

**A Report from**  
**“In Praise of Mountain Women”**  
**to**  
**“Celebrating Mountain Women”**  
**Bhutan, October 1—4, 2002**  
*The International Year of the Mountain*

On August 17, 2002 in Abingdon, Virginia forty-eight women from five Appalachian states gathered for a workshop “From Story-telling to Policy-Making” to create the contents of this report. They asked Renda Keith and Anne Leibig to carry this report to Bhutan.

**OUR VOICES**

In Praise of Mountain Women is a grassroots women’s organization working in the Appalachian Mountains of North America. We have a fourteen-year history of listening to women’s stories and creating processes to help women take the first steps in self-realization. This has involved local and regional gatherings of hundreds of women.

In Praise of Mountain Women has a process to listen to women in our challenge to bring their voices to the Bhutan Gathering. As we evaluated each *In Praise of Mountain Women* event, it became more and more evident that the process we used worked. It was clear to us that how we worked together felt comfortable. Over the years we have struggled and developed a way of being together that gives structure and support in a nurturing and goal-oriented way. But just what was this process? Our answer came to be known as "the recipe."

**Opening**  
**Ground Rules**  
**Roles**  
**It (the Agenda)**  
**Evaluation**  
**Closing**

For more information see ***Our Book***  
 by the Roundtable of  
 In Praise of Mountain Women

What follows are our requests, suggestions, and pleadings to the nations of the world to promote the continued development of women and their families of the mountain regions of the world. We ask that you also listen to the silences of women who, for whatever reason, could not speak.



## **NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIROMENT**

As Mountain women, we are grounded in the earth. We draw our strength from our mountains. We create communities in our cities, towns, and hollers. From this land, we grow food to feed our families. Our mountains sustain us and nurture us physically, emotionally and spiritually. In this, we feel bonded with our sisters in all the mountain regions of the world.

As women of Appalachia, we call on the nations of the world to help sustain our Natural Resources and Environment.

- We recognize that the United States of America is the #1 polluter in the world and we consume a large percentage of the worlds resources. We apologize of the harm that the United States has contributed to this over usage. We pledge, as mountain women, to work to change these policies.
- Decisions concerning our natural resources should be made on the community level.
- Economic Development must always mean Sustainable Economic Development.
- The power to provide economic development needs to be a shared community power, regardless of who owns the land. Decisions need to be for the economic health of the community.
- Corporations who established businesses need to be accountable to local communities and built for the best interest of the people who live here now and for the future generations.
- Build no more bombs. Our mountains have had enough death and destruction.
- Because the mountains of the world provide the water resources needed by people to live, we also ask that this natural resource and others like it be preserved and protected like our Appalachian Clinch River.

## **HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

As women of Appalachia, we remain in constant vigil over the health and well being of our families and communities. This we also have in common with women the world over. To help sustain the health and well being of our global families and communities we implore the nations of the world to:

- Provide more funding for programs and education regarding choices for women and families that promote dignity and that value family life.
- Recognize that mothers and fathers give birth to babies. Encourage paternity testing when appropriate.
- Provide equal access to health care that is affordable.
- De-stigmatize, decriminalize and re-medicalize the disease of addiction
- Create a women's model of addiction treatment
- Prioritize the uniting of addicted mothers and their children
- Support women and their unique work of pregnancy, labor, delivery and care of babies especially in isolated rural communities.
- Provide monetary, emotional, social spiritual and physical well being for pregnant and post-labor women by other women they can trust.
- Honor and support the work of midwives

- Promote and support women healing women who experience sexual abuse and trauma.
- Create policies to wipe out sexual abuse and revictimization
- Provide vouchers for families for personal needs items.

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

As women of Appalachia, we are aware of the differences between work and a job. Like our sisters in other mountain regions, we know how much we work to keep our families and communities together. We ask the nations of the world to:

- Honor the work that women do both inside and outside the home.
- Provide equal job training opportunities
- Promote sustainable viable job opportunities for women within their communities that are developed by women
- Create these opportunities that will preserve the beauty, culture, ecology and environment of the mountain regions of the world.
- Provide transportation
- Pay women who stay home to raise their children either by choice or necessity
- Provide a living wage for people in every country of the world.

## **LEGAL, POLITICAL, AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

As mountain women, we struggle within the boundaries of our legal and political systems. Human rights are not afforded to all the people of the world. We are well aware that women and children of many nations are not asked to the table of justice. We implore the nations of the world to:

- Honor the International Declaration of Human Rights.
- Bring women to the table of legal, political and human rights and to make them feel safe and secure so they can truly raise their voices.
- Maintain local decision making in political arenas where women can feel free to step into that arena.
- Create policies that enable women to become change agents by developing self-esteem and inner power.
- Develop policies that welcome diversity.
- Break down the barriers that separate men and women in struggles of power.
- Develop policies that welcome diversity.
- Allow the individual rights of self-determination.

## **CULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE**

As mountain women, we treasure the stories, traditions, and cultures that are unique to our region. Too much of our past is being eaten away, as we tend to deify advanced technology. While we affirm the necessity of these advances, we devalue a trade-off of our self-identity. We ask the nations of the world to maintain and continue to value our inner knowledge by:

- Balancing the old and the new in arts, technology and education
- Affirming girls and teaching men to affirm their daughters.

- Stopping the violence of self - physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Affirming stories of women struggling and triumphing so that girls can help themselves through example in their own hard times.
- Offering intergenerational support systems.
- Empowering religious experiences for women.
- Fostering the development of women's spiritual traditions
- Promoting women's techniques to heal the effects of trauma in their lives
- Equalizing education for girls and boys
- Creating cultural history courses in schools
- Creating a women's center in each community
- Developing curriculum that accepts all people, all races, all cultures
- Making a time, space and place for traditional arts and crafts to be taught and celebrated
- Maintaining cultural, intergenerational, gender-conscious values in curriculums, at all levels
- Providing professional development in a changing world
- Balancing the old with the new-more "field" work in learning
- Teaching women from birth how to make independent decisions about their lives.
- Creating opportunities for women to come together to share their stories and to be strong together
- Developing educational agendas for young men and women on the need for equal respect
- Establishing mobile learning centers that are alternative programs that help women complete their education.
- Teach from the earliest grades skills needed for healthy relationships including the values of respect equality, good communication and conflict resolution. (Best practice of this in the United States is Head Start)

This report is respectfully submitted by:

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**The Cover.** On August 17, women brought to our meeting items expressing life in the Appalachian Mountains. Margaret Gregg, a fabric artist, created a quilted collage banner from these gifts, to bring to Bhutan. The cover is a photograph of the banner. Margaret can be reached at: 203 Gravel Hill Rd., Limestone TN. 37681, USA. Phone: 423-257-3875. E-mail: [margaretgregg@wireco.net](mailto:margaretgregg@wireco.net)

