

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

“Human development, if not engendered, is endangered.” Preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) have shown that this strong claim, argued in the 1995 UNDP report of the Beijing World Conference on Women, is being taken up in Johannesburg. In this International Year of Mountains, it is therefore timely to ask: do women in mountain areas have concerns that differ from the concerns of women living in the plains? Are efforts to achieve sustainable development in mountain areas made with and for women as well as men?

Experience shows that the answer to both questions is: “yes – and no!” Women in the mountains and plains face discrimination no matter where they live. The difference is in the degree of discrimination and the ability of women to do something about it. Mountain women live in more remote areas; their challenges are multiplied many times compared to those faced by their sisters in the plains. Whether they collect water, fuel or fodder, go to a health center or send a girl child to school, it is that much more difficult. If women in the plains feel that policies ignore their needs, mountain women feel it all the more.

Mountain women’s concerns have been the subject of discussion in several major international forums since the 1970s. But the issue came up proactively on the global agenda only in the 1980s and 1990s, after the discussion on women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD). Because of this impetus, many things happened in mountain areas. More research and action were activated. Individuals and organizations began to pay attention to women’s specific needs. Understanding of mountain women’s realities internationally, by region, within nations, and in local communities has improved.

This is amply evidenced by the articles in the Development section of this issue, though some also underline setbacks, shortcomings, major obstacles and urgent needs. The lack of research pointed out in several articles in this section is reflected in the presence of only one article in the Research section that explicitly uses a gendered approach and investigates both men’s and women’s situations in a mountain environment. Some of the other research papers include consideration of women, for example by using sex-disaggregated data. But there is a general deficit in this area that needs to be addressed.

In an effort to support “gender mainstreaming” in the journal, MRD therefore encourages researchers to submit papers that address gender-related issues and include reflections on women in sustainable mountain development. The aim is not to pander to a fashionable topic in research and development, but to promote efforts to approach mountain issues from the perspective of both women and men. In the words of Kofi Annan in 1999, this will help prevent (mountain) women from becoming the “feel-good factors of international policy”.

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