



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

An Initiative of the Austrian Presidency
of the Alpine Convention

WHY TO ACT?

Mountains cover approximately 24% of the earth surface and are home to approximately 12% of the overall world population, approximately half of them are women. Social, cultural and economic factors vary substantially among mountain areas worldwide. Nevertheless, mountain areas across the globe are facing common challenges: be it the vulnerability of ecosystems, food security, climate change, loss of biodiversity, water availability and demographic changes.

The same can be said for the role that women play in mountain areas. Despite the specific characteristics of each mountain area, women represent an essential part of mountain societies worldwide. Although there can be as many different experiences and perspectives on the role of women as there are mountains, cultures, communities and individuals, women are affected in specific ways by the developments taking place in mountain areas and are being called to tackle them.

Therefore, the essential role of women as well as the promotion of women empowerment and gender equality has to be put at the forefront in the debate on sustainable development in mountain areas. This approach will in turn be beneficial for all the people living in the mountains of the world.

Demography

- Promote better framework conditions in order to enable women's choices to stay in or reallocate to mountain areas
- Preserve public interest services in remote areas
- Ensure the conditions for access to a broad spectrum of health services

Culture

- Recognize the role that women play not only in the preservation and transmission of traditional knowledge, but also in contemporary mountain culture, arts and science, challenging at the same time discriminatory cultural practices

WHERE TO ACT?

Work & Education

- Create framework conditions for female access to labor markets targeted on education and competences
- Ensure the conditions for access to education at all levels
- Create adequate framework conditions in order to enable female entrepreneurship

Governance & Society

- Improve access to representation, not only political but also in relevant stakeholders' groups and associations
- Improve access of women to resources
- Improve access of women to land ownership and economic rights

TESTIMONIALS



Jane Goodall, Primatologist, Ethologist, Anthropologist and UN Messenger of Peace

Women play a tremendously important role in health, in education, in farming and of course in raising the next generation. It is extremely important helping girls to stay in the school up to puberty. Once women are educated and empowered they do have an immense influence on everything that goes on in the villages.

Markus Reiterer, Secretary General of the Alpine Convention

We need to establish the conditions for an adequate representation of women in all sectors of society. This is a core issue for empowerment and equality. Not only women, but all parts of societies in mountain areas and beyond can largely benefit by it.



Mónica Gabay, Deputy Coordinator of the RG 9.03 Forest History and Traditional Knowledge at the International Union of Forest Research Organization

Women in mountain areas contribute to mountain forest ecosystems beyond the conservation of environmental goods and services: they promote food security and are the reproducers of culture and tradition. There is an opportunity to enhance international governance to further support local women organizations, foster local added value, build capacity and share knowledge and lessons of experience.



Musonda Mumba, UN Environment

Though some issues are location-specific, we are facing similar challenges across mountain ranges worldwide linked to the interconnection between people, governance and environment. Women are an important element in this equation; they are both agents of change and guardians of tradition. If we look at the example of adaptation to climate change, we see that, for it to be effective, it needs to take into account social changes particularly from a gender perspective.



Tshering Yodin Sherpa, Center for Women in the Himalayas

Women in mountains are vulnerable due to several reasons. Amongst them we can mention a limited access to information as well as to economic assets, property and decision-making, an increased responsibility over others, less time for self-care and related health issues. It is therefore crucial to empower women with access to technical support, market, economic assets, information and knowledge.



Barbara Wülser, CIPRA International

Women are often not aware of the important role they play in mountain regions. This awareness must be transferred, and women must be acknowledged for what they do. In order to improve their perspectives, it takes infrastructures such as childcare, digitalisation, affordable building land, and educational institutions as well as "soft" factors, such as the opportunity to participate in politics and the economy. It takes "gender heroes", both men and women, who can be the pioneers of change. We need a change in perspective.



ABOUT THE ALPINE CONVENTION

The Alpine Convention is the first international treaty on the protection and sustainable development of an entire mountain range. Its contracting parties (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia, Switzerland and the EU) agreed to embrace the economic, environmental, social and cultural dimensions of life in the Alps.

The Fifth Report on the State of the Alps, an Alpine-wide study dedicated to the topic of demography, carried out in 2015, has shown that, although in many alpine areas there are more women than men with completed university degrees, their employment levels are still not comparable with male ones. On the other hand, results of the analysis show that women have the potential to be the forerunners of sustainable development and innovation and their role is crucial for the future development in the Alps.

The Alpine Convention promotes the inclusion of the issue of the role of women in mountain areas in the debate on sustainable development. The first event in this respect took place under the Austrian Presidency of the Alpine Convention in spring 2017. At this event, a Declaration was elaborated that calls for improving women's access to the labour market, education and policy. Following the results of the Conference, a permanent exchange on the topic was since carried out in several international events, in cooperation with different mountain areas worldwide.

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