

# Changing Circumstances

The largely self-sufficient, independent, and isolated communities of the mountains are gradually giving way to become members of the 'global village. Externally - driven changes are more and more affecting even remote mountain societies through market forces, government development interventions, political movements, tourism - even internationally broadcast TV. Urban centres and international markets are increasingly consuming natural resources, which

require greater extraction from mountain regions and therefore the potential to increase the exploitation of mountain people. Commercial agriculture is being introduced to supplement subsistence systems, and local economies are becoming monetised. Out-migration of males is a well-recognised phenomenon that will only increase as farming becomes less sustainable and profitable. In-migration of lowlanders unfamiliar with strategies for proper management of mountain farming and for survival is bound to cause environmental damage. Education and employment opportunities elsewhere are distancing youth from the land and setting in motion a process of 'class differentiation' (Mehta 1990).

All changes, however, have not been negative. Many mountain residents have benefitted from the accessibility to nearby schools, health care centres, and other services. Some have earned significant profits from tourism. However, the vast majority of mountain regions in the developing world have experienced an increase in absolute poverty, especially that of women and children (Byers and Sainju 1993).

In the wake of these changes, mountain people have not been able to organise themselves to manage their own resources adequately and to make their voices heard in order to orient development initiatives to their own advantage (Bajracharya et al. 1990). Their resiliency to outside forces has broken down as old traditions, local institutions, and culture are challenged by the new religion of materialism and consumerism (Mehta 1990). Traditional forms of organisation are breaking down in the face of new forms promoted by development organisations, banks, and governments.