10/93

139/93

Mountain Population and Employment

Discussion Paper Series

TECHNOLOGY: WOMEN'S WORK AND STATUS (The Case of the Carpet Industry in Nepal)

Prabha Thacker

MPE Series No. 21

1993

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever, on the part of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city, or area of its authorities; or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries.

PREFACE

TECHNOLOGY: WOMEN'S WORK AND STATUS (The Case of the Carpet Industry in Nepal)

Prabha Thacker

MPE Series No. 21

Prabha Thacker was a professional staff member of the Mountain Population Employment Division of ICIMOD when she wrote this paper. A well-known researcher into women's issues, she was a founder member of the Centre for Women and Development, Kathmandu.

May 1993

**International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
Kathmandu, Nepal**

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The imperatives for rectifying existing concepts of technology, as consisting of "men and machines" only, are urgent. In the context of mountain development especially, where numerous projects have empirically proved the causal links between women and environmental sustainability, the understanding of technology is crucially linked to women, to their indigenous knowledge base, and to their perceptions as well as to their responses to technology. The multidimensional functions of women in the mountains indicate strategies that they have adopted under harsh climatic and geographic conditions and natural resource constraints. Off-farm employment is one such alternative. As an off-farm activity, the carpet sector has come to play an important role in Nepal's export economy. It has the potential to readily absorb a large, rural female workforce. As a positive indicator for policy decisions, this needs to be considered in terms of exogenous factors such as historical background, socioeconomic conditions, including migration; and as an industrial strategy. It also requires an assessment of factors that determine whether the environment is favourable for women's access to technology and innovations.

The present study is an attempt to analyse various activities within carpet manufacturing where technological inputs are high. In the production process, the division of labour is based on sexual bias and men and women are assigned different rates. Ramifications in status and in access to and control over resources are discussed with reference to gender implications. Susceptibility, as a female worker in an industry that is highly dependent on both imports and exports, arises partly because women are "distanced" from technology and its ensuing benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Scope and Objectives of the ITDG Study - Women and Technological Innovation	1
Scope and Objectives of Women in the Carpet Industry: The Nepal Case Study	1
Methodology	2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to Madhuwanti Tuladhar and Kamala Bajracharya for their contributions to this study. I would like to thank the Intermediate Technology Development Group, UK, for initiating discussions on women and technology through the Do-It-Herself Project which is being undertaken on a global basis. The study is a part of this effort. I am hopeful that it will promote institutional collaboration through research, training, and information networking in the areas of women and technology, in general, and women and technology for mountain development in particular.

Professional and Trade Language

10

EXAMINATION OF PRODUCTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S WORK

Technology of Work and Network of Hierarchies	13
Industrialised Production Process	15
Implications of Technology	15
Access to Technology	15
Mechanisation	16
Underutilisation of Female Labour	19
Child Labour	19
Problems in Raw Material Supply	19
Opportunities for Upward Mobility	19
The Concept of 'Salary'	20
Gender Roles, Divisions, and Bias	21
Susceptibility to the Business Cycle	21
Other Forms of Vulnerability amongst Young Women and Children	23
Jardi as a Manipulative Mechanism	24

WOMEN IN THE CARPET SECTOR

Socioeconomic Profile of Women Workers	25
Age Group	25
Ethnic Group	25
Migration	26
Marital Status	26
Education	26
Work History	26
Reasons for Working in the Carpet Sector	29
Mode of Entry	29
Working Hours	30
Flexibility at Work	30
Wage Rates	31
Skill Levels	33
Participation in Marketing	33
Dialogue with Women in Wool-spinning and Carpet-weaving	34

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	39
Women's Access to Technology	40
Susceptibility at Both Ends	41
Preoccupation with Employment Generation	41
Human Resources and Institutional Support	41
Training	42
Business Hierarchies	42
Loopholes in Policy	42
Slackness in Monitoring and Control	43
Lack of Quality Control	43
Sustainability of the Carpet Industry	44
Recommendations	45

Plates	47
---------------	----

REFERENCES	49
-------------------	----

LIST OF TABLES

1:	Total Export of Nepalese Carpets	8
2:	Demand Projection for Readymade Carpets	9
3:	Manufacturing, Classified by Systems of Work Organisation	13
4:	Percentage of Male, Female, and Child Labour Employed by Type of Work, Piece Rate, and Equivalent Daily Wage	14
5:	Gender-based Activities in the Production Process	17
6:	Impact of Mechanised Carding on Spinners' Income	18
7:	Age Groups of Women Weavers and Spinners	25
8:	Educational Levels of Home-based/Factory-based Workers	28
9:	Workers Presently Involved in "Other" Work	28
10:	Reasons for Seeking Employment in the Carpet Sector	29
11:	Mode of Entry	30
12:	Rate of Payment	31
13:	Annual Income (in NR)	33

LIST OF FIGURE

1: Reasons for Migration	27
--------------------------	----