in the vicinity of the women's hospital when the Afghan government felt the need to train female doctors. When wearing the veil became optional in 1959, the female doctors joined the male medical school and the training of medical doctors became co-educational with 20% female students. During the Taliban period, female medical education was stopped.

Nursing/midwifery and allied health workers are trained through a system of 8 Intermediate Medical Schools. Despite the large number of training schools producing a large number of medical and allied health workers, there continues to be a limited availability of and access to quality health services for women throughout Afghanistan. Only 15% of students returning to training for all categories are female. Traditional birth attendants (TBAs) have established a role in the Afghan primary health care system to deliver health services to Afghan women whose access to health services is circumscribed by the traditional/cultural practices affecting their mobility in the public sphere. Currently, many different agencies are training TBAs, though few are supervising them or building functional linkages between them and the nearest available formal health services.

There are 1,386 community health workers that are involved in health information education, including RH aspects. Communication materials, particularly on safe motherhood, have been developed in some NGO projects. Most of the RH NGOs have also developed the capacity for training in reproductive health including for community health workers, TBAs, midwives, and others. Training duration for community health worker (CHW) certification, however, differs among NGOs and needs standardisation.

## **Conclusion**

This paper provides a profile of the reproductive health status in Afghanistan and identifies issues and challenges for the provision of RH services. The available information indicates the acute need, particularly of women, for basic reproductive health services in the country (more in particular in underserved regions/provinces). United Nations Family Planning Association (UNFPA) has been designated as the focal agency for coordinating reproductive health by the MoPH, and the leadership of the Fund in this area is envisaged. Following this Country Profile document, a companion paper on

UNFPA support in the critical area of reproductive health in Afghanistan was also developed during the mission.

Below are recommendations for health/RH programming:

- Ensure participation of Afghan women in all stages of programming, including planning, implementation and monitoring of RH programmes.
- Employ Afghan women including in management positions in RH programmes.
- Ensure equal access to funding for Afghan women's organisations in RH service delivery.
- Give priority to the capacity building of professional Afghan women.
- All projects to develop/include indicators to measure progress and facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and projects with regard to their contribution towards achievement of gender equity goals.
- Ensure that all reports /assessments studies include sex desegregated data and statistics on the involvement of women in all sectors as staff, participants and beneficiaries.
- Some specific gender programming recommendations for RH programmes include:
  - examine special incentives for female health staff working in rural/remote areas;
  - preferential employment of husband of female health providers in the remote duty stations;
  - provision of crèche facilities in health centres for female employees;
  - gender training: if RH programmes are to be based on a gender approach, there needs to be an awareness of gender on the part of health workers in the field, on the part of programme managers, and on the part of policy-makers and donors.

Gender training is designed to promote such awareness. It enables people to examine their personal experiences and to realise how the neglect of a gender perspective has in the past disadvantaged men and particularly women. Such training also introduces participants to the tools of gender analysis and planning.







# Old laws and morals in the beautiful mountains of Albania

Xhi Xhi Xhenis

## Summary

Although Albania has had more than a decade of democracy following a severe Communist regime, the transition has been a difficult one. There is a lack of democratic traditions, and only a few people, mainly politicians, have flourished. Tourism has a huge potential, but it is severely hampered by poor infrastructure. Most of all, according to the author, the old tradition of blood feud has resurged. Blood feud dates from the very early years of Albanian history and is detailed in the *Kanun/Canon (Code of Customary Laws)* of Lek Dukagjini, a feudal ruler of the 15th century in the north of Albania. The *Kanun of Lek Dukagjini*, as it is called, was enforced over a large part of Albania for almost six centuries.

Today, there are three main versions of the code in northern Albania -- the *Kanun* of Lek Dukagjini, the *Kanun* of Skanderbeg, and the *Kanun* of the Mountains. According to Ismet Elezi, a law professor at Tirana University, the lack of state control and clearly laid-down laws in recent times has forced many Albanians to resort to the *Kanun* and its guidelines on blood vengeance. Elezi adds, however, that despite the *Kanun's* sanction of vengeance, its rules are strict about how it is to be extracted. For example, the *Kanun* firmly prohibits the retribution killing of women, children, and the elderly. It also limits the types of weapons that can be used, as well as the period of isolation that male relatives of a revenge killer must undergo. Whereas, in the past, male family members were isolated for a week after a blood killing, now entire families are forced into isolation for months and even years at a time.

Blood feuds were born in the Middle Ages out of the desire for domination; one clan would use the concept of the blood feud against another to gain

territory and power. As time went on, the predominant conflicts occurred between families. According to the *Kanun*, the relatives of the person killed must avenge the victim by killing the murderer or one of his male relatives. To escape the killing, the endangered people were obliged to stay closed in until the problem was resolved. So a solution could be that somebody from the killer's family was killed or that the killer's family was forgiven.

When King Zog came to power in 1928, Albania had for the first time a modern written constitution, which contributed to the gradual limitation of the blood feud. After the Second World War, the Communists took over and suppressed all old *Kanun*. As a result, blood revenge almost came to a complete stop until the new democratic changes of 1991.

Some of the reasons for the revival of this tradition were:

- the revival of old conflicts that remained hidden during Communist times,
- ownership conflicts dominated by land redistribution after 45 years of Communism,
- the weight of the old traditions,
- the lack of solid state police structures and a weak justice system,
- poverty and the lack of security, and
- the lack of order led to an increase in organised crime, including the enforced prostitution of women and the trafficking of organs.

As a result of these factors, many people continue to be victims of blood feud even today. Although the phenomenon has deep roots in the mountainous areas, many people in big cities still follow the old rules, particularly in the city of Shkodra. Between 1965 and 1990, there was only one case of a blood-vengeance murder. But between 1991 and 1995, nearly 10% of murders in the country were related to revenge. The figures soared during the 1997 anarchy to nearly 30% of all murders in Albania

In cases of blood feud, all males of non-reconciled families live under self-imposed house arrest and suffer the consequences of this isolation. The economic situation of 'closed in' families quickly deteriorates. The old law exempts females from participating in the feud, but does not prevent them from suffering. Women have the sole responsibility of earning livelihoods for the family, and their male children cannot attend school. The result for Albania is greater illiteracy and greater social problems.

A part of the problem, according to some experts, is that Albanian legislation currently treats blood vengeance as a lesser crime than murder. Thus, many murders committed in the name of blood vengeance may be invoking family honour as a pretext and using the *Kanun* as a way of escaping stricter punishment. It is difficult to envisage a quick end to the suffering caused by this in Albania, plagued as it is with other pressing problems such as high unemployment, low national production scale, deficient public services, and





trafficking, among others. The author reiterates that Albania is a beautiful country with a great potential for tourism hampered by the tradition of blood feud, poor infrastructure, and the weak rule of law.

With regard to women, the *Kanun* declares acts that make women untouchable – she is only required to give birth to children, serve them and the other members of the family, and do housework. According to the *Kanun*, the woman is a breathing object; she is a property and as such cannot be respected by male members of the family. The *Kanun* states that men have the right to beat and publicly humiliate their wives if their wives disobey them. If the wife does not conduct herself with respect to husband, the man is expected to “cut off his wife’s hair, strip her nude, and expel her from the house in the presence of relatives, driving her with a whip through the village.” Under certain conditions, a man may kill his wife with impunity for two acts (she can be shot in the back or abandoned) – for adultery and for the betrayal of hospitality. For these two acts of infidelity, the husband can kill his wife without requiring protection or truce and without incurring a blood feud.

Fifty years of Communist rule was not able to eradicate the patriarchal attitude inherent in the *Kanun*. Many women still view their social position as defined by these customary laws. The *Kanun* has often been cited as the main cause for the discrimination against women in Albanian society. This proposition, however, requires further analysis and must consider other factors such as the low level of socioeconomic development, poverty, lack of political stability, lack of a democratic culture, the low level of education, and lack of movements for emancipation, among others. Some of these factors are as follows.

- The inferior position of women within the Albanian cultural tradition
- The lack of safeguards in Albanian legislation to protect women, and the non-enforcement of existing laws
- The unfavourable economic and social conditions of women
- The political situation in the last ten years which has discouraged women from participating in the decision-making process
- The community’s encouragement of certain forms of violence against women in instances
- The view that domestic violence was considered a domestic problem rather than part of a wider social problem
- The high level of unemployment, especially among women

Despite the significance of the *Kanun*, young men have little idea of what it is about, and today, the *Kanun* does not correspond to reality and has become totally twisted. Women living in closed families have to carry out all the housework. They must not only mind their children but their husbands and male children. The only source of entertainment is television and radio, and that too only for few as most live in acute poverty. People come together only for two occasions – marriages and funerals.

Many have tried to challenge the *big dragon* of blood revenge. A number of peace and reconciliation associations have been formed for the reduction and elimination of the phenomenon. One is the League of Peace Missionaries, a local Albanian association created since November 1991 with branches in all the districts of the north and in some parts of the south. It mediates cases of misunderstanding and conflict, trying to reconcile existing blood feud factions, making efforts to prevent them in future. Many of their activities are in co-ordination with clerics, representatives of the local authorities, police and justice structures, students, pupils, and so forth. According to the information provided by the head of the League of Peace Missionaries, Emin Spahia, the mission has reconciled 1,370 families and freed 27,000 people locked in since 1999.

CAFOD Albania, whose mission is to *"help people who are trapped in poverty, deprived of resources and those who suffer problems because of disability, social stress and injustice,"* began its activities in Albania in 1993 as an initiative of CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development of England and Wales). It has taken an increasing interest in the blood feud phenomenon, seeing it as a serious obstacle to the alleviation of people's suffering and progress. CAFOD Albania has supported many initiatives to end blood feuding for the sake of a peaceful society.

The League of Peace Missionaries (LPM) is the local partner directly involved in the reconciliation process, while CAFOD Albania has assisted with its expertise and knowledge. A massive campaign was organised to raise awareness, and many open meetings were conducted, with the appeal to abandon the practice of closing in the innocent relatives of the person who committed the crime. A meeting was organised by LPM in Kelmend village in March 2002, attended by local authorities, police, clerics, media, CAFOD Albania, and the community to raise awareness among community members and other actors on the importance of law enforcement, abandoning old practices, and contributing to a peaceful future. A march through the streets of Shkodra was organised on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the League of Peace Missionaries. Thousands of children and adults supported the work of the peace missionaries. Reconciliations took place directly after this march, and 20 families were liberated from being closed in. CAFOD Albania has also assisted the organisation of peace missionaries by donating basic equipment such as desks, shelves for files, computer, fax machine, TV set, and video, to help facilitate the work of the League.

## Conclusion

Finding an immediate solution to ending blood feud in Albania is not possible, but things can change for the better if, aside from the work of the peace missionaries, the attention of state structures and citizens is brought to bear on this problem.





# **Decentralised food security systems and women: an examination of sustainable food security arrangements in Chhattisgarh**

Ilina Sen

## **Summary**

This paper argues that centralised food security systems have, by and large, failed to meet the needs of the poorest tribal people. It documents the decentralised food security systems that have existed in Chhattisgarh, traces of which remain today, though the traditional systems are being undermined by the forces of capitalist patriarchal modernisation. Further, it highlights the role of women, who traditionally played a central role in the management of food security systems, and calls for a radical reformulation of food security management systems, with women in a pivotal position.

The Chhattisgarh region is an area that is ecologically, linguistically, and culturally distinct. The Chhattisgarh region has a large area under forest cover, rich mineral reserves (limestone, quartzite, iron ore, bauxite, and alexandrite), and a large tribal population. The river Mahanadi flows through the central part of the region, and the plains' areas in the river valley are famous for rice cultivation, with input intensive high-yielding varieties (HYVs) having replaced traditional seeds in much of this region. Chhattisgarh has approximately 34% Scheduled Tribe population, 12% Scheduled Caste population, and more than 50% Other Backward Classes. While the process of modernisation seems to be apparent in the valley areas, the situation in the forest and hill areas on the periphery of the district is quite different. Although being affected more and more by invasive forest and mineral exploitation, traditional lifestyles and population compositions have survived to a far greater extent here.

Chhattisgarh has had an amazing variety of food production systems. It is one of the last places on earth to have a remembered history of an amazing diversity of food resources. These food resources include many kinds of rice

germplasm, a wide range of millets and other dryland crops, pulses, oilseeds, fruits, edible flowers, tubers, mushrooms and other gathered foods. Many of these are dependent upon access to and close proximity of the forests. The area has traditionally been known as the 'Rice Bowl' of India. The region is known to have grown an amazing diversity of rice varieties in the not too distant past. These include indigenous rice varieties capable of giving the equivalent of, or even higher yields than, the Green Revolution varieties. These yields have again been achieved without the use of chemicals and in the field conditions of simple tribal farmers having a low resource base and little, if any, formal education.

There has been a range of technical and production practices adopted by the farmers of Chhattisgarh. For example, the *Biyasi* system of rice cultivation was very beneficial for the farmers cultivating on lowlands. Under the broadcasting method, the farmers kept the seeds ready for sowing just before the onset of rains in June. After the seeds germinated for a little over five weeks and the water reached the height of the seedlings, the fields were ploughed with the standing crop to take care of weeds in July-August. Thereafter, the crop was left for growing with the villagers guarding it until harvest. The Marias of Abhujmarh practised this type of rice cultivation under the shifting system of cultivation where these tribals burned the trees in the forests to convert a strip of forests into cultivable land just before the rains. Practising the *Biyasi* system, they shifted their fields every two to three years, coming back to the same fields after its forest cover had regenerated after a gap of 13 to 14 years.

There are several other forms of paddy cultivation. For example, the Nagesia grew paddy along with other crops in the lowest portion of the uplands called the *Bahra*. The *Bahra* was suitable for paddy cultivation because it was a lowland and could retain moisture throughout the year. For this reason, the Nagesia only propagated the rice seed on these lands and no other. Then there was another type of land known as *Chanwar* that consisted of the middle lands. Here, paddy could only be grown when the monsoons came, as the soil had no capacity of retaining the moisture throughout the year, although other crops requiring less water could be grown.

There was also a variety of sowing practices known to the farmers. Apart from broadcasting, there was *Laichopi*, in which the seeds were germinated in a controlled environment and then sown. This was useful in areas/years where the rains came early, and the fields did not retain enough warmth for *in situ* seed germination. To cover seed shortage, the farmers knew the technique of *chaalna*, in which broken earheads were replanted in the soil using a technology of clonal propagation. Although Chhattisgarh is drought-prone, the farmers here are the inheritors of a rich heritage of biodiversity in rice and dryland crops, and this, together with great resilience, has helped them survive.



The diversity of rice crops found in Chhattisgarh is extensive but now under attrition because of the organised promotion of monocultures. Centuries of rice farming by indigenous communities have resulted in an evolution of a diversity in rice adapted to a variety of soil and micro ecosystems. These varieties have a good yield potential under normal fertility and organic manuring and vary in maturity period ranging from 55 days to more than 180 days, drought resistance, and water tolerance capacity. There are low rainfall area varieties to deep water ones standing in up to 10 ft. of water, short rice of 50 cm in height to tall ones of more than 150 cm. The grain size also varies from short fine to long fine, long bold to short bold and round, oval ones, beaked and awned ones, and awned ones of various colours, sizes and shapes. The kernel may be coloured white, dull white, red opaque white, the grain may be of various designs and shades such as yellow, straw golden, red black, brown, purple, and blotches of various colours and the grains may be of various quality and scent, and with protein content up to 14%. The world's longest rice Dokra-Dokri is found in Chhattisgarh. Wheat is also cultivated in some areas, but the area commanded by wheat is very little.

Farmers in Chhattisgarh are well aware of drought resistance and the ecologically wholesome nature of indigenous varieties and practices. Normally, each farmer grows about four to five varieties of rice. Thus, if some variety fails to grow during a particular season, another would make up for it. Beside this, the farmers grow different crop varieties for their different uses and preferences; in the Nagari region, for example, the farmers grow the *Danwar* variety of rice for its high nutritive and medicinal value. It is believed to be helpful as a tonic in recuperating from illness. There are a number of other rice varieties which are believed to have medicinal value, for example *Baisur* and *Alcha* for pregnancy.

Dryland crops are a very major aspect of the food security of the region as assured irrigation in the area is only 13% and supplementary irrigation is available in 35% of the area. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to develop dryland crops in the region. There is a rich tradition of dryland agriculture in the region but seeds and skills have been lost due to the penetration of market forces and capital in agriculture. Many dryland crops are nutritionally very valuable, although their market value may be low. Their loss has meant serious deterioration in the diet of peasant families, as well as a loss in terms of knowledge base.

It is not possible to have a discussion on the biodiversity in food resources without referring to the many kinds of uncultivated foods used in Chhattisgarh. These include many kinds of roots and tubers (*jimi kanda*, *keu kanda*, *karu kanda*, and *chind kanda*, to name a few), many kinds of greens, and the many seasonal edible mushrooms. There is a large range of tree leaves and bush and shrub leaves that are eaten here as *bhaji*. Some of these, the *tinpania* and *chanori bhajis*, for instance, grow naturally in the many rice fields after the rice



harvest. As a matter of fact, the distinction between what is a *bhaji* and what is a weed is a product of the culture of agricultural monoculture that is in complete contradiction to the culture of biodiversity prevalent in Chhattisgarh. These foods lend richness to the diet and, in times of drought and food scarcity, these food resources have sustained generations of the people of Chhattisgarh.

In Chhattisgarh we also have several models of decentralised distribution system. The *Charjaniha* (literally belonging to several people) is a community-based grain bank that is found in several areas of the southern hills, and variants are seen among the different tribal groups of the area. Procurement is through voluntary contributions, and/or preferential collection from the more affluent families, or those wishing in any given year to donate to a public fund. Community collections through the *Cherchera* rituals or through groups of women dancing the *Relo* also go towards building up the collection. The *Charjaniha* resources can be held in paddy, in the minor millets, and even in an NTFP product like *Mahua*, and are used for community functions, as well as for distribution to needy households in drought years.

The network of local traders, or *kochiyas*, was originally the link persons between the many local markets, and acted as the major agents in the local trade in primary food resources. It is an interesting fact that the *kochiyas* operating in the food trade were mainly women, while those dealing in forest produce or utility items were mostly men. Today, the system exists in a distorted form, with male *kochiyas* having become agents of a centralised trade system. However, the role of women belonging to the *Sonkar* (vegetable farmer) community in primary marketing up to the present day and institutions, such as the *Turi Hatri* (women's market) of Raipur, bear witness to the vibrancy of women-centred local distribution networks.

The major role that women have played in maintaining these systems is unappreciated. They work in each and every aspect of crop production, preservation, and storage. In certain parts of the state, such as Abujhmar and Sihawa, women are also known to use the plough, a function that is tabooed and prohibited for them in almost all other parts of the country. Apart from crop weeding, maturing, and harvesting, women are the leading players in all post harvest and storage operations. Women also play a major role in the collection and processing of the many kinds of uncultivated foods found in Chhattisgarh. Many of these foods are collections from the forest, and women use them for maintaining household food security and nutrition needs outside the market system.

Women are the primary gatherers of all uncultivated foods, and inheritors of an ancient knowledge system about food biodiversity. They are also gardeners and herbalists with the primary knowledge and responsibility for maintaining



the home gardens, the *baris/bakhris*. Again, it is the women who take the produce to the primary markets and barter or trade in the items related to primary food needs..

Women are also the keepers of the seeds. As stated above, women are responsible for all post harvest operations. An important aspect of these is the preservation of the seeds of biodiversity. In traditional Chhattisgarh, the crop to be harvested as seed is identified in the field of standing crop, and women take special care while reaping these. A wide variety of seed storage structures are used in subsequent stages, and the exact storage structure used for seeds depends on the length of time the seed is to be stored away, the moisture content, and other factors. Some seeds, such as rice, are stored in bamboo *dholgi* (or *dhongi*), thatched and sealed with cow dung, and kept away. These can last for up to three years. Other seeds, such as the minor millet seeds or vegetable seeds, are stored in *Sal* leaf containers and often hung up in the kitchen above a wood fire, so that the smoke can act as a pesticide and preservative. The extremely complex knowledge of seed storage and preservation, including its technical aspects, is in the hands of women.

The author believes it is important to encourage a debate on the viability of centralised and non-centralised systems of food security in this tribal-dominated state. The fact that widespread starvation and hunger have stalked this land and that we live in a time when the buffer stocks in food have been among the highest in the history of post-independent India, only raises questions about the distribution systems. She contends that it forces us to think whether a public distribution system (PDS) based on centralised procurement and centralised distribution mediated through a cash exchange ever fulfilled the food security needs of forest-based communities. Not arguing for the dismantling of the PDS, she makes a plea for radical rethinking about the role of the state and other institutions in understanding, maintaining, managing, and bolstering food security systems that are based on different paradigmatic realities. As the work of Amartya Sen has shown, it is the enforcement of food entitlement that holds the key to food security rather than mere plentitude of production or injection of food aid.

## Conclusion

The issues involved in strategising creatively on sustainable food security are extremely complex and cover a very wide ground. Food security issues go beyond food production through agriculture and its procurement alone. The author believes that, for sustainable food security systems, it is important to recognise women's role as upholders of food security at the household and community levels, and to evolve strategies that are able to build upon this role. Although they play a major role in maintaining sustainable food security systems, their economic roles are often not matched by their political control



over the systems they create with their blood and toil. She recommends action in the following areas for intervention.

- Strengthening gender-based management of systems and democratisation of institutions, as indicated above.
- Need to regulate the NTFP trade. In view of the possibly negative connection between NTFP trade and forest-based food resources (FFR), there is a strong need to extend forward and backward linkages to develop FFRs.
- Maintain and strengthen crop and gathered food biodiversity.
- Seek and evolve structures of water management that are participatory and do not have to stop at the *lakshmanrekha* of forestland.
- Recognise the importance of local markets in food security systems and develop them under community control.
- Engage in policy and advocacy action at local and non-local levels on the importance of indigenous technology and food security systems.
- Establish seed exchange networks among subsistence communities that do not necessarily see money as the only means of exchange.
- Promote institutional structures that highlight community rather than individual achievement.
- Promote community-based rather than state-based PDS – transfer PDS subsidies from state-corporate to community structure.





# **Status of women's health and well-being in Northern Pakistan**

Fareeha Ummar

## **Summary**

This paper is the result of an effort to fill the gap on the lack of information and related research regarding women's health and well-being specific to the northern areas of Pakistan, collected from agencies involved in health activities and relevant reports. The northern areas of Pakistan, consisting of the districts of Gilgit, Skardu, Diamer, Ghizer, and Ghanche, are spread over 72,496 sq km, with a population of about one million people. At the time of independence, there was no infrastructure and conditions were deplorable. Despite the building of the Karakorum Highway, and the work of NGOs and the government, the challenge of improving women's health and access to social sector services remains a daunting one.

Pakistan lags far behind most developing countries in women's health and gender equity. The sex ratio is one of the most unfavourable to women in the world as a result of female mortality during childhood and childbearing. The high number of deaths in childbirth (one woman in 38) and infant deaths (almost half) result from low nutrition and poor maternal health. Although high fertility rates are associated with a lack of adequate services to meet contraceptive needs, the preference for having large families, related to the traditional status of women, is a contributory factor too. The lack of mobility, decision-making power, and income present serious constraints to women accessing the limited services. More important, the inappropriate dietary patterns and nutritional deficiencies among women have serious implications on the quality of their life.

The northern part of Pakistan has an extreme climate. It is harsh and barren for several months of the year, with temperatures frequently dropping below

freezing. Whereas the low-lying areas grow crops twice a year, the high altitudes get only one crop a year. In subsistence farming, productivity depends largely on climate. In addition, the remoteness of the area makes the situation more difficult because the range of food available is limited and hinges on the storage of food during the summer season.

The total population is .93 million in the northern areas in comparison to 140 million in Pakistan. The sex ratio is 107 men to 103 women, suggesting a discriminatory trend against women. The number of female-trained professionals in the health services in the northern areas is appalling and can be taken as the reason for the high rate of maternal deaths in a society where women can seek advice only from women. On one hand, there is little knowledge about basic nutrition and the balanced intake of food; on the other hand, cultural backlash, religious taboos, and traditional habits aggravate the situation. Thus, socio-cultural factors play a part in creating and perpetuating these imbalances.

Because of the difficulty of delivering health care under these conditions, this part of the country has a maternal mortality of 600 per 100,000 live births and an infant mortality of 130 per 100,000 live births. The main causes of maternal ill health are related directly or indirectly to nutrition. Furthermore, the nutritional status is linked to the role of women and influences the health of the other members of the family as well. There is limited health facilities and the coverage in far-flung areas is low because of dilapidated infrastructure and limited funds. To tackle these problems, the Government of Pakistan is trying to foster partnerships with the private sector for the northern areas; one such venture is social marketing for delivery of family planning services and contraceptives.

Efforts are being made to address the immense problem by introducing programmes to improve the outreach of such activities and to increase the number of female health care providers by the Government of Pakistan and other agencies working in the region. Active stakeholders are Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS) and NGOs such as Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP). AKRSP has been in the region for 20 years and is recognised internationally as a community-based organisation with the mission to alleviate poverty through promoting sustainable livelihoods of mountain communities. It has set up in five districts of the northern areas and Chitral a network of almost 4,000 local organisations which facilitate men's and women's participation in a range of collective development initiatives related to constructing and maintaining infrastructure, managing natural resources, and creating assets.

While improving the situation of men and women, the impact of these activities on the health status of women has not been evaluated. For one, AKRSP is not involved directly in delivering health services, and, two, there is



minimal research regarding this. So far, programmes supported by the government and Aga Khan Health Services have concentrated on delivering health services to vulnerable groups (especially mothers and children) to reduce the alarming health-related problems.

In Baltistan, one of the programme areas of AKRSP, the infant mortality rate is 207 per 1,000, whereas the national rate is 110 per 1,000. The training of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) by AKRSP in Baltistan has been an important activity in the provision of social sector services. The TBAs are trained in antenatal post-natal care, childbirth, family planning, and childhood diseases. The local women now not only have access to increased supply of pregnancy-related services, such as vaccines and immunisations, but the TBAs have also found a profession and are able to earn an income.

Despite continuous efforts, the challenges posed by poverty, conflict, social instability, and preventable diseases have sabotaged the development of women. The level of existing health services, strategies employed to reach out, programmatic priorities, and the information needs are central factors in determining the health status of women in Pakistan. In addition to the technical aspects, the involvement of the community, mobilising its support, creating awareness about health issues, and the reach of health services are vital elements that need significant attention in health programmes. Here, greater emphasis may have to be paid to the nutritional status of women to help women carry out the designated roles and have an effect on the health of the family. Without doubt, poor maternal health, malnutrition, meagre services, and social issues exacerbate the poor health status of women in Pakistan.

*“Reproductive Health is a state of physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system at all stages of life (WHO).”*

According to a World Bank report (1997), ‘Towards a Health Sector Strategy,’ the conditions related to reproductive health constituted one-fifth of the disease burden and results in disability. The causes of the poor health status of women can be attributed to the lack of information, appropriate services, excessive childbearing, and low contraceptive rates.

In Pakistan, 20% of the population are undernourished, and 41.3% of women residing mainly in rural areas suffer acutely from anemia, indicative of low calorie intake. Pregnancy and lactation place extra demands upon the woman. Furthermore, religious taboos and traditional habits add to low intake of food and result in low birth-weight of newborns. Discrimination against women begins soon after birth. Studies and research in Pakistan reveal that gender was the most significant determinant of malnutrition among children, with this being more evident in low-income families where food is scarce.

An indication of the government's priority is that less than 1% of the Gross Domestic Product was earmarked for health expenditure in 1998, comparing poorly with military spending and education. A considerable percentage being used for debt servicing is a macro factor that underlies the weak economic situation.

There is a paucity of health facilities in Pakistan. The population per hospital bed in the northern areas is 1,210. There is a dearth of trained health professionals. For instance, trained health personnel supervise only 20% of births in the northern areas. There are only 244 medical doctors and 2,745 para medical staff available to provide health services in the entire region.

## Conclusion

This paper argues that a cost-effective, comprehensive approach to reproductive health care is required. Priority must be given to increase community-based services to meet the need for family planning. Increased capacity and number of female health providers would help to counter the sociocultural barriers that women face in accessing services, with special attention given to women in the far-flung remote areas.

Due to the enormity of the task, the private sector, and especially NGOs and local development organisations, should be encouraged. AKRSP has fostered almost 4,000 social organisations (village and women's organisations) in the northern areas. The capacity of these organisations can be built around different health needs and can serve the communities by providing services on the doorstep. It may be noted that crucial for the effectiveness of these programmes is the participation of women in planning and implementation. These programmes can bring a change, but we need to review and identify approaches that reduce gender discrimination and improve the overall status of women. National strategies will have to give much more attention to health interventions for women, particularly during their reproductive years.

The actions stated above could reduce the burden of disease and associated costs. Institutions that permit the formation of policies targeted at improving the quality of life and standard of health for mountain women must be strengthened. There are no possible short cuts and ready-made solutions. The government's commitment, in the shape of the Northern Health Project and such programmes, needs considerable resources and must be aligned to community requirements and to women.







# **Economic role and its impact on mountain women's strategies for the future**

Jatinder Kishtwaria

## **Summary**

In the mountain ecology, the woman is the pivot of the family for livelihood security since small landholdings and poor economic conditions cause men to migrate in search of economic gains. Therefore, women perform multiple roles as farmers and child bearers holding the family together through a variety of overlapping activities, which account for the much debated invisibility of both women's paid and unpaid work. An examination of the workload of women engaged in multifarious activities showed unacceptable workloads, improper postures, the lack of technology, poor work environment, lack of training, poor nutrition and stress to the cardiovascular and muscular system of the body leading to impaired health status, inefficiency, drudgery, and stress.

This paper attempts to document a complete picture of mountain women's work profile, economic role, and contribution through market, non-market and household production, their status in the family, community, and household development due to women's economic role and contribution, as well as the resultant drudgery and impaired health status of women. These issues have been overlooked at the national/international levels and need to be recognised and appreciated by policy-makers, administrators, and society to bring about an attitudinal change and shift in policies from an overdrive of welfare issues to equity as partners.

The author stresses the need for attention to be paid to identify women's roles, i.e., paid household production (dairy, weaving, etc.), household, and agricultural work and to impute value to all her dimensions of work because the support derived from her multifarious involvement generally provides the

very basis of survival for her family. The increased contributions of women are considered to be essential preconditions for improving woman's status, household development, and well-being. Mountain women from low family income groups are generally engaged in 'petty occupations' that make a substantial contribution to the total family income.

Migration of men and the economic indispensability of women empower the hill women to make decisions and accord them higher status. Women's economic activities contribute to mountain households' housing conditions, family health status, food quality, calorie intake, consumption expenditure, and savings and material possessions. Although the economic role and contribution of hill women have a positive impact on her status in the family and society, including the improved health status of children and other family members, this same economic role for a hill woman is a result of heavy workloads, drudgery, stress, and poor health. The economic role of mountain women also has a negative impact on their health status, as revealed by an inventory of their drudgery-prone activities in home, farm, allied and market work spheres, health status, and the ergonomic cost of work according to various parameters.

An inventory of all household, farm, allied, and other occupations undertaken by mountain women was taken in three zones of Himachal Pradesh, consisting of a representative sample of 900 randomly-selected mountain women respondents to identify drudgery-prone activities in a hierarchical order in all major work spheres by employing various parameters, techniques and formulae, i.e., time spent, frequency of performance, degree of difficulty, and drudgery index.

#### Result Highlights

- Inventory of drudgery-prone activities carried out by mountain women in household work
- Inventory of drudgery-prone activities carried out by mountain women in farm and allied activities (dairy and tea plucking)
- Physical characteristics of respondents
- Health status of mountain women
- Postural analysis while working in drudgery-prone tasks (angle of deviation of backbone from normal)
- Impact of improved technologies on the heart rate and health status of women

The study also looked at women's economic role and contribution to productive activities, both within and outside the household, whether paid or unpaid. It will be measured in the present study in terms of

- time spent by women in performing non-market productive work, which will be quantified in monetary terms; and
- money received through participation in market work.





In this study, 'economic role' is synonymous with economic contribution.

A descriptive type of survey design was selected for this study. A multi-stage purposive cum random sampling method was followed to select the study area, villages, households, and the ultimate sample of respondents, i.e., 100 employed and 100 unemployed. The data were gathered personally using a pre-tested interview schedule and time observation record sheet to cross-validate the time recorded by the interview method. The information was pooled and analysed. Two approaches were employed to estimate the economic role performed by respondents.

- Market Alternative Individual Function Cost Method (MAIFC)
- Opportunity Cost Method

The Market Alternative Method is an accounting technique that uses the cost of purchasing comparable services in the market to determine the value of non-market work time, i.e., the time spent by respondents on each task such as meal preparation and agricultural operations. Allied activities such as weaving of shawls etc for household consumption are valued at market wages, i.e., minimum wages fixed by the Government of Himachal Pradesh for these services. Hourly wage-rates so assigned were applied to the amount of time spent by the respondents in performing each task, and this provided the value of non-market work of all respondents. The economic role/contribution of non-employed respondents was the same as calculated above, and for employed respondents it included their earnings from market work also. The opportunity cost method equates an individual's value of work in non-market activities to the value of alternative activities that are precluded by performing non-market activity.

The findings showed that the monetary value of various non-market tasks was higher for non-employed than for employed respondents. The findings depicted that the mean monthly monetary valuation of non-market work (based on the MAIFC method) was estimated to be Rs. 602.10 for employed and Rs. 896.10 for non-employed respondents. The actual mean monthly income of employed respondents from market work was calculated to be Rs 1380.76. The economic contribution of respondents through participation in market and non-market activities was estimated at Rs 1982.86 for employed and Rs 896.10 for non-employed respondents.

According to the data, the minimum monthly value of non-market work for employed respondents was estimated by MAIFC at Rs 602.10 and by the Opportunity Cost Approach at Rs 620.12, as employed respondents spent less time than non-employed respondents in non-market work. Although both methods are appropriate in the prevailing context, the Opportunity Cost Method can be replicated over a period of time without showing any bias that may be reflected in the MAIFC method by imputing values of wage earners, which may be giving lower value to household work.

A comparison of the results obtained from MAIFC and the opportunity cost methods showed that the value of the time devoted by respondents to non-market work as calculated by the former was lower than that derived by the latter method. The nature of household activities is determined by the nature of economic activity prevailing in that area. These households were generally poor and the household activities undertaken were simple. Thus, the market alternative valuation reflected the earnings of unskilled/semi-skilled workers in that area.

Last, the study assessed the contribution of women through real income (time spent in non-market productive work) and/money income (through gainful employment) in raising the level of consumption of goods and services by household members, which can be considered an indicator in development achievement. In the present investigation, the following primary and secondary indicators were selected to determine household development of sample households.

#### Primary indicators

- Housing conditions including quality of construction, availability of facilities such as drinking water, electricity supply, and maintenance of the house.
- Family health status was monitored for all family members as well as immunisation of children.
- Food adequacy per consumption unit in terms of calorie requirements was compared with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) standards (1993).
- Expenditure was assessed on the basis of per consumption unit.

#### Secondary indicators

- Leisure time available to respondents

The source of power and status may be in the nature of work participation, i.e., economic role performed by women. Status of women was assessed on the basis of selected indicators after critical review of literature and according to prevailing conditions in the mountain context.

#### General indicators included

- age at marriage,
- training received for household production and gainful employment,
- leisure time availability,
- observation of tradition and culture,
- help received in performing various tasks,
- extent of freedom, control over and use of money, and
- authority for distribution and supervision of work at home.

Decision-making was considered to be a strong determinant of woman's status, therefore almost equal weightage of scores was given to decision-



making and other general indicators. Appropriate categorisation and scoring was carried out for each indicator to quantify status, and the level of status as low, medium, and high was categorised according to the range of scores so obtained, i.e., 17 to 51.

The co-coefficient of determination of this model was 58.961%. All explanatory variables turned out to be statistically significant at 0.01 level ('t' value in parenthesis). When employment status of women, age of respondents, economic role of respondents, marital status of respondents, family type, and education of respondents were considered as determinants of status of tribal women, the linear effect of determination was found to be 58.961%.

A larger number of tribal women from low family income groups were engaged in market work and contributed a substantial percentage to the family income.

- Employed respondents performed a greater economic role (both market and non-market).
- Early marriage was common and no variation in age at marriage was revealed due to employment status.
- Migration of men and economic indispensability of women empower them to make decisions.
- Employed women enjoyed more authority in delegation and supervision of work at home.
- Decisions related to personal matters of women were male-dominated. Farm decisions were not affected by employment status and were taken jointly.
- In spite of active participation of tribal women in decision-making, they still gave importance to men's opinions, as male superiority was a way of life.
- Visible economic contribution due to women's employment accorded them higher status than that of non-employed women.

## Conclusion

The economic role of mountain women accords her better-developed households and higher status in the family and society costing her poor health due to overwork of drudgery-prone tasks. The cost benefit ratio of the whole scenario of mountain women's lifestyle emphasises a need to break this vicious cycle for better options within the existing given system of society and governance. It is imperative to reorient the mindsets of policy-makers as well as stakeholders for strategic interventions for sustainable, holistic development and empowerment of mountain women in terms of gain in knowledge, skills, and application of technology. The author suggests the following options.

- I. Assessment of indigenous knowledge and prevailing management practices of farm and family systems in mountain sub-systems

- II. Identification of gaps in existing farm family practices and technologies in a particular eco sub-system.
- III. Supplementation of gaps in existing management practices and technologies in specific eco sub-systems
  - a) Transfer of existing appropriate practices and technologies within similar eco sub-systems
  - b) Improvement in existing practices and technologies through incorporation of the following:
    - relevant improved household, agricultural, and animal husbandry practices suitable for hill ecology;
    - developing, designing, testing, and application of drudgery-reducing technologies in the area of all work spheres in the mountain area for women to lessen the overload, and for ease, efficiency, and output; and
    - training and skill improvement of relevant and sustainable enterprises in a mountain scenario.
- IV. Establishment of linkages of family, community, and village governance within similar eco sub-systems
- V. Development of modules for farm families in specific zones of the mountain ecology for replication to all mountain areas





Entrepreneurship

4





# **Development of a strategy for the promotion of mountain women's entrepreneurship**

Edited by Phuntshok Tshering

## **Summary**

Although Bhutan's socioeconomic development, beginning in the 1960s, opened doors to both men and women without a distinct gender bias, women face certain difficulties. Education for both sexes might have been instituted as a core principle, but girls were more useful doing domestic and farm work. Thus, fewer girls attended school, and more girls dropped out, and, not surprisingly, men hold higher/better positions in government, professional areas, and the private sector.

This paper looks at ways to strengthen the existing programmes and spur initiatives of Bhutanese women entrepreneurs and their enterprises by focusing on institutions and policy framework, training, as well as the credit and market support required. Although the importance of the private sector in the development of enterprises is widely recognised and acknowledged by the Bhutanese Government, the sector is at a relatively early stage of development.

In the author's view, the arrival of modern education in Bhutan and the lack of a need to venture into new (including business) activities hampered industrialisation and the growth of private ventures. Consequently, the present business owners are first-generation entrepreneurs who rely on their own instincts rather than on any formal training. Little formal guidance is available to encourage young would-be entrepreneurs. Another major impediment has been the low absorptive capacity of the market. Because of a very small domestic market, there is a concentration of businesses in the small and cottage industries' sector rather than in large or heavy industry.



In the business sector, traditionally, barter was carried out by a few enterprising men until currency notes were introduced and motor travel facilitated business with bordering Indian towns. Businesswomen are often first-generation entrepreneurs or those helping family-owned businesses. But their problem is that they are often saddled with dual, often triple, responsibilities, namely, *reproductive work* – dealing with the home, family, and children; *productive work* – relating to production of goods at home or outside for consumption and/or income; and *community responsibilities* – concerned with social tasks for the benefit of the community. These activities are not recognised and valued in economic terms so that women's contributions to the national economy often remain un-quantified and invisible.

In spite of these drawbacks, argues the author, Bhutanese women entrepreneurs have fewer disadvantages than most others in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. The matrilineal pattern of inheritance is prevalent throughout the kingdom and the law ensures equal rights, including property rights, for women and girls. Marriage is sacred, but divorce is common and carries no social stigma. Many women entrepreneurs interviewed in the agricultural sector were, in fact, widows, divorcees, or single mothers.

Initially, the government focused on the small number of large 'real' businesses although it is the informal and less organised sector of small and mini/micro enterprise activities that forms the backbone of the country's private enterprise. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has, in its Eighth Five-Year Plan, stressed the creation of an enabling environment for the private sector, industrial estates and infrastructure, the continuation of private sector support and privatisation, the provision of industrial incentives making optimal use of indigenous raw materials, and the promotion of cottage and small enterprises.

International and national development organisations have also contributed to enterprise development through direct and focused interventions and programmes for capacity building. The UNDP/UNIDO support to the Entrepreneurship Promotion Centre – Ministry of Trade and Industry (EPC-MTI) programme for Comprehensive Entrepreneurship Development obliged the financial institutions to participate and share responsibility. SDC/Helvetas continues to support skill-based human resource development in collaboration with EPC-MTI. The Education Department and the Royal Bhutan Polytechnic are promoting vocational education that encourages self-employment and incorporates entrepreneurship and awareness about business ownership in their courses. The Non-Formal Education (NFE) national programme has benefited rural women who did not go to regular school so that 74% of participants in the NFE programmes are women.

The Bhutan Development Finance Corporation (BDFC) was set up in 1988 to provide credit and credit-related services for agricultural and industrial



development. The Ministry of Trade & Industry created the Entrepreneurship Promotion Centre to support and provide training and other related services to existing and potential entrepreneurs. The National Women's Association of Bhutan (NWAB), established in 1981 for the development and empowerment of women, has been active in mobilising and training women in income-generating activities such as handloom and handicrafts.

Despite these efforts, the obstacles are significant. Bhutan is a small, predominantly mountainous country with a mainly agrarian population. Little land is available for non-agricultural activities and industrial development, and transporting raw material and products is difficult and expensive as is importing industrial machinery and raw materials into the country. The domestic market for consumer goods is limited (pop. approx. 650,000) and free trade with India makes Indian consumer goods much cheaper. Given that 90% of its people are engaged in agriculture, and a large number of the remaining work force are drawn to civil service, only a small number of people are available to enter the private sector. There is an acute shortage of technical, professional, and managerial manpower. The absence of industrial sheds, a well-developed road network, telecommunication, postal facilities, water and power supply, and other social amenities are also hampering factors.

Reforms urgently needed include training programmes for 'commercial' craft workers as well as for family operations, with a need for greater awareness of the importance of tourist and export markets and quality control. The craft sector needs wide dissemination of improved technologies to increase productivity and improve quality. Micro-credit must be available for the further development of the craft sector in expanding craft production for tourists and for export.

In the tourism sector, the minimal infrastructure and policies are being reviewed and re-oriented to suit the future. Because of the inability of tour operators to do adequate marketing, the Department of Tourism (DOT) in the Ministry of Trade & Industry and tourism-related enterprises must take on this role through frequent participation in regional and international trade fairs. The scope for market diversification is almost non-existent, with too many agents in a small market. Further, the policy of 'elite tourism' has led many tour operators to close down their operations. Other constraints include poor infrastructure, the unavailability of hotel rooms during festive seasons, inadequate attention to services, lack of training, and a shortage of knowledgeable guides. Lack of new modes of travel such as helicopter services, the government's imposition of hire rates for vehicles, and the lack of an alternative to Druk Air with its inadequate sales system for air travel to Bhutan are further constraints.

The predominantly mountainous environment has a wide range of agro-climatic and soil conditions allowing varied cultivation, but the topography, diversity of ecology, and inaccessibility pose more problems than opportunities. Providing research and extension services is relatively costly. There is an acute labour shortage and rapid land fragmentation occurring, with increasingly shorter fallow periods. Although women have traditionally provided almost all agricultural labour and are the primary managers of natural resources including forests, agricultural extension support and services tend to be male-oriented as male farmers head households and are readily available in terms of labour. Furthermore, women find it difficult to undertake out-of-home and out-of-farm activities because of the heavy workload at home and on the farm.

Agricultural development packages (including technological ones) are conceived mainly with male farmers in mind. Tools and technologies that would reduce women's drudgery and workloads are too few. The inaccessibility of the terrain and difficulty of transportation impede women in agricultural marketing and entrepreneurship, added to which vegetable-growing villages are often far away from motor road heads. Most women still carry vegetables to the market on their backs or with the help of mules or ponies. Women's weaving and knitting, aside from their farm work, have no ready market outlets, so what they produce is a part-time business or for self-consumption.

Women's ownership of land and property and registration records in theory make them eligible for participation in the credit programmes offered by financial institutions and the local district administration. Local public representatives are, however, apprehensive about endorsing loan application requests from landless persons, particularly women. Women are not judged by their capacity for hard work but by their lesser physical strength than men. Rural women are often illiterate and not aware of the utility and benefits of a loan or the procedures for obtaining it, or they lack business ideas. A key impediment is that women continue to lag behind in literacy, with 24% literacy compared to 54% male literacy. Credit procedures and formalities are often difficult and cumbersome. Due to their limited knowledge of credit and of English (the language of most correspondences of financial institutions), rural folk, including women, are often unable to meet the basic requirements of financial institutions.

## Conclusion

The author maintains though that, on the whole, Bhutanese women entrepreneurs have more strengths and opportunities than weaknesses or threats to development. But the following considerations are important in the strategy for enterprise development in Bhutan: focus on products for enterprise development has to be based on the comparative advantage offered by Bhutan's natural resources and the skills of its workforce.



Given the diversity of resource potential and skills available in different regions, attempts should be made to emphasise regional specialisation. Emphasis should be given to improving the capacity of entrepreneurs, particularly women, and of the existing institutions rather than to introducing new and unfamiliar activities and institutional arrangements. The focus should be on up-grading skills, product development and diversification, entrepreneurship development, access to credit, streamlining of and continuation of support services, and marketing. A special focus on women is required, in view of the disadvantages they face in entering enterprise-based activities. It should include a careful selection and promotion of those activities in which women tend to specialise and place an emphasis on women's needs in programmes and the provision of inputs and support services.

To facilitate and promote women's ventures and women-run enterprises, information packages on technologies and products and marketing linkages should be among the key services to be provided to women in a simple and integrated manner. The package should be made available through a 'single window' service and include information on licensing, training, credit, product upgrading and development technologies, marketing etc. Training courses should be specifically targeted at and based on the needs of rural women. They should aim to upgrade the product lines and skills with which women are familiar and emphasise management with a focus on marketing and marketability to assist product diversification for the tourist and export market.

Licensing procedures need to be simplified, given the low levels of literacy among women. Awareness and information on/about credit packages need to reach a wider cross-section of women. These should be made more suitable for women-run enterprises. The language for any information dissemination must be *Dzongkha* as rural women are not comfortable with English. Most importantly, labour-saving technologies and options should be developed and initiated to reduce the drudgery of women from their 'triple roles' and to gain time for entrepreneurial activities.





# Women and work: an exploration into the lives of trading women

Tiplut Nongbri

## Summary

This paper looks at the situation of women entrepreneurs among the Khasi, a matrilineal tribe in northeast India. While in rural areas women are mostly engaged in agriculture, large numbers of women in urban centres have taken to trading and other non-agricultural activities leading to an outward migration of women from the villages to the towns. The study is based on the experiences of 120 traders in *lewduh*, the biggest retail market in the state. These women are engaged in the sale of cloth, fruits, vegetables, betel nuts, betel leaves, fish, grain, cooked food, tobacco, tools, spices, and a host of other goods.

Among the Khasi, the key structural factor that influences women's economic initiative is their matrilineal principle of descent. By conferring descent rights on women, society places a unique responsibility on them for the upkeep of their children, though this does not explain why they take up trade specifically. Engaging in trade may be related to women's poor access to land. In an agrarian economy, ownership of and access to land are vital for the economic security of the household. Land not only constitutes insurance against poverty, but also is the primary means of the fulfilment of basic needs. Some women were driven into trade because their land had been taken by the government to make way for the Umtrew Dam. While there is a variety of low-skilled jobs available for men without access to land, the avenues for women are restricted. Women either have to reconcile themselves to casual wage labour or set up self-employment ventures of some sort.

Like most markets in agrarian societies, the *lewduh* is a large, crowded, busy business centre which caters not only to the growing population of the city but



also to its vast hinterland. Located in the Mawkhar Ward of Shillong Municipality, the *lewduh* is the nerve centre of the indigenous Khasi economy. Originally a tribal market, the *lewduh* has a multi-ethnic character but, whereas the male traders are Bengali, Bihari, Marwari, and Punjabi, the female traders are primarily Khasi. Non-tribal merchants from outside dominate, and non-tribal agents often serve as middlemen buying agricultural and horticultural goods directly from local producers to sell outside the state. While their presence gives local farmers a competitive edge in the disposal of their goods, local traders tend to view these outsiders with some amount of reservation and misgiving.

To achieve success, entrepreneurs (traders) must not only be adept in sensing the workings of the market (specifically the laws of demand and supply), but also the complexities and intricacies of human relations. The author provides examples of women from a wide social and economic spectrum that have succeeded and failed in trade, their diversity of origins, and the different strategies they employ in running their businesses.

**Case 1:** Mrs. A comes from a rural family and entered trade late in her life. Untrained and inexperienced, the first few years were difficult, but in time, Mrs. A's business achieved some stability. In Shillong, Mrs. A's shop at her home stocked items in men and women's wear. If she trusted the client and was sure of her ability to pay, she gave goods on credit. Gradually, as the relationship grew, Mrs. A ended up supplying clothes for the entire family. An elderly cloth merchant introduced Mrs. A to a silk weaver from Assam who was looking for a person to distribute his products. She got in touch with other weavers with whom she reached a business agreement for the supply of *dhara* (a rich silk garment similar to the Indian saree) worn by Khasi women. This venture brought her success and also made her one of the leading distributors of this highly valued and expensive fabric.

Mrs. A's success stems from her customer relations and her innovative ideas and willingness to take risks. Where previously only a few traditional colours were available in silk, Mrs. A has added variety with a selection of colours from woollen and synthetic fabrics and having weavers experiment. The experiment was successful and brought her financial rewards. Mrs. A attributed her success not only to her abilities but to the money she received from her mother's (also a businesswoman) creditors after the latter's death, and to the support of her husband.

**Case 2:** Before her marriage, Mrs. B used to attend weekly markets in different parts of the Khasi hills. She obtained the initial capital from her mother but claims she owes her success to the credit provided by Marwaris. She has a flourishing business dealing in the retail and wholesale marketing of clothes to mostly urban women. She keeps track of new fabrics and also employs women to stitch and embroider garments that are ready-to-wear. The sole





earner in her family, Mrs. B runs her business single-handedly, with the help of a female assistant. Mrs. B also advances credit to most of her customers. Business is so competitive that without extending credit sales will suffer.

Mrs. B, attributing her success to her hard work, and is at her shop every day from eight in the morning to seven in the evening.

**Case 3:** Mrs. C, in her late forties, inherited her business from her mother who died some years ago. She regards the competition from bigger merchants and her low-income customers as reasons for her poor business. Mrs. C herself purchases her stock on credit from Marwaris, but she does not buy much as her sales are not good. She is not in a position to extend credit to her customers.

Mrs. C's situation reveals the kind of problems and constraints that a small-scale entrepreneur faces in a competitive market of large-scale entrepreneurs who supply her stock. *lewduh* has a large number of traders in the same position as Mrs. C. Their poor capital reserves provide them little bargaining power vis-à-vis the Marwaris and wholesale merchants on whom they depend for their stock. They cannot extend credit facilities to their buyers, thus affecting their ability to retain their customers.

**Case 4:** Mrs. D, eldest daughter of a poor family, entered trade at a young age to help meet her family's needs. Uneducated, she used money earned from baby-sitting to buy and sell betel nut (*kwai*). As time passed, she began to purchase goods in bulk directly from the rural producers, and sell the same at higher prices. To further improve her prospects, she began investing her profit in soaking the nuts, a highly risky venture. Currently, 75% of her investment is devoted to this. Mrs. D employs a couple of women to peel, check, and sort the nuts. Her customers are rich urban consumers and non-tribal vendors (*pan walas*) and traders in Gauhati and Nowgong.

Success resulted from Mrs. D's savvy about the market and the way she made use of her money. Her readiness to stake her earnings in a risky venture has also contributed.

**Case 5:** Mrs. E is one of eight leading women vegetable wholesalers and suppliers at the *lewduh*. She has spent years as a supplier, buying from the rural farmers and selling to merchants in Gauhati, Nowgong, and Agartala. Two managers look after the accounting and transportation aspects of the business, and four daily wages earners do the carrying, selecting, and packaging of goods. She bought her own truck to minimise losses when vegetables perish due to delays in transportation. Mrs. E has transformed the small retail stall inherited from her mother, but it has left little time for Mrs. E to attend to her children.

Mrs. E's story is typical of successful trading women. Success is achieved through hard work and the willingness to use the time that could have been spent with the children. Mrs. E had reliable domestic help, a service that is critical for working mothers. Mrs. E's case shows the potential for upward mobility offered by trade, learning as she went along.

Women in particular find trading a viable occupation that offers them not only financial security but also a high degree of professional autonomy. Also, in trade, business has a high degree of flexibility and, hence, those that have temporary reverses can reduce the scale of operations without leaving the market place altogether. Finally, trading requires little initial capital since wholesale suppliers will provide goods on credit, and social and community networks are particularly useful in helping a newcomer get credit and in finding a selling spot in an established marketplace.



Khasi women traders range from very small sellers of garden produce and petty commodities to middle-level traders to large-scale traders dealing in manufactured goods and as wholesalers and suppliers of fruit, vegetables, and related commodities. Two crucial factors that contributed to this diversity are the differential access to capital and the entrepreneur's willingness to take risks. A number of successful traders are also investing their profit from trade into enterprises such as transport, contract, and real estate, and also educating their children to achieve a middle-class lifestyle.

While the bulk of the traders are made up of marginal and less prosperous individuals, there is a small minority that has also succeeded in gaining control over production and distribution processes. These entrepreneurs constitute the embryo of a nascent capitalist class who, by investing in diverse kinds of activities, directly contribute to the process of capital formation in the once egalitarian and subsistence-based tribal society.

To consolidate their economic position, some women have diverted their profit and invested it in a variety of non-trading activities such as providing transportation services, investment in real estate and agricultural enterprises, or lending money to poor farmers. These women have been able to use profits gained in the indigenous economy to avail of the opportunities in the modern/formal sector. The impetus given by the state to infrastructural development as part of its wider strategy for economic development contributes in no small way to success.

Few women, however, were able to make use of such opportunities. In the first place, the lack of education among trading women imposed restrictions on their access to new opportunities. The cultural ideology of gender places daughters in particular in a highly paradoxical and ambivalent position. The Khasi law of inheritance acts as an obstacle to women's economic development. Since ancestral property is reserved for the youngest daughter,

elder daughters generally have little resources to invest in business. Even the youngest daughter, who is the legal heir to the property, is traditionally not free to use her inheritance in any manner she likes without the approval of her maternal uncle and older siblings. Further, as inheritance takes effect only after the death of the holder (mother), the prospective heiress can do little with the property she is likely to inherit without the latter's approval and consent. This curtails the woman's freedom to engage in activities not favoured by the household and is not conducive to her economic interests. It explains why a few women engage in large-scale enterprises.

Also, as women's economic activities expand and require greater interaction with the modern economy, their lack of education and ignorance of government rules and procedures increase their dependence upon men in conducting their affairs. The data show that women who expanded their activities beyond trade tended to rely on their male children for assistance in business affairs rather than on the female. The adoption of middle-class values among the upper strata of society also marginalises women from the system of production and reinforces their dependence on men. In many instances, a woman's lucrative business is passed on to male hands because of the marginalisation of daughters.

## Conclusion

It is a serious concern that the state fails to address the problems women face. One of the major obstacles faced by trading women is their poor access to capital. Notwithstanding matrilineal inheritance that transfers property to the woman, practices such as the denial of property rights to elder daughters and the obligation of the inheritor to discharge her duty (which is life-long) to her family ensure women's continued subordination. Besides, by selectively emphasising the woman's nurturing role, their economic contribution to the household, however substantial, is rendered invisible.

The success of an entrepreneur is dependent as much on the positive environment, availability of finance, and other social and material resources necessary to run and sustain an enterprise as the determination and hard work put in by the owner/proprietor. Given that women's work is critical to provide for their households and also contributes significantly at the macro level, steps are needed to set up appropriate institutions to meet women's needs. One answer is to set up micro-credit institutions, to be managed by women, through a democratically constituted committee under the supervisory eye of the government. Such action would promote self-reliance and co-operation among the members, which is important as more women enter self-employment due to dwindling resources and a fall in employment opportunities in agriculture. The state's efforts to build development infrastructure, such as roads, power, water, and hotels, must continue. The author warns, however, that globalisation and liberalisation, while

encouraging private industry, can destroy local initiatives. For the trading women and their counterparts in allied sectors, this could be a deathblow to the struggle for survival and economic security.





# **A study on three womens' enterprises in the high altitudes of Uttarakhand – India**

Malika Viridi

## **Summary**

In the wake of the adverse impact of the monetary economy on subsistence and its effect on the status of women, this study assesses the status and scope of three traditional enterprises that women engage in, namely, the wool-based cottage industry, extraction of medicinal and aromatic herbs from the wild, and the production and sale of 'Daru' or local liquor. These enterprises span different worlds, timeframes, and the subsistence, self-reliant, and traditional economies as well as the modern 'global' market.

This paper will look at the vulnerability of and opportunities for the women involved; the segmented nature of access to economic opportunities – and how reforms have opened up new livelihood options for some while closing down options for others; the changes in key rural markets and institutions that determine rural livelihoods and the significance of the recent import liberalisation; and if the government regulations and support systems facilitate or hinder rural economic activity

The study, encompassing the Pithoragarh, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi districts of Uttarakhand, is based on documents, detailed household surveys, interviews, and meetings with various stakeholders and players. The communities involved are the Shilpakars, or the present day Scheduled Castes, representatives of the Kols, the first known ethnic group of Uttarakhand. The second oldest are the nomad-pastoral Mongoloid Kiraats, with origins somewhere in eastern China. The present ethnic groups, representative of the Kiraats, now inhabit the border areas of Pithoragarh district. In the border district of Chamoli, west of Pithoragarh district, live the Tolchas and Marchhas of Niti and Mana valleys, and the Jadhs live in the westernmost border district,

Uttarkashi. The British Administration classified all these groups as the 'Bhotiya' tribe.

Although import liberalisation has made Merino wool from abroad cheaper, a significant proportion of locally-produced wool is still used. Most of the weaver households (76%) used their own sheep wool or procured local wool either directly from the sheep owner, or from retail outlets, or from within their village. In place of raw wool, 95% of weaver households procure a relatively poorer quality ready-made yarn for making duns from three main outlets in Munsiri Bazaar. State funds have been earmarked to establish wool banks and women entrepreneurs are taking up the challenge.

Wool products were traditionally aimed at the regional market for clothing and bedding, with no significant diversification of product types. With the advent of the mechanised woollen industry, the demand for local products has diminished. Women continue to produce and sell to an ever-constricting regional market, faced with competition from cheaper synthetic products flooding even the local rural mountain markets. The households engaged in wool work as an enterprise amounted to 64% of those surveyed (907 HHs out of 1414), of which 66% are from the Shauka community, 33% from the Shilpakars, and just 5% from among the general castes' category. With no access to any other means of production, women, especially those widowed or living singly, are the most dependent on traditional weaving of woollen products as a source of livelihood. Nearly 20% (289 HHs) of the total households surveyed are headed by women. About 65% of these families belong to the Scheduled Tribes, 27% to Scheduled Castes, and 8% to the General Caste category.

The local market for woollen products still accounts for half the sales. The demands of the local market have exerted a strong influence on the products, especially the use of bright colours and big designs for the carpets (*duns* and *asans*) as against the preference for natural colours and traditional designs for the export market. Entrepreneurs from this region have traditionally sold their products through friends and relatives to military personnel and to the tourists visiting Munsiri. Sale to the service classes constitutes the second largest market option. Woollen apparel, such as the *pashmina* shawl and the *pankhi*, are sold more to this section of the market than locally. Sale in the cities and towns (primarily of Kumaon, Uttaranchal) accounts for one-fifth of sales' outlets. Only a small section of households today reaches the larger urban markets of Delhi.

With the changing market (competition with cheaper, mass-produced machine-manufactured woollen goods), some non-local entrepreneurs have set up small factory-based enterprises. Today, there is growing competition for a share of the rural market between the handloom sector and mill-based





production. The Munsiri office of the Industries' Department has at various points of time initiated at least 14 programmes for the handloom sector. Following a major reorganisation of departments and the expenditure-saving exercise with the appointment of the Mazumdar Committee in 1993, most of the departments and facilities have been closed down. The sole exception is the wool carding plant, which, despite functioning well below its optimal capacity, is the only critical service still being extended by the state.

In a bid to strengthen livelihood options for women in the mountain regions, several development agencies and women entrepreneurs have undertaken to promote the wool-based enterprise, Panchachuli Mahila Hathkargha Utthan Samiti (set up in 1999 by a local woman entrepreneur from Munsiri).

- The formation of this Samiti has improved the availability of the locally valued Tibetan raw wool, along with that of average quality pre-dyed manufactured wool. By intervening in the raw material market it has successfully pushed down the price of the cotton yarn required for weaving *duns*.
- Where women were paid a daily wage for the spinning of wool yarn, the quality of work suffered, rendering it difficult to use.
- The Samiti is run in the traditional style of a one-person show and has yet to develop systems of management that optimise the interests of all shareholders.
- Pancha Chuli Woollens is an enterprise run by a guild of skilled women artisans with production centres in Almora and Pithoragarh districts.
- Not having a tradition of weaving, the women of Almora were more amenable to training in the modern skills of management, accounting, and current market trends in design.
- Being factory-based, it is able to ensure efficiency in meeting production targets and adherence to standards of quality and design.
- Although the organisation markets its products through four outlets in the two major towns of Kumaon, Uttaranchal, a large number of its top end products are exported. Strong market linkages have been established and designs changed each year to meet the demands of an ever-changing market.

Single and widowed women, especially of tribal origin, without gainful employment and with no access to land or capital, make a local liquor for the village, neighbouring communities, and even townships. The enterprise is informally acknowledged and accepted, and forms an important source of livelihood for these women. Consuming liquor is not traditionally considered immoral among the dominant community of the Shaukas. 'Jaan', the local rice beer, and 'Daru', the alcoholic liquor that is further distilled from Jaan, have been brewed in this region for personal consumption and for sale, in spite of the changing (sometimes negative) attitudes of the state administration towards this practice and enterprise. The last round of prohibition was lifted in 1996 in the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh in the face of protests by the

proponents of the separate state of Uttarakhand. The new state of Uttaranchal defends its patronage of liquor sales, as the excise tax derived from liquor sales is the state's largest revenue earner.

The findings are that about a sixth (17%) of the households surveyed (442) in six villages are engaged in the production and sale of the local liquor. Of them 60% are Shaukas (ST), 39% are SC, and just 1% are from the general caste category. Of the 21.27% female-headed households surveyed (94), 33% depend on the sale of liquor for livelihood. The Shauka women form the biggest group with 64% and the SC with 36%, while, typically, there are no women-headed households among the General Caste. Significantly, the female-headed households that do not engage in this enterprise have livelihood options.

There is strong resentment and moral disapproval towards women who make Daru for sale within the community. Women have joined the protest against state-sponsored liquor sales, citing the effects of alcoholism on several households in the area. The political implications of the state's involvement in promoting the liquor trade in the name of earning revenue for the state, and more significantly, the patronage the political parties derive from the liquor Mafia are issues that women oppose. Proponents of tourism believe that the resident Shauka populace should be issued licenses to brew only Jaan for sale, as it would give a fillip to the tourism industry, and also keep the money within the region. Others feel that the sale of state-licensed liquor should only be through local bodies and not by the liquor syndicate.

Women in the mountain villages of the border districts have traditionally migrated, along with their families, to high-altitude villages. One major source of livelihood available to them is the collection of high-value medicinal and aromatic herbs from the alpine pastures of their village-owned Van Panchayats and neighbouring reserve forests. Herbs such as *Aconitum heterophyllum* (Atis), *Picrorhiza kurroa* (Kutki), and *Dactylorhiza hatagieria* (Salam panja) have now become the mainstays of the poorest households that migrate to their seasonal dwellings in the 12 high-altitude villages of Gori Valley. Women have specialised in the collection of lichens (Jhula), *Chaerophyllum villosum* (Ganjari), and other herbs found closer to human habitation. In the last couple of years, women have participated in the proverbial gold rush with the collection of *Cordyceps sinensis*. In the 216 households surveyed of a total of 345 medicinal plant collectors, 40% (136) were women.

Herbs such as *Arnebia benthamii* (Laljari- used in hair oil) and *Rheum australe* (Dolu – roots used for dyeing wool), which are not in much demand, are collected in small quantities for domestic use, while others that fetch from Rs 25 per kg (Jhula) to Rs 40,000 per kg (*Cordyceps sinensis*) are extensively extracted. Women are responsible for the post-extraction processing of herbs collected by each household and are also employed by the locals to do the



initial cleaning and sorting of lichens that find their way to the aromatic and paint industry.

Entire families are engaged as a unit in collecting medicinal and aromatic plants from the wild. Of the 518 households surveyed in the 12 villages, 42% (216) of the households derive approximately 1/3rd of their income from the sale of medicinal plants. Increasing numbers of women collecting medicinal plants have led to stiffer competition and less herbs to be found.

As far as trade is concerned, in villages where households migrate to the 13 high-altitude villages, a system is in place whereby they take an advance or *bayana* in lieu of the medicinal plants that they will collect to repay the loan later. Of the 88 households that migrate to the three surveyed high-altitude villages, 55% (48 HHs) take advances. In villages, where there is no migration, the extracted herbs are sold directly through local agents to the road head contractors of the valley. A number of road contractors, with 14 local agents in villages, supply the medicinal and aromatic plants traded from the valley.

There is, however, no market intelligence among the local traders, much less among the collectors, of the destination of the resource traded by them or the eventual use to which it will be put. Market demand waxes and wanes, controlled by a global market, and often, local collectors are reduced to mere labour subsisting off this diminishing resource. The terms of trade in medicinal and aromatic plants from this remote and fragile mountain ecosystem are so unfavourably stacked against the primary collector that any concept of sustainable commercialisation will be at the eventual cost of wiping out the resource altogether.

Although there is a flourishing trade in this plant resource in the valley, the collection from the wild of a large majority of these high-value herbs has been banned by the Forest Department. Those that can be legally traded are under two regulatory agencies appointed by the State – the Bhesaj Sangh and the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam. Both, however, operate as commission agents between collectors and traders and have not done much to develop a market that benefits the former.

## Conclusion

- In the border districts of Uttaranchal, wool-based activities remain the main source of income for women that do not have enough land for agriculture, mainly the Bhotiyas/Shaukas and, to a lesser extent, the Shilpakars (SC). The craft is alive and continues to be passed down from one generation to the next.
- Marketing is perceived as the critical element in the making or breaking of this enterprise. Today, the competition posed by the fast-changing tastes and mass-produced synthetic products has prompted the need to

create alternative marketing avenues, apart from strengthening the supply to the large local markets in the mountains themselves. Marketing drives through traditional annual trade fairs and the Autumn Festival will help popularise these products.

- Promoting the wool-based enterprise as a unique craft engaged in by mountain women of the Himalayas will help create a special niche market for woollen products from this region. A diversification in the range of products to suit changing needs along with the use of other natural fibres would help expand the market.
- Wool banks and assured marketing linkages are critical.
- There is a need to upgrade the skills of more women so that they are able to produce quality products on a large enough scale to enter the market. These include managerial, accounting, and banking skills, which will enhance professionalism of the enterprise.
- There is also a need to develop collective bargaining power through the establishment of producers' collectives.
- With more local women entrepreneurs choosing to participate in producers' collectives and Wool Banks, exploring prospects of setting up a Natural Dyeing Centre, and collaborating with larger city-based enterprises, the enterprise has begun to grow.
- However, with the withdrawal of state support in dealing with an unfairly stacked larger market, the challenges before this enterprise are many. The government plans to hand over the ailing carding plant in Munsiri to a group of women.
- Women that make the local liquor for sale are often single women, widowed, deserted, or those with little or no land for subsistence. Women engaged in this traditional, now legally proscribed, enterprise are therefore exposed to risks.
- Women that have livelihood options will opt not to brew liquor for fear of stepping on the wrong side of the existing law. Those that do are vulnerable to the state's double standards, itself the biggest sponsor of the sale in liquor, as well as to social censure by the community.
- With low investment, poorer women can set up such an enterprise with relative ease. The daily sale of liquor brings in cash, sometimes well beyond catering to daily subsistence needs. It will continue in the grey areas between state policy and a social need.
- The extraction and sale of medicinal plants and aromatic herbs from the wild are engaged in by women with virtually no livelihood options and those that are the most deprived in the community. Livelihood dependence on the extraction of medicinal plants has increased in the past decade with a substantial increase in the participation of women.
- There is no market intelligence even among the local traders, much less the collectors, of the ultimate destination of the resource traded or the eventual use it will be put to, and hence they cannot intervene.
- The cultivation of a limited set of aromatic and medicinal plants could be developed in the long run as a lucrative enterprise for women.





# **Organising unorganised mountain women: a case study of gender tourism in the Garhwal Himalayas, Uttarakhand**

Mondira Dutta

## **Summary**

This study documents the situation of women as members of a workforce with a special focus on the tourism industry in Uttarakhand. Although Garhwali women constitute almost 50% of the region's population and have a relatively high rate of literacy, the tourism industry displays significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the labour market.

This paper identifies the specialised services that can be developed for women, given the natural resources, tourism potential, and marketing of products for tourists.

Because of indigenous beliefs and the dominant role of women in livelihood systems, mountain women have traditionally been afforded greater freedom of movement, independence in decision-making, and higher status in society than have women in the plains. But some common factors continue to pose major hurdles in the process of regional development, especially for women. Among them are following.

- *Patriarchy*: Societies throughout the region are male-dominated, more pronounced among Muslims and Hindus but also true among Buddhists and Christians.
- *Low self-image and self-esteem*: Women are considered inferior and even a kind of negative force, often accused of witchcraft and causing harm to others.
- *Patrilocal residence*: The patriarchal system, shaped by patrilocal residence and kinship relationships, force women out of their natal homes after marriage to live in unfamiliar surroundings under the control of their husbands' families.



- *Inequitable inheritance rights:* Women have been at the forefront of the agricultural labour force but do not hold ownership and tenure rights to land, trees, water, other natural resources, or livestock. This hampers women's ability to expand their livelihood options and, lacking the collateral requirements for loans, denies them credit from financial institutions.
- *Decreased access to forest and water resources:* The reduction of forest and water resources caused by environmental degradation has an impact on the women responsible for the collection and management of these resources, often forcing them to travel longer distances to meet the daily needs of their households. Environmental degradation increases the erosion of topsoil, leading to crop failure, which in turn leads to migration, food deficits, and a higher incidence of trafficking of mountain women into lowland and urban centres.
- *Heavy workloads:* Women undertake the daily backbreaking chores of carrying water, fodder, and firewood up and down steep mountain slopes, and this consumes all their time and energy. Girl children are kept back from school and given the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings and helping with domestic work.
- *Absent men:* Conspicuous male migration for short or long periods is increasing throughout the region as people struggle to find ways to sustain their families and farmlands. This leaves more of the labour burden on the shoulders of women. However, this may not give them a greater role in decision-making, as the presence of older men in the household usually negates such an opportunity.

Since highlanders have limited income-generating means and are dependent largely on growing a few cash crops, tourism has become an important alternative source of income and significant for the region's development. Among the economic benefits of tourism, the handicrafts' industry has proved to be the most remunerative. Most hill villages, however, are located in remote areas that are infrequently visited by tourists, and most transactions do not involve direct contact between producers and buyers, thus reducing the profit margins of producers. Hospitality is another source of income-generation. But this is also limited to a few tourist destinations and usually not remote villages. Jobs such as portage of food and baggage provide a minimal income but are not significant in alleviating poverty.

Owing to its size, rapid growth, and diverse and dynamic nature, the tourism industry is characterised by flexibility and as an important agent for the advancement of women. This enables it to develop key initiatives and models to benefit women that other industries can benefit from.

This paper highlights and documents the situation of women as members of the workforce with a special focus on the tourism industry of the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttaranchal. Its objectives are to:





- assess the current status of the female population on the basis of secondary sources of information;
- study the characteristics of tourists visiting the state in terms of socioeconomic and demographic parameters and gender-wise distribution;
- assess the magnitude of current gender participation rates at destination nodes; and
- highlight the role of gender participation in addressing the issues of poverty alleviation and suggesting measures to cater to the future tourist demand.

This study looks at Garhwal region in the state of Uttaranchal, which came into existence as the 26th state of the Indian Union in 2000. Its primary data were collected with the help of structured questionnaires through a short survey at various destinations across the Garhwal. Destinations were selected on the basis of the magnitude of tourist flow at specific popular destinations with a stratified sample of 500 tourists. In addition to the survey of tourists, the data regarding gender participation were collected through another random survey conducted in the same destinations among the employees of the hotel sector.

Consisting of 13 hilly districts of the former Uttar Pradesh, the region is rich in flora and fauna and attracts a large number of tourists. Some of the most important pilgrimage centres of the country are in Uttaranchal, made up of two main cultural and political divisions of the Garhwal and the Kumaon, covering 53,485 square kilometres with a population of almost eight and a half million people. Rain and alpine forests cover major parts of the region and are home to some highly endangered wildlife species and include the national parks of the Valley of Flowers in Chamoli, the Nanda Devi National Park, the Govind National Park, and the Gangotri National Park, among others.

The state of the tourism industry in Garhwal is quite similar to that existing in labour markets of the country in general. The tourism sector has significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation. Horizontally, women and men are placed in different occupations. Women are employed as waitresses, chambermaids, sweepers, receptionists, and sales' ladies, while men are employed as managers, gardeners, construction workers, and drivers. The typical gender pyramid is prevalent vertically as well. Women dominate all lower levels of occupation characterised by fewer career development opportunities, while men tend to dominate key managerial positions. This is in spite of the fact that the contributions of the women in many social movements, such as the Chipko and the anti-mining and anti-alcohol movements, have been noteworthy.

Despite an extremely promising scenario, severe constraints have slowed down the process of women's active participation in Garhwal's tourism sector,

such as lack of awareness, education, and training. There is a special need for training in financial management, knowledge of foreign languages, and computer skills. Community-based tourism activities allow women access to the paid workforce, but expansions of this nature involving Garhwali women groups seem to face serious problems due to lack of marketing skills. There is a low level of employment of women in the workforce structure, even in places such as Dehradun and Haridwar where the concentration of economic activities is the highest. This could be due to a number of reasons, including the lack of skill training.

In the hotel sector, which is usually the largest employer, women find employment around their area of origin; in fact, none of the female employees are from outside the Garhwal region, though this is not true for male employment. Among the locally-recruited employees, 33% are male employees compared to 78% female. This indicates that women do not venture outside the region in search of better employment opportunities, due to family constraints and thus remain in the peripheral areas of the job market.

Men are clearly dominant in terms of gender and the hierarchy of jobs. Only 3% of female employees occupy the highest paid posts, compared to 30% of male employees. As one moves towards the lower paid positions, a concentration of women workers becomes prominent. In Gangotri and Yamunotri, all the female employees belong to the poorest wage-group, earning <5,000 rupees per annum, and 93% of the female employees belong to the two lowest wage-earning groups with incomes of <5,000 rupees or <10,000 rupees per annum. In comparison to this, more than 41% of the male employees earn above 10,000 rupees per annum. The highest wage group, earning >15,000 per annum, has no female employees.

To provide self-employment opportunities for local residents, the government of Uttaranchal has offered state assistance of up to 20% for projects with a capital investment of up to rupees ten lakhs (Rs 10,00,000). Projects under this include fast-food centres, retail outlets for local handicrafts, plying buses and taxis, provision of equipment for adventure sports, establishing small residential accommodation, setting up of tourism centres with restaurants, tented residential facilities, and garages. But the state government has not specifically targeted gender equality or enhancement in its planning policies for the tourism sector.

This is unfortunate as nearly one-third of Uttaranchal's visitors are women belonging to the age group of from 20 to 60 years. While developing facilities for tourists, consideration needs to be given to the region's high female population (almost 50%), and the large number of female tourists who come here.



## Conclusion

Only the participation of women in the decision-making process will help achieve equality of control over the factors of production and the distribution of benefits through consensus and mobilisation. It is imperative for women to be able to exercise equal rights over family property and assets as that would automatically increase their confidence, self-esteem, and decision-making powers, ensure their position in society, and add to their future security. In the specific context of starting and running an enterprise, it can provide collateral that will enable them to access credit and capital. The author recommends the following to strengthen the role of women's participation in Garhwal's tourism industry.

- Development of the handicraft industry to form an important part of a comprehensive strategic planning programme for community – especially women's participation – in tourism
- Measures by local government, private sector, and NGOs to promote capacity building by working with women's groups separately in the beginning to enable them to articulate and follow up their interests. This would provide financial independence for local women and encourage them to seek education.
- Programmes to promote enterprises in mountain areas, particularly those meant for women entrepreneurs, should be integrated, providing all-inclusive support from a single window, including providing credit, service, and marketing.
- While production can be undertaken economically at small, micro-, and household levels, marketing must be done on a larger collective scale to make the enterprises viable. Direct participation by women entrepreneurs exposes them to wider markets as well as a better return for their efforts.
- The setting up of programmes and schemes by employers that encourage women to move into non-traditional occupations, invest in women's training, appoint them to managerial positions, and re-appoint them after years of less involvement due to family responsibilities
- The lowering of standards for locals' entry and compensation through on-the-job training to overcome the disadvantage of low levels of education and chances of entry into the workforce
- Developing and strengthening social, institutional, and legal mechanisms to improve women's access to and control over the resources necessary to start and run enterprises
- Engaging the tourism industry to educate tourists about women's rights and respect in an intercultural context
- Setting up all-women managed residential complexes for women tourists in the major destinations of the state





# **Mountain women's entrepreneurship in Slovenian policies and practices**

Patricia Verbole

## **Summary**

This paper is aimed at providing an insight into the state of entrepreneurship in Slovenia, with a focus on mountain women. It looks at the main characteristics of small enterprise development in the country and explores in detail women's entrepreneurship in the mountains. Due to the limited data available, the findings presented here allow for the first insights into the needs and problems of self-employed mountain women.

Slovenia, a former constituent partner of Yugoslavia, is one of the smallest and youngest countries in Europe, with an area of 20,256 sq.km, which is predominantly mountainous (with the Julian, Karavanke, and Kamnik ranges of the eastern Alps), and a population of two million. Since its independence in 1991, Slovenia has undergone a double transition: the transition into an independent state and the transition from self-management to a market economy. The experience brought to the forefront problems of increasing poverty, deterioration of the social security system, growing unemployment, revival of traditional values and ways of life, and the reduction of already acquired social rights. These changes have further marginalised Slovenian women, especially rural mountain and farm women. In the early 1990s, as Slovenian women faced new barriers in political and managerial careers, many opted for entrepreneurial careers.

Slovenia is a predominately mountainous and rural country. Farmers are, in fact, a minority group in the Slovenian countryside, and agricultural production is mainly geared towards animal husbandry (livestock/dairy farms), crop production, forestry, and horticulture. In the last 25 years, tourism and other supplementary activities have been developed in mountain areas. This

has created jobs and generated an additional source of income for farm and mountain families. Although agriculture accounts for only a small percentage of the GDP, rural areas are very important to Slovenia. Almost half of the Slovenian population lives in rural areas. Today, most of the countryside has a fairly good structure of basic services, including health care; and telephones, radios, televisions, and refrigerators are common goods in rural households.

About 500,000 women are living in Slovenia's countryside. Some data on rural and farm women are available and presumably indicative for mountain women. The heterogeneous group of mountain women consists of factory workers, shopkeepers, teachers, nurses, white collar workers, scholars, women entrepreneurs (self-employed or those that own their own businesses), and farm women, (who are actively involved in agricultural production or are supported by agricultural activities). Farm women represent only 3% of the female rural population, out of which almost one-third have no income of their own and many live in difficult conditions. They are rarely present in any sphere of the country's public and political life at a local or national level. In high-altitude mountain areas, most of the active women are employed on a family farm and rarely seek employment off the farm.

Slovenian women played an important role in the first entrepreneurial wave in Slovenia during the early 1990s. Many women were forced to join the workforce because of low productivity and wages. Hidden discrimination in Slovenia, which frustrated women employed in large companies, pushed women towards entrepreneurial activities. Although the Small Business Development Strategy, developed in 1996, identifies women entrepreneurs as a target group for support, current public policy as well as the professional and business associations fail to provide proper assistance to women entrepreneurs: support is far from enthusiastic and women face difficulties breaking into the old boys' networks in some business sectors. In rural areas, the situation is worse, and although the Slovenian National Action Plan for the integration of rural women in development, among others, has highlighted the problems of the rural woman entrepreneur, not much has been done to implement its recommendations.

Research on Slovenian entrepreneurs reveals that women and men entrepreneurs rank equally with regard to responsibility and enthusiasm. However, women ranked higher in communications, autonomy, ethical values, and endurance. In self-confidence, women ranked lower. Both groups ranked vision, risk-taking, and quick decision-making low in the list. Studies on *role conflict* show that women are torn between what society expects of them (as mothers, wives, and daughters) and their careers, which forces them to choose between the two. Women also fear the negative consequences of success, namely social exclusion, which may partly explain their lower level of achievement.





Studies on the socioeconomic position of women in the labour market show that a *dual labour market*, a clear division of primary, high salary on one hand; and secondary, low salary on the other, exists based on gender, skills, social status, nationality, and age, and allows for limited mobility across sectors. Only the primary sector, in which some women are employed as managers or company owners, usually in typically male industries, enables promotion and high salary benefits and, thus, offers secure employment. In general, however, the prime resources for the secondary sector, in which salaries are low, loss of employment likely, and working conditions poor, are women. Studies also show clear *divisions of sectors* in which women and men are usually employed. Women, including those that are self-employed or own a business, are concentrated in certain sectors, usually in retail trade and service. However, there is a slow increase in the number of women employed in all sectors. The concerns of women entrepreneurs are to gain financial independence, control over the products of their work, exploitation in the labour market, and the lack of employment opportunities.

Slovenian women entrepreneurs are between 30 and 49 years of age. They start their ventures at the age of 32.6 years (average), which compared to other countries, is quite young. About 13.2% of the women entrepreneurs began an entrepreneurial career without any working experience. Interviews with mountain women imply that enterprises are established some time after starting a family. Like women from western Europe, 70% of Slovenian women entrepreneurs are married with two or less children, 7% are single, and 7% are divorced.

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia guarantees equal opportunities for education to all its citizens. Primary school is compulsory, and education is free of charge up to university level and subsidised at the post-graduate level. Girls do not have more limited opportunities than boys with regard to education, and the majority of students enrolling in higher education, including university (69%), are women. There are also tendencies towards feminisation of certain types of education. More women than men enroll in the educational programmes for professions in pedagogy, medicine, economics, pharmaceutical work, chemistry, law and social sciences, and the tourism industry.

Data gathered regarding Slovenian women entrepreneurs show that, on average, women entrepreneurs have higher education (51% secondary, and 26% university education) than their male colleagues, although they are employed in traditionally female sectors. The educational level of women entrepreneurs in rural and mountain areas may be lower. Most of the women living in rural areas have primary education (64.6%), almost 30% have completed secondary education, and 4.4% have achieved higher education (university).

Studies in Slovenia reveal that many entrepreneurs, particularly women, started their own business due to barriers in promotion in former jobs. The most common reasons for establishing private business for women is that they see it as a promising opportunity and are dissatisfied with their previous jobs. Unemployment or the existence of a family business constitutes other factors. In a few cases, women entrepreneurs cited dissatisfaction with earnings or job opportunities as reasons for starting a venture. The prevailing motives for choosing an entrepreneurial career are the desire for independence, providing jobs for children, and higher income.

Women entrepreneurs tend to employ family members, often their children. Women-managed businesses tend to concentrate in certain sectors such as wholesaling and retailing, although women have ventured into real estate, financial intermediation, data analysis, and construction. Mountain women preferred to establish micro-businesses; they are self-employed or employ their husbands or some of the children. Often, they continue to work in the sector in which they have previously worked. Since this study was conducted in tourist regions, all women were involved in the tourism and hospitality trade: they were innkeepers, accommodation providers, and travel agents.

The problems encountered by women entrepreneurs include social and cultural constraints, traditional gender roles, barriers to education and training, lack of confidence in women entrepreneurs, lack of management skills, lack of information, lack of access to finance, barriers due to marital status, lack of access to sophisticated technology, and the lack of government support. All small business owners were found to have similar operational problems: marketing, building a customer database, and financing. Although it is generally difficult to relate these problems to gender, women are more likely to encounter problems related to leadership, irregularity of payments, tendency to sell at low prices, assured capital, creating a customer database, and traditional role conflicts.

When ranking business problems, Slovenian women entrepreneurs cited unfavourable and discrepant legal regulations concerning small business, unsatisfactory financial support, and poor business ethics. About 70% of women entrepreneurs reported that their career interferes in their private and family lives. Slovenian women do not face any special problems financing their businesses compared to their male counterparts, although specific problems arise due to the fact that a larger share of women-run businesses are in the less capital-intensive service sector, and that women appear to take less risks when managing growth. Business partners found women trustworthy and stated that bureaucracy and the old boys' network within distribution channels are greater hindering factors than gender. The significant problems were those of bureaucracy, lack of access to information, and the lack of funding. The lack of business knowledge, skills, and opportunities for adult learning were also cited.



When establishing a venture, 70% of Slovenian women entrepreneurs have strong support – financial, psychological, and decision-making – from their spouses or families and relatives. Friends, professional groups, and local authorities are not important support groups, especially at later stages of business development. Mountain entrepreneurs depend on networking for their business. They initiate informal social gatherings and events and see these as opportunities to exchange experiences and ideas.

## Conclusion

The author states that to gain an insight into mountain women's entrepreneurship in Slovenia, gender-sensitive data as well data relating to mountain areas are lacking. One concern of women entrepreneurs is the stereotyping of women's personal characteristics with their entrepreneurial capabilities. Since mountain women are a heterogeneous group, their experiences and problems vary from one mountain region to another, as well as within the sectors they are employed. Given that the general Slovenian business environment is not entrepreneurial and innovative, no specific factors hinder women's entrepreneurship in Slovenia. In rural areas, however, social and economic issues are hindering women's integration in development and their participation in public life.

In spite of the various attempts to enhance the development of small businesses, as well as of rural areas and the integration of women, the lack of coordination at the national level makes it difficult to coordinate and control such developments. For effective and appropriate support and entrepreneurial extension, specific data on mountain women need to be used. The following are important measures.

- Create a database on mountain women entrepreneurs.
- Create an entrepreneurial culture and raise the mountain women's (and general public's) awareness of their contributions to development.
- Disseminate information about access to funds, business opportunities, and projects.
- Train extension workers and extend or improve local advisory and training programmes.
- Promote adult learning programmes, focused on mountain women's needs, and stimulate the younger generation to obtain a higher level of education.
- Increase women's membership in business information centres, business incubators, and other local business infrastructure organisations to facilitate access to start-up capital and business premises.
- Stimulate the development of informal entrepreneurial women's networks in order to increase the level of business opportunities (sharing experiences and resources).





# **Women, forests and markets: researching poverty alleviation through commercialisation of forest resources in Mexico and Bolivia**

Elaine Marshall and Kate Schreckenber

## **Summary**

During the past decade, non-timber forest products, such as fruits, nuts, resins, fibre, and medicines, have been widely promoted as a potential solution to high rates of tropical deforestation. The commercial development of (NTFPs) could increase the value of forest resources, thereby encouraging forest conservation while alleviating rural poverty. However, while some NTFPs have been commercialised successfully, many have failed.

Specifically, this paper focuses on the relationship between poverty and gender and the successful commercialisation of NTFPs. It seeks to identify the socio-political, gender-related, and cultural factors that contribute to successful commercialisation and the impact of different types of commercialisation on communities, gender relations, and the environment.

In much of Latin America, women primarily undertake the harvesting of NTFPs and the management of the NTFP resource base. In areas with long-term habitation, women have a strong working knowledge of forest products and play a major role in passing on this knowledge to future generations. Despite this, women suffer from lack of access to health and education services; social norms limit their participation in public life and restrict opportunities, and their low levels of education result in occupational segregation and inequality.

While it is recognised that NTFPs are an important resource for rural women, and women play a key role in eliminating poverty, there have also been many

gaps identified in the sectoral coverage of existing research. While women have traditionally operated in the subsistence sector, they may not have equal access to the cash economy, because of traditional domestic responsibilities or gender inequality. These gender issues have been neglected in the implementation of many development projects. In addition to the role that this research plays in filling information gaps, it will also contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of change.

Principal outputs from the research are Decision-Making Tools (DMTs) that will assist communities in successfully developing NTFP resources. The following will be developed in collaboration with project partners, following comparative analysis of research data.

- *A manual developed and tested with rural communities, to provide tools for successfully developing NTFP resources.*  
Consultation is underway to ensure that this manual complements or feeds into FAO's manual on market analysis and development for community-based tree and forest product enterprises.
- *An Expert System for use by decision-makers to evaluate the potential for successful NTFP commercialisation*

This collaborative research is undertaken with country partners in 17 selected indigenous case study communities located in two of the three poorest states in Mexico and in some of Bolivia's most geographically remote areas. All the case study communities are geographically isolated, lack various basic services, and are characterised by high illiteracy rates, inadequate medical attention, poor domestic conditions, and high mortality rate. NTFPs are commercialised in these communities with varying degrees of success, and differ in a number of important characteristics including yield, perishability, value, seasonal availability, etc. The local communities harvesting these resources differ in social structures (including gender influence), culture and ethnicity, degree of marginalisation, and access to capital resources (financial, physical, environmental, human, and social). Considering the variables, a comparative analysis of different NTFPs can, therefore, enable the identification of key criteria for successful commercialisation.

In fact, one of the greatest challenges facing the researchers was the designing of a research methodology that could successfully be applied across different communities, commercial products, and geographical areas. In addition, this research is multidisciplinary and is being implemented across seven different institutions in four countries in two languages. The first four research hypotheses are predominantly concerned with the impact of NTFP commercialisation on different groups of participants in the commercialisation process (both within communities and along the market chain), as well as on the environment. The latter two are focused on understanding the different types of market structure that exist for NTFPs and, in conjunction with the earlier hypotheses, their relative impact on participants.





Some of the hypotheses are given below.

1. Changes in commercialisation of NTFPs have a greater impact on the livelihoods of women
2. Increase in the volume of NTFP commercialisation leads to forest over-exploitation and/or domestication
3. Changes in the volume of NTFP commercialisation lead to reduced rights/access to the resource for the poorest producers.
4. The successful commercialisation of an NTFP depends critically on: accessible market; potential demand; the absence of substitutes; access by producers, processors, and traders to market information; technical management capacity; organisation; high value/unit weight, and trader characteristics (age, experience, education, etc).
5. The success of poor producers, collectors, processors, and traders in NTFP commercialisation depends critically on the level of supply and demand (market structure); capacity to exert market power; barriers to entry; degree of vertical and horizontal integration; and presence of substitutes.

The research questions we developed to help us answer whether changes in commercialisation of NTFPs have a greater impact on women's livelihoods are as follow.

- To what extent are women involved in the harvesting, processing, and marketing of the NTFP?
- To what extent are women involved in transporting the NTFP from the forest to the market?
- To what extent do women have control over the income derived from NTFPs and therefore, to what extent do they benefit from their sales?
- Do men displace women when new technologies for NTFP processing are introduced?
- Does NTFP commercialisation help or damage the social, political, and economic status of women?

All the research at the field level was implemented directly by the researchers' country partners, allowing them to build on the trust that the research communities enjoy. The research tools were designed to be implemented using a multitude of participatory techniques, including group work (with different gender, age, and wealth groups), key informant interviews, household interviews, and so on, and partners were encouraged to draw from their previous experience with communities.

A community report is to be written for each community to collate all the information relating to NTFP commercialisation in that particular community. Each report will provide an introduction and context for the community, land use, organisation of resources, income and expenditure, labour; information specific to the NTFP collected, commercialisation from the community perspective, and the various social, political, environmental, and gender-related impacts of changes in commercialisation. Although predominantly qualitative, some of the data included in the report are of a quantitative nature

and can be codified for entry into a database. One of the final aims of the report is to show how representative these communities are in relation to other communities and, hence, each report is to be in a standard format to enable comparative analysis.

### Who are NTFP traders?

	NTFP actors	Control
Percentage female	(data from community reports)	(data from community reports)
Average income	(data from questionnaires)	(data from surveys, possibly also from secondary sources)
Etc...		

A market report will be written for each product with a focus on the overall marketing chain for the product, concentrating in particular on elements outside the study communities.

Four questionnaires have been developed with our NGO partners, all with the same basic structure. One is directed at community members involved in any aspect of NTFP production or sale, with a second directed at a control group of community members not involved with NTFPs. A separate form of the questionnaire targets people outside the community involved with the NTFP case study (e.g., processors and traders), and a final version targets a control group of non-community members.

With regard to our data analysis methods, we have attempted to achieve methodological integration with survey tools solidly based on results of community, household, and market-level research and provide data for a multidisciplinary research team. Simple tabulations and charts have been used to assess the characteristics of those involved in NTFP trade. Such characteristics may include female participation in percentage terms, average income, access to finance/land, etc, for NTFP actors, such as the chart shown below.

Charts also help to obtain associations between average income and access



Importance of NTFP Activities by Household Characteristics

		Household characteristics			
		Gender	Access to finance	Average income	Etc.
Share (%) of income from NTFPS	0–25				
	26–50				
	51–75				
	76–100				

to finance/land and gender, on the one hand, and the share of NTFP activities in total income on the other. This is important, as we would like to know the characteristics of the workers (e.g. poor, female, etc.) that derive a large share of income from NTFP activities. The table below does this.

The findings in the above two tables can then be combined to test certain hypotheses, such as:

- if it is found that NTFP actors are generally poor, female, lacking finance/land
- that these traders derive a relatively high share of income from NTFP activities,
- then, it would confirm hypotheses 1 and 2 above: “Changes in trade in NTFPs have a greater impact on the poorest producers, processors, and traders, and on women’s livelihoods.”

In addition, the project cycle has been planned to facilitate some triangulation of our results, including research with small working groups at the community level. This helps towards a better understanding of how women perceive successful commercialisation and helps us explore how much control women have over the expenditure of their own income and to measure less tangible and/or coincidental or non-linear benefits (children receiving better education or better nutrition, for instance).

## Conclusion

For the purposes of executing a multi-disciplinary and multi-partnered research project, the researchers believe in the value of jointly developed hypotheses as integrating factors for the wider project research team and the value of early and frequent joint analysis. They acknowledge the need for intensive management to achieve ‘consistency’ between research partners in terms of research implementation and interpretation of data. While this can be time-consuming, the benefits of a full-time project leader providing a constant point of contact and acting as a vital intra project link (having visited all the fieldwork sites) can clearly be seen in the quality and quantity of social capital that has been developed over the last 18 months of the project cycle.

It is worth mentioning the importance of transparency in what we will deliver as a research project, and acknowledging the sometimes less tangible outputs of the study of forest communities. A research project is much more about delivering long-term benefits rather than immediate solutions, both directly as outputs and indirectly through the design and implementation of future projects and policy changes.

There is also the issue of recommendations for future policy formation to be considered when analysing how far-reaching our outputs (as research methodology and decision-making tools) can be. It is hoped that, through the

careful selection of our case study communities and products and the sensitivity of our research tools, the adaptive decision aids will work successfully in many forest-dependent, poor communities throughout Latin America.

Much of the research findings to date emphasise the importance of the social aspects of sustainability, which requires that natural resource use does not disrupt social harmony beyond the capacity of social structures to tolerate such change. It is worth noting that, whereas the increased empowerment of women might seem a logical and desirable outcome of developing the NTFP resource, there may be social costs in terms of disunity within the community. As a result, a cautious approach to resource management and change is to be valued more highly than increased economic returns.

Any external assistance to communities recommended via the research outputs and our policy briefing paper will need to be very carefully planned and executed. However, such support could enable the rural poor, especially women, to benefit more fully from forest resources, and this will prove to be one of the most rewarding and environmentally benign ways of fighting rural poverty.

This paper sets out to capture and explain the importance of mainstreaming gender in natural resource research. It illustrates the value of rigorous planning and iterative development of research questions and data analysis approaches between project stakeholders to ensure thematic coverage. It describes how our research methodology, compiled of flexible participatory techniques and more structured research tools, has generated both qualitative and quantitative information that will provide a valuable insight into the impact of change in NTFP commercialisation.



5

# Political, Legal and Human Rights









# **Land in Latin America: the gender asset gap**

Magdalena León

## **Summary**

This paper argues that inequality in land ownership is related to male preference in inheritance; male privilege in marriage, community, and state programmes of land distribution; as well as gender bias in the land market. It draws attention to significant differences by which rural men and women acquire land and shows that inheritance is the primary means by which most women become landowners; men are more likely to have acquired land through its distribution by communities or the state and through the market. It reviews recent trends favouring gender equity in land acquisition.

After more than three decades of efforts by women/gender and development scholars and practitioners to make rural women visible, few Latin American agricultural censuses publish data on the gender of their nation's farmers. None of the agricultural censuses ask who in the household is the landowner and few enquire as to how ownership of land was acquired. Researchers and policy-makers alike continue to make the erroneous assumption that owner-operated farms are the property of the household head. The questionnaire for the Peruvian living standards measurement study (LSMS) for 2000 was the first in Latin America to specifically ask if the land parcel belonged to the respondent or any other household member, and then follow it up with the most important question: whether the property title was in the name of the household head, the spouse, the couple, another family member, or others; and whether the latter cases were in co-ownership. The available census data illustrate the low participation of women as principal farmers, ranging from 7% in Guatemala to 22% in Chile, and as principal farmers on owner-operated farms, from 14% in the Dominican Republic to 24% in Chile.

In the author's view, national level data on land ownership often obscure important regional differences. Moreover, any serious study of land ownership must take into account that land may be the joint property of the couple rather than being individually owned. The national level figures, nonetheless, underscore the point that gender distribution of land ownership in Latin America is extremely unequal, with women rarely representing more than one-quarter of the landowners.

Data for six countries (Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Ecuador) suggest that inheritance is a relatively more important mechanism of land acquisition for women than for men in Latin America, although, in absolute terms, men are favoured by inheritance practices in all countries. In Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru, inheritance is the principal means through which women acquire ownership of land. In Brazil, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, the purchase of land in the market is the primary means by which men acquire land; in all three, purchase of land is followed in importance by inheritance.

Although inheritance constitutes the primary means by which women acquire land, men are nevertheless favoured in inheritance over women. In Chile men constituted 54% of those that inherited land; in Ecuador, 72%; in Peru, 73%; in Nicaragua, 75%; and in Brazil, 76%. In explaining this, the author writes that Latin America has a relatively favourable legal tradition compared to other regions of the world, for women could inherit land under the norms of pre-Columbian civilisations as well as subsequent colonial rule. This has been associated with relatively egalitarian inheritance norms, and specifically with parallel or bilateral inheritance systems. After independence there were two main innovations in inheritance regimes – the establishment of full testamentary freedom in some countries, and in others, measures to prevent widows from being left destitute. Testamentary freedom increased the possibility for increasing gender inequality in the ownership of property since parents were free to favour sons over daughters in inheritance. But it also improved the position of some women, particularly widows, as husbands could will them their entire estate. The main innovation in South America, beginning with Bolivia in 1830 and Peru and Chile in the mid-nineteenth century, was, however, the forced inclusion of widows under certain conditions.

Given the relatively egalitarian inheritance norms, why is inheritance of land so skewed in favour of men? One reason has to do with gender socialisation and stereotyping. Many regions of Latin America define agriculture as a male occupation, women are seen primarily as housewives in spite of their contribution to family agriculture. This gender differentiation is reinforced where inheritance of land is seen as an earned right, following the principle that land should belong to those who work or earn it, i.e. men. Gender



inequality in the inheritance of land in Latin American peasant societies has also been associated with patriliney and patrilocality. Both are often associated with exogamy, where women marry outside their community of origin and leave their natal homes. The locale of post-marital residency is one of the strongest factors associated with different inheritance systems cross-culturally.

Continuing the family line is another factor that has been used to explain male preference and the custom of prioritising only one son in inheritance. Thus, the privilege of the son in land inheritance rights is a means that seeks to provide security to parents in their old age. The bias in favour of men in inheritance systems is also related to male privilege in marriage. Until the late twentieth century, husbands were the legal household heads in most Latin American countries. Property jointly acquired during marriage (with the exception of inheritances) was always considered common property, to be divided between the spouses upon dissolution of the marriage. In practice, such common property was rarely registered in the name of both husband and wife, favouring instead, the accumulation of assets in the hands of men. The rules of membership in peasant communities where land is owned collectively also favour inheritance of land by men.

Male-dominated community assemblies were the final arbiters of inheritance disputes and, until recently, these tended to favour inheritance of land by sons, particularly those of legal age, over widows. However, while inheritance by children could be very biased in favour of sons, countries whose civil codes favour inheritance by widows and in which there is a growing gender gap in life expectancy could support a trend towards greater female land ownership.

The author found the following factors relating to the trend towards a more gender-egalitarian inheritance of land:

- Rising literacy, including legal literacy among women, which led to greater knowledge of national laws favouring equality in inheritance among children and/or the rights of widows.
- A move toward partible inheritance practices, associated with smaller family size.
- Increased migration by children of both sexes so there are fewer potential heirs interested in farming activities.
- Growing land scarcity and/or a decline in peasant agriculture associated with the decreasing reliance of households on farming as their primary income-generating activity.

Most agrarian reform laws appear to be gender-neutral in that the beneficiaries are defined in terms of certain social groups, e.g., as tenants on the expropriated estates or landless workers. The most significant legal barrier to women was that while it was agreed that households were the main units to be benefited, the legal beneficiaries were often the household heads. Laws

that did not explicitly designate household heads as beneficiaries stipulated that only one person in a household could be a beneficiary. Cultural norms dictated that, if an adult male was present within the household, he would be designated the head or representative of the family.

The other culturally charged concept that permeated these reforms was that of who was the actual agriculturist. Irrespective of the amount of labour that rural women dedicate to agriculture, it has always been socially constructed as a male occupation. As a result, almost all agrarian reform laws that favoured agriculturists as beneficiaries always referred to them in the masculine form. The language of agrarian reform legislation, by failing to explicitly include women, reinforced prevailing cultural assumptions and gender stereotypes.

At the international level, the most important development was the ratification of the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The section on property rights made it clear that efforts to end discrimination against women must include recognition of women's rights to own, inherit, and administer property. By 1990 all nineteen Latin American republics had ratified the 1979 UN Convention. The most important advancement in favour of gender equality is legislation requiring explicit mechanisms of inclusion – provisions for the mandatory joint adjudication and titling of land to couples and/or for giving priority to female household heads or specific groups of women. In most countries joint titling reinforces the notion of a dual-headed household in which both husband and wife represent the family and may administer its property jointly.

A mechanism which should facilitate women's increased ownership of land and security of tenure is the priority which some of the laws, such as those of Colombia and Nicaragua, give to female household heads. Another proactive measure of inclusion is the priority given by Colombia's 1994 law to all rural women who have been victims of the violence ravaging the country. As a result of these and similar legal changes, the distribution of land has become more gender equitable. In Colombia, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, women have benefited much more in recent land adjudications than they did in the agrarian reforms of past decades.

In formulating a research agenda for the future, certain factors need to be kept in mind. A major problem in furthering the study of gender and land rights is that the agricultural censuses and major data sets collected so far give little or no attention to the ownership of assets by gender or how these are acquired. As we have emphasised, the critical question is who within the household legally owns the family farm or the different land parcels of which it is constituted. It is important to take into account that land is not only owned individually, but may be owned jointly by husband and wife, or by several family members. Moreover, laws regarding the ownership of property acquired



before and after marriage are often different across countries. All these factors must be taken into account in any rigorous study of the distribution of property ownership by gender.

## Conclusion

While ownership of land is associated with diverse income-generating strategies among the rural poor which could help in alleviating poverty, it has yet to be established that land ownership by itself keeps a rural family out of poverty and that the gender of the landowner makes a difference. This aspect should be among the key items on the agenda of future research studies. Increasing women's ownership of assets is important to establish real, rather than merely formal, equality between the genders, and because ownership of land is closely associated with women's well-being and empowerment. Rigorous empirical testing of this proposition in the Latin American context remains to be done.

Another important question raised by our review is whether the gender gap in the distribution of land varies by social class. The available data for Brazil suggests that women among the middle and rich peasantry and landlord class are more likely to be owners of land than those in poorer households. But this proposition needs to be tested directly and the differences by class and gender with respect to forms of land acquisition explored in depth.

The gender gap in literacy persists in most of Latin America and rural women often have difficulty in claiming their legal rights. This situation needs to be studied; policy decisions and resource mobilisation are required to bridge the gender gap in literacy.

The current priority of most governments is to enliven land markets, largely by land titling programmes to guarantee security of tenure. In countries that have adopted mechanisms for the inclusion of women in land titling programmes, they are emerging as a larger share of the beneficiaries than in countries where such programmes are gender blind. Nonetheless, land titling programmes in principle only benefit current landowners and do not address the fundamental inequities in current distribution of land, or class and gender inequities in how land is acquired. Land markets rarely favour the rural poor, neither are they gender-neutral. If land banks become the primary means by which poor peasants can acquire land, proactive measures will be necessary to assure equality of outcomes for both genders.







# **Women's rights to land in the Kyrgyz Republic**

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## **Summary**

Since 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic has followed a programme of economic reform designed to transform the centrally planned economy to one based on market principles. Approximately 60% of the population lives in rural areas, and about one-third of the country's population of 4.8 million depends on agriculture. Roughly one-third of the land area is considered unusable. A cornerstone of economic reforms has been the land and agrarian reform programme designed to: (i) transfer land and non-land assets of the state and collective farms into the hands of individuals, (ii) ensure secure private land rights, and (iii) create the legal and administrative infrastructure necessary to support a freely functioning land market. This paper is based on the research conducted in May 2000 by a team of three lawyers (one Kyrgyz, two U.S.) and two sociologists (one Kyrgyz, one U.S.) to understand and give voice to the needs, aspirations, social and legal constraints, and opportunities of rural women in the Kyrgyz Republic relating to land; identify stakeholders in the institutions affecting women's access and rights to land; and assess the structure and capacity of institutions related to women's land rights and recommend steps that could be taken to strengthen these institutions.

The team used Rapid Rural Appraisal techniques to interview groups of rural women and men, local and regional officials, judges, members of village Courts of Elders, religious officials, rural gender advisors, and NGO activists. The team collected comparative data about women's land rights and a stakeholder workshop was held in the country to inform various stakeholders of the research findings, to verify findings wherever possible, and to consider whether future action is needed to address the findings and how best to

accomplish this. The researchers looked at what the law was, what actually happened, and why.

Land is allocated on a household basis. When the head of the household, usually male, dies, abandons the household, or seeks a divorce – or when women themselves seek a divorce, the woman's access to the household land is at risk, especially if she is childless. The primary finding from field research is that the written law addresses members of a household as individuals and provides and guarantees individual rights. Customary law, on the other hand, addresses the household as a unit and works to preserve the unit as a whole. Given this split, written laws are virtually irrelevant in rural villages in many instances. Although customary law does not vest land rights specifically with women, women's needs are addressed in many cases through their access to household land.

According to legal regulation of matrimonial relations in the Kyrgyz Republic, only marriages registered in the state registry offices and village government are considered to be valid. Courts and the state registry offices protect the rights bestowed by marriage. To register a marriage, the parties must be 18 years or older. Marriage is not permitted if either or both persons are already married.

Under customary law, dowry (gifts given to a daughter by her family upon marriage) and bridewealth (gifts given by the groom's family to the bride's family) give the bride status and security in a way that marriage registration does not. However, the Kyrgyz tradition of bride stealing often puts the unknowing bride in a vulnerable position because it may take up to six months for her parents to provide the dowry. If her husband sends her home before her dowry is given and her bridewealth is paid, her price will be much lower for a subsequent marriage. Moreover, if her marriage is not registered, she loses any rights provided by the law. An estimated 15 to 30% of all girls are kidnapped against their will. In ethnic Uzbek families, parents marry off their daughters at a younger age, even as young as 14, so that their bridewealth is high and they have a better chance of marrying a wealthy man.

While polygamy is prohibited, in practice the *mullah* (Islamic priest) can perform and register the marriage of a second wife. Wealthy men often secretly get married a second time. Women expressed concern at losing their husbands and the rights to his income in the event of a second wife. Second wives have no legal rights to the man's property and are therefore very vulnerable.

*Analysis:* A new wife is vulnerable if her marriage is not registered. Especially troubling is the trend for younger girls to marry. Girls who marry young, under the age of 17 or 18, cannot be legally married because the official marriage



age is 18, and in some rare cases, 17. A girl who marries at 14 has no legal rights under the law until the marriage is registered three or four years later – in many cases, after the children have been born.

The trend of not registering marriages also has several effects on women's land rights. In the event of a divorce or death of the husband, it is more difficult for a woman to prove her interest in jointly held property if her marriage is not registered. It is also easier for the head of the household to alienate jointly held land without the written permission of his wife because the notary or registrars have no way of identifying the wife as joint owner.

A marriage may be dissolved by divorce based on a statement of one or both spouses. When deciding a marriage dissolution, the court may take measures to protect the interests of under-age children and disabled spouses. At the request of one or both spouses, the court may divide common joint property, in which case the shares of both spouses are generally considered to be equal. The person who applies for property division (almost always the woman) must pay the state fee, although the court can exempt payment, and poor women often pay less than the stipulated amount. The charge must be paid for the commencement of the judicial procedure, however.

Customary law does not encourage divorce, and extended families, village elders, and the village government usually makes an effort to keep the family together. If a divorce occurs, the land and house stays with the husband as they are considered to be his portion of his family's wealth. The wife most often takes the children and returns to her family. It is not traditional and is, in fact, considered shameful for her to take a share of the land, even if she has children.

Exceptions can be made if the couple has children and the husband has left the house (perhaps to marry another woman). In general, the written law is enforced – and women who provide proof of their investment in the house are compensated. The court may also compensate women for their portion of the household land share if their name appeared on the land share certificate. Besides the social stigma of divorce, one barrier to women going to court is the state fee charged for division of property.

In written law, an individual may bequeath all or part of their property to anyone even though they are not heirs at law. Surviving children, spouses, and parents take first in equal shares. A surviving spouse has the right to inherit by will or law a deceased spouse's share of common property and is also able to retain a share of the common joint property.

Customary law provides that all children get a share of the household's wealth, and the daughter's share is given in the form of dowry. It is very

shameful for a family not to fulfill this obligation. Women have the customary right to retain their dowry and to take it with them to their parent's home in case of divorce. With few exceptions, women interviewed valued the custom of dowry and bridewealth even though the gift exchange is a burden to the families. In the event of a husband's death, and if the couple has no children, the woman's in-laws decide her fate. Women interviewed responded that it is traditional to leave the woman with something.

An accurate recording of women's rights to land and farm assets within a household becomes important in at least three contexts: (1) divorce, (2) death of a spouse, and (3) alienation of the property by one spouse (if a wife's interest in the property is not documented, her husband could sell, mortgage, or lease it without her consent).

The 1998 Law on Registration calls for the implementation of new procedures through the gradual opening of registration entities throughout the country under a single state immovable property register (*Gosregister*). This section focuses primarily on the new system as implemented through pilot *rayon*-level registration departments. These new procedures apply both to land shares and to household plots. Married couples are joint owners of property unless otherwise specified by law or contract. Disposal of immovable property held in joint ownership (which includes sale, mortgage, and lease) requires the consent of all the joint owners.

In the authors' view, to ensure that all common shareowners' interests are adequately recorded in the registration system, the State Register could enforce current regulatory provisions so that: (i) common shareowners within a household are listed independently under the 'owner's name' field on the registration card, and (ii) the relative interests of common shareowners within a household are listed independently under the field for 'common or joint ownership'.

In the event that the spouse with the registered interest in the house attempts to transact it, Kyrgyzstan's system relies on notaries to identify and gain the approval of all common owners. Notaries provide important insurance for a woman's rights to her house. Despite this, recent legislation allows for land to be alienated for mortgage without the notaries' involvement. While this may have a positive effect in reducing transaction costs, it could jeopardise the rights of women joint owners within a household.

Members of a peasant farm enterprise may be spouses, children, or other people who help to run the farm, which consists of land owned by the members and any land they lease in. Any person of legal age may be a founder or head of a peasant farm enterprise and, unless otherwise specified, all members hold assets in common joint ownership.



Farm operations are based on a charter (if registered as a legal enterprise) and an agreement defining the procedure of formation and division of common joint property. To register as a legal entity, a peasant farm must submit the charter and/or 'founding documents'. Either one of these will contain information on farm members, including the names and contributions of members within households.

At the Issyk-kul Oblast Ministry of Justice in Karakol, the registration process appeared to follow legislative guidelines for registration of peasant farms, but none of the 10 peasant farms registered thus far was founded or headed by a woman. At the Ak-su Rayon Bureau of Statistics (in Issyk-Kul Oblast), 745 peasant farms were registered, of which no more than 15 were registered in the names of women. An institution that affects women's access to land, both according to law and in practice, is the village government, headed by an appointee of the head of the rayon state administration. Rural women confirmed that there is no gender preference specified in legislation for the position of the village government head, but none of the heads of village government interviewed or encountered during field research was female.

In the Court of Elders (*Ak sakal sotu*), established for each village government, as accorded by a Presidential decree, all members interviewed during field research were retired and male. Of all women interviewed, few, if any, considered the Court of Elders as a body that is "friendly" to women. Likewise, in Jalal-Abad and Issyk-Kul Oblasts, the post of Village Elder was neither a gender- nor an age-specific one but, in practice, no female village elders were encountered during the field research.

The Maila Committee, akin to a neighborhood or block-level organisation, encountered mainly in Uzbek villages, was perceived by some women as very important in the everyday lives of village residents, while others claimed it was less important. The women's associations appear to be state-supported organisations, although they identify themselves as NGOs. Members of the Women's Association, in this instance, were generally the wives of the heads of village governments and this appeared to be the main factor in their becoming members. It is common for the extended family to be involved in divorce and inheritance cases, and also in disputes over land and property. Within the extended family, the husband's mother is a powerful person.

Religious institutions clearly have a role (often through the *mullah* among the Muslims) in sanctioning and addressing problems of village residents. Although women are not allowed in mosques, separate mosques and *madressahs* (religious schools) were seen functioning for women.

## Conclusion

Despite legislation regulating the rights and freedoms of citizens, rural citizens, especially women, are not availing of their rights because of the lack of information. A lack of current information also impedes the ability of institutional actors, such as village governments and *rayon* courts, to respond adequately to issues involving women's rights (including rights to land) and provides opportunities for rural officials to violate the rights of unknowing citizens.

The research offered these conclusions:

- Access to credit, inexpensive inputs, and training is essential for women.
- While in many cases customary law supports women, it also renders them vulnerable and forces them to face serious violations of their individual rights. Women are marginalised and impoverished by the implementation of customary law in practice.
- Changes in customary law and its implementation will only occur when women no longer accept a particular custom and organise themselves to bring about change.
- Women interviewed did not want to disregard all customary law in favour of written law, nor did they want in all cases to exercise their individual rights at the expense of the household unit.







# **Patterns and trends of women's participation in land markets in Uganda**

**Abby Sebina-Zziwa, Richard Kibombo  
Herbert Kamussime**

## **Summary**

This paper discusses the trends and patterns of women's involvement in formal land markets, the reasons for their involvement, and briefly highlights the extent to which there are women as co-owners of family land. The authors tackle the contentious issue of land rights, contentious because it cuts across culture, politics, and economics. Issues concerning land and land tenure in Africa are not just related to factors of material gain but also rotate around power, wealth, and meaning. The traditional African way of relating to land is through membership in the clan, for example, as a network of an ethnic group. Here, the notion of land as a form of wealth was a non-issue as all the members of the group had usufruct. The commodification of land, which was to gain momentum, was introduced in the continent only after contact with Western cultures. Land now began to acquire market value for several factors such as accessibility and/or location, productivity, and the existence of modern amenities such as electricity, water, and other valued infrastructure.

In the process of commodification, women's interest in land remained on the periphery and a misconception developed that women had no interest in acquiring land. This misrepresentation is based on the belief that most women have access to land through marriage. Studies, however, indicate that women are fairly insecure in marital arrangements where they find themselves disenfranchised whenever there is marital conflict. The behaviour of husbands and the use of family resources are also causes for the woman's increasing desire to acquire personal land.

Although indigenous African traditions accord women rights over land at their marital place, the introduction of the Western perception of landownership

has generated three-dimensional operative principles in land matters. These are the right to access, right to use, and the right to control. In other words, there has been a transformation of land rights from usufruct to control for males while the same rights for females appear to have been frozen as user rights. Currently, women and some men of the younger age group are accorded access – but not control – and use of land. This lack of control is a source of controversy in Uganda today, and the trends in the region show that this extends to many countries in Africa.

Nevertheless, a small proportion of women has always participated in land exchanges, although informally. The Western definition of property rights which ascribe things – in this case, land – to be meaningless without the right of an individual or group to exclude others, forces women's interest in land to change from rights of access and use to that of the right of control. The control of land enables an individual to earn income by making the land productive. Women, whose major activity is to make the family land productive, are increasingly becoming appreciative of the market value of this commodity.

In Uganda, a new land law came about in 1998, following heated debates over access, use, and control of land. Some of the key aspects of this new law were the co-ownership of family land by the two main people constituting a family.

Since the introduction of titling in Uganda in 1900, a few women in Buganda (Central Uganda) have been granted individual titles, which they disposed of at their will and in the manner they wished. In the early 1920s, inheritance practices, which tended to overlook the rights and interests of the girl-child in their father's land, sparked off debates in local newspapers. In 1952, Southall, one of the leading anthropologists of the time, noted that quite a few women directly inherited land from their parents. This early involvement in acquiring land titles enabled women to participate in land transactions.

Various studies over in the last 15 years indicate a small but steadily rising trend of individual women's land ownership. In 1988/89, according to Friends of the Don East United Nations Children's Fund (FODE/UNICEF), 7% of women landowners in the districts of Kabale, Mbale, Mbarara, and Lira acquired their land through titling. By 1995, 20% of women landowners constituting 17% of the total number of landowners in Mpigi, Lira, Mbale, and Kabarole acquired land through titling. Other studies too show an increasing trend in ownership of land by women.

Reasons for women wanting to own land included the right to bequeath it without restrictions, security in case of divorce, and the desire for financial independence. That the insecurity of marriage is the main reason for the need to own land confirms that women are dissatisfied with the access-only status quo.



The Land Act Monitoring Exercise found that the number of women applicants for titles in Mbarara district increased progressively from 3 to 5% from 1996 through 1999. Ongoing study of the prevalence of joint titling in Mukono district with a sample of 5 out of 500 cadastral blocks to produce composite characteristics of urban, rural, and peri-urban areas showed that out of 1,758 titles, 1158 (66%) were held by men, 424 (24%) by individual women, and 176 (10%) were joint holders including a woman. This puts the total of titles held by women at 600 (34%).

There are various reasons for the participation of women in land markets. One study, identified no less than four different ways in which women get involved in land matters that translate into formal land markets. These include: inheritance from father to daughter, inheritance from mother to daughter, or inheritance from aunt to niece, and purchase of land from relatives (regardless of gender), from a woman or a man. Apart from land inheritance, the reason cited most often for women's ownership of land is 'security of livelihood', which simply means, something to fall back to in case a marriage fails.

## **Conclusion**

There are indications that the number of female-headed households is steadily increasing. Given both women and men's scepticism over the permanency of marriage, this number is expected to rise further. The changing gender roles within the family and the increasing number of educated and employed women also indicate that more and more women will be demanding control of land for themselves and for their children. They will also be engaging more in formal land markets. Finally, with regard to credit, micro finance institutions (MFIs) have indicated that women are more disciplined in repayment of loans. Their involvement in land markets enables them to access credit with greater credibility and secure collateral.





# **Social norms and the educational needs of women in Central Asia**

Nuria R. Ismagilova

## **Summary**

This paper examines the generally restrictive social norms for women in Central Asia and shows how they pose problems for women seeking participation in the public sphere of governance. According to a survey that looks at the violation of the rights of women, a majority of women do not study because they cannot leave home; there is no school or university nearby; there is not enough money or time for education; and because women do not find education interesting or compelling. Girls and women who start their higher education are often unable to complete their studies, often because of marriage and opposition from the husband and family. Further, the least educated women face the highest incidence of various forms of violence, with 96% of women with no high or primary education experiencing physical violence followed by psychological violence (99%), and even sexual violence (46%).

The paper argues that because women are less literate than men, they are marginalised in the public sphere. Although there are non-formal educational programmes available, household duties and a lack of awareness about such programmes prevent women's greater participation. The number of girls and women attending school and special development programmes is often less than half that of boys and men. In many regions, girls and women must travel with chaperones or risk violating social norms. Sexual harassment of girls and women travelling independently reinforces such gender norms. Distance and the fears associated with it are issues of greatest concern.

The paper points out that educational costs also include both education fees and costs resulting from the loss of the child's labour. Additional labour

provided by the child, especially a female child, is missed at home and contributes directly to low female student enrollment. Families will support the education of girls if the education is affordable, there are no bribes for education, and if books and stationery are subsidised, with lower admission fees, distribution of food (breakfast and lunch) in schools, and the proximity of educational institutions.

In the context of the new (market) economy, many more parents seek future security and independence for their children. Families may educate their daughters, but rarely is a daughter educated in preference over her brother. Many families' reluctance to educate their girls has to do with allowing girls to venture into public spaces where they may encounter boys who are not their relatives. Girls can gain a bad reputation as a result or education can encourage daughters to reject their parents' choice of a (possibly illiterate) relative for a husband. Many believe that girls who go to school are more likely to become pregnant before marriage. In some instances, especially in rural areas, children themselves prefer work and earning a livelihood to studying. Additionally, the resistance to educating girls and young women is due to patrilocal customs that place the daughter in the care of the husband's family after marriage. Thus, parents regard female education as investing in someone else's family.

The fear of girls and parents of abuse and sexual harassment by male teachers and students is another factor, especially since educational institutions generally do not have any or adequate responses to this problem. In the event of teachers or staff abusing students, communities are often unable to take action against offenders. Apart from the issue of sexual harassment, the role of wife and mother is so inflexible that women who fall outside this category are ostracised by individuals and discriminated against. The lack of female teachers in rural areas also keeps girls away.

In many Central Asian societies, women have little or no access to the institutions of power. The attempt to access such places of power may result in women being ostracised by society. Widespread lawlessness and corruption, fear of humiliation, intimidation, and insults by government officials and government structures significantly affect women's participation in government elections. In rural areas, traditional ideas about women's roles and the scepticism and disdain of local officials limit women's involvement in political activities and governance.

Although educational programmes are important, cultural traditions should also be taken into account when looking at the participation rates of women in these programmes. Ways must be found to overcome cultural obstacles such as securing the approval of community (usually male) leaders (for non-formal courses), creating an educational environment sensitive to cultural norms, and employing female staff as teachers and trainers.





While all Central Asian states formally declare the equality of men and women, social and personal relationships pose obstacles to the realisation of educational opportunities for women. Individual and personal actions are crucial in the cause of bettering women's rights as ways can be found to subvert outdated obstacles to women's aspirations for education even though such actions are often unnoticed or unpublicised.

## Conclusion

According to the author, illiteracy reduction programmes raise awareness and provide psychological support to both men and women, together and separately, to navigate the difficult path of change. As has often been pointed out: *"Women and men should sit at a round table to discuss their rights. Unless men are included, these things will not be understood..."*

The author believes that education is a key factor in enhancing women's ability to support themselves during economic hardships as well as in allowing them to contribute positively to the community. She believes that women should participate actively in the assessment, planning, and implementation of educational programmes that must be culturally appropriate and in accordance with women's needs. Further, educational programmes for women must take into account women's future needs and contribute to the process of social change. Schooling should be adapted to girls' lives to allow them equal access to educational opportunities. Pregnancy and marriage should not be regarded as insurmountable obstacles to education.

Her specific recommendations are as follow.

- Specially designed courses responsive to women's needs should be available to those women who have been unable to finish their education. Literacy should be a high priority.
- In designing training programmes for women, existing skills as well as employment opportunities should be studied.
- Ongoing evaluation of educational programmes should be carried out in close co-operation with women.
- Counselling including career guidance should be made available to all women in both rural and urban areas. Women should be actively informed of the availability of such resources through active outreach programmes.
- Non-formal education programmes are particularly important for women where access to formal education is limited or non-existent. Programmes should be aimed at promoting women's economic independence and teaching skills that are related to small business and marketing.
- Non-formal education programmes should provide a document (note, paper, or certificate) verifying the course taken and perhaps the number of hours attended.
- Governments and NGOs should set up a special fund to identify the educational opportunities available to women.





# 6

## Culture and Indigenous Knowledge





# **Gender roles in Colombian mountain areas**

Angela Castellanos

## **Summary**

This paper focuses on rural and indigenous women living in the Colombian highlands and their relationship with the environment, based on secondary research on the Andean culture, particularly the Inga nation culture and Tayrona descendants' nation culture. Although there has been in the past four decades a sharp decline in women's total fertility as well as a decrease in mortality rate, the size and structure of Colombian families remain the same. Women continue to take care of the cooking, washing, housekeeping and fetching water and fuel, and also birth, raising children, and maintaining family health.

Colombian women made significant gains in literacy in the 1990s, with an illiteracy rate of 4% and functional illiteracy of 8%, with the highest female illiteracy prevalent in the coastal areas and southern mountains. The barriers to women's participation in politics began eroding in 1954 with Colombian women gaining the right to vote. A 1998 quota requires 30% of senior executive and judicial positions to be reserved for women. In rural areas, women's organisations are involved in planning and consultative committees and extend to regional and national forums, but the implementation of policies has been affected by the sharpening of the armed conflict in which grassroots' communities resisting participation in the conflict are attacked.

There has been an increased participation of women in the economy over the past several decades (52% for urban women, 38% for rural women) with the employment of rural women at 36% in services, 27% in commerce, and 23% in agriculture. Women are hired as temporary workers in the labour-intensive task of weeding, harvesting, and threshing, while those with permanent jobs



work in agri-industries. Rural women also work their own plots and attend to their animals helped by their children. These are, however, regarded as domestic activities and do not count in government statistics and are not recognised as productive. The invisibility of rural women's participation also extends to activities such as fishing, mining, and handcrafting, as well as reproductive activities.

Most rural women are not covered by the Colombian social security system (health and retirement) because of their low involvement in stable, remunerative activities. Health care services in rural areas are deficient, particularly in remote regions. Recent surveys show that the mortality rate among rural women is a result of insufficient nourishment and low quality of life. Food security among Colombian peasants is increasingly harder, due to limited access and control, mainly of good land. Although both Colombian men and women inherit land, most rural landowners are men.

Rural poverty has been increasing since 1993, when the government opened its markets to agricultural commodity importation. In 1998, one-third of the 12 million rural populations was living in misery, the incidence of poverty being highest among women-headed households. The Colombian armed conflict has displaced about 1,500,000 rural people, mostly women and children. Women-headed households have increased due to the deaths of men and their enrollment in illegal armed groups. The conflict and the agricultural crisis have hit women hardest as they bear the greater burden of feeding their children and are also used as the spoils of war by groups in conflict.

The culture of the Andean group living in the highest areas of the Andean Mountains observes a conservative family structure based on patriarchal values. Women are in charge of child raising and carry out all the domestic activities, whereas men have economic control and make decisions. Women must remain virgins until marriage or risk being abandoned; unmarried mothers suffer social discrimination and frequently are bereft of the support of their child's father. They do not benefit from education, as they must become workers to provide incomes to feed their children.

Where small landholdings for subsistence foodstuff production is the norm for the peasantry, land tenure is important in determining women's active role in household plot activities and also in their participation in agricultural commodities' marketing. The sexual division of labour in agricultural production changes with the household unit losing access to its subsistence means. As Andean women are increasingly drawn into agricultural activities, they gain access to socialisation and recreation spaces traditionally reserved for men. Women may drink beer along with men in market places, but their participation in decision-making spaces remains limited.





Within the Inga nation, located 2,000 meters above sea level in the southern region of the Colombian Andean Mountains, women have an active participation in community decision-making positions. In fact, some women have been elected as *Gobernadoras de Cabildo*, the highest civil authority of the Inga nation. Traditionally, the Inga people live in houses surrounded by plots called *chagras*. Some Inga families still use their *chagras* to cultivate diverse products as it has been done traditionally, while others use it to cultivate a single crop and to raise livestock. The Inga women contribute to agricultural activities working in the *chagras* and taking care of domestic animals.

The Inga nation has preserved a medical tradition in which therapeutics are based on the use of plants. Hispanic medical principles and other indigenous medical knowledge have been incorporated into their medicine. They use plants from their own region as well as from other regions of Colombia, mainly from the Amazonian forest. Their shamans, called *Taitas*, are men with the knowledge of how to use the *Ayahuasca* plant. This is a hallucinogenic plant, which among the Ingas is called *Yagé*, and it is considered a sacred plant of power and knowledge.

Inga women are the traditional physicians of their community, specialised as midwives *tocadoras*, and *yerbateras*. Midwives assist women before, during, and after childbirth, using plants and their hands in their therapeutic assistance. The *tocadoras* or touchers see bone fractures and internal medicine (lesions of organs). They use their hands to heal. The *yerbateras* or grass-healers treat stomach illness, children's diseases, and reproductive disorders. They have a profound knowledge of medicinal plants and sometimes use bones or nails of animals as medicines.

Midwives and healers get their learning from other women, so any Inga woman can become a midwife and healer. Most of the women physicians are over 70 years of age and are not remunerated for their work. They live just as the other Inga women, working on the home plot, raising their children, and taking charge of domestic activities. Some Inga women produce woven articles as *sayos* or ponchos and *chumbes* or bands, traditional items produced for the community or sold to tourists.

Among the communities less influenced by Catholicism, household activities are equitably shared between men and women, whereas in the Catholic indigenous families, women are in charge of all the reproductive and domestic tasks. In addition, women act as midwives, whereas shamans, called *Mamos*, are men who have knowledge about the use of medicinal plants, although the wives of shamans have partial access to such knowledge. In addition to the traditional indigenous medicine, the nations of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta also have access to the Colombian health system.

Most of Colombia's high barren plains are located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and in the southwest portion of the Andean mountains. Endowed with ecosystems rich in flora and fauna, such as the Andean Forest and the high barren plains, this has been declared a Biosphere World Reserve.

The ecosystem is under the threat of agricultural expansion. The lack of opportunities and land have made the colonists migrate from lowlands to highlands looking for uncultivated and unowned land. The colonists clear forest to carry out extensive livestock and mono-crop production, causing damage to biodiversity, fresh water, and soils, and harming the poor peasants and indigenous mountain people who depend on land, water, and forest for subsistence and income. Deforestation affects land productivity and forest degradation generates erosion and avalanches. The lack of fuelwood pushes women to purchase gas stoves and generally increases the dependence of indigenous and peasant women of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on the market economy.

The unsustainable practices of the colonists, such as fires, non-native crop species, and inadequate use of agri-chemicals, have produced an adverse impact on the high barren plains' ecosystems and on its hydraulic potential. As a result, the fourth richest country in terms of hydropower resources worldwide is facing a scarcity of fresh water, affecting biodiversity, and vast areas of the Colombian Andean region with agricultural potential have been abandoned. Former small and medium peasant farmers have migrated to the cities; others have joined the armed groups in conflict, whereas other poor peasants are still cultivating exhausted soils and destroying natural resources. Rural poverty has driven some peasants of the southern Andean Mountains into cultivating illegal crops, particularly poppy crops, causing further deforestation and erosion. To eradicate these illegal crops, the Colombian government sprays chemical herbicides from airplanes, with an adverse impact on foodstuff crops, and human health.

The indigenous and mixed parentage inhabitants of the high plateau and of the high barren plains follow traditional values and depend on agriculture and livestock. Mostly made up of poor peasants and indigenous peoples confined to lands above 2,500 metres, their isolation has contributed to indigenous natural resource management. Some common characteristics among indigenous nations living in high mountains include the fact that territories are collective property; mountains are not only their habitat but also have a spiritual value. Nature is not at the service of human vanities, but human beings depend on nature and must protect it. Consequently, indigenous nations have traditionally observed respect for water sources and animals and have harmonised their agricultural activities with nature.

Within indigenous nations of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, nature is the mother of everything, and women represent the mother. In a culture that sees



conservation as a mission, both men and women share natural resource management. For example, they do not cultivate the land surrounding water sources and use rainwater to irrigate crops. Water for cooking and washing is provided from deep pools and streams and is stored in their households. Men bring it and women control its use.

This good practice of water resource management has its roots in their cosmogony. As an indigenous leader from the Kogui nation explains,

*“Sea was the mother. Mother was river, lake, stream, and sea. Mother was not people, nor a thing. Mother was spirit of unborn; it was thinking and memory. That is why land is present in water sources, that is why it is forbidden to cultivate in their surroundings. We produce subsistence, we belong to land, we have to deliver in exchange for what it give us.”*

But among the inhabitants of the high plateaus, traditional sustainable agricultural practices have almost disappeared, since many of them have adopted Green Revolution technologies and practices such as mono-crops, improper use of agri-chemicals, and forest clearing practices.

Women still contribute to biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources by cultivating native medicinal plants along with food crops on their household plots, which contribute to flora biodiversity conservation. As gendered division of labour allocates women the responsibility to collect fuel and store fresh water for household activities, there is a growing concern among women that the water sources and forests are threatened. In fact, the main factors that threaten mountain natural resources are out of women’s control: mega-projects (petrol exploitations, dams, non-ecological tourism); industrial illegal crops (coca and poppy crops); and illegal armed group activity. In turn these contaminate soils and water sources as a result of oil pipelines explosions and push people to cultivate illegal crops which causes deforestation and erosion.

Although men and women are both sources of knowledge on sustainable resource management practices, women are practically not consulted by the environmental decision-making agents, even though there is a mandate regarding that from the Ministry of Environment. When women do contribute to natural resource planning, it is often at the local level. This limited participation in decision-making means that women’s knowledge and needs are often ignored in policies and plans that affect them.

## **Conclusion**

Colombian mountain women contribute to the workforce reproduction, culture preservation, local community development, and to sustainable natural resource management. Due to rising poverty in highland areas,

women have increased their participation in agriculture and service activities and have turned traditional handicraft activities into a remunerative activity. Yet such changes have exacerbated women's work burden but not improved their position and condition within rural society or their political participation.

Rural women's contribution is not properly recognised, as most of their activities do not have monetary or commercial value. Within indigenous nations though, women's roles are better appreciated as they are linked to their cosmogonies and national survival as well as to aboriginal ancestral knowledge. Women of mixed parentage living in high plateau regions and high barren plains are limited by Andean cultural codes that place them in inequitable positions within their communities, particularly in terms of decision-making. Mountain women may have access to natural resources, but their control over them is limited due to cultural factors, government projects, the influence of illegal armed groups, and poverty.

Despite the loss of sustainable practices with regard to natural resources, Colombian mountain women have an important role to play in natural resource and biodiversity conservation. Unfortunately, this is neglected. Seven years after the Beijing Summit, the environmental commitments have not been implemented fully in Colombia, particularly the removal of obstacles to women's full and equal participation in sustainable development with equal access to and control over resources and the integration of rural women's traditional knowledge and practices into environmental management programmes.





# **The cradle of life: symbolism of Naxi's Sudu**

Xi Yuhua

## **Summary**

The Naxi people of Yunnan in south-western China that follow the Dongba religion worship a life god known as 'Sudu'. In the Naxi language, 'Su' means vitality, and 'du' refers to the bamboo basket in which the 'Su god' is believed to reside. The Naxi believe that vitality is a necessary precondition for the continuity of mankind and history. According to early researchers on the Dongba religion, Su is a family god or life god who brought life, vitality, rejuvenation, and prosperity to the family.

The German scholar Nooriman wrote that the Su god of the Naxi has primary female characteristics: the round bamboo basket is a symbol of the female body. The arrows kept in the basket, however, represent male characteristics. Thus, the Sudu includes both sexes. The Sudu is a round bamboo basket similar to the belly of the female body with an upper part that is open to the outside. Often, it is hung up on the main pillar and placed on the shrine of the family's ancestors. Within the bamboo basket are objects that symbolise the outside world such as arrows, stones, a pagoda, a ladder, and a small bridge, among others. The sacred life that takes shape within the bamboo basket enters a mother's body and allows her to give birth to children. It happens that the correct Chinese translation of Sudu is 'Cradle of Life'.

Fifty years ago, the Sudu played a very important role in Naxi life. The god was associated with vitality of life, perpetuation and protection of the family, peace, and happiness. Each family had a Sudu whom they worshipped during festivals and religious rituals to protect them and to ward off evil. There were two types of rituals in the worship of the Su god.

An important ritual called 'Suku' ('ku' means 'to invite vitality to the family') was held during a wedding ceremony. 'Suku' referred to the belief that the newly married bride would bring life and vitality to the bridegroom's family. Another belief had it that, after getting married, the couple would give birth to children and carry the family forward. The head of the family brings down the Sudu from the pillar, cleans the basket, and arranges it with new things. He then offers wine, tea, butter, animal parts soaked in salt, rice, and watermelon.

In Lijiang, Ludian County, Xinzhu village, it is the Dongba priest who conducts the ceremony. The Su god of the man's family is entrusted to protect the newly married couple, and the vitality of the bride is tied to the god of the husband's family. She can now worship the Su god and participate in social activities as a member of her husband's family. The marriage ceremony is also believed to bring major changes to the married couple: the marriage has taken place before the god and, hence, they will be husband and wife forever. They promise to live together and cannot have extra-marital relations. Their only task and responsibility is to give birth to their offspring.

The Dongba priest also smears butter oil (butter, made of mother's milk, symbolises nourishment, vitality, and strength) on the belongings of the family such as cupboards, doors, rooms, and the 'sheng' (used for measuring rice) to propitiate the Su god and to bring prosperity to the family. This ritual ensures that the god's sphere is not only limited to protecting the vitality of human life but also the things used by men and women.

During the wedding, another ceremony called 'Suke' is also performed that has a meaning opposite to the welcome ceremony dedicated to Su. 'Ke' means separation and refers to vitality separate from the bride's mother's family. The ritual ensures that when a daughter moves to her husband's family, she does not take away all the vitality from her natal family to her new marital home. Besides the wedding ceremony, some people hold the 'Suke' ceremony every five or six years to strengthen family life and vitality. The only difference is that the butter is not applied on the forehead of the newly married couple, but on family members and things.

There is another ceremony called 'Sumigong', which means, 'to hand over'. Family members are 'handed over' to Su who is entrusted with the task of protecting them. Every year, after the ceremony of the god is over, family members organise the Sumigong ceremony (conducted by the Dongba) so that life and vitality of family members are not detained at the place of worship. The offspring also holds this ceremony to ensure that, on returning from a funeral, the family's vitality does not depart with the dead person. The Sumigong ceremony is also held after three days of a child's birth. Butter is applied on the head of the newborn. Thus, the Su god is entrusted with the task of protecting the baby. The Dongba also puts butter on the forehead of the parents to enhance life and vitality.





In Ludian County, Xinzhu village, the origin of the Su god is traced back to the ceremony of worshipping the 'heaven god'. Each year during the ceremony, every family carries two bamboo baskets full of rice to worship the heaven god. When a child reaches the age of 12 or 13, another bamboo basket is prepared on his behalf; the child is now grown up and can participate in the ceremony of worshipping the heaven god. After the child becomes an adult, the bamboo basket that had been prepared for him earlier becomes his. When the owner of this basket enters his new house, the Dongba will worship the Su god, adding things such as stone, pagoda, ladder, rice, bridge, flags, and rope. This new bamboo basket will have to be taken from the ancestral shrine and placed in the shrine of the new house. The Sudu will take care of the children and grandchildren, and this 'cradle of life' will exist forever in the man's family and bring it life and vitality.

The basic symbolic equation is Female=Body=Container. The Naxi believe life comes out of the female belly, so the female body is the container of life. In the Naxi language 'big' is often representative of the mother (the female body) – a big pot is called a 'mother pot', a big tree is 'mother tree', and so on; roundness also symbolises the female body (the roundness of the belly that gives birth). Thus, the round Sudu is regarded as the container of life and symbolises the female body. The woman gives birth to children, but this takes place only after male traits enter her body from outside. The woman is not merely a container, but is composed of both male and female characteristics that come together to give birth to life. The man's arrowhead is put into the round bamboo basket to symbolise male qualities entering the female body. Life takes shape in the round belly of the woman, the container. Sudu represents the female, but includes the male.

The symbolic meaning of Sudu can also be understood from the objects contained in the bamboo basket. Things such as a pillar, stone, pagoda, ladder, bridge, flags, arrow, rope, and rice kept in the Sudu symbolise various objects in the universe. The yellow chestnut tree, associated with the god of beauty and regarded as indestructible, is used as a pillar of the Sugod; star-like black jade denoting long life and regulations and customs (that are strong as stone) is used as the worship stone. Green cypress is used to make the pagoda (that symbolises God) and the ladder. The ladder represents the way from earth to heaven. The bridge is made of pinewood and represents the bridge between life and death. Two flags, as bright as the moon and stars, symbolising victory and strength, are also kept. The arrow with the mirror symbolises man's power. These symbolic readings reveal that the Naxi regard the Sudu as a great universe, the mother body that takes the outside world into itself and contains everything.

The German scholar Nooriman pointed out that the Sudu is characterised by both 'basic' and 'variable' qualities. The round shape of the Sudu and its function as a container are its 'basic' characteristics and are associated with

the female body. He wrote that *"the variable characteristics mean that it (the Sudu) is against stagnancy and inclined to change activity and show lots of variety."*

Objects representing vitality, bearing, reproduction, and protection are all related to basic characteristics. But the Sudu also has variable qualities related to its sacred function of increasing the population. During a wedding ceremony, a new arrow is added to the basket to preserve the continuity of the family. If no new arrows are added, the marriage has not taken place, and there will be no offspring. The Sudu symbolises the female body, creator of life; new life comes out of the pregnant body. After being protected and raised by it, when men and women reach marriageable age, the families can be divided into smaller families. During this separation, the son should take the arrow out of the old bamboo basket and put it into the new basket (representing the new female body) to give shape to new life. After the things in the Sudu have been changed, it becomes a container of new things and new life. Life appears in the Sudu, but is also separated from it. Unless separation takes place, there will be no new life. This capacity for separation and change represents its variable characteristic.

## Conclusion

The basic characteristics of the Sudu are those related to bearing and protecting life. The variable characteristics are those of separation and continuity. The two qualities are inseparable from each other. The basic characteristics of stability and preservation represent the primary conditions of life. But without variable characteristics, there is no growth. Variable characteristics are the dynamic conditions of growth and separation that reflect the vitality of the mother's body.

The Characteristics of the Sudu are as follow.

- According to Nooriman's analysis, the Sudu is a whole that cannot be separated and reflects both male and female characteristics (the arrow within the bamboo basket symbolises this).
- The Sudu has primary female characteristics (the round shape and function as a container is equated with the female). It also has the exceptional quality of bearing and conserving life, which are its basic and variable characteristics.
- The Sudu is associated with nourishment and growth. Butter, which is used for worshipping the god, is derived from milk that comes from the mother's body and nourishes life. The worship of the Sudu symbolises the Naxi worship of the mother's body during earlier times. The equation of the female as body=container=world reflects the Naxi belief about life and nature. This reflects a respect for matrilineal society. Finally, the Sudu is the symbol of the female body that the Naxi worshipped as the mother body, as a 'cradle bearing and reproducing life'.





# **Indigenous Asia, knowledge, technology and gender relations' discursive invisibility**

Navjot Altaf

## **Summary**

The author states that women artisans in practising their craft in rural India have not attempted anything new or acted outside cultural history. Historically, they have always worked, however determined by factors of class, caste, gender, race, and economic position in different periods. Women have acted and articulated their point of view from different places and positions within society and culture.

To understand the art of rural women, it is important to note that painting, sculpture, bas-relief, embroidery such as *kantha*, and floor decoration (*rangoli*), among others, are practised by women in their daily lives even as they apply their art on to the surfaces of the walls and floors of their homes. They practise art while celebrating significant events and rituals such as those of birth, puberty, marriage, death, and festivals related to nature. The primary purpose of most of this art has been to beautify and to ask for blessings from the gods for the protection of homes, husbands, and children seen as central to women's existence. Women's artistic activities have been centred on the home, unlike the arts of men. For example, the ritualistic or decorative arts of women are not commercially oriented nor intended to endure, whereas men work as professional painters on such things as the murals of temple walls which are intended to last decades.

In the *Warli* tradition, the paintings of weddings are executed on the inside walls of the kitchen, regarded as the woman's domain. The household god is kept in a loft above, along with the produce from the fields. It is here that the women gather, not only to cook but also to change their clothes and chat with the freedom not felt in any other part of the house. On the one hand, tradition

defines the woman's space (the kitchen/home) and gives her freedom; on the other hand, it restricts and confines her.

In working with *Adivasi* men and women artists, the author's intention has been to re-read the position of the *Adivasi* artist's place in the history of art, and to emphasise the 'discursive invisibility' of women. Her interest is histories and their relationship to the women that narrate them and the conditions and circumstances under which they create art. This account provides a framework for the understanding of the significance of the various positions and stands women have taken from a position of 'difference' to establish and validate their sense of being a woman and a creative being.

The relationship between craft communities and *Adivasis* is fluid and constantly being negotiated. The *Gadba* (*Adivasi*) community has a rich tradition of bell metal sculpture in which training has been through apprenticeship. The art reflects their bonds with tradition and the idioms inherited from the past. The craft community includes ironsmiths and potters; woodcarvers do not necessarily have a continuous link with traditional carvers. In most cases, ironsmiths have attended training programmes sponsored by government organisations/NGOs and handicraft boards to acquire the skills of carving stone and wood. These artists cater to the needs of local communities, state/national cottage emporiums, as well as to independent urban and foreign clientele. They accept commissions to make religious icons, decorative objects, domestic furniture, and doors, among others. The demands of mass production, however, deny them the scope of either remaining true to their inherited artistic legacy or of creatively experimenting in art after being exposed to new and contemporary situations.

It is interesting to note that sponsored training programmes in crafts such as wood, stone, bell metal, terracotta, bamboo, weaving, and jewellery designing have occasionally included women. Despite learning these skills, however, they either remain helpers of male family members or discontinue practising their art altogether. Women are not engaged as paid assistants in local workshops and must, therefore, take on other paying jobs; women in one area have been helping their family's craftsmen throughout, but domestic, financial, and other social responsibilities prevented them from getting the time to make it a specialisation. Women interested in pursuing work independently (after learning the skill) find that artistic activity does not generate immediate funds for household expenses or for investing in raw material. Instead, they are forced to look for a daily wage doing something other than craft and earn less than assistants receive in craft workshops. The research revealed that, given the opportunity, women would like to practise their craft full-time and function as independent artists.

On one of the visits to Mumbai by *Adivasi* artists from Bastar district in 1996, while discussing the obvious absence of women artists from their region and



the changes in their art forms, the author was struck by how commercialisation and the interaction with urban culture have brought about changes in their aesthetic attitudes. While sharing the experiences of the author's earlier projects, especially *Images Re-drawn*, done in cooperation with a contemporary sculptor from Mumbai, the idea of working side by side with Adivasi artists at *Shilpi Gram* was born. *Shilpi Gram* is an institution conceived and built by the Adivasi sculptor Jaidev Baghel and his associates for local artists to interact with one another and with visiting artists and professionals.

The first phase of the project, *Modes of Parallel Practice: Ways of Art-Making*, was developed with four artists working in wood from Bastar, an art historian, and the author, funded by the India Foundation for the Arts. In this workshop environment, Adivasi artists such as Rajkumar, Shantibai, Raituram, and others wished to explore work that did not follow the dictates of the mass production of craft. Shantibai also wanted to work independently, as she had been an assistant to her husband Raitu for 15 years. The author, keen to further her understanding of the representation of the woman's body in the art of this region, looked at references and comparisons from Mayan, African, and Indian primitive art. Her interest was to look at the cultural/historical context in which art is produced. The art historian Bhanumati Narayan's interest was to document this experiment by keeping a journal.

During this period, the assumption that some experiences are more important than others was challenged, and the emphasis was on looking at the diversity of different creative/human experiences (including that of women) in the process of making art. The shared studio made the participants realise how important it is for each of them to define and represent their own language of expression. The project was seen as a journey of growth, exploration, and experimentation.

For Shantibai, aged 43, the project has helped her realise her creative power and to deal with the issue of self-esteem since she has to constantly fight against the system from which she comes. Raituram, her husband, who is a master woodcarver, reacted violently when she joined the project and wished to work independently as an artist as that meant that she would no longer be available to assist him. Shantibai's own interests, desires, and ability as a creative being was neither considered nor recognised by her own family.

*"In case of an emergency there is no one else who is there for me, whereas Raituram comes from a family of many brothers and sisters and has a daughter from his first marriage."*

Despite having assisted Raituram for a long time, Shantibai has not followed him slavishly in her work. She is open to experimentation and to exploring alternative ways of knowing. She is interested in the narrative mode of representation and, specifically, in transforming her life experiences and



interpretations of myth into images. In doing so, she has begun to recognise herself as an individual and an independent artist.

The environment of the workshop had a huge effect on Shantibai who created several innovative watercolour drawings/paintings far removed from repetitive art forms. She was exposed to other artists, including women such as Sona Bai, Teju, Yamuna Devi, Megha Devi (all from Madhuban, Bihar) and others such as Bava Devi and Ganga Devi who are well known in Mithila and in the rest of the country. Catalogues and reproductions of these artists' works have helped Shantibai to realise her own potential and have given her access to diverse ways of creating and imagining.

Shantibai has worked on four pillar sculptures and a number of watercolour works which, in certain cases, she treats as preliminary drawings.

Bhanumati, in describing Shantibhai's work, writes that in her third and fourth sculptural pillars, where her own life is the theme, Sanmati, Shantibai's friend and ally, is given all the emotional charge when she intervenes at the two major junctures of Shantibai's life. In the extensive drawings done for this pillar, Sanmati is shown echoing her pain when Shantibai, aged six, almost drowned, and again when, at 12 years of age, she enters a bad marriage.

The second pillar is about Madia life as seen by Shantibai while roaming the *tokapal* forests with her grandfather. This pillar works in four vertical panels. Two of these describe the adventures of lovers in the forest, their encounter with a tiger, and their escape. The stories – of how a tiger attacked the couple came from her grandmother.

Shantibai is skilful with the chisel and has some command of relief work in wood. This is the first time that she is working out a vocabulary of her own. The market demand is for products that are stereotypical and limited. The narrative mode, towards which she is moving, is demanding, not just in the working forms and their relationships, but also in the organisation of narrative events on the face of the pillar.

Shantibai says: *"I have tried to tell stories related to my life experiences and myths I know. While helping Raituram it was not so. The scale of my work and access to paper and colours has helped me explore many possibilities. The period spent with all the artists like Rajkumar, Kabi, Ghessu and you working in the project is very important. I feel good..."*

*Reproductions of other artists' works, of Madhubani women artists, and of Warli art are very interesting. Also, knowing about the dual attitude that exists towards women – where they are seen as infinitely creative as well as destructive – is extremely relevant. In Kondagaon, we have experienced a*





*similar witch-hunt practice recently...I would like to see works of art outside Bastar as well. It helps us think."*

Sasha Altaf, another participating artist, says: *"It is the critical use of the myth rather than its celebration that I have been concerned with...I try to imbue my sculpture with iconic power as they interrogate the existing power structure, I revert the notion of 'rootedness in the past' using traditional sources, motifs, materials and ideas towards non-traditional contemporary ends..."*

*I formally pit my work against the questions of sexuality and violence, where the body does not remain the traditional site for the exercise of power, but is positioned as an instrument of resistance."*

## **Conclusion**

The author reminds us that Kondagaon, where the work is taking place, is no longer cut off from outside influences – business communities from outside, government officials, and other professionals from so-called 'civilised' cultures constitute the dominant class here. Educated locals, too, prefer to align themselves with this class. In the process, the poor (including the craft person/artist) are further marginalised and exploited, particularly women.

On the issue of identity, she says, *"Identity is not singular but multiple – one belongs to a particular tribe, caste, class, religion, generation, as well as gender. Adivasis are dealing with the identity crisis caused by the insensitive categorisations of 'Adivasi/non-Adivasi' by the government."*

She warns us of the danger that Adivasis will lose themselves in an amorphous pluralistic mass, get relegated to the lowest levels of society, and lose their identity in an industrialised and developed world. Development schemes are often implemented without the consent of the inhabitants, leaving the Adivasi little or no voice in mainstream decision-making processes. There is also little realisation that the lives of Adivasis/non-Adivasis (from the same economic background) revolve equally around cultivation, waiting for the monsoons, collecting wood and produce from the forest, birth, death, weddings, festival rituals, finding jobs, and so on. As such, there is large-scale absorption of Adivasi and non-Adivasi customs and rituals by one another and clear-cut distinctions between the two cannot be made.





# True stories of Dangi innovations from South Gujarat, India

Tisha Srivastav

## Summary

The two pieces below are articles written by the author to convey to an urban audience that thinks, by and large, that villagers are “clueless suffering souls who deserve to suffer.” This ‘Innovations Special’ was a column in a mainline daily website to counter misinformed urbanites in a suitable language.

Sitaben<sup>1</sup> is a straightforward 45-year-old working woman of the Dangi tribe in Southern Gujarat in hilly Western India who grew up in the jungles that have become her workplace. She is a *veigdh* (herbal healer) who runs her household by preparing medicines, unassumingly, much like the kindred landscape. In fact, the entire hilly Dangi area looks picturesquely innovative itself. Forests and farmland both play hide-and-seek with the passerby as this feels like a large forest, but has no undergrowth. This is because the innovative Dangis can farm on any incline, go up a hillock, go down a river bed, around a tree that they will not chop with the same crop result. Talk about working around nature. They produce a kind of rice that they turn into *rotis* (baked bread in rolls) as well.

Most Dangi people have never heard of fertilisers, pesticides, crime, allopathy or disease despite the fact that the nearest primary health centre is a 25 kilometres away at the capital township Ahwa. Months having gone by since it was blessed with a doctor’s presence. With such a history and geography, it is no wonder that the local herbalist is active, well prepared, and knowledgeable about in the -house chemist ‘*ki dukaan*’ (shop) in the jungle.

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<sup>1</sup> Sitaben. (Ben in Gujarati means ‘sister’)

Sitaben learned the herbal treatments from her brothers when she was a child. The illnesses she has treated include too much blood flow during menstruation, ear or stomach ache, fever, asthma, diarrhoea, vomiting, coughs, gas trouble, jaundice, urinary pain, burns, and indigestion, well, almost anything. She is your general practitioner and your super specialist. No unnecessary fleece-all tests here. She usually makes the concoction in front of you and here is an example of the power of good quality earth that is still found here. She crushes the bark of the *Kalam* (no adequate corollary in English) tree and mixes it with the rich clay-like soil and this becomes a plaster for humans as well as animals with a fracture. She uses the *gal* fruit, which she crushes and throws in the pond to kill the fish without adversely contaminating it for human consumption.

Most of the cures have their own science of timing and additives, which she explains like a good doctor to her patient. These additives are not artificial but whatever forms a part of the regular diet. Sometimes it could be an egg with the medicine for indigestion or even a boiled bark or seasonal vegetable. Sometimes they can be as quaint as five holes made in the *Chilari* stick with a cotton thread passing through it. And then tying your ear with it. Believe it or not, it cures a headache. This system of medicine is local, creative, effective and, most of all, available in an emergency for these far-flung people. That explains Sitaben's popularity as a respected *veidh*.

An irreplaceable asset, this native herbalist does her own R&D, runs her own apothecary from home and without being unduly conscious of it, is keeping alive a vibrant tradition. And they still say women in backward India do not get to use their mind'.

## Conclusion

*The piece above was a part of a series entitled the 'Innovations Special'; the conclusion of the Innovation Special follows.*

'The best of minds work away in the worst of times, seeking to change thousands of lives in between, even when no one comes forward to help. Self-help is a forgotten art. They are our points to remember. Native genius – Inventive spirit – Caring professionals, all a euphemism for innovators we ought to be proud of.

Entry number 2: This is a story of a biodiversity contest held in a hilly school (The same Dangi region) where most of the kids are failing a class or two. It taps their knowledge and makes them proud of themselves instead of giving them an inferiority complex. One of them is a young girl..

*Padhoge likhoge banoge nawab, nahin to banogey kharab.*

(A saying in Hindi, which means, "If you'll study you'll become a big learned man, otherwise you'll become useless and a flunkee.")



Let me introduce you to two flunkees. Ranjitbhai Bhambhai Bhoje is one of them. A lad, all of 15, stuck in a class lower than where he should have been. Now in this co-ed village class, also meet Manishaben Sivarambhai Vadvi, 13 years old, also above age for her batch.

They are one among the 28 present on the day at the Panchayat Primary School at Mahal in Ahwa District where a biodiversity contest is in progress. What does that mean, you ask? How many species grow here, and of what type, a raincheck of a kind to openly share the importance of conserving.

Ahwa is the district headquarters near where we are. It is the very pretty and very backward (in official terminology, and in terms of access to amenities) capital of the hilly tribal Dangi area of Southern Gujarat.

It is an area that has the feel of a large forest with no undergrowth. Its people can farm on any incline, grow a kind of rice that they make into roti (baked bread) as well and they have never known fertilisers, pesticides, and crime, among many other things.

Here the people are a unique reflection of the unpolluted environment, although they have to steal electricity (nobody has come to give them the infrastructure in years) and treat themselves since the primary health centre is a rough, tumbling 25 kilometres away at Ahwa. It takes over an hour by the patchy, ghat-like (ravine-like) driving route to get there. There too, it is just a building, months having gone by since it was blessed with a doctor's presence. So that is the background of the motley group at the school.

This is a biodiversity contest as it happens. Usually, the organisers of this contest, Sristi (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions, an Ahmedabad-based NGO) gives the kids a week to spend with grandparents and local healers and collect specimens, discuss the tales around them, draw and map it out, write out all its healing properties, a superb technique for intergenerational transfer of learning while fostering inquisitiveness. It is a rewarding experience for participants when a homework lesson means you got to play, draw, listen to stories, trek, share, go on a treasure hunt, and play doctor. Much less tedious than performing in a biology lab, and the results show.

It is the two flunkies introduced in the beginning who have topped the class. In a little over two hours, Ranjitbhai lists 108 without repeating any. Manishaben lists 102 without repeating the same. Almost all of them who carry the species 'specimen have pulled off a leaf, never the whole plant insensitively. These are basics that are taught senior forestry students that no one ever told these kids about. And this is one small primary school hamlet in so called backward Gujarat – I call it unharnessed Gujarat.

Let's look at some of the qualities of the answers in the worst-off performances. Manishaben shares how she uses *Mahua* for oil, another herb for small cuts, another kind of green leafy saag for stomach pain. When asked if she knows what she wants to be when she grows up, she eagerly says, 'nurse'. She equally eagerly talks about how her parents take her along on trips to the jungle, where they share their learning in a useful proactive way. She likes school, but the teachers are trying to teach children inanities in English.

When Ranjitbhai is asked what he'll do with the prize money, he says, very shyly but surely, that he will buy notebooks. He says how, when he had a stomach ailment, his parents cured him by giving him a herb application. Since then, his curiosity persisted. He also shares openly on how long what will take to heal. Almost none of them have ever seen allopathic medicine. They have also never had any kind of epidemic. Asked many questions about collective health, they seem to be confident about healing themselves, even the 15-year-olds.

What kind of a system do we have that fails to tap the inherent potential in such a child, and lambasts his confidence by failing him? Turns a potential herbalist into a waiting-in-line *chaprasi* (a government servant who is generally a messenger or a guard)?

This learning is not a part of the curriculum, but look at how much they know. Kids coming from a radius of 4 kilometres brush past these species every day and would be the first to notice if something was disappearing.

How do we so unabashedly accuse these very people of decimating biodiversity when they know how much to use and when? Formal science marries informal learning and even the passerby stands to benefit as Sristi has realised. Their ecological findings through sophisticated techniques matched the knowledge of the communities based on their own careful observations. Besides being accurate, it is an exhaustive study with discoveries that go into the endangered list of the Red Data List of the International Union of Conservation Network. In one such study elsewhere, Sristi had recorded 107 species of trees, 58 species of shrubs, 49 species of climbers, 220 species of herbs, 40 species of grasses, and nine species of lower plants.

This led to a detailed sharing on animal movements, habitat, and food habits. The people participated enthusiastically, especially since they know the government more often than not ignores their experiential knowhow as irrelevant to any given project, even if it is in their own backyard. You cannot imagine how much trust this has built up with the locals. And knowledge at almost no cost.

All this achieved while you are really being asked to take a walk with your *nana dadis* (grandparents). Forget all that, just imagine the impact of a





biodiversity ripple in the whole country if such a contest would discover dropouts who can be tapped at the right age, instead of heading for a frustrated future in crime and a menial job far away from home. What the discoveries would be like in human, floral, and faunal terms.





# Matriliny in a patriarchal mould

Patricia Mukhim

## Summary

The Indian state of Meghalaya has the rare distinction of being a matrilineal society. Shillong, its capital, recently played host to a conference for women journalists from east and north-eastern India organised by Voices, a network for Indian women journalists. This paper is based on findings from the workshop that raised some important issues relating to the status of women in north-eastern India, Meghalaya in particular.

Unlike for most Indian women, women here carry the family lineage. It is the youngest daughter (*khatduh*) that inherits the ancestral and parental property. In fact, very few clans among the Khasis are wealthy enough to distribute their property among all daughters while giving the largest share to the youngest. Not all *khatduh* own property. Some families are too poor to keep body and soul together. The few affluent families that own substantial property do not discriminate between sons and daughters. In fact, the practice has always been to give sons a share of the clan/family property as well. The Khyriem, Kharkongor, Mawrie, and Nongkhlaw clans that own large tracts of land in and around Shillong have always divided the money earned from the sale of land equally among clan members be they men or women, sons or daughters.

Studies on Khasi matriliney have invariably focused on the *khatduh* at the expense of the other daughters in the family. Parents with adequate assets generally give a share of the property to all their daughters, but the biggest share remains with the *khatduh*. This gives her financial liquidity as the custodian of her immediate and extended family (consisting of her brothers' and sisters' children, aunts, uncles, and sundry relatives).

Aside from that, the author points out, the property handed down to the youngest daughter comes with conditions. The *khatduh* has to look after her parents and unmarried brothers, orphaned nieces or nephews, and brothers that have divorced their wives or vice versa. Thus, she is in effect merely the stewardess or custodian of the property, with the maternal uncle the chief executor. Attempts to sell off ancestral property have led to court cases. Every family member has a say, and often it is not based on the most equitable formula. The issue of inheritance is the weakest link in the matrilineal chain, with a propensity to create conflict between individuals in society.

For example, in cases where parents have only one home, the other daughters have to set up their own units after marriage. They live in rented houses until they manage to buy land and build their homes. In Shillong and other district headquarters, where at least one member in every family is a government employee, the government's house-building advance scheme has enabled families to buy land and construct houses. The problem persists, however, for those that live on the fringes of development. Not even 0.01% of those living below the poverty line benefit from government schemes aimed at giving homes to the homeless. Thus, in Meghalaya, the affluent are acquiring more and more land from what had previously belonged to the village and clan. This new class of landowners does not often include women. Matriliney has hardly been the answer to the problem of rising poverty among a large section of the rural population, including women that remain dispossessed and subject to the drudgery of back-breaking labour.

The author argues that the concept of empowerment is often confused with the freedom of mobility. In terms of social mobility, except for the *khatduh*, the women of Meghalaya are largely unhindered. The *khatduh*'s responsibility towards her parents forces her to forego opportunities for better educational and employment prospects outside the state or country. Her sisters, however, enjoy full freedom to pursue careers of their choice. But empowerment is not synonymous with mobility and encompasses a wider range of issues that include access to information, the awareness of birth control methods, and the freedom to choose the size of the family. In short, it means enjoying reproductive rights which, presently, are left largely to chance.

The right of lineage also comes with its share of curses. Because of it, when a couple divorce, the children invariably live with their mother. Since cohabitation is not a social taboo, a man can easily abandon his wife without compensating her or paying for the children's maintenance. Even when marriages are legally binding, very few women actually file for maintenance. They are either ignorant of their rights or afraid of the prohibitive legal costs. Ironically, lineage is the very issue that unsettles a man in Khasi society. He feels insecure because of the world's perception of him as a 'breeding bull' and his fear of being dispossessed of the family inheritance. These are two crucial issues for Khasi matriliney today.



Any talk of gender equity in Meghalaya tends to become acrimonious. Women believe they have been deprived of the right to decision-making in the *Dorbar*, the grassroots' Khasi democratic institution. Men contend that women are already empowered because of their right to lineage and ownership of property. Some traditionalists maintain that a woman's place is in the home and that she should stay out of politics and matters outside the home.

A gender war is not what Meghalaya needs, however. What is required is a climate for dialogue between the sexes, a non-threatening space where views can be openly shared without fear of criticism or loss of face. It is time men actively participated in seminars and workshops on gender sensitisation and women's empowerment. As the woman's partner, a man should not only listen but also try and understand the intricacies of reproductive health and share his own views on the matter.

Meghalaya compares favourably only when compared to other states in India. But the situation is rife with contradictions. The state's three major tribes, namely, the Khasis, the Jaintias, and the Garos, practise matriliney but are highly patriarchal in their world-view. At more than one conference where political rights of women were to be discussed, women from Meghalaya ended up saying that the time has not come for them to challenge the well-entrenched tradition of women being kept out of decision-making at the grass roots.

On the one hand, women in Meghalaya fare better than their counterparts in other states. There is no custom of dowry or the practice of child marriage or Sati; and lineage is vested in the mother. On the other hand, although the youngest daughter is the sole inheritor of her parents' property, she is essentially, merely, the custodian of ancestral property, since it cannot be sold without the concurrence of her maternal uncles. Besides, she has to look after her aged parents, her orphaned nieces and nephews, and her divorced or bachelor brothers. She must carry out the last funerary rites of her parents which, before the advent of Christianity, entailed considerable expenditure.

The absence of child marriage in itself is also no consolation because teenage pregnancies are rampant, particularly in rural Meghalaya. Reproductive rights are a taboo subject for Roman Catholics. The size of the family becomes a hindrance to the woman. Her mobility is largely restricted and poverty multiplied many times over. The children are unable to go to school as they are made to look after their younger siblings.

Another malaise is the high rate of divorce leading to broken homes. The mother is usually the single parent. A rough estimate would put the number of households with single mothers at about 10% of all households in East and West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. More often than not, the man has no

financial responsibility or emotional attachment to the child. This phenomenon has given birth to severely disjointed families and a dysfunctional society.

Women in matrilineal societies also suffer domestic and sexual violence as do their counterparts in the rest of the country. Cases of women being assaulted by their husbands are on the rise. What is heartening is that women have begun to speak about these problems with their peers. There still is a silent group that does not complain because they are ashamed and feel that it is a private affair. Consequently, in the cases of domestic violence, rapes against girl-children are on the rise. Surprisingly, society has been rather blasé in its reaction to rape in recent times and has left it to the law to take its course. This is curious as in the past rape was considered a heinous crime that deserved the severest punishment; that might have been a more effective deterrent. Today, traditional institutions simply let the law takes its course. This is one reason why rapists get away with a light punishment or go scot-free. Something lasting and effective needs to be done to contain this evil.

## Conclusion

The author reiterates that the fight for women's rights in Meghalaya must not be construed as a gender war. Women demand better health and reproductive rights. They should have as much say as the husband to decide the size of the family. Statistics in India today estimate that one mother dies of childbirth every five minutes, and India accounts for one in five of all maternal deaths around the globe. As many as 52% of women in India do not make decisions regarding their own health care. The statistics include Meghalaya where women regard their children's and husband's health as a priority and their own health the least important. With health care a distant dream in rural Meghalaya and family planning an alien concept, it will take some time for women to assert their reproductive rights.

Interestingly, while there have been strident demands for more power (and direct central funding) for traditional institutions such as the *Dorbar* and *Syiemship* (chieftainship), and several representations have been made to the Constitution Review Committee (CRC), the question of women's participation in these institutions has often been ignored. The *Dorbar* is not a sacrosanct citadel that cannot change with time, however. The acceptance of the demands of traditional bodies by the Central Government must come with the rider that women be equally represented in those *Dorbars*. Failing that, the Centre will also be endorsing and reinforcing the age-old bias against women in a matriliney.







# **The impact of tourism on gender relations among communities living near Mt. Kinabalu, Sabah**

Paul Porodong

## **Summary**

The increasing popularity of Mt. Kinabalu and Sabah with tourists has led to the employment of a large number of locals. Mt. Kinabalu (4,095.2m), the highest point between Irian Jaya and the Himalayas, is situated in Sabah, east Malaysia. The mountain is 83km from Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah and focal point of the whole Kinabalu National Park, which covers an area of 754 sq km. Besides tourism, the Mt. Kinabalu region is also economically important as a producer of highland vegetables and flowers. Traditionally, Sabah's women are entrusted with the care and upbringing of children, household tasks, production-related activities, and as ritual specialists and healers.

The onset of development has, however, had an impact on the traditional society, specifically the traditional gender balance. About 30% of the indigenous Dusun-speaking community are employed in the hotel/hospitality industries, in private companies, and as government servants. This paper investigates tourism as an agent of change and will concentrate on gender relations between the two groups of labour, namely, the mountain guides and the porters.

Preliminary observations show that the division of labour between mountain guides and porters is largely based on gender, determined by the park authority which insists on taking only male mountain guides and mountain porters who are almost exclusively female. The use of mountain guides for climbing Mt. Kinabalu is compulsory, while the option of hiring mountain porters is used by one-third of tourists.

Today, around 80% of the population in the research area are involved in agricultural activities, especially swidden agriculture and vegetable farming. In a 1999 study, Schulze and Suriani noted that work related to swidden agriculture, such as selecting the field, digging and sowing, harvesting, winnowing, pounding, husking, and storing, is largely undertaken by both sexes, but young men are not interested in cultivation anymore. Hence, women are left to decide on the field site and on the rice types to be sown. Among older couples, the man still decides on the field site, while women select the rice species to be sown. Although the household sphere had notions of male and female tasks, the actual boundaries between the two are not clearly demarcated. Generally, 'heavy' tasks such as building houses and hard physical labour in the fields were for men, while women concentrated on lighter domestic and agricultural work.



One of the principal tourist activities in Sabah is the climb of Mt. Kinabalu. It may seem intimidating, but Mt. Kinabalu is actually one of the easiest mountains in the world to climb. Such tourist interest in Mt. Kinabalu has necessitated the employment of mountain guides and mountain porters. The mountain guide assists climbers, looks after their safety, and provides information or instructions, or even motivation, and offers companionship. A group of eight or less must employ one guide with an additional guide for a group between eight to 16. In recent years, for reasons of safety, the park authority has increased the guide to tourist ratio from 1:12 to 1: 8. Every mountain guide is registered with Sabah Parks and is licensed. Able to earn up to 210US\$ per month, some mountain guides prefer to work as guides and to use half their income to pay for labour on their farm.

In contrast, a mountain porter provides the service of carrying the climber's belongings, and is paid on the basis of the load carried. Normally, payment is made after the safe arrival of the luggage at Timpohon Gate or the park headquarters. The individual client's luggage seldom reaches 5kg, and it is common for climbers to pool their belongings and employ one porter. An adult porter can carry up to 30kg. Due to a limited demand for their services, it is common for a porter to carry from 10 to 17kg, far below their capacity, and a porter may also carry the canteen supply for the Laban Rata restaurant of the park. The payment for the latter is less, but porters have the option of optimising their load, and they can return home after unloading at the canteen. The payment is made every two weeks, which is not viable if one needs instant cash. Sometimes, porter services are required for special purposes. Joana Agak remembered once being asked to carry camera stands and cameras for a Taiwan TV crew during the Kinabalu Climbathon of 2001. Porters also receive a small payment for every bag of rubbish they bring down from the Laban Rata restaurant for disposal outside the Kinabalu Park area.

Where income is concerned, all respondents agreed that porters earn more than mountain guides, but men prefer to work as guides rather than as

porters. Women are found to earn more due to the payment structure of porters. The qualifications required to become a porter are flexible. In general, 70% of porters are adult females, 20% adult males, and 10% children below 15 and men and women above 50. While the official requirement is for porters to be 18 and above, this is not followed stringently by the Kinabalu Park Authority or the local inhabitants. As far as the locals are concerned, anyone can become a porter provided they are physically fit and know the route. Since only the villagers in nearby areas are actively involved as guides and porters, husband and wife may work together on the same day, perhaps with different groups of climbers. They will eventually reach the same destination, and might meet at Laban Rata where they may stay overnight if the wife is working as a porter. Mountain guides may earn less money than porters, but they enjoy a higher social status and better job security (with license, insurance, and better regulations).

Apart from the traditional swidden agriculture, it is tourism that has created new economic opportunities. Approximately 90% of the respondents are involved in new activities such as growing and selling vegetables or other commercial agricultural products such as pineapples and exotic hill rice, handicrafts, or they work full- or part-time in tourism-related fields. Commercially-based activities, such as growing vegetables, have no strict gender division of labour. Thus, husband and wife can complement each other's work and are able to venture into other economic activities. Porters and mountain guides gain a double advantage – using their land for vegetable growing (and other commercially-based activities) and using the excess time to work as a porter or guide. In a typical but loose division of labour for vegetable growers, the man concentrates on the garden while the woman concentrates on selling and other business dealings.

Commercially-based agriculture creates more opportunities for women for a number of reasons. First, since women are at the end of the production chain (selling), they have more control over the family income. The woman's contribution to the family income complements her control over its use. Second, the availability of wholesale markets has speeded up the process of vegetables sales, but not of growing them. This has given women extra time compared to their male counterparts who concentrate on cultivation. They can either help their husbands in agricultural work or become porters to bring in an instant and reliable income. Third, since vegetable stalls are built in a row by the roadside, women can look after each other's vegetables if any of them takes on a portering assignment or has to attend to other matters. Thus, they secure an uninterrupted chain of marketing activity as long as they have vegetables to sell.

Women's contribution to the economic well-being of the family (through work as porters and other economic activities) has changed general social attitudes. According to Sokiam Lusuyun, her husband (who has never been on the

mountain) is grateful she has a part-time job that helps to provide some of the family's necessities.

Some of the women respondents pointed out that, whereas they do traditional domestic work at home, the opportunity to earn an extra income for the family cannot be resisted. Besides the husband's support and understanding, community support, especially of close relatives, is important in their decision to work as porters. Many of the middle-aged porters, who have small children, leave them with grandparents and aunts or at school. Strong community ties and support reduce the mother's anxiety while working on the mountain. Despite that, mountain guides and some of the male mountain porters still prefer the traditional division of labour between men and women.

If the children are young, parents may take turns to work on the mountain. If the children are already in school, the support of close relatives may be required if both parents work. Some children may be able to follow their parents to the mountain during weekends and school breaks, even becoming porters themselves.

Being able to climb Mt. Kinabalu is considered an achievement for those that are moderately fit. The traditional Dusun believes that heavy tasks require strength and endurance. Mountain guides and porters, however, have additional burdens. Guides are responsible for the safety of climbers and for dealing with life and death situations. In contrast, mountain porters have to do the kind of heavy work traditionally reserved for men, requiring strength and endurance – porters carry up to five times more than loads carried by ordinary climbers and have to move almost twice as fast.

The Kinabalu Park Authority regulates the selection of mountain guides on a first-come first-served basis, with priority given to those previously unselected. When a mountain guide is identified, he may ask the group under his care if anyone needs a porter and, if there is a request, he will engage the number of porters required. The selection of porters is left to the discretion of the mountain guide. But he follows certain unwritten criteria.

- Priority should be given to those who have not been selected previously (including the day before).
- In case every porter present has been selected previously, priority will be on a first-come first-served basis.
- Since mountain guides and porters come from a small number of villages, they know each other and are often related. These family ties enable them to follow the unwritten rules effectively; not doing so may have negative effects on their relationship with fellow villagers. Mountain porters are not as regulated as mountain guides and have greater individual freedom to negotiate with climbers, especially if it is the climbers who approached them. Some climbers feel more secure if they choose their porters personally.



The mountain guides and porters who have to remain overnight in Laban Rata Restaurant stay in quarters provided for them. They have to do basic domestic work such as cooking and cleaning. Mountain guides and porters have to cook for themselves or bring their own food even if their relatives or spouses are working on the same day. That is because guides and porters will most likely have to travel with different groups or persons, regardless of family ties with other porters or guides.

In general, porters arrive sooner at Laban Rata because they have the option to walk with the fastest moving climbers who employ them. If the wife (porter) arrives earlier, she usually does not cook for her husband (guide) because she cannot predict when he will arrive. Relatives, though, may cook together if they arrive at the same time. In the rare event of husband and wife being together, traditional roles continue to operate on the mountain.

To make sure that quarters are ready for the night, female porters must ascend to Laban Rata to clean up. They must clean inside and outside their sleeping quarters while waiting for climbers to descend from the summit. In a gendered division of labour, the female porters clean inside the quarters, while male porters clean the outside. Female porters will have to make the guides' beds, clean the kitchen and the washing areas, and sweep the floor, while the male porters (especially boys) are left to do minor cleaning outside the quarters.

The Mount Kinabalu International Climbathon is an annual race covering 21km from the starting point to the summit and back again. Originally the Kinabalu Park's efforts to prepare its male park rangers for emergency evacuation, the Climbathon is today an internationally acclaimed challenge that attracts top international athletes. The prize money offered can be a year-end bonus for mountain guides and porters who climb the mountain regularly, as many as 80 times a year, and have a distinct advantage over outsiders. A female porter took sixth place when she was 40 and fifth in her second attempt, and another woman managed fifth position in 2001.

As far as strength and endurance is concerned, the Mount Kinabalu Climbathon has provided formal recognition that mountain guides and mountain porters are both capable of outdoing each other, and that strength should not necessarily be measured in terms of gender.

## **Conclusion**

Family ties and a strong community spirit, while enforcing the traditional division of labour, has also become another element in empowering women by offering them new economic opportunities. In the new economic setting, women's position at the end of the production chain has given them greater freedom in decision-making, especially with regard to family expenditure, saving, and investment.

The notion that men are qualified to do heavier work remains in place with minor modifications. Safety is the major concern of the park authority and, traditionally, since men were seen to fit that role, the stereotype of superior male strength has been perpetuated. Thus, men have been given the 'important' work of mountain guides. Practices such as assigning women porters the task of cleaning at Laban Rata demonstrate the influence of traditional gender divisions of labour even in an increasingly market-driven society.







# Rural women of Mongolia

Amarsanaa Darurisen

## Summary

Mongolia is one of the least populated countries in the world with only 2.4 million inhabitants, of which 51% are women. Mongolia's principal ethnic group are the Khalkh Mongols (86%), of which 7% are Khazakh. The other ethnic minorities include Tuvan, Chinese, Buriat, Russian, and Uigur. According to the 2000 Census, 43% of the population lives in rural areas. Urban dwellers constitute 57% with one-third of the population concentrated in the capital city. The recent census data indicate that young people below 20 years of age constitute a significant 46.5% of the population. The dominant religion is Buddhism, and it is undergoing a major revival in the new democracy after suppression during the Socialist period. The Khazakh population is Islamic.

After three centuries of Manchurian rule, Mongolia achieved independence in 1911. The Chinese attempted to re-occupy it in 1919, but were repelled with the assistance of the Soviet People's Republic. Power was assumed by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) and the Mongolian People's Republic was declared in 1924. The MPRP, with backing from the Soviet Union, ruled as a one-party socialist state until 1992, when a new democratic constitution was adopted and the first multi-party elections held. Since then, the former centrally-planned economy has transformed into an open-market one. Economic liberalisation and structural adjustment have had a major impact on all areas of life, particularly employment and social welfare services. Women, particularly rural women, have been the group worst affected during the transition.

The semi-nomadic herders living in remote areas herd livestock as their primary source of livelihood. Herders account for 17.5% of the productive population of Mongolia and between 35 to 42% of the total population. Before 1991, herders belonged to collectives of specialised production brigades called *negdels* and received a wage. With the introduction of the open-market economy, the livestock of *negdels* were privatised and distributed among households. Many households depend on livestock for their livelihood and food security.

Although largely patriarchal, the division of labour between the men and women in the herder communities is not rigid. Women usually take primary responsibility for housekeeping, milking and processing of dairy products, combing cashmere, taking sheep wool, cleaning/spinning camel wool, tanning hides, and gathering fuel and water for domestic use. They also participate in herding tasks which are the primary domain of men and require physical strength and long periods of travel. A survey of women herders indicated that 62.5% of them chose to be herders and 15.6% became herders because they had lost their jobs. The remaining were either married to herders or had no choice since their livestock had been privatised.

Men are primarily responsible for those herding activities that require physical strength, travelling long distances for longer periods of time. This relates to herding large animals, trading, or searching for livestock. Other tasks that men are responsible for are raising and taking down gers in seasonal moves, packing stock for seasonal moves, training animals, and building or repairing shelters. The most strictly gender-defined task is animal slaughter, which is undertaken by men solely.

On privately-owned farms, women do not have legally-defined working hours, wages, or paid vacations. Surveys show that rural women work six hours per day more than rural men do. Their unpaid work has not been recognised, and the tradition of valuing men's work more than women's is strongly maintained. The Best Herder Award is given by the state only to men. Men dominate conferences of herders. One example of such low recognition of women's contribution to rural economic survival and development is the fact that women constituted only 28 out of the 500 participants.

Herders have limited access to local administrative *aimag* (provincial) or *soum* (sub-unit of a province) centres, but herder women have even fewer opportunities since they are less mobile. This limits their opportunities for receiving medical care, education or training, and economic opportunities, and generally restricts their political participation in local development. It is mainly men who attend the regular meetings at the community level, receive local and national news, and acquire market updates.



The economic transformation of the last decade has left some herders able to achieve adequate living standards, but a majority live close to or below the poverty line. Female-headed households have been the most affected by poverty. In 1998, 10% of all households were female-headed; moreover, the number of female-headed households increased by 44% between 1993 and 1998, and the number of single mothers doubled between 1990 to 1998. Female-headed households with four or more children below 16 years of age were defined by the Poverty Alleviation Office as the most vulnerable to poverty.

The author points to the urban-rural disparities in housing, electricity, and telephone services: in rural areas, only 2% of households have telephone and only 34% have electricity. Thus, women have to perform their tasks manually and walk longer distances to gather dung or wood for fuel to cook for their families. Out of all households living in gers, only 42% of households get water from a river, lake, or spring; others obtain it from snow or rain. Women collect water and boil it for cooking and food, all this adding to their burden of unpaid domestic work.

In 1997, life expectancy at birth for women was 67.7 years compared to 61.1 years for men. The average age of women at first birth was 21.6 years and is consistent with the average age of marriage, which is 20.8 years. On average, rural women have more than the Mongolian average of three children, with less than three years separating the length of time. In 1998, maternal mortality was 158 per 100,000 live births, whereas it was 131 in 1991. The causes were related to transitional hardships in mostly remote rural areas. In 1999, 70% of all maternal deaths occurred in rural areas. Infant mortality rate was also high at 65 per 1,000 births in the first years of transition. The rate of births in hospitals or maternity homes is 99.9% in urban areas compared to 94.1% in rural areas. Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to begin child-bearing between the ages of 15-19.

According to the 2000 Census, women's literacy rate was 97.5% compared to 98% for men. Surprisingly, rural literacy was three times higher than in urban areas, with a greater number of female students at all levels of education. Partially this is because herder families in rural areas demand more male labour, so boys often drop out of school. In 2001, women constituted 22.9% of the elected representatives of the local *khurals* (local parliaments) on average, with no significant difference between urban and rural areas. Notably, women's representation is significantly lower in the remote rural *aimags* than in those centrally situated. In the far western Bayan-Ulgii *aimag*, for instance, women's representation is only 5.7%, whereas it is 28 to 30% in the central *aimags* such as the Bulgan, Dornogobi, Dornod, Khentii, and the Tuv *aimag*. Among the 275 local governors, only 14 are women.

## Conclusion

Herders' livelihoods are largely dependent on the weather. In the last three years, Mongolian herders experienced the worst winters in 30 years when temperatures dropped by 5 to 10 degrees centigrade. Prior to winter, the affected areas had suffered the worst drought in 60 years as much of the pastureland was overgrazed and destroyed by rodents in some areas. *Dzud* was a natural disaster in the winter, causing mass death of livestock and affecting 500,000 people. Herders were forced to move outside their normal grazing areas, putting additional burden on areas not directly affected by the *dzud*. In the most affected areas, animals were the only source of food, transport, heating materials, and purchasing power by cash/barter. Rural herder women suffered short- and long-term effects of the *dzud* on their incomes, nutrition, and health status, apart from the trauma of losing their livestock. There were suggestions that the increased number of cattle after privatisation led to overgrazing pastures above their natural capacity that further worsened situation. Policies need to be implemented to prevent and decrease the devastating effects of weather.





# **Gender relations and housing in matrilineal and patriarchal communities**

Girija Shrestha

## **Summary**

According to the author, housing is not only a technological product but also a product of culture and gender relations. Just as gender differentiation affects the structure of the house, the structure of the house reveals existing hierarchies and perpetuates differential access to opportunities. Architecture is, therefore, the record of the work of those that have the power to build. The process of building and the manner of using space are shaped by social, political, and economic forces and values embodied in the forms themselves. The first part of this paper examines housing design and gender relations among the Newar of the Khokana Village in Nepal. The second part of the paper deals with how the nature of housing in turn affects women's lives.

The Newar are the indigenous inhabitants of and the largest ethnic group in Kathmandu Valley. The study area here is Khokana Village, which is a small Newar village on the southern flank of the Valley and constitutes the smallest Village Development Committee (VDC) in Lalitpur District. The total number of households in this village is 665 and the population is 6,000. All the Newar here are Buddhist. Residence is patrilocal, and the woman goes to the husband's home after marriage. Widows rarely remarry, while widowers tend to get married soon after the wife's death. Newar women adopt the husband's family name; children too take the father's name. Family property is distributed among the sons, and daughters have no rights over parental property. The main occupation of the villagers is farming. As men have started working outside the village, the burden of farming has fallen on the shoulders of the women. Almost all women spin wool as a source of secondary income.



There is a very distinct gender division of labour among these Newar compared to the Karen and Isan people in Thailand. Although the primary responsibility for household tasks rests with women in all three communities, there is some sharing of household work among the Karen and Isan, but this sharing is absent in Khokana. Also, while men among the Newar make all household decisions, women have a say in household matters among the Isan and Karen. The restriction on women's mobility is also much higher among the Newar than among the women of the Karen and the Isan.

The layout of the Newar house is generally rectangular. The aim of each family or clan is to build a single house around a courtyard, providing security and privacy. Wood and brick are the main materials used for the superstructure, and mud or clay is used as mortar. The house has a vertical functionality. The ground floor, which has no protection from dampness, is usually used as a storeroom or shed for cattle. A central wall divides the ground floor into two rooms, one of which might also be used as a shop. The kitchen is on the top floor, and the hearth in the kitchen is located in a corner. The room on the second floor is used as a bedroom. All social interaction takes place on the first floor. In a Karen building, the kitchen is bigger and the hearth is located at the centre of the kitchen. All social and familial activities take place around the hearth. In an Isan house, the kitchen is in the corner, but the dining and living space is large and open. Most of the family and other social interactions take place in this open area. Both Isan and Karen houses have horizontal functionality.

During fieldwork in Nepal among the Newar, the author asked respondents what importance they assigned to different rooms in the house. Although all the couples cited here belonged to the educated circle, their gender awareness and perceptions were very different. Discussions with the respondents showed that women having decision-making power over household expenditure gave first priority to investment in their workplace, i.e., the kitchen. Women who had little or no say in allocation of resources gave first priority to spaces other than the kitchen. Women who had little or no say in household expenditure tended to give priority to the living room. The reason they cited was that the living room was the showpiece of the house/family. In the case of men, those that had some awareness of gender issues ascribed a high value to women's workplace.

The comparative size of spaces is another measure of the relative importance designated to the users of that space. Partition walls indicate the seclusion of one activity from other activities and seclusion of one user group from others. Partition walls are used, for instance, to veil women from outsiders. A comparison of the houses of the Isan in Khon Khen and the Newar of Khokana shows that fewer strictures placed on women means fewer partition walls. Newar women are subjected to restrictions on their mobility, which is evident from the partitions created to separate and seclude women's spheres





of activity. The open design (it has fewer partitions) of a house among the Isan on the other hand, allows for the possibility of sharing space and work, suggesting a more gender egalitarian ethos.

The location of spaces in individual homesteads also reveals the hierarchy of relations in the household. Some people have their kitchen in the backyard, separating the dining room and the kitchen. Because of this separation of kitchen from dining or living spaces, a woman or a servant has to spend more time not in, but adjacent to, the dining/living spaces. Hierarchy and location of rooms thus reflect the stratified relationships within a home – the subordination of servants to the family, family to wife, and wife to husband.

A cross-cultural study found that, as culture becomes more complex, the segregation of space by gender too is accentuated. Similarly, when power relations between men and women are tense, there is greater segregation of spaces. The more respectable and status-conscious the household, the greater the differentiation between front and back, the public sphere of the street and the parlour and the private sphere of the kitchen, the yard, and the back lane.

Another reason for the segregation of space is that roles and responsibilities are segregated by gender, influencing space utilisation. As the income level of a family increases, the function of a space becomes more rigid. Poorer people would use the same space for different functions at different intervals of time. A field survey indicated that the Karen house has less gender division of space, and both women and men spend most of their time in the kitchen, whereas, in a Newar house, men spend hardly any time in the kitchen.

Usually, the ownership of land or a house plays an important role in housing design. The person who owns or inherits a house usually has a say in the investment pattern, that is, the space he/she wants to invest in further. Among the Newar, it is the son who inherits the house, whereas, among the Karen, both daughters and sons inherit property, and it is usually the daughter who stays with the parents in their house. These inheritance patterns have a bearing on the importance given to spaces in these two communities. Priority is given to the kitchen in the matrilineal system, whereas it is the living room or bedroom that gets priority in a patrilineal system.

Although the Newar from Khokana are Buddhist, they follow many traditions and practices of the Hindus. Thus, they place a high premium on the concept of purity of women. During menstruation and for 10 days after delivery, a woman is considered impure. Her husband cannot touch her and she cannot enter the temple, the *pūja kotha* (worship room in the house), storeroom, or kitchen. She cannot cook or touch potable water. Access to sacred spaces (*pūja kotha*) is also taboo to people of lower caste and strangers. Thus, the kitchen and *pūja kotha* in a traditional Newar house is usually located on the top floor.

Differences in eating and cooking habits affect the form of the house and vary between cultures. There is gender differentiation in the manner in which household activities are carried out. In Khokana's Newar families, women exclusively perform all household chores. The hearth is in one corner of the top floor in the Newar home, while the hearth in the Karen kitchen is in the centre, allowing room for men to share work with women. Among the Karen, although cooking is mainly the responsibility of women, there is a tendency to share household work. In an Isan household, the hearth is in a corner, but there is a larger dining area. In Newar families, the men and children eat first, while the women serve food. Women eat only after the men have finished their meal. Eating together or separately, cooking by one person or many, affects housing design. Thus, the space for the kitchen and dining area is smaller in Khokana compared to that in the Isan and Karen villages.

The size of the family is also reflected in housing design. As the family size decreases, the demand for smaller houses increases. Household decisions are taken by men in joint families and by both men and women in nuclear families among the Newar in Khokana. Further, communities where women are involved in household decisions have better housing and the women here are satisfied with the arrangements of space in the house. In comparing patrilineal (Newar) and matrilineal (Karen) communities, we find that in both communities the major decisions on maintenance and construction are taken by men – the difference is that Karen women have a greater say in these matters.

In the process of social interaction, the degree to which women interact with outsiders (other than family members) is revealed in the spatial arrangement of houses in that community. For instance, Newar women have greater restrictions on social interaction with outsiders than Karen women. The location of a Newar woman's workplace, the kitchen, is on the top floor of the house, and the living room (space for interaction) is on the first floor, so that outsiders can rarely interact with women who are usually cooking on the top floor. Karen women, who have fewer restrictions on interaction, have a joint kitchen and living space, which is where outsiders are entertained.

Restriction of women is also defined in terms of privacy by separating spaces within the house into male and female domains. Normally, people with a higher income can afford privacy/segregation, which they maintain more strictly than people with fewer resources. Women and men work to maintain households and communities but their work tends to differ in nature and value. Better-designed housing has a direct bearing on a person's labour, whether domestic or paid/economic work. Housing design can save labour time or provide comfortable working conditions, offering flexibility of space according to the needs of the users.



The percentage of married women that have taken up employment outside the home has increased in Nepal from 44.1% in 1981 to 50.1% in 1991. Working women have to take care of housing, employment, and child care simultaneously. Due to the problems of reconciling child care and domestic work, social restrictions on mobility, women's lack of human capital (skills, education, and job experience), and discrimination in formal employment, most of women's economic activities are predominantly in the informal sector, and frequently home- or community-based in nature. The percentage distribution of economically active women in Nepal by employment status (1991), shows that the largest proportion of women are self-employed (84%), the remaining being divided among employers (0.4%), employees (12%), and unpaid family workers (3.5%).

There are four major areas of domestic work for women: 1) child rearing; 2) caring for family members; 3) provision of appropriate food and shelter; and 4) clothing. Normally, women are expected to perform all these tasks and actually do so. Inadequacies in dwellings, community amenities, and infrastructure play a major role in intensifying this domestic work which, given gender divisions of household labour, rebounds disproportionately upon women. Nepali women spend an average of 76.4% of their time on domestic activities, whereas men spend less than 20% on domestic and expanded activities. The lack of essential services, such as domestic water supply, sewerage systems, and solid waste disposal systems, have a great impact on women's lives. In Khokana, out of 20 respondents, eight did not have toilet facilities at home. Likewise, in other villages surveyed in the Kathmandu Valley, 40% of the residents did not have toilets at home. Scarce amenities involve further time and trouble for women, especially where public transport is unreliable or expensive.

The design of individual dwellings as well as the whole built environment (created surroundings, including homes, public spaces, transport routes, workplaces, and community areas) maintains the concept that women's work is of less value. Since women's work at home is not recognised as work, the home itself has not been viewed as a workplace. As a result, there has been insufficient recognition of the needs of the users and little effort has been made to increase the efficiency and productivity of housework.

## **Conclusion**

In the author's view, any housing design emerges in order to fulfil requirements of some existing gender relations. Religion, family and kinship systems, social interactions, and the means to meet basic needs determine gender relations. The author's field work shows that communities having unequal gender relations have different housing arrangements than communities having relatively better gender relations. In Khokana, gender differences are seen in the quality of space of the dominant users, size of

space, hierarchy of space, and the gender division of space. And once a house is built in such a way, it has a long-term bearing on the lives of the residents, particularly women and children, as they spend many more hours at home than men. Housing also has an impact on women's domestic work and paid work. The lack of basic amenities to suit the main users impacts health. Field data show occurrence of accidents and diseases, women are the primary victims of these health hazards. Further, it is important to remember that gender relations are not static, they change over time. It is imperative, therefore, to see housing in terms of its consequences for gender relations and to build structures that are flexible enough to be amenable to changes in the future.





# **Gender relations and forest management in indigenous mountain communities**

Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan

## **Summary**

These case studies set out answer these questions: How do gender relations within and outside the household affect use and management of forests? What is the extent of the centrality of women in providing livelihood, especially with regard to the management of forest resources? What can we learn about gender relations from forest-dwelling societies that are characterised by the absence of institutionalised male control? Does the structure of gender relations within the household and in the community change as members respond to broad religio-cultural, social, and economic restructuring of indigenous societies?

This paper is based on 12 studies of forest-dwelling indigenous peoples in South and Southeast Asia. Of these, six studies were done in matrilineal communities, five in patrilineal communities, and one on women and hunting. Changes in gender relations in forest societies were looked at for four different situations: the imposition of colonial or national state rule over forest communities and the forests; the examination of revolts, historical and contemporary, that sought to re-establish local community control over the forest; the response of nation states to these movements for autonomy by shifting to devolution as a policy; and the current situation in which women's inclusion in committees is becoming increasingly a policy norm.

Gender relations are complex, dynamic, and socially embedded and have many interlocking dimensions. In matrilineal systems, women have effective power in maintaining the lineage and hence, owning children. They have rights over ancestral property and control and knowledge of ritualistic activity, including being the spiritual heads of the community, e.g., the Syiem Sad

among the Khasis in India and the Bobolizan among the Rungus in Sabah, Malaysia.

In most patrilineal societies, the woman's major role in reproduction and/or income-generation does not necessarily lead to social empowerment or gender equality within the household. However, women's rights to access forest resources can mitigate this inequality in gender relations, as among the patrilineal Nagas of Northeast India, and the role of women in swidden agriculture and the processing of commercial forest products. But it is largely in matrilineal systems that women's control over forests has enhanced gender equality by giving them a greater say in how forestland is to be used.

Matrilineal societies often associate women with forests through their role in healing and religious ritual. Among the Warlis in India, many women have a fair knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants, and among Tamang villagers of Chisapani in Nepal, women shamans are accepted as equally knowledgeable and powerful as the male shamans. Thus, before the advent of state pressure in favour of patriarchy, gender relations were more equitable and women enjoyed considerable space within the household and the community.

In the state-sponsored colonisation by the dominant religio-cultural regimes such Hinduism, Christianity, Lama Buddhism, and Confucianism, women were made inferior to men and excluded from political, spiritual, and community decision-making. The Naxi's matrilineal system was replaced by a system of patrilineal inheritance in which marriage for love was discouraged and replaced by arranged marriage. Confucian values of a woman being subordinate to her father, husband, and son were promoted. During the expansion of Christianity among the Rungus in Sabah in 1952-59, the missionaries dealt directly with the village headman leaving out the *Bobolizan* (a woman priest and healer who had absolute power in community decision-making). There was always an element of local male participation in this colonisation, for through this they acquired both power and representation.

For many forest dwellers, the major agency of change in their cultural system and gender relations was colonial education, which came through missionary or religious schooling, followed later by public and secular schools. Domestic science schools in Sabah forced women into domesticity, denying their past role in productive and political life, and limiting its future. Further, by centralising forest management, states weakened an important source of women's power in matrilineal societies by limiting the role of women in forest-based production, thus reducing their ability to fend off the forces of patriarchy.

State efforts to centralise forest management triggered widespread rebellions in India and China, in particular. These movements, however, did not often





reassert women's rights with respect to forest management, or any other aspect of social life. A shift in power from women to men was well underway, and local men used the movements to further consolidate patriarchy. In the historical and contemporary movements for local control over forests and political autonomy among the Santhal, Munda, and Ho communities in Jharkand, India, before every rebellion, the men undertook a special drive to 'cleanse' society by eliminating witches and poison givers, *"the dirtiest creatures who keep evil spirits."* The need to strengthen or impose male power was legitimised to enable forest-based communities to regain control of their forests and overall livelihoods.

The authors argue that women had to fight on two fronts – against patriarchy within and outside their own communities; and against the takeover of forests, their source of authority and livelihood. Some spoke publicly against growing male dominance and control of resources, whereas others, choosing not to speak out openly, exercised informal resistance in what has been described as 'off-stage defiance'. Khasi, Mosuo, Rungus, Warli, and Santhal women resisted not only their subordinate position in life, but also the conversion of natural forests into commercially useful monocultures and their overall depletion and degradation. Where women have been allowed to participate in forest management, the results have sometimes been remarkable, as in the Chipko movement in the northern hills of India.

Many devolution policies target the community as the unit to take decisions once made by the government. This is true for Joint Forest Management (JFM) in India, Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) in the Philippines, and some of the collective management policies in China. The Nepal Leasehold Forestry, which specifically targeted women's user groups and included women's needs for fuel and fodder, has had a substantial impact on women's lives whereas Nepalese forest user groups dominated by men have not.

There are also examples of Community Forest Management in India where women have played an active role in initiating forest protection and where women's committees are managing forests. However, when it comes to the inclusion of women in formal decision-making bodies, male resistance is summed up in the statement of a leading member of the Forest Protection Committee of Lapanga village, Orissa, *"We are not so modern that we would involve women in Forest Protection Committee."* By and large, devolution has resulted in promoting the accumulation of forest income in the hands of the local elite, thus excluding women from ownership, control, and institutional management of forests. Hence, forest societies have experienced widening socioeconomic disparities and deepening gender inequalities.

In Northeast India, privatisation has brought changes to women's lives. Among the changes, the status of women has depended on their ownership of

ancestral property. But the registration of former community-owned forests as 'private lands' by the state does not constitute 'ancestral' property. It becomes what is called 'self-acquired' property, whereby men are able to legislate for a right to inherit these on various grounds. Where the village itself privatised forests, however, the new property remained in the names of the women whose houses the lands were attached to.

More important have been the changes in management of property. Even in the traditional Khasi system, the maternal uncle or brother managed the woman's ancestral property, but as caretakers. Today, husbands effectively manage the land, including forestland; and, more than land, capital has become the key economic resource and capital as 'self-acquired' property is passed on from father to son.

In Meghalaya, among the landless who worked as wage labourers in logging, the timber trade that began in the 1970s with road construction for the Indian army was the chief source of cash income. Unlike upper class Khasi women, women of this class had no property of their own and the domination of men was strongly established through their wages from logging. This capital as 'self-acquired' property is passed on from father to son. Thus, the timber industry in Meghalaya has undermined matriliney.

For devolution to succeed, governments and civil society institutions must acknowledge the urgent need to close all spaces of marginalisation of indigenous peoples in general, and indigenous women in particular. They must provide them with effective assistance in reconstructing their present communities – based on gender equality, indigenous knowledge, local sociocultural practices and political systems, and self-determination in ownership and management of forests. Thus, in Asana village in Bastar, India, forest-based indigenous women have been effectively running Van Dhan Samitis (Forest Producers' Cooperative Societies), largely as a result of women's movements, but also facilitated by the space created by devolution. The Asana success, however, also shows that unless women are organised, the space created by devolution would be usurped by local youth not involved in forest production or protection. Increasing evidence suggests that where women and men form joint groups, men marginalise the women.

The state often ignores the role of women in resource generation and promotes men's control over them. But the inclusion of women in forest decision-making does make a difference in the administration of local management and gender relations. It has been generally observed that even where women play a key role in protecting the forest and managing natural resources, formalisation tends to marginalise them. In Orissa, the youth clubs hardly ever took account of the woman's knowledge and experience of forests while she continued to work long and hard, under worsening conditions, with



poor access to health care and education. Even within the community, spaces for women's participation in decision-making (households, communities, and forest management committees) are plagued by male hierarchy and power-based gender relations. Many case studies suggest that, when women started protecting their forests and began managing the local forest resources, they faced problems with the men from their own and neighbouring villages.

Women's indigenous knowledge of forest resources and technologies has often been considered non-knowledge as it is disguised in ritual and myth. In the tree plantation and nursery schemes in Nagaland, it is reported that women-managed nurseries and plantations do better than those managed by men. Yet, it is difficult for women to enter formal forest management groups, often because of rules against the inclusion of women. The formal inclusion of women in management committees is important as it increases the possibility for this inclusion to be made significant. Also, separate women's groups tend to be more effective than groups made up of both men and women. In mixed groups, men tend to dominate the proceedings, whereas all-women groups help to develop the managerial abilities of women and address gender-specific issues.

## **Conclusion**

Recognition of the importance of gender relations does not happen by itself. The inclusion of women in management committees is a result of political movements. External agencies can often play a substantial role, for instance, by making it mandatory for external project rules to include women in committees. Undoubtedly, since legislation is important in bringing about the change in gender relations, it is necessary to recognise the dialectical relation between internal struggles and enabling external rules and decisions, whereby each feeds off the other.





# **Women of the mountains: from silence to recognition**

Michela Zucca

## **Summary**

Through the centuries, women have succeeded in surviving in environmental frontiers such as the mountains, exploiting natural resources while preserving and caring for the terrain. When women leave, the mountain dies, it is said, for large-scale migration depopulates the hills. Where the women stay, entire valleys are reborn and, today, a majority of the micro-economy and identity-economy initiatives are run by woman. Many women have revived traditional economic practices such as animal breeding, handicrafts, the harvesting and transforming of herbs, and hospitality, making use of new methods and managing them by means of the latest state-of-the-art methods of communication.

When the women left the hills, they set in motion a feminist protest against a culture that saw them as little more than useful tools to be used for work and procreation. They were relegated to the sidelines, repressed sexually, and denied opportunity for self-fulfilment. The exodus that began in the 1950s and became a cause for concern for the decades that followed had ancient origins, rooted in the condition of women in Alpine culture.

Among the mountain folk there is no single vision of the female world as the vision changes according to women's social condition and role, their life story, and economic function. The woman was regarded as the repository of ancient wisdom, and the woman-witch-matriarch is still believed to exercise power over nature. The life of the mountain woman, however, was, and remains hard.

Youth was a very short-lived period and single girls were watched over by parents and priests, the guardians of the family's good reputation. Peasant

women were held to a moral double standard which denied them their right to pleasure. From a very early age, priests would instil in them notions of sin and of duty. Everything, especially sexual 'transgression', was a sin, and transgression was often accompanied by great feelings of guilt. Social control exerted by the community was powerful and, even as recently as 30 or 40 years ago, women would be publicly scolded for not wearing socks or for going dancing on a Sunday afternoon. Any departure from their sombre attire constituted a provocation.

In the case of marriage, however, the family did not get involved in selecting a spouse, although many observers of the 19th and 20th centuries have pointed out that financial interest was always a greater factor in peasant weddings. Marriage often ratified an existing state of fact: pregnancies that occurred before the canonical blessing were frequent. After marriage, women's lives changed totally and their personal lives became less important. They had to be devoted wives, mothers, and work until they died. The testimonies and songs of women point to the trauma of separation from parents and of dependence on the mother-in-law. Invariably, the young bride felt she counted for nothing.

Once married, aspirations had to be suppressed, and it was sinful to talk about them. Working in the fields, taking care of the home, the husband, and the old folk gave no respite to the woman. Love, if it had ever existed at all, was gradually destroyed by exhaustion and hardship. Consider this testimonial:

*"...The woman was simply an animal...Women worked sixteen hours a day, more than the men, in fact. Any intimacy was reduced to a mechanical act, without a hint of affection. The man was master, the man had the money, and the man had everything."*

The woman had no rest. The man had his local tavern, which the woman was never allowed to enter. In winter when the man took rest from work, she had to work harder than ever. In times of economic hardship, women were forced to leave the village long before the men. There were also some extreme situations. In Alto Adige and in Tirol, within the hereditary farm system, daughters were forbidden from inheriting property if they had any brothers. They managed to get married to the owner of a farm or lived as servants in their fathers' homes or in houses far from their village.

Female protests were voiced through songs or the telling or rewording of legends and myths. Both song and story telling in the Alps became the main form of expression and cultural creativity. Through their songs and stories, women became custodians of memories, guardians of ancient culture and traditions, speaking for the frustrated aspirations of one half of the population.





In peasant society, the woman was the first to get up and the last to go to bed. Girls started working from the moment they could walk. However, despite this social inferiority, the financial standing of family, community, and village revolved around the female. In a society where the man is often away or has to do the hardest physical agricultural work, the woman looked after the family's economic resources – feeding and tending to the cows, sheep, and goats.

Young girls and the mothers had access to ancient knowledge, which allowed them to exploit the wealth of the forest – they sold medicinal herbs, small fruits, and mushrooms at the market. They worked at the loom and knitted to provide clothing and linen and, in this way, passed down ancient decorative motifs from generation to generation. Women have always attempted to make their homes warm and welcoming. The housewife would subsequently draw upon this heritage when renting out rooms or doing seasonal work in hotels.

The woman has looked after the mountains for millennia, alone. For long periods of the year the men were away working as shepherds, mowing hay in the valley, or travelling as commercial salesmen. If the woman suffered from loneliness, she managed to exorcise this 'pernicious' feeling. In fact, life often became more pleasurable after the man left. A widow was commonly considered fortunate if she succeeded in getting some time to herself and was no longer at her husband's beck and call. The truly unfortunate were those that grew old childless, or worse still, without even a daughter.

Women not only busied themselves in the day-to-day running of the farm, but also developed alternative forms of supplementing their income. This allowed them to deal with additional expenses and brought worthwhile features of renewal and quality of life to their own community. In Claut, in the Val Cellina, and in Friuli, women would leave home with their spoons and wooden ladles, carved by men during winter, and stay away for months, only returning in the autumn when their load had run out.

From medieval times onwards, right up to recent times, the Alps have always provided refuge to rebels and transgressors. According to contemporary accounts, bandits infested the roads and the pathways of the entire alpine region for centuries. Women, almost always servants that had fled their masters and occasionally prostituted themselves, joined these derelict bands, even taking part in robbery and pillage.

Women or 'witches' were often regarded as the main instigators of the rebellions. It was believed that they were specifically encouraged by the devil to rebel against their masters. The demands they made, or encouraged the men to make, on owners and employers, and in particular, attacks against property, were often branded as witchcraft. The woman-witch became the

symbol of the 'dark side' of nature, of all that is uncontrollable, wild, disorganised and violent. Witch-hunts were a most powerful weapon against any form of social insubordination.

At the end of the century, it is the women, not the men, that the various writers of the inquisition on the state of the campaigns (Jacini, Meardi, and so on) point out as the true enemies of the social structure. Women's love of luxury was cited as the primary cause of demands for altering existing production relationships. The obstinacy with which a woman forces a man to spend huge sums for his daughter's trousseau was seen not in an individualistic light but in a social one. It was an invitation to the husband to earn more, thus indirectly making the wife the agent of independence and demands.

Before getting married, Alpine women would traditionally work as domestic servants in the city, thus gaining a certain degree of personal freedom. They often resented their loss of autonomy on returning to the village. Wet nurses stayed away for years, only coming back to the village for the time it took to produce the children which allowed them to go on working. From the last century onwards, men emigrated en masse from the hills, leaving the women alone in poverty. Women's response to centuries of repression was to flee from the village in search of a better life in the cities.

In the last few years the situation, in places, has changed. Today, as never before, the job market demands that one is up-to-date, flexible, and capable of accepting new challenges. This must be combined with self-discipline, the ability to communicate one's own thoughts quickly and well, and to be able to start afresh, if necessary. Alpine women have begun to develop these qualities in order to survive and assert themselves. Not surprisingly, women run some of the more interesting economic initiatives of the region.

The economy of the Alps in terms of luxury hotels, industry, and tendering for public works are still securely in men's hands as is political power. But the economy of the valley and the family concerns that root a person to the land are once more being looked after by women.

In recent years, however, a new economic concept has begun to take shape, the identity-economy. These are businesses whose origins may date back to the remote past but are being developed with the help of modern technology. In addition to producing an income, these initiatives preserve and assist or 'launch' the traditional cultures, allowing them to become the base for production. Women, as custodians of memory, have been successful in discovering and utilising the unexpected resources within 'their' territory.

The women of the Alps have refused to resign themselves to the subservient role of the housewife. Since traditional alpine cultivation collapsed, they have reorganised and adapted family businesses. Women now provide for family



consumption – the wholesome foods, *‘because if we were to look at the cost, we wouldn’t save that much,’* the vegetable garden, the cornmeal for the polenta, the poultry pen, and the pig for making salami.

These parallel economies allow savings and sustenance from a single income, including at times the children’s university education. They also allow the alpine territory to be constantly tended to and monitored, actions that otherwise would have placed a high financial burden on the tax payer who would have to pay through taxation, or, worse still, through natural disasters.

Even tourism, which has for a long time overtaken agriculture, animal breeding, and rearing as the main income earner in the Alps, is almost entirely run by women. They are the actual masters of the house who take care of the guests, even though tourism comes at a price. It can lead to social and cultural changes that foster psychological problems, the erosion of the environment, loss of privacy, a quiet life, and well-entrenched ideas and prejudices.

## Conclusion

For a social policy for the mountains to succeed, it must address the needs and desires of women. To keep the population on the mountain, it is necessary to provide essential services. Women should have access to education and training courses and to gender-specific assistance relating to children, the family, and the care of the elderly. Professional organisers and motivators are needed to help the mountain people deal with their sense of isolation and to learn to appreciate their own cultural heritage. Development of tourism is particularly important in that respect, but it too requires an investment in quality training. Women are increasingly proving themselves as the emerging and innovative factor, both in professional agriculture and in those new and hybrid forms that link agriculture to tourism.

In 1931, women in Italy constituted 19% of the agricultural labour, 24% in 1951, 29% in 1971, reaching 36% in 1981, and a little above this figure in 1991. But such statistics are misleading. In real terms, the exodus of women (as of men) from the mountains has been considerable. The total of 2,033,000 farming women of 1951 fell to 589,000 40 years later. The drop in the female agricultural workforce, however, has been accompanied by a rising trend of women owning businesses. In 1970, at the end of an exodus that resulted in the near depopulation of many of the alpine valleys, the agricultural census apportioned 18.9% of businesses to women. But starting at the broad end of the spectrum with 26.9% of smallholdings with less than one hectare, it narrows down at the opposite end to 7.2% of medium-sized concerns of 10 or 20 hectares. Figures from the 20-year period that followed, however, show noticeable progress. Despite the overall drop in the number of businesses, those run by women rose from 18.9 to 25.9%. Moreover, the

increase is not centred on small holdings of less than two hectares but on those with 10 to 20 hectares that were run by professional men in 1970, but which were absorbed by women's part-time work.

In the earlier models of family structures, the wife undertook actual physical work on the farm. Women were exempted from working the fields due to consideration of their advancing years or of the economic importance of the business. In fact, the presence of the working wife was inversely proportional to the importance of the farm. More recently, that situation has begun to develop in the direction of a counter evolution. That is the challenge of the new rurality.





7

Annex







# THE THIMPHU DECLARATION

## Preamble

The 250 participants - mountain women, members of civil society organisations and NGOs, policy makers, entrepreneurs, media professionals, researchers, representatives of development agencies and the donor community - attending Celebrating Mountain Women conference in Thimphu, Bhutan, October 1-4, 2002, held in the context of the International Year of the Mountains (IYM), submit the following Thimphu Declaration to the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (BGMS), and call upon the international community to:

- include the perspectives of mountain women and the principles of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the Bishkek Declaration;
- strengthen mountain women's influence in decisions in public affairs and ensure a strong presence of women in all mountain partnerships
- build networks of solidarity and endorse and support the Global Mountain Women's Partnership (GMWP)

## Declare that

- 1) Without women, it is impossible to achieve sustainable development in mountain areas.  
Women have crucial knowledge about resource use, traditional health systems, and social, cultural and spiritual customs. Their productive activities contribute to the economy; they promote family and community development; they create innovative solutions to cope with change under harsh physical and political conditions. In many mountain regions they constitute well over 50 percent of the population.
- 2) Without peace, an undegraded and uncontaminated environment, and food security, which are currently under heavy stress in mountain areas worldwide, it is impossible for mountain women to nurture their families, sustain livelihoods, carry out business activities, contribute to the well-being of their communities, and protect their environment.
- 3) Without gender equality and social justice, and a supportive social, political, legal, and economic environment, mountain women cannot make their voices heard, and exercise rights that enable them to contribute their full potential to community development and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

- 4) Without access to health services, education and training, recreation and adequate infrastructure -- water, sanitation, roads, markets, credit, the remoteness and physical challenges of mountain environment, poverty, and social and political marginalisation that prevail in most of these areas — mountain women's ability to fulfil their roles is seriously impaired.
- 5) Without effective policies, networks, partnerships and alliances at the local, national, regional and international levels, mountain women's economic, social and political marginalisation will continue to hamper their development and the development of their communities.

These realities are not given sufficient recognition, and even negated in some areas. Moreover, women are not adequately integrated into planning and decision making processes at all levels, and do not have effective access to, control of, and ownership of resources.

In view of this, we call upon the UN, the international community, and the regional, national and local authorities and organisations to:

- heed the voice and concerns of mountain women and their perspective on peace, natural resource use, and sustainable mountain development;
- provide the institutional and financial support for future policy and action on the principles of gender equality and gender mainstreaming
- strengthen mountain women's right to resources and their role in their communities and cultures
- promote a rights-based approach to development and strengthen economic and technological opportunities to empower mountain women

We recommend the following

1. Inform mountain women about their human rights, in including political, economic, property, environmental, health, cultural, intellectual and other rights, and provide adequate training in claiming these rights;
2. Promote and enforce gender equitable laws, policies and programmes that facilitate participation of mountain women in the management of natural resources, and secure access to the ecosystem goods and services
3. Advocate that policies and laws provide equality-based political, social and economic rights to mountain women. Ensure that such policies and laws exist for aspects that specifically address women's well being and rights;
4. Promote equitable representation of mountain women in all decision-making bodies, and advocate their participation in negotiation and decision-making processes at all levels, including in conflict prevention and resolution;
5. Ensure that health programmes focus on reproductive and sexual health problems, including HIV/AIDS, and encourage involvement of men in prevention of these problems;
6. Advocate addressing mountain women's reproductive and sexual health rights and support community-based health care and insurance;



7. Create awareness and appreciation of gender equality issues and traditional health practices among all kinds of health professionals;
8. Integrate indigenous knowledge systems into formal education, and develop alternative, flexible and context-specific curricula, including indigenous and practical knowledge, and employing indigenous teaching staff;
9. Promote communication among mountain women and communities while preventing the erosion of linguistic diversity;
10. Encourage research and disseminate results of mountain women's indigenous knowledge in cultural and religious systems, natural resource use, traditional farming and conservation techniques, and health practices;
11. Collect and document disaggregated data on mountain people (by sex, age, region, etc.) in all fields.
12. Ensure increased access to information about businesses, markets, technology, and other livelihood opportunities that utilise and conserve the diversity of mountain environments, and promote training programmes, and social services to meet the needs of mountain women;
13. Encourage and promote fair trade and ethical business in mountain areas, in order to ensure that producers reap a fair share of the benefits from sale of their products;
14. Promote peace to prevent mountain women and their families from suffering the consequences of armed conflicts, eradicate trafficking of women and children in poor mountain areas and domestic violence, and promote social programmes aiming to overcome violent cultural practices;
15. Promote physical and social infrastructure (roads, electricity, telecommunications, markets, health care, schools, etc.) that are sensitive and responsive to women's needs and enhance income generation and entrepreneurship among mountain women, reduce their workloads, and improve the quality of their lives;
16. Analyse and mitigate the impacts of increasing privatisation of resources within mountain communities, and create safety nets where the impacts of globalisation destabilise mountain communities;
17. Provide gender budgets and increase budgetary allocation for mountain women's initiatives to make development sustainable.

Adopted October 4, 2002  
Thimphu, Bhutan







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