

## **Business as Unusual: The Potential for Gender Transformative Change in Development and Mountain Contexts**

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# Business as *Unusual*: The Potential for Gender Transformative Change in Development and Mountain Contexts

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Enabling transformations of power relations in order to achieve greater equity is challenging; years of experience and scholarly analysis show that “gender mainstreaming” has usually been depoliticized in development and has missed its aim, including in mountain contexts. Important innovations and strategies with potential for achieving gender shifts in power relations do exist, but they require sustained effort, rigorous monitoring, and continual reflection. Indeed, tenacious resistance to change and barriers that hamper gender work consistently reappear in development projects and organizations, as illustrated in the papers in this issue of MRD. A novel approach is required to effect truly gender equitable change: an approach that entails challenging “business as usual.” This introductory essay synthesizes insights from gender and feminist scholarship and from debates that took place at the recent Bhutan+10 conference entitled “Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World.” The essay presents the concept of gender transformative change, placing it within a discussion of the failures of “gender mainstreaming” and the

potential of strategic innovations for transforming power relations into more gender equal ones in development and mountain contexts. New theories, organizational change, and a gender transformative change approach are some of the innovations with potential for advancing gender equality. Failures in advancing the gender agenda include the persistence of outdated “gender mainstreaming” approaches, confusion between 4 gender approaches (gender awareness, gender championing, gender analysis, and feminist activism), gaps in knowledge, policy, and practice, and tenacious forms of resistance (“3Bs”: backlash, backsliding, and burnout); it is crucial to learn from these failures. The paper concludes by reflecting on the way forward, arguing for more strategic alliance building, gender championing, negotiations as well as out of the box thinking and action.

**Keywords:** Gender; development; innovations; resistance; mountains.

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*Rather than adding women to recipes for poisonous, unsustainable development based on exploitation—in particular, of women in poverty in the global South, or portraying these women as virtuous victims while failing to support their activism and demands for justice—development organisations need to take on a commitment to transformative gender mainstreaming. Development requires the perspectives and solutions of women, and women require rights and justice.* (Sweetnam 2012, p 402)

## Introduction

Enabling transformations in gender power relations in mountain contexts is easier said than done. Experience shows that simply “adding women and stirring” them into complex power-laden gender relations within development is unlikely to yield empowering or meaningful results for women, or for men (Cornwall et al 2004; Rathgeber 2005; Cornwall et al 2007; Parpart 2014), let alone for those living in remote mountain environments. And yet, this is what has been done for years in the name of “gender mainstreaming.” One key reason for this is that both development and gender equality are transformative processes and, as such, inherently political

and demanding. Rather than aiming for deep changes in objectives, outcomes, and gender power relations both in institutions and at the grassroots, gender equality has often been reduced to developing tools, logframes, mechanisms, bureaucratic targets, and organizational exigencies (Goetz 2004; Sweetnam 2012). Gender equality is also political and challenging in that interpretive power is contested in various development contexts, as a result of different agendas based on different conceptions of power and knowledge, including what these should help to achieve or change (Cornwall et al 2007). Reflecting this reality, many of the articles in the present Special Issue of MRD refer to relations of power and knowledge that tend to disadvantage differently positioned women and men in development and mountain contexts, and some present in-depth, theory-based analyses of such relations.

Despite efforts over time involving women’s agency, knowledge, and power to effect change in development contexts, meaningful shifts in gender equality and power relations have thus been at best limited. Many of these efforts have yielded mixed, though important, results and lessons for sustainable and equitable development (Cornwall et al 2004; Rathgeber 2005; Cornwall et al 2007; Sandler and Rao 2012; Parpart 2014). Gender

discrimination, gender exploitation, and disenfranchisement of women were mentioned as persisting in mountain regions and within development contexts over a decade ago (Anand and Josse 2002); and they are still a problem today, as is reflected in this issue of *MRD*. Socioeconomic inequalities have increased, not only between rich and poor people in general (Piketty 2014), but also specifically between women and men, worsening the terms on which women and men negotiate resources, status, and identity at all levels from the local to the international (Pearson 2004; Sardenberg 2004; UNICEF 2009). Feminist advocacy faces a difficult task “within the domain of mainstream development practice, which can be indifferent or even hostile to gender issues” (Cornwall et al 2007, p 2; see also Parpart 2014).

Given the difficulties encountered by “gender mainstreaming” around the world, calls have increased for ramping up gender equality and empowerment within development in the post-2015 development era (UNGA 2012; UNWomen 2013). Important innovations and strategies with potential for achieving gender shifts in power relations now exist, but they require sustained effort, rigorous monitoring, and constant reflection in a context where tenacious resistances continue to hamper gender work. What is clear from both these arenas is that a novel approach is needed to effect truly gender-equitable change: an approach that entails challenging “business as usual.”

“Business as *unusual*” was the groundbreaking rallying call that emerged at the decennial international conference “Bhutan+10: Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World,” held in October 2012 in Thimphu, Bhutan (Verma and Gurung 2014). The conference enabled delegates to substantiate and fine-tune *gender transformative change* (see Box 1) as an innovative conceptual framework and approach for sustainable and equitable development in mountain contexts. The present introductory essay synthesizes insights from these debates and previous work, and presents the concept of gender transformative change, placing it within a discussion of the failures of “gender mainstreaming” and the potential of innovations for transforming unequal gender power relations into more equal ones in development and mountain contexts.

## Innovations towards gender transformative change

A decade after *MRD* published its Special Issue entitled *Women in Mountains: Gathering Momentum* (MRD 2002) in preparation for the “Celebrating Mountain Women” international conference in Bhutan in 2002 (ICIMOD and TML 2002; ICIMOD 2003; Tshering and Thapa 2003), notable strides have been made in research that takes a gender-analytical approach to mountain issues. Although such research has been varied in terms of rigor, depth of

### Box 1: Gender definitions and concepts

**Gender:** refers to the socioculturally and political-economically constructed roles and responsibilities ascribed to women and men that change over time, are context- and historically specific, and are inseparable from power relations. It also refers to a domain of characteristics that shape the value, status, and access to resources of women and men within different societies.

**Gender equality:** is the measurable equal representation of women and men. Gender equality does not imply that women and men are the same, but that they have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment, opportunities, and benefits.

**Gender equity:** is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies, policies, and measures must often be available to compensate for women’s historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.

**Gender analysis:** refers to the systematic examination of the multiple roles, relationships, social institutions, agency, and processes between and among women and men in different cultures and societies, focusing on imbalances of power, wealth, workloads, ownership, and access to resources.

**Gender transformative change:** goes beyond identifying and exploring the symptoms of gender equality, and addresses underlying causes such as socially constructed norms, attitudes, and relations of power. It is committed to rigorous gender analysis, organizational change, capacity and institutional strengthening, and ensuring gender positive impact through meaningful participation of women and men in leadership, policy, and decision-making processes and institutions.

(Source: Verma 2013)

analysis, policy influence, and on-the-ground impact, it is nonetheless an important gain.

### New theory and research, new steps towards organizational change

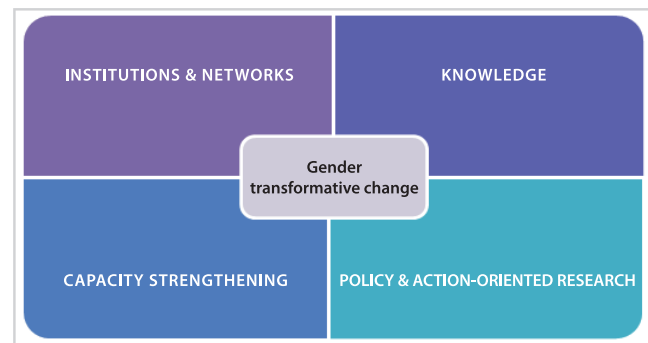
One innovation is on the theoretical front, with feminist political ecology emerging as an in-depth critical approach to analyzing the gendered nature of knowledge, resource access and control, local struggles, and more global issues (Leach 2007). In the field of natural resource management, feminist political ecology conceptualizes gender–environment and gender–development relations as being embedded in dynamic social, cultural, and political relations, while insisting on the need for context-

specificity rather than universalisms and essentialisms about a homogenous and undifferentiated category of “women” (ibid). Most importantly, the analysis shifts the focus from roles to relations, with emphasis on “how relations of tenure and property, and control over labor, resources, products and decisions, shape people’s environmental interests and opportunities, and how environmentally-related rights and responsibilities are almost always contingent on kin and household arrangements and the negotiations they entail” (ibid, p 75; see also Bossenbroek and Zwartveen 2014, in this issue).

Such conceptualizations have helped to raise awareness of gender issues in development. Sustained efforts in researching women’s and men’s different experiences, struggles, and status, along with international organizations’ advocacy efforts, have led to better integration of gender issues in some development initiatives. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for example, carries out gender assessments of all its infrastructure projects, and projects that fail to integrate gender are required to provide justifications for such omissions. International donors, such as Norway’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), have earmarked funding for research on the role of gender and women to be conducted within larger climate change adaptation projects—for example, the Himalayan Climate Change Adaptation Programme carried out by the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research-Oslo (CICERO), GRID-Arendal, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Other important efforts include workshops and trainings aimed at strengthening gender equality and gender analysis in development projects and research funded by donors such as SIDA and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

These innovations point the way forward in development-relevant gender research, where scientific theory, institutional change, and self-reflective practice need to go hand in hand. Indeed, theoretical innovations will have an impact on the realities of development only if gender equality becomes an integral part of organizations’ missions, thus offering the institutional conditions that research aiming to influence development requires. And this can only take place if institutions foster continual reflection on norms and values. In short, there is a need for greater strategic orientation and improved operationalization of gender-analytical frameworks. Numerous innovative practices have potential for effecting gender equality. Examples include gender budgeting (as in the ADB case mentioned above), gender targets and corresponding indicators, specific gender equity policies, institutional policies such as flextime and child care, performance evaluations that make gender transformations the responsibility of all staff, affirmative action, gender championing, gender auditing, measures

**FIGURE 1** The 4 domains of gender transformative change.



to enhance women’s leadership and negotiation skills, etc. Many of these innovative strategies and practices are at the heart of the concept and approach of gender transformative change.

### Gender transformative change

The approach was conceptualized and deepened by conference leaders and organizers in preparation for “Bhutan+10,” based on lessons learned over 20 years of “gender mainstreaming” within research for development organizations focusing on natural resource management in the Himalayas, as well as other institutional experiences in mountain contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. It mirrors the thinking of many other feminist scholars and institutions who have simultaneously developed conceptual frameworks and goals along similar lines with the aim of advancing gender equality, women’s empowerment, and women’s rights (APWLD 2012; UNWomen 2013). In brief, gender transformative change entails going beyond identifying and exploring the symptoms of gender inequality. As defined in Box 1, it addresses and enables the analysis of underlying causes of inequality, such as socially constructed norms, attitudes, and gender power relations that often disadvantage women. At the same time, it also entails simultaneously focusing on 4 domains of transformation (Figure 1):

1. *Knowledge*, to be advanced through rigorous gender research and analysis, peer-reviewed publications and processes, transdisciplinary research, sharing of research findings with multiple audiences, etc;
2. *Institutions and networks* focusing on organizational change, institutional strengthening, alliance building, meaningful participation of women in leadership, policy and decision-making processes, etc;
3. *Capacity strengthening*, to be achieved via targeted training in women’s leadership, gender sensitivity, combatting sexual harassment, conducting gender analysis, etc; and
4. *Policy- and action-oriented research*, to be promoted through applied research work, promotion of indigenous



knowledge, advocacy for policy formulation and implementation, etc.

It is crucial that all 4 domains are addressed at the same time; attention to any one of them to the exclusion of others will result in a failure to achieve gender transformative change. Moreover, it is important to understand that each of these cornerstones of gender transformative change concerns all actors at all levels, including local actors with and for whom development options are explored, as well as researchers, development practitioners, and all research, development, and other institutions involved.

Proponents of the gender transformative change approach point to the importance of addressing the everyday lived realities of women and men as they struggle to survive and eke out livelihoods within increasingly skewed gender power relations (Verma and Khadka 2014). They call for research and policy-making that focus on women's voices, lived experiences, and agency in reconfiguring gender roles, negotiating resources, and challenging inequitable gendered norms and relations (ibid). The approach requires both the integration of gender issues into larger projects and programs, as well as targeted gender-focused initiatives (Sweetnam 2012; Verma 2013). Moreover, gender transformative change upholds "the right of women living in the global South to participate equally with men not only in development organisations, but, more widely, in all the institutions which determine their lives and choices: including the household, community organisations, the market and the state" (Sweetnam 2012, p 393).

Hence, the approach is as much about changing one's own institution in a positive and empowering way, as it is about achieving positive impacts on the ground and creating the necessary conditions for effective development-oriented gender research and meaningful action. All levels of the approach are important. This includes rigorous analysis of gendered lived realities using sound theoretical frameworks, as well as working with women and men at the grassroots, through action-oriented research and for their perceived benefit; and it also includes ensuring that the institutional context for both types of work allows for a gender transformative change approach. Gender transformative change is not just about applying a tool: it is also about reflecting on oneself and one's own institution in the interest of change towards greater gender equity.

The concept of gender transformative change thus explicitly moves away from terms such as "gender mainstreaming" and "Women and Development," which have been used in development organizations to such diverging purposes that they have led to a hollowing of the original epistemological and political aim of the concept of gender equality itself. Understanding the

reasons for the failures of "gender mainstreaming" seems critical to the project of gender transformative change. Indeed, without being aware of the reasons for these failures, the potential of the concept may be lost and instead lead to repetition of the same omissions, resistances, and blind spots.

### **"Gender mainstreaming": failures and resistances**

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, over the past decade, critics have increasingly been pointing to failures of outdated "gender mainstreaming" approaches to bring about real and meaningful transformations in gender power relations. A number of special issues of development journals have emerged as a result of this research (see *Repositioning Feminisms in Development*, IDS Bulletin, 35(4), 2004; *Whither GAD? New Directions on Gender and Development*, Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 26, 2005; *Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: The Struggle for Interpretive Power in Gender and Development*, Development and Change, 38(1), 2007; *Beyond Gender Mainstreaming*, Gender and Development, 20(3), 2012), pointing out that "gender mainstreaming" efforts have more often than not failed to increase women's wellbeing, livelihood opportunities, meaningful participation in decision-making and governance institutions, positions in leadership, access to resources, rights to land and property, control over the conditions and proceeds of their labor, equitable division of labor and responsibilities, and access to justice in relation to men.

These failures have been accompanied by tenacious resistance to changes in gender relations and knowledge production. There are several reasons for both the failures and the resistance to change, and it is worth reviewing briefly those that are relevant to mountain and development contexts.

#### **Outdated "gender mainstreaming" approaches**

First, although historically there have been theoretical shifts from "Women in Development" (WID) and "Women and Development" (WAD) theories in the 1970s to "Gender and Development" (GAD) theories in the 1980s and feminist post-structuralist political-ecology theories from the 1990s onwards (Rathgeber 1990; Parpart and Marchand 1995; Rathgeber 2005; Leach 2007; Sweetnam 2012), development practice has either neglected to adopt these approaches or adopted them with a time lag. WID approaches were anchored in a simplistic focus on women's experiences, perceptions, and productive activities, without focusing on gender relations with respect to knowledge and power (Leach 2007). While they questioned women's position in development and in the international economy, what they proposed was to simply "add women" to preexisting institutions, programs, and policies without challenging skewed gender power relations that systematically disadvantage women (Parpart

and Marchand 1995; Rathgeber 2005). Critiques of WID and WAD approaches also center on their failure to challenge modernizing notions of science and neoliberal economic growth models, as well as on their low to nonexistent uptake by development organizations and agencies due to the inherent transformative considerations of power that are frequently viewed as too “sensitive” (Verma and Khadka 2014) or negatively labeled as “activist” and “feminist.”

WID and WAD approaches were later nuanced by the advent of GAD theories, which put forward the concept of *gender* and also began to analyze women’s reproductive and community roles (Kabeer 1994), as well as the different forms of difference that emerge as gender cuts across age, class, marital status, caste, etc. Still later, feminist post-structuralist political-ecology approaches shifted the focus to gendered relations, divisions of labor, decision-making, access to and control over resources, subjectivities, and meanings of gender (Moore 1993), as well as the way that gender, the global, and the local are mutually constituted (Mackenzie 2010). However, with some exceptions, these theoretical innovations have not translated into everyday development practices, which have continued in the vein of “gender mainstreaming” as espoused by WID and WAD. In terms of discourse, although GAD, feminist political ecology, and sociocultural analysis have found their way into development reports and documents (Leach 2007), they are less present in organizations focusing on natural resource management, where biophysical and economic analysis prevails (Bennett 2013). In this area of development, the concept of “gender” has either been substituted for a homogenous and undifferentiated concept of “woman” (Rathgeber 2005), or it has remained at the level of “window dressing” or a box to check off within larger development programs and institutions.

#### **“Doing gender”: unclear goals, unclear means**

Second, “while many organizations have begun to pay more attention to ‘doing gender,’ it is not clear that this attention is grounded in in-depth theorization or understanding of what this actually means” (Verma 2001, p 249) or how it can be effectively operationalized in practice. Hence, problems arise when 4 different but mutually supportive approaches are used interchangeably: ie when *gender analysis* (defined in Box 1) and *feminist activism* are conflated with or, most worryingly, disregarded in favor of *gender awareness* and *gender championing* (elaborated below). Although all 4 are required in a mutually supportive framework to effect change, it is important to define and differentiate them, as each represents a different strategy and politics of engagement, activism, and depth of knowledge.

*Gender awareness* means that researchers, development practitioners, policymakers and local managers of natural resources are sensitized, conscious, and cognizant of

gender issues in development practice, policies, and research. Gender awareness is often promoted by *gender champions*, ie individuals who actively advocate, support, and implement gender transformative actions, policies, and research. Gender champions are not necessarily trained in gender conceptual frameworks, gender analysis, or gender-based methodologies, nor are they necessarily part of feminist networks or engaged in feminist activism. Potential gender champions include enlightened and committed researchers and staff of development institutions, as well as managers, directors, and leaders of such institutions.

*Gender analysis* entails in-depth understanding of gender relations, theories, methodologies, and strategies, which is often achieved through academic training in fields such as gender and development, women’s studies, international development, environment studies, geography, anthropology, and feminist economics, in addition to—most importantly—through lived experience and applied fieldwork within these fields of expertise. It is often wrongly assumed that anyone—including “gender focal points,” many of whom may be both gender-aware and gender champions—can “do gender” in research without adequate training in gender analysis. Hence, fundamental contradictions and double standards exist in the way sociocultural and gender analysis is problematically regarded as an “add-on,” in comparison to other subject areas of specialization that are viewed as “real science” (German et al 2010). These mutually reinforcing misperceptions of what gender analysis entails increase the challenge of conducting such work and translating it into transformative action. Gender analysis in a development context involves the critical examination of taken-for-granted assumptions about development through a gender lens. For example, while many scholars argue that mountain areas are inaccessible, isolated, and remote, a gender-analytical critique will challenge these assumptions in light of the spread of powerful discriminatory practices, discourses, and norms that work against women in particular (Anand and Josse 2002, p 234). In this specific case, analysis has revealed that even isolated mountain contexts are not cut off from broader forms of social, political, cultural, and economic processes, which connect even the remotest regions of the world (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The fact that the global interacts with the local in complex and multidimensional ways (Mackenzie 2010) is critical in understanding how certain gender-biased discourses, norms, and interventions are privileged over others.

*Feminist activism* in the context of development normally involves an inherently political agenda for gender equality and for shifting power relations, focusing on women’s rights, empowerment, and elimination of gender disparities in power and status (Goetz 2004). Although feminism is about effecting a change towards more equitable power relations between women and men,

feminist activism is often viewed in a negative light in development organizations as it challenges the status quo and techno-centered orientations.

Failures in addressing gender inequities have tended to arise when “gender mainstreaming” is understood as focusing on simplistic logos, technical fixes, and apolitical and ahistorical agendas, and when gender awareness and gender championing are promoted at the expense of gender analysis and feminist activism. As mentioned above, all 4 are simultaneously necessary to challenge the obstinate resistance that exists in many development contexts, and to effect real, meaningful change.

### **Major gaps in gender knowledge, action-research practice, and policy implementation**

Third, several major gaps in knowledge about the gender aspects of specific development issues persist. In some cases, they are due to a lack of sound gender analysis and methodologies in specific subject areas (eg climate change, land tenure, large-scale land acquisition, water, black carbon, pastoralism, cryosphere, extractive industries, or food security). In other cases, the gaps are the result of weak and simplistic gender approaches being used in lieu of rigorous gender analysis and conceptual frameworks. Although the scientific literature examining mountain issues from a gender-analytical perspective has grown over the last decade (Molden et al 2014), more work in this area is needed. Gaps in systematic evaluation, accountability, and resources have been critically noted as well (AfDB 2012). Another issue is the need for translating findings from gender research into policies that influence change. This requires disseminating research in accessible non-jargonistic forms to the general public and local communities—especially those who participate in contributing to the production of that knowledge itself—and producing and sharing findings in accessible forms across disciplinary boundaries.

In terms of policy, Leach (2007) argues that there is

*little evidence of a well-conceptualized gender relations perspective on environmental relations in policy literature. Issues of rights and resource access and control are now acknowledged, but not necessarily in relation to gender, and rarely through the relational, multi-layered lens which feminist political ecologists and gender analysis of land have seen as important. (p 82)*

Although many development organizations may have strong gender equity policies in place, these policies are prone to “evaporation” in practice. Some researchers may not be aware of approaches that could help them to ensure that their gender insights influence development practice and policy; but others may consciously resist gender approaches. Action-oriented approaches, developed to ensure that research responds to the needs of society, are not yet sufficiently well operationalized, and their practice requires training.

Ideally, in an action-oriented approach, the objectives of applied research for development are defined jointly with the stakeholders concerned, and phases of co-production of knowledge are implemented in the course of the research process. This is one potential way of ensuring that research is relevant to society and is capable of taking into account the normative aspects of development.

Gaps also exist between strong gender policies and their weak implementation within development institutions, at national levels, and in international laws and obligations. Monitoring and advocacy is needed to ensure that gender actions and policies are implemented effectively. This means being aware of the sometimes “hidden” and unintended consequences of development projects, which may diverge from the stated project objectives and have negative effects (Ferguson 1994). Unintended consequences often arise in the context of problematic assumptions about the “unlimited” availability of women’s labor for implementing development technologies and interventions in field-level projects (Leach 2007; also see Narain 2014, Halbrendt et al 2014, and Khadka et al 2014, in this issue). Accordingly, these assumptions require critical reflection, including on how to mitigate their negative impacts. Similarly, disjunctures exist between representations of development policy as a technical matter and demonstrations of “success” through technical evaluations, on the one hand, and the complex political realities of policy formulation and implementation, on the other (Mosse 2005). Mosse’s argument that “policy primarily functions to mobilize and maintain political support, that is to legitimize rather than to orient practice” (2005, p 14) is especially relevant to feminism in development. Gender equity policies, strategies, and plans are often regarded as “window dressing” to mask patriarchal practices and the unwillingness to embrace meaningful changes in power relations.

It is worth noting that disconnections also exist “between the discourses circulating in transnational feminist networks, politics at the national level, and the way gender relations, which are embedded in complex layers of historical and cultural determination, are actually played out in everyday livelihood contexts” (Kandiyoti 2004, p 135). Such divergences also characterize feminist activist spaces, academia, and development institutions. Many scholars reflect on these gaps and suggest that critical attention is required in future to bridge such feminist spaces, while keeping in mind the costs and compromises involved in building alliances (Cornwall et al 2004; Goetz 2004; also see Joshi 2014, in this issue).

### **Tenacious forms of resistance**

Fourth, a systematic critique of “gender mainstreaming” is difficult to articulate without reflecting on the multitude

of frustrations and disillusionments (Rathgeber 2005; Cornwall et al 2007; Sandler and Rao 2012; Parpart 2014) and the not-so-surprising high turnover of gender and development experts that occurs in many development institutions. These problems are often due to the fact that “gender appears to be neutralized of political intent. Diluted, denatured, depoliticized, included everywhere as an afterthought, ‘gender’ has become something everyone knows that they are supposed to do something about” (Cornwall et al 2004, p 1). Most professionals in any subject area would be demoralized by such a perception of their discipline, and gender experts and analysts are no exception. The task of gender transformative change, however, is further complicated by stubborn resistances. With almost 20 years of experience working both within and outside of research for development organizations, I have come to refer to resistance as the inevitable “3 Bs” associated with advancing gender transformative change within development institutions: backlash, backsliding, and burnout. Briefly, backlash is an expected and unavoidable cost of advancing gender equality. It is often the manner by which those who are privileged in terms of power resist changes that they foresee as being threatening, destabilizing, or disadvantageous. Backsliding means that every step forward is followed by 2 steps backwards: advances made in policy, laws, research findings, or the status of women are almost inevitably followed by attempts to dismantle and override these gains. Burnout, lastly, is the phenomenon experienced by many gender experts as a result of backlash and backsliding; for instance, it is what occurs when hostility, barriers, and indifference cause them to opt out of their positions as gender experts and to abandon gender research and activism. Taken together, the “3 Bs” result in a loss of vitally important experience. Although these and other forms of obstinate resistance continue to thrive in many development contexts and institutions, they are rarely discussed, theorized, or given due attention.

## Conclusions

The mere fact of the “Bhutan+10” conference being held a decade after the first gathering in 2002 speaks volumes about the strides that have been made in the field of gender and development in mountains. The move from a conference that focused on “celebrating mountain women” to one that was more reflexive, strategic, and content-driven is a major achievement. This move is reflected, among other things, in the increased number of articles in *Mountain Research and Development* that take an explicit gender analytical approach: from one in *MRD* 22(3) in 2002 to many more in the present issue, and several others that have been published meanwhile in open issues of *MRD*.

However, many profound challenges remain in future, including translation of these visions into meaningful

gender transformative change, leading for example to more women in higher decision-making positions; diligent work towards a gender-friendly and equitable organizational culture; building on and retaining the many innovations introduced in organizations; strategically addressing and mitigating tenacious resistances; resolving conceptual and methodological tensions between gender integration (ie “mainstreaming”) and gender-focused work; and enabling rigorous sociocultural and political-economy gender research on an equal footing with other subject areas and disciplinary foci. Ensuring increased citations and uptake of research findings into practice so that those people who are supposed to benefit from research actually do, will also be important challenges in the future.

As we gear up for “Bhutan+20” and a more gender transformative agenda, it will be important to retain significant gains already made. Several organizations have lost their hard-won gender units despite growing recognition of the importance of gender-focused and integrative work that requires highly skilled gender teams (AfDB 2012; UNWomen 2013)—a form of the backsliding mentioned above. Reflecting on these and other losses, Bhutan+10 delegates banned the use of the “M word,” shorthand for “gender mainstreaming,” and instead called for a gender transformative agenda, as highlighted in the *Bhutan+10 Declaration* (NCWC et al 2012). Such an agenda requires collective action, or an appropriate politics of solidarity (Kandiyoti 2004), especially when there is tenacious resistance within development institutions, programs, and projects, and in a context where there is “more effective strategising and alliance building by conservative forces” (Molyneux 2004, p 114).

Working towards gender transformative change while retaining gains of the past continues to be a great challenge. In their review of the disjunctures between professional intentions and actual practices with respect to the transformative agenda of gender in development, Cornwall et al (2007) note the compromises and pragmatism that are required in working within institutions of development, within what they call the “politics of influence”. The politics of influence means working within the institutional rules of the game and organizational politics of agenda setting, which often create pressures for “simplification, sloganizing and the most common denominator of consensus” (ibid, p 16). These are frequent characteristics of “gender mainstreaming.” Cognizant of the risk of backsliding on important international policy gains, feminist gender and development advocates took the decision not to hold an international women’s conference in 2005 (“Beijing+10”; Cornwall et al 2007). Awareness and analysis of such compromises are important to ensure that the more strategic issues remain at the center of development.



Finally, within the politics of influence, it is important to recognize that “women do not operate in worlds devoid of men, or more powerful women for that matter. Those who are powerful must also be included in the constitution of the ‘problem,’ as well as the ‘solution” (Verma 2001, p 249). The importance of involving powerful women and, in particular, powerful men cannot be emphasized enough, as the latter are most often the gatekeepers of policies, decision-making, and allocation of resources, and are strategically positioned to enable, or constrain, effective change. Working within development programs, projects, and organizations often means

compromising the gender agenda in order to move forward in one area or retain hard-won gains in another. But it also means reminding decision- and policy-makers of their responsibilities as enlightened leaders, gender champions, and agents of change towards greater gender equality and wellbeing of women and men who are supposed to be the intended beneficiaries of development. It means walking the walk, not just talking the talk. Working strategically to ensure this over the next decade will require systematic changes in attitudes and beliefs, as well as a great deal of out of the box thinking and action.

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