

Dear Friends of ICIMOD,

This current issue of our periodical Sustainable Mountain Development is dedicated to celebrating women's contribution to mountain livelihoods and wellbeing.

ICIMOD has dedicated this issue of our periodical to celebrating women's contribution because the integration of the gender perspective in the development process is particularly significant for its agenda. Throughout the Himalayan region, long-standing customary practices have shaped the distinct rights and responsibilities of women and men, which manifest in divisions of labour and differential access to and control of various resources.

With a high level of outmigration by men, women now play an even more crucial role in mountain livelihoods, performing most of the farming and domestic work and nurturing future generations. Their skills and knowledge about the environmental resources contribute to the survival of their families in often inhospitable conditions.

However, there is still a lack of recognition of women's contribution, which is manifested in development policies and household practices that perpetuate unequal access to financial services, property, rights, legal protection, education, information, health, and other economic and social services. It furthermore prevents women from participating effectively in making the decisions that shape economic, political, and social development. Women require access to services and appropriate technologies to address their basic needs and adapt to a changing world.

Experience has shown that gender inequalities hinder the achievement of sustainable development. For this reason, many international and regional forums have asserted the importance of promoting gender equality for achieving development goals. Gender equality is one of the Millennium Development Goals, and is regarded as an essential condition to achieve the other development goals. The necessity of gender equality for mountain development was affirmed at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in 2002, in the preceding Thimphu Declaration of 2002, and in the Orem Declaration of Mountain Women in 2007.

Since climate change is becoming a major driver of change in mountain livelihoods, ICIMOD is concerned with increasing the capacity of mountain communities to adapt to climate change and with enhancing their resilience. In so doing, we should not assume that women have the same capacity to adapt to climate change as men. Nonetheless, despite women's greater vulnerability, their local knowledge and roles in mountain livelihoods could be a key to adaptation.

This edition of the ICIMOD periodical examines the gender perspective in mountain development, reflecting on emerging gender issues in the Himalayas and presenting innovative approaches for empowering mountain women. These short articles explore a range of complex issues from the feminisation of agriculture to the impact of climate change on women, and present innovation approaches ranging from REDD to drudgery reduction.

We would like to thank the contributing authors for taking the time to prepare these articles for sharing with a wider audience.

Sincerely,



Andreas Schild
June 2010

