

Gender and forests in a changing landscape

Understanding women's participation in forestry in Nepal

Policy brief



Photo by David Gritten

Key messages

- Opportunities offered by existing gender-responsive policies, strategies and frameworks are not being utilized effectively as women remain under-represented in planning and decision-making.
- The Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) needs to further enhance social inclusion and gender-focused programmes in the forestry sector.
- Increase the impact of the Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy through institutional capacity development at the national and subnational levels to promote gender equality in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GESI.

Background

Nepal is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The government has created a complementary national legal framework to protect women's rights and promote gender equality in the forestry sector. Since the emergence of community forestry in Nepal, there has been gradual progress towards recognizing gender equity through laws, policies and strategies governing the forestry sector (Table 1). Currently, about 1.45 million households, or approximately 35 percent of Nepal's population, are involved in community forestry programmes, including 18 000 community forestry user groups (CFUGs) (USAID Nepal 2012).

Although women's participation in CFUG executive committees has gradually increased to 31 percent, it has not reached the target of 50 percent set out in the Community Forestry Guidelines (2009). To encourage and empower women's involvement in forestry further, the Department of Forests developed the concept of women-only CFUGs; the initial purpose was to hand over smaller and degraded areas of forest land to them.

Box 1. Community forestry in Nepal

Total number of CFUGs	18,000
Total community forestry area (ha)	1,664,918
Total number of household members	2,194,350
Women-only CFUGs	1,035
Total number of household members covered by women-only CFUGs	95,955

Source: USAID Nepal (2012).

There is increasing anecdotal evidence that women-only CFUGs have contributed to improvements in forest cover and maintained better transparency, communication and accountability in financial management and governance. Currently, more than 1 000 FUGs are being managed solely by women (Buchy and Rai 2008; Jhaveri 2013) (Box 1).

This brief describes how gender perspectives are integrated in Nepal's forest plans and policies in terms of women's representation, participation and access to decision-making in forest use and management. It also highlights the key challenges in mainstreaming gender aspects in forest policies and practices, and outlines recommendations to promote gender mainstreaming further in the forestry sector.

Gender concerns in forest policies

Nepal's evolving community forestry sector has laid the groundwork for facilitating integration of gender-inclusive strategies and policies. The forestry sector's gender mainstreaming process is a relatively good example of this activity in the region. It is amplified by the strong presence of the Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN) and the MoFSC's GESI strategy and Gender, Poverty and Social Equity (GPSE) monitoring framework.

Nepal's accomplishments include the appointment of gender focal points at ministerial and departmental levels within the MoFSC, and the integration of GPSE monitoring framework indicators into the community forestry database system to record gender-disaggregated data.

Despite the progress on promoting gender parity in government policies through the GESI strategy and the GPSE monitoring framework, more efforts are needed to address the following key challenges to further the thrust.

- With women occupying only 3 percent of positions, the current composition of staff within the MoFSC is much lower than the quota of at least 33 percent advocated by the government, showcasing acute gender imbalance.
- Women are under-represented in planning and decision-making, despite the opportunities offered by the GESI strategy. For example, the quota of female members in CFUG executive committees has gradually increased to 31 percent, but has not reached the government's prescribed target of 50 percent.
- The annual budget to undertake gender-focused programmes is inadequate. For example, less than 1 percent of the MoFSC's budget was allocated to mainstream the GESI strategy into planning, training, monitoring and evaluation in 2010.

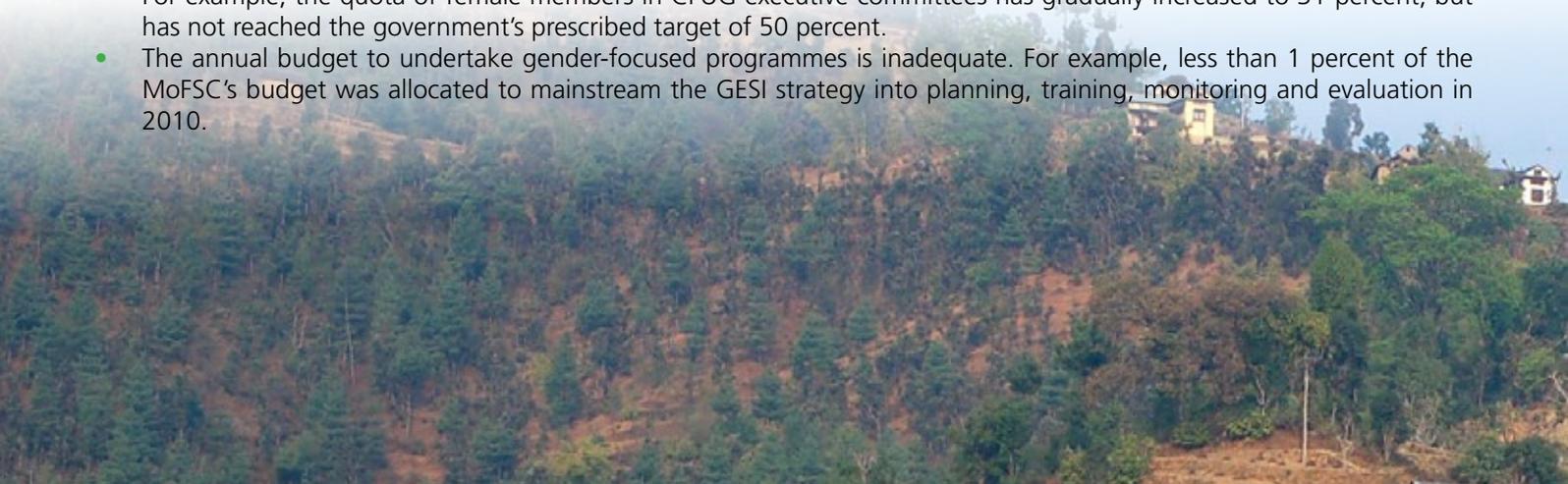


Table 1. Historical overview of women's inclusion in Nepal's forestry sector

<p>1970s Early years</p>	<p>Minimal attention was given to poor and marginalized communities, including women. But awareness of women's roles in forest management and gender equality concerns in the forestry sector started to grow.</p>
<p>1976-1977 People's participation</p>	<p>The National Forest Plan (1976) acknowledged the need for people's participation in managing the country's forests. In 1977, the Forest Act of 1961 was amended to include provisions for handing over forest areas to village institutions (MoFSC 2007; Kanel 2008).</p>
<p>1988 The Forestry Sector Master Plan</p>	<p>The Forestry Sector Master Plan (FSMP) became the key policy, planning and budgetary framework for developing Nepal's forestry sector. It introduced user-group modalities and recommended executive committee membership in each CFUG to comprise female composition of at least 33 percent.</p>
<p>1990s-2001 Democracy and consolidation</p>	<p>The Forest Act of 1993 and the Forest Regulation (1995) provided legal foundation for community forestry. In 2001, the Joint Technical Review of Community Forestry suggested that CFUGs should include one male and one female member from each household (Buchy and Subba 2003; Buchy and Rai 2008).</p> <p>Since the mid-2000s, gender mainstreaming in Nepal has focused on gender equity and women's empowerment within the context of social inclusion. The MoFSC completed the GESI strategy and the GPSE monitoring framework.</p>
<p>2009 Gains in gender equality</p>	<p>The Community Forestry Guidelines amended so that 50 percent of CFUG executive committee members would comprise women and 35 percent of user-group income would be used for pro-poor interventions (Acharya 2010; HURDEC Nepal et al. 2012).</p>
<p>2011 – MSFP</p>	<p>The ten-year Multi Stakeholder Forestry Programme (MSFP) was jointly initiated by the Department for International Development, UK, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Finnish International Development Agency. The MSFP will work in 61 districts of Nepal; some strategic objectives are to address gender equality, good governance and inclusion issues in the forest and climate change sectors.</p>
<p>2011-2012 New vision launched</p>	<p>The MoFSC launched a new vision – Forests for People's Prosperity – to promote private sector involvement and improve economic viability of the forestry sector by highlighting the potential of women's enterprises. More details will emerge when a review of the Forest Sector Strategy (up to 2022) is done.</p>



Moving forward

The following recommendations would be instrumental in helping to implement policies, guidelines and institutional mechanisms to effectively incorporate gender dimensions in the ongoing discussions on the next steps for the new Forest Sector Strategy (2012-2022) and the REDD+ social and environmental safeguards:

- Leadership awareness-raising, orientation and sensitization about the GESI strategy, its milestones, vision and objectives at national, regional and district levels, would help to develop gender-responsive forestry institutions.
- Capacity development activities such as training events, workshops as well as the introduction of specific training modules in the Institute of Forestry's curriculum on gender and forestry would help to ensure that forestry officials have the required skills to implement the GESI strategy.
- A gender-sensitive review of the Forest Sector Strategy and FSMP, and the related implementation plan, is important to identify obstacles that impede promotion of gender mainstreaming activities.
- Dedicated additional financial resources for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming activities including recruitment of trained staff with necessary expertise at national, regional and local levels are advocated.
- Staff composition within the MoFSC and other key forestry institutions needs greater gender balance.
- Protocols and training on collection of appropriate gender-disaggregated data by district forest officers and forest rangers need to be developed; exploiting GPSE monitoring indicators in the management information systems for community forestry is vital.

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