

Integrated Mountain Development: A Question of Gender Mainstreaming

Author: von Dach, Susanne Wymann

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Susanne Wymann von Dach

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FIGURE 1 Enhancing the status of women requires more than focusing on women's roles in society. The entire social context must be analyzed to determine the need for measures to promote equality of opportunity. (Photo by Author)



“Development without women is like a bird trying to take off with only one wing,” according to Abeba Habtorm, director of the Ministry of Education in Asmara, Eritrea. Are mountain women adequately integrated in development cooperation efforts internationally, by region, nationally, and in local communities? Has the vital role of women in sustainable development of mountain communities been sufficiently documented, understood, and especially taken into account in development projects? Mountain women’s concerns have been the subject of debate during the last 3 decades, and some efforts have been made to develop more gender-sensitive policies and programs as well

as more opportunities for mountain women, especially at the local level. Yet, there is still a great lack of disaggregated data on women’s roles and responsibilities, on their access to and control over natural resources, services, and infrastructure, and on their knowledge of and participation in the elaboration of strategies to improve the situation they face as a result of male out-migration, globalization, and hence marginalization. The “bird” can take off only if women and men have equal opportunities to design policies and take part in decision making on more sustainable forms of mountain development at all levels.

Does the “mountain woman” exist?

As has often been pointed out, mountain women, men, and children usually have to contend with harsh environmental conditions, remoteness, and steep slopes. Mountain women play a vital role in turning these environmental factors into valuable cultural landscapes. They make a substantial contribution to the sustainable use and conservation of areas that are of inestimable value to mankind. Environmental conditions have also shaped their status. In quite a few mountain areas, law and custom have favored an enhanced status for many mountain women in the past. In *Searching for Women’s Voices in the Hindu Kush–Himalayas*, Jeannette Gurung shows that many mountain women have had more freedom of movement and independence in decision making at the local level than have women in the lowlands. Less rigid indigenous beliefs have often led to greater status for mountain women, although this is not the case everywhere. Although the situation of mountain women is characterized by some common features, the social, cultural, and economic conditions faced by women in the South and the North, the East and the West, and even from one valley to the other vary greatly.

What do we know?

Careful analysis of women’s and men’s roles and responsibilities, their access to and control over natural resources, servic-

es, and infrastructure, their education and knowledge, and their opportunities to take part in decision making at the local, regional, national, and international levels is an indispensable prerequisite for enhancing sustainable development in mountain areas.

Reliable and systematically compiled data on the status of women and men, and of their roles and responsibilities in mountain regions throughout the world—ie, the material needed to support well-founded arguments for more gender-sensitive developmental efforts, policies, and programs—are virtually nonexistent. Information is not disaggregated by agro-ecological regions, nor is it differentiated by sex. Few figures only are available at the country level, where existing data indicate a slight improvement in the situation of women in mountain countries in the last decade (see Table 1). Great disparities among countries remain, and equality is far from being achieved. But it is very doubtful, whether country-level data sufficiently reflect the situation of women in mountainous regions or if they are adequate for formulating developmental needs, policies, and programs in these regions.

Critical issues

In their introductory essay to a volume on gender and resource management, Corinne Valdivia and Jere Gilles argue that women are not only the major

TABLE 1 Data on mountain women are rare. These selected figures on women's educational status and participation in decision making give a very incomplete picture of the lives of mountain women. Shaded cells indicate percentages higher than the worldwide average. (Sources: UNICEF—*The State of the World's Children*, 1994 and 2001; Population Reference Bureau—*Women of our World*, 2002; UNDP—*Human Development Report*, 2001).

	Adult literacy (1990), (%)				Adult literacy rate: females as percentage of males		Enrolment ratios: females as percentage of males				Women in Parliament (%)	Gender Development Index GDI ^a
	Male		Female				Primary school		Secondary school			
	1990	2002	1990	2002	1990	1995–1999	1986–1991	1995–1999	1986–1991	1995–1997	Oct 2000	1999
Ethiopia	33	44	16	33	48	68	65	60	71	71	8	0.308
Kenya	80	89	59	76	74	80	96	99	70	85	4	0.512
Rwanda	64	74	37	60	58	—	99	100	67	75	26	0.391
Bhutan	51	61	25	34	49	50	65	76	29	29	9	—
Nepal	38	59	13	24	34	44	51	74	40	51	6	0.461
Bolivia	85	92	71	79	84	85	90	96	84	85	10	0.640
Colombia	87	92	86	92	99	101	102	100	119	107	12	0.760
Ecuador	88	93	84	96	95	95	99	99	104	104	15	0.711
Guatemala	63	76	47	61	75	85	85	89	85	92	9	0.610
Peru	91	95	79	85	87	93	96	98	91	93	18	0.724
WORLDWIDE		83		69		83		92		89	14	0.706 (1998)

^aThe gender-related development index (GDI), introduced in the 1995 *Human Development Report*, reflects gender inequalities in human development. The GDI measures achievements using the same variables as the Human Development Index (HDI) and takes into account the differences in achievement between men and women.

sources of family well-being but also the stewards of natural and productive resources. If they cannot participate in negotiation processes to provide for the well-being of their families, great losses to the environment and to society may result. Indeed, there is a close relationship between control and voice; to manage natural and other resources in a livelihood-improving way, women's voices need to be heard. A brief look at some critical issues indicates that this may be even more true for women in remote mountain areas.

Women's roles and responsibilities

Numerous studies have shown that mountain women have heavier workloads than men have. Men and women share agricultural and livestock tasks quite evenly, but women have additional domestic responsibilities, such as preparation of food, collection of water and wood for fuel, child-care, and maintenance of family health. Steep slopes, great distances, and especially the absence of men due to increasing out-migration intensify the workload of mountain women.

Access to and control over natural, social, and economic resources

Although women may have access to land, forest, and animals, they rarely have formal ownership of these resources, especially in developing countries. Their rights are often linked with their marital status. The lack of ownership limits women's access to other resources and information. They cannot use land as security to obtain the loans they need to invest in their farms or develop small, innovative businesses. Extension programs and training courses are still designed for male farmers, even where men are absent because of off-farm activities.

Despite the increasing number of initiatives by NGOs and governments to improve sanitation and access to medical services and modern communication networks in mountain areas, restrictive patriarchal systems often limit the benefits of such improvements for women.

Knowledge and education

As pointed out by Anand and Josse in this issue, mountain women and men possess a



FIGURE 2 Participants at a workshop on Autodidactic Learning for Sustainability (ALS) in Ak Bosogo, Kyrgyzstan. The ALS approach has proven to be one successful way of achieving sustainable development because it enables women and men to formulate their own vision of development together. (Photo by Andreas Kläy)

great wealth of indigenous knowledge, especially regarding the management of natural resources. Failure to recognize the gendered nature of knowledge and integrate women in development processes means losing half this knowledge.

Some of the rare gender-differentiated figures available at the country level indicate that school enrolment of girls in mountain countries seems to have improved in the recent past. Especially in Central and South America the percentage of girls with formal education is above the world average and remarkably higher than the rate in Asian countries. But information about the quality of formal education in mountain areas is lacking, and case studies show that female illiteracy rates are higher than the national average, especially in mountain areas.

Participation in decision making

Women are rarely involved in the formulation, planning, and execution of policies and programs (Figure 2). Nor are they usually explicitly mentioned in local, national, and international agreements. Hence, their perspectives, needs, and knowledge are often ignored. A closer look at the 10 thematic background papers for the upcoming Bishkek Global Moun-

tain Summit in October 2002 reveals that gender-differentiated analyses 30 years after the first UN conference on women are still lacking. The special situation of women is sometimes acknowledged in a brief paragraph, but despite their vital roles in the economy and social fabric of mountain regions, women are not considered an integral part of the process of fostering sustainable mountain development.

Challenges for future research

There is undoubtedly an abundance of new research and information based on local case studies. But as Jane Pratt, a committed mountain researcher, states, "what is difficult to find are systematic, spatially disaggregated data.... This lack is critical because it makes the problems of mountain people invisible to governments and development agencies, and thus difficult to address through standard institutions and mechanisms at national and regional levels." The greatest challenge is to undertake comprehensive studies in collaboration with local women and men, integrating their perspectives rather than conducting research from an outsider's perspective only. New approaches and mechanisms need to be developed to give mountain women and men a say in these studies.

The global research community has a special role in fostering gender-sensitive programs to compile convincing data that can be compared worldwide to give an adequate picture of the great contribution of mountain women to sustainable development, and of the difficult situation of men which forces them to migrate. The Mountain Research Initiative (MRI),

Gender Mainstreaming

...is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (ECOSOC, 1997)

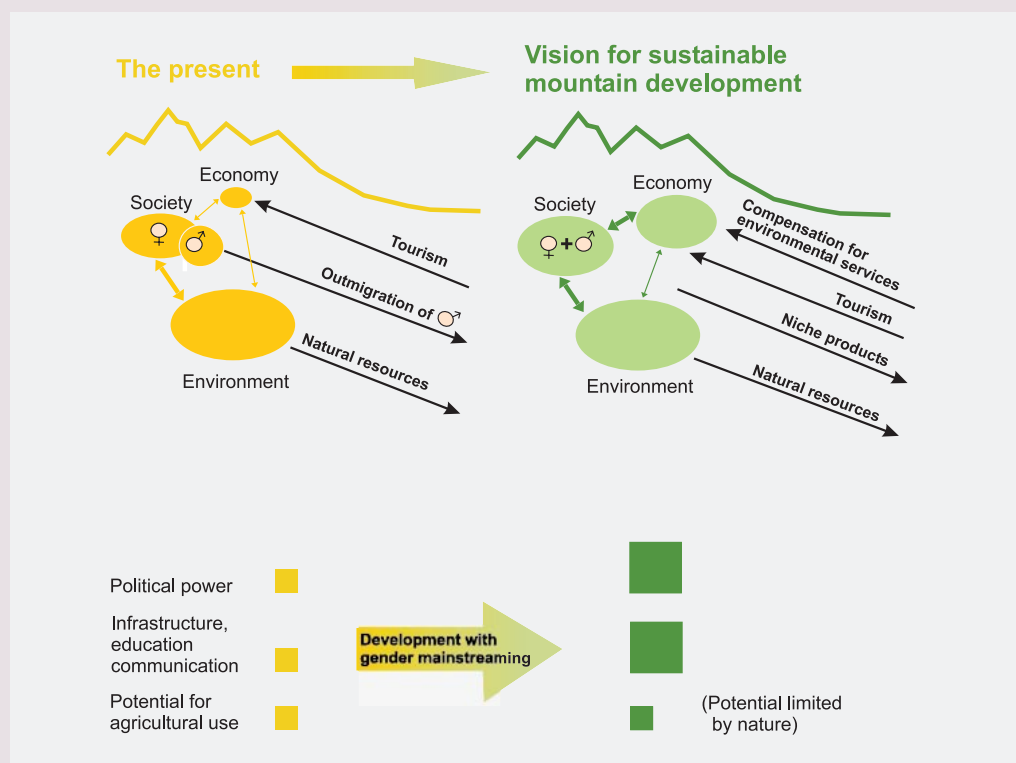


FIGURE 3 To counterbalance present development trends, characterized by high outmigration primarily of men, successful integrated mountain development requires innovative economic and political policies (such as compensation payments, decentralization), improvement of social and technical infrastructure, based on gender mainstreaming to achieve gender equality and a balanced demographic structure.

launched 1 year ago, is the only global research program with the explicit objective of investigating the links between human and natural dimensions in mountains. All other global programs, such as the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA) and the Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (GLORIA), to mention only 2, focus mainly on biophysical aspects. Regional efforts focusing on and integrating human dimensions in research, such as the Andean Mountain Association and ICIMOD, also exist and in the case of ICIMOD have a gender component. There is a need to integrate these and other regional initiatives as well as to systematically compile data and findings on mountain women and men. One aim of the International Year of Mountains (IYM) forum, “Celebrating Mountain Women,” is to create a database of existing studies and research—a step in the right direction.

Challenges for development cooperation

As already mentioned in this issue, it is vital to acknowledge the crucial role women play and to systematically integrate women in development processes. In view of the overall objectives and visions of sustainable mountain development being formulated during the IYM, much more emphasis has to be given to a gender

mainstreaming approach to meet ambitious targets. The processes of enhancing economic opportunity, decentralizing political power, and improving social and technical infrastructure can contribute to a more balanced and sustainable form of development only if gender mainstreaming is integrated (Figure 3).

Why not learn from others? The international World Water Council developed its World Water Vision in a participatory process that gave high priority to balanced participation of women and men. The main objectives were:

- To integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of the World Water Vision and its implementation plan.
- To enable women and men to express their opinions by participating in the regional, sectoral, and networking Vision consultations.
- To put gender issues on the international agenda in the 21st century.

In such a process, mountain people—both women and men—have to be given a more important voice. And this voice must be heard by decision-making bodies that have male and female members. Giving high priority to fostering communication channels concerned with gender issues at the local, regional, national, and international levels is a prerequisite.

AUTHOR

Susanne Wymann von Dach

Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Berne, Steigerhubelstrasse 3, 3008 Berne, Switzerland. wymann@glub.unibe.ch

Susanne Wymann von Dach is a geographer specializing in mountain issues. Among many other responsibilities, she is the co-coordinator of the “Development and Environment Info Service” and a scientific associate in the Environmental Mandate at the Centre for Development and Environment.

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