Mountain women of the world
Shaping change for the common good
# Contents

**Acknowledgements**  iv  
**Introduction**  1  
**Interview approach**  2  
**Voices of mountain women**  5  
  - Sources of strength and resilience  6  
  - The pathway forward  8  
  - Solidarity in action  10  
**Conclusions**  12  
**Bibliography**  13
Acknowledgements

This booklet is only possible because of the time and dedication of all the mountain women who shared their stories. The different experiences and insights shared by the mountain women across the world are the heart of this booklet. We thank Analía, Ariadna, Belén, Berta, Betiana C., Betiana M., Betty, Camila, Carla, Concepción, Cristina B., Cristina P., Daiana, Doña, Eleonor, Elvira, Eulogia, Fabiola, Fernanda, Flavia, Florencia, Gisela, Guadalupe, Heliana, Hilda, Julia, Julieta, Karen, Lorena, Mabel, Marcelina, Margarita L.M., Margarita M., María C., María G., Maria R., Mariel, Mariela, Nancy, Natalia, Nelly, Popi, Romina, Roxana, Sofía, Soledad, Ursula, Vanesa, Vanina, Vidalva and Wenitzate from Argentina; Adelaida, Alaya, Ana, Angelica P., Angelica Y., Camila, Chabela, Chelsey, Cristina, Dionisia, Elena, Elizabeth, Elsa, Evelyn, Fausta, Francisca, Georgette, Isabel C., Isabel M., Itzel, Javiera P., Javiera T., Juana H., Juana Z., Katy, Loreto, Luisa, Marcela, María F., María A., María M., María V., Milady, Nicole, Palmenia, Patricia B.M., Patricia S.B., Paz, Pilar, Rosa, Ruth, Stephanie, Susana, Tamara, Viviana, Ximena and Zoe from Chile; Alessandra, Anna, Cecilia, Chiara R., Chiara S., Chiera S., Debora, Elena, Eleonora, Giulia, Idà, Karin, Lucía, María, Mariela, Matilde and Paola from Italy; Albright, Alia, Antonela, Bernadette, Caroline, Cheptoo, Doris, Dorothy K.E., Dorothy I., Esther, Eunice, Faith W., Fridah M., Fridah W., Janet, Kellen, Mercy K., Mercy M., Paustine, Prister, Purity, Stella, Win and Winfred from Kenya; Aida, Aidai, Ainura, Altnyn, Anais, Anara, Baktygul, Bermet, Burulbubu, Cosul, Gulbar, Gulkayir, Gulmira, Gulushai, Irina, Janyl, Jibeck, Jumagul, Kunduz, Kyal, Madina, Mahabat, Nasiba, Nurgul, Nuria, Parizat, Patila, Poza, Zamira, Zauresh, Zumratzan, and the other mountain women who preferred to remain anonymous, from Kyrgyzstan; Alicia C.C., Alicia L.Q., Alicia Q.T., Alison, Americo, Carmen C.A., Carmen P.S., Cecilia, Celia C., Celia M., Delfina, Delia, Domitila, Elena, Elizabeth, Emilia, Ernestina, Fortunata, Francisca, Genara, Geroma, Helen, Ima, Janneth, Judith, Julia, Julieta, Lidia, Lucy, Margarita, Maribel, Marisol, Marta, Maura, Mery, Octavía, Pacesa, Petrona, Rebeca Q.M., Rebeca T.M., Rosalia, Sandra C.Y., Sandra P.T., Sonia, Teodocia, Valeriana, Victoria, Virginia A.D.Q., Virginia J.L. and Virginia M. from the Plurinational State of Bolivia; Alina, Amisha, Anita, Beijing, Billi, Bimala, Danu, Dikkie, Divya, Doma, Durga, Fula, Gaj, Hari, Indra, Jeevyan, Jyoti, Kanchee, Kanya, Kopila, Kuma, Lal, Laxmi A., Laxmi Y., Lucky, Man, Mana, Maya P., Maya S., Mingmar, Muna, Neha, Nila, Nirma, Palti, Paru, Prakriti, Puspa, Putali, Ramlila, Reny, Rexia, Ritika, Riya, Saba, Sangita, Sapania, Sarita, Sen, Shanti, Sita, Soniya, Sunita, Tila, Tom, Tuk, Usha and Yashoda from Nepal; Agnes, Asha J.A., Asha M., Denisi, Ekeney, Enjoylight, Esther, Furaha, Gift, Grace, Heavenlight, Juliana, Marry, Matrona, Neema M., Rehema L., Rehema P., Rose, Sescilia, Siriel, Tini and Tumaini from the United Republic of Tanzania.

Thanks are extended to the in-country researchers Alia Datoo, Ada Rasulova, Alessandra Segantín, Ekeney Njau, Muna Gurung, Patricia Breuer Moreno, Popi Spagnuoli, Belén Escudero and Stephanie Carmody.

Research coordination: Patricia Breuer Moreno
Research elaboration and text authors: Elena Ghizzo and Ria Ryan
Samantha Abear, Sara Manuelli, Fabio Parisi, Zoe Cuthbert, Stefania Corrado, Yuna Lee, Julie Cheek and Rosalaura Romeo, FAO/Mountain Partnership Secretariat, provided extensive inputs to earlier drafts.

Editing: Clare Pedrick

Graphic design and layout: Roberto Cenciarelli
Introduction

On the occasion of International Mountain Day 2022, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), together with the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and the Feminist Hiking Collective, published the study *Mountain women of the world: Challenges, resilience and collective power*. Based on in-depth interviews with 313 mountain women in Argentina, Chile, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the United Republic of Tanzania, the publication provided insight on life for women in mountain areas in a post-COVID-19 world.

Building on the challenges and opportunities identified in the 2022 study, this booklet focuses on mountain women’s own insights on resilience, as well as on their ideas for the pathway forward and actions that are needed to support their collective work. The booklet draws on their testimonies and highlights their stories of change, transformation and solidarity.

A contribution to the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions 2023-2027, this booklet aims to ensure that the voices of mountain women are heard and considered in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically its Sustainable Development Goal 5 on ensuring gender equality.
Interview approach

To interview mountain women across eight countries, the Feminist Hiking Collective teamed up with researchers from the Mountain Women of the World network, a transnational group of mountain women co-founded by Empowering Women of Nepal, the Feminist Hiking Collective, Kilimanjaro Women, las Cholitas Escaladoras de Bolivia, Mujeres a la Cumbre, Topchu Art Group and Women Who Hike-Africa.

Between June and August 2022, the researchers spoke with 313 women – 52 in Argentina (Mendoza, Salta and Catamarca), 48 in Chile (Coyaique, Pucon, Curacautin, Santiago de Chile, Putre and Parinacota), 17 in Italy (Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Emilia Romagna), 25 in Kenya (Chogoria and Naromoru), 58 in Nepal (Tilche, Pokhara and Solokhumbu), 39 in Kyrgyzstan (Issy-Kul, Chon Kemin Chuy and Chon Alay Osh-y), 51 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia (Alto Mullini, Pinaya Ilimuni, Chunayi, Tuni Condoriri and Sajama), and 23 in the United Republic of Tanzania (Arusha, Moshi and Macham). The majority of the interviewees were aged between 30 and 50.

The interviewees were identified through the researchers’ respective networks in each country. Individuals who self-identified as a woman living and/or working in mountains were invited to participate. Although for the purposes of this research the focus was on mountain women, it is acknowledged that gender-based discrimination is also faced by gender non-conforming, transgender and queer people in mountain settings.

It is also acknowledged that gender-based discrimination intersects with multiple forms of discrimination, such as that based on race, disability, class and caste, age, religion and sexual orientation, among others. The researchers recognize that overlapping forms of oppression are connected and reinforce each other, which increases vulnerability, and that any effort to end discrimination and violence must take this intersectional approach into consideration (FAO, 2023).

Prior to speaking with the mountain women, the researchers developed a set of semi-structured questions, together with FAO and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, to guide the conversations. The researchers were trained in dialogue facilitation and video recording before conducting the interviews. The research process began with a research methodology development initiative involving the Mountain Women of the World network members, together with the development of a guidance document, key principles to adhere to for privacy, safety and safeguarding, and training in both dialogue facilitation and video recording.
The interviews were mostly conducted in person, either in the homes of the mountain women, in the buildings of mountaineering organizations, or in outdoor community spaces. In some instances, interviews were held via online video call platforms. At other times, interviewees responded to the interview questions in writing and shared their responses with the research team. The interviews were conducted in English, Gurung, Italian, Kyrgyz, Nepali, Spanish and Swahili. The non-English interviews were then translated.

This booklet provides an analysis of ten interviews with mountain women for each of the eight focus countries, and specifically of their responses to the following questions:

- What are your sources of strength? What helps you to face problems and difficulties?
- How do you think women who live and/or work in the mountains can be stronger?
- How do you think the international community, including institutions, organizations, networks and governments, can better support mountain women?

The analysis of each question is accompanied by a series of direct quotes from the mountain women interviewed. The 80 interviews were selected collectively by the in-country researchers, who chose 10 interviews from each focus country, based on the diversity of experiences expressed, the geographical location of the interviews, and the insights provided. Although the research process that led to publication of the first report and of this booklet involved 313 interviewees, this booklet focuses on insights that emerged from 80 interviews as outlined above. This methodology was chosen to reflect a diversity of experiences, voices and insights, and to facilitate the elaboration of the analysis, while taking into account restraints on resources.
Voices of mountain women
Sources of strength and resilience

What are your sources of strength? What helps you to face problems and difficulties?

The sources of strength identified as important for them by the women interviewed included strengthening their relationship and connection with their territory. This was especially important in mountain regions with a challenging climate, many of which were based in arid environments with high plateaus and suffered from water scarcity. Indigenous mountain women highlighted the fundamental importance of the land and of Indigenous communities belonging to the territories they inhabit.

Other sources of strength included forming networks to train and to climb mountains together, forming support groups and welfare groups to facilitate this process, sharing in times of need and building relational support, including community economics, and sharing practices of autonomous food production, as well as the creation and sale of art and handicrafts.

I think we can support ourselves by strengthening networks. As Indigenous People, we are one and the same, what is nature, its immensity, and the mountains. We take care of our Pachamama, our Hoiri Paw (Mother Earth). We take care of her because she gives us everything.

The mountain has given me the opportunity to educate the women who come here, to share this way of life with other people, to share my Mapuche culture, the care of the forest, of the water.

Isabel, Chile

Milady, Chile
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I pooled together funds by reaching out to friends in the international community and bought food supplies to distribute among my network. Mountain women can be stronger and support each other by coming together and saving up for alternative means of income like business and agriculture.

We, the native peoples here in Socoroma, just like we continue to do with the seeds we have, have been able to maintain good health; young people start farming and that has been favourable for us because it allows us to carry out cultural transfer.

I found the training [with Empowering Women of Nepal] really difficult because I am shy. I was also away from my daughter and mother and divorced from my husband. I was depressed at the time, but there were so many women and girls like me that were there. I met with them and I talked to them, which made me feel lighter. After the training, I started working as a porter. My friends, Lucky and Dicky, always encouraged me, and after I took training there, I know who I am and what the importance of life is. I am more confident now. Also, I finally managed to become a guide and have been a guide for 17 years now. The experience at 3 Sisters Trekking and my training there has been a great motivation for me. They have given many women the opportunity to become mountain guides.

I work with mountain women in art. The area of my activity is the protection of women’s rights, where the main tool is art.

Photos courtesy of the Mountain Women of the World network.
The pathway forward

How do you think women who live and/or work in the mountains can be stronger?

The most frequently voiced insight to have emerged from the interviews was the desire of mountain women from different backgrounds to be more united and connected. Many women spoke of the importance of the sense of togetherness created by spending time with other women in mountainous areas to train. They also commented on the value of forming networks of support between mountain women to assist each other during times of need during the pandemic, and of helping each other to have better access to livelihoods. The essence of this idea can be summarized in a quote from Asha Juma from Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania: “We should become a source of strength for each other.”

I am part of a local network of mountain women with different passions, like naturopaths as well as holistic healers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the group remained connected. The women’s circle went online and connected with women who were stuck in cities. Often, difficult situations bring the best out of you and build collective autonomy. It is important that after moments of crisis we don’t go back to individualistic and ‘easier’ ways.

Elena, Italy

I lost my partner in the mountains. I reacted with resilience, continuing to go to the mountains and formed collaborations during the pandemic, based on relational support. To face challenges, we need more support amongst people in mountain territories – more connection.

Marta, Italy
We want to make the women here feel motivated and even feel good so that they have more knowledge of the mountains that can be climbed.

Today, after the pandemic, women have realized that they needed spaces for themselves. We are realizing that if we do not take care of the spaces and do not respect nature, we will continue to become a society [that is] even more individualistic and sick.

I want to bring women closer so that they feel that they are all protagonists of their own lives and not look for a stereotype, or follow something to be somebody or look like somebody. And I believe that this network (Mountain Women of the World) will include all those women who sometimes do not feel perhaps represented or supported by other spaces, organizations or institutions.

Women should come together and work together, either collectively or through a registered NGO or cooperative.

Photos courtesy of the Mountain Women of the World network.
Solidarity in action

How do you think the international community, including institutions, organizations, networks and governments, can better support mountain women?

Mountain women shared their reflections on how they believe the international community can support mountain women across different geographical locations. Their ideas included implementing a community-led, context-sensitive approach in any initiative that involves mountain women. They noted the devastating impacts of resource extraction practices in their territories as well as of various stakeholders asserting their power and dominance, disrespecting the leadership and autonomy of local communities.

The women highlighted the need to listen to the experiences of women and all other structurally excluded identities, with specific attention paid to intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination. Other themes that emerged were the importance of nurturing spaces and opportunities for strengthening women’s collective power, embracing sustainable tourism practices, supporting women’s economic autonomy and local opportunities, and making funding, training and economic opportunities available and accessible to mountain women.

The need to focus on mountain protection is a recurring conviction expressed during the interviews. To a large extent, this urgent desire to protect the environment and live more sustainably emerges from experiences of extreme climatic changes, particularly seen in the mountain regions that are home to the mountain women interviewed. Many of the women reported changes in the frequency of landslides, melting glaciers and variations in extreme weather conditions.

Access to and availability of training and education is a key topic voiced by many women, along with spaces and opportunities to come together as mountain women, connect deeply, develop collaborations, share knowledge and wisdom, and learn from each other’s experiences. Strengthening economic justice for mountain women is also a core recommendation, together with greater efforts to end gender-based violence and harassment through support to lighten the burden of providing unpaid care faced by many mountain women in different highland locations.

Until now, the training that we as mountain women have been doing has all come out of our pocket, that is, everything is privately financed, and the women who want to be updated or take specific courses have been doing it like this, at least from where I speak – that is the women from Mendoza, professionals who work in the mountains, for example as guides and porters.

Popi, Argentina
Regarding economic issues, it would be good if the planning came from the territories, where the needs are clear, that the governments plan with a global vision, incorporating the actors that are in the territories. Government and international support is often not useful: they do not know the Mapuche community and the rural community. They do not know the state of the roads, the state of the families and they plan investments that are not viable. Territorial planning should be demanded, or at least to know the reality of the Mapuche communities.

For the women I work with, who are mostly shepherds, I think that tourism is trying to develop more right now, but it is a tourism that has to be very communal; and the problem is that if you involve the government or international cooperation, there is a long history of not considering the communities’ own interests, and there is no understanding of the conflict dynamics that exist within the same communities or between them, which comes from a very long history of territorial displacement. So, when you do cooperation, you have to be very careful who you talk to - how you get the data, let’s say - to understand what is needed, what the different parts of the community need, and where those resources that you create are going to go.

By recognizing the efforts of the women, NGOs can support them by buying their products and also referring or recommending climbers to buy from them, as well as supporting them with education on financial literacy, like savings and investment that can help women become financially independent. Also, supporting the women's groups who are turning towards farming, and with education on effective farming techniques and production of healthy produce that can support the community health and resources.
Conclusions

Although in many cases the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the structural exclusion and discrimination of women in mountains, it also led to the rise of support networks and collective action. While the differences between their regions, languages, cultures and individual experiences are many, just as numerous are the similarities between mountain women’s hopes and desires for the pathways to shift towards a better future for the common good of themselves, their communities and the mountains in which they live and work.

Insights to emerge from interviews highlight the importance of healing and regenerating people’s relationship with one another, with the way food is cultivated and produced, with the way mountain dwellers earn their livelihoods, and the way that society organizes itself.

The following is a list of recommendations made during the interviews for action by the international community to support the collective power and autonomy of mountain women:

- Strengthen, sustain and promote accessibility to and availability of livelihood opportunities for mountain women.
- Ensure accessibility to and availability of mechanisms to address gender-based violence and harassment, including in the context of informal work.
- Recognize the rights and cultures of Indigenous communities, including the right to land.
- Develop, sustain and promote accessibility and availability of education and training opportunities for mountain women.
- Develop, sustain or strengthen avenues of care, including social security provision and childcare, for mountain women and communities.
- Work in partnership with and in support of communities, sustain the development of networks, and ensure stakeholders’ work in local communities is not extractive, both in terms of resources and knowledge.
- Make flexible, core funding available and accessible to develop and sustain networks and the collaboration of mountain women across different geographical locations.
- Fund projects and initiatives that work at the intersection between gender and climate justice.
- Sustain initiatives that strengthen mentorship, training, knowledge-sharing and economic opportunities for mountain women by mountain women.

Mujeres a la Cumbre and Mountain Women of the World network climb Mount Aconcagua, Argentina ©Patricia Breuer Moreno
Bibliography

FAO. 2023. *Practical guide for the incorporation of the intersectionality approach in sustainable rural development programmes and projects.* Santiago. [https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2823en](https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2823en)
This booklet is published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, together with the Feminist Hiking Collective – a non-profit organization and transnational hub for feminist hikers, and a member of the Mountain Partnership. It builds on the challenges and opportunities identified in the 2022 study *Mountain women of the world: Challenges, resilience and collective power* on life for women in mountain areas in a post-COVID-19 world.

Based on in-depth interviews with 313 mountain women in Argentina, Chile, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the United Republic of Tanzania, this booklet focuses on mountain women’s own insights on resilience, as well as on their ideas for the pathway forward and actions that are needed to support their collective work. The booklet draws on their testimonies and highlights their stories of change, transformation and solidarity.

A contribution to the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions 2023-2027, this booklet aims to ensure that the voices of mountain women are heard and considered in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically its Sustainable Development Goal 5 on ensuring gender equality.