

Gender Implications

It is apparent that a village-level institution, especially of women, cannot exist in isolation. It has to contend with competing interests within its wider environment. Issues regarding power and the control of benefits from natural resources have been complicated by gender biases.

The dispute was between the DOF, HMG/Nepal and a small women's group. The women's group of the Jalbire community forest consists of illiterate women, inexperienced in administrative and legal matters but dedicated to their work. It is likely that they had received instructions from someone in a position of authority to execute the forestry operations that led to the 1992 violation of the OP. At the same time, the male members of the group's households derided the women's efforts, claiming that a group composed only of women would not function well. The men did not like the women's involvement in forest activities which gave them less time for household and agricultural work. The women were not supported by their male counterparts in their dispute with the DOF.

As matters stand, the women cannot use the income generated from the community forest for general development work, and their authority to make decisions is extremely limited. They do not need to construct new houses and have no urgent requirements for timber. They do not need the forest for livestock grazing, as they obtain fuelwood and fodder for their livestock from agricultural residue and the trees on their land. Thus, the women and their male family members feel that working hard for the management of the forest without benefitting from it is pointless. The women have also started thinking that certain decisions, such as the prohibition on the felling of trees for five years, strict control over funds, and other restrictions, were imposed because the group consisted solely of women.