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Critical approaches to gender in mountain ecosystems

Edited by Omer Aijazi and Sejuti Basu

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Preface

Women are vital to environmental action in mountain ecosystems. Their contributions to resource management, biodiversity conservation, water and food security cannot be stressed enough. On average, women in mountainous communities are more likely to engage in agricultural activities than their male counterparts. Similarly, they are more likely to stay behind as men migrate to urban centres. Since women are at the forefront of mountain ecosystems, they are also more sensitive to environmental change and degradation. This timely volume extends understandings of gender in mountain ecosystems and the multiplier gains achieved by supporting and empowering women.

Organised as a series of research articles and reports, the volume integrates emerging insights from critical feminist literature and gender studies with discussions on mountain ecosystem management. The editors have attempted to minimise persistent disconnects between academic and policy discourses. Contributing authors range from researchers in universities and regional think-tanks to practitioners and policymakers in grassroots organisations, civil society groups and government offices. Geographical coverage is also impressive: authors cover mountain communities in South Asia, Europe, North America and West Africa.

The constellation of articles showcases successful and innovative initiatives that integrate critical feminist approaches to gender within ecosystem management practices. They offer nuanced approaches to gender, which push beyond existing tropes of "gender inclusivity" and "gender sensitivity." The volume reinvigorates the analytical category of "gender" outside its static and universalistic understandings by capturing its fluid, contextual and relational nature, seeking to address power imbalances urgently.

This CEM-led initiative is a welcome addition to IUCN guidance on mountain ecosystems. It presents lessons learned and insights gained from the diverse and vibrant regional experiences of its members. The compendium will contribute towards IUCN knowledge resources to influence critical global, regional and local decisions and actions on ecosystem conservation and governance. The knowledge produced in this volume bridges policy and practice gaps by placing feminist approaches at the heart of nature conservation.

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Angela Andrade

Chair, IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management

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Executive summary

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.

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.

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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.

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.

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

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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

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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.

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CHAPTER

1

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gendered pluriactive and multifunctional development in Western Mexico

The case of the indigenous women's group "Colour of the Earth"

By

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About the author

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Abstract

The Mexican countryside faces numerous social and environmental challenges. Environmental conflicts have also increased substantially. However, farmers have developed new strategies that aim to make better use of resources and strengthen autonomous production methods. These efforts relate to different components of the production chain. Additionally, they revalorise the multifunctional character of the Mexican countryside.

Even though gender roles are more or less clearly defined in rural Mexico, new spaces for women farmers are emerging.

This is exemplified by a group of indigenous women farmers in the south of Jalisco state in western Mexico. The group, called "Colour of the Earth," works in agroecology and rural tourism. Its activities have evolved from handicrafts and embroidery to the production of coffee and other agroecological products. Since 2006, the group has welcomed increasing numbers of visitors who are drawn to the women-managed coffee gardens.

Its members have faced gender-related barriers at the family and community level along with other socio-economic and cultural obstacles. However, the evolution of the group's activities closely reflects changing gender roles. Their work can be considered as an example of rural development alternatives that strengthen the multifunctionality of the Mexican countryside. The group's experiences are grounded in the local context of its activities, which also allow the adaptation of traditional rural life conditions vis-à-vis globalisation. The collective incorporates a gendered point of view, centred on the indigenous women farmers that are members of the "Colour of the Earth" group.

Keywords:

gender   multifunctionality   pluriactivity   western Mexico   indigenous women

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Introduction

We have entered a new era of unprecedented socio-environmental transformations. This era is commonly known as the Anthropocene, or when a more explicit political economy standpoint is taken, the Capitalocene (Moore, 2011, 2017; Steffen et al., 2011). It is marked by the existence of intersecting socio-environmental challenges, such as global warming (Klein, 2014; Moore, 2018).

The recognition of the Capitalocene brings into sharp focus the urgency of sustainable development (Steffen et al., 2011; The Worldwatch Institute, 2014). Underlying these social and environmental challenges is a neoliberal development model that aims at capital accumulation. In this model, social and environmental costs are treated as externalities, which profoundly undermines sustainable development efforts (Moore, 2018).

Poverty remains an outstanding concern. Indeed, many people are still unable to fulfil their basic needs. Global biodiversity loss is another major challenge that humanity faces. The loss of plant and animal species is rising at an unprecedented rate (UN, 2018). Both challenges, poverty and biodiversity depletion, appear as interrelated in mountainous environments, which are often inhabited by structurally disempowered and marginalised indigenous peoples. Mountains are also considered to be biodiversity hotspots in Latin America and Mexico, where this case study is located (Toledo & Barrera, 2008).

Within the existing debate on poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation, there is considerable attention on endogenous rural development initiatives. As Ploeg and Long (1994) state, these initiatives are "born from within," which is to say that they build on local socio-cultural and natural resources, local actors' agency and local organisations. As such, endogenous rural development initiatives are considered to have more potential for strengthening sustainable development than exogenous development schemes (Gerritsen & Morales, 2007).

In this paper, I focus on an endogenous rural development initiative in western Mexico. More specifically, I present the experiences of a group of organised women in the indigenous community of Cuzalapa in the southern State of Jalisco. This group, which is known as the "Colour of the Earth," turned 25 years old in 2021. They are situated in the mountainous Sierra de Manantlán area in western Mexico (Figure 1).

Because the case that I discuss deals with a women's group in a mountainous area in western Mexico, reference must be made to the themes of gender and mountains as the specific social and

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environmental setting in which gender relations are configured and reconfigured. I discuss these themes in the next section.

Figure 1. Location of the Sierra de Manantlán and Cuzalapa

Source: Gerritsen, 2002

Gender, mountains and mountain women

As an object of study, gender entered the scientific realm since World War II, and was further given (political) visibility by the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Moser, 1993; Braidotti et al., 1994; Haraway, 1991). Increasingly, gender has also gained renewed attention in mountainous areas in particular (Rudaz & Debarbieux, 2012).

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In rural contexts, explorations of gender are mostly concerned with the different access male and female community members have to land and natural resources. Gender issues also involve the daily life activities that each gender performs (Moser, 1993; Premchander & Müller, 2006; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). Accordingly, Moser (1993, p. 27) describes the triple role that women perform in daily life: 1) reproductive work (childbearing and rearing responsibilities), 2) productive work (both on- and off-farm) and 3) community management work and politics (regarding collective needs and interests). However, the conceptualisation of gender goes beyond the different roles of men and women; both groups also have different needs. As such, a further distinction can be made between practical and strategic gender needs. Practical gender needs are formulated from the concrete conditions of women's experiences. In turn, strategic gender needs are those that are formulated from an analysis of women's subordination to men (ibid., pp. 39–40). See Table 1 for an elaboration of practical and strategic gender needs as captured in Moser's (1993) multidimensional framework of gender relations.

Approaching gender from a multidimensional perspective allows an understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the relations between women and men. This perspective also indicates that one must necessarily go beyond the conceptualisation of gender roles in static categories. In contrast, beyond these categories, heterogeneous social constructions are hidden that are place- and space-based (i.e., context-related) and that have a fluid and relational nature (Escobar, 1992; Harraway, 1988; Sundberg, 2004; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). Above all, the nature of gender is embedded in existing, historically constructed power relations (Rudaz & Debarbieux, 2012; Long, 2001).

This means that various gender barriers can be identified for the economic, political, psychological and social empowerment of women (Gil-Arroyo et al., 2019). Additionally, other (possible) barriers to women's empowerment include differential gender access to labour markets, intrahousehold violence and crime, emigration (feminisation of rural areas), access to working capital, lack of technical skills and training, female unemployment, unequal access to paid work, and gender wage gaps, amongst others (Stuart et al., 2018).

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Table 1. Moser's multidimensional framework on gender relations

	PRACTICAL GENDER NEEDS	STRATEGIC GENDER NEEDS
REPRODUCTIVE SPHERE	✕	✕
PRODUCTIVE SPHERE	✕	✕
COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AND POLITICS	✕	✕

Source: Moser, 1993

Regarding the role of women in mountainous areas, Rudaz and Debardieux (2012) argue that the category of "mountain women" does not exist as such and is a contested identity. They further assert that when discussing "mountain women," reference is made to a social rather than a collective identity. This clarity is needed to reflect the diversity that exists amongst the women who inhabit mountainous regions and who do not necessarily self-identify as a specific group within the women's movement. This diversity, in turn, reinforces the need for a thorough empirical approach to understand the characteristics of women in mountain environments and the ways they identify themselves vis-à-vis other women and other actors including men and external intervening agencies (Sundberg, 2004).

On the context and concepts used

In the first section, I stated that the neoliberal development model underlies many contemporary social and environmental problems. In Mexico, where my case study is located, neoliberal policies have deepened a rural crisis that has its origins in the 1960s. This crisis affects livelihood strategies and biodiversity conservation in the countryside and has also expanded to urban populations (Morales, 2004; Gerritsen, 2010a).

Few Mexican producers have benefitted from the neoliberal development model (Morales, 2004). In fact, many conflicts have emerged from the incompatibility of neoliberalism with specific farmers' conditions, especially those of indigenous peoples, in the Mexican countryside (Toledo, 2000).

The persistence of social and environmental challenges in rural areas has forced the design and implementation of new development models that are more suited to the particular conditions of each region and where the most affected actors, namely peasants and indigenous people, can build and enhance innovative strategies to solve socio-

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environmental problems (Gerritsen, 2010a; Gerritsen, 2010b). Within this context, the notions of "pluriactivity" and "multifunctionality" have emerged. Both notions involve an examination of the endogenous potential of rural areas and the connecting and transforming capacity of their inhabitants to change the direction of rural development. Pluriactivity and multifunctionality can be understood at a family or collective (group) level, and thus they focus on both peasant households and producer organisations (Giel et al., 2007).

I expand my case study through this conceptual lens, which I discuss in the next two sections. Such an exploration may permit us to identify (new) "alternatives to (neoliberal) development" (Escobar, 1992; Hurni et al., 2004).

Producer organisations, pluriactivity and multifunctionality

Producer organisations have played an essential role in solving the socio-environmental problems that the Mexican countryside faces. These organisations consist of groups of peasants and indigenous people who have common objectives, such as improving family and community welfare, defending territory and socio-cultural identity, access to land, and food security, amongst other objectives (Blokland & Gouët, 2007).

The nature of producer organisations can vary; they can have a formal status (for example, a cooperative or civil society) or they can function based on a social agreement among their members (Ton et al., 2007). Often, they share an organisational culture and a specific identity, and they have collective work experiences both with the natural resources they manage and their particular political-economic context (Valk, 2007).

I am interested in producer organisations that seek to revalue the endogenous properties of their local environment, including agricultural activities (Ploeg & Long, 1994). An investigation of the endogenous potential of particular contexts can open new perspectives for rural development, such as the related notions of pluriactivity and multifunctionality.

With the term pluriactivity, I refer to the combination of agricultural and non-agricultural activities developed by farmers or producer organisations. Contrary to productive diversification, pluriactivity refers to activities that occur outside the farm household (Huylenbroeck &

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Durand, 2003). Related to the notion of pluriactivity is the concept of multifunctionality. With this term, I refer to the full range of functions, both tangible and intangible, that farmers or producer organisations generate through agricultural or non-agricultural activities (Reig, 2001). See Table 2 for examples.

Table 2. Possible functions generated by agricultural and non-agricultural activities

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL
• Self-sufficiency	• Conservation of soil fertility	• Strengthening of local knowledge
• Fair trade	• Diversification	• Occupation of territory
• Employment of family labour	• Preservation of local varieties	• Food security
• Technological innovation	• Natural equilibrium	• Social organisation
• Income diversification	• Water conservation	• Knowledge transfer
	• Landscape maintenance	• Commitment to the earth
	• Generation of biological control	• Cultural identity

Adapted from van Huylenbroeck & Durand, 2003

The functions that are generated depend on the mode of production and the particularities of the different farming and livestock management systems that are either individually or collectively managed. That is, the generated functions are related to farming strategies (Toledo, 1995).

The attention to multifunctionality arises in a context where there is a need to develop a new understanding of rurality from the perspective of the Mexican countryside that is strongly transformed by the processes of urbanisation and globalisation (Gerritsen, 2010a; Gerritsen, 2010b). Both of these processes have not only deepened the rural crisis but also opened new possibilities as well as limitations for farmers. In this sense, pluriactivity and multifunctionality go hand-in-hand, since the development of new activities can generate new functions in the Mexican countryside (Gerritsen, 2010b).

Research on the specific role of women in the development of pluriactivity and multifunctionality started in the 1990s (Seuneke & Bock, 2015). Many studies argue that although neoliberal processes have marginalised (farm-)women, women have also succeeded in developing new activities and rebuilding their labour domain (Brandth, 2002). Accordingly, pluriactive and multifunctional development initiatives have permitted women to enhance the fulfilment of their practical and strategic gender needs, allowing them to overcome (some of) the gender

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barriers mentioned before. This enhancement has been made possible by the inclusion of new activities and functions that are integrated with existing activities and functions (Seuneke & Bock, 2015).

In the following sections, after making some methodological comments, I present and analyse the case of the "Colour of the Earth" group in western Mexico by using the concepts elaborated earlier.

Some methodological comments

In this paper, I analyse the experiences of the "Colour of the Earth" organisation through a gendered lens and explore what bearing that has for the concepts of pluriactivity and multifunctionality. Since its foundation in 1996, I have accompanied the group as an action-researcher for various lengths of time (see Gerritsen, 1998, 2010b, 2014; Villalvazo et al., 2003; Gerritsen et al., 2008; Olson & Gerritsen, 2011; Gutiérrez & Gerritsen, 2011; Figueroa et al., 2013; Gerritsen, 2014; Gutiérrez & Gerritsen, 2017). Therefore, the results I present below are based mainly on my experiences with the group and the use of three methods of action-research: informal interviews, participant observation and participatory workshops. I contextualise my empirical experience within the literature on gender, producer organisations, pluriactivity and multifunctionality.

My experiences as described in this paper are complemented by the results of one bachelor's and three master's theses realised by students I have supervised, all of which have helped to deepen my insights on the group, its work and the contexts they have been influenced by (see Gutiérrez, 2006; Larco, 2010; Licona, 2013; Ancona, 2015).

Study area

The "Colour of the Earth" group is located in the indigenous community of Cuzalapa in the municipality of Cuautitlán de García Barragán to the south of the Sierra de Manantlán mountain range. In turn, the Sierra de Manantlán is located in the southern part of the state of Jalisco, as well as in the neighbouring state of Colima in western Mexico.

The Sierra de Manantlán, with an extension of 140,000 hectares, was declared a biosphere reserve in 1987 due to its high biological diversity. There are three core zones within the reserve that have prohibited access to humans; together these zones make up 30% of the reserve. The remaining 70% is declared as a buffer zone, where special rules and regulations govern land use. The reserve's rules and regulations,

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which are based on Mexican environmental law, are imposed on top of existing land tenure regimes and its institutions. The conservation mission for the biosphere has expanded from the protection of species to an integrated conservation and development project. This dual mission has challenged the reserve managers (Gerritsen, 2002).

The indigenous community of Cuzalapa is located on the southern slopes of the Sierra and encompasses 23,963 hectares. Currently, 71% of the indigenous community forms part of the buffer zone and 19% lives outside the reserve in the so-called influence zone. The community includes 1,500 inhabitants in a central village and several hamlets. The productive activities in Cuzalapa are mainly agricultural. In the lower parts, corn and bean dominate. Cattle raising is conducted extensively in the middle and upper parts and has had a boom in recent decades. Consequently, pasture establishment has primarily replaced traditional crops. Regarding the forests of the community, the decree to make the region a biosphere reserve was triggered by the indiscriminate felling of forests between the 1970s and the late 1980s. This resulted in approximately 10% of the Cuzalapa territory becoming part of one of the three core zones. Currently, forest use is limited to domestic use. Consumption of wood is limited to use in fence posts and the beams and butts of roofs (Ibid.).

Gender relations in Cuzalapa

In rural Mexico, gender roles are generally clearly defined, and men and women typically have pre-assigned social rights and responsibilities. In this sense, gender roles are embedded in a highly patriarchal structure characterised by very clear social boundaries (Segrest et al., 2003). Furthermore, Mexican culture, and thus gender roles, is based on social hierarchy and conflict avoidance (Paz, 2015). Closely related to a patriarchal structure is a generalised male attitude known as *machismo*. The notion of *machismo* refers to a form of masculinity that is characterised by male dominance over and a feeling of superiority vis-à-vis women (Segrest et al., 2003). This dominance is manifest above all in the social and economic spheres, although it is also present in the political and psychological spheres (Gil-Arroyo et al., 2019).

In the rural areas of Mexico, the patriarchal structure and attitudes of *machismo* are explicitly present. This is also the case in the Sierra de Manantlán and the indigenous community of Cuzalapa. Although differences can be observed according to the family life cycle, clear-cut roles can be observed amongst women and men. I illustrate this by revisiting Moser's (1993) ideas on the three roles of women (Table 3).

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Table 3. Moser's multidimensional framework on gender relations (1993) as applied to Cuzalapa

	PRACTICAL GENDER NEEDS	STRATEGIC GENDER NEEDS
REPRODUCTIVE SPHERE	Female-dominated	Female-dominated
PRODUCTIVE SPHERE	Male-dominated	Male-dominated
COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AND POLITICS	Male-dominated	Male-dominated

To start with, women are primarily expected to attend to the reproductive role within the household. They are the primary adults responsible for childcare and all the activities related to the household, such as cooking, cleaning and washing. They are also responsible for the health and education of the children. Men's activities in the home are limited to very occasionally helping their wives. This is closely related to the family life cycle, as it is mainly elderly husbands that assist their wives. Agricultural activities, on the other hand, are very clearly the domain of the male members of the family (the father, assisted by his sons), who go to the fields and manage the cattle. Women may participate but mostly do so when there is a labour shortage, which is mainly the case during harvest time. Finally, regarding community management and politics, women again play a secondary role. Women may participate in health or school committees, but these efforts are never compensated. Regarding land and natural resource management, the general assembly of (landholding) farmers and the related local institution are dominated by male farmers. When women participate, it is generally limited to widows who have inherited their husbands' land. However, even then, women's participation is extremely limited, and they usually do not intervene in the discussions.

Origin and development of the "Colour of the Earth" group[1]

As stated above, a patriarchal structure and *machismo*-based gender relations are the context in which the "Colour of the Earth" group emerged. Over its almost 25 years of existence, the group has made

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[1]   This section draws on Larco (2010), who beautifully describes the history and internal dynamics of the "Colour of the Earth" group.

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remarkable strides (summarised in Table 4). The group's origins can be traced back to 1994 with the arrival of a woman farmer named María.[2] María came from another peasant community in the Sierra de Manantlán, following her husband who accepted a job at the Biosphere Reserve in the community development centre of Cuzalapa (see also Gerritsen, 1998).

Table 4: Important moments and stages in the development of the "Colour of the Earth" group

YEAR	ACTIVITY INITIATED
1993	• First gathering of girls and mothers
1996	• Informal founding of the group
2000	• Incursion in regional markets • Start of coffee recollection and processing
2001	• Recognition of the group by the local authorities
2006	• Start of rural tourism activities
2016	• Organisation of the first coffee cultural festival • Start of formalising the group's status (as a cooperative)

After her arrival, María started a course on embroidery for 12 girls from the community. With the help of a community development worker who was affiliated with the biosphere reserve project, the products were successfully sold in the cities of the region. This, in turn, motivated the mothers of the girls to also participate in these activities. Accordingly, the founding members of the group recalled that 1996 was the year when the seeds for the "Colour of the Earth" organisation were planted. In the following years, using funds obtained throughout the reserve, the women were able to receive training in different activities, such as embroidery, potting, and the preparation of marmalades, amongst others. In this way, the group started to diversify its activities and commercial success soon followed.

In the year 2000, the group was already participating in regional artisanal events and selling and innovating its products. Also, in this period, the motifs used in their embroidery shifted from biosphere

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2   A fictitious name is used here.

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reserve-related designs (mainly plants, animals and maps of the reserve) to themes that were closer to their life worlds (i.e. plants and flowers that are found near their homes).

In 2001, the group requested recognition before the local authorities, and the "Colour of the Earth" group was formally founded. In this year, the group started to collect and process coffee beans from the coffee plant-dominated agroforestry systems in the community. Traditionally, men collected coffee beans, however men abandoned this activity when coffee prices started to fall.

Due to coffee sales in the region, people started to notice the group. Over time, an increasing number of (mainly foreign) tourists started to visit the coffee home gardens. The steady influx of tourists kept the women busy, and they worked hard to clear the waste that was left behind by visitors.

Eventually, in 2006, a rural tourism project came into fruition. Its origins lie in my student's bachelor's thesis (Gutiérrez, 2006) that was converted into an action-research programme (Gutiérrez & Gerritsen, 2011). Since 2016, the group has organised a yearly cultural festival around coffee. This festival has received widespread attention and involves not only the group's members but also the wider community.

Finally, the group received financial support from the Directorship of the Sierra de Manantlán Biosphere Reserve and the municipality of Cuautitlán (to which Cuzalapa belongs). This has permitted the construction of a visitors centre, with a shop, restaurant, kitchen and production area managed by the group. The University of Guadalajara has also played an important role; several researchers have offered training courses to the group's members.

A view on the group's pluriactivity and multifunctionality

Today, the group integrates 15 members, one of which is male. The male member was recently incorporated by inheriting the right to participate after his mother died. Table 5 provides an overview of the products that are processed and commercialised.

Over the almost 25 years of its existence, the group has evolved into a dynamic organisation that continually innovates by developing new production, processing and commercialisation activities. Its activities also contribute to the socio-cultural and economic valorisation of natural

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resources such as through rural tourism and coffee festivals. Table 6 compares the different activities of the group (i.e. pluriactivity) and the functions that they generate (i.e. multifunctionality).

Table 5. Products that are elaborated (ordered according to production volume)

- Organic coffee
- Maya nut "coffee" (locally known as mojote)
- Traditional embroidery
- Artisanal products
- A vast array of local (produced and processed) food products, such as pipián (ground squash seeds), pinole (ground maize), fried banana chips, tortillas, marmalades and honey

Table 6. Activities and accompanying functions generated by the "Colour of the Earth" group

ACTIVITY	DIRECT FUNCTION	INDIRECT FUNCTION
COMMERCIALISATION	• Self-sufficiency • Capitalisation • Employment generation • Increase in productivity • Increase in organisational capacities • Knowledge transfer	• Productive diversification • Preservation of local varieties • Conscious consumption • Technological innovation • Food security
ELABORATION OF ARTISANRIES	• Knowledge conservation and transfer • Increase in organisational capacities • Cultural identity strengthening	• Knowledge transfer • Bonding with land and nature • Occupation of territory
PROCESSING OF FOOD PRODUCTS	• Productive diversification • Preservation of local varieties • Generation of family labour • Technological innovation • Generation of biological resistance • Self-sufficiency • Saving	• Diverse productivity • Knowledge preservation • Food security • Social organisation • Knowledge transfer • Cultural identity • Natural equilibrium • Water conservation • Landscape maintenance • Conscious consumption

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RURAL TOURISM

- Natural equilibrium
- Landscape maintenance
- Income generation
- Family employment
- Use of territory
- Social organisation

- Knowledge preservation
- Knowledge transfer
- Bond with land and nature
- Cultural identity

Currently, the "Colour of the Earth" group is regionally recognised for its work. It has obtained many awards from governmental and non-governmental institutions for being a successful example of an endogenous rural development initiative (Gerritsen, 2011). Throughout the almost 25 years the "Colour of the Earth" organisation has existed, several factors have been crucial to the permanence of the group.[3] These factors are as follows:

1. Strong leadership and teambuilding
María's arrival in 1994 was crucial in bringing the women together. María has worked on teambuilding from 1994 until now and is the group's unofficial leader. It is essential to note that her leadership was based on motivating other members rather than centralising the decision-making process.

*2. Importance of training and the acquisition of machinery
    and infrastructure*
The second factor includes the development of human capital in the organisation through training courses both from the University of Guadalajara and different government institutions. The acquisition of machinery and infrastructure has accompanied human capital development.

3. Markets and product quality
The third factor consists of entering into new markets in the region. Participation in new markets has demanded the improvement of the quality of the products.

4. Internal organisation
Another critical factor to the success of the group is its internal organisation, where an organisational structure was formed that included different committees. Also, a common fund was established for the collective needs of the group.

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3   The following draws on Ancona (2015), who explores the group's dynamics and associated structuring factors.

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5. Expanding activities
Almost from its beginning, the "Colour of the Earth" has incorporated new activities, such as coffee collection and processing and rural tourism, amongst other activities.

6. Negotiation capacities vis-à-vis external actors
The group's interaction with outside agents has been crucial for obtaining financing for the construction of the group's visitor centre and funding its training needs. This interaction has also helped to provide visibility to the group and its work outside the region. Table 7 groups these factors together with reference to the activities undertaken.

Table 7. Relationship between pluriactivity and the structuring factors of the group

ACTIVITY	DETERMINING FACTORS
COMMERCIALISATION	• Strong leadership and teambuilding • Markets and product quality • Internal organisation • Expanding activities • Negotiation capacities vis-à-vis external actors
ELABORATION OF ARTISANAL PRODUCTS	• Expanding activities
PROCESSING OF FOOD PRODUCTS	• The importance of training and the acquisition of machinery and infrastructure • Markets and product quality • Internal organisation • Expanding activities
RURAL TOURISM	• Strong leadership and teambuilding • The importance of training and the acquisition of machinery and infrastructure • Internal organisation • Negotiation capacities vis-à-vis external actors

On gender, pluriactivity and multifunctional development

The women of the "Colour of the Earth" group have been working together for almost 25 years. This longevity has allowed them to develop social capital based on a specific pluriactivity that, in turn, has enhanced multifunctionality. Both pluriactivity and multifunctionality have permitted

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the group to improve its members' socio-economic status and revalorise the community's natural resources, such as the coffee home gardens. Accordingly, poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation are at the heart of the work of the women. Both poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation are relevant interventions for mountainous areas, as stated at the beginning of the paper.

Although this was never an explicit issue for the women or for the external agents who worked with them, the group's work has contributed to opening up new social spaces for achieving the women's (practical and strategic) gender needs. In other words, a process of gender role reconfiguration has occurred, even though the women are still confronted with traditional gender barriers. Again, both this fulfilment and reconfiguration can be associated with the pluriactivity developed and the multifunctionality generated by the group.

Changes in traditional gender roles are the most visible in the reproductive sphere. Notable shifts have been observed regarding what activities women do and are allowed to do. The process is very much activity-related; some of the group's activities have had more impact on the established roles between men and women than other activities. Training activities, the obtaining of technology, leaving the community to sell produce in the region, and contact with external actors have significantly impacted expectations associated with gender roles. Consequently, tensions and even conflicts have emerged within families, which has led some women to leave the group. However, these tensions disappeared in most families when the group started to achieve commercial success. As the majority of the women members belong to poorer social strata, the income that they obtain from their work has been a welcomed mechanism for poverty alleviation. However, it has taken time for the men to accept that the women can have their own income, leave the community unattended, and talk with outsiders.

Shifts in gender roles in the productive sphere were less conflictive. First, the main activity in the productive sphere, i.e. coffee collection, had been abandoned by male farmers since the late 1990s. Second, the other activity, rural tourism, was not implemented until 2006, by which time many men had already accepted the new activities of the women. Moreover, as tourism is a non-traditional function in the productive sphere, it was not perceived as being threatening.

However, few changes within gender roles in the community management and political sphere have occurred. For a long time, local authorities considered the group to be "those poor women doing things together in order not to get bored," who were of no threat to the interests

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of the dominant political group in the community. Later, by 2001, when the group had gradually obtained recognition and success within and outside the community, local authorities officially recognised it. Because its work also benefitted the wider community, including other families not directly affiliated with the group, it was allowed to continue. However, again, it was allowed to continue as it posed no threat to the local political establishment.

Overall, gender role changes in all of these three spheres have been a gradual process and they are considerably related to the learning processes of the group's members. A much-discussed illustrative example that is fondly remembered by the women is commercialisation. When commercialisation activities began, several of the group's members were not allowed by their husbands to leave the community by themselves. In a later stage, women were allowed to leave the community to sell their products, but only when accompanied by one of the husbands. At present, women can leave the community by themselves.

Although important progress has been made, many gender barriers still exist. These barriers are mainly related to the patriarchal structure and machismo attitudes of male family and community members. Following Gil-Arroyo et al. (2019), empowerment of the members of the "Colour of the Earth" group has taken place, above all in the economic and psychological spheres and, to a lesser degree, in the political and social realms.

The group's work has also had spin-off effects. A new group of women farmers dedicated to making and selling embroidery emerged in the community, and the (male) owners of the coffee home gardens united in a producer organisation aimed at the rehabilitation of coffee production. Interestingly, many producers no longer sell to middlemen but to the "Colour of the Earth" group.

Regarding the practical and strategic gender needs of the women, the generation of new functions has mainly contributed to fulfilling practical gender needs. This fulfilment goes beyond mere economic needs (extra income) to involve matters of culture and identity as well as psychological wellbeing, such as solidarity and feeling proud of one's work (see also Licona, 2013).

Regarding the women's strategic gender needs, it is not so much multifunctionality but pluriactivity that has had a major impact on the reconfiguration of gender roles. Pluriactivity has strengthened the role of women vis-à-vis men and has increased feelings of self-respect and self-esteem.

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Figure 2. Members of the "Colour of the Earth" group

Photo credit: Peter R.W. Gerritsen

Figure 3. A monthly meeting of the group

Photo credit: Peter R.W. Gerritsen

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Figure 4. Learning how to observe birds

Photo credit: Peter R.W. Gerritsen

Figure 5. Preparing food for visitors

Photo credit: Peter R.W. Gerritsen

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Figure 6. Coffee plants, the main product of the organisation

Photo credit : Peter R.W. Gerritsen

From theory to practice: policy recommendations on gender and ecosystem management in mountain communities

The experiences of the women's group "Colour of the Earth" permits the identification of lessons that might be useful for policy makers and implementers. In the specific case of the women's group of Cuzalapa, the policy recommendations relate to the gender roles and needs of women in mountainous environments. Here, I provide four policy recommendations.

First, the "Colour of the Earth" shows the importance of strengthening farmer organisations with women-only members. In this respect, strong organisational culture and social cohesion have permitted the group to continue for almost 25 years and overcome many barriers. Second, the strong leadership of María was crucial for the development of the group; her leadership has not only promoted internal social cohesion but has also stimulated the exploration of new activities within and outside the community. This type of leadership has been crucial to motivating other members to assume active roles rather than centralising decision-making. Third, natural resources and socio-cultural practices have

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permitted the local embedding of the group's productive and commercial practices. The women have identified 'gendered' niches within local ecosystems and their management. That is, they forged a gendered endogenous rural development initiative. The notions of pluriactivity and multifunctionality have been important in understanding the specific characteristics of this initiative. Finally, the support of both governmental and non-governmental institutions has been very important and has facilitated the financing of both infrastructure and training.

In conclusion, as stated in the first part of this paper, I argue that references to "mountain women" imply a heterogeneous social group which, in turn, requires an empirical approach to understand the specific characteristics and conditions under which women live, work and thrive in mountainscapes. Accordingly, this approach requires that the implementation of policy recommendations, such as the recommendations above, must be embedded in a participatory bottom-up approach. Only then will policy interventions be able to strengthen rural development initiatives that are "born from within" and employ a beneficial gendered lens.

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Narratives of inter-generational change from rural Uttarakhand, India

Reframing discourses on the *Pahadi* woman

By

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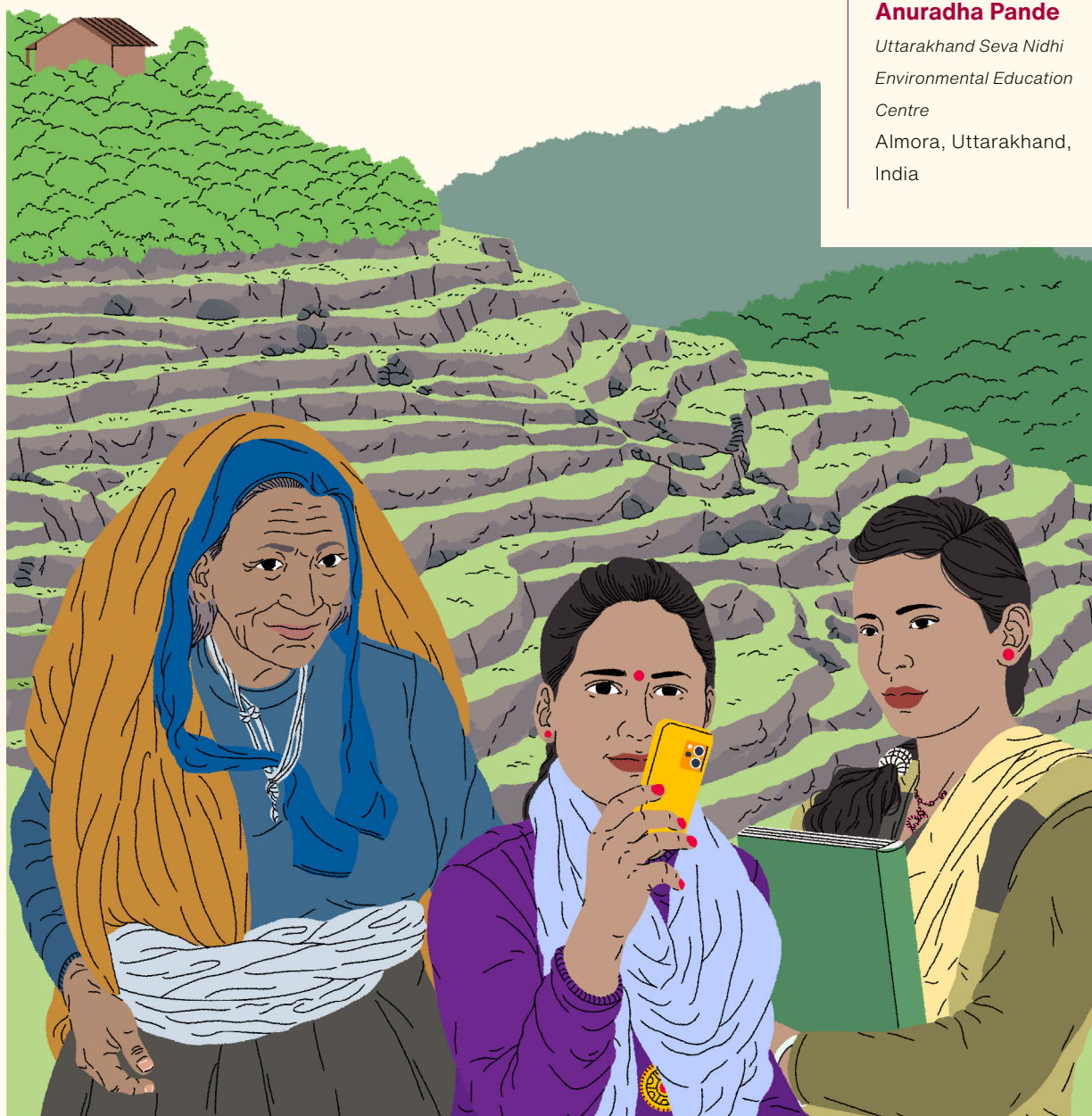
About the authors

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is a young researcher whose career trajectory spans the social and consumer research sectors. In her capacity as a researcher with the Uttarakhand Environmental Education Centre, since 2014 she has been engaging with themes of urgent relevance to rural futures in Uttarakhand, such as inter-generational change and the aspirations of young people, gender and labour, mundane life in hazard-riddled geography and methodological questions of voice and inclusion. Her educational credentials are cross-disciplinary, including an MPhil in Natural Resource Management from the Indian Institute of Forest Management (Bhopal) and a Master's in Social Entrepreneurship from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai).

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has worked with the Uttarakhand Environmental Education Centre in Almora since 1992. She has been part of a team designing, testing and mainstreaming environmental education in government schools, which led to policy reform in education in Uttarakhand. She is the founder and coordinator of the Uttarakhand Women's Federation, a state-wide network of rural women's groups which organises women and adolescent girls into village groups and conducts training sessions. In addition to developing educational materials for use in villages, she organises annual conventions across the state that bring women together to raise their voices.

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Abstract

This paper looks at the diversity of women's and girls' lives, work patterns and aspirations across different agro-ecological and social contexts in the north Indian mountain state of Uttarakhand. Adopting an intergenerational lens and drawing on location-specific empirical material that emerged from an inductive, iterative and dialogic research process, we explore how *Pahadi* (mountain) young women and girls express rural modernity. The younger generation's access to schooling and exposure to a wider world through television, social media and consumer and popular culture is shaping aspirations for another kind of life; girls are distancing themselves from the agriculture and forest work that still defines the lives of their elders. This generational gap casts new light on the diversity of experiences and growing complexities that characterise contemporary *Pahadi* households, as trajectories of change over the past few decades have altered physical, material and social landscapes. People's relationships to the land and natural resources are changing, as are their concerns and priorities; the young in particular seek new social roles, relationships and ways of being in the world. Our work highlights the urgency of developing more nuanced understandings of the embodiment of gender in mountain ecosystems that draw on these contemporary realities and, critically, acknowledge social and attitudinal realities as the young themselves perceive them. At a conceptual level, gender analysis based on cross-generational differences challenges the common perspective that views mountain women within a restrictive domestic economy and natural resource management approach while overlooking the heterogeneity of circumstances and experiences that shape their lives. At a methodological level, this study contributes to learning from a participatory bottom-up research design that enables under- or unrepresented voices to come forth, not merely in academic writing but also within the household and the community. At a practical level, it offers a way of reflecting on what a realistic mountain perspective and sustainable development approach needs to consider in this moment of the 21st century that will contribute to a more engaged on-the-ground policy for mountainous areas.

Keywords:

Background

Picture the scene: a large multi-generational gathering of women, including the elderly, middle-aged and young married women as well as unmarried girls, sitting on rugs spread out on the uneven, damp ground; the blue skies and a mild sun offer a welcome break from the rain of preceding days. There is an air of festivity. There are all too few occasions during which women of the Uttarakhand communities in the Indian Himalayas have the luxury to relax or to engage with one another in informal ways. The discussion is lively, occasionally heated, as the women reflect on how their roles within households and the community have changed over time. One older woman remarks, "Our days were very dangerous; we used to be so scared of elders. If the mother-in-law came then the daughter-in-law would keep quiet. We were scared as we would be of a tiger!" Others nod in agreement, sharing the horrors of those long-ago years of youth. Then a young voice pipes up, "If we have not done anything wrong, why should we be scared at all?"

This exchange captures the essence of an important change visible throughout these hills: a growing confidence amongst girls to voice their opinions even amongst elders. Not long ago, their lives would have been charted by a roadmap similar to that which shaped their mothers' and grandmothers' lives. Today it is possible to envision another future, made possible by increasing access to schooling, the adoption of mainstream values, and the messages of consumer and popular cultures that satellite television and social media are bringing into once isolated villages.

These changes owe in considerable part to the unprecedented economic and social growth that has followed in the wake of the liberalisation of India's economy in the early 1990s. In tandem with the formation of the mountain state of Uttarakhand in 2000, these changes have extended the parameters of rural people's lives far beyond their immediate communities largely through 'revolutions' in the telecommunication and transportation sectors. These have led to improved levels of accessibility and connectivity hitherto unknown, new levels of market and urban growth, population expansions and displacements, increasing land prices and new industrial policies that have reconfigured mountain landscapes and the lives of rural communities (Govindrajan, 2018; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008; Joshi, 2001). The certainties about a 'village way of life' that once prevailed are fading as households and communities become more heterogeneous and a culture of consumerism reshapes behaviours and aspirations. A commonly heard remark is that "now there is no difference between the town and the village," which bears testimony to how the distances that once literally

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and figuratively defined and separated highlands from lowlands, mountains from plains, and villages from towns are being erased.

In this chapter, we explore what the experiences of *Pahadi* (mountain) rural modernity, described as an "era of the consciousness of the new," means for young girls.[1] Though the young are a constituency inadequately represented in regional and national discourses on mountain development policy in India, their voices offer rich insights into their lives and aspirations, and how these remain at odds with those of their elders. This generational divide, expressed in a distancing from the village way of life, further highlights the diversities and complexities of contemporary mountain households. It also casts light on the challenges girls face in balancing the allure of a 'modern' life with the realities imposed by their social environments.

Various strands of research have influenced our work. At a broad level, we engage with studies drawn from both mountainous and plain areas that look at the myriad ways in which this moment of modernity, shaped by global flows of capital and technology, education and consumerism, is shaping people's lives and evoking responses (Resurrección et al., 2019; Sijapati & Birkenholz, 2016; Kumar, 2014; Mines & Lamb, 2012; Mines & Yazgi, 2010; Johnson, 2005). Specifically, the issues we raise resonate with existing conversations on how this time of rapid social change and emerging aspirations is shaping gendered and youth subjectivities (Dyson, 2014, 2010; Jeffrey, 2010; Klenk, 2010, 2004). Our work also draws on and adds to a continued interrogation of an element of the *Pahadi* narrative that, despite endless critiques and challenges, continues to permeate policy and development thinking about women in mountainscapes: that their lives are framed by a close affinity to their natural resource bases (Joshi, 2014; Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2007; Gururani, 2000, 2002; Sinha et al., 1997). The most recent incarnation of the women-environment convergence has emerged around the envisioning of mountain women as the bedrock of sustainable mountain development who can serve at the forefront of responding to climate change-related issues (Rudaz & Debarbieux, 2012; Nellemann et al., 2011; Leduc, 2010). As noted by others, this is a discourse that places an undue burden on women themselves and is increasingly divorced from the contemporary realities in which women find themselves.

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1   *Pahadi* refers to 'of the mountains,' an identity people use to describe themselves as well as the languages spoken. The majority of the population in our research site is Hindu; while people observe the major festivals of the Hindus of the northern plains, they also follow feasts, fasts and rituals that are distinctive to this region. For discussions of religion in the contemporary Himalayas, see Sijapati & Birkenholz (2016); Berreman (1972); and Sax (2009).

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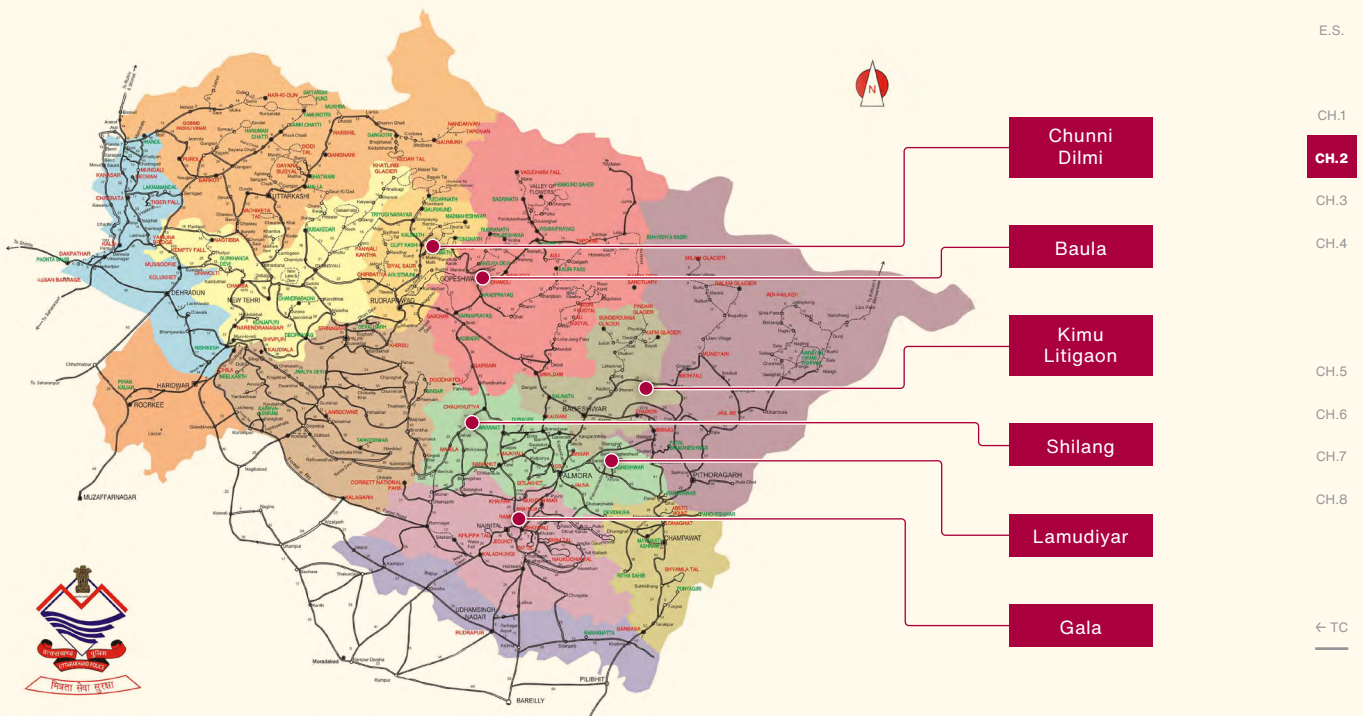
Figure 1. Map of Uttarakhand depicting the eight hamlets that were part of the sample of the study

Source: Uttarakhand Police Department [website][2]

Methodology

Our discussion draws on an inductive disaster research study conducted during 2014–2017, the genesis of which lay in the urgent need for fresh insights into hazard-induced disasters in Uttarakhand.[3] One fundamental dimension of the study was to capture the diversity of labour roles and aspirations of women of different age groups, including young girls, across different agro-ecological and social contexts. Guided by the rich body of lessons derived from the participatory involvement of the Uttarakhand Environmental Education Centre (UEEC) in the villages of Uttarakhand over three decades, we locate this study within a body of up-to-date grounded knowledge about the contemporary realities of rural hill communities.

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2   Available at: https://uttarakhandpolice.uk.gov.in/pages/display/169-uttarakhand-road-map (Accessed 16 September 2020)

3   In the aftermath of devastating flash floods that ravaged Uttarakhand in June 2013, The Indian Council for Social Science Research funded several research projects to look into issues presented by the disaster. UEEC, a grassroots non-governmental organisation in Almora, was awarded funding to look into the broad theme of gender and natural disasters. See UEEC (2017).

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Since close engagement with community members was a critical element for our research, we adopted Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) to shape the research methodology. CGT is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to construct theory about issues of relevance to people's lives and acknowledges the subjectivity of multiple truths and realities. CGT encourages the research experience to develop in an organic manner, drawing on an inductive process of data that encourages a dialogic relationship, whereby the research participants can express issues they deem important. This multiplicity of voices enables researchers and participants to engage in the co-construction of meaning, which helps to shape the research process. Thus, from the start our research was participatory and iterative, encouraging inputs and feedback from varied sources. We also attempted to promote, as far as was feasible, equitable participation amongst all involved in the research endeavour.[4]

We selected a purposive sample of nine hamlets across five districts in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of Uttarakhand. Selection was based on meeting one or more of a combination of thematic criteria. This included caste distribution; reliance on traditional hill agriculture versus commercial horticulture; the nature of participants' involvement in non-farm activities; the nature of adverse environmental events; and relative remoteness. Each of these thematic groups also represented different altitudes and socio-ecological conditions which had implications for the local economy and community life, women's labour, attitudes and the transitions they had experienced in day-to-day living and, finally, experiences of vulnerability in the context of environmental disasters.

A combination of qualitative methods (including in-depth interviews at the individual/household level, focus group discussions and participatory resource mapping at the community level) and quantitative tools were employed to collect expansive evidence. In addition to group activities, our findings draw on detailed inputs from 273 adult and married women and 54 girls (aged between 12 and 21 years), who were the primary interview respondents. Quantitative data was generated through a detailed interview schedule designed to elicit household-level information on a wide range of issues: household demography (education levels, types and levels of migration and return migration, household incomes and remittances, land-based and non-farm sources of livelihood and

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4   There is a large amount of literature on constructivist grounded theory. See Lincoln & Guba (2011); Morse (2001); Patton (1990); Glaser (1992); Glaser & Strauss (1967); and Strauss & Corbin (1998). For good overviews, discussions about and limitations of CGT see Redman-MacLaren & Mills (2015); and Mills, Bonner & Francis (2006).

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asset ownership), the nature of individuals' dependence on natural resources and the related intra-household labour distribution, changes and continuities in village life, and, finally, lived-experiences of hazard-induced disasters.

Two critical features of the research design included providing space for often under- or unrepresented stakeholders -in this case, women and most notably young girls- and a commitment to inclusion and ongoing dialogue between the researchers and the community sub-groups through out the duration of the research. An important aspect of gaining the confidence of and working with the women was being able to offer them an encouraging environment in which to articulate opinions that would be valued. For most respondents, it was the first time their opinions were prioritised over those of adult male household members. Women would often initially direct us to talk with their husbands or sons and were amused when we insisted that we wanted to hear *their* opinions. The young girls were shy and needed time to open up, and we had to work on presenting our questions in a way that would not appear intimidating. We were also conscious that the presence of other family members might put pressure on the girls.[5] As a result, each interview had its own flavour, shaped both by circumstances that had to be dealt with, as well as matters of personality and temperament. The UEEC's long-term engagement in these mountains and our choice of research tools facilitated a dialogic process between intra-community interest groups. Research tools used included in-depth interviews, multi-generational focus group discussions, and participatory resource appraisals that brought together the entire community including men.

Ensuring that these heterogeneities were adequately reflected gave a particularly rich texture to the process of data recording, coding and analysis.[6] We presented data analysis and findings based on three events in Almora, Uttarakhand. These were attended by multi-generational groups of women from different parts of Kumaon and Garhwal Himalayas (including the women and girls from villages where we had done fieldwork and elected women representatives from villages where we had not previously conducted research). The free-flowing discussions, inputs, critiques and clarifications not only strengthened our

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5   Some elders expressed reservations about why we needed to talk with their daughters in private, questioning what sorts of issues we were going discuss with them.

6   The open-ended responses from the interviews were recorded in respondents' words so as to retain their undiluted meaning and then coded to convert them into quantitative data. All group interactions were audio recorded and transcribed in the local dialect and only later translated into Hindi, so that context specific meanings were not lost in translation.

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understanding of the emerging data but also helped us to acknowledge our own biases in interpreting the material.[7]

Figure 2. Girls from the remote hamlet of 'Litigaon' in Bageshwar district during an interview

Photo credit: Ritu Yumnam

In retrospect, there were obvious challenges and limitations to the study. Given the objectives of the research, we deliberately privileged women's and girls' experiences and voices over those of men and boys. Inevitably, many of the issues that we engaged with – gendered norms, expectations of labour, migration and aspirations – would have generated different sets of concerns from the men and boys. The research might well have benefited from their inclusion, but it would then have been a very different study and not the one we intended. Moreover, working in areas in which UEEC has had a long-standing engagement over three decades brought both benefits and certain limitations. We were able to tap into networks and prior relationships but also had to contend with raised expectations about what the research might mean for the communities.

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7   Another workshop was held with participants from academia, administrative and non-governmental agencies at the UEEC office in June 2015.

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Figure 3. A data dissemination workshop being held at the UEEC office at Almora

Photo credit: Ritu Yumnam

Results and findings

Consuming modernity *Pahadi* style

The 'rural' has long engaged with processes and dynamics of the 'new,' an interaction which has brought about a merging of the old and 'traditional' with the new and 'modern,' giving rise to new occupations and activities. This interaction has enabled new attitudes and practices to shape how some people begin to think about themselves (Dalmia & Sadana, 2012, p.5). The multiple facets of modernity are also reflected in ways of working, interpersonal relationships, modes of thinking and, increasingly, new objects of desire played out and experienced in the material/social domains, such as access to schooling, a mobile phone, novel kinds of foods and satellite television. Also pertinent are patterns of behaviour "calibrated to morality and to emotions, affecting not just what people have in their homes or pockets but in their souls and hearts" (Gold, 2012, p.14). Ambiguities are also embedded within modernity allowing for the embracing of new ways of being that are no longer circumscribed by place but coloured by anxieties about what embracing the 'new' might mean in terms of losing the past and its related moorings. Complex socio-economic and gendered contexts also

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suggest that the impacts of modernity are necessarily layered, sending out mixed messages, and carrying different meanings depending on whether one is female or male.[8]

The relatively isolated mountain communities of this region have until recently been protected from the onslaught of changes that have been experienced in the more accessible rural areas of the plains. Today Uttarakhand's villages are no longer entirely rural in the sense of the word's normative association with an agrarian economy. Depending on location and accessibility as well as migration and employment histories, these villages are likely to be a melting pot of the old and the new. Changes are apparent in newly constructed houses with contemporary urban designs, the penetration of consumer goods, expanded mobility and so on. The most visible manifestations of generational change in the hill villages of Uttarakhand are revealed in the different preferences for clothing and foods as well as an explicit transition from the use of local dialects to Hindi as a common language. These shifts are apparent even within a single household, where it is common to see women at different life stages wearing different types of clothing, stating a preference for different types of foods, and observing different customs in their preparation of food. Preferences also differ regarding how open they are to eating outside the home or at community functions and their choice of language. Each decision constitutes a small step towards embracing 'being modern,' a reflexive act which to varying degrees has inter-generational and gender implications.

Food practices offer a rich terrain on which social meanings play out, highlighting issues of identity and belonging that offer people ways to think about themselves in relation to a wider world, including the preservation of cultural identities or a desire to belong to the modern world (Baviskar, 2018, pp. 49–50; Mintz, 1996, p.70). Diets in these mountains have been undergoing changes for decades; the devaluation of once central food grains reflects a diminishing agricultural base, the expansion of markets and the availability of hybrid grains through agricultural extension agencies.[9]

In one multi-generational focus group, the discussion highlighted the ways foods can serve as links to or breaks from the past in ways that show stark generational differences. The older women are critical of

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8 Gold (2012, p. 16) talks of the "intense affect" surrounding the "potential polarities of desire and revulsion for the trappings of modernity."

9 This is noted throughout the Hindu Kush Himalayan belt. See Adhikari et al., 2017; Gautam & Andersen, 2017; Dame & Nüsser, 2011; Maikhuri et al., 2001; and Finnis, 2007.

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how packaged foods have entered village diets, pointing to the adverse effects these have on the health of people and especially children. A woman remarks:

> **"Earlier we used to have just *Mandua ki roti* (bread made from coarse-grained millet); it is much more nutritious than *atta* (wheat). Look at us! We are healthier because our daily diet has consisted of local cereals and vegetables like nettle leaves which are said to contain iron. Today, they do not like to eat traditional foods. Chow mein (noodles): where is the nutrition in that?"**

The young are certain that their food choices are the right ones: "If the food isn't nutritious, so what? Calcium and iron tablets are available in the market. We will eat those in case we become anaemic or weak." Expressing a clear association between what one eats and the extent to which one is of the modern world, a young interlocutor added, "One has to make progress. We cannot keep having the same old food items while the world is changing." Her companion adds, "We do not want to eat *Mandua ki roti*. It is hard, thick and difficult to eat. Moreover, it is brown … if we eat it, our complexion will change."

Millet reflects culturally valued aspects of life that still find expression in folklore and festivals which correspond with the agricultural seasons, and which offer something for elders to grasp in the face of rapid change. In contrast to the flavourful foods of their remembered pasts, new hybrid forms of wheat and vegetables constitute a literally "tasteless modernity" which many elders decry (Gold, 2012, p.21). Today these so-called 'inferior' grains are finding new popularity amongst urban buyers, while also signifying for permanent migrants a way of connecting to their *Pahadi* identity.[10] Symbolically the younger generation's refusal to eat certain foods is seen as liberating, a "form of self-identification" that involves a shrugging off of the past (Mintz, 1996, p.13). The equating of certain foods to skin colour also highlights the extent to which once-isolated mountain villages are now connected to the Indian mainstream, and how advertising and product accessibility enable people to participate in a collective national obsession around skin colour with products like Fair and Lovely, a popular skin lightener.[11]

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10   For elaborations on the 'psychology of loss' and the emotional responses to the evocation of the past through the senses, see Ann Grozdins Gold (2009) and Seremetakis (1996).

11   Since the late 1980s an ethos of consumerism, central to the message of modernity, has been disseminated via television, initially conveyed through a popular programme, '*Hum Log*' (We the people) via the state-run television channel *Doorsharshan*. See Ibrahim (2012) and Johnson (2005, p.43).

Clothing, a signifier of modernity *par excellence*, similarly lays open generational divides, in addition to making assumptions about the wearer's moral status. This pertains particularly to women. Women of different age groups wear different types of clothing. The older generation (e.g. women who are now mothers-in-law) often prefer traditional, mostly home-made clothing; middle-aged women (their daughters-in-law) tend to wear machine-made nylon saris that are easy to wash and dry; adolescent girls and young newly married women, on the other hand, wear *salwar-kameez*, while children favour jeans and tee-shirts. Homemade clothes are now viewed as rough, embodying 'backwardness' and older women talk of the pressures to change their grandchildren place on them:

> **"I feel more comfortable in my *pankhula* (homemade cloth, Figure 4) but my grandchildren scold me. They say that the times have changed and I should wear a *sari.* Pankhula was warm, and one could wear it with ease. A sari is thin, and I feel cold in it, but what can I say? Children don't like us dressing up in the old ways, so we give up."**

Schools also serve to channel mainstream values, behaviours and trends, which overtly delegitimise and devalue the local ways. A young woman in her 20s remarked, "Teachers from the cities come to the village...(and) ask why we dress like that. Children also feel that their friends will make fun of them." Against these restrictions, the perceived freedoms associated with urban life further add fuel to the aspiration of living another kind of life.

The most significant inter-generational change that women experience is in the domain of education. One woman describes a context common to her generation:

> **"Earlier the social norm was that boys would attend school and girls would look after the cattle ... they would get married by 12–13 years of age. Later...many girls expressed their willingness to study, but they had to struggle to get enrolled in school. Now, the situation has changed completely. In my own village, all girls go to school; some of them are in college now."**

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Figure 4. Three generations of women from a single family wearing very different kinds of clothing

Photo credit: Anuradha Pande

Even when girls began going to school in the last years of the previous century, it was common to withdraw them after the primary level; the ability of girls to continue their education was likely to be contingent on their families' labour needs. Today, on the other hand, the education of girls is seen not only as desirable but essential even amongst parents who themselves are illiterate (Mehta, 1994; UEEC, 2017).[12]

Many women in their middle and older years who did not benefit from going to school see education as a stepping stone to achieving a life outside the hamlet. One woman said, "Given the conditions and the way the world (is), even we feel like educating our children and helping them to progress." Nodding in agreement, another added, "What they turn out to become depends on what they do with their mind. If they study, only then they can become something." Another woman remarked, "When we were children, some of us went to school, but we still had to do household

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12   Lower-caste households typically exhibit the lowest educational levels for girls, a trend confirmed by Census data (2001, 2011).

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and agricultural work … Now we never ask our daughters to do this work. We say study hard and do well. If they do that, they will get a job."

Increased accessibility to schooling in these hills has played a key role in introducing a particular version of 'the modern' to village communities through the inculcation of values, orientations and perspectives that have brought once peripheral geographic and cultural spaces into the Indian mainstream. The type of education to which the rural children of the mountains are exposed is one which privileges an urban-based modernity. At a time when the rural economy is in decline and livelihood opportunities are seen only as possible somewhere else, the general pull of urban life (further strengthened by the influences exerted by the mass and social media) is a powerful one (Kumar, 2014, pp.38–42).[13]

One important dimension of education has been the introduction of Hindi-medium instruction. In the late 1980s in many areas, even in the accessible lower hills, it was common for women in their middle years to be more comfortable speaking Garhwali or Kumaoni rather than the Hindi that the men and children spoke which they acquired through jobs and schooling (Mehta, 1994, 1996). Today women of that age group, some of whom might have had access to some schooling, speak Kumaoni or Garhwali amongst themselves but are comfortable speaking Hindi if they need to. This schooling-language equation has contributed to an erosion of a linguistic tradition once centred around an understanding of *jal*, *jungle*, *jameen aur jaanvar* (water, forests, land and animals) as central to subsistence livelihoods and through which people made sense of and understood their surroundings.[14] The greater use of Hindi and knowledge systems imparted through schools and other institutions external to the community (e.g. extension agencies) have also brought in a new language of environmentalism that has helped to break this link. Words like *paryavaran* (environment), *paaristhitiki* (ecology) and *jalagam* (watershed), translated directly from English to Hindi and used widely by educated youth, have now entered the *Pahadi* idiom; however, they are likely not to resonate with the elderly who have a more holistic understanding of 'the environment.' Today

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13   This is not to suggest an unchanging Indian village; as Kumar (2014) points out, this is something constructed by the "modern, urban imagination" (p.43). There is, however, a way in which 'the rural' is positioned, in terms of rural development projects (Pigg, 1992) and at a conceptual level in which "village and villagers remain resolutely in the past" (Gupta, 2004, p.7).

14   For more on the ways in which the social, religious and cultural order are connected to ecology, underscoring the strongly held belief that the environment does not exist as a separate entity, see Gokkale and Pala (2011); Bhagwat and Rutte (2006); Bisht and Bhatt (2011); and Everard et. al. (2019).

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arguably migration, new income sources and changing environmental trends have further contributed to declining hands-on interactions with natural resources.

For all that is positive about girls' access to schooling, what also emerge are the contradictions of contemporary *Pahadi* life that lie not too far below the surface, which affect girls and young women's lives in ways not true for their male counterparts. Education may be an avenue for employment and much-needed income, but it also highlights a tension at the heart of the patrilineal system which emerges at the time of marriage: that there are "two kinds of mothers – those of sons and those of daughters" (Pande, 2003, p.xix). Thus, the same women who want their daughters to be educated and who speak of the importance of letting girls stand on their own feet express concern that overly educated daughters-in-law could jeopardise the well-being of the household: "Why would a girl with a BA or MA be interested in agricultural work?" is a commonly posed query.

Young lives: agency and aspirations

"Who will do the field and animal work?" is not an idle question. Going to school is increasingly a way for girls, especially those from better-off households, to distance themselves from agricultural and forest work, even if they are still expected to chip in with domestic labour in a way that is not the case for their brothers. A well-known *Pahadi* folk song women sing as they work in the fields speaks to this shift in what was once an unquestioned division of labour. The old lyrics went: "We have sown the seeds of fenugreek, sister. We have sown the seeds of fenugreek. We will work together and complete the tedious work of cultivation in the hills." A newer variant offers a picture of less compliance, rejecting the life that their mothers have had. Embedded in the lyrics is the hope of marrying men who will take them away from the hardships that village life represents, "We have sown the seeds of fenugreek, sister. We have sown the seeds of fenugreek. I refuse to do this (hard) work, sister I cannot do this work in the hill farms."

Conversations about how women's lives and labour have changed from one generation to the next are invariably lively, accompanied by bantering and friendly teasing. For the very old, there is no question that the work burdens of their young days were immense; one woman said, "Earlier people would put in a lot of physical labour, they would run around for work, it is not so now." There is general agreement that the young women of today would not be up to the task of doing what their elders did – they are simply not strong enough. One older woman remarked, "Now women are not doing that work. So, they have time,

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and they watch television. For today's women, everything is at home, a toilet, running water and cooking gas … The kind of work we have done, women of today cannot do." Yet, another woman contemplated the newfound confidence and ease apparent in young women when engaging with the opposite sex, something that would have been unthinkable in another time:

> **"In our day when the groom's family reached the village, we would start crying. We are now old, but we have never referred to our husbands as '*tum*' (informal you). These days the girl will herself say that the boy's family has come to select me and from that moment on the groom becomes '*tum*'."**

For older women, the pace of change is bewildering, and many view the decline of the old ways with something akin to pain. Young and even middle-aged women are likely to view this situation as contributing to less arduous work, greater leisure, and more time for self-care. By communicating through their words and actions that cultivation and cattle-rearing are not the only ways to live their lives, the young women and girls are helping to construct a new human-environment relationship that looks considerably different from what once shaped the lives of their elders. While forests and agriculture are important aspects of *Pahadi* material life, they do not necessarily take precedence over other activities that the young see themselves as fully capable of performing. In reply to an older woman's concern that an educated woman will not be motivated to work in the fields or take care of the cattle, a young mother exclaimed, "No, it is not that if she is educated, she won't want to work. But of course, she will not spend her entire day in the forest. She will give time to her children, and she will take out some time for farming also, and she will also take out time for herself." Her companion added, "…the ways of working have changed. We work in ways that save time. People also spend time on themselves, on self-care and take care that they do not inconvenience themselves too much."

It remains to be seen whether girls are actively demonstrating a belief in development as a dynamic process. Nevertheless, they readily speak of wanting to learn new skills, focusing on further education and, with any luck, finding employment. The consequences of environmental and resource degradation carry special meanings for them as opposed to their elders. Young women do not necessarily see environmental degradation as a cause of their hardships; rather, it is the absence of educational and employment opportunities that they envisage as the most pressing problems they face in their villages. This is not to suggest that girls are not aware of the role of environmental health for the

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welfare of their households but rather that their more pressing concerns are now focused on themselves.[15]

Figure 5. Adolescent girls taking the lead in mapping their hamlet during a resource appraisal exercise in 'Kimu' of Bageshwar district

Photo credit: Ritu Yumnam

'Working smart', thus, is not just about the dismissal of the physical labour that is a defining feature of their mothers' and grandmothers' lives. It also acknowledges an approach to domestic responsibilities that is about not overly inconveniencing oneself and leaving time for other things that combine chores with entertainment: watching television while cooking, listening to film songs while cleaning the house, and talking regularly to friends on the mobile. In this respect, mobile phones have transformed so many aspects of young women's and girls' lives, helping to attenuate the social seclusions accruing from remoteness and lack of cultural permission to move around in the way that boys and

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15   While we didn't specifically probe levels of general awareness about environmental issues and how these influence many of the hardships they and their families experience, young female participants did not seem to see excessive construction and road building as relevant issues.

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men do. They are used to talking with friends, sending messages and downloading songs and videos in Hindi and in the local dialects, adding spark to drudgery, as a newly married woman explained:

"We take the mobile to the forest and share songs and see photos in each other's sets. While we cut grass or collect fuelwood, one of us will play the film songs. It is nice to be able to combine music with physical work...we feel relaxed... it gives a sense of freedom and relief."

Her friend added: "From here (the forest) I can talk to my mother and friends in my *maika* (parents' house) without anyone from my *sasural* (husband's house) listening to me." Mobiles are also beginning to transform the experience of childbirth, at least for those living in more accessible areas within closer reach of roads and towns, "When a woman is ready for childbirth, we use the cell phones to call 108 (a free ambulance service). The long time we used to spend at home experiencing pain is now replaced by quick delivery (in the hospital)."

Figure 6 and 7. Mobile phones have opened up a new world to young girls and women

Photo credit: Anuradha Pande

But mobiles also clash with age-old restrictions pertaining to rigid gender norms and parental concerns. Parents view them warily, speaking of their potentially bad influence in enabling girls to communicate with boys; in some families, mobiles have become tools of surveillance, a way in which elders and even brothers can exert control over daughters and sisters.

Another example relates to fashion and the increasing choices girls have regarding clothing and their appearance. These choices collide with the realities of village life that include the lack of anonymity and a sense

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that a girl's every action is subject to scrutiny. One girl exclaimed, "It is so difficult to wear a pair of jeans in the village. All the women in the village begin to talk about it, making up stuff … and when our mothers get to hear what they are saying, they criticise us." This is an illustration of how the externalities of 'modern ways' can and do co-exist with more culturally entrenched mores. The adoption of new behaviours and ways are, at one level, far more easily donned relative to the kinds of thinking and attitudes that shape the various cultural 'permissions' that dictate gender roles, relationships and ways of being in the world. Thus, for some, jeans serve as an emblem of the dangers of modernity, constituting a state of decline or *bigad jaana* (getting spoilt) that affects girls in ways that are not true for boys.

The 'stick' of modernity

For all the trappings of newer ways, changes in girls' and women's perceptions about themselves and those of society about women are slower to emerge. Girls' lives thus remain limited by social mores and the persistence of codes shaping gendered behaviour that affect their ability to take advantage of the few opportunities available to them in the broader world. This is the double-bind created by a wider social environment that offers the young, girls as well as boys, a glimpse of ways of life that feed into their aspirations, but also persistent limitations laid down by families that limit their ability to truly spread their wings.

Girls speak of the opportunities that would be available to them elsewhere: access to better and higher education, training in vocational skills, access to the use of computers, learning English, and greater avenues for shopping and for travelling. They long to make these and other trappings of 'modern' sensibilities introduced via television and social media their own: the freedom to choose what they wear and where they work where the privilege of anonymity allows escape from constant familial monitoring. Here they collide with reality: many families refuse to give their consent for their daughters to study or work elsewhere on the grounds that, unmonitored, a girl's morality can all too easily be called into question. There is also the persistence of a line of thinking that if girls pursue their own lives, they will continue 'getting spoilt' (*bigad jaana*); even parents who aim for something more for their daughters are aware that when the time for marriage comes, the *sasural* (the in-law's house) will not want 'that kind' of daughter-in-law, one who prioritises her own independence.[16]

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16   For a discussion of the harassment girls and women routinely face in towns and cities see Gadekar (2016).

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A gendered analysis of educational attainment and associated aspirations uncovers complex dynamics that suggest that while *Pahadi* girls are experiencing important changes in their lives, arguably these are superficial rather than substantive. This dynamic begins early on in the domain of education, which is of poor quality in the hills, and most young people – boys and girls alike – from rural backgrounds are ill-equipped to get well paid jobs in a town. Provisions to challenge gender inequality in education have gained traction over the last two decades under the government-led scheme *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for All) which, along with the Right to Education Act 2009, mandates that both boys and girls are expected to attend school. However, high enrolments have not challenged gender stereotypes which are, in fact, often reinforced by teachers and textbooks and do not necessarily build confidence in girls to make decisions about their own lives.

While gender norms and practices are slowly becoming less restrictive, as discussed above, boys continue to be permitted greater leeway in taking time for themselves. At the same time, their sisters are expected to share in domestic chores and, if needed, fetch fuelwood and fodder. Gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities, along with cultural entitlements to act in a certain way, have bearings on girls' and women's confidence in stepping into non-traditional spaces, reflected in lower female participation in education and, subsequently, in community-level matters (Pande, 2001). One consequence is that in adulthood, men participate more in public spaces and engage in community networks while women, even those who are educated, tend to limit themselves to traditional household activities.

Given the limited opening up of opportunities for girls, their lives continue to be viewed through the prism of marriage and eventually motherhood. Here a regressive ideal of domesticity is emerging, especially amongst young women from relatively well-off families who seek to emulate a middle-class standard of living by 'protecting' their status through 'being at home' rather than 'in the fields.'

Reflections

This paper has attempted to bring alive a moment of transition in rural Uttarakhand which, through a dialogic and participatory methodological approach, helped us to look beyond prevailing truisms about mountain communities and women's lives and to focus on the changing aspirations of a younger generation of girls and women. Certainties about a 'village way' of life and of gendered agro-ecological relationships and labour

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patterns that might have prevailed in an earlier time can no longer be taken for granted. This is the main policy implication our work brings to the table, which needs to inform the reshaping of sustainable mountain development. Even modest village households wear an increasingly 'urban' face which is reflective of new types of work in new places and diversified income sources, and are characterised by a greater diversity of needs, concerns and interests. Trajectories of change over the past few decades have altered physical, material and social landscapes; resource endowment is undergoing a change, as are relationships to the land and natural resources that were once central to the *Pahadi* domestic economy. Agriculture and its allied activities, which have long held a prominent place in the way hill women's lives have been thought of, are now giving way to more diverse and complex realities shaped by these intersecting circumstances.

These findings offer insights of both theoretical and practical importance toward understanding contemporary socio-ecological realities in the mountains generally, and the varied and complex ways in which they are expressed across generations particularly. They have a contribution to make to a much-needed dialogue about how development policy can become more attuned to on-the-ground situations and conditions in mountain areas and offer a foundation upon which to build further research. While it fell outside the scope of this chapter to talk about the generational divide in the context of communities' lived experiences and their perceptions of adverse (often) recurring environmental events, in closing it is useful to bring these two issues together.[17] At a time when the young are moving away from the land, literally and aspirationally, climate-induced variability and the impacts of climate change are contributing to the declining quality of agriculture and natural resource endowment, and the more frequent extreme weather events are creating new levels of uncertainty, risk and vulnerability.

Against this backdrop, the voices of young women suggest an urgent need to interrogate what older understandings of a 'mountain perspective' and 'sustainable development' mean for the communities of the Uttarakhand Himalaya at this juncture of the 21st century. Many youth desire to live another kind of life and experience a dilemma. While they

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17 See Ritu (2020) for a discussion on the phrase "adverse environmental events" which better reflects the grounded reality of complex and varied encounters with natural hazards (such as the considerably common experience of recurring landslides in the region) than what is suggested by a focus on catastrophic events. Such events can introduce new dimensions of risk and vulnerability that are often considerably more complex and diverse than what is evident from a focus on big events that more readily catch public and bureaucratic attention due to their sensational attributes.

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are proud to call themselves *Pahadi*, they are acutely aware that there are perhaps not many resources available in their villages to pursue their aspirations. In no longer prioritising the environment and agriculture in their lives, this younger generation offers a reminder of the changing face of the social capital of these mountain communities. The existence of an educated and youthful population familiar with social media and technology opens the possibility of developing a more dynamic and layered conversation, which could be directed toward engaging with disaster-risk reduction initiatives and forging new pathways to develop sustainable nature-based approaches. Rural and urban areas in these fragile environments urgently require these new approaches.

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Can homestay businesses build gendered resilience in mountain ecosystems?

A case from the Panchase area of Nepal

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Abstract

Climate change impacts ecosystem services and geological processes and has long-term effects on food security and livelihoods. These impacts are not gender-neutral and they pose an added challenge in achieving gender-equitable livelihood goals. Ample literature and project implementation experience suggest that the consequences of climate change are disproportionately borne by women. Nepal is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate risks. Mountain ecosystems and those communities who depend on them for their livelihoods and other services are especially sensitive to climate variability.

Rural Nepal is in the midst of a complex period of transition involving out-migration, urbanisation and commercialisation of the local economy. Further, various vulnerability assessments suggest that the mountains of Nepal are highly vulnerable to climate change. Efforts to manage and restore natural environments can help people residing in these mountain ecosystems to adapt to a changing climate. A sound understanding of their adaptive capacity is therefore critical for effective adaptation measures on the ground. Thus, ecosystem-based approaches were piloted in the Panchase area of Nepal through the global "Ecosystems-based Adaptation (EbA) in Mountains" programme.

In order to reduce the vulnerability of local communities and enhance ecosystem resilience, homestay business promotion was a key part of the EbA approach. Further, a set of EbA measures was implemented as part of the integrated approach. These measures helped to diversify livelihood opportunities and reduce the shocks and stresses of climate change. Women were able to participate more effectively and their ability to earn economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits was enhanced. This helped to improve gender resilience, as linked with the protection of different ecosystem services and the preservation of community culture.

Keywords:

climate change   Ecosystem-based Adaptation   gender resilience   homestay

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Background

Rising temperatures create diverse challenges for the management of ecosystem services, particularly with regards to service provisioning and regulation. These challenges result in a decline in the quality of ecosystem services, which contributes to the loss of biodiversity. This loss of biodiversity ultimately has disastrous effects on human wellbeing (ICIMOD, 2019). This assertion is supported by the Millennium Impact Assessment, which recognises that the sudden change in climate is one of the major factors contributing to the degradation of the environment. Impacts on ecological services due to climate change are significantly hampering the lives of the world's poorest and further exacerbating poverty and deprivation (Gentle & Maraseni, 2012; ICIMOD, 2019). According to the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, people residing in temperate and tropical Asia are more likely to face the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme events like floods, landslides, glacier melts and forest fires.

Nepal is an agricultural country situated in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region and is bestowed with the diversity of the Himalayan range. Agricultural systems and practices make up 37.4% of Nepal's total GDP (Nepal & Hening, 2013). However, over the last century, temperatures have risen in the Himalayan country of Nepal (ICIMOD, 2019; IPCC, 2007). Changes in precipitation patterns and warming rates have altered hydrological regimes, decreased permafrost, and changed land use and land cover (LULC), amongst other impacts. Climate-induced disasters such as erratic rainfall, unpredictable monsoons, droughts and landslides are now common (Gentle & Maraseni, 2012; ICIMOD, 2019; Machhi, 2011; Shrestha et al., 2000; World Bank, 2009). These events have impacted livelihoods and worsened economic insecurity by increasing the likelihood of crop failure and water scarcity (Gentle & Maraseni, 2012; Kohler et al., 2010; Machhi, 2011; Martson, 2008). According to Fischer et al. (2002), the expected rise in temperature of 1.5–2.5° C will dramatically reduce the production of food crops like rice, maize and wheat. Therefore, climate change is not only reducing agricultural productivity, but it is also having substantial impacts on the national economy of Nepal, particularly the economy of rural areas.

Climate change is predicted to reduce the livelihood assets of remote communities, cause fluctuations in economic growth and threaten the lives of rural women and children (Adhikari et al., 2018; Gentle & Marseni, 2012; ICIMOD, 2019). Since women already have limited access to crucial natural resources such as land, they are even more vulnerable to climate change (UNDP, 2010).

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Rural Nepal is undergoing a complex transition period involving out-migration, urbanisation and the commercialisation of the local economy. In 2015, Nepal faced a disastrous earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale. The earthquake has affected Nepal's economic, social and environmental spheres. Tourism forms the economic backbone of the country, and many rural communities rely on seasonal tourism (Ulak, 2015). The earthquake also adversely impacted tourism in the country.

Panchase is a rural region in western Nepal. Its residents are greatly dependent upon water, agriculture, forest products and various other natural resources (Adhikari et al., 2018). However, changes in precipitation levels and rising temperatures have caused rampant habitat loss, crop failure and water scarcity. This has adversely affected rural livelihoods and the overall socio-economic profile of the region (Dixit et al., 2015; IUCN, 2014). These changes are only expected to worsen over time.

Attention to gender, especially the involvement of women in environmental activities, has produced multiple positive effects. These effects can be seen in environmental campaigns, development projects and broader social movements. In a post-conflict country like Nepal, where political stabilisation has taken place only recently, the importance of including women in environmental stewardship cannot be stressed enough (Kim & Gururani, 2014).

Various adaptation studies have been conducted in the Panchase region. Adaptation is generally defined as a systematic approach that integrates socio-economic and ecological systems in order to tackle the consequences of climate change (Gallopin, 2006; Smit et al., 1999). Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) in particular can be understood as the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an overall strategy to assist people in adapting to the adverse effects of climate change (CBD, 2009). EbA is based on an integrated approach that constitutes the range of conservation, restoration and sustainable ecosystem management practices that assist in building ecosystem resilience (Adhikari et al., 2018; Dixit et al., 2015). The IPCC (2001) report defines resilience as "the ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organisation and the capacity to adapt to stress and change." Thus, ecosystem resilience is the capacity of ecosystems to deal with disturbances, either by resisting them, recovering from them, or adapting to them. Resilient ecosystems can carry on delivering services and benefits despite disturbances. If they are not resilient, ecosystems are unable to function and deliver services and benefits (Natural Resources Wales, 2016).

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IUCN Nepal identified homestay businesses as a way to build ecosystem resilience and, importantly, focused on including women in these efforts. Homestay is a type of accommodation where visitors or guests pay directly or indirectly to stay in private homes where they interact with a host family. The host family usually, but not always, lives on the premises and shares the home's space with the guests (Lynch, 2003 quoted in Sweeney, 2008). IUCN Nepal strengthened homestay businesses in the Panchase area under an EbA project to foster green businesses, promote efficient use of natural resources and enhance gender resilience.

Methodology

The Panchase region makes up the western part of Nepal's mountain ecosystems and has linkages with the lowlands and the high Himalayas of the Annapurna range. It covers an area of 278.7 km^2 and is bestowed with rich natural and sociocultural resources (IUCN, 2014). The region is comprised of 17 different Village Development Committees (VDCs). A VDC is the lowest administrative unit of the country. Nepal is divided into 14 zones and 75 districts, and each district has several VDCs. Each VDC is further divided into several wards, depending on the population of the district, with an average of nine wards. Working at the VDC-level, IUCN Nepal chose to work with homestay businesses as a point-of-entry into the local economy. The homestay businesses we worked with were the Panchakoshi community homestay business in the VDC of Arthar, the Chitre rural tourism homestay business in the VDC of Chitre, the Boudha Tamu community homestay business in the VDC of Bangefadke, and the Sidhane community homestay business in the VDC of Bhaduare Tamagi. Homestay businesses are expected to reduce the environmental vulnerability of local communities by enhancing their resilience to climate change.

As previously mentioned, targeted VDCs included Arthar, Chitre, Bangefadke and Bhaduare Tamagi of the Parbat, Syangja and Kaski districts.[1] These VDCs lie along the path of multiple trekking routes, including the Annapurna-Panchase trek, the Pokhara-Panchase trek, the Panchase-Naudanda trek and various other short trekking routes (IUCN, 2014). Therefore, they are greatly impacted by tourism. Each of

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1   According to the new current governance structure, these VDCs now lie in Kusma Municipality and Modi Rural Municipality of the Parbat district, the Phedikhola Rural Municipality of Syangja district and the Pokhara Metropolitan City of Kaski district.

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the previously mentioned four homestay businesses is affiliated with the tourism development board and registered with the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTA, now the Ministry of Tourism, Industry, Commerce and Supplies of Gandaki Province or MoTICS).

IUCN Nepal adopted an integrated and holistic EbA approach to ecotourism. EbA measures were implemented at the field level through activities like the promotion of women-led community homestay businesses. For the EbA programme, both existing and interested homestay communities were selected. Before implementing the EbA measures, awareness-raising, institutional-strengthening and capacity-building activities were conducted at existing homestay communities. A homestay business training session was delivered to each interested homestay community. Further, homestay groups were formed from the interested households in each VDC. These groups, with the help of IUCN, then registered their homestay business with the former MoCTA (now MoTICS). After these initial steps, EbA awareness-raising activities were conducted for the new homestay businesses. Furthermore, exchange visits among the different homestay communities took place. In total, 60 households from four different homestay communities were engaged.
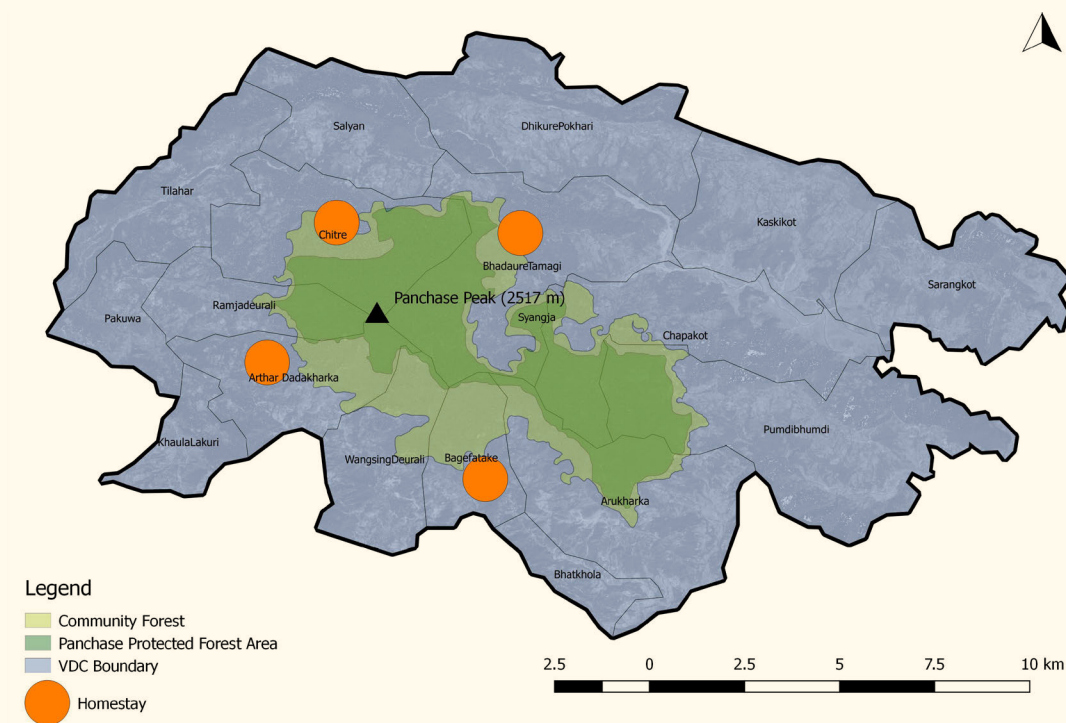
Figure 1. Map showing the homestay sites

Source: Provided by the authors

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As part of the project, a set of EbA measures and activities for homestay businesses was created and implemented. Some of these measures and activities included business management skills training (with a focus on homestay-relevant skills like hospitality, financial management, record keeping, etc.), cultural conservation training, the establishment of an information centre, organic vegetable and fruit farming, bee farming, waste management and pollution control, sanitation and hygiene improvement, efficient use of kitchen wastewater, biogas promotion, livestock farming and improvement of livestock sheds, organic manure improvement, installation of improved cookstove, in situ conservation of different species, water source protection, pond conservation, soil erosion control, broom grass plantation, and the promotion of agroforestry. Financial support was provided for most EbA measures. Most of these homestay communities are ethnically Gurung. To promote the preservation of Gurung culture and tradition, a cultural museum was established in the village of Sidhane.

Figure 2. Board at a homestay

Photo credit: Anu Adhikari

Homestays were primarily run by women, with the support of male family members, making women the business leads. In each locality, homestay business heads joined to form a business group. Therefore, all EbA measures were implemented and managed by a group of women. To facilitate these businesses, orientation trainings were delivered in different communities, and were targeted at female household members

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responsible for homestays. The criteria for running a homestay were that the home should have basic infrastructure such as a room for lodging, restroom provisions and a separate kitchen.

Figure 3. A homestay group welcomes guests

Photo credit: Anu Adhikari

This study was carried out in 2017. Data was collected through four focus group discussions and 15 key informant surveys with women from various homestay business groups. Secondary literature was also reviewed. The personal experiences of the lead author provide a further layer of contextualisation, as she was directly involved in the coordination and implementation of the EbA programme. Information about the status of homestay businesses in the years following the project (2018 and 2019) was also incorporated into the study.

Results and findings

Tourism is traditionally associated with leisure and vacation, and tourists look for rejuvenation and relaxation on a holiday. In the year 2011, the Nepal government celebrated 'Nepal Tourism Year,' which was envisioned to raise the number of tourists visiting Nepal to one million tourists per year. As a result, thanks to support from the Government of Nepal and local organisations, during 2011 communities were motivated

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to engage in ecotourism. As the Nepalese mountains and hills have high biodiversity and natural beauty, many tourists want to visit the mountains during their travels. However, due to poor accessibility, remoteness, and minimal infrastructure, opportunities for doing so are scarce. This gap in accessibility is what homestay businesses strive to fill.

Homestay businesses in the Panchase region are still in their early years. Fifteen homestays have been established from the support of different stakeholders, including IUCN's EbA programme, of which most are still in operation. A few remain dormant due to a lack of adequate management oversight and labour shortages. More than 185 local people are directly involved and employed in these businesses. All homestay businesses supported by the programme adhere to EbA principles and follow sustainable consumption and production guidelines. Some key findings and observations are summarised below.

Nurturing green tourism

Green tourism is comprised of three interlinking components: social goals, economic goals and environmental and resources goals (Azam & Sarker, 2011). In the Panchase region, homestay businesses were able to promote these three components. The presence of business groups provided ample opportunities for social learning and positively impacted homestay promotion, profit margins, and conservation and resource management goals. The homestay groups also provided community members a collective platform to implement EbA measures. It is pertinent to note that the local homes that homestay businesses operate out of are predominately constructed from sustainable materials. Close proximity of tourists and households within a homestay arrangement also promotes the local culture and lifestyle, and sustainable use of local materials.

Green jobs at the local level

The increasing flow of tourists in the Panchase region has both positive and negative impacts on the environment. Positive impacts include greater employment opportunities, particularly for porters and tourist guides. Negative impacts include a high demand for local products, leading to possible overexploitation of local resources, which can threaten the ecosystem. Other negative impacts include increased pollution of the land, air and water, and the theft of rare and endangered species.

Most homestay owners are women. The businesses are run by groups called "mother groups" (*Ama Samuha*). They are involved in both income generation and ecosystem restoration activities such as planting broom

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grass along the roadside, organic farming, bee farming, agroforestry practice on abandoned lands, water source conservation, pond conservation, and the management of community forests. Women's roles in ecosystem management are widely celebrated in the literature (Singh, 2015). Women are also able to earn money by engaging in ecosystem restoration activities. For example, when they participate in water source protection, they are able to earn income for their labour through the project.

Women have also taken initiatives in practising agroforestry in abandoned lands and harvesting cash crops such as cardamom in their fields. This has contributed to the expansion of women-run enterprises through the selling of cash crops to tourists. Tourism has also spurred opportunities in allied sectors like grocery shops, tea stalls and butcher shops. Homestays have allowed women to diversify their livelihoods from traditional agricultural practices. Some women have also secured jobs in development projects run by various organisations. Women have benefitted the most from homestays' income-generation activities. The wider community has also tapped into government resources, such as funding for the promotion of homestay businesses and organic farming.

Figure 4: A woman farmer harvesting honey

Photo credit: Erin Gleeson

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The 2015 Nepal earthquake and associated landslides also majorly affected the tourism industry (Ulak,2015). The earthquake's total financial impact on the tourism sector alone is estimated to be USD 81.24 million (IRIS, 2015 cited in Ulak, 2015). However, the Panchase region was not heavily impacted by the earthquake. As the limited infrastructure in the region was not destroyed, international and domestic tourism was able to slowly resume within a couple months of the earthquake.

Efficient use of water

According to UNICEF, women and girls across the world collectively spend 200 million hours every day collecting water (UNICEF, 2016), eating up time that could be used for money-generating activities and decision-making processes (FAO, 2016). To ensure the efficient use of water in homestays, the project promoted the concept of recycling and reusing household water. For example, wastewater from washing clothes or utensils was collected in a pit and reused in home gardens. Structures were also built for drying home utensils in the sun after washing. These activities have not only ensured the efficient use of water but have also increased produce production from home gardens. Produce from home gardens, which is frequently organic, is sold to tourists. Time saved from water collection is used for other activities, such as improving livestock sheds and separating urine and compost manure for organic vegetable farming.

The EbA programme also promoted the conservation and management of natural water resources such as ponds in the Panchase region in order to help ensure water security. Ponds have cultural and religious values, and the water from the ponds can be utilised both on and off farmland. Therefore, after the involvement of "mother groups" in homestay businesses, ponds were further utilised, preserved and conserved in the region.

Health benefits

The EbA programme supported the installation of biogas plants and improved cooking stoves in each homestay household. These installations reduced a household's dependency on firewood, the collection of which is typically women's responsibility. In addition to freeing up time for women, forest resources are also protected. Further, the use of biogas and improved cooking stoves has discouraged the use of traditional woodfire cooking stoves. Traditional woodfire cooking stoves are known to adversely affect the health of users, who are typically women.

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Multiplier effects in marginalised communities

Homestay businesses provide opportunities to disadvantaged Dalit (the so-called 'untouchable' caste) community groups in the region, such as the Sarki ethnic group, who otherwise face economic exclusion. The homestay groups have adopted a partnership approach that ensures an equitable distribution of guests amongst all homestay hosts. The groups jointly organise cultural and other recreational programmes for tourists, increasing social cohesion. Homestay businesses are helping women to become more self-confident and actively engage in the preservation of their culture. Women from the Sarki ethnic group reported that they feel more comfortable engaging with their community thanks to their homestay businesses.

Figure 5. Sidhane homestay group with guests

Photo credit: Khadga Kharel

Gendered resilience

Women are the architects of resilient households (Chanamuto & Hall, 2015). Previously, the people of Panchase were primarily dependent upon agricultural commodities like rice, wheat and maize. In the past, household income greatly fluctuated due to uneven weather patterns and unstable crop production. Most people were unaware of cash crops. Through homestay businesses, communities have increased their incomes, diversified their livelihoods and acquired new skills. Practices

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such as community agroforestry have also contributed to environmental stewardship. Other multiplier effects include improvements in health. Engagement with different ecosystem restoration activities, such as water source protection, pond conservation, controlling soil erosion through broom grass plantation and low-cost bioengineering techniques, is enhancing the community's adaptive capacity.

Communities, and especially the women within them, are realising the intertwined nature of their homestay businesses and the environment. They understand that the protection of mountain ecosystems directly impacts the success of their businesses. This has enhanced women's roles in and ownership of nature conservation efforts. The EbA homestay business programme in Panchase is an exemplary case of a programme that connects ecotourism, gender, protection of the ecosystem and climate change. However, homestay businesses are not without their challenges. These include the high out-migration rates of young people in the region. As a result, many homestays are increasingly being run by the elderly. Further, the government continues to pay little or no attention to infrastructure development in the region, which is needed to enhance tourism opportunities. Since the Panchase region is geographically close to urban Nepal, there is potential to link local entrepreneurial activity with urban markets.

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CHAPTER

4

RESEARCH
ARTICLE

Stories of resistant and resilient women in the protected areas of the Central Apennines, Italy

By

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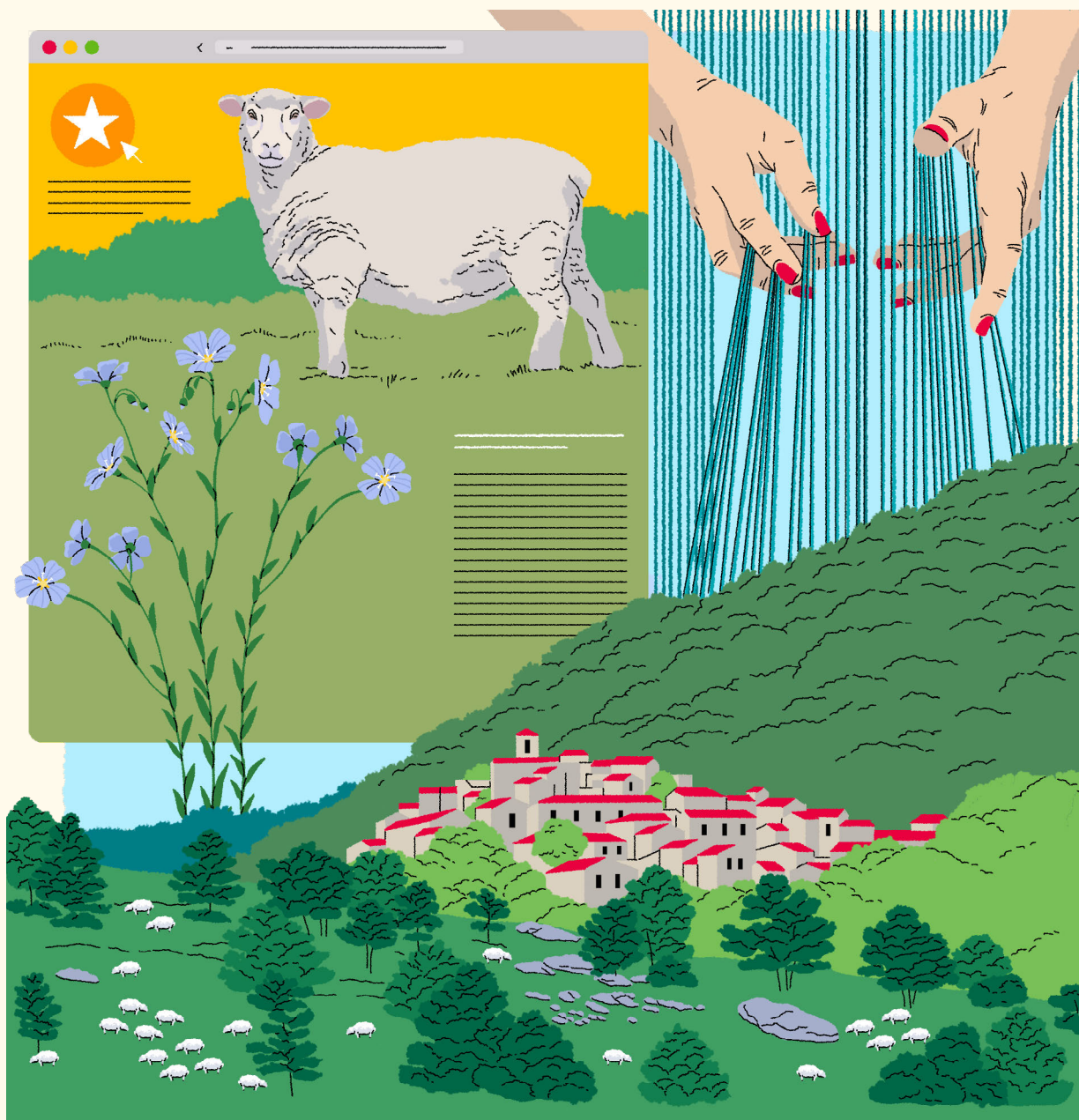
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Abstract

Since the 1960s, the women's movement has been at the forefront of the debate around a new development model centred on sustainability, which generated ecofeminism. Recently a wide debate across the women's movement has centred the concept of empowerment as a common feature of gender and sustainability discourses, stressing the importance of balancing powers and participation in decision-making. The decline of pastoralism and mountain farming, and the subsequent problem of land abandonment, has been identified as threats to many species of concern for conservation efforts. Despite nearly three decades of policies that supposedly couple conservation and local development, communities are still declining in the inner territories, marked by ageing and depopulation. Here we present three case studies from the Central Apennines area, a mountainous territory characterised by a long history of pastoralism and the presence of big national parks and other forms of nature conservation. The first case study illustrates the issue of the representation of women's visions and perceptions in mountain communities. The second showcases women as agents of innovation in their communities. The third discusses the importance of cultural, social and community aspects other than innovation. All three highlight opportunities for fostering improved landscape stewardship approaches by local mountain communities, using a gender-sensitive approach.

Keywords:

women's rights   resilience   local communities   women-driven innovation

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Introduction

The feminist movement can be conceptualised as an organised and politically conscious endeavour to overcome gender inequalities and support women's rights to self-determination and freedom. In Italy, the feminist movement has deep historical roots, despite the systematic erasure of women's critical contributions from history and collective memory. Even a rudimentary search reveals the names of countless women's groups and movements, which at various historical moments have urged society to improve the female condition, producing written documents or organising actions to claim women's right to a free existence (Biblioteca delle Donne, 2018).

The evolution of the feminist movement has been more and more linked to debates on alternative models of development, which take into account environmental and social justice aspects of development in addition to narrower economic considerations. In particular, since the 1960s, debates on inclusive development paradigms have brought women's needs to the forefront. This renewed attention to women's experiences has fostered diverse ecofeminist traditions, which gained strength in the 1980s as a social and political movement.

Research by eco-feminist groups (EcoPol Atelier, 2017; Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2005) has produced a series of commentaries on the negative impacts of gender exclusion on the environment and resource use. Generally speaking, these reflections lead to the following conclusion: if the profoundly different (but equally important) female point of view on democracy is not taken into account, there will be consequences for the environment. The exploitation of natural resources, climate change and environmental degradation, which are the result of a gender-biased status quo, will continue to accelerate, leading to greater damage and greater social and economic inequalities, further widening the gender gap.

Unfortunately, even some 40 years later, these insights have not been well integrated into political, economic and social decision-making towards meaningful change. Approaches such as WID (Women in Development) and later GAD (Gender and Development) have only marginally taken up the range of solutions and insights offered by feminist traditions, and they have instead opted for the use of fixed gender categories.

There exists a lack of analysis on the lives of women in mountain regions in Italy and beyond (Debarbieux & Rudaz, 2012). It is pertinent to the conversation on gender and ecosystems to investigate the roles women

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perform in mountain communities, and whether specific relationships between women and mountain ecosystems can be observed.

In the cases we present in this chapter, we talk about resistant and resilient women. We understand resistance as "the refusal to accept or comply" or "the ability not to be affected by something, especially adversely" (Oxford English Dictionary). By this we mean the perseverance shown by women to remain in place in marginal mountainous territories despite difficult conditions. We are also drawn to their proactive strategies and efforts to adapt to both ongoing and sudden environmental and social changes.

In the domains of sociology and ecology, "resilience" is more or less understood as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or stress. This is general enough to apply to individuals, communities and ecosystems. From a feminist perspective, however, we wish to emphasise the need to go beyond depoliticised understandings which consider resilience merely as the ability of women to recover from abuse and violence. Resilient women are a positive autopoietic force, capable of generating or strengthening networks and bonds within their community; they are not principally vulnerable and in need of protection. In this chapter, we highlight how resilient women can be a resource and a strength for the whole community, particularly in times of crisis.

Women and empowerment

Dissatisfied by the slow uptake of gender in discussions on development, a range of women's groups have developed the concept of "empowerment," which has now become an essential lens for viewing intersections between gender and sustainability. As a concept, empowerment is powerful precisely because it aims to address power inequities by demanding the increased participation of women in decision-making, among other things. Despite the move towards empowerment, sustainable development continues to adopt a tokenistic approach towards gender, rather than robust forms of analysis, evaluation and effective action (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2005).

Beyond the concept of empowerment, which may refer to the individual dimension only, in Italy some women's groups are starting to reflect on the social concepts of space and place, focusing on women's points of view. For example, The Italian Association of Women Philosophers (IAPH) issued a report that proposes to "redesign territories as spaces in which women and all subjects may live according to their own wishes

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and freedom... to restore the political centrality of social reproduction and of collective care practices." These statements underline that the collective care of a territory is not exclusively a task for women, but rather a society-wide concern. This statement also points out that the wider concept of "care" should pertain to the human being in general not just to women, thus challenging a common assumption (EcoPol Atelier, 2017); therefore, the aim of territorial planning should be to ensure that spaces and places are adequate to address the specific wishes and needs of women and various sectors of society.

In our research, we start from the fact that gender differences influence the reification (i.e. the concrete representation of an abstract concept) of a territory, a multilayer of terrain, ecosystems, heritage and community. Research must not be neutral; rather, it is necessary to acknowledge, in an inclusive way, multiple gendered views of space and place, in line with the concept of "sharing the world" expressed by feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (2009). Irigaray argues that the adoption of environmental, social and economic sustainability practices must first take into account gender difference and the possibility of sharing between genders. Irigaray's worldview is based on the concept of 'breath' as a flow of energy that feeds the exchange between the inner and outer worlds, thus enabling communication and encounters between different entities.

According to Irigaray's vision, this debate can be overcome by encouraging dialogue between genders, allowing concrete actions towards collective care of the environment, which can lead to social and economic sustainability. In an essay published in the book *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, the Italian geographer and journalist Claudia Bruno (2013) wonders whether there could be a world capable of including a variety of cultural approaches to 'nature,' even among women from different cultures. She frames this idea as a 'desire for sustainability' that needs to be shared in order to be realised, to give birth to communities not rooted in exploitation (Bruno, 2013).

The commitments and norms in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) clearly state that development will only be sustainable if its benefits accrue equally to both women and men; crucially, women's rights will only become a reality if they are part of broader efforts to protect the planet and ensure that all people can live with dignity and respect. Although the most severe disadvantages in the lives of women accrue in less developed countries, many aspects of the Western world also lag behind. For example, in Italy, women's wages are on average 23% less than their male counterparts (UN Women, 2018).

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Territorial setting and context

We take the reader to the Italian mountain range of the Apennines, and particularly its central region, where its highest peaks (the highest being 2913 m asl.) are concentrated (Figure 1). Farming in these mountainous areas has gone uninterrupted since pre-Roman times. In particular, the strong altitudinal gradient offers the possibility of mitigating the extremes of the Mediterranean climate with seasonal migration, maximising the use of natural resources. While pastoralism has taken on a marginal role in local economies, it still has a strong identitarian role within Apenninic communities.

In alternating intensities, transhumance nomadism has been practiced almost continuously throughout the centuries. These human movements have deeply shaped local ecosystems, landscapes, settlements, communities and society, with impacts well beyond the borders of the mountain territories. Transhumance seasonal movements follow specific paths (*tratturi*), leading herds and shepherds hundreds of kilometres away from home during the winter months ("horizontal transhumance"). More localised migrations take place between the main village and nearby uplands ("vertical transhumance," also known as *alpeggio*). Together with commercial routes stretching all the way to Tuscany (where wool was historically processed and traded with the rest of Europe), these migratory paths mark strong cultural linkages from Abruzzo down to Puglia in the extreme south east of the Italian peninsula, where the winter pastures are located and have been kept free of agriculture until very recently. Additional waves of migration triggered by the post-World War II economic crisis, overlapping with existing patterns of movement, have led to the depopulation and urbanisation of most of Apenninic communities.

Transhumance has contributed to the consolidation of a social, cultural and economic model that sees women as rooted at home, within the community and the territory, and men as outward-bound income-seekers for the household. Presently, horizontal transhumance has disappeared, but marginal vertical transhumance still occurs. Therefore, migration continues to have remarkable effects on Apenninic ecosystems.

As clearly summarized in a recent report (Bakudila, 2017), nowadays mountain farming (including shepherding, cattle raising and arable farming) is often economically non-viable, unless a strong product chain is in place. Wool, which was traditionally used in women's craftwork, lost its economic value (for a complex set of reasons), while meat suffers from the market competition of cheaper farms, thus eroding the viability of pastoralism. Over the last decade, in areas where these changes

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had not yet taken place, mountain farming survived mostly because it was considered to be a family tradition. It was too painful for many to abandon the land over which their fathers and grandfathers had long toiled. Farming often survived alongside a nonfarm-based job that provided the basis for daily family subsistence. Even if both men and women worked outside the local community or in a non-primary sector, many families owned some sheep and/or cattle and maintained a few fields, mostly because to do so is part of the local tradition. However, this custom is declining, and younger families are unable to keep purchasing new animals or tend to family allotments.

A pilot study has highlighted how engagement in tending the land or using natural resources can influence the bonding attitude to place, also known as the "sense of place" (Scozzafava & Farina, 2006). Despite these changes, some young people are choosing to turn, or return, to full-time farming. Many have been able to trace and consolidate their family land, which is often fragmented and previously neglected, or even rent new land. Some of them are drawn to new market opportunities offered by sustainable farming as linked to "green tourism" or "zero-mile diets".

In recent years, Rural Development Plans have provided agricultural start-up grants to young women. Therefore, nowadays many farming enterprises are run by women, although in some instances this is only true on paper, as the farms are really managed by male family members. Nevertheless, a real increase in numbers of women who choose shepherding and farming as a main activity has been recorded (Bakudila, 2017). Despite these encouraging signals, mountain agriculture is still on the decline. Keeping this evolving context in mind, our study includes other activities that, while they do not directly impact local ecosystems in a significant way, appear to be linked to the general viability of mountain communities and, indirectly, in providing pastoralism with a viable social context.

Conservation and land management efforts today

Today the Apennines mountain range crosses several administrative regions in Italy, each having a certain degree of autonomy, especially with reference to development planning, funding mechanisms and protected area management. Therefore, there are significant differences in the availability of subsidies for farmers and communities depending on the administrative region they reside in. The variation also applies to Italy's "Natura 2000 sites," designated after the European Union's "Habitat" and "Bird" Directives, which depend on various administrative

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region-specific rural development plans for conservation funding. At the same time, there are a number of national parks which fall under the directives of the National Ministry of Environment that are nevertheless subject to local regional laws and protocols. Decision-making and funding are especially challenging for parks and protected areas that span multiple administrative regions.

One important concern facing these mountainscapes is the urgent need to reconcile conservation efforts with the territorial claims and practices of indigenous and local communities (Beltrán, 2000). The decline of pastoralism and mountain farming, and the subsequent problem of land abandonment, have been identified as threats to numerous species of concern to conservation efforts (Keenleyside et al., 2014). Farming practices, therefore, play a crucial role in ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation. Most conservation initiatives targeting pastoralism in the Apennines are focused on aspects of sheep herding, especially defence from predators; national parks have devised compensation systems to offset losses of protected species due to predators, as well as subsidies for the installation of suitable protection measures (most often electrical fences or trained lifestock guarding dogs). However, these issues remain at the core of a bitter conflict between conservation institutions and local communities that regularly manifests as outright opposition to conservation policies in general. A series of EU-funded projects in mountainous areas in Italy between 2006 and 2017 highlighted the conflicting interests of different stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in conservation action and developed strategies to improve conservation and sustainable development policies (Bath, 2012; Calandra, 2017). This remarkable body of work is mostly reported in grey literature or on project websites. Data collected within these projects' frameworks and subsequent activities have allowed us to consider the dynamics of various stakeholders, including women.

Throughout the years, the Gran Sasso Laga National Park (Figure 1) has been the forerunner in inclusive and participatory decisional processes. Several successful projects in the park have shed light on the human dimensions of conservation policies while also revealing the intertwining of various social dynamics pertaining to ecosystem functioning and conservation effectiveness (see Case Study #2 for more on the Park).

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Figure 1. A map of the Apennines mountain range and the Gran Sasso Laga National Park. Regional borders are in light grey

Source: Provided by the authors

Surprisingly, many studies addressing the human dimensions of conservation practice fail to identify gender as a relevant factor in the shaping of collective attitudes towards conservation policies, despite the fact that it appears as a significant variable in some statistical analyses (Glikman et al., 2010). Less prominent among conservation professionals is the perception of pastoralism as a means of active landscape management within a multifunctional land use approach.

In the context of the Apenninic mountainous area, we encountered women's stories which we consider highly relevant to building a critical approach to gender in mountain ecosystems. Their stories show that indeed women are an active part of the recent attention to value ecosystems, not only as a source of income but also as a way to participate in a nurturing environment that offers opportunities for self-fulfilment. Their stories also clearly show the shortcomings of current policies that address gender in a non-specific way, as well as the inadequate attention being paid to ecological problems in mountain environments.

These women's stories helped us realize that the breadth and depth of the topic of gender in ecosystems management is most likely underestimated; thus, we seek to rectify this gap in literature and

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practice through our case studies. We present some of the lessons that can be learnt from these valuable stories, followed by a description and discussion of the selected case studies.

The territory of (women's) dreams: analysis of an interview data subset

The National Park of Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga assigned the University of L'Aquila the task of carrying out a preliminary study, called "The territory of my dreams: Pathways and maps for the economic and social valorisation of the Park." The study was designed to assist in the preparation of the Socio-economic Development Plan, a planning tool that is demanded by the National Protected Areas Framework Law (L. N. 394/91). The study involved gathering hermeneutical interviews with residents in mountain villages about their expectations and visions for the future. The research was carefully planned and included both individual and group interviews. The interviews provided vivid descriptions or "dreams," in addition to maps illustrating the geographical scale of these "dreams." More than 600 "dreams" were collected, in which the inhabitants expressed visions and projects that would enable them to continue living in their villages (Calandra, 2018).

Despite efforts to speak with a diverse range of residents, an open-ended interviewing style and informal mode of contact, women respondents were a striking minority (Figure 2). Among the 428 people that took part in the interviews, only 94 were women. Of the 316 recorded interviews (including individual and group interviews), only 85 included at least one woman participant, and women-only interviews were even fewer, with just 59 (involving 63 women). The main reason for this lack of participation seems to be that women often do not feel entitled to speak for themselves or their community. When they did take part in interviews, it was mostly in women-only groups, while only a very small number of mixed-gender interviews featured women's voices. During the interviews, when men were present or nearby, women often called them in or let them answer for them even if directly addressed by the interviewer; this did not happen in women-only groups, where each woman answered freely on the basis of her personal knowledge and inclination.

The level of education of female interviewees is another interesting aspect: the vast majority had a secondary school diploma (51.65%) or a university degree (29.67%). Both percentages are remarkably higher than the average rates for the region's overall female population; the Abruzzo regional average is 30% for secondary school diplomas

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and 13% for university degrees (National Institute of Statistics, 2011). Female respondents were highly educated, more than the regional average, which indicates to us that women with higher education, such as those in our study, are more likely to take an active part in their community's social and economic life and publicly express their views.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

- Men
- Women

22%

78%
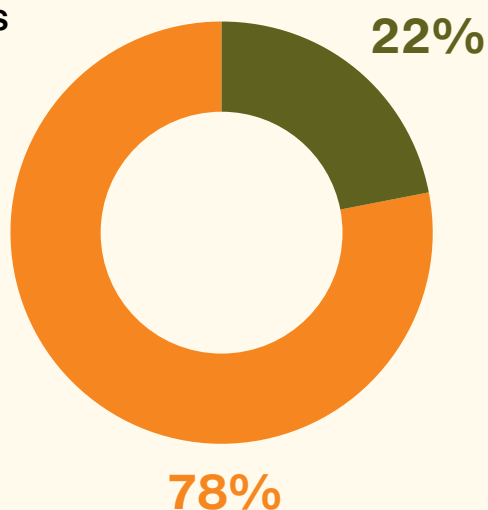
REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

- Only men
- Women present
- Only women
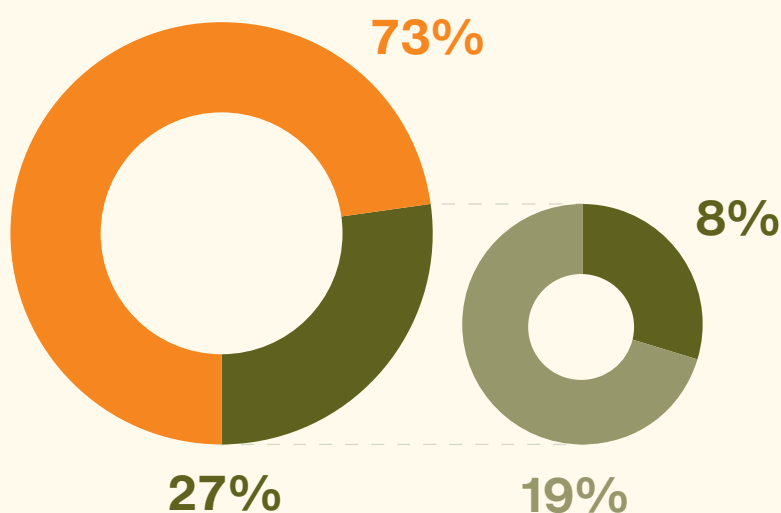
73%

8%

27%

19%

Figure 2. Women's participation in the interviews

Source: Provided by the authors

The words collected in the interview transcripts were processed graphically; the dimension of the font is proportionate to the frequency of the word in the transcripts (Figure 3).

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Figure 3. Textual representation of women's "dreams"

Source: Provided by the authors

Visual processing of the interview data presents several interesting insights. The most frequently appearing word in the dream cloud is *fare* (to do), followed immediately by *parco* (park) and *territorio* (territory). This shows that women very clearly see their protected territory as an opportunity, although another rather significant phrase is *potrebbe/ dovrebbe* (could/should). The latter phrase represents the gendered histories of unmet expectations, the unquenched desire for improvement and the willingness to be an active part of the needed change. *Paesi* (villages) is the most mentioned geographical feature, and *turismo* (tourism) is the most mentioned economic activity, while natural and landscape elements are strikingly small: *montagna* (mountain), *fiume* (river), *lago* (lake) and *animali* (animals).

At first sight, this data can be interpreted as if women do not have much awareness of how specific ecological features of their territory fit into their vision for the future. But it may also mean that the symbolic value of these features is already embedded into the wider concept of "territory," showing a more holistic view of the environmental elements as part of a whole. The relative importance of the words *essere/creare* (to be/ to create) shows an important reference to the sense of identity that emerges which we also present in the case studies in the following sections. We also found remarkable the infrequent occurrence of the word *bambini* (children), indicating that the maternal aspects of their lives may not be at the forefront of the mountain women's dreams.

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CASE STUDY

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When women's heritage becomes central in a declining community

The following case study tells a story of resilience grounded in traditional culture and craft, which is strengthened by women's rights advocacy. We present the story of a woman archaeologist, Assunta Perillli, who decided to train as a weaver. She learned this ancient and complex craft from old women in Campotosto (L'Aquila Province) with the intention of reviving the spinning and weaving craft. Campotosto is a mountain village (1,400 m a.s.l.) already damaged by the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake and subsequently nearly destroyed by a series of earthquakes between 2016–2017. Unlike most residents who were forced to leave the village or preferred to be moved in emergency housing in other less remote areas, Assunta and a handful of residents decided to maintain their village life and activities. They took upon themselves the task of keeping mountain traditions alive, be it in the form of a small shop, a bed and breakfast, camping sites or the weaving of customary clothing and handicrafts using traditional tools and equipment.

The journey of Assunta Perilli is fascinating, starting when she found pieces of an old wooden loom in the cellar of her house and decided to put it together. This was a task far more complicated than she had expected: the knowledge of how to correctly assemble the pieces, how to thread the loom properly, and how to make it work to produce different cloth patterns all rested in the memories of her grandmother, her aunt and a few other elderly ladies from the village. For them, weaving connoted negative memories: working at the loom was not a choice for them; it was the only way to produce the *corredo*, the dowry that every woman needed in order to be able to marry. It was also a dire necessity in times of poverty, and it represented the only affordable way to make everyday clothes in communities where low cash earnings prevented the purchasing of pre-made clothing. Therefore, at the beginning the older women were unwilling to share any knowledge or skills, and they tried to discourage Assunta from carrying on this endeavour. They also felt that since Assunta is "educated," she should not waste her time in what they considered a "worthless" pastime, as education should have freed her from such ancient miseries.

Yet the beauty of the traditional clothes, the complexity of their specific patterns and features, and all the feminine culture linked to them were entwined with the history of the local villages. These elements enticed

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the archaeologist Assunta, and they gave her the motivation to persist with the women until they gradually disclosed various techniques and tricks to her.

As the years went by, the older women understood that Assunta was pursuing the loom freely, that she really treasured their disregarded skills and art, and that she had additional skills and knowledge that could bring this ancient craft forward into the present-day. They realized that Assunta's project could be the unexpected acknowledgement of the wisdom and skills possessed by women that were once taken for granted or considered trivial and were now disappearing with them, forever. Her success became a source of pride for them. After years of teaching and coaching Assunta, eventually they became her greatest supporters, endorsing her in front of the whole community. Sadly, one by one, all the senior women passed away.

The old loom was not the only treasure that Assunta's grandmother had kept for her: she had also stored away a handful of seeds of an ancient linen variety that used to be widely cultivated in the area before the surrounding arable land was permanently flooded by a hydroelectric basin. However, her grandmother continued sowing it as a flowering plant in pots on the windowsill. For several years, cultivation of this linen variety was restarted on a broader scale and was honoured in the form of a local "linen festival" that demonstrated all the steps of linen cropping, mashing, spinning and weaving.

Assunta was able to add a broader view to these practices by participating in an international archaeological project on ancient textiles led by the University of Cambridge and the University of Copenhagen. The project carried out genetic studies on ancient linen varieties from archaeological findings across Europe. Assunta worked on making replicas of spinning tools found in ancient tombs and was an invited speaker at the final project conference in Copenhagen. Her efforts were supported by a more coherent project of development, including systematic seed saving, before the second earthquake swept away this fragile "cultural agriculture." The linen seeds are presently still kept by the local women, waiting for better times and a new sowing season.

Assunta's success in reviving and carrying on these traditional practices of textile craft, and bringing them to national and international attention, is not by chance. It occurred because she did not mount her loom and use it just for leisure. She started from the strength of the women's network in her family and community and added to it her knowledge and ability.

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There now exists significant and high quality anthropological and historical research on the local textile craft. These studies trace the entire supply chain, down to the raw material and its production from farming. Through saving a variety of linen, the biodiversity aspect of the craft was taken into account, again thanks to some old women who perceived its value without being really aware of the whole picture. Assunta bridged the past and the present in an innovative way. Her craft activity is a catalyst for new models of community.

Assunta's reputation has grown in the community. She even helped to fundraise and organize activities for a "Women's House" in the nearby village of Amatrice, a village destroyed by the 2016 earthquake. The motto of this Women's House was *fare*, again, "to do," and its activities revolved around craft. She became the symbol of a territorial identity going beyond administrative borders (Amatrice and Campotosto are in different provinces and regions). Assunta was already a national celebrity in her field and willingly disseminated her skills to make the villagers' voices heard. On the occasion of the humanitarian visit of Prince Charles to Amatrice, she wove a kilt as a present for him, and this had great resonance in the media. However, as the spotlight faded, the earthquake-struck communities returned to their everyday struggles. Presently, Assunta's biggest fear is that her 20 years of hard work, now overly exposed in the national media, may be reduced to some shallow icon of the "Weaver of Campotosto," losing all the deeper social and cultural meaning attached to these traditional weaving practices.

The network of social relationships Assunta has woven is much more important than the clothes she weaves and sells; this is why she chooses not to sell her crafts on the internet, as she wants her activity to be an attractor of visitors to the local villages, and to provide a boost to the local economy. She participates regularly in national craft and sustainability fairs, where she always brings other villagers' products with her. For Assunta, these occasions serve as a platform to amplify villagers' voices, which she values over their economic benefits. She wishes to share "the burden of mediatic exposure" (her quote, translated) with her fellow villagers, who she acknowledges are fully part of the values she stands for. She has a clear perception of being part of a local network and reaching out to others. In nearby villages, up-and-coming women entrepreneurs such as Antonella, a restaurant and campground owner in a village by the lake, consider Assunta to be an inspiration. Assunta serves as a mentor to her, providing her the support which remains lacking in her own family. Antonella's story is also that of a return to her mountain traditions. Together they share the dream of creating a training and educational centre in the mountains where weaving and crafts will have a central place.

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CASE STUDY

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Pecunia – Opening new perspectives on pastoralism through women-driven innovation

In 2010, the Pecunia project started as a partnership between the National Park of Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga and the Biella Wool Company, a private enterprise in Northern Italy which aims to recover traditional wool production by strengthening the value chain. The Park offered to cover the transport costs of raw wool bales to the processing centres, where they were washed, sorted and evaluated for sale in bulk on the international market. The entire process was tracked so that each wool lot remained linked to its producer up to the final selling stage. This allowed each producer to get a share of income proportionate to the final quantity and quality of their wool. The innovation of the project lies in the fact that the private partner did not directly buy the raw wool from the farmers; its role was just to attend to its processing to improve its final market value. The final price was entirely paid back to the producer (after subtracting processing costs). After the sale, each producer also received detailed feedback on the quality of their raw product and specific tips on how to further improve product value. The feedback was crucial, as it encouraged farmers to pay attention to how they carried out the "in-stable" steps of production (especially shearing, but also selection of breeds) so that the following year they could increase their earnings.

In 2014, a consortium of local farms was created to manage the collection and transportation of raw wool, which provided independence from the Park's subsidy. Two women from two different farms took the lead: one, a young animal production technician, and the other, an Economics graduate. They took up the challenge of innovating the sheepherding world in order to save it from extinction. They both saw the great opportunity this project was offering to the pastoral system, and they were more than willing to engage with the necessary innovations to maximise the income their farms earned. They were also aware that this was not a one-person-show, and that collective action could multiply benefits for all stakeholders.

In 2016, a few association members, mostly women, received training in wool sorting techniques. A sorting and packaging centre in Castel del Monte, a village with very strong pastoral traditions, was set up to be run by the association. Local farmers could now bring their wool to the centre, where it was sorted and packed in pressed bales, further saving

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transport costs. Community members readily adopted new processing techniques, thus allowing the wool collection to become more cost effective and more accessible to other farmers in the area.

Initially a heavily subsidized activity, the Pecunia project is now growing on its own and generates sufficient revenue. Some farms have made wool their core business, shifting to superior breeds and adopting all possible innovations to maximise the quality of the product, including marketing nationally and internationally through social media and selling online. Other farmers have joined the wool collection project as a way to supplement their incomes based on the awareness that even a small contribution can help to reach the bulk quantity that is needed to gain access to international markets.

The wider results of the Pecunia project extend beyond wool. Not only did it transform a burdensome material (raw wool was considered as waste) to a significant source of income for farms; the project became a source of encouragement for innovation and opened the farmers to the world (e.g. through the wool craft, knitting communities in big cities, etc.). The project had the multiplier effect of improving other farm products as well, such as ancient arable crops (pulses and cereals), while others chose bakery products or agritourism. Overall, the project resuscitated declining human activities with high ecological significance such as sheepherding. Two women catalysed the revival and became leaders in their community.

Despite repeated attempts, these two women were not available for interviews. Unlike the other people we contacted, they were only marginally curious about the scope of this work and were not particularly willing to share their personal views on the theme of gender in mountain ecosystems, although on other occasions they stressed the difficulties of being a woman in a traditionally male business. What we reported here, therefore, is what we were able to glean from project documents and other available sources.

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"Adotta una pecora" ("Adopt a sheep") – A forerunner approach to ecosystem service payments

Manuela Cozzi is an agronomist from Florence who started as a consultant at the Ministry of Agriculture. Her job in the early 1980s led her to Abruzzo, where she met a local cooperative that was determined to farm sheep. She decided to join the enterprise, turning it into a remarkable entrepreneurial success. The enterprise, named the ASCA Co-op, precedes by some decades the rise of concepts such as Ecosystem Service Payments, in which people that live far away acknowledge the ecological value of an activity and willingly pay for it.

The ASCA Co-op adopted all possible innovations: from the diversification of activities by starting agritourism (among the first in the region), to a mobile dairy room that milks sheep while in the *alpeggio* (upland pastures), to improvements to wool processing and an in-farm butchery. They successfully set up a new multifunctional model of responsible social agriculture that did not exist before (EU agro-environmental measures were drafted in the 1990s).

Their greatest innovation has undoubtedly been the "Adopt a Sheep" project,[1] which began in 2000. The project encourages customers to do more than just purchase sheep products. It enables customers to "adopt a sheep" by paying a fixed annual amount. This guarantees constant cash flow, which the customer recuperates through products and other complimentary bonuses that are provided throughout the year as they become available.

An important factor for the project's success is its clear communication and global marketing strategy which attracts customers from all over the world. The primary goal of the project is clearly communicated to customers: sheep farming preserves the pastoral ecosystem. The challenges and costs of sheep farming are also clearly communicated, as well as the unique features of all edible products, which are marketed along the lines of the "slow food" movement. This is a perfect example of an *ante litteram* Ecosystem Service Payment system, in which people

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1   For more information refer to the website:
          http://laportadeiparchi.com/adopt-a-sheep/?lang=en

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pay for the ecological value of an economic activity. It is common knowledge that organic products garner a higher price, and the "Adopt a Sheep" project motivates people to join and support landscape stewardship efforts.

In her leadership role, Manuela also maintains networks with other enterprises in the farming, tourism and education sectors, and she keeps close collaborations with relevant public offices such as the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, the regional government, park administrations and local municipalities. Manuela continues to be an active professional in the field of rural development, which provides her a broad view of the policy context in which she operates.

We asked Manuela to share her views on how regional rural policies incorporate gender. The management of the Rural Development Funds in its previous programming periods always parsed recipients into "weak" categories, such as "young people," "women" and "mountain areas," and simply assigned bonus points in the evaluation procedures to these "disadvantaged" categories. The result was that many enterprises were fictitiously transferred to a woman in the family (wife, daughter, sister) in order to heighten the chance of getting financial support. This happened especially in the earlier programming periods, after which women started to become more aware of their potential and started to take control. Over time the number of women-led ventures have increased such as educational farms, forest kindergartens and social farms, although most are small-scale. These initiatives have rarely tapped into the full potential of the market. Multifunctionality and an Ecosystem Service Payment system are necessary for them to have broad positive impacts on their community and territory.

There is also untapped potential in the social dimensions of mountain farming to be accounted for. By acknowledging the health benefits that a rural context can provide to visitors coming from urban contexts, such as by comparing the expenses of medical treatments, another remarkable value of these ventures can become apparent.

According to Manuela, an interesting possibility is represented by the community co-operative format, a recent innovation to the co-operative society in rural contexts, where an entire village or wider community is involved in a multiservice co-operative. Community co-operatives offer a way of learning different skills and professional competences around a comprehensive farm-based social, recreational and educational activity system. Unfortunately, the present fiscal and administrative systems make this idea unpractical. Also, the growing "sectorialisation"

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of economic policies makes it very difficult to engage and profit in multiple commercial sectors.

Manuela shows that environmental management need not conflict with income-generating activity. In fact, as her enterprise has demonstrated, through careful integration and local embeddedness, social enterprises can provide a range of multiplier effects including the protection and revival of ecosystems. Or put differently, environmental stewardship can be integrated within income-generating opportunities that holistically benefit local communities and beyond. Women leadership and insight seem to be a key factor uniting the three case studies presented.

Discussion

In addition to the women mentioned above, we met with a large number of women in Italy whose stories echoed similar experiences. We can only stress the fact that, contrary to common perception, the Western world is far from reaching gender equity. Nevertheless, women continue to achieve remarkable results in advancing new ways to cultivate sustainability in mountain communities.

Our cases show some common elements, and some significant differences:

·   **Education**
    Education has a critical role in empowering women. Women with higher education are more likely to speak up for themselves, have the tools to identify innovative ideas and evaluate their feasibility. Competencies in Information Technology (IT) also appear to be crucial for the success of social enterprises. Similarly, knowledge of ecology and the environment is also vital for ensuring that all business choices made are sustainable.

·   **Being an "insider" as well as an "outsider"**
    Being a native makes a tangible difference in mountain communities, as it gives access to local social networks and to the informal skills and knowledge that, in some cases, are at risk of extinction, together with the communities they belong to. Being an outsider is also a bonus, as it gives the possibility of a broader viewpoint, a fresh perspective that allows one to surpass local constraints and seek unexpected opportunities. In our stories, a dual identity is present: the women featured have either been away from their home communities or grew up outside the mountain community they presently are a part of.

- **Relationships among women, within the community and out into the world**

  Our study suggests that within women's groups, women are more likely to express their views. The cases presented support this assertion and highlight relationships to be a crucial element of success (and, when lacking, they may be the crucial element for failure). The positive relationships among women, such as sharing a common vision and common values, seem to be the most strengthening factor. Also, women's relationships with the community in which they are embedded are important in all stories, both for obtaining support and encouragement, and for scaling-up a small project towards bigger ideas of development for the entire territory. Relationships with the "outer" world act as an engine, not only in providing fresh ideas and perspectives but by providing a cash flow that is reflective of approaches to ecosystem services and their acknowledgement by faraway users. For instance, the fact that pastoralism is at risk of disappearing seems to matter more to an urban dweller than to a member of the local community, and that the latter is also willing to pay for it to keep the practice alive is an excellent example.

Mountain ecosystems are not yet widely seen as sources of ecosystem services for the wider geographical region. Rather, they are conceived by mainstream culture as a disadvantaged area, a view which stresses that mountain ecosystems lack compared to lowland areas. In other historical periods, mountains were often valued more than the lowlands, or at least just as much.

A mountain slope can be seen as a difficulty if the focus is on the hindrance to the movement of people, or as a resource, if the focus is on the potential energy of water along the slope. A mountain is a half-filled glass, and it is important to stay aware of the full half as well as the empty half. The diversity of mountain agriculture and social contexts needs to be recognized as worthy in itself as an agro-ecological system, and not pitied as an imperfect replica of existing development models.

The women in our case studies managed to find meaning, and a future, in things that were worthless to the mainstream, male-dominated views. These women identified hidden opportunities in mountain communities, a setting with reduced competition from the mainstream, male-dominated world. As shortcomings and negative externalities of mainstream development models are becoming increasingly visible, mountain ecosystems offer alternative and sustainable ways of economic and social organisation to those open to innovation.

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Multifunctional farms are complex socio-ecological systems that need additional economic support due to the value of the ecosystem services they provide both locally and globally. The Common Agricultural Policy (Europe) should push towards the economic evaluation of ecosystem services that mountain agro-ecological systems provide. Moreover, the positive health benefits of these natural landscapes should be taken into account as positive externalities of sustainable agriculture. The national welfare system should recognize social agriculture as an effective and less costly way of promoting population health and general wellbeing, compared with other ordinary methods. We may define this approach as "responsible and ethical farming," a holistic approach that has seen women on the forefront and as leaders for sustainability traditions within mountain territories.

This holistic approach reminds us of a famous essay by Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, in which Woolf argues that the separation of women from the mainstream male society was an opportunity to develop their own values, through which a new political model of action could be founded ("finding new words and creating new methods"). It seems that the marginality of the mountain context gave women the opportunity to experiment with innovative ideas in practice. The three guineas that Woolf refers to – education, economic freedom and justice – may be transposed onto our case studies as pointing to IT, language and ecology as empowering tools for women, that allow them to make a tangible difference in their communities. The women who inspired this chapter seem to have found them, both Woolf's guineas and their modern equivalents.

The affirmation of women in the mountain farming world does not seem to be the product of a good gender policy, but rather the by-product of a bad mountain policy that totally disregarded whole sectors of activity, in which women autonomously saw opportunities and turned them into personal (and collective) success.

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RESEARCH
REPORT

Revising traditional laws that prevent women's participation in land management and livelihoods

Experiences from the Togo-Ghana Highlands

By

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Abstract

In Togo, the land tenure system has constituted a major obstacle for the management of natural resources from colonial times to today; the delimitation of protected areas still leaves a lot to be desired. Customary law and local ambitious provisions lead traditional leaders to appropriate the land tenure system, which disadvantages women and prevents them from exploiting lands as they please. Several factors slow down changes to land tenure and management practices, including the lack of wide-ranging initiatives from civil society organisations, nature conservation actors and organisations that promote women rights; the total silence of local decision-makers; and the lack of commitment by the administrative authorities to support the few lobbying and advocacy activities carried out by civil society organisations. Measures that have negatively impacted women's development require specific and holistic approaches as well as time for improvement. Les Compagnons Ruraux (LCR), a national organisation in Togo fighting for the fair and sustainable management of natural resources, has decided to tackle the problem for the wellbeing of all.

Keywords:

land tenure   customary law   obstacles   natural resources   commitment   conservation

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Introduction

It is time to forge ahead with innovative approaches that support the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources. A significant concern is how to reconfigure gendered relationships implicit within resource use in ways that empower women without compromising the positive roles they already play in their communities. This assertion is based on the acknowledgement that our wellbeing is intrinsically linked, reliant on and embedded within nature (Costanza et al., 2014).

In this chapter we take the reader to the mountains between Togo and Ghana where women's labour and contributions to their communities remain largely unrecognised and unrewarded. Traditional leaders often stand in the way of desired socio-economic and cultural changes.

Context

This case study features the work of Les Compagnons Ruraux (LCR), an organisation that advocates for environmental justice for rural people, particularly women whose lack of access to land rights interferes with sustainable land use in the southwest of the country, not far from the border with Ghana.

The Ghanaian region close to Togo has similar customary laws to Togo, and it is only the mountain ranges that separate both peoples. LCR assists women in this region in coping with traditional laws that prevent them from having free access to lands.

The idea for the LCR's initiative came from two sources. Firstly, we noted during various consultations and public awareness sessions on the protection of natural resources that only a few women responded to our calls for participation. We learned that most women are not encouraged by their husbands or male heads of the household to participate in such meetings. Men prefer briefing them later because they assume that women have other useful things to do at home. It is widely believed that these meetings are primarily intended for men. Secondly, most of the men who attended the public meetings clearly stated that only men deserved to inherit lands; women are only to benefit by virtue of their husbands. These widely held beliefs can be traced to concerns regarding the consolidation of land. For example, if a father gives a parcel of land to his daughter, the land will be sooner or later be expropriated by a husband from another clan, or possibly their son. According to local traditions, individuals from one clan cannot benefit

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from the land of another clan. This is not the same throughout Togo, but it does hold true for the localities where this chapter is set.

For these reasons, LCR's programme on sustainable management in the Togo and Ghana Highlands (TGH), which includes the establishment of a transboundary biosphere reserve, decided to solicit input and advice from women in the surrounding communities to find a way forward that will enable women to own and manage land and its resources. The establishment of a reserve can contribute to nature conservation in general, as well as the sustainable development of local communities.

LCR aims to highlight the important role women are playing within their communities, including within environmental protection activities. Their work also strengthens women's knowledge base so that they may become key stakeholders in the establishment of the reserve.

Gender and natural resource management

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 identified the environment as one of 12 areas critical for women and asserted that "women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management"(United Nations Women, 1995, Section K). With this mandate in mind, the LCR set up strategies to involve women from the communities surrounding the biosphere reserve that it intends to establish. This consultation was needed to address the barriers that prevent women from contributing to nature conservation and the sustainable use of resources. The dedicated Gender and Environmental Justice Programme was set up despite the challenges pertaining to land tenure in Togo.

Gaps in Togolese land tenure policy

In Togo, laws related to administration of the territory were established during colonial times and were only recently renewed in 2016. Unfortunately, the application of the new 2016 law has yet to be established. Therefore, in Togo the government does not manage lands and the system of land tenure is based on customary law. Most land tenure issues are discussed and judged in accordance with traditional provisions. For many decades, local clans managed the land using a traditional system that is based on the authority of the village chiefs.

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Those traditional structures unfortunately often exclude women; women's role has mostly been to assist men in village management and to honour male chiefs.

According to LCR, women do not benefit from their work, although they play an important role in maintaining their communities. In traditional Togolese society, women do not inherit land. The only way for women to access land is through their husband or, in rare cases, to buy it (which requires an income). They are not allowed to manage land in order to carry out their environmental and economic activities. Women's role is to stay at home and take care of the household, which makes them responsible for the household's survival.

Women often get blamed for destroying the environment and cutting down trees because it is usually their responsibility to collect firewood. Their direct link to the forest puts them at the centre of criticism and they are not seen as caretakers of the forest, but rather as the main drivers of deforestation. These mountain areas are also prone to frequent bush fires which, along with deforestation, are slowing down the local economy.

Further, the lack of democratic practices in Togo in many sectors of activity enables male chiefs to subjugate and exploit women and prevent them from receiving their due considerations.

Efforts to initiate change

LCR entered into a partnership with the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) to address some of these challenges. The common objective of the partnership was to strengthen the capacities of grassroots groups in the domain of women's rights and environmental justice. This is necessary to catalyse the collective power of various women´s rights and environmental justice movements for realising a future in which women can exercise their right to water, food security and a clean, healthy and safe environment. Levels of education remain low in the TGH due to a lack of resources, and this is true for both women and men. Denying women education can also be understood as an intentional strategy to maintain the status quo where women can be easily exploited by men. LCR recognised that the lack of knowledge on ideas of self-governance was the main reason behind women's silence, which is why the project stressed developing capacity and raising awareness.

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Through the creation of mixed working groups as part of the reserve's establishment, LCR created opportunities for the male chiefs and the Queen Mothers to work together on issues pertaining to conservation. The powerful figure of the Queen Mother, the mighty woman who works with the chiefs to defend the interests of the village and its women, has weakened over the years. The motivation behind these mixed working groups was to show participants that conservation is crucial, and that the creation of a new relationship of care between humans and their environment is an important lever for economic development and ecological sustainability. The working group elaborated on modern and customary law to formalise processes such as access to land and natural resource management that are usually only established orally.

Figure 1. Queen Mothers at a workshop

Photo credit: Jules Adjima

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The LCR has also adopted two further approaches:

Community Resource Management Area (CREMA)

Community Resource Management Area (CREMA) is the institutional framework for community participation in natural resource management in Ghana[1]. It aims to foster a win-win situation by creating financial incentives for farmers to use and manage natural resources on a sustainable basis by developing management rights and responsibilities. This approach has the potential to improve livelihoods, conservation efforts and democracy and to strengthen local economies. CREMA is a democratic process and mechanism which enables communities to manage and use resources for their own benefit. In Togo, decentralisation processes are not yet well established; CREMA plays a key role in enabling some level of decentralisation.

Analog Forestry (AF)

Analog Forestry (AF) is an approach to ecological restoration which uses "natural forests as guides to create ecologically stable and socio-economically productive landscapes."[2] The AF approach educates and raises awareness about the necessity of conservation, as opposed to a mentality of doing conservation only for the sake of conservation. The AF approach helps local decision-makers to understand their roles and responsibilities in implementing adequate policies and enabling the sustainable use of natural resources.

Women must be included in economic development and have the right to create, manage and use natural resources such as those offered by forests. To enable this, LCR educates women on alternatives for income-generating activities in order to reach self-sufficiency. With the help of GAGGA[3], LCR set up a demonstration centre: a cacao plantation that is sustainably managed by both women and men. This is a way of showing the locals that there are income-generating alternatives to selling land.

Women have rarely been taught to plant trees or to use sustainable methods for collecting wood. LCR rectifies this situation by providing women the tools to engage more fully in sustainable development. This includes empowering women with knowledge on their rights and

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1   See https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/CREMAs-to-
         strengthen-community-participation-in-natural-resource-management-694390#
2   See https://www.analogforestry.org/about-us/analog-forestry/
3   Joint programme of Both ENDS, MAMA Cash and FCAM

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other necessary knowledge through trainings and workshops. One example is groups created specifically for Queen Mothers where they reflect on various ways to leverage customary and modern law to assert their rights. The challenge is not only to empower women with ecological techniques but also to offer the courage and resources to stand up to patriarchal norms.

The revision of customary laws: bringing stakeholders together

Various efforts have been made by different stakeholders to urge the Togolese authorities in charge of territorial administration to work together with traditional lawmakers, which can enable women to have free access to land. The intention of these collaborations is not to take away power from traditional leaders and law-makers but to set up uniform principles that can facilitate the equitable and sustainable use of natural resources for all. Progressively, each resource person involved in the process becomes aware that the revision of customary laws is an opportunity to eliminate misunderstandings regarding land tenure issues and other difficulties women in rural areas face.

Even though the new law from 2016 is yet to be implemented, LCR and other stakeholders dealing with nature conservation have ensured that traditional practices are mapped onto modern laws to enhance the management of natural resources. A dialogue between different stakeholders – lawyers specialising in modern and traditional laws, village chiefs, local decision-makers, Queen Mothers and women members of a diverse range of grassroots organisations – was initiated through workshops and roundtables.

Relevant passages in the new law (that is yet to be implemented) pertaining to the participation of women in land management processes were translated into the local language to enable community leaders to understand and appropriate the new approach. Campaigns were organised in the various communities and the documents were written in more popular language.

Through the principles of lobbying and advocacy, LCR strengthened the knowledge base of women and supported their efforts in negotiating with local decision-makers on land tenure issues.

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Achievements

These initiatives improved the knowledge base of women, male chiefs and local decision-makers in Togolese laws related to land tenure and natural resource management. Additionally, male chiefs and local decision-makers have shown their commitment by conceding one hectare of community lands to women's groups to establish cocoa farms and over four hectares for natural regeneration-assisted activities and for supplying firewood to households. These activities give due consideration to the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of natural resources. The actors were sensitised to their rights and responsibilities in the short, medium and long term.

Through the training and field activities, coupled with sensitisation, women are becoming increasingly resilient in their ecosystems, where soil, landscape and riverbank trees are being destroyed, leading to desertification. The mobilisation of women and their commitment to learn and change their economic and social conditions impressed the male chiefs, who accepted an invitation to participate in finding the best mechanism to revise and improve land use provisions of customary law. Consequently, a joint committee including women and some experts in traditional law was constituted to elaborate an appropriate methodology that can lead to the modification of the traditional practices that prevent women from free access to land for agriculture and other needs. LCR started this process in 2015 before the elaboration of the new law by the Togolese government in 2016.

Moving forward and policy recommendations

We are aware that old provisions will not be modified in one day but require undertaking a step-by-step process which is rooted in local principles including the involvement of priests. While male chiefs are on board with revising various aspects of traditional law, final approval from spiritual priests is yet to obtained. Most sacred forests in Togo, Ghana and Benin have survived until now due to the contribution of these priests.

Technical and financial resources must now be gathered to direct the advocacy process at spiritual priests. This can include setting up a dedicated task force which seeks dialogue with the priests and shares with them success stories from other countries where women have improved their lives and that of their community by actively participating in natural resource use and management. It is crucial that the outcomes

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of the lobby and advocacy activities such as the agreement obtained from the male chiefs are officialised to actually revise traditional laws. Finally, there is a need to plan measures to popularise the outcomes of the lobby advocacy activities in other communities as well.

We offer the following recommendations:

- **Demonstrate more commitment and flexibility in working with traditional leaders and local decision-makers to avoid past mistakes**

- **Search for approaches that may lead to innovations in traditional laws related to ecosystem management**

- **Simplify the language of traditional laws and encode them in writing so that they can easily be consulted and preserved for future generations, since in Africa most traditional practices are passed orally**

- **Support and leverage grassroots organisations, particularly those that defend women's rights and seek to sensitise communities to the important role women play in local development**

- **Make learnings and resource materials on the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 15: Life on Land and SDG 5: Gender Equality) available to grassroots organisations.**

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Heritage values through gender

Case studies from South Asia

By

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Abstract

Gender and culture play an important role in sustainable natural resource use, especially in the Himalayan landscapes of the Indian subcontinent. Culture shapes people's identities and determines the ways they relate to their surrounding environment. UNESCO-designated World Heritage Sites are good examples of setting standards and sharing best practices from around the world. The management of World Heritage Sites aligns with the cultural beliefs underpinning the functions of a place and the roles of women and men, including access to the site. In this paper, a gender lens is applied to the definition of heritage to further analyse the role of heritage sites, especially for inter-generational transmission of values associated with the site. Case studies from mountain ecosystems in South Asia have been reviewed to illustrate the diversity of cultures, beliefs and practices exercised around natural world heritage sites including cultural landscapes and the role of gender. Examples are drawn from UNESCO-designated World Heritage Sites such as the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, Khangchendzonga National Park, Nanda Devi National Park in India and Chitwan National Park in Nepal. Ecosystem-based livelihood practices that create sustainable interactions between people and nature have been the hallmark of such sites, and therefore occupy a prominent position in the discourse on heritage sites. It is argued that these sites have retained their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) *inter alia* through oral traditions that are passed from one generation to another primarily through women. Gender equality is instrumental in broadening the definition of natural heritage, as gender enriches the scope and meaning of heritage for the benefit of society at large.

Keywords:

world heritage   Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)   nature-culture linkage   gender

heritage conservation Manas Wildlife Sanctuary   Khangchendzonga National Park   Nanda Devi National Park   Chitwan National Park

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Background

Gender is invariably shaped by the power relations between men and women, and the norms and values regarding 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviours (Bokova et al., 2014). Gender relations are influenced by a variety of intersecting factors, such as class, race, poverty, ethnicity, religion, age, disability and marital status (Ibid). The socio-cultural values that help in the negotiation of gender are crucial to the identity of women in their communities. Gender relations determine how individuals and communities understand today's world, and how they envisage and shape their future. Gender equality is critical to attaining the goal of inclusive and sustainable development (Bokova et al., 2014).

At a time when countries, especially those in the Global South, are defining the contours of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, there is an increasing recognition of the role of culture and gender in promoting inclusive social development, eradicating poverty and advancing environmental sustainability.

Heritage is commonly understood as a legacy from past generations, cherished in the present for its recognised aesthetic, spiritual and social values within society. It comprises historical monuments, cultural properties and artefacts, landscapes and natural environments, as well as intangible, or living, heritage (UNESCO, 2019). Heritage can be passed down from one generation to another in multiple ways, and gender plays a vital role in its interpretation, transmission and sustenance. Heritage practises have gender implications, as arts and crafts are largely considered the domain of women while agricultural practises are the domain of men. In all cases, gender roles are defined within the heritage concerned and are transmitted as such, strengthening social assimilation, gender relations and stereotypes. Traditional ecological knowledge of natural heritage environments can be vital to ensuring a balanced ecosystem, food and livelihood security, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation (Berkes, 2012). In particular, recognising women's roles as primary land and resource managers is central to the success of biodiversity policy and heritage conservation and management efforts.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage defines the kind of natural or cultural heritage sites that can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List through a system of international cooperation. The most significant feature of the Convention is that it links together in a single instrument the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties. The Convention recognises how

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people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two. The Convention sets out the duties of States Parties in identifying potential sites and their role in protecting and maintaining them. By signing the Convention, a State Party pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage Sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage. As of July 2020, there are 1,121 sites inscribed by 167 States Parties (UNESCO, 2019).

Methodology

This chapter analyses four case studies to highlight the role of gender vis-à-vis the protection and management of World Heritage Sites in the Himalayan landscape of South Asia. We reviewed relevant literature cited and available on the UNESCO World Heritage List for the inscribed sites to understand aspects of gender vis-à-vis the protection of the sites. We reviewed and integrated the available literature, though scarce and uneven in geographical scope, supplemented by the first author's experiences as a site manager. Together, our findings help to reveal the complex relationships between gender and nature.

Manas World Heritage Site: safeguarding traditional ecological knowledge and the role of women in reconstructing an endangered site

In many ways, the dynamic political journey of human rights and the rights of nature has been intertwined with the fate of the Manas World Heritage Site (Manas WHS). This UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site has stood the ravages of time. Manas WHS is part of the core zone of the 2,400 sq km Manas Tiger Reserve that forms a transboundary landscape along the Terai belt in Lower Assam, India. It is bound in the north by the forests of Bhutan, River Sankosh and West Bengal in the west, and the administrative boundaries of the Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) Assam in the east and south respectively. The recorded history of Manas dates back to late 15th century when the renowned Vaishnavaite saint Shri Madhabdeb established the Barpeta *Satra* (an institutional centre associated with the Vaishnavite spiritual movement in India), wherein the preserved sacred texts mention a "dense forest" beyond the boundaries of the Barpeta human settlement (Choudhury, 2007). Since then, land ownership has changed hands from Indian royalty to British foresters, later becoming a prized possession of the Assam Forest Department in the post-independence era.

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The historical evolution of Manas suggests a linkage between forest resource alienation and the mobilisation of local tribes. The colonial British government affected the territory dominated by the Bodo (tribe indigenous to the area) in at least two ways: by using the forest as a revenue source and by settling outside workers in the region, thereby outnumbering the Bodo people. This had the unintended consequence of the political mobilisation of the Bodo people. In all this, Manas became a contested space for the possession and dispossession of the Bodo people. Within a few years of its inclusion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Manas ended up on the "danger list" owing to the ongoing unrest (Goswami & Ganesh, 2014).

The site's scenic beauty includes a range of forested hills, alluvial grasslands and tropical evergreen forests that provide a contiguous transnational landscape with critical and viable habitats for rare and endangered species, including tigers, greater one-horned rhinos, swamp deer, pygmy hogs and Bengal florican. The peace and stability in the region and the revival of Manas also helped in supporting the revival of local economy through tourism, which is intrinsically linked to nature-based skills such as silkworm rearing, bamboo crafts, nature-inspired music and performing arts that is transferred inter-generationally through women in the local community (Saikia, 2011; Das et al., 2013).

In 1985, the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (391 sq km) was inscribed in the list of World Heritage Sites (UNESCO) as a site of outstanding universal value under criteria numbers (ii), (iii) and (iv). However, in 1992 UNESCO-IUCN reviewed the status of the site and decided to tag it as a "World Heritage Site in Danger" due to damages that had occurred to park infrastructure and other properties as a result of Bodo agitation since 1988 (Vigne & Martin, 1991; Goswami & Ganesh, 2011). In June 2011, Manas regained its original status of World Heritage Site (Ghosh & Kumar, 2012). The 20-year armed conflict coincided with a period of civic unrest in which the Bodo people fought for their community identity. Studies indicate that several biodiversity hotspots in the world are currently in areas of significant political volatility and armed conflict (Hanson et al., 2009). Such conflicts often result from the intentional and unintentional exploitation of wildlife and other natural resources, such as forest timber, by conflicting parties (Goswami & Ganesh, 2011). With human security concerns taking priority, financial resources and international aid is often diverted to peacekeeping, rehabilitation and humanitarian efforts, thereby marginalising conservation activities and priorities. Manas met the same fate during the insurgency period that lasted for almost a decade and a half from 1989 until 2003. In 2005, when the first elected local government was formed, park infrastructure was in shambles, and there was virtually no protection.

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The 100-odd rhino population had been completely decimated, and more than 90% of the park infrastructure had been destroyed (Debonnet et al., 2008; TCP, 2013).

What emerged as a ray of hope was the evidence of persistent wildlife (camera trap studies yielded signs of tigers in the area) (Goswami & Ganesh, 2014). International concern and support (the UNESCO World Heritage Committee sent monitoring missions and called for annual status reports from the Government of India) and local political will to take up the challenges enabled a turnaround. First and foremost, protection of the site was of major concern. As the Forest Department was extremely understaffed, a unique conservation model was adopted wherein local youth from fringe villages were deployed to take up surveillance and anti-poaching activities inside the park. Such youth (mostly men) had experienced armed conflict in their lifetime, and several were motivated to surrender their firearms and take up conservation instead. In a way, the alternative livelihood support provided immediately in the aftermath of a war was a major boost towards lasting peace in the area. At the same time, sustained nudging from UNESCO, international conservation agencies and local non-governmental organisations helped in formulating a scientifically backed wildlife restoration plan including the highly ambitious 'wild-to-wild' rhino and swamp deer translocation and population augmentation programmes at Manas. Funding from the central and state government was channelled to rebuild park infrastructure and adequate human resources were recruited and posted in the area.

A key method utilised was to catalyse empowered community institutions to protect forests and wildlife (Feeney et al., 1990; Horwich & Lyon, 2007). Several governance models facilitated success, changing the situation from open access to an informal community co-managed system and, subsequently, into organised zones of wilderness and multiple-use zones in Manas WHS and forest fringe areas. It was a multi-pronged strategy that included a focus on women in the forest fringe villages of Manas. Women were offered opportunities for skills upgrading and alternative livelihood options. The Bodo women enjoy equal status in their community and have also been influential in the economic upliftment and political discourse in the region (Talukdar, 2012). The fact that they were integrated in the conservation narrative helped the park to recover in a much shorter time than expected.

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Khangchendzonga National Park: when mountains are sacred and nature is culture

It is well established that culture and religion play a determining role in shaping one's relationship with the environment (Verschuuren et al., 2010). In this regard, it was a proud moment for India when in 2016 the Khangchendzonga National Park was inscribed as the country's first mixed World Heritage Site in recognition of its unique nature-culture linkages. Located at the heart of the Sikkim Himalayas, the park has a unique high-altitude biodiversity and landscape. Mythological stories are associated with these mountainscapes and a great number of natural elements (such as caves, rivers and lakes) are considered to be objects of worship by the indigenous people of Sikkim (Arora, 2006; Little, 2008). The sacred meanings of these stories and practices have been integrated with Buddhist beliefs and constitute the basis for Sikkimese identity.[1]

Sacred beliefs have therefore helped to preserve some of the region's unique biodiversity, protecting it from hunting or over-harvesting. It has also resulted in an extensive gain in traditional ecological knowledge, especially regarding ethnomedicinal plants in the local indigenous tribal communities such as the Lepchas people (Gorer, 2000; Pradhan & Badola, 2008). The Lepchas people are nature or animist worshippers who prefer to live in tranquil surroundings largely in harmony with nature (Tambe & Rawat, 2008; Laskar, 2015). The women are especially adept in making handicrafts from cane and bamboo and weaving textiles from locally available materials. While no direct study on the region was found that depicts the linkages between women and their role in nature conservation, it is evident that, similar to other mountain ecosystems, natural resource preservation is gendered, and the responsibility for the intergenerational transfer of ecological knowledge rests with the women.

Recent eco-tourism initiatives in and around the Khangchendzonga National Park have made a good start in being cautious towards waste management, and in all this, women from the local communities certainly have a lot to offer (Dam, 2013).

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1   Available at: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1513

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Nanda Devi and the Valley of Flowers: women's empowerment for sustainable tourism in the high mountains

Nanda Devi National Park in the Northern Himalayas became India's fourth World Heritage Site in 1988. The site was later expanded in 2005 to include the Valley of Flowers National Park. Both parks are rich in biological and cultural diversity. Until the early 1960s, cross-border socio-cultural exchange including marriages and trade helped local communities to flourish in an otherwise remote inaccessible mountainous landscape. The scenario changed somewhat after the Indo-China War in 1962 as borders were sealed and informal exchange was discouraged between the two countries. It is, therefore, more than a coincidence when a women's group from the Nanda Devi region launched the *Chipko Andolan* ("hug the trees") movement to oppose the felling of green trees for developmental projects (Jain, 1984). This small women-led movement went on to become a flag-bearer for many future non-violent forms of environmental protests all over the world.

The hill people, including women, protested the new forms of mountaineering and adventure tourism activities that emerged along the Nanda Devi peak and adjoining ranges and valleys. While these activities emerged as an alternative source of income to the local residents, in the long run the unorganised mountaineering activities seriously threatened the biological as well as cultural integrity of the region. In a bid to reverse the loss of biological wealth, the mountaineering activities were banned, and the entire Rishi Ganga River basin was declared the Nanda Devi National Park (NDNP) in 1982 and subsequently also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The ban improved the biodiversity of the area, as evident from the expeditions that have taken place since then (Negi et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, tourism opportunities shifted to the surrounding buffer areas where better road connectivity led to a rise in religious tourism. The Valley of Flowers National Park hosts a buffer zone with a 19-km trail that leads to Hemkund Sahib, the highest *Gurdwara* (a place of worship for the Sikh community) in the world. The sudden increase in the tourists visiting the *Gurudwara* also meant an increase in garbage and pollutants. To make matters worse, the Forest Department was at odds with local communities, especially because of the strict preservationist and no-resource use approach by the former (Silori, 2007).

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Circumstances improved after a female forest officer involved local community members through a series of vigorous campaigns[2]. As a result, Eco-Development Committees (EDC) were initiated with local women and villagers to make them equal stakeholders in decision-making. While it has been reported that gender-based divisions within EDCs yielded mixed results (Badola, 2014), the formation of localised institutions of 40 *Van Panchayats* (local forms of forest self-governance) and more than 60 *Mahila Mandal Dals* (women's groups) to make conservation a socially and economically self-alleviating experience was a step in the right direction. The idea was to integrate livelihood and equity concerns in conservation practices for long-term durability. Training was imparted to the community to harness local resources and generate eco-tourism activities. Growing and preserving medicinal plants, exotic condiments and traditional crops were listed as priorities. This stimulated the hill economy, which helped to prevent the poaching and illegal uprooting of herbs from nearby forests.

Communities were also encouraged to document and preserve their culture and folklore. Young people (both boys and girls) were placed at the centre of local biodiversity, folklore and culture promotion. Eco fees were introduced for cleaning operations and for building green value chain systems to serve the pilgrims without depending on government funds. Many small businesses dedicated to service the pilgrims, such as renting plastic coats, were introduced. In this way, additional income-generating opportunities were created, especially for women, thus linking the livelihood concerns of locals with the conservation realities of the area (Silori, 2007).

Chitwan National Park: a case for co-management

Chitwan National Park is situated in the inner Terai lowland of Nepal, and it is globally renowned for its unique floodplain grassland biodiversity, as it is home to the second largest population of the great one-horned rhinoceros in the world (Lehmkuhl et al., 1988).

The indigenous tribe of Tharus and other hill tribe immigrants numbering over 200,000 reside in the park's buffer zone (Straede & Helles, 2000). Local communities are organised into formalised Village Development Committees (VDCs), the smallest administrative unit in Nepal.

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2   Available at: https://www.thebetterindia.com/5904/tbi-heroes-jyotsna-sitling-a-green-warrior/

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Community-based conservation has been practised in the region not just as a tool to improve forest management but also as a means to alleviate poverty and promote equity among the local communities (Parasai, 2006). Nepal is largely an agriculture-based economy and forests provide opportunities for livelihoods and other resources such as firewood for cooking.

In Chitwan, a grass-cutting programme has been running since 1976. The Terai grasslands are a successional stage in the floodplain ecosystem and therefore must be maintained by using methods such as controlled fires and cutting. The park devised a unique strategy in which locals (including women) cut the grass, reeds and rope bark and use them for thatching, fuelwood and fodder purposes. In this manner, the dual purpose of meeting local demands for these materials are balanced with managing the ecosystem.

This also serves as a way to resolve the park-people conflict as it provides resource-usage opportunities for the local people who were deprived of their customary rights to collect traditional house-building and binding materials after the park was established. The grass-cutting programme has been under scrutiny for a while, and the feasibility of opening up the park to a burgeoning population in the buffer zone has been revisited (Straede & Helles, 2000). At the same time, it has also been acknowledged that a positive perception towards park and wildlife has been generated, besides providing customary resource use to local communities including women whose lives have been improved by the programme.

Reflections

Forest governance is complex and driven by elements of the local politics of place, history, ecology and socio-cultural relations (Gurunani, 2002). Forests can be more than a source of fuelwood and timber resources; they have shaped the social relations that are locally specific and respond to the ecological and geographical contexts of a place.

The above case studies clearly demonstrate that heritage can no longer be regarded in isolation but as part of biocultural conservation, thereby strengthening the meaning and cultural identity to the people concerned (Bokova et al., 2014). It also underlines that heritage is increasingly gaining importance as part of the discourse on human wellbeing. Case studies and examples as stated above help in garnering support from

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the local communities towards forest governance and also for ensuring long-term gender equality and sustainability in economic development.

Heritage has therefore proved its close connection to people's identity, thereby making it a potential instrument of voice and representation for women and other marginalised people of civil society (e.g. forest fringe communities), among others. Recognising and enabling an inclusive, integrated and multi-stakeholder approach to heritage will therefore have a significant bearing on the future sustainability of heritage. While heritage, by designation, encompasses a vast array of monuments, cultural landscapes, protected areas and the environment, it is the people who identify, choose and carry out the actions for its protection, conservation and safeguarding that make these constellations a living heritage.

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CHAPTER

7

RESEARCH REPORT

Collective rural marketing for gender transformative change

Evidence from the Argeli value chain in Nepal

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Abstract

Collective action can strengthen rural market linkages through the engagement of women and other marginalised groups. It can help to address challenges such as small quantities, time poverty, illiteracy and limited rural mobility. An example of successful collective action is the Kangchenjunga Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KLCDI). The KLCDI and implementing partners worked to upgrade the Argeli (*Edgeworthia gardneri*) value chain in the Panchthar district of eastern Nepal. The Argeli plant provides the raw material for the production of hand-made paper and its white fibre is in high demand for the preparation of Japanese yuan. In addition to making the value chain gender inclusive, four areas were pursued: i) process upgrading, ii) product upgrading, iii) function upgrading and iv) business enabling environment upgrading. Evidence from the KLCDI shows that collective action can improve the condition of women and the marginalised, such as small-scale farmers embedded within rural market systems. Despite these efforts, Argeli-enterprise development continues to face several challenges related to existing legislation and regulations, which also impact the women who benefit from these enterprises. Challenges include that Argeli production from private land is considered to be a forest product; hurdles based on inappropriate Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) registration; establishment formalities; and additional royalties and taxation. These challenges discourage Argeli producers, mainly women and poor and marginalised groups. Effective dialogue with producers, traders and government stakeholders is necessary for the government to recognise the value of NTFPs in enhancing local livelihoods and providing benefits to marginalised groups, particularly women, so that they are encouraged to undertake NTFP-based enterprises.

Keywords:

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Background

The mountain people in the Hindu Kush Himalayas (HKH) region are one of the most impoverished populations in the world. A number of research studies have indicated that globalisation and climate change are likely to worsen food insecurity in the region more than in many places in the world (Hunjai et al., 2011). This is due to high dependence on local agricultural production and rampant natural resource depletion. Poor accessibility is another critical issue in this region, which is exacerbated by the lack of basic infrastructure and connectivity to markets, resulting in high transaction costs and network failures (Jodha, 2005; Gioli et al., 2019). Hence, there is an urgent need to find alternative livelihood options to ensure food security in this mountainous region. Even though women play an essential role in local food production and they have different vulnerabilities compared to men, they face social, economic and political barriers which limit their resilience capacities.

To respond to these challenges, mountain people have been adopting risk-averting and resilience strategies for food security including livelihood diversification across on-farm and non-farm sectors (Wymann et al., 2013; Gioli et al., 2020). For instance, the outmigration of youth for economic reasons is common in the region. This comes at a cost to female residents, who must take on new roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to food security, such as farm management and disaster preparedness. Women are not necessarily prepared to take on these roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the acquisition of new skills, capacities and knowledge is key to building resilient livelihoods and ensuring regional and local food security.

With a focus on strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacities of women, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) initiated a number of activities based on the principles of collective action for marketing. At the heart of these interventions lies the engagement of a range of existing informal local institutions, such as women farmer groups. The Kangchenjunga Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative[1] (KLCDI) is one such example. The KLCDI, an action research project, focuses on agriculture and farming practices in the region with the vision of enhancing the resilience capacities of mountain people, particularly women, to overcome climate change

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1   The Kangchenjunga Landscape Conversation and Development Initiative (KLCDI) is committed to the conservation of the important biodiversity, ecosystems, and livelihoods of the Kangchenjunga Landscape, which stretches across Bhutan, Nepal along the southern side of Mountain Kangchenjunga.

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and other risk factors (Molden et al., 2014; Gurung et al., 2016). The KLCDI has identified women and women's groups as key entry points for collective rural enterprise planning to enhance market access, build entrepreneurial skills and offer social and economic empowerment opportunities.

Methodology

Adopting a gender-inclusive value chain approach in mountain contexts

In mountainous areas, most farmers/producers are smallholders who are weakly integrated into commodity markets, unable to compete with large-scale producers from the lowlands. This is because of low quantities, dispersed and unreliable production levels, remoteness, lack of processing technology and knowledge, and limited access to market information, as well as inadequate negotiation and management skills. The value chain approach is appropriate as it links small-scale producers with markets, stimulating growth, value addition and job creation (Schneemann & Vredeveld, 2015). ICIMOD has emphasised the value chain approach as a market-led approach that can strengthen adaptive and resilience capacities of smallholder farmers in mountain contexts (Hoermann et al., 2010; Joshi et al., 2016). However, there are growing concerns that for enterprises and businesses to remain profitable in the long term, the value chain must also be green and socially responsive. Successful value chain enterprises require an enabling institutional environment (e.g. supportive policy) to enhance their growth and strengthen value chain systems (Schneemann & Vredeveld, 2015).

The pilot sites in Pancthar district in Nepal revealed that the engagement of women in enterprises is often either "gender-blind" or "gender-neutral." It is erroneously assumed that men and women benefit equally from inclusion in value chains, or that enterprises can become gender-inclusive by simply forming women-led groups, without understanding and addressing the specific social and gendered barriers that women face (Kotru et al., 2020; Kantor et al., 2019). These assumptions are further compounded by production constraints such as restricted access to land, credit and inputs for women.

Key barriers faced by women include limited mobility outside their villages, restrictive socio-cultural norms, inadequate or lack of education and literacy, and time poverty. These barriers significantly constrain women's access to markets for agriculture or other rural enterprises.

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To address these constraints, the KLCDI organised a series of discussions with both men and women between 2015 and 2016 with existing informal local institutions such as youth groups. The discussions sought to identify value chain products and services in the pilot sites in Nepal, India and Bhutan (Figure 1). Argeli is one of the value chain products that was identified specifically for the Sidhhing village in the Panchthar district of Nepal. Focus group discussions were also conducted with women and marginalised groups as part of a needs assessment. The KLCDI leveraged local groups and institutions as a key entry point for the enhancement of collective rural marketing.

Socially responsive approach to selecting and developing value chains

Institutional

Environmental

Economic

Social

KL Bhutan

- Yak-based ecotourism in Hada
- Cane in Chhukha
- Ginger in Samtse

KL India

- Ecoturism in Bandapani
- Ecoturism in Gorkhey
- Dairy farming in Ribdi
- Ecoturism in Dzongu

KL Nepal

- Argeli in Sidhing
- Akabare in Chillingding
- Ecoturism in Mai Pokhari
- Ecoturism in Bahundangi

Figure 1. Gender-inclusive approach to selecting and developing value chains in KLCDI pilot sites

Source: Adapted from Schneemann & Vredeveld, 2015

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Collective action is a mechanism that can enhance women's market access through collectives to reduce the vulnerability of unreliable, low production and increase the producers' negotiation power in value chain processes. More direct links between producers, sellers and consumers will benefit farmers and also reduce their vulnerability to exploitive practices by traders and intermediaries. Additional efforts to address social constraints with the objectives of livelihood diversification and improved livelihoods and food security further complement collective action.

Why was Argeli chosen as a value chain product in Eastern Nepal

Panchthar district in eastern Nepal is the leading producer of Argeli in the country (Box 1 & Figure 2), followed by Ilam and Teplejung districts. Argeli production areas in Panchthar district are Sidin, Prangbung, Chayngthapu, Memeng and Phalaicha.

BOX 1: ARGELI (*EDGEWORTHIA GARDNERI*)

Is an evergreen and fast-growing deciduous shrub found in the Kangchenjunga landscape (KL) at altitudes of 1800-2600m. The plant was traditionally used as bio-fencing and its fibre for household purposes like making rope and paper. Demonstrations have proven that Argeli can grow through vegetative propagations between May and July. The plants are ready to be harvested after three years of growth.

Figure 2. Argeli plant in the flowering stage

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

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Sidin lies within the Phalelung Rural Municipality of Panchthar district. It is a heterogeneous community composed of several ethnic groups including Limbu, Rai, Tamang, and other marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Apart from casual labour as a source of livelihood, people also depend on remittances, collection and trade of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and livestock rearing. Each family has at least one member who is part of a community group. In most cases, women form part of the mother's groups formed by the Department of Women and Children under Nepal's Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. The collection of NTFPs is a primary source of income in Sidin. Argeli is one of those NTFPs, which is mainly cultivated and harvested on private land.

Using the KLCDI's gender-inclusive value chain approach to diversify income options for the local population, Argeli was chosen for further upgrading and promotion, given that:

- Out of a total of 880 households in Sidin, around 300 households (33%) are already engaged in Argeli production (Value Chain Study Report, 2016). As Argeli producers often lack advanced processing techniques and information about the market, they sell their products to paper factories in Jhapa through middlemen/traders. As a result, low-quality Argeli bark is sold at a low price of approximately NPR 40 to 50/kg (USD 0.34 to 0.42/kg[2]). If the market is tapped, high-quality Argeli bark can be sold at much higher prices.
- A large area of land owned by the Limbu and Rai communities under the *kipat*[3] land tenure system lies fallow. Owners of such land are interested in cultivating Argeli to generate more income (Figure 3 & Figure 4).

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2   *Exchange rate USD 1= NPR 18 (27/09/2020)*

3   The *kipat* land tenure system is a form of communal tenure with certain ethnic groups (e.g., Limbu). It is estimated that about 77,090 hectares of land were cultivated under *kipat* land tenure system before 1950. *Kipat* land cannot be alienated and sold to individuals outside the community (Acharya, 2008).

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Figure 3. Agreli fibre drying in the open

Photo credit: Nakul Chettri

Figure 4. A woman making paper from Argeli fibre

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

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The KLCDI, along with its implementing partners, the Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST) and the Divisional Forest Office of Panchthar district, is working to increase the income of Argeli producers through collective rural marketing by adding value to Argeli products and changing market opportunities. For this, the KLCDI focuses on upgrading the Argeli value chain through four specific steps: i) process upgrading, ii) product upgrading, iii) function upgrading and iv) upgrading business enabling environment. These four upgrading strategies have also been identified as priority areas for gender-inclusive Argeli value chain promotion (Figure 5 & Figure 6).
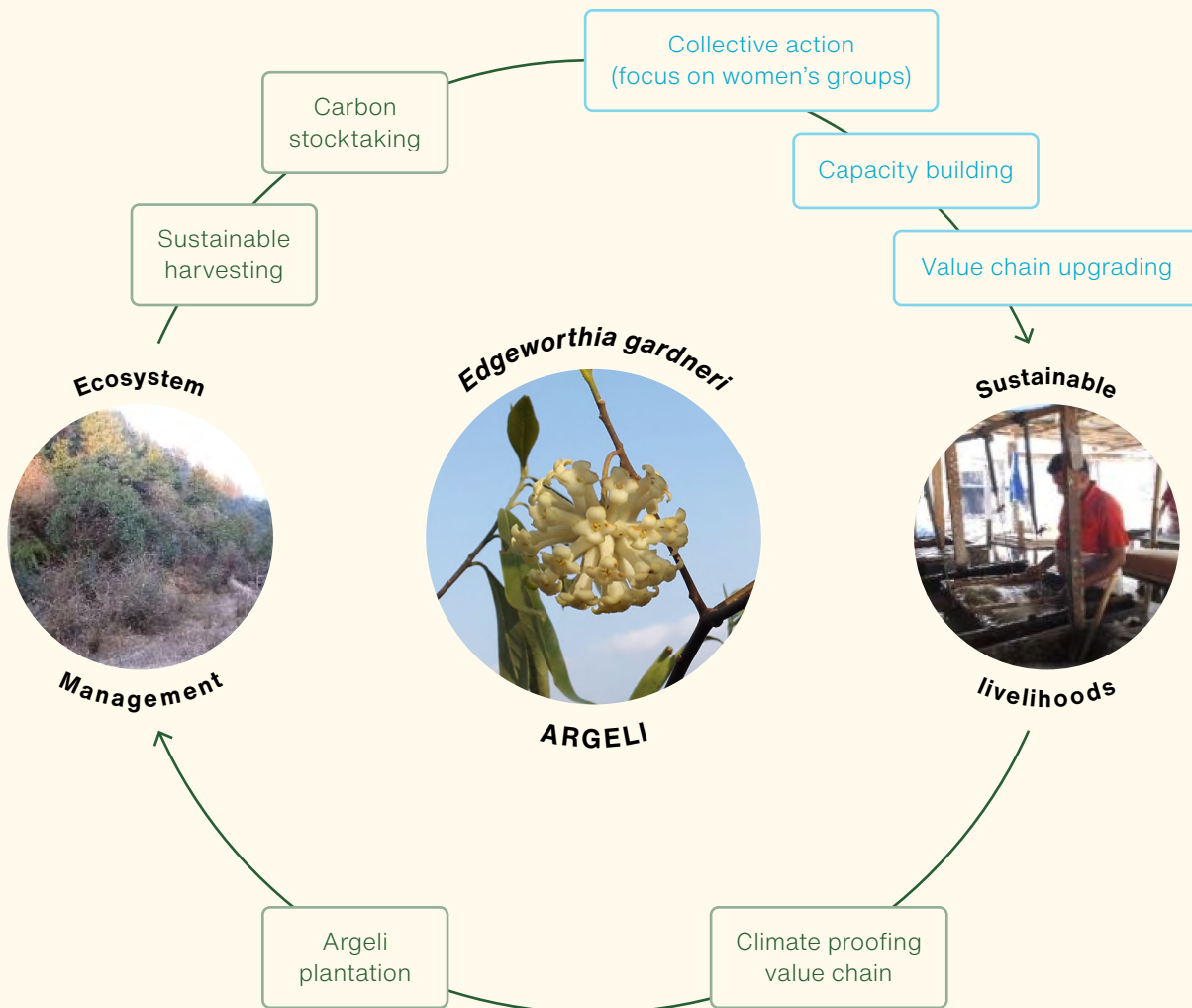
Figure 5. Steps for upgrading a gender-inclusive Argeli value chain

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

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ARGELI HIGH QUALITY WHITE BARK PRODUCTION	UPGRADING STRATEGIES	
Production/collection	Process Upgrading	
Steaming	Product Upgrading	
Peeling and Cleaning	Function Upgrading	BUSINESS PERFORMANCE
Wetting	Enabling Environment	
Drying & Storage	Horizontal Coordination	
Transportation	Vertical Coordination	
	Inter-chain Upgrading	
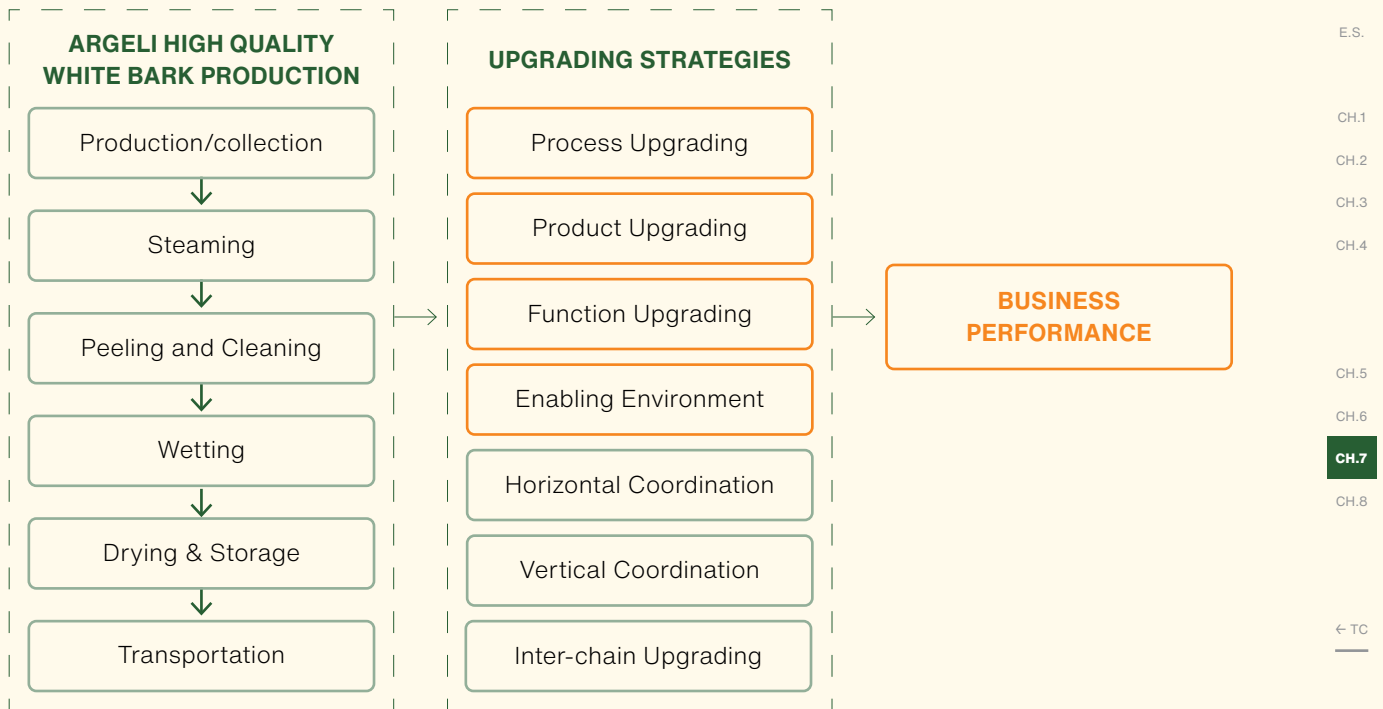
Figure 6. Selective steps for upgrading the Argeli value chain

Sources: Modified from Mitchell et. al. 2009 & Kanpou Inc. 2016

Results and findings

Evidence of upgrading strategies for Argeli value chain promotion and interventions

Process upgrading is always expensive because it requires capital investments in enterprise operations. For Argeli, process upgrading requires improved harvesting equipment, storage facilities and boiling/cooking equipment. Women are particularly engaged in harvesting and boiling/cooking activities individually or collectively.

The KLCDI worked with the private sector (Kanpuo Pvt. Ltd.)[4] along with Argeli producers in Sidin to achieve process upgrading. Kanpuo Pvt. Ltd., along with

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4   Kanpou Inc. is a private company based in Japan that has received a quote to supply Argeli raw materials for bank notes for the National Printing Bureau of Japan. The company also supplies other Argeli products such as fortune-telling paper and other handicraft products. This information was extracted from the feasibility report of Kanpou, 2016.

BOX 2: PROCESS UPGRADING

An increase in production efficiency results in reduced costs of production. This may involve improved organisation of the production process or use of new or improved technology.

Evidence:

→   Argeli women producers switched from ordinary bark production to white bark production. Women are involved in removing the green cover and extracting the bark.

→   Approximately 400,000 Argeli stems were planted in 7.6 acres of private fallow land in Sidin 5. About 500 kgs of Argeli bark can be harvested from 0.05 acres of land.

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the KLCDI, provided techniques and services to make high-quality white Argeli bark through improved harvesting techniques, providing equipment for harvesting, along with purchasing high-quality white bark from these producers. The hands-on trainings improved techniques such as boiling, cooking and equipment processing, which were provided to the women and men producers. Such technical services assisted the women producers mainly from poor and marginalised groups to increase their efficiency and productivity. Furthermore, the Divisional Forest Office prioritised Argeli as one of the products for promotion in the district and supported Argeli cultivation in private land that was fallow.

Figure 7. Mapping Argeli areas in Sidin village

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

As stated earlier, women from marginalised groups are actively engaged in Argeli production as a source of income. However, Argeli production is constrained by the small quantity of raw materials produced at the household level among poor and marginalised groups; therefore, KLCDI is working with existing local groups and institutions for collective rural enterprise development (see details in *Function upgrading*). Working as a collective provides benefits in terms of increasing the supply of materials; providing an appropriate platform to producers; and gaining access to training, information and advice from other actors such as buyers, which is one of the most effective platforms for small-scale producers. Accordingly, the KLCDI focused on three dimensions for upgrading Argeli processing:

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- Leveraging existing local groups and institutions (e.g. mother groups, saving credit groups)
- Building capacity for preparation of white bark
- Cultivation of Argeli on private and community land

Figure 8. Argeli plantation area supported by the KLCDI

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

Product upgrading: The KLCDI realised that one of the best ways to attract Argeli producers, mostly women and those from poor socio-economic groups who are engaged in this enterprise, is to invest their resources, particularly labour, in upgrading their product so that they can fetch higher prices. Inadequate and insufficient processing technology, along with the lack of market information, hindered Argeli producers in Sidin from further developing their products. Currently, Argeli bark is traded in its crude low-quality form to local traders who supply the bark to small-scale paper factories. The KLCDI focused its interventions for product upgrading in the following dimensions:

BOX 3: PRODUCT UPGRADING

Qualitative improvement of a product, making it more desirable to the consumer and earning a higher unit price.

Evidence:

→ Preparation of white Argeli bark fetches a higher price of 3 USD to 4 USD per kilogram as compared to current bark at 0.36 USD per kilogram.

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- Hands-on trainings on cleaning, grading and packaging Argeli bark and making white bark were provided to women and youth through groups;
- Building partnerships with the private sector (e.g. Kanpuo Pvt. Ltd.) for collective marketing so that individual women and poor households can sell the Argeli bark for higher prices;
- Facilitating collective storage for Argeli bark.

Through such measures, Argeli producers are ensured higher prices for their upgraded products. This has incentivised them to procure more labour, to invest in the necessary equipment and to follow the processing techniques to produce high-quality white bark.

Figure 9. Storage system for the Agreli fibre

Photo credit: Nakul Chettri

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Figure 10. Argeli fibre used for Japanese yuan

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

Function upgrading: Argeli producers from Sidin used to sell their Argeli bark individually through a trader/middleperson. The KLCDI initiated upgrading the current approach through a collective-action approach for Argeli enterprise development. Daju Bhai Jadibuti Utpadan tatha Prasodhan Sahakari Sansthan from Sidin and Indreni Sahakari Sansthan, two cooperatives composed of a majority of women and marginalised ethnic groups, were taken into consideration in upgrading their approach. These institutions directly negotiate with exporters (e.g. Kanpuo Pvt. Ltd.) and government agencies for Argeli plantation support. Moreover, coming together in cooperatives enables members to address socio-cultural norms, particularly the constraints faced by women and marginalised groups in terms of lack of mobility, capital and market information.

BOX 4: FUNCTION UPGRADING

This is related to changing functions in the value chain in order to increase the overall value of activities. This can be done by adding new actors to horizontally coordinated chains or shortening chains by excluding intermediaries or traders.

Evidence:

→ Argeli women producers are selling through cooperatives or groups instead of selling individually.

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Figure 11. Group discussion with local groups/institutions

Photo credit: Kamala Gurung

Business enabling environment upgrading: Improving the Argeli business environment by addressing the constraints and filling the gaps, particularly regarding rules and regulations, has been a central point in the KLCDI's Argeli value chain promotion. Although Argeli is collected from private land, traders from Panchthar district mentioned that they require permission from the Divisional Forest Office for its collection and trade. Furthermore, they are required to pay taxes at several places (DFO office, range post, etc.) because Argeli is considered a forest product.

Reflections

This chapter makes the case for developing Argeli enterprises through the application of step-wise upgrading approaches of this crop with a gender lens in mind. With this, the Argeli enterprise case demonstrates how gender and social integration can be incorporated into value chain selection and marketing by engaging with existing women's groups. Gender-inclusive value chain intervention will result in more sustainable enterprises or businesses and a more equitable distribution of the benefits.

BOX 5: UPGRADING THE BUSINESS-ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

A bottom-up approach is considered to influence and reform policy, rules and the regulatory setting of the targeted value chain.

Evidence:

→ KLCDI and partners brought together Argeli producers, traders and government stakeholders to discuss its categorisation as a 'forest' product, despite being largely cultivated and harvested from private land. This categorisation creates hurdles, particularly for traders, who must pay a product tax fee. Argeli tax payment exemption was the priority topic for further follow-up. Tax exemption initiatives will encourage the creation of Argeli plantations and enterprises, which will directly benefit women from poor and marginalised groups.

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As stated earlier, Argeli is an NTFP that is mainly cultivated and harvested collectively on private land in Sidin, with smaller quantities being harvested from national forests and leasehold forests. One-third of households in Sidin are engaged in Argeli production, and the KLCDI has implemented a number of strategies for upgrading Argeli value chain enterprises. However, a number of challenges are still present in relation to the existing legislation and regulations of the Government of Nepal. These challenges affect the women benefiting from Argeli value chain enterprise:

1. **Formalities and procedures for Argeli harvesting:** Argeli is mostly harvested from private land rather than from forest areas. However, the categorisation of Argeli as a 'forest' product means that complex formalities and procedures are involved in the export and trade of Argeli products (e.g. bark) outside the district. Export formalities involve a number of government and non-government organisations, including product certification by the Department of Plant Resources, certificate of origin by the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and income tax certification by the relevant taxation authority (Ojha, 2000). Such procedures discourage women and poor socio-economic groups from cultivating on their private land.

2. **Inappropriate NTFP-based enterprise registration and establishment formalities:** As stated earlier, out of a total of 880 households in Sidin around 300 households (33%) are already engaged in Argeli production, mainly women from poor and marginalised groups. These households and local communities prefer to add value to the raw Argeli bark and subsequently market them through collective enterprises. However, forestry regulations inhibit them from doing so. For instance, regulations require that forest-based enterprises be established at a distance of 3 km (in mountains) and 5 km (in Terai) from forest areas (Subedi, 2010). Such regulations function as significant hurdles to establish and operate NTFP-based enterprises in mountain areas. Furthermore, a consensus is required from three offices – the Divisional Forest Office, Land Survey Office and the Cottage and Small Industry Authority – for business registration to establish NTFP-based enterprises (Group discussion, 2016).

3. **Royalties and taxation:** The Divisional Forest Office collects fees from national forests according to the rates specified in the regulations. However, determining royalty rates is arbitrary. Women and poor producers who are engaged in Argeli enterprises are discouraged from trading their produce due to the many taxes imposed on the trade of NTFPs at local, district and inter-district levels. In fact, taxation was found to be as high as 200% - a concern further compounded by the absence of a well-developed system of determining royalties.

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Effective dialogues among men and women producers, traders and government stakeholders are necessary to recognise the value of NTFPs in enhancing local livelihoods. The resulting improvement in legislation and removal of regulatory hurdles will help to mitigate barriers while encouraging the establishment of collective marketing that will provide benefits to marginalised groups, particularly women, so that they are encouraged to undertake NTFP-based enterprises.

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CHAPTER

8

RESEARCH REPORT

Entrepreneurship as a socio-economic empowerment tool to close the gender gap in a Himalayan transboundary landscape

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About the authors

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a regional knowledge centre working in eight countries within the Hindu Kush Himalaya region. Starting from 2013, ICIMOD implemented the Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative with partners in China, India and Nepal. The livelihoods component, on which this chapter is based, was implemented with partners represented by the co-authors. The Central Himalayan Environment Association (CHEA),

a non-governmental organisation based in Uttarakhand, India, works to ensure prosperous and secure mountain communities. Sichuan University, based in Chengdu, China, promotes research for national and regional development, particularly in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China. R&D Innovative Solution is a private organisation that provides solutions for farmers and agribusiness entities.

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Abstract

Strengthening women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship has been identified as an effective approach to closing the global gender gap. In the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region, the gender gap is further exacerbated due to the specificities of mountain environments (i.e. inaccessibility, fragility, marginality and heterogeneity), socio-cultural factors and the political environment. These cumulatively challenge the participation of women and marginalised social groups in economic and political activities. Lessons learned from applying entrepreneurship as a tool to enhance women's socio-economic empowerment in the transboundary Kailash Sacred Landscape have indicated that family support, social trust, market linkages and an enabling policy environment are important factors that contribute to the success of women entrepreneurs. Despite the achievements of several women-led enterprises in this mountainous landscape, key challenges persist. These include the social and cultural norms that identify women as 'nurturers' rather than entrepreneurs, high levels of illiteracy among women, and their limited awareness of available market and financial opportunities. Achieving socio-economic empowerment through women's entrepreneurship to close the gender gap requires a number of priority actions that include increasing women's literacy rates, supporting collective action among women-managed enterprises, linking women entrepreneurs with government and private sector schemes, sharing market information with women entrepreneurs, and promoting entrepreneurial networks among mountain communities.

Keywords:

women's entrepreneurship   socio-economic empowerment   Kailash Sacred Landscape

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Background

The Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018) states that across the 149 countries studied, no country has yet achieved full gender parity. Moreover, gender disparities are one of the key barriers to economic growth and poverty reduction (Wodon & de la Beiere, 2018). The Global Index for Gender Parity ranks the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH)[1] countries as follows: Bangladesh at 48, Myanmar at 88, China at 103, Nepal at 105, India at 108, Bhutan at 122 and Pakistan at 148 (WEF, 2018). In general, the Index indicates that the HKH countries have progressed in the dimensions of educational attainment and health, but additional gains are required in economic participation and political empowerment.
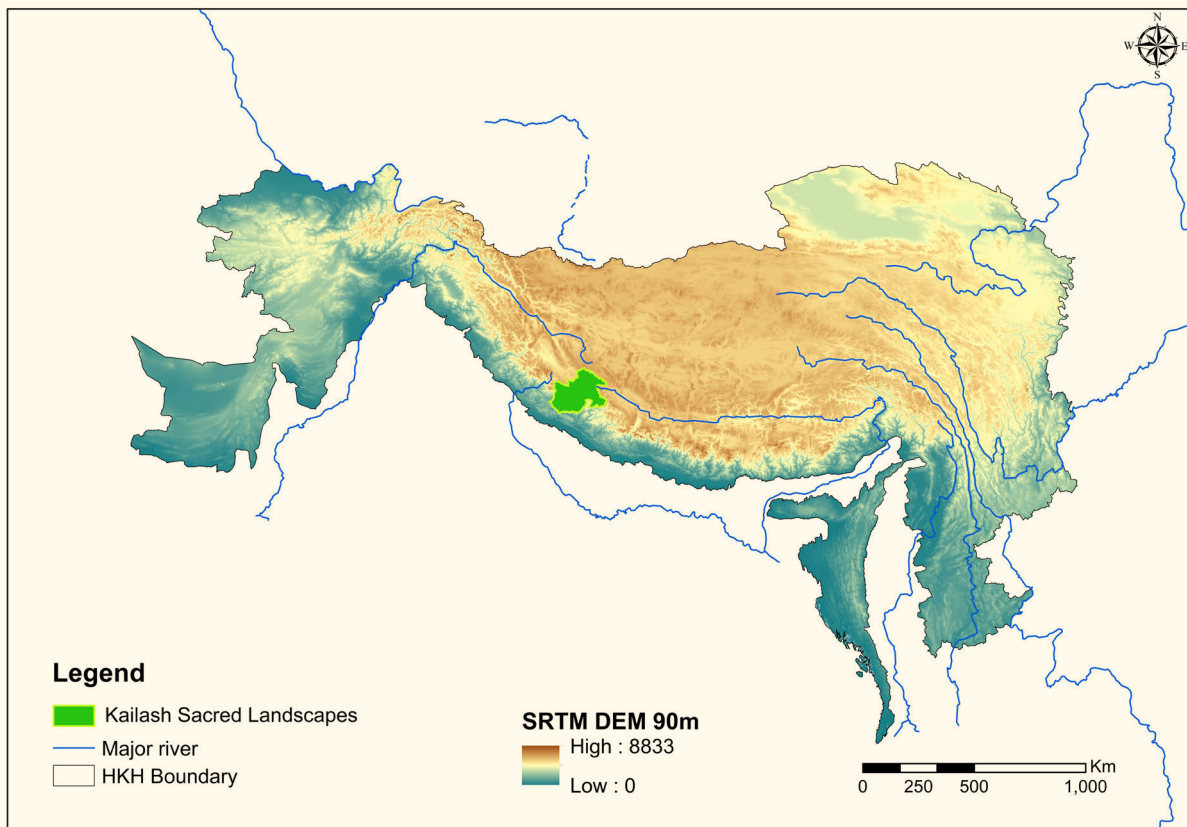
Figure 1. The transboundary Kailash Sacred Landscape within the HKH region

Source: Provided by the authors

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1 The Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region includes all or parts of eight countries from Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east (Molden et al., 2017).

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One of the identified mechanisms to close the gender gap is by promoting women's entrepreneurship (Meunier et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship is defined as a process initiated by an individual or a group to use available opportunities and resources to create economic value by producing and selling goods or services in existing or new markets while taking all necessary risks during the process (UNDP, 1999; Klapper, 2006; Ahmad et al., 2008). Women's entrepreneurship contributes to their economic empowerment, which in turn generates social values, strengthens women's access to education, land or capital, and increases their capacities for decision-making in terms of health, education and politics (SIDA, 2015; Nicolas & Rubio, 2016). There have been efforts to understand the impacts of enterprises on the socio-economic empowerment of women, as well as to explore factors that enable or constrain their engagement in enterprise development (Roomi & Parott, 2008; Agarwal & Lenka, 2016; Kungwansupaphan & Leihaothabam, 2016; Adhikari et al., 2018; Yunis et al., 2018). A better understanding of women's enterprises will help in designing and implementing programmes aimed at reducing gender disparity and improving the living standards of women.

This paper is based on experiences and lessons learnt from the implementation of a programme on women's empowerment through entrepreneurship development in rural mountainous areas of a Himalayan transboundary landscape. The paper aims to understand how women's engagement in entrepreneurship can contribute to their socio-economic empowerment and analyses factors that enable and restrict women's involvement in enterprises.
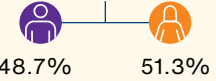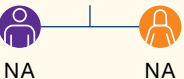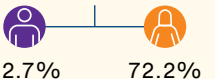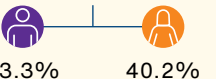
Methodology

Study area
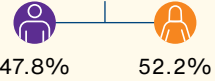
This paper is based on a programme that was implemented in the Kailash Sacred Landscape (KSL).[2] The KSL is a transboundary landscape spread over 30,000 sq. km across the southwestern part of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China, the eastern part of Uttarakhand State in India, and the far-western region of Nepal (Figure 1) (Zomer & Oli, 2011). The landscape lies between 369 meters above

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2   The landscape was delineated through consultative processes engaging local communities and experts representing institutions from China, India and Nepal with support from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ, formerly GTZ) (Zomer & Oli, 2011).

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sea level (masl) and 7,679 masl. Mt. Kailash, a sacred mountain revered by at least five religions, is a dominant feature of the landscape. Over a million people live there, of whom 51.3% are women (*see* Table 1). Agriculture and livestock husbandry are the primary livelihood strategies of resident communities, while other important income-generating sources include tourism, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs), and off-farm services (Zomer & Oli, 2011). Within this landscape, the Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KSLCDI) is being implemented through the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) in China, and the respective forest ministries in India and Nepal (Kotru et al., 2017).

Women constitute more than half the total population of the KSL (*see* Table 1), yet gender inequalities persist. The literacy rate among women is consistently lower than men; in Nepal this gap is most apparent (*see* Table 1). In the far-west region of Nepal, the social practice of barring women from household and agricultural activities during their menstrual cycle continues to occur (UNRHCO, 2011). The Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) are both lower in Nepal than in India within the studied region (*see* Table 1). Furthermore, the challenges of mountain landscapes (i.e. inaccessibility, fragility, marginality and heterogeneity) (Jodha, 1992) pose challenges to the participation of women and marginalised social groups in economic and political activities.

Table 1. Gender disaggregated socio-economic statistics from KSL

KAILASH SACRED LANDSCAPE

	CHINA	INDIA	NEPAL	TOTAL
Population	8,839	462,000	564,000	1,034,840
	47.8% / 52.2%	48.5% / 51.5%	48.8% / 51.2%	48.7% / 51.3%
Literacy (%)	NA	82.2%	56.7%	
	NA / NA	92.7% / 72.2%	73.3% / 40.2%	
HDI	*NA	0.675+	0.414#	
GDI	*NA	0.728+	0.332##	

*NA: Not available
+: Data for Uttarakhand State (GoUK & IHD, 2018)
#: Average for four districts in KSL-Nepal (GoN & UNDP, 2014)
##: Data for the far-west region of Nepal (GoN & UNDP, 2014)

Source: Data compiled by the authors, table designed by Estudio Relativo

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Data collection and analysis

Set in parts of the KSL that traverse India and Nepal, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. Focused group discussions (FGDs) were the primary data collection method, and four FGDs were carried out with a total of 26 participants from two enterprises in Pithoragarh district, India, and one enterprise in Darchula district, Nepal. These FGDs were designed to gather information about the lessons learnt and challenges faced during the process of enterprise development. In addition, interviews with two resource persons, one in each country, were conducted to learn about their experiences while working with the enterprises. The resource persons in India and Nepal included a field staff and a skill development trainer, respectively. The qualitative data collected through FGDs was recorded using a voice recorder; they were then transcribed, translated and analysed following a thematic hierarchical approach. The data was collected between November 2015 and July 2017. In addition, we reviewed published and unpublished reports of the KSLCDI and other literature on entrepreneurship and socio-economic empowerment.

Key findings

Socio-economic empowerment of women in the KSL

The communities in the study area are linked through socio-cultural connections; families are connected through marriages across international borders in this landscape. Local communities follow a patriarchal system, and gender inequality and discrimination pose a serious challenge for women's participation in economic activities. Outmigration of adult male members is a common issue in the landscape, which increases women's drudgery (Pathak et al., 2017).

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Figure 2. Vegetable production by a Van Raji family in India

Photo credit: Uma Partap

In the study area, NTFP-based enterprises include those involving the Himalayan nettle (locally called *allo*), Indian butter-nut tree (*chyuri*), honey, medicinal plants and soapberry (*rittha*), among others. Agriculture-based enterprises are based on vegetables (both seasonal as well as off-season), fruits and pulses. During the first phase of the KSLCDI from 2013 to 2017, the programme provided technical and financial support to enterprises that were led by or employed women and marginalised social groups. This included providing a range of training programmes on producing and adding value to products; supplying necessary tools, equipment and materials; and supporting institutional strengthening for collective action. Furthermore, specific trainings were provided to enhance women's entrepreneurship capacity. A transboundary learning visit was also organised where women entrepreneurs from Nepal visited India and exchanged their experiences, both their successes as well as their challenges. Providing guidance and mentorship throughout was an essential aspect of the entrepreneurship-building process. The inputs of the KSLCDI were supplemented by other ongoing schemes in the landscape. The targeted interventions in the KSL were able to reach out to 1,176 households, among which

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378 households (32%) increased their income by 5 to 10% (Kotru et al., 2017). The positive outcomes of working with the following three groups in the landscape are elaborated below.

Mahila Prayas Swa-Shakti Swayatta Samanvit Vikas Cooperative (MPSSSVC), India: This women's cooperative was established in Jajurali, Uttarakhand, in 2006. Swati, a non-governmental organisation, supported the formation of this cooperative with 92 members from various Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the village. Members of the cooperative collect their vegetable produce at their collection centre in the village, grade their produce and then distribute the produce to the market. The cooperative charges a fee of INR 0.50 (USD 0.007) per kg of produce to cover the cost of transporting goods to the market. In addition, members contribute between INR 20 to 50 (USD 0.28–0.70) every month into a savings scheme that can then be borrowed at an interest rate of 1% per month for income-generating activities. Currently, the cooperative has transactions of over INR 10,000,000 (USD 145,000) per year. Through this collective action, women have reaped economic benefits while also being empowered in the social arena. The interventions increased the income of beneficiaries by 9%. Collective decision-making regarding the quantities and rates of products sold to traders helps increase the bargaining power of members of the cooperative.

Jai Maa Bhagwati Participatory Group (JMBPG), India: This group was formed in 2012 by women belonging to the Van Raji community in Kulekh, Uttarakhand. The Van Rajis have traditionally been nomadic hunters and gatherers found in the central Himalayan region of Uttarakhand and are one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities in India (Pandey, 2008). The KSLCDI programme worked with the group and other women from 169 Van Raji families to produce kidney beans, vegetables and bamboo handicrafts. As a result, many positive behavioural changes were observed among the Van Raji women. They each now have a bank account, a ration card and a voter identification card. They have also started to visit relevant government agencies to acquire necessary support from the various programmes offered to them.

Bhumiraj Allo Collection and Processing Centre (BACPC), Nepal: This centre, located in Naugad, Darchula district, is a community enterprise engaged in the production of fabric and products from Himalayan nettle. The centre started with 23 members in 2016 and grew over the years to a total of 76 members (75% of whom are women). The centre has promoted women's and men's participation in economic activities through skills development and the provision of materials. Trainings

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increased the participation of women in thread-making, knitting, sewing and weaving by 23%, 14%, 31% and 18% respectively (Adhikari et al., 2018). Twenty-five women members of the centre have reported increased cash income, earning Nepali rupees (NPR) 3,000-10,000 per month (USD 26-88) (Adhikari et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2019). The women now have a steady income source that they spend on household expenses and their children's education. Moreover, their income is greater than that of daily wage labourers.

Enabling factors for empowering women through entrepreneurship

Engaging with women entrepreneurs in the landscape has provided some valuable lessons on the enabling factors and challenges for women's empowerment through entrepreneurship. Four significant enabling factors were identified and are elaborated below.

Figure 3. Women from Naugad Rural Municipality participate in an international handicrafts fair in Kathmandu, Nepal

Photo credit: Rajendra Kumar Shakya

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Family support: Much of the KSL is generally patriarchal, and existing cultural and social norms restrict women from engaging in income-generating activities (Kadariya & Aro, 2015). Support from the family, particularly husbands and in-laws, is essential for women entrepreneurs to flourish. Successful married women entrepreneurs in the landscape were supported by their husbands who performed household tasks or accompanied them when they had to leave the village, along with mothers-in-law who attended to the household during their absence:

> **"I was reluctant to attend a training that was organised out of town. However, my mother-in-law took care of the children and all the household chores while I was away from home. Also, my husband accompanied me to the training."**
> *(48-year-old BACPC member, Naugad, Nepal)*

Social trust: Trust and reciprocity play a vital role in the effective functioning of collective action (Ostrom, 2000). The Mahila Prayas Cooperative and Bhumiraj Allo Centre were established by highly motivated leaders who demonstrated their entrepreneurial leadership to their respective communities. Their achievements were also recognised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, which further strengthened social trust. Most importantly, women in the community must be supportive of women entrepreneurs for their growth and development:

> **"Earlier, when she (cooperative leader) shared her idea about forming a group and selling vegetables in the market, the community joked that she wanted to be rich by selling a few kilos of vegetables. However, with her consistent persuasion, I reluctantly joined the group. Today we have made good progress, and I am happy that I joined the group."**
> *(43-year-old MPSSSVC member, Jajurali, India)*

Building trust in the community is essential for an enterprise to succeed as well as sustain success in the long run (Adhikari et al., 2018). The local project staff regularly visited beneficiaries and provided necessary support to resolve their issues. Regular in-person engagement with beneficiaries helped to build trust and gain family support (BSR, 2016). Moreover, the cooperatives developed transparent mechanisms for financial transactions and benefit-sharing. In India, the chairperson and treasurer presented details of financial transactions to members at monthly meetings. At the same time, they also shared information on available schemes and selected members who were suitable for those schemes in a participatory manner.

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Market linkages: Mountain communities are generally not aware of market opportunities because of limited communication infrastructure. This is further exacerbated for women who are generally less literate than men, and usually have less access to information technology and communications (FAO, 2018). After the Bhumiraj Allo Centre was linked with a Kathmandu-based social business company that ensured a buy-back guarantee of their products, the Centre provided women with a regular income-generating opportunity. Furthermore, the 'Kailash-Truly Sacred' brand created a niche identity which fetched a premium price for the women enterpreneurs' products.

> **"Traditionally, we used to process allo (Himalayan nettle) to make ropes and grain sacks for our use. After linking with SABAH (a social business organisation), we received training for weaving various clothing products. Now, I can make mufflers, caps, etc., which are sold in Kathmandu, and this has increased my family income."**
>
> *(36-year-old BACPC member, Naugad, Nepal)*

Figure 4. Products developed under the 'Kailash-Truly Sacred' transboundary brand

Photo credit: Rajendra Kumar Shakya

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Enabling policy environment: Government policies that support and encourage women entrepreneurs are crucial for empowering women through entrepreneurship. Women who are aware of government schemes can utilise them and start their own enterprises. The governments of India and Nepal have policies and schemes for promoting women in enterprises. In Nepal, the Ministry of Industry created the Women Entrepreneurship Development Fund (WEDF) which provides financial support to women entrepreneurs. In India, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) avails loan to farmers' groups without collateral. Similarly, the Bank has created the Tribal Development Fund (TDF) for supporting the livelihoods of landless tribal groups such as the Van Raji in Uttarakhand:

> **"The Gram Panchayat (local government) called us for a meeting where a representative of the local NGO explained to us about the schemes as well as conditions of NABARD. We consulted amongst ourselves and agreed to form a group. Through the scheme, we received seeds of various crops, training for sowing, and grading and packaging 'Munsiyari' kidney beans. All this has increased my income as well as improved food nutrition and reduced food expenses."**
>
> *(38-year-old woman, Kulekh, India)*

Persisting challenges

The lessons learnt from applying entrepreneurship as a socio-economic empowerment tool indicate that many challenges remain:

Family responsibilities: Usually, women are family caretakers and are expected to fulfil their family responsibilities above all else (KC, 2012; Yunis et al., 2019), particularly in the context of the KSL where male members migrate for jobs. In such situations, it is difficult for women to start and sustain an enterprise. In both India and Nepal, women are mostly responsible for cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water, taking care of children, looking after animals and agricultural tasks. All these responsibilities were reported as significant hindrances for participating in capacity building programmes as women generally have to leave their homes and villages to attend them:

> **"I have been involved in weaving and cutting *allo* fibre in BACPC. One time they organised a skill development training in Kathmandu, but I was unable to attend it because Kathmandu is far away and I had to take care of my two-year-old baby."**
>
> *(26-year-old BACPC member, Naugad, Nepal)*

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Social and cultural norms: Social and cultural norms can prevent women and marginalised groups from participating in economic activities (Mason & Smith, 2003) and also restrict women's mobility (Rankin, 2003), which further undermines their networking potential (Hanson, 2010). Women in the KSL were often reluctant to attend training programmes and trade fairs that were organised away from their homes. During the early phases of entrepreneurship, women were discouraged by their families and communities to join the enterprises. Women were delegated to manage household chores and were not perceived as capable entrepreneurs. Also, women belonging to low-caste groups faced more challenges than their high-caste counterparts:

> **"Because of our conservative mind-sets and family responsibilities, women are reluctant to travel alone to distant places; but they are more willing to travel if they are in a group or if any family member accompanies them. In our programmes, we have made arrangements for women to take their children or even husbands along. This sometimes adds to the financial costs of a programme."**
> *(Resource person, KSL-India)*

Illiteracy: Lack of education is one of the major barriers for women in pursuing entrepreneurship as it limits their access to information, knowledge and decision-making abilities (Bushell, 2008). During the discussion in Kulekh, India, participants described the challenges they faced while starting enterprises. In India, it was mandatory for group members to meet every month and maintain meeting minutes. For women from the Van Raji community, drafting meeting minutes was extremely difficult because all the group members were illiterate, and only two girls from their village had completed a secondary school-level education. During group discussions in both countries, participants shared that lower levels of literacy make them less confident in terms of going to the market, making sales, preparing bills and making payments. In interviews with resource persons, they described that enterprise development involves business registration, bookkeeping, making business plans and keeping records of sales and profit. All these duties require at least basic reading and writing abilities among entrepreneurs. When lacking, women are forced to depend on men who more likely possess these skills:

> **"It is easy to provide skills development trainings, such as designing and developing new products. However, it is difficult for me to train women with no literacy on bookkeeping, record keeping and finance, which is an integral part of entrepreneurship so that they can take full charge of**

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their business. They can calculate it in their head but cannot put it on paper or makes vouchers. Therefore, they shy away and give financial control to men."

(Resource person, KSL-Nepal)

Figure 5. Many group members are unable to write, as evidenced by their thumbprint 'signatures'

Photo credit: Binaya Pasakhala

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Lack of awareness of opportunities: Both in India and Nepal, there are governmental and private sector schemes to promote entrepreneurship amongst women, such as the Start-up Policy of the Government of Uttarakhand (GoUK, 2018) and the Women Entrepreneurship Development Fund of the Government of Nepal (MoI, 2012).
In KSL-Nepal, group discussion participants shared that they were unaware of relevant policies and schemes that provided credit to women to start an enterprise. Lack of access to information technology and extension services were described as major reasons for not knowing about those schemes. Moreover, the women were upset that they were unable to reap the economic benefits of high-value products available in their area:

> **"I heard over the radio that our government gives allowances to old people, but I did not know that the government also supports women's enterprises. Nobody has told us, and also none of my family members visit government offices to seek such information or support."**
> *(36-year-old BACPC member, Naugad, Nepal)*

Reflections

In developing countries, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have promoted entrepreneurship development and contributed to employment generation as well as poverty reduction (Cook, 2000). The governments of India and Nepal have implemented policies and programmes to mainstream women's economic development through their engagement in SMEs (Bushell, 2008; Goel & Rishi, 2012). Key interventions for the socio-economic empowerment of women include skills and leadership development, institutional strengthening, and technological and financial support for women's enterprises. Women entrepreneurs in the KSL had more control over their income expenditure, thus contributing to improved health and education for children and an overall positive impact on development (Buvinic, 2009). They are also able to enhance their bargaining powers and actively engage with government and non-governmental organisations. These findings are consistent with other studies on women entrepreneurship in the region (Roomi & Parott, 2008; Kungwansupaphan & Leihaothabam, 2016; Yunis et al., 2018).

The long-term sustainability of enterprises supported by external agencies is a serious concern (Sen & Majumder, 2015). In the KSL, the three enterprises supported by the programme continue to function as of today. This can be attributed to several factors. Linking community

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enterprises with relevant business companies has ensured the uptake of supplied products. Similarly, linking the enterprises with appropriate government schemes provided them with the required technical and financial support to ensure their continuity. Another factor contributing to their continuity is that these enterprises are currently performing within the limits of their technical and financial capabilities. Growing beyond this capability level may present further challenges in terms of resource procurement, funds management and institutional cohesion.

Despite government prioritisation of women's economic development, ownership of enterprises in the HKH countries is largely dominated by men, except in China where 64.2% of enterprises have some form of women's ownership (WB, 2019). In other HKH countries, women's ownership of enterprises remains less than half: 43.3% in Bhutan, 35.1% in Myanmar, 21.8% in Nepal, 12.7% in Bangladesh, 11.8% in Pakistan, 10.7% in India and 2.2% in Afghanistan. Widespread gender discrimination and inequality have restricted women's participation in economic activities (Kabeer, 2012). Restrictions on mobility, the onus of performing productive and reproductive roles, and the lack of access and control over resources are some common barriers women entrepreneurs face in the HKH region (Rankin, 2003; Roomi & Parott, 2008; Panta & Thapa, 2017). Most of these barriers are the outcomes of long-standing discriminatory gender norms (Gururani, 2002; Yunis et al., 2018).

The lessons from the study area indicate that socio-economic empowerment through entrepreneurship is possible, but additional interventions are required to ensure the growth and long-term sustainability of women-led enterprises. Increasing women's literacy rates through programmes that enhance school enrolment and retention of girl students is a priority. In addition, adult literacy programmes targeting women with a special focus on financial literacy skills are desirable. The promotion of collective action enhances the bargaining power of women entrepreneurs, particularly for the sale of perishable products. Increasing awareness of government and private sector schemes among women entrepreneurs can be achieved through various forms of media. Non-governmental and grassroots organisations can play a significant role to support women to access these schemes and enhance their entrepreneurial capacity. Availing women entrepreneurs of the prevalent market price also increases their bargaining capacity. Therefore, tools and mechanisms to provide such information, including SMS services and media broadcasts among others, must be available. Finally, promoting entrepreneurial networks among mountain communities offers an opportunity to develop and sustain women's entrepreneurial skills. In implementing such programmes, it is essential

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to note that the local context must be understood to avoid exacerbating existing hierarchies and hence, further oppressing women (Karim, 2008; Rankin, 2010; Sen & Majumder, 2015; Yousafzai et al., 2018).

In mountainous regions, gender disparity is one of the major issues that limits women from participating in entrepreneurial ventures. Women are not expected to actively participate in social and livelihood activities as they are considered to be nurturers and caretakers of the family and household assets. One of the KSLCDI's livelihoods strategies was to enhance the skills and entrepreneurial aptitudes of rural women so that they can start or participate in collective enterprises. They were provided with technical, financial and institutional support to achieve this goal. Family support, social trust, leadership and enabling policy environment are vital for women entrepreneurs to succeed.

Entrepreneurship can be an effective socio-economic empowerment tool to bring women to the forefront. However, women continue to face numerous challenges, particularly in mountainous regions, where limited access to services, communication and networks must be overcome. Both basic and financial literacy skills must be prioritised to overcome these challenges. Actions to address issues of access and communication include supporting collective action for selling products, raising awareness through various forms of media, and greater engagement of non-governmental organisations to provide support to women's groups. Connecting mountain communities through entrepreneurial networks can provide opportunities for sustaining mountain women's enterprises.

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