

Human Resources' Development and the Centrality of Women

Planning for integrated development with the induction of modern infrastructure, commercialisation, and value-added production requires the introduction of new technologies and, therefore, human resource development is inevitably of special significance. Technologies that use resources without environmental degradation but lead to a significant increase in income levels; that conform to the requirements of mountain specificities; that are easy to learn, adapt, and operate; and that result in reduction in drudgery and physical burdens, especially for women, need to be developed. Besides the 'hardware' of technology, which may be easier to develop, greater attention needs to be given to the 'software' aspects in the use of technology and management of its processes and products. Thus, not only do we need to develop technical and vocational education and training with mountain-specific orientation but also the skills required in a market-oriented economy, entrepreneurship, management of enterprises, and marketing being among them. It must, however, be recognised that work-related education and training and their effectiveness in increasing productivity and raising incomes are only feasible and fruitful if there is a reasonably sound foundation of basic education and health services. Therefore, provision of social infrastructure must be an integral part of development planning, both to improve the quality of life and to provide necessary inputs for economic development. Planning of social infrastructure in mountain areas may, however, require innovative approaches in terms of costs of technologies and modes of institutional management. Local material-based, low-cost technologies and indigenous knowledge and practices and community management of resources and institutions need to be employed to the maximum extent possible, since conventional modes and technologies often prove too costly and inappropriate in inaccessible mountain areas and for traditional mountain communities.

In the socioeconomic development of mountain areas, an issue that assumes crucial importance is that of the role and status of women. The issue is important everywhere, but it has special significance in mountain areas because of the centrality of women in most socioeconomic activities. Several specific attributes of women's lives and activities in mountain areas are well-established and well-documented. Women are the principal producers in mountain agriculture. They are overburdened with the tasks of procuring the essential means for family survival, viz., water, fuel, and fodder. Additionally, they attend to the domestic chores of cooking, washing, and rearing of children, yet they are the worst victims of environmental degradation as it results in scarcity and, therefore, greater difficulty and longer distances are involved in procuring these items for the family. Quite often, they have to manage the

households because the males migrate out. In spite of all their contributions they do not have a role in making crucial household decisions, for example, in the purchase and sale of assets, education of children, and migration of individuals or the family. The prevalence of a large number of female-headed households in mountain areas may thus be a mere demographic phenomenon rather than an indicator of economic and social status. Besides, the traditional values and practices of a male-dominated society and the poor educational and health status of women also contribute to their being 'major workers but marginalised members' of the family.

In this situation, certain measures should be given priority by development planners. Such measures include development of drudgery-reducing technologies to enable women to have time for other activities as well as leisure and education (particularly in the case of girls). But, in the development framework outlined earlier, much more needs to be done to make women effective partners in the process of development. It has been observed that lack of education and skills prevents women from participating in productive and income-earning activities in a commercial, market-oriented development process based on cash-crop farming and non-farm activities. Whereas in a subsistence-oriented agricultural economy, they were the main producers without necessarily having commensurate social status, in the new situation they have become marginalised workers with no improvement in their economic and social power. Measures adopted to mainstream women have often failed, as they mostly emphasised training and assistance for women-specific activities (e.g., kitchen gardening, stitching) of the supplementary and low-income type. This has left them without prospects of upward mobility or equity. Only a radical change in thinking, recognising that women can do most jobs that men can do, and endowing them with the necessary skills (e.g., in processing, managing, and marketing of produce rather than mere farming and collecting of subsistence needs) can make them effective partners in development.