Mountain Population and Employment

Discussion Paper Series

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN OFF-FARM INCOME ACTIVITIES: CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES AND POSSIBLE OPTIONS IN NEPAL

Dagmar Baer

MPE Series No. 4

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

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FOREWORD

This discussion paper by Dagmar Baer is the fourth in the series of five papers (MPE Series Nos. 1-5) that deal with the role of women in mountain development. The objective of these is to highlight the importance of gender issues which have lately gained some ground in the development dialogue, but are yet far from being internalised in mainstream planning and implementation. This is particularly true in the case of women in the mountains where the harsh realities of a subsistence economy and the fragile high altitude environment, have alienated women from the benefits of mainstream development. Women in the mountains are crucial to the production system. Yet there are several indications, that the changing socio-economic conditions are contributing to greater marginalisation of women. This is unacceptable from the standpoint of equity and effectiveness of the production system. The development process needs to recognise this unfortunate state of affairs, make deliberate efforts to incorporate gender perspectives, and involve women as active participants in decision making and control. I hope that the publication of the Discussion Papers under ICIMOD's Mountain Population and Employment Division will shed some light into the complexity of the tasks that lie ahead.

Dagmar Baer's analysis of women's position in off-farm activities is a timely pursuit. In the context of unsustainability within subsistent mountain economics and the dismal contribution of off-farm activities so far towards alleviating the problem, some fresh thinking is in order. The role of women in this respect is undoubtedly crucial. Ms. Baer's analysis of current conditions in Nepal shows that economic contribution by women is undervalued; traditional skills are used effectively within the subsistence agricultural framework; and women's involvement in the formal manufacturing sector is very limited. She concludes that, for greater involvement of women and to capitalize on the off-farm opportunities, the pressures of agricultural work burden have to be reduced and efforts should be directed simultaneously towards the development of managerial and technical skills, change in social attitudes and norms, initiation of women's cooperative groups, and availability of credit and support services. These are all vital issues. I am confident that readers will find the paper thought provoking. We would be happy if you would write to us with your comments and suggestions and join in the discussion on these important issues.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Ford Foundation for their generous support to ICIMOD's programme on the "Role of Women in Mountain Development." The grant has made it possible to establish collaboration with relevant institutions in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region, engage professionals to conduct case studies, write conceptual papers, publish and disseminate the findings. At ICIMOD, Dr. Deepak Bajracharya, Division Head of Mountain Population and Employment, is the overall Coordinator of the Programme. Thanks are due to Dr. Deepak Bajracharya and Ms. Prabha Thacker for providing professional input in improving the final text of this paper and others in the MPE Series (Nos. 1-5).

E. F. Tacke
Director

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