Her Way Forward

Voices of mountain women...

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A resource kit based on

Voices of Mountain Women...

at "Celebrating Mountain Women"

*a Global Gathering in the International Year Of Mountains
1- 4 October 2002, Bhutan.*

October 2002

SOCIETY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATION

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 the future 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.

The Missing Link (TML) - Society for Environment and Communication is a non-profit, non-government support organisation based in north east India. Established in 1995, TML is a colongmeration of professionals from different sectors and stands on the belief that Environment Education and Development Communication can be the basic instrument to enable and engage people's participation. The other thrust areas of TML are training and Capacity Building; Research and Documentation; and Networking.

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Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW) was the one of the first global mountain women's conference, organized during the International Year of Mountains (IYM) 2002. It was organized by ICIMOD, in close collaboration with the Mountain Forum, as its only global event to mark Year. The conference brought together over 250 mountain women and men from 35 countries and five continents. An immediate outcome of CMW was the Thimphu Declaration, which was a message from mountain women to the global community. CMW also provided a platform for the emergence of a vision of a continuing global network of mountain women. This later culminated into the formulation of the Global Mountain Women's Partnership, which was launched at Bishkek.

PARTNERS AND DONORS

The **Mountain Forum** was established in 1995 through international collaboration from non-government organisations, universities, governments, multilateral agencies, and the private sector. It is governed by a six member International Board of Directors.

It is an innovative global network composed of thousands of people, professionals, and organisations from over 100 countries and is open to individuals and organisations concerned with sustainable mountain development and conservation. It was at the First Mountain Forum Council Meeting in Cusco, Peru that ICIMOD proposed to host and organize CMW in collaboration with MF.

www.mountainforum.org

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was established in 1976 in response to the persistence of widespread hunger and malnutrition in the world. Hence the Fund's specific mandate is - to combat hunger and rural poverty in developing countries, especially low-income, food-deficit countries, and to improve the livelihoods of poor rural people on a sustainable basis. Hunger, for the Fund, is not just a food production and supply issue, but also a livelihood issue.

www.ifad.org

CMW received financial support from the Women in Development grant to IFAD from the **Overseas Development Assistance of the Government of Japan (ODA)**.

www.mofa.go.jp/oda-japan

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

was created in 1976, in response to a call from women's organisations attending the 1975 UN First World Conference on Women in Mexico City. Within the UN system, UNIFEM promotes gender equality and links women's issues and concerns to national, regional and global agendas by fostering collaboration and providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies.

www.unifem.org.in

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

is Switzerland's international cooperation agency within the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Together with other federal offices, SDC is responsible for overall coordination of development activities and cooperation. The agency undertakes direct actions, supports programmes of multilateral organisations and helps to finance programmes run by Swiss and international aid organisations. The aim of development cooperation is to alleviate poverty by helping people in partner countries to help themselves.

www.sdc.admin.ch

ICCO is an Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-

operation committed to working towards structural poverty alleviation. In cooperation with partner organisations all over the world, ICCO supports the under-privileged in their fight for a more dignified existence. ICCO is one of the six Dutch co-financing organisations, which, with funds from the Dutch government and the European Union organisations, supports projects and programmes in developing countries.

www.icco.nl

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

(Sida) was established in July 1995 to be part of development cooperation and to assume part of a global responsibility. The overall goal of Swedish Development Cooperation is to raise the standard of living of poor people in the world.

www.sida.se

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

(FAO) was founded in 1945 with a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations. FAO was appointed by the General Assembly of the United Nations to serve as the lead agency for the International Year of Mountains.

www.fao.org

Austrian
Development Cooperation
Austrian Coordination Bureau Bhutan (ACB)

The **Austrian Co-ordination Office** in Thimphu, Bhutan handles large-scale projects like hydro-electric power plant construction with Austrian support as well as preservation of cultural heritage, glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) mitigation, scholarship programmes, projects designed to enhance the efficiency of forest resource utilisation, and many others.

acb@druknet.bt

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PREFACE

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) was founded in December 1983 in Kathmandu, Nepal, with a statutory mandate *"to help promote the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region"*. The founding members were the Centre's eight regional member countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

At the global level, ICIMOD has made significant contribution in promoting the 'Mountain Agenda' arising out of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Agenda 21), in supporting the establishment of the 'International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions' launched at the WSSD, Johannesburg in 2002, and developing the Bishkek Platform at the 2002 Bishkek Global Mountain Summit. The Centre has been instrumental in planning and carrying out regional and global activities during the International Year of Mountains (IYM) 2002 and in building alliances for follow-on partnerships.

The International Year of Mountains 2002 was an important and exciting year for mountain people and issues. To ICIMOD the Year presented an extraordinary opportunity to make major strides in fulfilling our mission and promoting the cause of mountain peoples both globally and in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Our most important global opportunity was the organisation of the world-wide gathering titled "Celebrating Mountain Women" (CMW) from 1-4 October 2002, in Bhutan – the only global event throughout the year focusing on women of the mountains.

For the first time, 250 women and men from some 35 countries from every continent of the globe gathered together to celebrate mountain women – and find common voice for their unheard concerns. The conference brought together farmers and agriculturalists, craftswomen and entrepreneurs, herders and livestock specialists, writers and film makers, scholars and independent thinkers, development workers and service providers, networkers and advocates, mountain climbers and spiritual leaders, and of course mothers and caregivers: daughters, sisters, wives, homemakers, and bread makers.

The conference was an attempt to recognise and draw the world's attention to mountain women's immense contribution in sustaining life in harsh and fragile environments, their roles, responsibilities and rights as nurturers of their families and communities and their stewardship of the mountain ecosystems. It presented a unique opportunity to admire and appreciate mountain women's resilience and drive to live, their arduous labour and their willingness to adapt to a changing milieu while preserving their old traditions and cultures for future generations. The Conference explored ways of creating opportunities for mountain women to be recognised as 'agents of change'. Through dialogue, debate, exhibition, films, and days of informal interaction those of us who participated were privileged to celebrate the wonderful diversity of mountain women. All worked hard to bridge perspectives from the South and the North, from the

grassroots to academia, from the specific stories of mountain women to the varied natural and social environments in which mountain women live. The exhibition stalls displayed an eclectic collection of arts, crafts, ceramic, clothing, food, herbs and spices, and other products produced by women of various mountain regions of the world.

Apart from this Resource book, some other outputs are currently under production. These will include the report, conference briefs, technical papers and the film. As they are ready we intend to put them on CD Rom and post them at our website (www.mountainwomen.net) for wider dissemination. We are also exploring the production of an abridged version of the Conference outcomes which could be made available in different languages.

The Thimphu Declaration which was the message to the world from the gathering of mountain women was presented at the culminating event of IYM 2002 – The Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in Kyrgyzstan and its principles noted and integrated in the Bishkek Mountain Platform. A draft framework for a Global Mountain Women's Partnership (GMWP) was initiated at CMW and launched at the Bishkek Summit. Additionally, as part of the follow-up to CMW the key principles and objectives of the Thimphu Declaration were also used to give shape and focus to our Gender Mainstreaming action initiative under the newly formed Integrated Programme of Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance. The GMWP will be one of the activities that will be pursued by the programme.

I would like to thank each and every participant that came to this event and helped make it happen. I would also like to put on record, ICIMOD's and mountain women's gratitude to those whose generous financial assistance helped make this unique event possible.

- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome.
- United Nations Development Fund for Women, South Asia Regional Office (UNIFEM-SARO), New Delhi, India.
- Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), Berne, Switzerland.
- Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida)
- Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation (ICCO), The Netherlands
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Rome
- Austrian Development Co-operation in Bhutan (ACB)

We are especially grateful to the Royal Government of Bhutan for their extraordinary generosity, hospitality, and support in numerous ways.

We are also grateful to The Mountain Forum and The Mountain Institute (TMI) who made significant in-kind support to the organisation of this major event. We appreciate the dissemination support provided by Mountain Forum. The additional help by Elizabeth Byers of TMI to design and set up the first web page for this event was most useful to initiate the process. I would like to particularly thank Ms. Anita Anand of the global steering committee who served as the direct liaison with ICIMOD to guide and steer the process. I am grateful to the many ICIMOD colleagues who directly or indirectly contributed to the process, and express my particular gratitude to Ms. Phuntshok Tshering and Ms. Ojaswi Josse who worked so hard and well to make CMW a success.

Thank you all !

J. Gabriel Campbell, PhD.
Director General
ICIMOD, Kathmandu, Nepal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"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 (1999) - Searching for Women's Voices in the Hindu Kush Himalayas edited by J.D.Gurung, 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 consolidate mountain women's situation and perspectives on national and international policies and mountain development in general.

Against this background, the then Director General of ICIMOD - Mr. Egbert Pelinck had proposed at the First Mountain Forum Council Meeting in Cusco, Peru (October 1999) that ICIMOD would host and organize an international conference for mountain women as part of its plans for celebrating IYM 2002. Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW) was one of the first global conferences to make mountain women it's only agenda. It was a historic gathering of some 250 mountain women and men from 35 countries, representing all five regions of the globe. CMW was an event which was geared to bringing real mountain women together, listening to them and hearing their stories from mountain women themselves. Some of outputs by way of audio, video and print proceedings, briefs and a resource kit are nothing but testimonies of the voices of mountain women from all over the globe. In the end it was a simple but heart-warming gathering with a lot of life, energy and color which made it special and memorable.

Without the foresight, vision and commitment shown by ICIMOD immediate past ex-Director General Mr. Egbert Pelinck and the current Director General Dr.J.G Campbell and without the passion of my senior ex-colleague Jeannette D. Gurung for mountain women I am sure this dream would never have been dreamt when it was. We really appreciate the initial small grant made available to us by two United Nation's agencies - Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome, that a well represented Planning meeting could be organised in May 2001. The highest level delegate at this planning meeting was none other than Ms. Chandni Joshi, Regional Director of South Asia Regional Office of United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM-SARO), New Delhi, India, UNIFEM, herself a mountain woman with a difference. Ms. Joshi's pledge of the first major portion of funds to implement the planned activities was immediately matched by IFAD, Rome through its WID grant from Government of Japan. The Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), Berne joined us next as mountain women occupy an important place on their development agenda. The small grants that later followed from Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation, The Netherlands (ICCO), Austrian Cooperation Office for

development in Bhutan (ACB) together with the organizational/ outreach support from the Mountain Forum and The Mountain Institute are highly valued by us. Every little assistance that came our way was valuable and appreciated, both in kind and in funds.

I am sure this celebration would have remained a beautiful dream had it not been for a diversity of support the CMW team received from all quarters. We have benefited immensely by the willing guidance of the five Global Steering Committee members : Ms. Anita Anand for Asia-Pacific, Ms. Elizabeth Byers for North America, Ms. Josefa Nolte for Latin America, Ms. Francoise Mees for Europe and Dr. Esther Njiro for Africa. We also knew that Organising Committee members were always there for us to assist in any situation if required. Dr. Govind Kelkar was one of those who most ably and willingly took upon herself the coordination of the Research component of CMW. The Chief Executive Officer and President of The Mountain Institute - Ms. Catherine Cooke was one of the most inspiring and encouraging of partners and she was instrumental among other things to mobilize a number of mainstream media and other professionals from North America.

Media coverage of CMW was something we tried to pay particular attention. The Women's Feature Service (WFS) ably managed the media aspects by sensitizing them about mountain women and their issues in order to have a multiplier effect and lasting impact on general audiences around the world. Among other things the WFS sent out pre-conference postings, daily press releases over the internet from Paro and post-CMW news releases. WFS tried to get the media interested and attracted to come to CMW to write about mountain women. Let me take this opportunity to say thank you to all media organizations who demonstrated their support and offered mountain women their space in the media by sending their representatives to participate in CMW. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Newsweek, United News of India, The Times of India, South China Morning Post, Nepali Times and Kuensel were among the major media houses represented while we also had the fortune of having with us a few free-lance journalists who were into making films on women or preparing stories for major women's magazines.

Above all, what I found most touching was the spontaneous goodwill and participation by my country Bhutan and its determination to help make CMW a success under any circumstances. Without the keenness and enthusiasm of the Royal Government of Bhutan as a whole and the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dzongkhag Administration of Paro, the Management of Wang Watershed Project in Paro and the commitment and interest of all the staff concerned, the organization of such a huge gathering in Paro would have been an impossible task to accomplish. Druk Air management was also most supportive and tried their best to cope with us. Mr. Wangchuk Wangdi and Sonam Chopel of Ms. Thunder Dragon Tours and Treks handled most ably the highly complicated travel schedules of the international participants coming from the five regions of the globe. Mr. Wangdi went out of his way to fly down to Bangkok at his own cost "to shepherd" (as he said) some of the participants into Paro. Most importantly the services provided to us by the Paro District Hospital which set up a First-Aid room at Olathang as well as 24 hours Doctor on call service was like no other !

I owe special gratitude to Dasho Sangay Thinlay, ICIMOD Board Member whose committed leadership and strong support to us helped ensure that we received coordinated support. Dasho took deep interest in the event and painstakingly visited the venue several times before the conference and stayed at the venue throughout the duration of the conference.

Aum Neten Zangmo - Bhutan's Cabinet Secretary and highest ranking woman official was exemplary in her expression of support and solidarity. Despite her busy schedule and indispensable responsibilities as Cabinet Secretary, Ms. Zangmo took sincere interest and stayed at the venue throughout the conference. She was most informal and moved around freely to discuss, to be interviewed and to ensure that the locally elected Bhutanese women participants were participating and comfortable.

The input provided by Ms. Dorji Yangki, professional architect of the Special Commission for Social and Religious Affairs cannot be matched as she designed and supervised the making of the fashion ramp, in the open grounds of Olathang hotel, on which Mountain women paraded proudly to show-off their exotic and unique costumes on that memorable evening. We are equally grateful to civil engineer Tshering Dukpa of the Ministry of Agriculture who willingly managed the task of organizing and building and shed quite some sweat and sleepless nights. It was again Ms. Dorji Yangki together with, her able and creative colleague, Tshering Uden Penjor of the National Textile Museum, who choreographed and conducted the entire mountain costume show.

The choice of venue at Olathang Hotel and having the man who never said 'no' - Mr. Chencho Tshering, its manager was the greatest blessing indeed. Deki and I had never ending demands and we were joined by the 250 women and men later on, but Mr. Tshering went about doing his business with a smile and did his best to cater to all our needs.

Without the quiet, firm, organised and efficient support I received from my friend and colleague Ms. Deki Pema of the Ministry of Agriculture I am not sure, I'd have survived it all! Tshering Gem was just superb as she was ever ready to take orders from Deki and me and run about to implement them immediately.

Overall, I am deeply obliged to one and all in Bhutan who were there behind us to give a helping hand any time without any complaints!

We are so pleased and grateful to Himal Film South Asia and its team of Mr. Maneesh Shrestha, Ms. Ramyata Limbu, Mr. Basanta Thapa and Mr. Sudarshan Karki who put together the mini mountain women's film festival at CMW after months of research to look for films only on mountain women. It was a valuable input. While Mr. Shrestha could not make it to Paro the latter three over-came the initial technical apprehensions and did a good job with the shows which gained popularity quickly.

And ofcourse we are extremely grateful to the participants who readily accepted to be facilitators and led sessions most ably. 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 an innovative documentation style. The Conference Briefs, provides the gist of all the exchanges that

took place at CMW while a Resource kit following that attempts to capture the essence, colour and excitement. The two products include and reflect the expressions, voices and perspectives of a number of mountain women, who contributed to the process.

Last and most important, I have to thank my dear ICIMOD colleagues who stood by me through out this period of organising and implementing the CMW. Special thanks and gratitude are due to Dr. J.G Campbell, Director General who accorded high priority to the project and took personal interest to help ensure that we were on track. My appreciation and thanks to Mr. Rajen Upreti and his travel and hospitality team who put in many hours of hard work as we were finalizing the travel itineraries. To Mr. Milan Tuladhar, Mr. Rajendra Mali and Mr. Kiran Shrestha, I will never be able to thank you enough as you demonstrated your willingness and capacity to be flexible and open when the situation called for it. Thank you for providing all your support on time.

Thanks to the prompt and generous help from my senior colleague Mr. Anupam Bhatia and his superb photographic skill that we have beautiful still pictures from the Mountain Costume Show and the gathering as a whole, which vividly capture the color and essence of the gathering. Many of these have been scanned and organized into a photo gallery at the www.mountainwomen.net website. The video documentation has picked up the highlights and moves. Ms. Ragini Deshpande and her camera team did a wonderful job of filming the whole event. We have made copies of the film on video CD and will make it available to all participants as a memento of CMW. We will also try to upload the four minutes video clip at our website so that more people can view it.

With out the untiring, energetic, efficient, prompt and intelligent support from my colleague Ms. Ojaswi Josse and Ms. Atsuko Toda the team work that went into making CMW a success would not have been possible. Together we could rely upon Ms. Anita Anand Steering Committee member for Asia-Pacific who flew up from Delhi at such short notices to give us a helping hand.

How can I end without thanking Ms. Irene Santiago who came with her heart and soul to be among us, and delivered the most inspiring and moving Keynote address which set the tone for the celebrations. Her words on empowerment were powerful reminders to the women gathered and she wished "power to mountain women".

Last and most important, thank you participants for coming to CMW, despite the hazards and endless challenges of international travel and adjustments in personal lives as mothers, daughters, wives and farmers to be able to get away ! The single most beautiful aspect of 'Celebrating Mountain Women', was the human relationships that were established. Thank you for being there to make CMW 2002 a reality and memorable !

Phuntshok Chhoden Tshering,
Coordinator of CMW 2002
ICIMOD.

ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
CMW	Celebrating Mountain Women
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IYM	International Year of Mountains
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFS	Women's Feature Service
WHO	World Health Organization