



Gender gaps in forestry tenure systems

Info brief

Langtang National Park, Baraban Collaborative Forest, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, Indreni Community Forest and Magar Community Customary Religious Forest, Nepal

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Context

There are 59 indigenous communities in Nepal. Each has its own distinct culture, social structure, tradition, history and knowledge of the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Indigenous Peoples' customary laws and practices have played a vital role in forest management and maintaining the integrity of the country's natural ecosystems. Indigenous Peoples' rights to their land, territories and resources have been included in international declarations and agreements. These include the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

and the International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169. Nepal has adopted both. However, there has been no recognition by Nepal of indigenous women, who have a critical role in contributing to conservation and forest management.

Research questions

The research aimed to answer the following main research question: to what extent can indigenous women access and exercise their rights to forest spaces and products and take part in decision-making mechanisms?

Methodology

The study used primary data collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews and field observation. Secondary data was collected by desk review of laws, regulations and guidelines and published and unpublished articles and reports.

The study was conducted in four different forest management regimes: national park and protected forest; community forest; collaborative forest; and customary forest. They cover mountain, hill and plains (Terai) regions in Madhesh, Bagmati, Lumbini and Sudurpaschim provinces.

Findings

In all four forest management regimes, indigenous women's access to forest resources for cultural and economic use is constrained by policies, laws, and regulations which do not recognize the rights of indigenous women to their lands, territories and resources. In protected areas, indigenous women do not feel safe to access resources due to militarization and their exposure to different kinds of harassment and violence. The relationship that indigenous communities and indigenous women have with their forests and culture is deep, but this relationship has not been incorporated into policies, acts, regulations, and rules in the different forest regimes.

Indigenous women are not able to continue their traditional activities such as collecting herbs, non-timber forest products and wild vegetables, traditional

wine making, shifting cultivation and fishing. The procedures required to access forest resources are difficult for them to navigate due to the language barrier and their lack of education and information.

Regulations for the buffer zones of national parks and wildlife reserves specify that benefits of those protected areas should be provided for community empowerment. However, this was not evident in the field surveys at the study sites.

Indigenous women's representation in decision-making roles is very low. They do not have lead roles in the decision-making bodies of the four forest regimes even though they have been playing key roles in forest conservation and management. There are provisions for women's representation in decision-making committees in the four forest regimes but not in the lead roles that could bring change in decisions and management. The collaborative forest management regime documentation mentions that representation of Indigenous Peoples is a priority in the management committee but this was not seen in the field.

Conclusions

There are persistent gender gaps in all four forest management regimes in Nepal in the areas of representation, decision-making and benefit sharing. Despite a provision on representation of women in national community forest guidelines, there is under-representation of indigenous women. There is no enabling environment for them to

build leadership skills, networks and confidence that would encourage their participation and representation in forest management regimes.

The establishment of national parks, community forests, and wildlife reserves has affected indigenous women's access to forest resources, impacting their livelihoods and culture. The restrictions have increased their vulnerability to sexual harassment and violence. Procedures to access forest resources are lengthy and costly. Indigenous women's access to information regarding trainings and other programs is low due to their limited networks and language barriers.

- Make securing the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples mandatory before establishing new protected areas or community forests on lands traditionally occupied by Indigenous Peoples' communities.

Recommendations

- Amend the existing National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973 to ensure the rights of Indigenous People, especially indigenous women, to access and use forest resources.
- Monitor violations of human rights in the forest regime, with particular attention to the needs of Indigenous Peoples' communities.
- Amend forest regulations to ensure Indigenous People can participate in forest management and respect for their traditional knowledge.
- Identify and document Indigenous Peoples' customary forest management practices in order to recognize their importance and ensure conservation of traditional knowledge.

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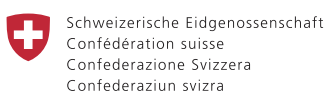
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