

## Executive summary

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Women play a key role in nature conservation, yet they often lack the inputs, technologies, training and extension services, and various enablers and linkages that can enhance the effectiveness of their efforts. They rarely formally participate in shaping conservation policies or programmes. Evidence indicates that gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive conservation practices have far-reaching multiplier impacts. This compendium by the Mountain Ecosystem Specialist Group of the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) includes four research articles and four research reports that bring out gender-specific knowledge for ecosystem management in mountain regions. Insights are collated from India, Italy, Mexico, Nepal, and the Togo-Ghana Highlands. The chapters capture diverse approaches to nature stewardship examined through a gender lens at the regional, national and sub-national level.

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Gerritsen focuses on alternatives to (neoliberal) development and the role of women in the development of pluriactivity and multifunctionality, citing experiences of women farmers from the indigenous community of Cuzalapa in the State of Jalisco in western Mexico along the Sierra de Manantlán mountain range and biosphere reserve. The article explores the management of homestead coffee gardens by an indigenous women farmer group, including their efforts in organising regional artisanal events and selling and innovating their products, which led to higher tourist influx, contributing to the socio-cultural and economic valorisation of local natural resources. The article explores how the different activities of the group and the functions that they generate helped in opening new social spaces to help the female farmers address their (practical and strategic) gender needs. While many gender barriers still exist, pluriactivity by women farmers helped reshape traditional gender roles.

Adhikari and Adhikari share experiences from Ecosystems-based Adaptation (EbA) in the Himalayan mountains piloted in Parbat, Syangja and Kaski districts in Nepal. The pilot focused on women-led community homestay businesses to diversify livelihood opportunities and build resilience to climate change. The initiative involved “mother groups” in both income generation and ecosystem restoration activities, enhanced their business management skills, and diversified local livelihoods, while also engaging them in in-situ conservation, efficient water use and agroforestry. These EbA measures nurtured green tourism, creating jobs at the local level, resulting in multiplier effects in the marginalised mountain communities of rural Nepal.

Notwithstanding the continued challenges of high out-migration rates and policy neglect, the women's solutions demonstrate effectiveness in enhancing the resilience of the target community and empowering women to lead nature conservation initiatives in the region.

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In another article from the Himalayan mountains, Mehta et al. explore the diversity of inter-generational experiences of *Pahadi* (mountain) women in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions in the state of Uttarakhand in India. The study captures the voices of young *Pahadi* women, offering insights into their lives and aspirations, and explores how they diverge from their elders. It explores the trajectories of change across physical, material and social landscapes and subsequent changes in relationships to the land and natural resources in the mountain economy. The changes are evident from the diet, folklore, clothes, usage of mobile phones, and the perspectives of the young women on domestic responsibilities and environmental issues, etc. The authors note a shift from agriculture and allied activities having a prominent place in the lives of mountain women to more diverse and complex realities as the young women, familiar with social media and technology, seem to be moving away from the land, literally and aspirationally. This, in turn, highlights the need for a more nuanced and layered approach involving the mountain women and girls in the sphere of conservation and disaster risk-reduction initiatives.

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Scozzafava and Leone focus on integrating ecofeminist insights in conservation through case studies from the Protected Areas of Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park in the central region of the Apennines mountain range in Italy. The article demonstrates proactive strategies adopted by women to adapt to environmental and social changes in the mountains where they are witnessing a decline in pastoralism and mountain farming. The authors cite the lack of representation of women's voices in local consultations and the gendered histories of unmet expectations. The case studies explore a range of women-led initiatives for reviving traditional textile crafts and conserving ancient linen varieties; the collection, preliminary processing and transportation of raw wool; diversifying farm products to offer ancient arable crops; baked goods; starting agritourism; mobile dairy initiatives; and the introduction of Ecosystem Service Payments to engage people in supporting landscape stewardship. These initiatives have contributed to local resilience and resuscitated shepherding, which has high ecological significance in the mountains, thus advocating for gender-sensitive approaches towards landscape stewardship.

The research report by Adjima and Koumi discusses the impact of customary law in regulating community participation, especially by women, in natural resource management in the Togo and Ghana

Highlands. It explores the role of Community Resource Management Area (CREMA) in generating financial incentives for local farmers to sustainably use and manage natural resources and the approach of Analog Forestry for ecological restoration, which mimics natural forests to create ecologically stable and productive landscapes. The report captures how engaging women in alternative income-generating activities such as cacao plantations, tree plantations and local multi-stakeholder round tables on modern and traditional laws has resulted in equitable benefits-sharing and enhanced resilience.

Ghosh and Mathur reflect on the role of gender vis-à-vis the protection and management of UNESCO-designated World Heritage Sites in the Himalayan landscape in Nepal and India. Recognising that natural resource preservation is gendered, and that women play a critical role in intergenerational transfer of ecological knowledge, the authors analyse case studies from four Heritage Sites to highlight how alternative livelihood options for women in forest fringe communities foster sustainable interactions between people and nature; models of eco-tourism; Eco-Development Committees (EDC) led by local women; the growing and preserving of medicinal plants; and the controlled seasonal harvest of grass, reeds and bark by locals to help resolve park-people conflicts and engender support of the local communities towards forest governance.

Another report from the Kangchenjunga Landscape in Nepal by Gurung et al. documents learnings from the Argeli (*Edgeworthia gardneri*) value chain. Recognising that engagement of women in enterprises is often either “gender-blind” or “gender-neutral,” the initiative adopted a purposeful stepwise approach for the inclusion and facilitation of women and poor socio-economic groups. Through process, product, and function upgradation and the creation of a business-enabling environment, the initiative successfully increased the income of Argeli producers. The report stresses that while collective marketing can enhance the resilience of marginalised groups, particularly women, multi-stakeholder dialogues and the removal of regulatory hurdles are needed to boost the non-timber forest products based enterprises and value chains.

Rajbhandhari et al. examine women’s economic empowerment through entrepreneurship in their report focusing on experiences from the Kailash Sacred Landscape (KSL) in India and Nepal. The transboundary initiative facilitated a range of training programmes for women on agriculture-based enterprises and adding value to the products, institutional strengthening for collective action and transboundary learning visits, resulting in steady economic benefits

for women, improved bargaining power and enhanced ability to leverage various government programmes. The learnings from the programme indicate that family support, social trust, market linkages and an enabling policy environment are key contributing factors for the success of women entrepreneurs. The report highlights that while socio-economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship is possible, additional interventions and building linkages are necessary to ensure long-term benefits.

These peer-reviewed articles and reports generate valuable lessons and concrete recommendations for addressing knowledge gaps and inspiring future actions in mountain ecosystems with critical feminist approaches at the forefront.

## About the editors

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