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Special Issue: Gender and Sustainable Development in Mountains—Transformative Innovations, Tenacious Resistances

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Special Issue

Gender and Sustainable Development in Mountains—Transformative Innovations, Tenacious Resistances

Dear Readers,

Despite years of "gender mainstreaming" in development, many challenges remain. A decade ago, Anand and Josse (2002) noted the persistence of gender discrimination, exploitation, and disenfranchisement of women in mountain regions. Although there have been some innovations and progress towards gender equality since their article appeared in MRD, *tenacious resistances and contestations persist in the face of rigorous feminist research, knowledge, agency, and activism (Cornwall et al 2007; Sandler and Rao 2012). Both institutional barriers and global drivers of change (eg climate change, globalization, geopolitical shifts, economic crises, and gender-blind development interventions) are worsening the conditions of women's lives, as well as widening socio-economic inequalities between women and men (Pearson 2004; UNICEF 2009). For women and men living in harsh mountain conditions, challenges have a different set of complexities compared to those of people living in the plains (Anand et al 2002). Innovative and strategic approaches to gender transformative change have never been more necessary. However, their potential within development institutions requires serious reflection, stocktaking, analysis, and resources, as well as profound changes to gender power relations in both institutional and applied development contexts (Verma 2014, in this issue).*

Most recently, the Rio+20 outcome document entitled The Future We Want *was a reason for hope: it articulates the importance of mountains (UNGA 2012, paragraphs 210 to 212), as well as of gender equality and women's empowerment (paragraphs 236 to 244, and in other sections of the document). However, these 2 spheres have been articulated separately, without any cross-reference to one another or to the critical importance of the interrelatedness between them. This is symptomatic of a broader problem: on the one hand, most research on natural resource management and sustainable mountain development continues to be predominantly gender-blind; on the other, development and gender research tends to lack engagement with mountain and environment issues. This problem is taken up in this Special Issue, in several papers that bring these spheres together.*

The tenacious resistances to gender equality and persistent omission of a reflection on power relations that shape gender relations within development have also been the subject of recent feminist scholarship (eg Cornwall et al 2007; Sandler and Rao 2012; Sweetnam 2012; Parpart 2014). These resistances and omissions were among the subject areas debated at the Bhutan+10 Conference on "Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World". Organized by Bhutan's National Commission for Women and Children and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests of the Royal Government of Bhutan, along with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), it brought together nearly 200 participants from around the globe. Delegates came together to discuss, debate, and assess achievements and challenges over the decade since the "Celebrating Mountain Women Conference" took place during the International Year of Mountains in 2002. They also reviewed the latest knowledge on and best practices in gender equal development, and elaborated a new agenda to trigger gender transformative change within natural resource management and sustainable mountain development (Molden et al 2014, in this issue). This pioneering agenda was articulated in the Bhutan+10 Conference Declaration *(NCWC et al 2012; see also the video declaration at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7Sq-UVTKG8), the conference proceedings (Verma and Gurung 2014), a video highlighting interviews recorded during the conference (ICIMOD and UNEP Grid Arendal 2014), and a brief on the concept of and operationalization of gender transformative change (Verma 2013).*

The present issue of MRD *brings together a selection of peer-reviewed papers from 2 sources: some authors participated in the Bhutan+10 conference, others responded to* MRD's *call for papers in early 2013. The introductory essay by Verma further develops some of the issues raised in this editorial, detailing the failures of "gender mainstreaming," presenting gender innovations that show signs of traction, explaining the novel gender transformative conceptual framework reviewed at Bhutan+10, and offering some recommendations for the way forward.*

The MountainDevelopment section includes 4 papers that analyze the gender impacts of development efforts in mountain environments and discuss the way forward. Khadka and co-authors critically assess the differences between the claims of Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) projects to address gender inequalities and their actual implementation in Nepal. They conclude that women should not just be physically present during planning and decision-making processes but should effectively be empowered to participate in these processes. Only thus can the social agenda in REDD+ mechanisms be strengthened. In the next article, Narain examines the unintended negative consequences of a water supply project in terms of women's increased workloads, due to men's suddenly increased demand for domestic water in India. He recommends applying more comprehensive process-based and qualitative indicators to assess the gender impacts of water supply interventions in order to ensure that these interventions truly contribute to transformation of gender relations. In the following article, Halbrendt and co-authors investigate the increase in Nepalese women's labor burden in conservation agriculture; they point out that the introduction of such innovations requires interdisciplinary and gender-sensitive approaches to avoid unintended impacts and to ensure that adoption rates and gender equity are increased. Finally, in an insightful application of social network analysis aiming to increase the gender effectiveness of postdisaster support, Faas and co-authors show that gender is a determining factor in accessing resources, project assistance, and support by formal and informal institutions in Ecuador. The 4 articles demonstrate that rather than decreasing women's

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workloads, increasing their decision-making power, and giving them equal access to development resources, project interventions often inadvertently lead to more benefits for men.

In the MountainResearch section, 5 papers explore gendered livelihood strategies, ie the different ways in which women and men negotiate change and development interventions, and the influence this has on their daily lives, their relations, struggles over power, and access to resources. The first 2 papers focus on India: Drew's article analyzes social movements in relation to the construction of a dam, and Joshi's paper discusses women's political engagement in relation to water scarcity. Both authors call into question simplistic and essentialized assumptions about women's relation to the environment and about their assumed solidarity and desire for collective action. In the next 3 papers, Gioli and co-authors (Pakistan), Bossenbroek and Zwarteveen (Tajikistan), and Unbehaun and co-authors (Austria) explore different aspects or impacts of gendered migration and mobility. While Gioli et al explore migration as a mitigating response to environmental shocks in the West Karakoram, Bossenbroek and Zwarteveen provide a differentiated analysis of gender relations in irrigated agriculture in the post-Soviet Pamirs, where labor migration is an important livelihood strategy, and Unbehaun et al assess the role of mobility in men and women's care and employment activities at the eastern end of the European Alps.

In the MountainAgenda section, the article by Schmitt looks into the extent to which gender is (not) integrated into protected area management with the advent of integrative biodiversity policies in the European Alps, and suggests an agenda for change. This article is followed by a MountainPlatform statement in which Molden and co-authors describe ICIMOD's efforts and activities in the Hindu Kush–Himalaya to address gender equality, gendered regional collaboration, a future agenda for gender empowerment, and the outcomes of the Bhutan+10 conference.

All the authors in this issue tackle different aspects of the question of gender equality and empowerment in mountain contexts, and therefore provide an important contribution to research, knowledge, and sustainable development. In MRD's *2002 Special Issue dedicated to* Women in Mountains: Gathering Momentum *(MRD 2002), the Editorial pointed out that urgent research gaps and deficits exist, including the lack of research using an explicit gendered approach. A decade later, we are pleased to highlight that nearly all articles in this Special Issue engage in thorough gender analytical approaches, including several papers that solidly employ feminist post-structural political ecology theory to better understand the reality of gender relations in mountains (in particular Khadka et al, Drew, and Joshi). Regardless of their theoretical frameworks, the findings from all the papers indicate that it will be important to engage in gender transformative change to trigger real change towards sustainable development. Indeed, we have made important progress in the past decade, but there is still a long road ahead. We look forward to future rigorous analysis and insights from development research, and to explorations about how meaningful gender equality in mountain contexts could be achieved.*

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Bhutan+10
Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World
Thimphu, Bhutan, 15 –19 October 2012

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