

## **Report from the Women's Workshop of the Mountain “States-General” in Turin, Italy, 27 September 2001: “Women on the Climb”**

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## Report from the Women's Workshop of the Mountain "States-General" in Turin, Italy, 27 September 2001: "Women on the Climb"



"*Donne in Salita*" (Women on the Climb), a workshop dedicated to the women of Italy's mountain areas, was surely one of the most popular on the first day of the Mountain "States-General" held in Turin, Italy, from 27 to 29 September 2001, in preparation for IYM2002. The Mountain "States-General" was promoted by the National Union of Mountain Communities, Municipalities, and Institutions (UNCCEM) and brought together hundreds of stakeholders, policy makers, and local administrations from mountain areas around Italy. Numerous events and workshops were held on subjects from economy to politics, climate, and safety.

### Promoting the Global Mountain Women's Agenda

Around 70 participants including representatives of local administrations convened for "Women on the Climb," the first in a series of initiatives that will focus on mountain women, organized and promoted by the Italian Committee for the International Year of Mountains (IYM). The objectives of this workshop were the same as those adopted by the international organizations involved in promoting the Global Mountain Women's Agenda during the IYM, which will be addressed during the "Celebrating Mountain Woman" event in Kathmandu, in May 2002:

1. Give mountain women a platform to articulate their concerns and share experiences and ideas related to the future of mountain livelihoods and cultures, using the IYM as a vehicle.
2. Collect, present, and disseminate state-of-the-art knowledge on the situation of mountain women.

3. Create new coalitions, networks, and partnerships among mountain women to influence policies and issues.
4. Increase interaction between policy makers, entrepreneurs, media, civil society organizations, and mountain women.
5. Improve and increase the media's coverage of mountain women.

Valerio Prignacchi, Vice President of UNCCEM, opened the session, reconfirming the attention that his organization, made up of local administrations representing 4200 mountain municipalities, intends to give to women's issues throughout 2002. Manuela di Centa, the renowned Italian cross-country skier, Olympic gold-medallist, and testimonial of the Italian Committee for IYM2002, moderated the workshop presentations briefly presented below, as well as a series of "personal-experience testimonials" given by mountain women professionals and entrepreneurs invited to the workshop.

### Challenges for Italy

The 4 main speakers addressed some particularly urgent themes Italy's mountain women (and men) will need to address throughout the IYM and beyond.

Michela Zucca, anthropologist of the *Centro di Ecologia Alpina* (Centre of Alpine Ecology), Trento, discussed the growing problem of depopulation in mountain areas, citing difficulties faced by women such as disruption of traditional social structures and reduction of public services as one of the main causes. Dr Zucca went on to highlight the productivity of and opportunities for women in the mountains: For example, women statisti-

cally seem to be more proficient than their male counterparts at engaging in entrepreneurial activities, despite the relative absence of professional stability and the need to dedicate a large amount of personal free time to work activities. Such efforts in fact need to be reinforced and supported institutionally, both with facilities and funding, to ensure continuation of this positive trend and help stem the migratory patterns currently exposing mountainous areas to abandonment. The Centre of Alpine Ecology will continue to strengthen its focus on this issue during 2002, through promotion of mountain women's culture, by creating links between working women in the Alps and other mountainous regions of Italy and Europe, and by facilitating exchange of experience and information on how to benefit from available funds and entrepreneurial development initiatives.

Annalisa Cogo, President of the Italian Society of Mountain Medicine and a member of the Italian Alpine Club (CAI) Medical Commission, emphasized the additional need to guarantee adequate health care facilities and services for populations in mountains, and mountain women in particular, where territorial characteristics combined with demographic phenomena have formed enormous obstacles over recent decades. Major short-term objectives should be the improvement and the diffusion of a more efficient emergency service, including helicopter ambulance services, development of telemedicine initiatives, and dissemination of information for health care providers as well as for the public. To reach these goals, the collaboration of the Ministry of Health as well as of local government bodies (Regions,

Provinces, etc) and specialized organizations such as the CAI Medical Commission, the Italian Society of Mountain Medicine, and the National Institute of Mountain Research (INRM) will be sought.

Paola Ortensi, President of the association “*Donne in Campo*” of the Italian Confederation of Agriculturists, also reaffirmed that more and more mountain women are engaging in entrepreneurial activities such as organizing the increasingly popular farm holidays (agrotourism), small-scale cheese manufacturing, etc. Thanks to their enthusiasm and their desire to succeed, women can be credited with keeping mountain society full of life and work opportunities. In order to improve living and working conditions in mountain areas, however, Paola Ortensi suggested that the new revision of the Italian Mountain Law (94/97) include incentives and other support, not only for women. It is essen-

tial that the enormous variety of possible contributions provided by men and women—the true protagonists of mountain life—be highlighted during (and beyond) IYM2002. Indeed, 2002 was chosen as the Year of “Mountains” (and not “the Mountain”), thus emphasizing the need to respect the diversity and numerous realities that mountains present.

Maria Cristina Ronc, Archeologist of the Aosta Valley Regional Archaeological Museum and President of the Aosta Valley Section of Zonta Club International, addressed the relevance of culture as an important resource for mountain women’s practical and spiritual life, pointing out the regrettable absence of an observatory similar to that of Trentino in her valley, the Aosta Valley. Dr Ronc went on to illustrate regional statistics regarding female school attendance, career choices, and the presence of women with college-level education

in the workforce. The resulting figures show a substantial percentage of women in managerial positions in the Aosta Valley (36.46% of the total), whereas women tend to dominate the traditionally “cultural” occupational sectors in the region: museums, theaters, etc. Apart from the field of construction, where they are totally absent, women are equally present in all professional areas. Furthermore, there is a growing need to thoroughly analyze the trend toward overlapping or combined work activities, mainly between tourism and agriculture.

For more information on the proceedings of the workshop *Donne in Salita*, contact Beth Schommer (see following).

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