



## **Mountain Population and Employment**

**Discussion Paper Series**

### **PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT: TWO PAPERS**

**Maria Mies, Bina Pradhan and Katherine Rankin**

**MPE Series No. 1**

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March 1990

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Kathmandu, Nepal

## FOREWORD

Two papers, the first by Dr. Maria Mies and the second by Ms. Bina Pradhan and Ms. Katherine Rankin, are included in this first issue of the Discussion Paper Series of the Mountain Population and Employment Division. This and four others are devoted specifically to the issues related to women and 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 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 Programme will shed some light into the complexity of the tasks that lie ahead.

The two papers included here were originally presented at ICIMOD's International Workshop on Women, Development and Mountain Resources: Approaches to Internalizing Gender Perspectives" (1988) and were subsequently revised and improved upon. Although I had not yet joined ICIMOD at that time, those who participated in the Workshop have indicated to me that these papers in particular were instrumental in generating a great deal of lively discussions. Indeed, on reading the papers, I find myself agreeing on some points and disagreeing with others. Dr. Maria Mies, in particular, advocates the dismantling of the values and belief systems that are based on the "basic patriarchal structure" and is highly critical of institutions like the World Bank, which "destroyed women's control over their independent subsistence base, and eventually increased their poverty". Without endorsing such a view point, completely, we think that this should at least be aired. Also, the "methodological postulates for women's studies" and the emphasis on social action are worthy of further discussion.

The paper by Ms. Bina Pradhan and Ms. Katherine Rankin argues that the environmental crisis that Nepal faces is attributable largely to unequal distribution of land and resources. Women become central to the argument because they are frequent users and manipulators of natural resources but are disadvantaged from the perspective of distribution. By looking into forestry management as a case in point, they advocate that women's commitment is quintessential for environmental protection. The approaches adopted by development interventions are also critically appraised in this light.

I am confident that readers will find both these papers thought provoking. We hope you would write to us with your comments and suggestions and join in the discussion on the issues raised by the papers.

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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The paper by Ms. Bina Pradhan and Dr. K. Christine Rankin argues that the environmental crisis that North India is experiencing is based on unequal distribution of land and resources. Women become central to the argument because they are responsible for and managers of natural resources but are disadvantaged in the process. The paper then is about women's participation in management as a case in point. The author also writes of "women's studies" as a contribution to environmental protection. The approach adopted in environmental research are the critical, appeared in this paper.

I am confident that readers will find both papers very thought-provoking. We hope you will write to us with your comments and suggestions by return of the journal. The names of the authors are given at the end of the paper.

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