



# THE FORESTS DIALOGUE

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## Scoping Dialogue on the Exclusion & Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector 22-24 September 2012—Kathmandu, Nepal Co-chairs' Summary Report

by Jeannette Gurung, Leena Hytönen and Barathi Pathak

### 1. Introduction

Decades of research and overwhelming evidence underline the important roles women play in forest use, management and protection. But, in many parts of the world, women are still largely excluded from the forest sector at local, professional, institutional and policy levels, especially in relation to forest governance, benefit sharing, and policymaking. They are also limited in their opportunities for capacity building, education and employment.

In partnership with Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), The Forests Dialogue (TFD) organized a Scoping Dialogue on the Exclusion and Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector to:

- ➔ Create a better understanding of the perceived advantages of and the constraints to including women in natural resource management;
- ➔ Identify areas of agreement as well as disagreement and to further develop recommendations that address specific stakeholder questions around gender and forestry;
- ➔ Draw up mutually agreed upon recommendations on how to include women at all levels in ways that can benefit forest-dependent communities and climate change interventions.

The Scoping Dialogue brought together 33 participants from 13 countries representing Indigenous Peoples, local communities, forest-based industries, investors, development assistance agencies, forestry departments of national governments, intergovernmental organizations, women's groups, researchers and non-governmental organizations (see participant list in Annex). Among 33 participants, 11 were men and 22 were women.

During the Dialogue, participants were first engaged in a half-day discussion on the underlying reasons for women's exclusion from the forest sector.

Participants then travelled to Chitwan to visit the Watershed Level REDD+ Forest Carbon Trust Fund (FCTF) project. The field trip was designed to help participants understand key challenges and opportunities on the ground for women's inclusion in the forest sector and to inform discussion on the exclusion and inclusion of women in the forest sector at an international level. During the field trip, participants met with local authorities and local Community Forest User Groups (CFUG), including one group that was comprised of only female members. Based on observations from the field, participants further explored the main causes of the exclusion of women in the forest sector and identified possible interventions.

This report summarizes key observations and discussions from the Dialogue, with specific lessons from the field trip detailed in Annex I and a participant list for the dialogue in Annex II.

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## 2. Reasons for Exclusion of Women in the Forest Sector

Participants identified the following underlying reasons for women's exclusion from natural resource management:

### **Women's exclusion is primarily a result of social-cultural factors.**

Social-cultural factors contribute to women's exclusion in all sectors. For example, women's exclusion from leadership positions is in part due to the fact that their responsibilities at home tend to exceed those of men, forcing women to choose between career and family. Leadership is associated with mainly masculine qualities, which can be a barrier for many women. In many cases, when women do achieve positions of power, they do not embrace feminine styles and values, but rather have to adapt to the masculine norms and behaviors that predominate.

As illustrated by the field visit, traditional social structures, such as the caste system, and rigid gender roles present formidable and yet implicit barriers for the inclusion of women in forest management.

### **Forestry is still very much associated with timber and men.**

Forestry started with a paramilitary orientation dominated by men, that is, protection of the king's forest and hunting reserve. This later became a matter of protecting the forests of the state. The masculine identity of forestry has lasted and has been reinforced to this day. In many areas, lack of field training, appropriate accommodations and suitable equipment precluded women from becoming foresters. For example, in some areas women are still thought not physically strong or skilled enough to do some forestry work, including fire fighting and the operation of chainsaws, although they do undertake such activities in other areas.

### **Women's uses of forests are deemed insignificant and passive.**

At the local level, women's uses of forests are mostly related to Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and/or subsistence activities, which are economically not valued and therefore considered insignificant in comparison to men's work, which is linked to timber and markets. Women's lack of access to more valuable forest resources has put them in a weaker position relative to that of men.

In addition, women's roles are not included in forest conservation approaches, and many conservation programs still view the discussion of women's rights and livelihoods as a diversion. In some cases, they even see these topics as threatening to their primary agendas. Even when forest conservation programs, including REDD+, are done in a participatory way, it is hard to ensure that women's interests are represented. It is even harder to get suggestions on women's rights included in program design and implementation.

Local women's knowledge of forests is often regarded as localized and irrelevant to national and international contexts. This has led to missed opportunities for capacity training for women and utilization of women's knowledge in forest management schemes on a larger scale.

Women are often categorized as a "marginalized and vulnerable group" rather than seen as active caretakers and contributors to forest management. This creates a passive image of women and forests, instead of recognizing them as agents of change.

### **Forestry institutions lack awareness of gender issues.**

Women are still excluded from some forestry institutions responsible for training future foresters. In much of the world, forestry institutions create norms, including those of dress and appearance, that are predominately masculine. Since forestry is still a sector dominated by men, women often lack female peers and mentors in forestry schools, and thus may choose career paths in fields other than forestry (i.e., environmental studies).



Participants in the community forest



Co-chair Jeannette Gurung



Lam Ngoc Tuan



### **There is a lack of champions for women's rights.**

Few women professionals challenge the norms that exclude women. It can be uncomfortable for women professionals—who are a minority in the forest sector, struggling to achieve credibility and respect as foresters—to raise the gender issue and draw additional attention to themselves. Some women professionals may be reluctant to be labeled as a “gender person” or “feminist” within their professional circle.

Many men do not see the women's world and hence reject the existence of women's exclusion. It can be difficult for men to admit to and change the privileged position that they currently occupy. Thus there are few male champions for women's rights.

The work on gender has also been fragmented across the globe. There is a need for consolidated national and international platforms that can support champions for women's rights in the forest sector.

### **Women's rights are not directly linked with property rights or customary rights.**

In comparison to those of Indigenous Peoples', women's rights are generally not directly linked to any land, territories or resources, thus preventing them from receiving equal attention in forest sector or climate change-related interventions. Nor are they always included in the rights-based approaches used in some development schemes. Advocating for women's leadership can also be seen as interfering with traditional cultures given that, in many Indigenous Peoples' groups, traditional leaders are men.

## **3. Actions toward Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector**

Reflecting on the barriers identified above, participants suggested several key actions that could lead to increased inclusion of women:

Raise awareness among both men and women of women's exclusion and of the benefits of women's inclusion.

It is important to raise awareness of the widespread exclusion of women amongst both men and women at local, national and international levels.

An awareness campaign should be carried out to help men (as well as some women) understand how certain behaviors exclude female peers, and how these behaviors can be changed. For example, meetings scheduled late at night may exclude women colleagues who have children and family members to care for. If men in decision-making positions can become proponents of women's inclusion, they can be powerful drivers of change in their organizations and in society. In many cases, men become more gender sensitive through an understanding of the experiences of their daughters or wives. There should be a more concerted effort to educate men on gender issues.

Participants also emphasized that changing behavior and social paradigms is a gradual process that requires long-term commitment. There needs to be dedication and continuous leadership throughout the process.

### **Invest in education and leadership training for women at all levels.**

Education and leadership training are the keys to the empowerment of women and the achievement of transformative changes. With more education and leadership training, women can more easily access information, utilize technologies and assert, defend and organize themselves. Currently, there is a lack of investment in quality education and leadership training for women at local and district levels. The gap must be filled to facilitate transformative change from the ground up. REDD+ could be a good opportunity to bring in the additional investment needed for such capacity building. Investing first in training quality trainers could help leverage other resources that are available for capacity building.





The Jamuna Community Forest Group welcomes TFD participants in Shaktikhor



Akihito Kono



Co-chair Leena Hytonen



Amity Doolittle



A breakout group at work

### Build the “business case” for women’s inclusion.

Dialogue participants came to the conclusion that there is a need to demonstrate how women’s inclusion can enhance the performance of forestry projects and programs through the articulation of a “business case.” For example, governments and donors are interested to know how the inclusion of women can more effectively reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation in REDD+ projects.

A mapping exercise of successful cases of women’s inclusion in the forest sector is needed to clearly identify the benefits (e.g., creativity, productivity, economic gains) of including women. There is also a need to analyze why some attempts to achieve women’s inclusion have failed, so that similar mistakes can be avoided in the future. For example, when a women’s cooperative in Ghana reached a certain scale and success level, men took over the project. It is important to learn from this case how to prevent a similar take-over in other projects.

To develop more examples of the positive impacts of women’s inclusion, there needs to be a better understanding of what leads to women’s meaningful participation, instead of merely reaching a quota or checking a box. For example, in Burkina Faso, a women’s shea butter cooperative has built on their strategic strengths of leadership and traditional knowledge of plant species, while also addressing their weaknesses in skills related to sales and communications by hiring outside, qualified candidates (both men and women).

More successful projects that specifically include women will help to build the business case and lead to more transformative societal changes.

### Combine women-only and mixed group approaches.

As illustrated by the Chelibeti women’s experiences, in a women-only group, women feel safer, more at ease, connected and free to express themselves. Such an environment can help boost women’s confidence and can provide a safe space to develop their capacities and exercise their leadership in their own style. In some cases, women-only groups are more transparent and are more effective at decision-making than men’s or mixed groups. But the mixed group approach also has its benefits: there is more diversity in a mixed group, and women may gain from sharing information and knowledge; mixed groups often have more access to resources; and women are forced to learn how to exercise their rights when men are present.

One participant expressed his concern that a women-only approach may drive a divide within households and communities and undermine the collective nature of community forestry. Others argued that the expectation to hold a nurturing relationship is indeed a barrier itself for women to set up boundaries to protect their rights. It is also thought unfair to argue against women-only groups while there are plenty of men-only groups.

Participants agreed that it is not an either/or question but that both women-only and mixed group approaches are needed. Each approach will have its own advantages based on local context. Some argued that in the early capacity building stage, women-only groups could help women build skills and confidence that they could later use as part of mixed groups. In the mixed group, quotas could be used to guarantee gender balance in leadership. Leaders of women-only and mixed groups should receive training on how to be inclusive of all stakeholders including lower caste women and men.

Other suggested actions include the following:

- ➔ Create more networking opportunities for women to share experiences, learn from and support each other;
- ➔ Governments, international organizations and donors should create guidelines and requirements to support women’s inclusion;

- ➔ Women's inclusion should be part of forest certification schemes as well as other standards;
- ➔ Closer monitoring of funding expenditures is needed to ensure that resources intended for women and women's groups reach their targets.

#### **4. Next Steps**

Participants were supportive of the Dialogue initiative. They proposed to communicate the Dialogue outcomes within their networks and committed to carrying out some of the recommendations, including mapping of successful cases of women's inclusion, raising awareness of women's exclusion, supporting capacity building, developing standards for women's inclusion within carbon projects, strengthening support for gender actions within donor organizational mandates, and promoting inclusion of women and gender issues in the national frameworks of REDD+.

To model the desired behavior, The Forests Dialogue committed itself to a mandate of at least 40% women on its Steering Committee and at least 40% women participants in its dialogues.

Based on the Scoping Dialogue outcomes, TFD is currently reviewing whether and how to continue its work on this theme.

#### **Acknowledgments**

This summary draws on, and tries to do justice to, the inputs of 33 participants involved in TFD's Scoping Dialogue on Exclusion and Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector in Kathmandu, Nepal, in September 2012. We would like to heartily thank all of the participants for their contribution.

This Dialogue's main partner is WOCAN (through its headquarters and Nepal office). The Dialogue and this report are financially supported by WOCAN, through the contribution of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad).

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#### **ANNEX 1: Key Learning from the Field Trip**

The pilot Forest Carbon Trust Fund (FCTF) was created under the project on "Design of and Setting up a payment system for Nepal's Community Forestry Management under REDD+" in 2009. The project has been piloted in three watershed areas in Nepal, including the Kayarkhola watershed in Chitwan, where participants visited. The project is financed by Norad and implemented by The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN) and Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources (ANSAB).

The Kayarkhola watershed covers 2,382 hectares of forest, comprising 16 Community Forests (CFs). Out of the 16 CFs, only one CFUG has only women members and is chaired by a woman. Four committees oversee the project at the district level: the REDD Network and the REDD Network Secretariat, Monitoring and Advisory Committees. In the Kayarkhola watershed area, except for the REDD Network, which has 50% men and 50% women members, the rest of the committees have less than 2% women members. In terms of resources, the watershed received about US\$21,900 in 2011 and about US\$24,695 in 2012. In 2011, the watershed sequestered more than 2.5 million tonnes of carbon.

The distribution of the funds received is based on the FCTF criteria (operation guidelines), which are (i) quantity of forest carbon saved above the baseline, (ii) the number of households of indigenous peoples and Dalits, (iii) the ratio of men to women and (iv) the number of poor households within the project area. The more of the above criteria are met, the greater a community's chances of qualifying for payments. There are also guidelines on how communities can spend the payment: at least 40% of the payment should go toward conservation/project management, at least 15% toward activities related to women's empowerment and needs, and at least 20% toward meeting the needs of the poorest in the community.

Participants met with representatives from the REDD Network Committee, the CFUGs with both men and women members and with the women-only CFUG. The key observations from the field trip are summarized below.

**A higher female to male ratio does not automatically translate into increased decision-making power.**

The distribution of funds among CFUGs is based on FCTF operation guidelines, which includes the ratio of men to women. So, the greater the percentage of women, the better the chance of getting more funding. Linking this ratio to the payment level has increased women's participation in the project and ensured that women are given training in skills needed to carry out various roles, including facilitation and monitoring of carbon measurement, as well as access to biogas and cooking stoves.

But despite higher levels of participation, women still find it hard to compete with men for higher-level positions in the governance of the CFUGs or to rightfully exercise their decision-making power. CFUGs in Nepal are required to have at least one woman in the executive committee, filling positions as chairperson or secretary. But women are not elected as the Chair, except within the women-only groups. Political parties in the community are dominated by men: when women try to run for vital positions in the political party, they always face resistance.

**The value of women's participation and inclusion in the executive committee needs to be better demonstrated to local stakeholders.**

In Chitwan, some community members think that women can contribute unique perspectives and help make the group work more harmoniously. Others also perceive women to be more trustworthy than men and believe that they tend to take more care in their fieldwork (e.g., measurement of carbon).

But many others still hold the view that there is not much difference between men and women's contribution to forest management and that there is no need for special consideration of women's needs and participation.

The lack of understanding of the barriers to and the values of inclusion of women at the local level has made it harder for the community to embrace the policy that mandates women's inclusion in the executive committees of the FUGs. which has in turn contributed to the lack of implementation and enforcement of this policy on the ground.

If existing social-cultural norms are not dealt with first, REDD+ benefits could exacerbate women's exclusion.

Social and cultural norms still disadvantage women in community decision-making processes. In Chitwan, members of lower caste and indigenous groups are often marginalized, even in the women-only group. And because men are viewed as being more educated and having more capacity for leadership, voters—including women—are more likely to choose men for vital positions. At the household level, women are mainly responsible for domestic and farm-related chores. Their additional work outside of this traditional realm is not supported or appreciated by the men in their families, thus further discouraging their participation.

When REDD+ investments are introduced into a community bounded by these social-cultural norms, those already in a privileged position tend to become even more reluctant to share decision-making power. Thus some women feel that there is even more resistance toward women's meaningful participation and leadership in forest management when there is an inflow of financial resources.



**Women-only groups can build confidence and promote higher levels of decision-making power.**

In the face of significant social-cultural barriers, women-only groups work most effectively to help increase women's meaningful participation and decision-making power.

The women-only group (Chelibeti) in Kayarkhola watershed organized and fought for a piece of land to manage themselves. As a result, they are strongly dedicated to their group and appreciate the value of their land. They perceive that they are better organized and more willing to learn from the others than the men. They are also proud of their role as caretakers of the forest and think that they can take better care of the forest than men, given their nurturing nature. Being members of the CFUG has improved their status at the household level, though they still struggle with the social-cultural barriers discussed above.



Tore Langhelle

**Capacity building tailored to women's needs has lasting value for the community.**

Women have lower levels of education and technical training than men. When community members received the same level of GPS training without considering different education levels, women had more difficulty than men in grasping the technology and implementing the carbon inventory methods. Women are also not computer literate, thus making it difficult to access the technology used by men to obtain information and process data.

When capacity building is done in a way that is sensitive to the education level of women and the social-cultural norms they face, it can have lasting impacts in the community. Women who marry and have children will stay in their community for their whole lives, so the knowledge and skills they obtain will stay within the community even when projects change and men migrate out. As women are usually the main educators of their family, they are more likely to pass on their knowledge to their partners, children and relatives.



Leaders of the all-women's CFUG

**Champions at district and national levels are needed to support women's leadership at the local level.**

The operational guidelines for the pilot project were drafted at the national level without consultation of the local community. Very few women's representatives participated in the development of the guidelines.

Local women's groups expressed frustration that when they report to the district level, they often feel uncomfortable and marginalized as there are few female officers who can understand their needs and constraints. For example, district officials sometimes require group members to travel back and forth to complete paperwork requirements; this is a particular hardship for the female group members due to their extensive household responsibilities. Moreover, there is a danger of sexual harassment: the enforcement of sexual harassment laws is not strong in the region and women are often left to defend themselves without the support of enforcement agencies.



Kevin Whitfield

**Annex 2: Participant List**

- Kenneth Ames** Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests (LEAF)
- Gry Asp Solstad** The Government of Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, M&E
- Estebancio Castro Diaz** International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests (IAITPTF)
- Amity Doolittle** Yale University
- Gary Dunning** The Forests Dialogue
- Barun Gurung** Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN)
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Participants walk to the community forest in Shaktikhor



## Co-chairs' Summary Report

Scoping Dialogue on the Exclusion and Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector

22-24 September 2012 - Kathmandu, Nepal

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