

A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN NEPAL

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Introduction

Women were involved in development activities and programmes (perhaps even before Mexico Conference, the International Women's Year of 1975 or the Decade for Women, 1975-1985), they are and will continue to do so as long as they have their given responsibilities to fulfil. The idea of increasing women's participation that we hear so often from agencies, policy makers or planners sounds more like just another rhetoric associated with today's concept of development. Mies (1990) noted that even after the International Decade for Women, the integration of women into development had not solved women's survival problems. She argued that it only increased women's workload but did not give them more income and assets. I believe that part of the problem in the past may have been a misconception among the planners and policy makers as to what constitutes women's participation. This may be the reason why many (e.g., NGOs/INGOs in Nepal at least) talked about increasing women's participation, without knowing in what and how and what made it easy or difficult to do as a task out in the field.

This paper aims at discussing constraints of women's participation in forest management activities in the context of social, cultural and economic realities of Nepali society. It is found that without support and motivation from the male members of the community, increasing women's participation in development activities is not only difficult but also almost impossible. On the basis of empirical findings, the paper also suggests some practical strategies to eliminate those constraints.

Data /information used here were collected as a part of a gender analysis study (Chhetri and Rana 1994) carried out in two districts – Sindhu Palchok and Kavre Palanchok – in the mid-hills of Central Nepal. Six Forest User

Groups (FUGs) in four sites were selected purposively on the basis of natural and planted type of forests as "Community Forests" (CF), gender and caste/ethnic composition of users and their committees. Fieldwork was carried out in 1994. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, group discussion, observation, informal and personal discussions, and review of Operational Plans and Minute Books of the FUGs under study.

Background Arguments

Women have been taking part in development activities in Nepal, long before international concerns were voiced for including women in development and increasing their participation. In Nepali socio-economic context, women's workload is believed to be heavier in the rural areas of the country compared to that of their men. However, their contribution to development activities at community level and work at household level is never recognized and their status remained unimproved in spite of global efforts in increasing women's participation. There are constraints of women's participation in Nepali society at various levels which can be eliminated or overcome mainly by awareness generating and training at massive scale for both men and women because neither of the two gender exist in isolation.

If women were sending their men to participate in the meetings and gatherings, they may have good reasons for the same. Why they do not want to or can not participate in village meetings in stead of or along with their men? Without knowing this, arguing about involving or nominating of women into committees without their knowledge or consent, just because a project or program has a mandate to involve women or ensure their participation, is not going to solve the problem or make things better for women. The practices in relation to this issue which can be observed at the field level in different parts of the country raises some questions such as: Whose requirement is this? Is it of the State, planners, policy makers, donor agencies, or community and villages? If women's participation is deemed essential in planning, implementing and decision making, why are they left out? Where do they belong in the process of development? How long they will have to represent only in the papers or just get nominated by others who think their participation is necessary? Questions such as these have intrigued many of us. This paper will attempt to address some of these questions on the basis of empirical findings from selected Community Forest Users Groups.

There is no readymade solution to increase women's participation in forestry or community and rural development. As it is said, necessity is the mother of invention, women's needs and problems could only motivate them for participation in any development interventions. Therefore, they themselves and others as well will have to identify their needs or interest to begin with. They should seek and also be given opportunities to speak about their problems, listened to and properly motivated by the local people and the elite. So long as men decide what the needs, problems, interests and priorities of their women are (and unfortunately, this is the prevailing practice in most of the situations from the level of households to the national and international arena), the idea of enhancing women's participation in development will only remain a rhetoric.

Women and Forestry in Nepal – A Review

Nepal's commitment at the UN, as it appears to Bhadra (1995), created a felt need towards including a woman's component into the packages or programs on development in the country. It has generated a strong interest and concern for issues and problems of women in the country and aroused interests at various levels among nation states, development agencies and organizations towards gender issues. Women in many societies of the world today are recognized as a disadvantaged group deserving special attention. In Nepal, many programs and organizations have added women's sections or components to their regular activities in response to the global advocacy for including women in development.

The Status of Women project (1979) carried by the Center for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) and supported by USAID, was the first extensive application of WID concept in Nepal. The project is also believed to be the first to "set an agenda for the understanding of Nepali women, and for practical development interventions in their favour" (Upadhyaya 1996:424). Recommendations of the Status of Women Studies and International and national concerns for women's issues were considered as instrumental in creating a separate chapter on WID policy in the sixth five year plan of Nepal (Bhadra 1995).

Forestry programs have followed the general pattern along with other development programs of adding women's components. Forestry programs and other development programs with forestry components in Nepal have experimented with various methods of involving local people in forestry development activities. Since "people" has now included women as well (it

appears that not long ago peoples participation" meant "men's participation"!), most such programs seek women's participation (see R. Chhetri 1999 for a critique of the practice of participation in Nepal). However, we have yet to see a strategy good enough to increase involvement of women in forestry development activities.

Since women are the primary users of forest products, it would be logical that they be given responsibilities for its conservation also. Any activity relating to access and/or improvement in the condition of forest resources will invariably have a bearing on women as its users. Women and forestry appear to have a closer link in the rural areas of Nepal where life is shaped and dictated by availability and access to basic resources such as water, fuel and fodder. The villages in general and their women in particular have used and managed forests from the past. Their participation, therefore, becomes critical for the success of forestry programs.

Siddiqi argued in favor of the idea of "women for forestry" in response to the question, "women for forestry or forestry for women"? She wrote, "women's participation will help forestry first and women second. Women will have to give to forestry their interest, time, effort and even money (in some cases) before forestry gives them products for household consumption and commercial use, income and consequent improvement in position, status and decision-making power" (1989:4). I would consider it more appropriate to argue that it is neither women for forestry, nor forestry for women, but Women and Forestry. Because our concern should not be who gives who first, rather who is perceived how in relation to each other. How women perceive the role of forestry for their lives? What knowledge do they possess about forestry? How forestry can benefit from women? In short, it is the interactive dimension between women and forestry that is crucial.

In this paper, gender differences are assessed in terms of the participation in forestry and forest-related activities and decision making at the community level. Despite all the slogans and efforts of bilateral and multi-lateral donors, projects of the government agencies, NGOs and INGOs, not much seems to have been achieved in terms of achieving women's genuine participation or involvement in rural development and forestry in Nepal. Why are women still invisible? What are the constraints of women's participation and what are the possible ways to overcome them? These questions have guided the present study. Some illustrations from the field level will be used to support the emerging arguments in the subject.

Social, Cultural and Economic Realities: Some Observations from Nepali Society

In order to understand the given role of people or the way they act, one has to understand the structure of the society, and the prevalent norms and values which guide them in every day activities.

Socio-cultural Norms and Values

In Nepali society, each and every individual has different sets of roles to perform on the basis of their age, sex, position within the family and status as well as the caste/ethnic group they belong to in some cases. Traditional high-caste Hindu ideals have dictated women's manners and behaviours (See Bennett 1983, Gray 1990, Kondos 1990). Men are accorded higher status and importance in the society (Shrestha 1999). As such high-caste Hindu women are put under constant control of their men in different forms at different stages of life. Age and status in the family also determines the nature and degree of women's involvement in household work and decision-making (Shrestha 1994 and 1999, Bhatt et al. 1997). Women are believed to have their primary responsibilities in domestic chores, farm activities, collection and utilization of forest products, rearing and taking care of children, as well as looking after the livestock (see Thacker 1993; Gurung and Banskota 1993; Pandey 1990, Bhatt et al. 1997). Not only the work sphere, but also the manners, body language, dressing pattern, etc., are defined culturally and women in Nepali society are expected to behave womanly (how this is to be defined is a contested issue in itself).

Caste affiliation seems to have some influence on the role and status of women. For instance, among the lower caste people, economic imperative seems to put women next to their men (in the absence of economic disparity) in power status and for their contribution in maintaining family economy. A survey by women of Nauhatta Block (Bihar, India) revealed that, "among depressed castes, earning women members in households evoke respect" (Mahila Bikas Sangh, 1988:43). Whether this could apply to the Nepali context is a research issue in itself.

Dichotomized Sphere of Economic Activities

Men and women seem to have culturally and biologically defined sphere of activities in Nepal. For some reason, the work and responsibility outside the house or "Bahira-fera" and farm production is often considered as a male role

(e.g., attending public meetings or gatherings where decisions are to be made). In contrast, women's work domain is considered inside work or "Bhitra-fera" although fetching water, fuel and fodder falls within their responsibility. Outside work, which requires public contact is taken up by men and inside work, is carried out by women. In other words, men carry out community work whereas women are involved in productive and reproductive works in the households. Activities such as ploughing, fixing roof, animal slaughtering and felling/splitting huge trees are performed exclusively by men. Whereas women's responsibility is stretched from domestic chores to farm and forest. A World Bank paper recognizes that women in most underdeveloped countries are responsible for managing fuel, water, food and sanitation (Herz 1988). However, a study on intra-household gender analysis of work roles and resource distribution in a Nepali village, (Bhadra, 1997) revealed that, women perceived men as "providers" and themselves as "nurturers" even though they spent more time than their men in productive activities. Besides, women were found to be involved in income generating activities only when men's income was not sufficient to support the family. Reality also testifies that, women's entrance into job market is associated with supporting family from men's and or other household earnings.

Nepali women have already been participating in development activities and they have performed important social and economic roles in the society. However, what they have done and what their potentials are (and what they are) has not been acknowledged or recognized. Given the above conditions, what is the justification of the calls for "enhancing women's participation" in forestry activities? Are we not "refusing" to see what is already there? An important option to this is to recognize what exists. There may be gaps, weaknesses, etc., which may be corrected. What already exists may need to be strengthened. This of course, is not to suggest that there are no constraints for women to participate in public affairs as easily as their men. There are problems and let us now talk about some of those.

Constraints of Women's Participation: Field Realities

Women are constrained by various factors to participate in forestry or development activities. The case studies (See Chhetri and Rana 1994 for details) revealed that women generally do not appear in the meetings/gatherings because they have heavier workload; are normally not

invited; do not have a say in decision making because of their lower representation; are scared of being teased by fellow villagers (people hold such discouraging behavior or negative attitude towards women's participation); and are not expected to attend formal meetings. Let me elaborate on some of these in order to give a clearer picture of the realities.

Persistent Heavier Workload of Women In Spite of Developments

Although men and women in Nepali village have culturally defined sphere of activities, the village women have heavier workload compared to their men (Acharya et. al. 1981, ILO 1986, Mahila Bikas Sangh 1988, Pandey 1990, Gurung & Banskota 1993, Chhetri and Rana 1994, SDC 1995, Shtri Shakti 1995, Bhadra 1997). The work burden of women in Nepal is reported to be much higher than the global average for women (NESAC 1998). Women's work domain in rural Nepal is such a field that there is no salary or tips or holiday or overtime payment or any reward. Their work days are often long beginning early in the morning and closing late at night. Women in so called developed western societies stretch their weekends often by watching late night movies. But women in Nepali village wake up every morning with mouths to feed regardless of the days of the week or months of the year (see Chhetri and Rana 1994 for a summary of activities for an average day of women in the village).

During the months of Asar and Saun (mid-June to mid-August) work schedule is hectic due to plantation activity. Women get up soon after midnight, and prepare meal and khaja (snacks) before dawn. They carry the meal and khaja to the field. The hali (ploughman) should be fed with rice before other workers arrive. In the field, women harvest corn, remove corn stalks for rice plantation. They not only work all day doing plantation, they also carry corn back home finding their way to home in twinkling star-light. Yet, feeding the animals and the family remains waiting for them. After such long exhausting day, they have much little rest/sleep and have to wake up for early in order to begin another hectic day. Even during slack season from farm activities, women have reported that they collect firewood, and get engaged in some kind of income generating activities such as, Namlo (headband used in carrying loads) weaving in between domestic chores and also while talking to the visitors (See Chhetri and Rana 1994).

Elderly women in the study sites commented that with the development of drudgery reducing technology and other changes like the setting up of rice

and flour mills, road construction, time saving devices such as pressure cooker, improved stoves and so on, women's work have been simplified and made easier. They also agree that because of community forestry developments in the area, time for collecting forest products is reduced. In other words, the elderly women see a difference in the stress caused by the type of work they did as young women in contrast to what their daughters and daughters-in-laws have to do.

For instance, a 72-year-old Tamang woman of Asine, (Thulosirubari of Sindhu Palchok district) recalled her days as a young women and said: "We had to walk all the way to Kathmandu, for 3 days (one way) to buy salt, pots, mustard oil, kerosene, clothing, etc. While going on such trips we had to carry our own flour for dhindo (thick porridge/mush), cooking utensils, firewood and sal leaf plates. It sounds funny now but we did all that. We neither had delicious food to eat nor good clothes to wear on as today." She finished by asserting that things are much better today. Another elderly Chhetri women (about 65 years old) of Kabhre Bhanjyang (in Kabhre Palandchok district) compared her work with that of the young women today and argued that she used to get up very early in the morning and finish pounding 8-10 pathis of rice on a dhiki (traditional rice pounding device) or grinding few pathis of corn or millet in a janto (traditional hand-grinding device made with stone) before dawn. She said: "Our daughters-in-law go to the mills even for grinding small amount of dal (lentil) rather than use the janto". A Bahun woman (age 55) of Kamiko Pandhero (Kavre) added, "We had to walk all the way to a ghatta (traditional water mill) in Roshi Khola, near Panauti for a whole day in order to grind cereals. Our daughters-in-law have access to the electric grinding mills just at the door steps (in Kavre Bhanjyang) and rice mills in Dhulikhel (1 hour walk at the most)". From what these elderly women reported in a comparative view, it appears that life must have become much easier for village women within the past 2-3 decades.

But, the question before us is: Do village women have some leisure time now as a result of the developments? As the elderly women say the work of village women may have been simplified because of some modern innovations. So things are different today. But on the other hand, with many of the recent developments like the opening up of dairy development centers (e.g., in Daduwa and Kabhre Bhanjyang) intensification of land use and production of cash crops for market (in Asine), extra work loads seem to have been added for local women. The women in the study sites in general agreed

that they are required to work harder to feed their cattle and buffaloes well to ensure that they produce more milk as well as to produce more and quality crops in their farms so that the family could earn some extra income regularly. This study corroborates a similar finding discussed by Bhatt et.al. (1997) that the business of livestock production in the hill community have posed constraints on rural women of livestock-maintaining households, because unlike agricultural production, livestock production occurring year round, required a rigorous daily work combined with daily household chores.

From group discussions with men and women in the study sites it was revealed that large number of young and able-bodied men were away during most of the year from their villages. Consequently, women are left behind with more responsibilities at home and in the village. Off-farm employment of men away from the village; seasonal utensil business (Lapse and Gaurati); production of cash crops like garlic, vegetables (in Asine); and production of milk for dairy (in Daduwa and Kabhre Bhanjyang) were reported to have increased women's workload in the village. Women not only have to perform what have always been their jobs, but they also have to fulfil men's works and responsibilities during their absence from the village (see Chhetri and Rana 1994, Gurung 1999, Thapa 1999).

Thus we see that some modern innovations (e.g., the rice and flour mills) have made life easier (or at least reduced the drudgeries of having to grind or pound cereals in the 'morning' hours before day light) for village women today. But other types of developments (e.g., the market access or commodification of farm products) have kept those women as busy as ever.

In villages closer to towns or district headquarters, women also revealed that most of their men do not work at home, farm or forest because they were working in offices. Men prefer to wander about when there is no office or work outside rather than staying home and giving a hand in women's work. If men could change such attitude about work and help their women, perhaps things would be much different for rural women in Nepal.

Attitude of Men: Social Expectations of Women

Pandey (1990) pointed out that women were rarely consulted in forest related projects because they were seen as "destroyers of forests". This kind of attitude discourages their participation. Gronow (1987) found that an all-female forest management committee (Dolakha) which was accepted by the community and welcomed by women remained ineffective and unable to

implement its decisions due to lack of credibility and support by men. But Inserra (1988) saw little resistance from the community. She believed that women have worked successfully on mixed and all-female forest management committees in Nepal. The forest users group members of Asine (Thulo Sirubari of Sindhu Palchok) for instance, have set an example by entrusting women with a decision-making and management role. Their practice and experience has revealed a fact that if women are well motivated and have the support and trust of the local men and elite, they can do forest management activities effectively and successfully. Thus it is evident that if the local men can trust their women, the latter could do things that are perceived as difficult for women. The women's committee of Asine is managing its activities effectively with strong support and motivation from the local elite and men in the village. There is neither any fence around the forest nor is there any watcher guarding it, yet the users feel happy that there have been no problems of stealing forest products or similar offences. Even at times, those women did not hesitate to impose a penalty on one of the elites (male) from the advisory committee for breaking the rule. The man who committed the offence said in a supportive tone: "I liked their decision. I paid the fine thinking that this will be a lesson for others not to break the rules in the future". This clearly means that women take their responsibilities in CF seriously. Besides, if men adopt an open or positive attitude, they do not have to feel offended by women imposing rules on them.

The case of Tamang FUG in Asine suggests that women would happily take part in any development endeavours and/or status raising activities in their village if they receive strong support and motivation from male members of their community. In the absence of open and positive attitude among village men and elite towards their womenfolk, things can be very different. Let me illustrate this with an observation from a village called Daduwa which is less than one hours' walking distance away from Asine. In Daduwa (Thulo Sirubari, Sindhupalchok), a predominantly Brahman-Chhetri village, the women seem to have been discouraged by their men even from going to the adult literacy class. Women in Daduwa reported that the local men teased women that they were not children to be attending the classes. It was revealed in the group discussion (at Daduwa) that, some women were not only being teased by young men, but were also discouraged by their fathers-in-law from attending such public gatherings. In Asine (Tamang villages), 40 women were found to be learning to read and write in adult literacy class with all the

support of their men. Some women came to the class in spite of having to carry their babies on their back. In this Tamang community, men were also found to be sharing household chores (cooking or taking care of babies) while the women attended the adult literacy classes. Perhaps the Brahmans in villages like Daduwa have a lesson to learn from the Tamangs of Asine.

In Daduwa (the Bahun-Chhetri village), it was also found that women have limited access to information related to CF activities. Men who attend meetings/public gatherings often did not communicate to their women about the important decisions made at the meetings concerning forest-related activities. A similar finding was reported by Shrestha (1992) in Nala village (Kabhre district), where she found that majority of women including wives of UGC members were not aware of user committee, their meeting dates and time.

From the above illustrations, it can be argued that women would happily take part in any development endeavors and status raising activities in their village if they receive strong support and motivation from male members of their community. For example in Daduwa, a predominantly Bahun-Chhetri village, there appears to be a strong will among the women for learning new skills and raising their social status. But the male members in their community do not seem to always favour this. In contrast, in a Tamang community (same VDC), the men were found to be supportive of their women learning to read and write. They also had given all the support needed by the women FUG committee for the protection and management of their CF. From these two contrasting cases, we may conclude that the support and motivation from local males and elites plays a vital role in raising women's confidence towards forest management. This could be true for any other program aiming at empowering women or working towards a gender-balanced approach in development.

Women's Role in Decision-Making: How Far are They Involved?

Women are not directly involved in decision making in development activities at community level. Their participation is limited in labour contribution in the form of pitting, planting, watering, cleaning, thinning, pruning, harvesting, etc, in community forestry activities. Women and children of Daduwa reported that they had participated along with men in carrying seedling from the road-head, as well as in pitting and planting work in the CF. But they were not always involved in FUG gatherings or decision making or at management

planning. Invitation to participate in the meeting and gatherings are often understood that they are for household heads (who are generally men). Women are not invited to the meetings nor are they encouraged to participate in them so long as male members in the household are around.

Although local elite supported women in forest/community development activities (e.g., in Asine), it was found that the women were not considered as important in planning and decision-making process. Committee (all women) members of the FUG, including the president said that they were not informed as to how the committee was formed to begin with. Ful Maya Tamang, the chairperson of the FUG committee revealed that the men in the assembly simply asked her and other female members to put Lyapche (thumb print/signature) in the register and then declared that they had formed a women's FUG management committee. She added: "I could not sleep properly that night thinking what was going to happen?" Ful Maya and her friends have done well with the task given to them. However, they simply felt that there was a lot of pressure on them. It appears that merely selecting women or increasing sex ratios of committee membership in any development activities or programmes neither promotes women's genuine participation nor expands their level of awareness about it. One women member of the milk collection committee in Daduwa village even did not know the names of the committee members she was representing.

It was found that most of the women including the Committee President of Kamiko Pandhero FUG (in Kabhre) did not know that they (users) were allowed to harvest the products from their forest. When we visited her village in 1994, she showed us the forest and asked whether it looked well protected. From what she said, it was clear that she did not know that the group and the committee had any decision-making authority. She felt that she was a mere watcher for the CF (and wondered why she was not being paid!). She was surprised to hear that the forest is theirs to manage and use. From this it is evident that, women were involved in the forest management/development because it is required to do so. They were not involved in decision-making because it was not mandatory.

It may be argued that women's participation in forestry should not be conceived "mechanically". The belief that their inclusion in the committees translates to their effective participation is faulty. Because inclusion of women in the committees may not necessarily reflect their involvement in the decision making process. In some cases the user groups make decisions and

the committee performs an executive role only. In other cases decisions are made by the committee where women's numbers are minimal. For example, some women involved in forest users committee in Gaurati Chyandanda FUG of Sindhupalchok were removed from the committee for not being "active" (i.e. not being able to attend all committee meetings) due to their heavy household responsibilities. Of course, those women did come to the forest management activities (i.e., cleaning of the forest, pruning of branches, or thinning activities in CF). But the male dominated committee and assembly decided that attending meetings was more important.

Women perhaps with ignorance of their own potential or heavier workload or rigid work domain, do not think it necessary to attend meetings or community gatherings. For instance, it seems that women in predominantly Brahman/Chhetri village in Kavre, neither take initiative by themselves nor are inspired by their family members to do so. A 56-year-old Jaisi woman of Kabhre Bhanjyang despite of being de facto household head, (husband and sons were away from home working and/or studying in Kathmandu), retorted, "Why should we (women) go to the meetings? If our men were around, they would have gone to such meetings"

From the discussion of case materials above, it is evident that women's participation in forestry or other development activities is constrained by factors related to the social, cultural and economic realities of Nepali society. The main hindrance or the facilitating factors for women's involvement in public spheres in the villages seems to be manifest in the attitude of men towards women, both at the household level and the community level. For instance, the Tamang women of Asine were not hindered by their men from participating in development and their status raising activities while the opposite was true for the Brahman/Chhetri women of Daduwa. Tamang men in Asine seemed to have a more open attitude towards the involvement of their women in local development activities. In many places in Nepal, the social expectation of women is such that they are not seen as partners in development but are instead taken as 'means' to development. The idea of women being the 'other half' of the society, or equal partners, or 'the other wheel of the chariot of society' remains a rhetoric. The attitudes of people in the society will need to change before things start to move smoothly—i.e., with a gender balance in any development programs and activities.

Strategies to Overcome the Constraints: Some Practical Ideas

Constraints of women's participation in forestry or development activities as we have seen are related to social and cultural norms, values and practices of our society. Any strategies aimed at combating such constraints will show their results slowly since cultural norms, values and beliefs do not always change overnight. Keeping this in mind, I suggest some strategies as "practical ideas" that have emerged out of field observations and discussions with women in the villages. I believe that some of these could have practical implications for bringing about a gender balanced practices in community forestry at the local level.

Change in Social Attitudes and Practices

Although changing men's attitudes and practices regarding women's work is considered requiring "new and untested" strategies (UNICEF 1996:129) the perceptions of men and women towards women's participation in development activities could be changed through training and mass awareness raising activities. Awareness raising of any one particular group men or women would not help to solve the problem since neither one exists in isolation. They have to be seen in relation to each other as parts of the system. Awareness raising programs as such should ensure that, men and women take part in development endeavors as partners whether it be at family level or at community and village level development. A 'holistic' approach to this issue can be more practical than any other means used for the purpose.

Non-formal Education Focused on Gender Awareness Raising

Non-formal education is considered an entry point to development programs for women and men. It has been reported very effective to reach the most disadvantaged group of rural women to raise their awareness about various opportunities and to organize them for collective objectives (Acharya, 1993, Denholm 1993). Adding gender awareness and sensitization package in literacy classes and providing some incentives (e.g. stationary, posters, calendars, etc. to introduce gender issues to adults) would encourage women and men to learn about and respect each other. It could be emphasized that men and women take part in development endeavors as partners whether it be at family level or at community and village level development. This could pave the way for a gradual change in social attitude and norms towards women (which is vital) and their worth in the society and culture.

Involvement for Active and Effective Participation of Women

Involvement of women in development activities should not be taken as a physical presentation or a mere nomination of women rather it has to be understood as having their role in decision-making. As the saying goes, "Dhanle dhan thap..." and "Jahan gahiro tehin ashriyo" (wealth accumulates wealth), similarly, women's active participation in development ensures women's effective participation. Confidence of women, their active participation, and power of decision-making in development activities are factors reinforcing each other. As a result, changes will begin to manifest in their way of thinking and acting. Such participation will give women a genuine measure of access, participation and control, and confidence necessary to initiate changes in their own homes (see UNICEF1996:129)

Initiatives to be Taken by Field Staff

Development workers or extension workers are the ones who often interact with men and women in the village with regard to development programs and projects. If they take initiative and incentives for involving women along with men, women would be more than happy to take part or be involved in any development endeavors. For instance, a female Ranger of Kavre District revealed (during our field work) that more women participated when she took initiatives particularly to invite women and request men to send their women to take part in community forest activities. Thus field level staff for example, can play a vital role in increasing women's participation in activities like setting up Forest User Groups, discussing user rights and responsibilities, making important decisions on rules and regulations, etc.

To overcome the constraints discussed above, men's attitude towards women as well as social and organizational practice (which are the main constraints) need to be changed. Efforts for this has to come from all sides e.g., project planners, local elites, social workers, local NGOs, local authorities, educated men and women in the area, etc. In order to make women's participation effective, they must be seen as partners equal to men in forestry/development activities and most importantly they should be given equal role in decision-making.

Summary and Conclusions

Village women have heavier workload than their men. Their workload has more or less remained the same even after "development" reached their

village. Because of heavy responsibilities on household chores and farm works, women get very little spare time to participate in community / village level development activities on a regular basis.

If the local men can trust their women and provide the necessary support, the latter could do things that are perceived as difficult for women. People (Tamangs) in Kali Devasthan forest user groups have set an example by entrusting women in UGC with a decision making and management role. Those women have already set a good example of managing forest successfully with the help, support and motivation of the local men / elites.

Support and motivation from local males and elites plays vital role in raising women's social status as well as confidence, which is essential for any development activities in general and forestry in particular. The Brahman/Chhetri men in the study area, for instance, were found to be less supportive of their women's attempts towards making themselves literate by joining the adult literacy classes. The Tamang community in the same area gave a contrasting impression. It appears that social and cultural norms and values of various caste and ethnic groups towards gender roles should also be understood in order to find out the factor which may facilitate or inhibit women's active and effective participation in public activities including community forestry.

Heavier workload of rural women appears to be the main constraint of their active and effective participation in development activities. They would happily take part in any development endeavors or status raising activities in their villages if they receive strong support and motivation from male members of their community. Mass awareness generating and training to sensitize men and women will promote support from the males. Involvement of women in development activities should not merely be understood in terms of their physical participation or getting nominated into committees. It is more critical that men and women share power and authority in decision-making from the household-level upwards. Sharing of responsibilities and benefits as well by both men and women would be equally important for the success of a rural development program like community forestry in Nepal.

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Notes

1. The FUGs studied included: Kali Devasthan (natural forest managed by Tamang women), and Gaurati Chyandanda (planted forest managed by heterogeneous users) in Sindhu Palchok district. Similarly, the FUGs from Bhandarkharka (natural forest managed by high caste women), Ghoda Ladeko Bhir (planted forest managed by "lower caste" users), Kami Ko Pandhero (planted forest managed by mixed caste groups (Kami, Damai and Brahman), and Gaukhureswar (natural forest management with incentives for women's participation) were included from Kabhere Palanchok district (see Chhetri and Rana 1994 for a detailed report).

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