

# The Challenge for ICIMOD

## Facilitating New Gender Roles and Opportunities for Women

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While ICIMOD has seen how change in the HKH region creates new risks and vulnerabilities, some articles in this publication reveal new roles and opportunities for women that can be emphasised enabling us to build upon these promising potentials.

As a knowledge management organisation, ICIMOD's first priority is to contribute to a better understanding of how socioeconomic and environmental changes affect mountain women and men and their respective capacities to adapt differently. For example, the fact that women-led households appear in certain circumstances to have a greater potential to escape poverty, could be because migrant men are contributing more to the family income. Nevertheless, the growing absence of the male population certainly affects mountain livelihoods and has consequences on women's drudgery and gender roles.

The second priority refers to the opportunities that changes offer. Our hypothesis is that the changes taking place in the mountain areas are also creating new roles and economic opportunities. If this is correct, we should promote approaches to strengthen the capacity of women to benefit from the changes. However, we must be aware that changes offer different opportunities in the different parts of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, where prevailing socio-cultural and religious values strongly influence gender roles and relations. For example, whereas in the Eastern Himalayas, the labour migration of men gives an opportunity for the empowerment of women, in Northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan, the growing wealth from labour migration of the male population tends to be used to support conservative values influenced by the traditions of Middle Eastern countries.

ICIMOD recognises that gender inequities are a major obstacle to mountain development. With our partners, we are committed to addressing gender issues together by promoting women's participation in our programmes, ensuring equitable access to economic and social

resources, and empowering women. ICIMOD advocates the mainstreaming of gender in the mountain development agenda of the Himalayan region, particularly as the regional challenges of globalisation, geo-political tensions, cross-border migration, and climate and environmental changes are demanding the invention of new approaches to address gender inequalities in the mountain context.

The core areas for ICIMOD to address the gender issues in the Himalayas can be summarised as follows:

- Promoting a deeper knowledge on the vulnerabilities, and their causes, of women and men to climate variability and environmental changes
- Acknowledging the roles women and men play in coping and adaptation strategies for socioeconomic and environmental changes
- Strengthening the opportunities for women wherever possible, notably by supporting initiatives that empower them
- Ensuring that change and innovation do not contribute to growing inequality, but instead promote better balanced and shared gain for both women and men for the benefit of the entire mountain community.

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