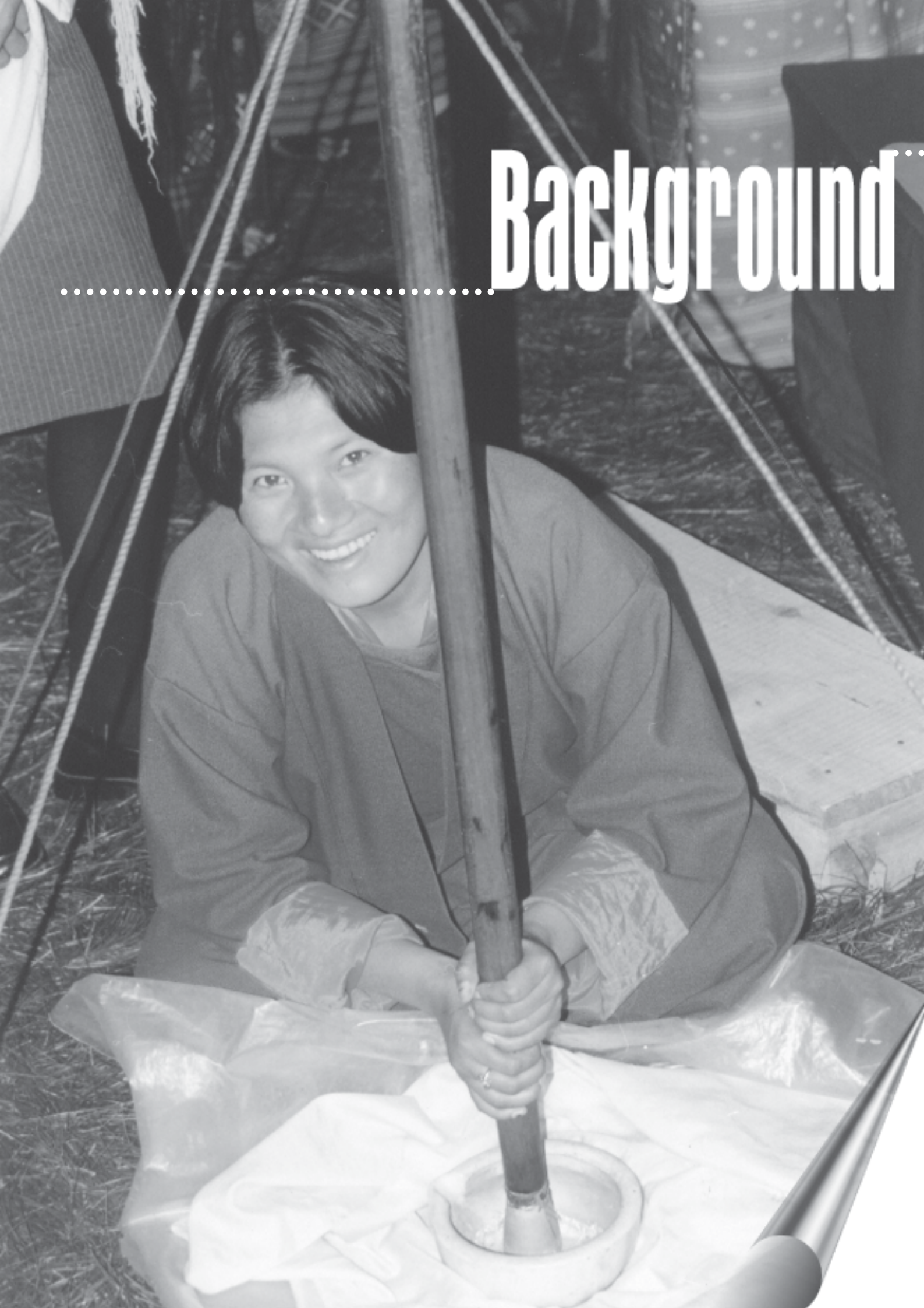


# Background





# Background

## Introduction

Mountain people rank amongst the most deprived of the world's population, and yet, their stewardship of mountain natural resources is closely linked to the sustainability of life in both upland and lowland areas. Their marginalised status compared to those who dwell in the plains is well documented.

Mountain women play a crucial, and in many respects, a dominant role in natural resource management, agricultural production, income generation, and in the well-being and the very survival of mountain families. Women across the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH) are responsible for almost all farm activities as well as household maintenance, and are an enormous source of indigenous knowledge related to these activities.

Moreover, they are also entrepreneurs, heavily involved in small-scale businesses related to crafts, food products, and so on. The increasingly common migration of men to urban centres and their involvement in armed conflicts have exacerbated women's already heavy responsibilities in managing farms and households. And yet, in mountain regions, as in the world over, women, as a class, are more undernourished, more under-compensated for their labour, and more under-represented in formal decision-making bodies than men.

Despite their dominant role in the production systems of the mountains, there is little understanding of the contributions made by mountain women and of gender relations in mountain regions. The studies that have been carried out are neither well known nor accessible, and policies remain inadequate. In addition, the personal accounts of mountain women about their unique situation are missing. Thus far, processes of historical, economic, and social development have been told almost exclusively from a male and non-gender perspective.

Therefore, a discussion of gender relations must start from the so-far neglected perspective of women. This would allow an understanding of the differences and similarities between the conditions of mountain men and women. These perspectives must directly reach policy makers in a way that will encourage them to make the necessary changes.

Since mountain women often appear independent, the need to revise policies has not been evident to local leaders. Because of the predominance of less rigid religious beliefs within the indigenous systems, and the dominant role of women in the livelihood systems of the mountains, mountain women have traditionally been afforded more freedom of movement, greater independence in decision-making, and higher status than women of the lowlands. Perhaps due to the difficulties of eking out a living in a harsh mountain environment, the women of highland areas have historically played a dominant role in agricultural production and natural resource management. Yet, instead of celebrating this traditionally higher status and its benefits to the community, the current social and economic integration of mountain areas into nation-states is rapidly eroding the status of mountain women.

However, it is evident that mountain communities will not survive if women reduce their responsibilities. Strategies of survival have always included the frequent absences of males for trading and herding purposes; hence, women have traditionally been responsible for the maintenance of the farm and the household, in addition to participating in small-scale trading and income-earning activities.

Male biases in the development process are built into institutions, policies, and processes, and promise to continue along a similar path despite the increasing

availability of data on the predominant roles of women in the primary sectors of economic development and natural resource management.

These issues are of particular interest to those working in mountain development, because socialisation in mainstream societies relegates women to a lower status. This occurs through a number of processes involving religious, cultural, and legal mechanisms. In addition, biological differences are also used negatively to allot an inferior status to women. And yet, study after study has exemplified the paramount role of women as custodians of not only their families and culture but also the environment at large. It is only through their arduous labour and extensive indigenous knowledge of the environment that the mountain community and its livelihoods are sustained. How can this knowledge be translated into constructive action that will strengthen mountain communities?

Given this milieu and the opportunity presented by the International Year of Mountains 2002, the challenge is to provide a platform that brings together and highlights the experiences and aspirations of mountain women. At the same time, there is an additional challenge to begin building a community of concerned individuals who will promote the interests of mountain women within development circles, in the marketplace, and within decision-making bodies. Policy-making and advocacy have more recently been assisted by developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs). Since 1992, networks of mountain women have slowly begun to emerge, finding a common cause in their double marginalisation – as ‘poor and unsophisticated’ mountain people, and as women. Many mountain regions are rich in economic resources such as minerals, timber, hydropower, and fresh water. The scenic, cultural, and sacred beauty of mountains draw increasing numbers of tourists and pilgrims to remote mountains all over the world. Have mountain women benefited from these local resources? Can they benefit?

The real challenge lies in creating networks – nationally, regionally and internationally – that will take the discussion and empowerment of mountain women forward. The International Year of Mountains provides just this opportunity.

### **Conceptualisation of CMW**

To respond to the situation and to meet the challenge, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) proposed that it host an international gathering of men and women around the issues of mountain women.

This was a result of ICIMOD’s commitment to focus on mountain women, made during the Mountain Forum

Council Meeting in Cusco, Peru, in 1999. “Celebrating Mountain Women” as the gathering came to be called, was the first such event that sought to give a platform to the unheard voices of mountain women from around the world, and the first ever international gathering devoted to the issues and concerns of mountain women.

The idea of calling the event a ‘celebration’ was deliberate. While mountain women have hard lives, are undoubtedly exploited, discriminated against, and disenfranchised, they also have enormous resilience, strength, knowledge, and power. It is these latter aspects that the gathering wished to capture and take forward.

### **Why CMWs?**

The purpose of “Celebrating Mountain Women” was to celebrate the wonder and challenge of mountain living, and to bring to the public’s attention the major contributions women make to the environment, and to national economies through their various roles as nurturers and caretakers. Their stories enable the wisdom of the mountains to be passed on to the next generation. Their traditional knowledge about caring for the environment, providing fuel and fodder, and raising families without the support of modern infrastructure, have lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The meeting was designed so women would have opportunities to learn about each other’s experiences, and be exposed to modern communication techniques such as the Internet, which could enhance their lives and livelihoods. By bringing together women from diverse backgrounds who have a shared love and passion for the mountains, the meeting enabled the creation of new and improved networks that could work together in creative problem solving.

Yet another very important objective of CMW was to create new coalitions and networks to work on policy issues related to mountain women, and an effort was made to identify and connect groups of mountain women and intermediaries. Throughout CMW, a great deal of interaction between intermediaries, mountain women, and policy makers took place.

Therefore, while women’s voices need to be heard and need to be incorporated into decision-making processes if we are to achieve sustainable development, there is an even greater need to address the issues and concerns of mountain women. Without their active involvement in the planning and implementing of development initiatives, no real impact can be made in their lives. Measures need to be taken to address their specific issues, hence this conference.

### **Planning of CMW**

The first major step in making CMW a reality was the planning meeting held in Kathmandu in May 2001. Twenty-three women from around the world met to



discuss the significance of such a gathering and to plan this unique event in a most creative and fruitful manner.

The women attending represented mountain women from their respective regions and had a great deal of experience working with them. These women chose five from the group to form the CMW Steering Committee, representing five different regions of the world. The steering committee was responsible for assisting and guiding the CMW Secretariat, based at ICIMOD in Kathmandu.

CMW was organised with the aim of providing a platform for mountain women to articulate their concerns, and share their experiences and ideas related to the future of mountain livelihoods and cultures. In short, it was intended to provide a means for unheard mountain women's voices to be heard.

In July 2001, the CMW Secretariat was formed to coordinate and organise CMW. Based in Kathmandu, the secretariat was responsible for corresponding with potential participants, contracting work related to CMW, and making logistical and other arrangements. It was also responsible for raising funds, organising press conferences, advertising, spreading the word about CMW, selecting participants, and finally, producing reports.

The secretariat began by collecting and disseminating information on the situation of mountain women. It then looked at strategic points where this information exists, and in what form (for example, written or anecdotal).

CMW was also a very effective means of increasing interaction between development players and mountain women. During planning and coordination, groups in mountain areas who could learn from each other were identified. CMW provided a venue where all these different groups could come face to face for more effective interaction and results.

Among other things, the importance of the media's role was identified and plans were made to pursue this more vigorously. It was decided that more relevant resources and incentives needed to be provided to the media in order to increase and improve coverage on mountain women and their specific needs and issues.

It was decided that a message from CMW should be taken to a global forum for wider dissemination. Thus the participants of CMW drafted the Thimphu Declaration, which was presented at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (BGMS) in October 2002. The Thimphu Declaration proved an important tool for beginning the dialogue on what has been achieved and what still needs to be done to better the lives of mountain women everywhere.

Originally, CMW was to be held in Nepal from 28-31 May 2002, but was later postponed and moved to Bhutan due to the volatile political situation in Nepal. Bhutan provided a perfect venue, as it is a mountainous country where mountain women enjoy much more freedom than other mountain countries around the world. Bhutan is an

enchanted kingdom nestled in the eastern Himalayas — a country of breathtaking natural beauty.

Based on discussions with various CMW counterparts in Bhutan and the tourist industry, the dates were fixed for 1-4 October 2002. The full CMW event as planned for Kathmandu would now be held in Bhutan.

These dates (despite being at the height of Bhutan's tourist season) made it possible for the CMW delegation to be sent to the BGMS — the culminating global event for IYM, which was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, from 28 October to 1 November, 2002.

Those planning CMW ensured that it would still be the same kind of event that had been planned originally for Kathmandu, only now with Bhutan's charm, the enthusiastic support of the Bhutanese Government, and the warm hospitality of the Bhutanese mountain people. The Royal Government of Bhutan also generously agreed to waive the normal \$200 per day visitor's fee to all CMW participants and played an important role in organising the entire event.

## **Fund Raising**

The total budget proposed for CMW was approximately US\$ 600,000. A total of \$318,000 was raised with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) through the Japanese Government; the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, South Asia Regional Office); the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC); the Interchurch Cooperation Organization (ICCO), the Netherlands; and Sida. In addition to intellectual guidance, coordination and supervision of the entire effort, ICIMOD's in-kind contribution also consisted of a full-time professional staff member together with space, equipment, secretarial services, Internet connectivity, and other operational conveniences.

## **CMW Programme**

CMW started with a traditional Bhutanese ceremony. Women and men had gathered around the venue of the conference in colourful outfits to watch the procession led by the Prime Minister of Bhutan and the Director General of ICIMOD.

There were workshops on five theme areas — Natural Resources and Environment; Entrepreneurship; Legal, Political and Human Rights; Culture and Indigenous Knowledge; and Health and Well-being — as well as a mountain women's film festival, a mountain costume show, exhibition stalls and booths, presentations, photo exhibitions and informal sharing of experiences, and story telling. All of these activities took place in the spirit of learning and celebration. In this age of information technology, the organisers of CMW saw this as a unique opportunity to start working on developing new networks, new ideas, and new alliances amongst mountain women worldwide.

### **Markets for mountain women's products**

Mountain women's products from around the world were displayed around the grounds of the CMW venue. Participants took a keen interest in showcasing their own products, including arts and crafts; and were equally interested in examining others' booths and learning about the different items and cultures represented there. Many participants left Bhutan with an eclectic collection of goods from all over the world, most of which were made by mountain women. Among the different products on sale were spices and herbs, clothing and jewellery, arts and crafts, and pottery and food items. Products from Bhutan, Bolivia, Columbia, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, and Swaziland were sold during the event. For many it was the first chance ever to see, feel, buy, and wear products from across the mountain regions of the world. Many participants were seen exchanging information and details of the products at the stalls — who made them and how, who wore them, and why they were made in that particular way.

### **Mountain Costume Show**

The Mountain Costume Show was truly a feast for the eyes, where women and men paraded in their national and tribal costumes. These outfits were often very elaborate, handmade, and colourful. Some were woven, as in the case of the Bhutanese traditional dress called the 'kira'. The women from Bolivia wore their Bolivian hats and long skirts, while the women from the Columbian mountains showed off their cotton dresses with intricate embroidery. Each costume told a story about the mountain people's age-old traditions embedded in culture, customs, and a unique set of beliefs and values.

### **Last day**

The last day of the conference was to take place in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, where the arrangements for the closing ceremony included Bhutanese folk dances. The drive to Thimphu was stunning and the beauty of the land, which for so many years was closed to outsiders and is still restricted to tourists, captivated the participants.

Participants had once again worn their very best attire to the closing ceremony, which was to be graced by Her Royal Highness Ashi Chimmi Yanzom Wangchuck. A young woman in her twenties, she thanked the participants and wished them a pleasant stay in her mountainous country. She also told them that she, as a young person, had a lot to learn from their experiences.

### **Challenges**

Although organising the conference was extremely interesting and very rewarding, it also presented many unique challenges. Making sure that participants were attended to and arrived in Bhutan safe and sound was at times difficult, due to the fact that many were travelling very long distances. Some were even travelling outside

their country for the first time. Many were anxious about travelling to an exotic destination where travel is not always easy.

Another challenge was meeting the various needs of the participants, which were as varied as the participants themselves. Some participants were not well due to the high altitude, while others were simply exhausted from their long journey. Many wanted to stay connected with their offices and homes, however this was difficult to provide given the number of participants. Many had thought that the same kind of technological infrastructure would be available in Bhutan as elsewhere.

One of the other challenges was transportation. Participants were put up in different hotels around Paro, as the venue of the conference, Hotel Olathang, could not accommodate everyone. Participants often wanted to go back to their hotel before the last event of the day was over. Many also wanted to go back and rest between events. Drivers were not instructed to take two or three of them at a time. Many also wanted to stay at the venue and were not happy with their hotel arrangements.

Because of the nature of the conference, language was yet another challenge we needed to tackle. The diversity of the group meant that many different languages were spoken. However, to ensure that no-one felt left out, we had selected participants in pairs. Often the two were an indigenous mountain woman, who did not speak English and a NGO professional who worked with her. This way, they knew each other and could translate and facilitate for those who did not speak the language.

### **Rewards**

In spite of some challenges, the overall conference was very fruitful and achieved what it set out to do. The five theme areas were discussed within the framework of policy, practice, and research. Many interesting presentations were made from different regions of the world, highlighting various issues and concerns. Stories, experiences, thoughts, and ideas were openly shared and discussed.

CMW is only the beginning of things to come. It was a way to bring the world's attention to the issues of mountain women, to provide a platform for them, and to ensure that their voices do not go unheard in this important International Year of Mountains. It was an opportunity to celebrate the wisdom, hard work, lives, and contributions of mountain women towards the stewardship of the mountains, mountain resources, and their families.

Participants left Bhutan with renewed zeal and enthusiasm to further the cause of mountain women. Sharing experiences and ideas opened ways to finding new solutions to age-old problems. As varied as the cultures and countries represented at CMW were, one thing that became very apparent was the fact that mountain women all over the world are marginalised,

and their voices need to be heard and their roles in decision-making bodies — both national and international — need to be strengthened if sustainable mountain development is to be attained. Mountain women can no longer be sidelined if the world wants to protect the mountains and the mountain environment, on which both mountain and the lowland people worldwide depend to such a great extent.

## Overview of Background Papers

Research on the five theme areas, namely, Natural Resources and Environment; Entrepreneurship; Legal, Political and Human Rights; Culture and Indigenous Knowledge; Health and Well-being; and the interdisciplinary 'Gender Roles and Relations' was carried out prior to CMW. Research papers were carefully reviewed and selected by the research coordinator, Dr. Govind Kelkar, to be presented and discussed during CMW.

### Gender Roles and Relations

The following research was collected and presented at CMW:

- Gender Relations, Livelihoods and Supply of Eco-system Services: A Study of Lashi Watershed, Yunnan, China — Yu Xiaogang
- Gender and Management of Mountain Resources in Africa: A Participatory Approach — Esther L. Njiro
- Sustainable Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation: Study of Kullu District, HP, India — Vinay Tandon
- Gender-sensitive Study of Perceptions and Practices In and Around Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia — Fiona Flintan
- Tourism and Forest Management in Mosuo Matrilineal Society, Yunnan, China — He Zhonghua
- Engendering Economic Valuation of Forests — Pierre Walter and Gadsaraporn Wannitikul

### Natural Resources and Environment

- Participation of Women in Joint Forest Management in India — Pratima S. Jattan
- Role of Mountain Women in the Management of Sustainable Eco-Systems — Chhaya Kunwar
- National Income with an Eco-feminine Perspective — Pushplata Rawat
- Development Strategies for Qiang Nationality Women in Ero Village, Sichuan Province, China — Zuo Wenxia and Li Junlin
- Devolution of Forest Management and the Alangan Mangyan Women — Merlyne M. Paunlagui
- Working with Community Based Conservation with a Gender Focus: A Guide — Mary Hill Rojas
- Improved Labour Saving Options for Mountain Women — Pampa Mukherjee
- Biodiversity and the New Voice of Women — Maria Mayer Scurrah

### Health and Well-being

- Health and Well-being of Women in the Mountain Areas of the Asia-Pacific Region — Ritu Bhatia
- Afghanistan Country Profile: Reproductive Health — Farah Usmani
- Old Laws and Morals in the Beautiful Mountains of Albania — Xhi Xhi Xhenis
- Decentralised Food Security Systems and Women: Sustainable Food Security Arrangements in Chattisgarh — Ilina Sen
- Status of Women's Health and Well-being in Northern Pakistan — Fareeha Ummer
- Economic Role and its Impact on Mountain Women: Strategies for the Future — Jatinder Kishtwaria

### Entrepreneurship

- Development of a Strategy for the Promotion of Mountain Women's Entrepreneurship — Phuntshok Tshering (ed.)
- Women and Work: An Exploration into the Lives of Trading Women — Tiplut Nongbri
- A Study on Three Women's Enterprises in the High Altitudes of Uttaranchal, India — Malika Virdi
- Organising the Unorganised Mountain Women: A Case Study of Gender Tourism in Garhwal Himalayas — Mondira Dutta
- Mountain Women Entrepreneurship in Slovenia: Policies and Practices — Patricia Verbole
- Women, Forests and Markets: Researching Poverty Alleviation through Commercialisation of Forest Resources in Mexico and Bolivia — Elaine Marshall and Kate Schreckenbergh

### Political, Legal and Human Rights

- The Gender Asset Gap: Land in Latin America — Magdalena Leon
- Women's Rights to Land in the Kyrgyz Republic — Renee Giovarelli et al
- Patterns and Trends of Women's Participation in Land Markets in Uganda — Abby Sebina-Zziwa
- Social Norms and the Educational Needs of Women in Central Asia — Nuria R. Ismagilova

### Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

- Gender Roles in Columbian Mountain Areas — Angela Castellanos
- The Cradle of Life: Symbolism of Naxi's Sudu — Xi Yuhua
- Indigenous Asia, Knowledge, Technology and Gender Relations: Discursive Invisibility — Navjot Altaf
- True Stories of Dangi Innovations from South Gujarat, India — Tisha Srivastav
- Matriliney in a Patriarchal Mould — Patricia Mukhim
- An Experience in Assisting Mountain Women in Six Districts in East Java — Indonesia Romlawati
- The Impact of Tourism on Gender Relations amongst Communities Living near Mt. Kinabalu, Sabah — Paul Porodong

- Rural Women of Mongolia — Amarsanaa Darurisen
- Gender Relations and Housing in Matrilineal and Patriarchal Communities — Girija Shrestha
- Gender Relations in Forest Societies in Asia — Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan
- Women of the Mountains: From Silence to Recognition — Michela Zucca
- Celebrating the Tribal and Indigenous Women of Thailand: Bringing Women's Voices to the Forefront of Development — Anchalee Phonkling

### Study Highlights

- a) Gender relations in mountain areas – matrilineal and patrilineal systems. Papers discussed the “deeply embedded patriarchal structures” and the erosion of women's rights even in matrilineal communities (Mosuo in Yunnan, China, Khasi in Meghalaya, India). Exceptions are seen in South American countries, with the recent (1998) adoption of legal measures for dual-headed households and the strengthened possibility that assets acquired during marriage will actually be jointly owned and managed. As a result of *ad hoc* gender mainstreaming and gender sensitising efforts, some changes occur in traditional institutions in South Asia as well, although only marginally.
  - b) Several papers on art forms in mountain societies suggest the significant role of women as mothers — the producers of life in traditional settings. However, this ideal is much eroded today. Some common typical features of mountain women in the present day are:
    - Patriarchy or emerging patriarchy in matrilineal societies
    - Low self-image and self-esteem
    - Patri-local residence except in a few matrilineal societies
    - Inequitable inheritance rights
    - Decreased access to forest and water resources
    - Heavy workloads
    - Absent men within families
  - c) A study that took place in the Alps points out the interesting phenomenon of women's historical revolt against their subordination: their response to centuries of repression and “being treated like goats” was to flee from the priests, the villages, the fathers, the brothers, and the husbands (a similar example can be found in the Central Highlands in Vietnam). In recent years, however, a new economic concept of “the identity economy” has begun to take shape. In addition to producing an income, these initiatives preserve and assist traditional cultures, becoming the base for production and supplementary income. Women are emerging as innovators in professional agriculture and innovators in new enterprises that link agriculture to tourism.
  - d) Women's exclusion from community and forest decisions, when they are heavily involved in work in forests, agriculture, other sources of their livelihood, was examined. The issue was also considered in the context of matrilineal societies.
- e) The gender asset gap, and women's ownership of land and resources was scrutinised. Three papers (Latin America, Uganda, and Kyrgyzstan) demonstrated that land and education inequality is negatively related to the income growth of the poorest in the population. Women's formal property rights are much stronger in all three regions than in South Asia, both because of more favourable inheritance rights, and recent advances establishing a dual-headed household in most of Latin America – where husband and wife both legally represent the household and jointly manage household assets. Women value assets and land ownership because of the security it offers against minimum food requirements for the family; as well as the intrinsic value of owning assets which they can rent, sharecrop etc; and the bargaining power assets and land ownership gives them within the household.
  - f) Ecological benefits and services by mountain women and men were also the subject of some papers, grouped under various types, as follows.
    - Direct: provision of fish, aquatic edible plants, fodder, medicine, irrigation and transport
    - Indirect: water regulation, water purification, and genetic resources
    - Recreational: cultural, educational, and scientific benefits
 The case of Lashi Lake in China was presented, where a large area of the local people's traditionally owned land was submerged. Women suffered the most from this change, since women bore the responsibility for agriculture there.
  - g) The promotion of tourism and its effects and impact on gender relations was considered: economic development, ecological services, and whether more women have entered the sex trade. The fact that problems are displaced to other non-local forest areas was also discussed. Sustainability of resources requires gender equality in social relations and women's adequate participation in community and forest management decisions.
  - h) The engendering of the economic valuation of forest resources was studied. The importance of gender as an analytical framework, the questioning of male dominated scientific knowledge particularly in the field of environmental economics; and the issue as it affects the economic value of fuelwood, NTFP collection, and the direct and indirect use value of environmental services were all discussed. Mountain women have a great deal of knowledge about and special interest in conserving biodiversity, including seeds and weeds. They are also skilled in various methods of storage.
  - i) Another area of concern was policy making for the development of mountain women, which is far



removed from the reality of indigenous societies. There seems to be a lack of adequate recognition of women's role in joint forest management and other natural resources. Although several papers did talk about the 'two pillars' of the mountain economy: forests and women.

Devolution has failed to create an impact on the political capacity of women.

- j) The lack of political rights (for example citizen ID cards in Thailand) and human rights of mountain women and men was presented for discussion. The Thai Government's signing of CEDAW does not work in this regard as they are not citizens and the concerned government lacks political will.
- k) Figures for education/schooling of mountain women and girls reveal a particularly grim picture in South Asian and Central Asian regions. Some methods that were suggested for overcoming cultural norms which exclude girls and women from education include:
  - Securing the approval of community leaders (usually all men)
  - Creating an educational environment sensitive to cultural norms (free of gender stereotyping, gender responsive technology, and gender-biased science text books)
  - Employing women staff: teachers and trainers
- l) When building or strengthening capabilities (health care, education, employment, self-employment) attention should be given to the personal over the institutional. A number of papers from South Asia and Central Asia make explicit and implicit recommendations for this approach.
- m) Possible and potential change in gender relations through the following were discussed.
  - Women's engagement in income generation/employment — when the opportunity cost of women's labour is recognised and she brings in money, men are reportedly willing to share housework and caring for dependents and children.
  - The presence and implementation of supportive legislation for the women's right to education and asset security — this empowers them to take decisions.
- n) Mountain areas in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region have some of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. Gender was found to be the most significant determinant of malnutrition among children. The shortage of water and inadequate sanitation causes many diseases among mountain women and men. These are coupled with poor health infrastructure, high illiteracy of women, and gender based violence, e.g. 'honour killing', persecution of 'witches', and trafficking of women. Despite of all the rhetoric of 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.

- o) Mountain women and entrepreneurship papers, (including an ICIMOD paper on Bhutan) suggest the following:
  - Matrilineal pattern of inheritance is common and widespread throughout Bhutan.
  - By and large, women have better status in Bhutanese society than in other South Asian countries. However their weakness, as anywhere else, lies in the burden of household responsibilities and lack of mobility, and lack of exposure to markets.

In another matrilineal society (Khasi in Meghalaya) women frequently find themselves at the mercy of more powerful traders who control the movement of goods in the market. In many cases, a lucrative business belonging to a woman is passed into male hands because of the marginalisation of the daughters from production.

As mountain communities move into the monetary economy, subsistence roles are devalued and women's status is increasingly eroded with marketing processes and structures. The wool-based enterprises in Uttranchal, India, provide some exceptions to this, however.

Women who are self-employed or own a business are more concentrated in the retail trade and in services. There is, however, some change in this trend. Women are increasingly becoming financially independent, seeking inclusion in the labour market and control over the products of their labour. A case study of Slovenia provides some hope.

- p) Built technology: The degree to which women interact with outsiders (other than family members) is revealed in the spatial arrangement of houses in their community.

The location of the Newar (Nepali ethnic group) women's workplace — the kitchen — is on the top floor of the house, while the living room (space for interaction) is on the first floor, so that the outsiders can rarely interact with women who are usually cooking on the top floor. Thus the restriction over women is supported by the built technology. Karen women (from the Kirat ethnic group), who have fewer restrictions on interaction, have joint kitchen and living space and this is the place where outsiders are entertained. Even as the woman carries on with her household chores, she can interact with the outsiders.
- q) Whether formally or informally, directly or indirectly, establishing new norms requires political struggle. Mountain communities have experienced protracted struggles to establish patriarchal norms. Simultaneously, and often in the same communities, struggles to overcome these patriarchal norms take place. The difference in these struggles is often that external agencies too have a substantial role to play

in bringing about the democratic functioning of the home and society. What is necessary to note is the dialectical relationship between the internal struggle and external enabling rules and decisions. Each one feeds into the other.

***Policy intervention, research, and gaps***

- a) The dual-headed household and its impact on women's empowerment / agency development, productivity and development in general.
- b) The ways of addressing the time constraints or increases in the workload of mountain women — largely a result of development projects and modernisation.
- c) Effects of tourism on mountain women and men and strategies for strengthening women's local knowledge and practices in the conservation of resources and women's equality and dignity.
- d) Enabling mountain women to establish NTFP-based enterprises through addressing problems related to lack of control over assets, finances, technical know-how, and marketing.
- e) Culture and institutional factors are often barriers to women's effective participation. A number of papers talked about the "cruelty of social norms" regarding mountain women in Central and South Asia, denying women access to education, resources such as land, and community decision making. How structural changes are/can bring about cultural and social constraints on women's inclusion need to be examined.
- f) Positive interpretations of cultures and religions to advance gender equality.
- g) Violence against mountain women: the role of familial and social violence in disempowering women, not permitting them access to education and government / public structures.
- h) Economic valuation of mountain women's work in management of natural resources.
- i) Effects of quota system-related measures (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan) on women's empowerment in mountain societies. Inclusion of women's voices in community affairs as being essential to the attainment of just societies and sustainable development.

## Themes of CMW

### ***Natural Resources and Environment***

Women are the primary resource managers of many mountain regions. They have an intimate knowledge of their complex and diverse mountain environments, and often know the use and proper management of literally hundreds of native species for food, fodder, fuel, medicine, and micro-enterprise purposes. In recent years, environmental degradation, poor resource management, and increased migration of men to the plains have added to the already high rate of food insecurity and to the workload of women in the remote, mountainous regions of the world. Additionally, non-local interests, including extractive industries, profit from mountain resources (timber, minerals, hydropower) but seldom re-invest any of the revenues locally. This has devastating effects on women, as they are most dependent on common property resources. In most parts of the South, women

do not have rights to the land they work. Often, decisions made about land take place without any input from the women, who have an intimate knowledge, relationship, and vested interest in the land and environment around them.

### ***Issues highlighted at CMW***

- Predominant role of women in mountain natural resource management
- Land tenure/user rights from various mountain regions
- Links between culture and agriculture
- Indigenous knowledge and use of biodiversity
- Biodiversity conservation and religion
- Impacts of extractive industries such as timber and mining on mountain women's ability to manage natural resources
- Critical dependency of mountain women on natural resources



Significantly, the largest group was 'Natural Resources and Environment'



Smaller groups were formed to tackle different sets of issues within 'Natural Resources and Environment'



Women and men share their differing views



Participants from four countries are present here

## **Health and Well-being**

Mountain people have a major disadvantage in access to primary health care due to their remote locations. Other factors also contribute to the poor health of mountain people, especially women. Cold stress and cold-related illnesses are common. Food is more difficult to grow on steep fields with short growing seasons, yet calorific requirements are greater in the difficult terrain and colder climates of mountain areas. The various life choices and activities of men — such as migration, and their involvement in armed conflict among other things, have added to women's already heavy responsibilities in managing farms and households. This affects their health and well-being, which is already under stress due to excessive and early child rearing, as well as malnutrition. Women are more vulnerable to illness because of their lower socioeconomic status in society.

Given the increasing migration of males from these remote villages to the city centres, there is also a growing risk of, and increasing cases of, sexually transmitted diseases. Men often return from outside with these

diseases and pass them on to their wives: many women are unaware of these diseases and this increases the risk of transmission. Bold steps are needed to redress this current trend. Improving women's health and well-being would mean taking a hard and creative look at women's workload, as well as the provision of information about HIV and STDs.

Best practices that could be highlighted include:

- Prominence of women's health in health policy
- Promotion of various contraceptives at all levels
- Launching of safe motherhood and family planning programmes
- Provision of training for female health care workers

Research and discussions could focus on:

- How women's health in the mountains is affected by the lack of infrastructure
- HIV in the mountain regions
- Prominence of traditional medicines such as herbs, and practitioners such as shamans and wise women, as well as on traditional knowledge and home remedies



**The theme facilitator notes important points from the discussion**



**Two women from Mongolia and Bhutan share a laugh during the session**



**The Vice Governor of a mountainous province of the Philippines makes a point**



**Director of UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office talks about UNIFEM's work in women's rights**



## **Entrepreneurship**

Mountain women have traditionally engaged in small-scale, entrepreneurial activities based on the use of natural resources — crafts, food, medicine, and utilitarian products. Such activities help in human resource development, build local capacity, and contribute significantly to revenue generation in the community.

How can factors such as credit, regulations, and policies be created to encourage women's capacity to engage in entrepreneurship and contribute to the economic well-being of their families and societies? Are there ways that private entrepreneurs and mountain women can develop businesses together?

Issues to be highlighted are:

- Examples of success stories and case studies of various projects undertaken by women with access to micro credit
- How women's knowledge of crafts and natural resource-based products can be passed on from generation to generation
- The importance of credit
- A woman's extra earnings and the positive impact on her children and society at large



**Participants from (clockwise) Thailand, India, Italy, Uganda, Mexico, India, Vietnam, and Bhutan**



**Women from Colombia and Mexico discuss the indigenous knowledge of mountain communities**



**African viewpoint: a South African and a Ugandan talk it over**



**Thai mountain women in their traditional attire exchange notes**

### **Political, Legal and Human Rights**

In a few traditional, matriarchal highland societies, women enjoy a relatively higher status than their lowland sisters. This status is coupled (not surprisingly) with a significant level of resource control, a clear voice in the affairs of the community, and even with lower reproduction rates. However, the majority of mountain women do not enjoy the same legal, political, and human rights as men, and subsequently lag behind in education, health, and public participation. As mountain communities move into the monetary economy, subsistence roles are devalued, and women's status is increasingly eroded. In most mountain societies, women are the primary caretakers of the land; yet they do not have the right to own the very land that they work on. At the same time, women in mountain areas have little knowledge of their rights, and enormous demands made on their time, making it difficult for them to be involved in the public sphere or in decision-making processes. Therefore, women's voices and concerns are not

incorporated into the programmes and policies that impact their lives and their environment. To achieve sustainable mountain development, women need secure access to resources and to decision-making power. It is essential for women to enjoy the same legal, political, and human rights as men, and for women's work to be recognised as an important contribution to the national economy. Revolutionary changes can be attained if women can enjoy social justice and have access to resources.

Some of the issues to be highlighted are:

- Women as agents of change/leaders
- Women's roles in matriarchal highland societies
- Links between legal and political rights and globalisation/liberalisation and how they affect mountain women's productive, reproductive, and other roles
- How to uphold indigenous women's rights to land and resources



**A woman from Mexico talks about her work, related to mountain women's health**



**The group discusses which points to highlight in the Thimphu Declaration**



**A woman from the Philippines shares her experiences with the other members of the session**



**A doctor from India working for UNFPA in Nepal facilitated the session on health**

### ***Culture and Indigenous Knowledge***

Until recently, development policies and programmes had largely ignored the rich culture and the indigenous knowledge base of mountain people. Development paradigms had initially focused on modernisation and mainstreaming people into development, rather than encouraging their diversity and uniqueness. In a changing world, the mores and traditions of mountain people have evolved too. Their rich tradition of oral history, songs, myths, and legends is being lost. Many young people in these communities want different lives, which often means migration out of the community. While some attempts have been made to capture the lives of mountain people, much more can be done.

Knowledge gaps exist in terms of data relating to mountain peoples' ways of life and mountain resources such as medicinal plants, as well as a critical examination of the historicity of cultures and their relevance to contemporary times.

There is, and can be, increased and deliberate activity to generate markets for women's products that use the cultural and indigenous knowledge of mountain people. This will help mountain women and communities see themselves as vehicles of change rather than requiring outside assistance.



**A mountain woman from the north-east Indian Himalayas shares her views**



**A Peruvian mountain woman who heads an NGO working with women artisans**



**The facilitator records the points made**

