Plenary 5: Governance and gender

The session reinforced that the fundamental challenges and questions at the heart of the gender debate remain contentious. Panelists had different views on the need for quota systems for women in politics, solutions for capacity building and gender empowerment, and the pros and cons of matrilineal and patrilineal societies.

Chief challenges of gender and governance

- The conflict between women’s role in the household and their expectations of increased engagement in decision making and politics
- The inadequacy of GDP as a development indicator because it does not take into account household and caregiving activities
- The attitudes of men

“Gender will be understood better if we try to understand what life is without gender understanding.”

Plenary 6: Livelihoods and gender

The panel debated on the impacts of globalization, marketization, and privatization on gender identity, the feminization of agriculture, and shifts in gender identity. It highlighted the importance of decision making, land tenure, and enhanced engagement of farmers with markets; and noted that globalization also presents new opportunities for women.

“We do not want to restrict ourselves to micropolitics at the household level, but to do better in governance at the macro level.”

Areas for research

How do mountain women engage in markets? What are the constraints and opportunities for women’s leadership and engagement with different institutions? How does the younger generation relate to and participate in changes in the environment, mobility, consumption patterns, and gender issues?

Food for thought

- Increased connectivity has improved market linkages.
- The traditional roles of women have been changing with new opportunities, but the changes are more related to their ability to use their minds, agility, and strength to diversify their social enterprises.
- Migration is an option for dealing with food security at times when small-scale agriculture seems impractical relative to faster means of economic intervention such as focus on exports and seasonal wage labour.
- Research is needed to ensure that the feminization of agriculture is accompanied by feminization of agricultural technologies.

“Rural women never think they are poor, indeed they are not; it is we as outsiders who label them as poor. We really need to be conscious of this when we speak on their behalf.”

“Every change brings new opportunities, but we have to start bringing women into activities that are valued by the larger social structure.”

“With migration come added responsibilities for women in dividing their time between food production and economic growth. If men are supportive, the family prospers.”

“If every one of us took the responsibility for teaching our children that the future will be a gender equal future, society would change. Mindsets must change at the household level.”
“We all want good leaders, good government, social justice, respect for fundamental human rights, and access to basic needs. This sounds simple, yet the hardship many of our people face to get this is difficult and unfair.”

“It is alarming to learn that the number of rural women living in poverty has doubled since 1970. It is critical that we take action now and empower women by including more women in decision making. This conference has been instrumental in educating the participants on how we can and should make this a reality.”

“At this conference we have been highly successful in setting new agendas for gender transformative change, including networking and tool setting, and in calling for mountain perspectives in global and national agendas.”

- Dr Christoph Beier, Vice Chair of Management Board, GIZ

“Networking can’t substitute for good work, but good work can’t exist without networking either.”

Ten years ago we celebrated; here we seriously worked.”

Eklabya Sharma, Director of Programme Operations, ICIMOD, praised the very content-oriented conference. He noted that:

- Attention to gender is needed at the highest policy levels in the region.
- The specific socio-cultural and ecological conditions of mountains must be considered.
- Enabling conditions are needed for change for women and farmers on the ground.
- Feminization-related issues arising from men’s out-migration require special attention.
- Networking and media engagement are vital to raise awareness.

GEM launched
Anja Rasmussen, Head of Integrated Knowledge Management, ICIMOD, launched an initiative to create a Gender Environment Mountain (GEM) Network.

“Networking can’t substitute for good work, but good work can’t exist without networking either.”

Conference Declaration
Honourable Lyonpo Thakur S Powdyel, Minister of Education and Chair of the National Commission for Women and Children, Bhutan, unveiled a video of the declaration recited by participants.