



Mountain Population and Employment

Discussion Paper Series

CASH CROPS AND THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S WORK AND STATUS: A CASE STUDY FROM TEHRI GARHWAL, INDIA

Manjari Mehta

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FOREWORD

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FOREWORD

This discussion paper by Manjari Mehta is the second 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.

Manjari Mehta's paper presents a relevant case study in the current context. Saklana in Tehri Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh (India), represents a village where, she argues, monetisation of the local economy has contributed to women's low status and "invisibility", and thereby constrained their life options. This is by no means an isolated instance in the communities of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region. The author does not, however, argue against the introduction of cash crops per se into hill agriculture. This is perhaps inevitable, given the present realities. The challenge, however, lies in mobilizing women for active participation in situations where the intensity of labour in daily activities is so great, and the socio-economic stigma against their participation, so prevalent. Equally important is the need to identify the means of overcoming constraints -- legal, socio-cultural, and economic-- to ensure women's access to and control of the means of production? I am confident that readers will find the case study of Saklana stimulating, especially in light of the conclusions drawn and recommendations made by Manjari Mehta. We would be happy if you would write to us with your comments and suggestions and join in the discussion on important issues raised by the paper.

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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This case study emerged out of a perceived concern for the neglect of hill agriculture, in general, and for the position of women in particular. It inevitably represents the culmination of many people's insights and inputs. Particular thanks go to Dr. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay who brought to my attention the context under which agrarian systems in the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh are being transformed, and on whose advice I first explored the possibility of doing fieldwork in Saklana. Both he and Dr. Vandana Shiva provided the intellectual stimulation and support to think through the complex and multifaceted issues that emerged from the fieldwork.

The actual field work would not have been possible without the tremendous warmth and kindness extended to me by the people, and especially, the women of Pujargaon. Manohar Lal Saklani, in particular, provided invaluable assistance in preparing and conducting the initial village surveys. His and Vishveshwar Dutt Saklani's families took me in as one of their own, providing me with a "home away from home", friendship and laughter.

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Manjari Mehta

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