Hariyo Ban Program

Identifying Barriers to Dalit and Janajati Women´s

Successful Leadership in Community Based Forest Management in Nepal

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Written by Kine Valvik Mitchell for Hariyo Ban Program, CARE Nepal

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Content

Abstract

Previous research has identified various barriers hindering women´s and lower caste people´s successful participation in Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) in Nepal. This study focus´ on barriers faced by dalit and janajati women regarding taking on leadership positions in Community Forest Management (CFM) and participating in the decision- making process. The findings indicate that discriminatory gender and social norms create barriers for lower caste women, and so do lack of economic resources, inadequate access to information and lack of education and capacity. Further, the study finds that some barriers are less prevailing among younger women with some level of education, and among women belonging to FUGs managed only by women. The study also examines contemporary policy provisions regarding gender and social inclusion in Community Forestry (CF), and concludes that although many of the policies do well in targeting main barriers they have not been successfully implemented in practice.

Key words: Community Forestry; Nepal; Gender; Caste; Social exclusion; Leadership; Forest Policy.

Acknowledgements

List of Acronyms

CARE - Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere

CBNRM – Community Based Natural Resource Management

CBO - Community Based Organization

CF – Community Forestry

CFM - Community Forest Management

CFUG – Community Forest User Group

CSO - Civil Society Organization

DFO – District Forest Office

DoF - Department of Forest

EC – Executive Committee

FECOFUN - Federation of Community Forest Users

FUG – Forest User Group

NGO - Non- Governmental Organization

NRM – Natural Resource Management

NTNC - National Trust for Nature Conservation

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WWF - World Wildlife Fund

1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background

Community Forestry (CF) in Nepal was fist initiated in 1978 under the first amendment in the Forest Act of 1961, and later reframed under the new Forest Act of 1993. The main objective of CF is to hand over the management of national forest from the government to local communities, so called Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs). The role of the CFUGs is to protect and develop forest resources, as well as to manage the use of these resources. The aims of CF include sustainable use of natural resources and nature conservation, as well as improving the livelihoods of local communities.

All CFUGs have elected an executive committee (EC) that meets once per month to discuss, decide and implement various activities according to the operational plan and constitution of the FUG. The EC usually consists of 10- 15 members, were five of these hold a key position including chairman, vice- chairman, secretary, joint- secretary and treasurer. In addition to EC meetings, a general assemble that encourages the attendance of all FUG members is held once or twice per year. During the general assemblies the FUG members are supposed discuss the management and activities of the FUG and make plans for further action.

The District Forest Office (DFO), working under the Department of Forest (DoF), is responsible for handing over national forest to CFUGs and to provide services promoting development and protection of forest. The DFO also develop projects aiming at improving local livelihoods and empowering women, poor and other disadvantaged groups (DoF 2012).

In 1995 the Federation of Community Forest Users (FECOFUN) was established, the largest civil society organization (CSO) in CF. Included in their mission is to promote the rights of community forest users through advocacy and lobbying, economic empowerment, capacity building and technical support. Further, their role is to promote inclusive democracy, gender balance and social justice within the FUGs (FECOFUN 2013).

In addition to these two instances various Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) provide support services during FUG formations and after their establishment. This study is conducted on the behalf of the Hariyo Ban Program initiated by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in cooperation with Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and FECOFUN. The Government of Nepal is also a key partner of the program.

The Hariyo Ban Program is a five- year USAID funded program aiming to reduce adverse impacts of climate change and threats to biodiversity. There are three pronged objectives of the program: reduce threats to biodiversity, ensure effective sustainable landscape management with strong emphasis on reducing emissions from deforestations and forest degradation and increasing capacity of the local population to adapt to adverse impacts of climate change. Further, gender equality and social inclusion are key cross cutting themes of the project. It focuses on strengthening leadership roles of women, dalit, youth and other marginalized sections of the society and enabling them to claim rights and benefits of natural resource management (NRM) and conservation efforts.

1.2 Objectives

The objective of this study is to map out the barriers dalit and janajati women face regarding participation in the decision- making process and occupation of leadership roles in CFUGs in Nepal. It will also attempt to assess if contemporary policy provisions aimed at tackling such barriers have been successful in practice.

1.3 Significance of study

There have already been conducted a number of studies dealing with the main barriers to participation of women and other vulnerable groups in the activities and decision-making processes in CFUGs in Nepal. However, much of their focus has been on the participation in general assemblies and the decision- making process, and not so much on leadership specifically. There is a growing focus among policy makers to raise the number of women, lower castes and indigenous groups in CFUG leadership positions, and therefor this study focus specifically on this aspect. There is also a need to assess

weather contemporary policy provisions are targeting the main barriers and if they have been successfully implemented in practice in order to plan for further action.

1.4 Research questions

1. What are the main barriers dalit and janajati women face in relation to participating in the decision- making process and taking on leadership/key roles in community- based forest management?

2. Do dalit and janajati women of various age and educational background face different barriers?

3. Does number of dalit and janajati households, fund size or female/ mixed management in the FUG affect the barriers faced by dalit and janajati women in any way?

4. What policy implications have been utilized to deal with problems faced by dalit and janajati women in relation to participation and leadership in CBNRM, and have these policies been successfully implemented?

1.5 Methodology

A qualitative research approach has been adopted for the purposes of this study, as the study seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of local practices and how they relate to various social norms, gender roles and socioeconomic status. Further, the study seeks to understand the research focus from the perspectives and experiences of the local people involved (Mack at el. 2005).

The study has been conducted in five different CFUGs in Banke district[1]. The CFUGs differ from each other regarding high or low numbers of dalit and janajati households, small or large FUG fund, and one of the FUGs is only managed by women while the other four have mixed management. These categories have been chosen because the study attempts to assess weather some barriers are more prominent in some FUGs with specific characteristics than in others. All the FUGs in the district where put in groups

[1] Due to confidentiality and protection of privacy the names of the five FUGs will not be listed

matching these different categories and then chosen by randomized drawing. Most of the FUGs belong to more than one category.

Further, focus group discussions with 8-15 participants have been undertaken with three different groups in all the five FUGs, separated by gender and socio- economic status. The three groups are 1) dalit and janajati women 2) higher caste women, and 3) mixed higher and lower caste men. The participants varied in age and educational background. These groups where selected in order to understand the behaviours and viewpoints existing within the various groups, and to create, as far as possible, an environment where all participants felt comfortable talking and sharing their opinions. It would also have been ideal to separate the men´s group by socio- economic status, however due to a limited time schedule this was not possible.

In addition to focus group discussions with participants from various FUGs, focus group discussions were also conducted with representatives from the Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal (FECOFUN) and from the District Forest Office (DFO) in order to understand what they define as the main barriers and how they think these should be approached.

Two personal interviews have also been conducted with experts working in the field of social and gender inclusion in CF, both for the purpose of data collection and to verify study findings.

1.6 Limitations of the study

- The study has been confined to the Banke- district, and therefore does not represent the whole scenario of the country.

- Do to limited timeframe the fieldwork has been conducted over a time period of 4 weeks. This has put some constraints on variations of methods used and number of FUGs represented in the study.

However, this study will be used as an additional part of another study bigger and wider in scope, which will contribute to minimize these limitations.

1.7 Study area

The study has been conducted in Banke- district, located south in the Mid- Western Region of Nepal.
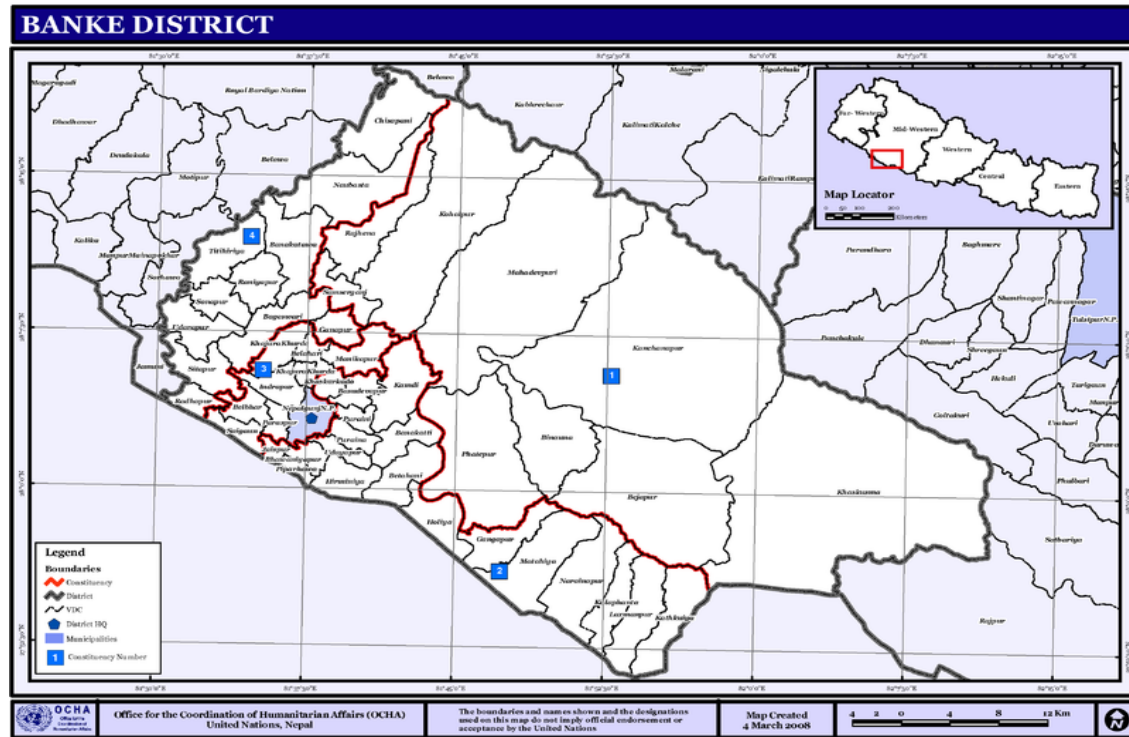
Map: OCHA 2008

Banke district has a population of 491 313, where 83.3 of the people living in rural areas directly depend on forest resources in everyday life. The district has a sub- tropical climate, and temperatures vary from above 40°C in the hot summer months of April-June to below 10°C during winter. The region covers an area of 2337 km² in which 50. 7 per cent is covered by forest. Deforestation is still a major problem in the region, with land encroachment, illegal logging, forest fires and settlement near forest areas being the main contributing factors (UNCFO 2011).

2. Chapter Two: Literature review

The objective of this literature review is to provide some background information on the history and development of community forestry in Nepal, as well as to place the practice in the context of participatory approaches to development. Further, it provides an overview of the current situation regarding social and gender inclusion in community forestry.

2.1 Community Forestry in Nepal

A majority of Nepal´s population depends on forest resources in order to sustain their livelihoods. Forest resources provide direct livelihood benefits through products such as food, timber, fodder, medicine and leaves, as well as more indirect livelihood benefits through the provision of ecological services including erosion control and watershed and farmland protection. Forest resources also generate income for private households and communities as a whole, for example through sales of various forest products (Thoms 2008; Agarwal 2001; Scoones 1998).

For a long time, in Nepal and other developing countries, state forest departments exercised immense power over public natural resources, often without much consideration for resource dependent local populations (Poffenberger and McGean 1996). In the 1970s, however, it became evident that the state had failed to manage forest resources effectively, which had lead to unrestrained deforestation again causing soil erosion and flooding (Pandit and Bevilacqua 2011; Springate- Baginski et al. 2003; Agarwal 2001). These trends lead to raised concerns about Nepal´s forest and hill environments, and the concept of CF was introduced in order to improve resource management, reduce deforestation and better secure resource access to forest dependant communities (Pandit and Bevilacqua 2011; Hobley et al. 1996; Hausler 1993).

Since the mid- 1980s national forest has been handed over to local FUGs, which are in charge of the management of the forest resources as well as entitled to all the benefits produced (Adhikari et al. 2004; Timsina 2003; Agarwal 2001). This approach to forest management has become a fast growing trend in many developing countries, and is

often described as "one of the most widespread and rapidly expanding attempts at participatory development" (Timsina 2003: 236; see also Agarwal 2001; Malla 2001).

2.2 Participation and the myth of community

Participatory approaches to development build on the belief that use of indigenous knowledge and local participation will lead to more effective and cultural appropriate development outcomes that better target the needs of the local population involved (Chambers 2005, 1994; Sillitoe 1998). For example, previous studies indicate that the creation of community forest user groups has lead to more effective natural resource regulation and protection (Dev et al. 2003; Yadev 2003; Gautam et al. 2002). However, the success of community forestry regarding equal resource distribution and inclusion of women and other marginalized groups has been widely questioned (Adhikari and Di Falco 2009; Dhakal 2006; Nightingale 2003, 2002; Agarwal 2001).

Agarwal argues that there is an "emerging consensus that effective participation requires peoples involvement not just as individuals but as a village community" (2001: 1621). This emphasis in ´community´ is highly evident in CBNRM, as the idea is for the local FUGs to cooperate regarding the management of resources and distribution of benefits. The idea of a coherent uniform community where people have shared interest and needs has, however, been widely criticized (Cleaver 1999; Chambers 1998; Cornwall 1998; Sillitoe 1998; Mosse 1994). For instance, Cornwall (1998) argues that there is a naive optimism connected to participatory approaches to development, often portraying communities as simple and uniform entities and at the same time overlooking the realities of conflict and inequality. Mosse (1994) put forward a similar argument, saying that participatory approaches often fail to recognize and deal with power relations within communities. Accordingly, Chambers (1998) argues that a commonplace problem in participatory approaches to development is the dominant interaction with local elite and men, while overlooking the marginalized population such as the poor and women.

In Nepal the dogma of the caste system still remains a major issue, and lower caste people and ethnic groups form the most impoverished and social disadvantaged parts of society. These groups still experience disadvantages regarding various elements

including land ownership, socioeconomic marginalization, employment opportunities and participation in political decision- making processes (Adhikari and Di Falco 2009; Lawati 2005).

A range of previous studies indicate that poorer and lower caste people benefit less than higher caste people from CF practices and other local development interventions. Following 6 months of field research in four different hill districts in Nepal, Thoms concluded that there are "significant power disparities within community forest user groups" (2008: 1452), and that the poor and lower caste people participate less in decision- making processes and have more limited access to vital forest products. Similar findings where made by Adhikari and Di Falco (2009) after conducting field research in the mid- hills of Nepal, where they concluded that people belonging to lower caste groups have a lower probability of being elected has members of decision- making bodies, such as the executive committees. Agrawal and Gupta (2005) also support these findings, concluding that higher caste groups have privileged access to natural resources, leadership positions and decision- making processes.

In addition to caste, the aspect of gender is also widely discussed in relation to community forestry. Nepali social codes often expect women to appear shy and refrain from speaking in public, and they are expected to stay in the home and avoid participating in the public sphere (Lama and Bucky 2002). After conducting extensive field research among community forest user groups in India and Nepal, Agarwal (2001) concluded that the seemingly participatory approaches behind community forestry continues to exclude women (see also Locke 1999; Hobley 1990). For example, she found that women were often unable to voice their opinions or affect decisions made in the FUGs (see also Nightingale 2002). Similar findings were made by Collet et al. (1996), after conducting a survey in a village in the Palpa District of Nepal. They found that few women participated in the initial stages of FUG formations, they participated less in FUG meetings and decision- making processes and lacked knowledge about FUG activities.

2.3 The importance of gender and social inclusion
Communities are thus heterogeneous entities, and there are many different resource users within one FUG, which have different social and economic status, knowledge

systems, objectives and needs (Adhikari et al. 2004). When failing to equally include the different users, this will have implications both for the economic and social aims included in community forestry, as well as the goals regarding natural resource conservation and protection (Agarwal 2001).

Women are recognized as the primary users of forest resources in Nepal. Accordingly, they often have broad knowledge about practices that lead to forest destruction and how this affects the life of themselves and others in the community. Since they play such an important role regarding the use of the forest, their contribution to forest protection could be very valuable (Acharya 2007, Khadka and Verma 2012). For example, when looking at community forest management in India and Nepal, Agarwal (2009) found that in FUGs where there was a higher proportion of women in the ECs the ecological condition of the forests was higher compared to the ones with fewer women.

In a different study Agarwal (2001) points out that women use natural resources in different ways then men. While women often use forest resources for household activities, such as collecting fodder, leaves, fire- wood etc., men use the forest more for timber and commercial purposes. If the ECs make decisions about forest use without taking the women´s knowledge into account, it may lead to conclusions not suitable for either forest protection or community needs. According to Agarwal, when women on rare occasions are consulted, "they often come up with more suitable alternatives" (2001: 1628).

Restricting use of forest without consulting those who use it the most may also contribute to taking away important resources that they depend on for their livelihoods (Agarwal 2001, Agrawal 1999). In a study by Agrawal (1999) of a van panchayat village in India, she found that 70- 80 per cent of the people charged with using forest resources illegally between 1951 and 1991 were women, most of them also being poor and from lower castes.

Further, different groups in a community often have different views about how the FUG funds should be used and what are the most important development issues (Lama &

Bucky 2002). Women, lower- castes and the poor may have other needs than men, elite people etc., and for these needs to be met those people need to be consulted.

3. Chapter Three: Study Results and Discussion

3.1 Women, family and household

In Nepali society the traditional role of women is confined to the home and domestic area, and many women experience restrictions regarding free movement around the village and participation in more public activities.

Women participating in this study, including both lower and higher caste, felt prevented by family members such as husbands, fathers and brothers in law when attempting to attend general assemblies. According to them, their male family members often did not understand the purpose of spending so much time at meetings and assemblies and perceived it as a waste of time. They rather preferred the women to stay at home performing their household chores. Some women were also prevented because male family members were afraid they would gain more knowledge about the community and politics, and accordingly start raising their voice more in the home. These barriers can especially prevail if a woman try to take on a leadership position in her CFUG, as she has to spend even more time out of the house, attend more meetings, gain more knowledge and learn how to speak up in public.

Women carry the main weight of domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. Although most women said they were able to spare some time in order to attend general assemblies that are held once or twice per year, having a leadership position consumes much more time. EC meetings are normally held once per month, and having such a role also often includes frequent trips to the forest and sometimes travelling outside of the village for additional meetings. Many women felt that they could not spare the time for all these activities. These findings were also confirmed by some representatives from the DFO, explaining that:

> If a man occupies a leadership position this is his one and only role, while a woman will first and foremost be a housewife and the leadership role will always have to come second.

However, while some women feel prevented by male family members regarding various levels of participation in their CFUG, other women felt that some of their male family members, mostly husbands specifically, supported and encouraged their participation. According to these women their husbands wanted them to learn more about the community, forest activities and politics in order to move forward in the society. This attitude was also confirmed during focus group discussions with men.

This study indicates that women having their husbands´ support are often younger women with some level of education, and they are also often married to younger men with some level of education. Both women and men from various castes argued that the younger generations are challenging traditional gender roles and moving more and more away from discriminatory practices, often influenced by their increased access to information and education. Senior, uneducated women are therefor often more restricted by male family members than younger, educated women. This study showed that dalit and janajati women as groups were less educated than higher caste people, however, many senior higher caste women also lack education. On the other hand, younger women often face more constraints regarding household chores, as they are in their reproductive age and often have a higher number of younger children than senior women.

3.2 Male domination in general assemblies and executive committees

In most general assemblies these days women often represent the majority, much because of high rates of male outmigration which I will discuss later. However, this study indicates that there is a persisting divide between nominal representation and effective participation in the decision- making process. Although most women do not feel directly prevented from speaking up and raising their voice, many still feel that others don't listen to them and that the topics they want to raise are of less importance:

> We cant talk, what they are saying we don't understand and they do not listen to us due to this we feel shy so we don't talk (focus group discussion with dalit and janajati women).

We talk in the meetings but nobody listens to us so we just keep quiet. Everybody talks at the same time, the EC cant listen to everybody. We are not prevented from talking, can talk but people don't listen (focus group discussion with higher caste women).

Most women emphasized that they only talked when they had an *important* topic to discuss. When I asked them if they could give me some examples of important topics, the answer was always the same: access to and need of timber. Getting timber from the forest is mainly men´s work, and often connected to commercial use as well as for use in the community. Women spend more time collecting other forest products for domestic use, including fodder, leafs and fire- wood. Although access to timber is often more restricted than access to other products, and this may also affect why it is considered a more important topic to be discussed, many of the women told me that people sometimes had to use the forest illegally in order to collect enough food for their animals and fire- wood for cooking. Despite this, access to animal food was never mentioned as an important topic, and access to fire- wood was mentioned once in a discussion with women belonging to the FUG managed solely by women. This indicates that men still play a key role when it comes to setting the agenda for meetings, and as some men said to me during one focus group discussion: "the most important topics are not raised by the women". This male dominated discourse restricts women from talking about the topics that are most important to them.

Such a male dominated discourse also puts restrictions on women in leadership positions, as there may not be room for the topics they would like to raise. Further, men still dominate in key positions, and in Banke district the majority of FUGs have 0-1 women in leadership roles. It becomes very difficult for one woman to put forward her agenda if the other male members try to stop it or do not want to listen. Although most of the women I talked to felt it was important to have women in leadership positions in order for them to move forward, many felt it was very limited what these women could contribute in such a position.

3.3 Caste discrimination

Dalit and janajati women often felt prevented by higher caste people regarding participation and access to leadership positions in the CFUGs. For example, many

complained that there was a lot of "politics" involved regarding the management of the FUGs, and that higher caste people, both men and women, organised themselves in groups and listened to and supported each other, while at the same time holding others back. Some dalit and janajati women felt that higher caste people where afraid of lower caste people getting too much power in the FUGs, and therefor tried to prevent them from taking on leadership roles.

During a focus group discussion the dalit and janajati women participating explained that:

> Upper -caste people don't want dalit and janajati people in key positions. The upper castes want to go forward themselves and keep the others back. If we have ideas for work in the forest we might be threatened by upper- castes not to share the ideas. We get scared. This is the same for men, as we have a dalit man in key position and sometimes he gets scared.

In another FUG I visited where there were no dalit or janajati women in key positions, the dalit and janajati women told me that: "we want the dalit women to be in the key position but other people don't count them as human." They were also sceptic about the contribution a dalit woman would be able to make in the contemporary FUG environment, saying:

> We want to keep the dalit women but it is useless if she remain like a useless pole like if she can´t talk and make the operational plan for the development of the forest what the use of having them?

According to the field experts I talked to, caste discrimination is still a major issue hindering lower castes´ participation and occupation of leadership roles. Decades of discrimination have also lead to lower castes feeling inferior to higher caste people, which again keeps them from raising their voices.

3.4 Inadequate access to economic resources

Inadequate access to economic resources is another obstacle hindering participation and occupation of leadership roles in CFUGs, and dalit and janajati households have on

average less economic resources than other households. Poor women especially face more barriers in relation to leadership roles, as having such a role can be very time consuming. More work in and for the community forest means less time for work earning an income. Sometimes having a leadership position also means covering extra expenses. As some dalit and janajati women explained:

> We need a higher income to take on key role, because you need to spend money on phone calls, bus travel and things like that, and we cant afford that.

In the FUG managed only by women people in leadership positions could get some compensation for their work, for example if they had to spend a whole day on community forest related work. However, not many FUGs offer this opportunity, often because they do not have sufficient funds to cover these extra costs.

3.5 Inadequate access to information

Most of the men and women I talked to got the information they had about the activities of their FUG orally at general assemblies and from the watchmen. This mostly included practical information such as when to clean the forest, make fire- lines, plant trees and so on. However, few people had much knowledge about the FUG operational plans and constitutions or other policies regarding their rights in the FUG.

I brought every FUG´s operational plan and constitution with me to the focus group discussions, and asked the participants if they had seen the documents before. Some had seen them at general assemblies, but did not have much knowledge about the content. Others had not seen them at all. Further, I asked the participants if they had any knowledge about any community forest group policy provisions, and most times this only led to a discussion about penalties for using the forest illegally. Documents such as the Guidelines for Community Forestry Development Programme were never mentioned.

Some participants, both men and women of various castes, said it was sometimes difficult to understand the information being given during general assemblies. There were often many people present, and this made it hard to understand what was being

said. Sometimes many people tried to talk at the same time, and they could not listen to everybody.

Many dalit and janajati women also complained about lack of information regarding key posts. They were asked to take on such roles, but did not get any information about what such a position would include, what would be their responsibilities etc., and this was one of the reasons why they were very reluctant to take on a leadership position.

3.6 Lack of education and capacity

This study indicates that lack of education and capacity is one of the main barriers hindering dalit and janajati women from taking on leadership roles in CFUGs. It creates barriers on two levels as 1) the dalit and janajati women themselves feel they cannot manage a leadership role without education and 2) other people view them as less competent due to their lack of education. Some men and women from other castes also faced this problem, however, it was most prevailing among dalit and janajati women, because they as groups are less educated than other groups in the community.

Although most dalit and janajati women wanted to have other dalit and janajati women in their ECs, very few were willing to take on such a position themselves. The reason for this reluctance was usually the same in all the different FUGs:

> We don't want to be in the committee, because we don't have education enough. We don't know how to act in such a position and cannot handle that responsibility for so many people (Focus group discussion with dalit and janajati women).

Due to affirmative action policies aiming to include more women and people from lower castes in the EC committees, more and more dalit and janajati women are asked to take on such positions, but they often decline:

> We don't have any dalit or janajati women in key roles in the EC. We are asked to be in these positions, the EC even try to force us, but we don't want to. We don't know anything about these positions. It is too difficult to handle so many people (Focus groups discussion with dalit and janajati women).

Not having education affects the women´s self- esteem, and they highly doubt their own capability to handle a key position. This again contributes to reinforce stereotypes of dalit and janajati women in the society, as others also feel they cannot handle the position or that they do not have any interest in trying:

> How can they handle the position when they don't feel the responsibility? We reserved the positions for dalit and janajati women, and we elected one for the post. But she didn't come to meetings regularly and she didn't respect the position so we had to find someone new (Focus groups discussion with higher caste women).

> We want more janajati women in key positions, but they are uneducated (…). What will they gain from having a key position? (Focus groups discussion with higher caste women)

The dalit and janajati women said that if they had access to some training regarding how to act in the leadership positions, more would be willing to take on such positions. But the way it is now they are just put in the position without any form of training:

> We don't get any training so that we have the knowledge of how to handle the key position. Nobody learn anything by birth, if we get the training we can handle the key position (Focus group discussion with dalit and janajati women).

Putting dalit and janajati women in a key position without giving them the information or training that is necessary in order to handle that position can be viewed as another form of domination and oppression. Firstly, it can lead to diminishing their self- esteem even more, as their fear of not being able to handle the position becomes reality. Secondly, it also becomes a way for higher caste people to "prove" that lower caste women cannot handle the position as well as others. Thirdly, without sufficient knowledge of how to act in a key position, it becomes very difficult for dalit and janajati women to forward their agenda and participate in the decision- making process, and easier for more resourceful persons to forward their own agendas and hold dalit and janajati women leaders back.

3.7 Impact of male outmigration on women´s participation

The area where this study was conducted continues to experience a high rate of male outmigration, and as indicated by Giri and Darnhofer this "provides a 'window of opportunity' to increase women's participation, as the left-behind wives were more likely to attend and voice their opinions during the general assembly" (2010: 55). Many of the women I talked to explained to me that these days the women represent the majority in general assemblies, mainly because they have to attend when their male family members are out of the village for work.

Although many of the men and also government officials I talked to were concerned that high male outmigration lead to increased workload for the women left behind, most of the women I talked with experienced the opposite:

> We have more freedom when the men are gone. If the husband is at home we have to cook nice food for him and take care of him. When he is away we can spend less time cooking and stay out late (Focus group discussion with dalit and janajati women).

More freedom can have positive effects on women´s participation, as they communicate and engage in discussions with other women outside of their own home. Some women continued to attend meetings after their husbands and other male family members returned home because they had more knowledge and information about topics related to the FUG and the community in general.

However, in many households the men reassume the role of attending general assemblies when they return home, and many women explained that "when the men are home in the village they attend the assemblies". In previous sections of this study I have also showed that attending general assemblies does not necessarily mean having a say in the decision- making process.

3.8 Different FUG categories

The CFUGs explored in this study differed from each other regarding number of dalit and janajati households, size of FUG fund and female/ mixed management, and the study aimed at comparing the barriers faced in the various FUGs.

There are very few FUGs managed only by women, and out of the 79 different FUGs in Banke district only two fall in under this category, and one of them has been part of this study. In this FUG ten out of the eleven EC members were dalit or janajati, and they held four of the five leadership positions. These numbers were much higher than in the other four FUGs, where two had no dalit or janajati women in key positions, and two had one janajati woman in a key position.

In the FUG managed only by women the dalit and janajati women I talked to said they were willing to take on a leadership role should any of the current leaders resign. This attitude was quite different from the ones prevailing in the other four FUGs, where most women felt they were not educated enough to take on such a role. In the female FUG on the other hand, the women said they could manage a key role without being educated, because previous and current EC members would teach and support them. This kind of support was not mentioned in any other FUG.

The female FUG also had a high number of dalit and janajati households, and the higher caste women and men I talked to said that since dalits and janajatis represent the majority in the community they should also represent the majority in the EC. This may also be an important factor contributing to the high number of dalit and janajati leaders in this FUG. On the other hand, however, in another mixed FUG I visited, janajatis represented almost 90 per cent of the households in the FUG, and still only one janajati woman held a key position in the EC. In this FUG the dalit and janajati women complained that the higher caste people engaged in "politics" together, and tried to keep dalit and janajati people back. This may indicate that the higher castes as a minority felt threatened by the lower caste majority, and try to stay in power by dominating over them.

It has been pointed out that it may be in the elite´s interest to control the power in the FUGs, as this means power over forest resources and FUG fund (Lama & Bucky 2002). I therefor thought it would be interesting to compare FUGs with small and large fund sizes. The study showed that neither the FUG with the smallest fund not the one with the largest fund had any dalit or janajati women in key positions. In both FUGs dalit and

janajati women complained about discriminatory behaviour towards lower caste people. In the FUG with a small fund, the previous EC had withheld information from the user group, and used forest resources and money from the fund for their own personal needs. For instance, they had spent money on personal things instead of paying wages to the watchmen.

The dalit and janajati women belonging to the FUG with a large fund were the ones reporting to sometimes feel threatened by higher castes, and prevented from putting forward their ideas regarding FUG activities. However, the female FUG also had one of the largest funds, and at the same time few reports of caste discrimination.

The female FUG also stood out regarding discriminatory gender practices. For instance, this was the only FUG where women said they went to the general assemblies weather their male family members were present in the village or not. Men only went if the women could not go, for an example because of illness etc. The men I talked to said it only made sense that the women go, because the FUG is managed only by women.

The women in the female FUG also had more knowledge about FUG activities other than only practical forest activities. For example, they mentioned loan opportunities and income distribution in order to help the poorest households. The women also raised other issues that they felt needed more attention, including lack of health facilities and the problem of girl trafficking.

The female FUG positively separated itself from the other mixed FUGs, and many of the most common barriers were less prevailing here compared to the other mixed FUGs. Similar conclusions have also been made in previous studies (Agarwal 2001), while others on the other hand have found that higher castes still dominate in key positions in female FUGs as well (Bucky and Rai- Paudya 2008). This study has only examined one female FUG and the representation is therefor too limited to make any final conclusions, however, I would recommend looking deeper into the success of female FUGs in further research. None of the other FUGs clearly separated themself from any of the others, and this study indicates that the barriers dalit and janajati women face keep repeating themselves in FUGs of various categories.

3.9 Contemporary policy provisions

Contemporary forest policies included in the Guidelines for Community Forestry Development Programme issued by DoF (2009) recognize the need for special focus on women and people from dalit, indigenous, poor or other excluded groups regarding participation and leadership in CF. However, the findings of this study indicate that the majority of these policies have not been successfully put into practice.

Section 3.2 (DoF 2009: 6) states that:

> Separate discussions with poor, women, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, indigenous people, ethnic groups, distant users and other excluded groups should be held about the points that have to be included in the constitution. (…) Members of these interest groups should be encouraged to convey their ideas in the general assembly without any hesitation.

Separate discussions with these groups have not been facilitated in any of the five FUGs included in this study. Further, many dalit and janajati women had difficulties expressing their ideas during general assemblies. They felt that the topics they wanted to discuss were not important to others, that people did not listen or that they did not understand what was being talked about during the assembles. Often many people are present at these meetings, and it is impossible to let everybody talk.

Section 6.4 (DoF 2009: 18) also states that:

> The revised constitution and operational plan should be presented at the general assembly for a detailed discussion among the users. (…) This process should have meaningful participation of all the users including the poor, women, *Dalit,* indigenous people and ethnic groups as well as other excluded groups and ensure these people have understood the points that are being revised.

According to most community members, both men and women from lower and higher castes, the constitution and operational plan are presented at general assemblies, but the environment is usually inadequate for such detailed discussions. Often the plans already made by the EC are presented to inform the user group without the opportunity to make changes. When I showed the constitution and operational plan documents to

the participants in the focus group discussions, some had never seen them before, while others had seen them but did not know much about the content.

Section 5.2 (DoF 2009: 14) states that:

> The decision making process should include poor, women, disabled, *Dalits,* indigenous people and ethnic groups, and special attention should be given to develop leadership of these groups. There should be provisions for positive discrimination for these groups such as special consideration for their representation in the committee, and special opportunities of capacity development.

This study indicates that positive discrimination is the policy provision being given most attention. During discussions with government officials from the DFO and representatives from FECOFUN they emphasized affirmative action policies as their main focus and deemed them to be fairly successful. From discussions with the user groups as well it became clear that there was a major focus on enforcing positive discrimination, as many dalit and janajati women had been asked and almost forced into leadership positions. Higher caste women and men also explained that they reserved key roles for dalit and janajati women. However, as I have argued earlier in this analysis, positive discrimination enforced without any focus on training and capacity development has not been very successful in increasing dalit and janajati women´s participation in the decision- making process and leadership roles. On the contrary, it may contribute to reinforce contemporary stereotypes indicating that dalit and janajati women do not have the skills or interest to handle leadership positions.

Both in section 5.2 above and in Annex 3 (DoF 2009: 29) capacity building and training for vulnerable groups are mentioned, however, the findings of this study make it clear that these policies have not been successfully enforced. Government officials from the DFO could also confirm this, saying that capacity building programs are lacking.

Following Annex 3 (DoF 2009: 29) there should also be arranged "appropriate financial incentives to the poor users who participate in assemblies and meetings". As my findings indicate, this has not been implemented. There are reasons to believe that financial incentives would encourage more dalit and janajati women to aim for

leadership roles, as some said they did not have the chance as long as their income remained low. The government officials also recognized that this could encourage more people, but currently most FUGs do not have sufficient funds to offer this.

According to government officials the development of these policy provisions are fairly new, and it takes time to put them into practice. Further, although decreasing, traditional social and gender norms are still one of the main barriers to successful implementation. It is very difficult to develop policies dealing with social and gender norms, and changes in this area happens very slowly.

According to the field experts I interviewed, there is also a lack of interest and political will within the government and FECOFUN when it comes to implementing existing policy provisions. People in these positions are often higher caste and resourceful persons operating within the hierarchical social system they are themselves a part of. According to the field experts, the people who actually want to redistribute power to the more marginalized people are in a minority. During the focus group discussion with FECOFUN I found that the participants were very reluctant to talk about existing problems such as caste discrimination and lack of capacity building programs in CF, and this attitude is likely to have negative affects regarding policy implementation.

4. Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Discriminatory practices in relation to gender and caste are still very much prevailing in Nepali society and create barriers for dalit and janajati women´s occupation of key roles in CFM. Women are sometimes prevented by male family members from participating in CFM, or they do not have time do to heavy workload in the home. Men also dominate in ECs and in setting the agenda for topics to be discussed during meetings and general assemblies, while topics raised by women often are considered to be of less importance. In addition, higher caste people often dominate over lower caste people, preventing them from taking on leadership positions.

Dalit and janajati women often come from poor households, and lack of economic resources has also been identified as a barrier to participation in CFM. They cannot cover extra expenses in relation to having a key role, and they need to spend more time on income earning activities.

This study identifies lack of education and capacity as some of the main barriers to dalit and janajati women´s leadership in CFM. The women feel that they cannot handle the positions without any form of education. In addition to general education they lack knowledge and information about the key positions. Most often dalit and janajati women are put in these positions without any training, which often lead to weak performance. This often only contributes to reinforce the stereotype viewing dalit and janajati women as incapable or unwilling to handle a leadership role among men and higher caste people, as well as negatively affecting the dalit and janajati women´s self- esteem.

Younger dalit and janajati women often have a higher level of education than senior women, which can make it easer for them to access key roles in CFM. Younger women are also more often reported to have the support of their family and husband regarding CFM. This study indicates that senior dalit and janajati women often face the biggest barriers. However, younger women often have more young children to take care of, and can face bigger barriers in relation to workload in the home.

Regarding the five different FUGs explored in this study, only one really separated itself from the other four: the FUG managed only by women. This FUG had a high level of dalit and janajati women in key positions, and the women felt more confident taking on such roles because of the support they received from other EC members. Much of the most common barriers were less prevailing here, while in the other four FUGs they where found to be the same.

This study has found that the contemporary policy provisions outlined in the Guidelines for Community Forestry Development Programme are doing very well in targeting the main barriers to gender and social inclusion in CF, however, there are major problems at the level of implementation. Reasons for this include discriminatory social norms hindering successful implementation, lack of technical resources, limited timeframe and lack of political will and weak enforcement of existing gender and social inclusion strategies among key stakeholders such as DoF and FECOFUN.

4.2 Recommendations

There is an urgent need for more capacity building programs targeting emerging female leaders in CF, as well as providing them with continues guidance and support. Enforcing affirmative action policies without also focusing on capacity building may lead to unintended consequences, and the focus should be on combining these policies.

There should also be more focus on what can be done within and by the communities themselves, for example in relation to providing support to female leaders, rather than only focusing on interventions from the outside. The female FUG explored in this study illustrated successful results coming from community members helping, teaching and supporting each other. One need to explore further how one can encourage such network building between members of one community, and also members of different communities.

The findings of this study show that policies outlined in the Guidelines for Community Forestry Development Programme target many of the key barriers to women´s and other marginalized people´s participation and access to leadership roles in CF. However, most of these policies have not been successfully implemented, and further research

should focus more on the role of DoF and FECOFUN regarding policy implementation: What have they accomplished so far? What has not been accomplished and why? What can be done to improve results? The field experts I interviewed also pointed out that FECOFUN staff often does not have enough experience regarding the implementation of various policies, and there is a need for more capacity building programs targeting FECOFUN staff.

Many of the policy provisions also lack more concrete plans for how they could be put in to practice. Most stakeholders now agree that there is a need for better capacity building programs, economic support for the most poor, separate discussions with lower caste people and women etc., but *how* can we reach these goals? There is a need for more detailed planning regarding the implementation of various policies.

For further research it could also be interesting to explore more in detail how male out-migration affects the position of women in CF and the opportunities this create for women, and how forest policy can use these changes to promote female leaders.

Another element that should be further explored is caste and gender based violence in relation to dalit and janajati women´s leadership, as this study has not been able to find much information on this subject. Some previous research have found cases of gender based violence in relation to CF (Lama and Bucky 2002), however, the subject remains very little explored. Jewkes (2002) argues that educated and empowered women experience less violence compared to uneducated women. However, at the same time violence is used as a way for men to resolve a crisis of their male identity that can occur when women gain more power. Since many CF activities seek to educate and empower lower castes and women, more research should be done regarding these aspects.

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Annex[2] 1:

Basic information to be collected
- Name, address and location of CFUG
- Area of community forest and HHs under groups (by ethnic and well being composition)
- Date of when forest management was handed over to the community from government authority
- Number of members in executive committee (by gender, ethnic and well being composition)
- Activities (forest development, community development and other social welfare) conducted so far.
- Networking, coordination, collaboration and cooperation

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[2] Find attached the checklists used for the focus group discussions and interviews conducted during this study. Note however, that these checklists have been used as guidance during discussions, and some topics included here may not have been discussed, while other topics not included may have been added during discussions.

Annex 2:

Focus group discussion: Dalit and janajati women + Higher caste women

Information access and understanding
- What are the sources of information with regards to the forest management and user groups in your community?
- How do you access information about your CFUG?
- Do you understand all information given to you?

Venue/ time
- How many times are the meetings and assemblies of your CFUG held?
- When and where are those meetings and assemblies held?
- Do you have time to go to meetings?
- Have you attended meetings and/or assemblies before?
- Do you feel welcome and comfortable at the venue?

Confidence and self- esteem
- Do you speak often at the meetings?
- How do you feel when talking in the meetings?
- Do the other members listen to you and respect what you say? If yes/no, give an example of an agenda you put forward that people did/did not listen to.
- Do other participants support you in speaking your mind?
- Or do you feel that other participants prevent you from speaking?

Family and community
- Does your family members (parents, husband etc.) want you to go to the meetings/assemblies?
- Does other people in the community want you to come to meetings/assemblies?
- Why/ why not? If yes, how do they support you to come to meetings/assemblies?
- If no, do they prevent you to participate in some way?
- Do you feel that your family or other community- members regard you differently after you started to participate in your CFUG? Example.

Leadership key roles

- Have you had any dalit or janajati women in any key positions in your CFUG?
- If yes, how many and in which positions?
- Did you find their contribution important?
- Did you feel that people respected their positions and listened to their opinions?
- Can you mention an example of agendas raised by them that you thought was good? Bad?
- If no, would you like to have? Why/why not?

Improvements?

- What are the policy documents that you know your CFUG has?
- Do you know the content of the policy documents in your CFUG?
- Have you participated in the constitution and forest operational-plan development process?
- If yes, were your voices and concerns heard and incorporated in those policy documents?
- Have those policies and provisions been implemented?
- If not, what may be the reasons or why?
- What do you think could be done to improve the implementation?

- **Anybody wants to add something related to the discussion we have had?**

Annex 3:

Focus group discussion: Mixed (higher and lower- caste) men

Information access and understanding
- What are the sources of information with regards to the forest management and user groups in your community?
- Do you have good access to this information?
- Do you understand all information given to you?
- Do all people in the community have equal access to this information?
- Who do you share information with?

Venue/ time
- How many times are the meetings and assemblies of your CFUG held?
- When and where are those meetings and assemblies held?
- Do you go to the meetings/ assemblies?
- Do all members of the community attend meetings/ assemblies?
- If no, why do you think some attend more than others?

Confidence and self- esteem
- Do you speak often at the meetings?
- Does some talk more/ less than others?
- What about dalit/ janajati women?
- Do you find their contribution important?
- If yes, in which particular area/aspects?
- Do you do anything in order to support them in speaking? Or prevent them?

Family
- In your family, who goes to the meetings?
- Do you want your wife, daughter etc. to go? Why, why not?
- Do you think the women in your family have important knowledge about forest use? If yes, what knowledge?

Leadership key roles
- Have you had any dalit or janajati women in any key positions in your CFUG?
- If yes, how many and in which positions?

- How did this contribute to your CFUG? Positive/ negative?
- Can you mention an example of agendas raised by them that you thought was good? Bad?
- Was their contribution important?
- **If no: why? If yes, why?**
- Would you like to have that contribution continue in the future?

If they have not had dalit and janajati women in key positions
- Would you like to have it? Why/ why not?
- What do you think they could contribute?

Improvements?
- What are the policy documents that you know your CFUG has?
- Do you know the content of the policy documents of your CFUG?
- Have you participated in the constitution and forest operational plan development process?
- Do you feel that everybody in the community participated? Why/ why not?
- Have those policies and provisions been implemented?
- If not, what may be the reasons or why?

- **Anybody wants to add something related to the discussion we have had?**

Annex 4:

Checklist DFO, FECOFUN, field experts

Practice

- What do you see as the main obstacles faced by dalit and janajati women when trying to participate in and take on leadership/ key roles in CBNRM?

- In what ways do you think gender and caste discrimination hinders dalit / janajati women´s participation and leadership?

- How is information about community forest practice and policies spread/ shared with the community members? Do you think everybody has equal access to this information?

Policy

- What policy provisions have been put in place to meet these challenges?

- Do you think these policy provisions have been successful in practice? Why/ why not?

- Policy provisions include training and financial compensation for the most poor who choose to take on key roles, however very few have been offered this. Why do you think that is?

- How are you planning to enhance leadership capacity to dalit and janajati women?

- How do you think lack of training and compensation affects dalit and janajati women´s participation and occupation of leadership roles?

- Do you think affirmative action policies have been successful in promoting dalit and janajati female leadership? Why/ why not?

- Do you have any suggestions for new policy provisions? Or improvements for contemporary ones?

- What do you think are the biggest challenges when trying to implement various policies and promoting dalit and janajati leadership capacity?

Social change?

- Do you think participation and leadership in CBNRM have the potential to challenge contemporary gender and social norms and power relations? Why/why not?

- In what ways do you think men´s outmigration affects women´s position in CBNRM?

- Has there been any change in the government agencies how they perceive dalit and janajati women leaders and their competence?