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**WOMEN IN FORESTRY:  
STUDY OF A WOMEN'S FOREST COMMITTEE  
IN A NEPALESE VILLAGE**

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*Policy Analysis in Agriculture and Related Resource Management*

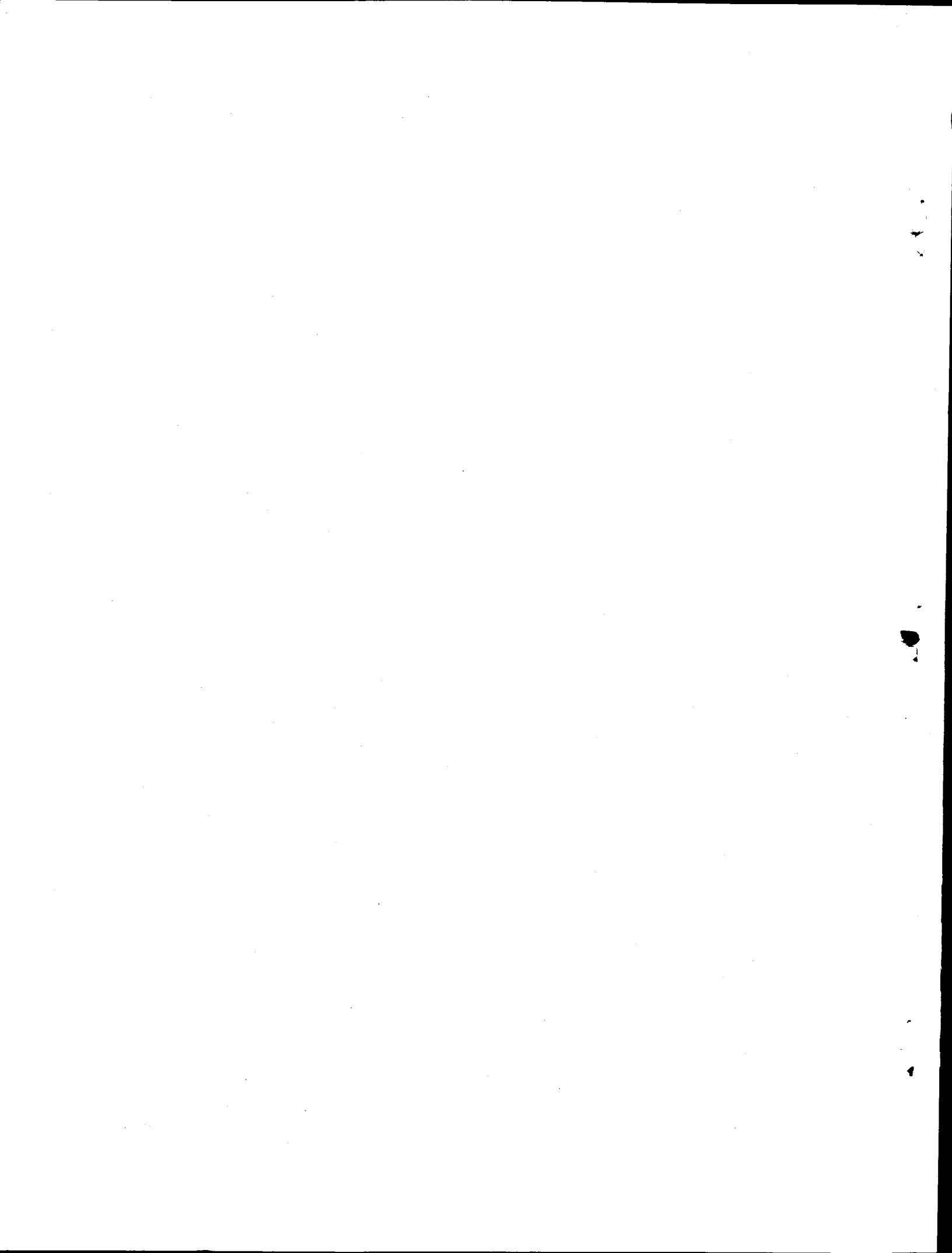
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# **WOMEN IN FORESTRY: STUDY OF A WOMEN'S FOREST COMMITTEE IN A NEPALESE VILLAGE**

Shibesh Chandra Regmi<sup>1</sup>

## **1. CONTEXT, ISSUES AND METHODS**

### **Background**

In Nepal, forest is one of the most important national resources and the Nepalese economy, mainly based on agriculture and livestock farming, is greatly dependent on forest resources for its maintenance. Of the country's total land area, 38 percent or 55,334 sq km is covered by forest. This area produces more than 50 percent of Nepal's total supply of animal foods in the hilly region. In 1986-87, the total revenue from the forest was about Rs. 139 million, 81 percent of which came from the sale of timber and about 4 percent from the sale of herbs (CBS 1988:77). As Nepal has few fossil fuels, fuelwood from the forest also accounts for about 84 percent of the country's energy supply, and about 93 percent of the population's requirements for cooking and heating (MOF 1985).

Before 1957, no strict regulations governed the use of the forest in Nepal as the population was smaller and forested areas relatively larger. This oversupply of forest resources relative to demand led to underinvestment and misuse over the years. In 1957, hoping to improve the situation, the government nationalised all forests and curtailed the rights of local people to use them. With their traditional access to forest products limited by the new law, the villagers no longer felt a sense of responsibility for managing the forest, and rather than ease the problem the Nationalisation Act led to further deterioration of the situation. Moreover, as there were no up-to-date land records, forest was destroyed as people cleared and cultivated the land so that they could claim it as private property.

To reverse this trend, the government enacted the Forest Act of 1978, which

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established two new categories of forests: *Panchayat<sup>2</sup> Forest (PF)* and *Panchayat Protected Forest (PPF)*, both to be managed by local communities. With the assistance of the World Bank and other donor agencies, they subsequently launched several other measures such as the implementation of community forestry programmes (1979), establishment of the Community Forestry and Afforestation Division (CFAD) and initiation of the Community Forest Development Project (CFDP) in 1980.

Despite these efforts, the consequences of forest degradation still plague Nepal: land erosion, floods, landslides, a worsening supply of forest products and a declining productivity in agriculture all continue to exert an adverse impact on the general environment. Because of the over-utilisation of natural resources, a number of eco-systems have reached or are reaching their carrying capacity.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Problem**

The blame for the worsening situation in forestry has been laid at the door of rapid population growth, slash-and-burn agriculture, the lack of people's participation<sup>4</sup> in reforestation programmes and protection of existing forest resources, and frequent changes in government policy. However, one major reason, observed in several studies (Acharya and Bennett 1981, Thurnberg *et al.* 1980/81, Werner 1981) is that all forestry programmes at that time excluded women from forest resource management. This was a gross oversight, considering that women not only constitute half the country's population, but are also responsible for collecting firewood and fodder and are the primary users of forest resources.

The above studies also show that Nepalese women in any case participate as much as much as or perhaps more than, men in managing forest resources such as fuelwood and fodder and that, as primary users of these resources, they can undertake the activities necessary for their proper use and conservation. In view of this, in 1984 the CFDP began forming women's forest committees so that women could participate in designing and implementing forest resource management plans.

This study analyses the process by which women's forest committees were formed and how these village committees were instrumental in encouraging village women to participate in forestry development activities. By highlighting the role of such committees in implementing forest-related programmes, the study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of women's participation in a development project and to better planning

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<sup>2</sup>The term *panchayat*, which referred to a party-less political system or a political administrative unit, is no longer used. The physical unit is now known as a "village development committee area".

<sup>3</sup>This ecological imbalance will not only create unrest within the country but may threaten Nepal's position as an independent state (Poffenberger 1980 and Bajracharya 1983).

<sup>4</sup>In forestry programmes "people's participation" often refers only to men.

and implementation of other such projects in the future.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to examine women's participation<sup>5</sup> in programmes designed to develop and manage local forest resources.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To describe the tasks identified and activities undertaken by one women's committee;
2. To identify the factors which fostered or hindered the women's participation in committee activities; and
3. To propose recommendations to improve the organisation and participation of women's groups in forest resource management.

### **Research Methodology**

This is a descriptive and exploratory study emphasising the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspects of the information relating to women's participation in forest management; it documents the women's work in the committee in some detail, an exercise which has not been carried out before.

Because of time and budget constraints, the study focused on only one women's forest committee located in Armala Village (formerly *panchayat*) of Kaski District in the Mid-Western Development Region of Nepal (see Figure 1). The site was purposively selected because of easy access and the researcher's familiarity with the area.

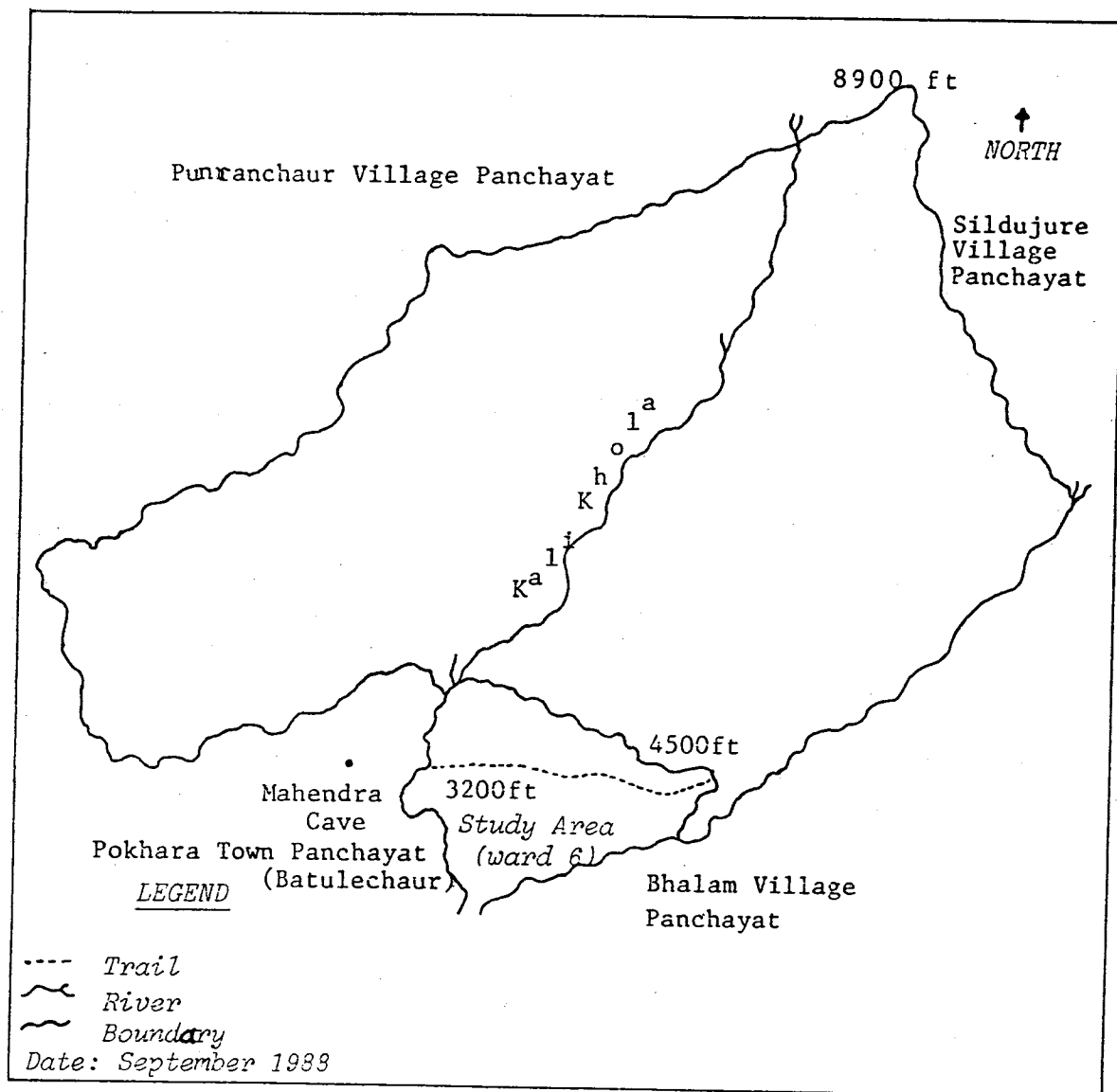
The field data were collected over a three month period (July-September 1988). Information was provided mainly by 22 key informants, comprising members of the women's committee, local political and social leaders and local government (such as forestry department) officials. Some informal discussions were also held with other villagers - both men and women - with knowledge of the local situation. Data were gathered through individual interviews as well as formal and informal group discussions with key informants, field observation and secondary data collection.

Two data collection instruments were used: a community level information form for data on the physical environment of the study site and an interview guide for key informants to collect information about the women's committee.

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<sup>5</sup>In this study "participation" is defined as the active involvement of members (in this case female members) of a community in the decision-making, implementation, benefit sharing and evaluation of the development activities in question.

FIGURE 1  
 MAP OF ARMALA VILLAGE PANCHAYAT  
 SHOWING THE STUDY SITE



## Literature Review

Studies have shown that women can be effective participants in social forestry programmes.

Social forestry can be defined as any activity (such as growing trees purposively, certain techniques in crop production, soil conservation, improved use of wild forest products) of a social group which has as its ultimate effect a movement of that group towards self-sufficiency in forest resources, while at the same time lessening its pressure on the resources of the natural forest through a more efficient and more intensive use of land (Alvarez 1982; Aguilar 1982). It can also be defined as those local forest resource management activities which command people's active participation, often as a result of strong community organisation effectively controlled by the people themselves. Underlying the different definitions of social forestry is the active participation of local communities in planning and managing local forest resources.

In most Asian countries, women (more than men) spend a significant portion of their time in forest-related activities such as farming, collecting fuelwood and fodder, grazing animals, fetching water and cooking. Several studies conducted in different parts of the country show that this is also the case in Nepal and such studies stress the need to involve women in forest management so that the community itself can protect and develop local forest resources successfully (Werner 1981, Hoskins 1981, New ERA 1983, Landis 1984).

The above studies generally show that when there is a scarcity of wood near the house, women walk great distances to collect and carry heavy loads of wood home. They also sell a wood portion of this fuelwood in commercial urban centres, an activity which has become important off-farm work employing thousands of people, the majority of whom are women. Similarly, a scarcity of fodder near the house - one consequence of the depletion of forest resources - forces women to take their animals farther and farther for grazing. These situations have led women to look for better ways of managing forest such as planting tree species which provide more fuelwood and fodder, taking proper care of existing forest resources and minimising the amount of fuelwood used for cooking and heating.

Rural women in Nepal have used and managed forests in the past. Their participation in forestry needs to be understood in this light by all forestry personnel for any forestry projects to succeed.

Siddiqi (1989a) writes that women's participation will help the forests first and the women second; women will have to give to forestry before forestry gives to them. Siddiqi (1989b) further writes that, given that it is essential to involve women in developing and implementing workable management plans, there has to be a targeted effort to draw them in. Because of the nature of Nepalese society and the positions of men and women in it, other strategies may be unworkable, e.g., the attempt by the Nepal Australia Forestry Project to integrate women into existing organisations rather than organise a separate structure for them, which proved to be unworkable.

Inserra's (1988) experience is that women have worked successfully in both mixed and all-female forestry committees in rural Nepal. Village men and women and professional foresters now generally agree that women are capable of committee

management. She recommends that women's membership of forestry committees be promoted, primarily through extension activities.

The literature identifies several factors affecting women's participation in development programmes such as social forestry. One such factor is the gender division of labour Mead (1949) and Gonzalez (1977) whereby men are expected to be involved in outside activities providing an economic return. Such gender norms result in women being discouraged from participating in development programmes which entail "outside" work.

Illo (1977) and Banskota (1978) describe another factor inhibiting women's participation in outside economic and social activities. The women must confront a societal norm which dictates that their place is in the home, while the husband's duty is to support the family. Consequently, a working wife may be seen as a husband's "failure" to perform this economic function. Other norms stress that men are naturally superior to women, and that there are activities proper only to men, or only to women. Such norms allow only men to deal with development agencies.

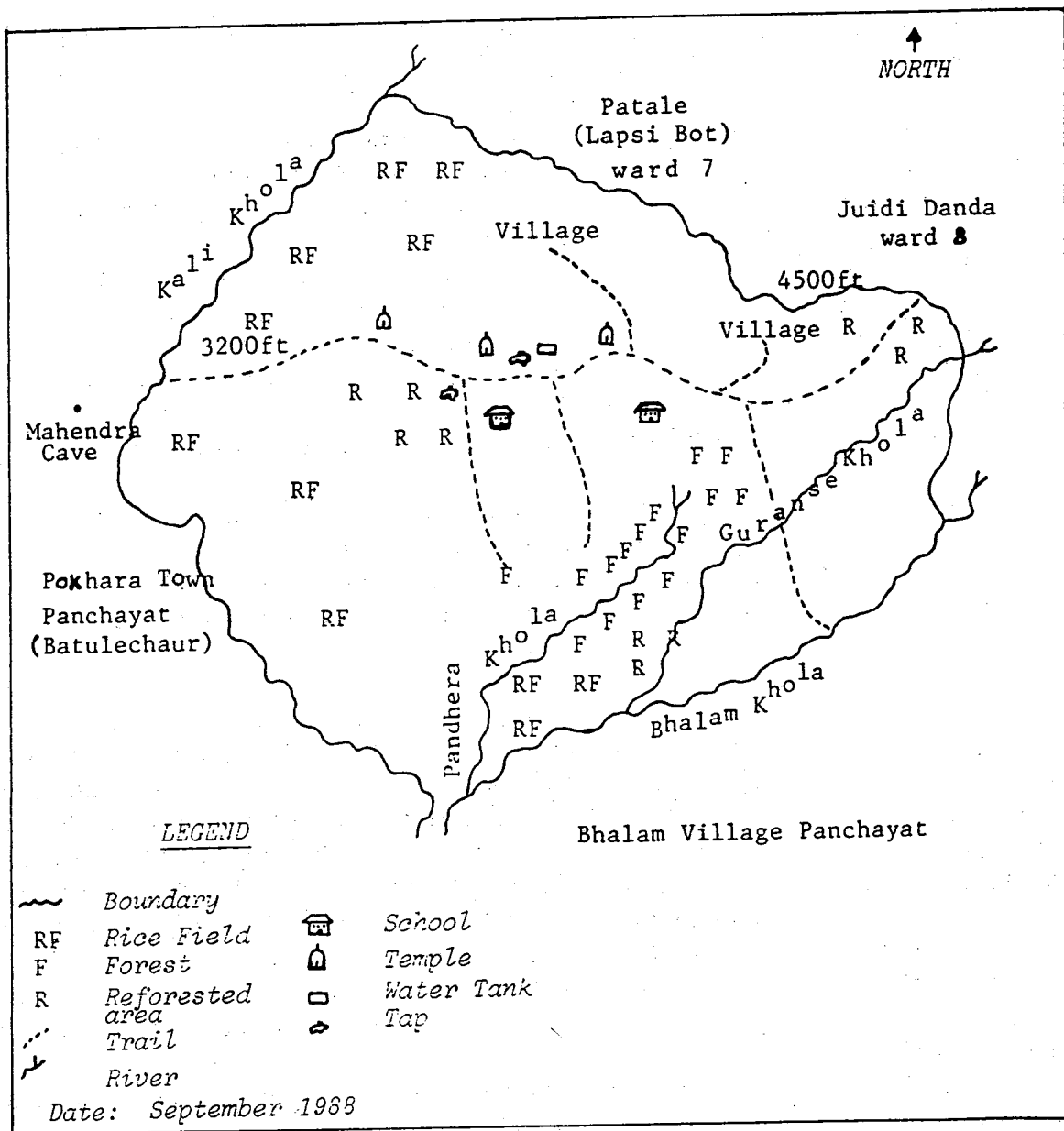
Women's participation in a programme also depends on how they perceive the benefits accruing from it. As Castillo (1983) puts it : people's participation depends on how effective a programme is in fulfilling the interests of the people. Generally speaking the higher the prospect of benefits from a development programme, the greater will be participation in its activities. Hoskins (1981) argues that the way in which a programme's benefits are shared out is also a major factor affecting participation. Again generally speaking, the higher the prospect of equitable benefit sharing, the greater the chances of women's participation.

Cohen and Uphoff (1977) note that land, capital or labour required as inputs for implementation of a project may be barriers to participation. One would therefore expect that the lower these requirements are, the higher will be women's participation in a development programme's activities.

Other issues involved in women's participation relate to the attitude of the development agencies concerned and the support they give women. Miralao (1980) points out that despite women's active role in subsistence and agricultural activities, rural development efforts, including the provision of credit, technical advice and extension, appear to be systematically channelled to men. Hoskins (1981) argues that women's expertise in forest related activities is generally unnoticed by the concerned agencies and as a result, programmes cannot achieve their commitments.

The above studies suggest that women's participation in a development programme (including forestry) is affected by several factors, a small selection of which are dominant. Beginning with these latter, the study intends to find out various other factors affecting women's participation in forest management.

FIGURE 2  
STUDY SITE (WARD 6)



## 2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Formation of the Women's Committee

The committee under study comes from Ward 6 of Armala Village about 3 km north of Pokhara, the headquarters of both Kaski District and the Western Development Region of Nepal. The study ward has an elevation ranging from 3,200 to 4,500 ft (see Figure 2).

Information collected from the field revealed that the women's forest committee in Armala Village was formed mainly for the following reasons:

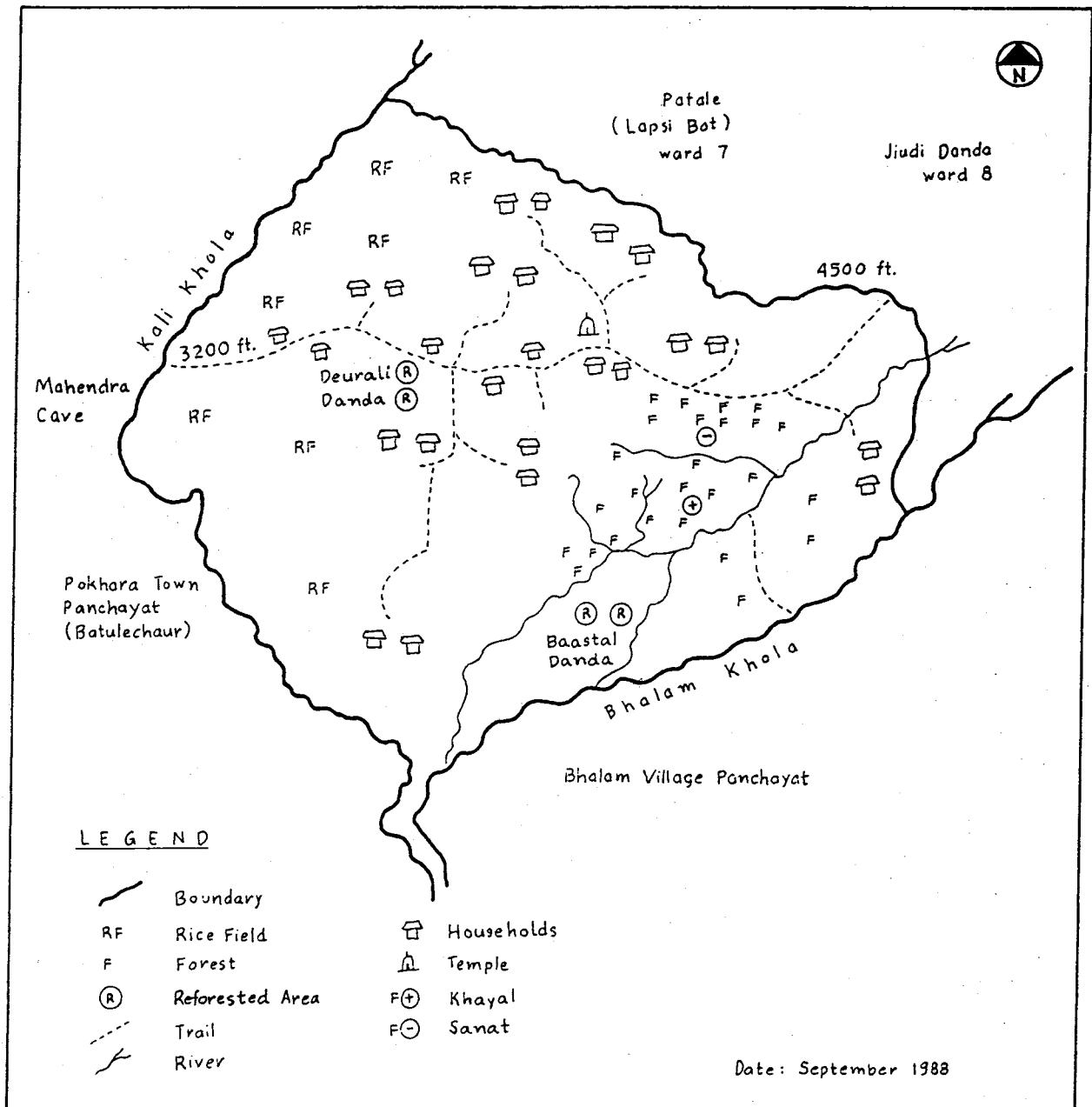
1. Failure of the then ward chairman and other leaders, who were all men, to address local development needs, such as the school building, drinking water, roads, etc. and to ensure equitable distribution of training opportunities made available by the then District *panchayat*.
2. More important was the ward chairman's unilateral decision to implement a government sponsored plantation programme on Baastal Danda, a grazing area belonging to the villagers, rather than on Deurali Danda, his own grazing area. In this way he could please the District Forest Controller (DFC) by actively supporting the government plantation programme in his area without disturbing his or his relatives' grazing rights (see Figure 3).
3. Since most of the men in the ward were serving in the Indian and British armies, the women household heads had to deal with these problems themselves. As women, they were in any case the ones to suffer most from this planting programme since it would mean their having to walk great distances to graze their animals.

To address these problems, the local women came together and decided to organise themselves. They had several meetings with the DFC, during which he explained the benefits of the plantation programme and suggested that they form a women's forest committee so that they could participate in forestry and other rural development programmes. The women then held many meetings in the village to decide on the matter. The ward chairman and his followers did their best to ridicule the idea of forming a women's committee, claiming that women would be incapable of handling such matters. However, with the support of both the DFC and villagers and teachers dissatisfied with the chairman's activities, the women stood firm and the committee was formed on 20 August 1986. It consisted of 11 members, eight women and three men, representing different localities of the ward.

One of the first decisions the committee made was to implement a plantation programme not only on Baastal Danda (which had been their own grazing land and on which, at the instigation of the ward chairman, plantation had been carried out the previous year) but also on Deurali Danda, the chairman's grazing area.

FIGURE 3

LOCATION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS IN THE STUDY AREA  
(WARD 6)



The aims of the women's forest committee, agreed upon after several meetings, were as follows:

1. To develop and manage the former grazing areas in the ward into *panchayat forest* by planting tree saplings. Previously such forests were "government forests" (*sarkari ban*) and the local people did not control them.
2. To protect the *Panchayat Protected Forest*, by making and enforcing rules, guarding the forest and monitoring the activities of the forest watchers. Previously such forests, known locally as *sanat or khayal*, had been managed by specific groups in the area. The Gurung, Chhetri and Kami, who are dominant in the community, had usage rights over the *sanat* forests, while they and other village households (with the exception of the Brahmins) owned the *khayal* forests as a group.
3. To undertake development activities such as storing drinking water, roofing the school building, and repairing trails in the ward.

The women's forest committee undertook the responsibility of protecting and managing both the old and new forest areas. To this end they formulated the following regulations:

1. Except in cases of emergency, fuelwood may be collected in the PPF only from December to February.
2. Collecting fodder and foliage in the PF will only be allowed for a specified 15 days in September - October.
3. Anyone cutting more trees than approved by the committee will be fined Rs. 50. Such fines, together with funds obtained by auctioning off the overcut trees, will be deposited in the committee's fund.
4. Any person cutting a tree in the PPF without the committee's permission will be fined between Rs. 15 and Rs. 50 depending on the size of the trees cut.
5. Every household will pay a certain amount for the forest products collected when weeding, thinning and pruning.
6. All the money collected by the committee from fines and confiscated timber will be spent on development work in the ward.
7. Committee meetings will be called as and when needed.
8. The above regulations must be sent to the local leaders and, if necessary, amended to accommodate their views.

The committee hired a forest watcher to ensure effective management and enforce the regulations.

## **Women's Participation in Forest Management**

The women's participation in forest management involved making decisions about developing the PF area, protecting the PPF, implementing community development work and evaluating the committee's major activities.

**Developing the PF Area:** This involved forming a forest committee, selecting leaders, choosing a site, planting and protecting saplings, visiting government officials, holding meetings, and monitoring all activities related to the development of the PF area.

The local women were very active in all this. They were fully involved in decision making, spreading information about decisions taken and encouraging other women to join in. Although the idea of forming a committee came from the DFC, the decision actually to do so had to come from the women themselves and they went ahead with it despite repeated objections from the incumbent ward chairman. They held several meetings, formed the committee, worked out its regulations, and informed the DFC and other concerned women and local leaders of their decision.

The selection of the committee members was also carried out by the local women in consultation with the villagers. It consisted of women who had actively supported the idea of forming the committee, representing different areas of the ward.

The women also chose the plantation site. Again the ward chairman opposed them but the women decided where and when to plant the saplings and informed the DFO of their decision. They then cleared the site, prepared pits and brought saplings from a nursery located about two km from the planting area. They were active in organising the local people, especially the women who volunteered to plant the saplings. Altogether 4500 seedlings were planted in the PF area covering around 10.25 ha of land.

The committee was also actively involved in consulting government officials about problems they encountered in their forest management activities. Such problems were frequently caused by the ward chairman and his supporters. For example, the women had to wait a month to get a forest guard, nearly three months for fencing materials and five months to obtain a letter of recommendation from the ward chairman, a legal requirement without which their committee could not be registered. Despite these difficulties the women were resolved to carry on with their work for which they had local support.

Committee meetings were attended not only by the executive members but by other men and women as well. In general the women were very keen to participate and quite vocal. The meetings proceeded with analytical discussions on ideas and proposals put forward by those attending, and decisions were taken after due consideration of the arguments.

The committee members sometimes had consultative meetings with the local leaders at which the latter were briefed about the committee's decisions and asked to comment on them. Their comments and suggestions were then incorporated before the decisions were implemented. By involving everyone in the village in this way major problems in carrying out committee decisions were avoided.

One important activity of the committee relating to the development of the PF area was to monitor the work of the forest guard and check on seedling growth. To do

this, the committee prepared a schedule requiring women members to visit the forest at least once a week which they scrupulously did. They were especially vigilant in rainy weather when illegal grass cutters often sneak into the forest. In fact the majority of offenders were caught on rainy days.

**Protecting the PPF Areas:** The committee's other major activity was the protection of the PPF which covered nearly 68.5 ha of land. This included guarding it from encroachment, pruning and thinning the trees, and settling minor offences in the area.

As with the monitoring work in the PF, the women's committee had worked out a schedule whereby each member visited the PPF area once a week. Based on information from these visits, they decided when to do the pruning and thinning. The women members would visit the forest at any time of the day or night, and responded to shouts for help from the forest guard. Occasionally they would guard the forest themselves if the guard was sick or absent for one reason or another. Since the PPF was the only forest in the area, it attracted illegal cutters and encroachers both from within the village and elsewhere. As a result, the guard had a hard time carrying out his duties. As an incentive to do the job thoroughly, the committee granted him the right to confiscate offenders' tools and gave him the money realised from their sale. Adopting these measures helped to deter offenders and protect the PPF area over the years.

For pruning and thinning, the committee divided the PPF into several parts and the work was done by all the villagers in rotation, under the guidance of the committee. Mobilising the local people to do this was not difficult as the timber and firewood collected in the process were divided among the workers in exchange for their labour.

Informants reported that before the women's committee was formed, the villagers were in the habit of collecting firewood at any time of the year which eventually led to a scarcity. This problem was brought under control by implementing the committee's system of resource utilisation.

The committee also had to settle minor forest offences in accordance with the regulations they had drawn up for the protection of the PPF. When someone is caught illegally taking forest products the forest guard informs the women's committee who summon the offender to a meeting attended by local leaders. In assessing the case, the committee takes into consideration the transgressor's position in the village and his or her past record of committing such offences. The size of fine is decided in consultation with local leaders.

If the offender is an outsider, the committee informs the leaders of his or her village what penalty has been imposed. Often the committee members will themselves visit the offender's village, meet with its leaders, and agree on the size of the fine.

By the end of the field work (September 1988), the committee had fined 50 people from inside the ward and 12 outsiders, collecting a total of Rs. 3,275.

**Community Development Activities:** The committee initiated various community development programmes in the village which required substantial amounts of money, time and labour.

Some of the money came from fines imposed on forest offenders and from the fee charged to every household collecting fodder-grass from the PF areas, but this was

not enough to finance all the development activities in the village. The committee therefore decided to organise fund-raising programmes such as a cultural show during *Deepawali*, the festival of light, a time when many local men employed in the British and Indian armies come home on vacation.

Altogether they collected Rs. 16,150 to complete a drinking water project, roof the local school and buy some furniture for it, and repair local trails.

In recognition of their forest management activities, the committee members were invited to participate in a seminar on forestry held at the DFO in January 1987. Another interesting development was their active participation in the local elections held in early 1987 when they decided to field their own candidate for the post of ward chairperson. The committee secretary duly won the post.

In short, the women committee members were extremely active in all aspects of local forest management and community development work. They *made decisions* about forming the committee, selecting plantation sites, settling minor forest offences and the like. They *conducted meetings* which reviewed progress, the forest guard's performance, etc. They *implemented activities* such as planting and protecting seedlings, guarding the PPF and undertaking community development activities through the mobilisation of time, labour and money. Last, but not least, they *shared in the benefits* of the work, among them: a share in fuelwood and fodder grass, access to grazing, a better supply of drinking water, and improved trails. Above all, they gained a sense of personal satisfaction and self-confidence by attending a seminar, interacting with government officials and electing their own candidate to the post of ward chairperson.

### **Factors Affecting Women's Participation**

There were several factors which facilitated or hindered women's participation in committee activities. These factors fall into four major categories:

**Committee Level Factors:** One thing that fostered women's participation was their familiarity with the work that needed done. They were already involved in tree planting, collecting fuelwood and fodder, grazing animals, etc. This familiarity with the tasks of the programme encouraged a high level of participation. As Cohen and Uphoff (1977:122) write: "the less the difference between the community's present level of technology and that of the project, the greater the potential for participation in the decision making, implementation and evaluation phases of the project".

Another factor which encouraged the women to participate was the fact that they did not have to provide any substantial inputs in the form of land or capital; instead they gave time, labour and occasional cash contributions. As Thomson (1988:205) notes: "resource management must make economic sense and be financially feasible before rural people will cooperate in efforts at reforestation".

The clear prospect of benefits accruing was another reason for the women's active participation in committee work. They expected their participation to improve their and their families' lives, for instance by shortening the time spent collecting fuelwood and fodder, obtaining a source of drinking water, improving the trails, repairing and

furnishing the school, etc. Cohen and Uphoff (1977:131) stress this point: "risk serves as a deterrent to participation by those who cannot afford to bear it, while its converse, the probability of benefits, serves as an incentive for those who have sufficient resources to gamble". Gronow and Shrestha (1990 : 4) also support this point when they write : "people will begin to participate in the development process when they believe that they have secure rights to the resources and will therefore receive any and all benefits that accrue". Pandey (1987 : 72) adds: "the higher the confidence among women in securing the benefits of a forest project the greater their participation". It was also found that the women participated equally in committee work because the expected benefits were of a collective nature. To quote Esman and Uphoff (1982:29-30): "more equitable distribution of assets and income - though not necessarily equal - appears to be a necessary if not sufficient condition for extensive rural development... Some degree of relative equity seems critical to the success both of the local organizations and of rural development."

It is not only tangible benefits such as easy collection of fuelwood and fodder, better trails and so on as mentioned above that matter but intangible benefits too: personal satisfaction gained through increased self-confidence, interaction with government officials, and contacts outside the village. The participatory nature of the committee also helped. The women themselves organised it, elected the members, decided its activities and implemented them. Esman and Uphoff (1984:158-159) state that: "the correlation between participatory orientation and effective performance of specific local organization tasks were all relatively high... The general finding that local organizations contribute more effectively to rural development goals, broadly defined, when they are oriented to operating in a participatory way should not be surprising".

**Physical and Social Factors:** The households within the ward were scattered (it takes two hours on foot to go from one end to the other), so the women's committee did not meet regularly. However, as a physical unit the ward was small enough for the committee easily to identify problems that arose from their activities and find the means to solve them. The ward's compactness also helped the committee to mobilise help for several of their activities. The lesson here is that the chances of a programme's success are greater if the geographical area covered is small.

Gender discrimination has been recognised by many observers as a major impediment to participation. To expect men to participate in women's work and vice versa arouses opposition in many societies. In Nepal, traditional societal norms legitimise unequal rank and power in decision making and benefits. Owing to this, there is a belief that women should not be involved in traditionally male activities but should confine themselves to tasks such as cooking, washing and taking care of children. Certainly in the study area many men resented the very idea of women making decisions and meeting with government officials. This attitude discouraged some women members at times but they ultimately persisted.

In such a context, the support given to the women by their families deserves special mention. It may be that the attitudes of the women's husbands and fathers were different from those of many Nepali men because of their employment in the British and Indian armies which gave them the opportunity to see women in other countries in

decision making roles. In any event the men were absent for a great deal of the time and, as Chavangi and others (1988:245) observe: "whether or not the husband lives on the farm is one major factor affecting the status and role of women. Women whose husbands are employed away from home tend to have greater access and control over household resources and decision making".

**Structural Factors:** Of several structural factors, the size of the committee was important. It was small, which apparently resulted in smooth inter-personal and inter-group relationships and fostered a sense of group loyalty. Because of this, there were no conflicts or misunderstandings between the members to interfere with implementation of committee activities. As well as its size, the women's participation was affected by the composition of the committee. Almost all the members were either married or over 20 years old. These women were stable members of the community, undertaking many household responsibilities, which apparently predisposed them to accept the further responsibility of protecting the forest. A New ERA (1987:34-35) study concludes: "having married women and women in the age group 20-50 years in a forest committee helps promote effectiveness because these women are generally older, more experienced and self-confident to undertake higher responsibilities and possess the capabilities to motivate others".

On the other hand, the women members' illiteracy probably impeded their full participation, making them hesitate to take major decisions without consulting other local leaders, especially men. The illiteracy also meant they had no record keeping system.

**Political and Administrative Factors** also affected participation. Given their generally lower political power, the women often found it difficult to express their ideas in a public meeting. As a result, they sometimes stayed mum even though they were dissatisfied with the decisions made by local leaders some of whom are their close (and senior) relatives. Chavangi and others (1988:246) write: "despite the growing desperation of women in their search for new sources of energy, they cannot plant trees for that purpose. Such an action would be considered an act of rebellion against the conventional acceptance of male control over household resources; in fact many women at present would be too afraid of social censure even to consider doing it openly".

The other important factor affecting women's participation was the nature of local village politics, i.e., who participates, how they participate and what decisions are taken. There were two political factions in the ward, one of which was led by the incumbent ward chairman, and the committee found it very difficult to maintain a balance between the two groups. When the chairman's opponents supported the committee, the other side tried to sabotage one of their projects by grazing animals and uprooting saplings in one of the reforested areas.

The degree of support given by the district and local government offices was also important. The support of the DFO gave the women members confidence and enhanced their status in the village. It was mainly because of this that the women could form a committee even though the ward chairman was against it. The DFC's invitation to the women members to attend a seminar also gave them moral support. On the other hand, the women felt very frustrated when the DFC delayed in providing fencing materials for

the expanded plantation area and hiring forest guards. Esman and Uphoff (1984:122) observe that: "one of the factors often mentioned as affecting the operation of local organisations is the extent to which the government favours and assists them. It may be presumed even more strongly that if the government opposes local organisations, their prospects of success are greatly diminished. Thus, it can be concluded that the more constant the support of the concerned agencies, the greater the chances of generating maximum participation from programme beneficiaries".

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The literature asserts that there are several factors which foster women's participation in development activities. The results of this study validate these assertions, and expand them.

In sum, the major factors facilitating women's participation in committee work were the clear prospects of benefit sharing; family support; the small size of the committee and the compact area in which it worked; personal characteristics such as marital status and age; local people's support and the support of the DFC. The factors hindering participation were traditional gender norms, the factional nature of local politics and the lack of a management plan clarifying the committee's rights and authority.

In more detail, this study found the factors affecting women's participation to be as follows:

1. The less defined the division of labour between women and men in a community, the more women will participate in development programmes.
2. The fewer the traditional cultural and societal norms, especially those which restrict women's work to domestic activities, there are, the more women will participate in development programmes.
3. The higher the prospect of benefit sharing from a programme, the more likely it is that women will participate in its activities.
4. The more equally the benefits accruing from a programme are shared out, the more chance there is of women participating in its activities.
5. The lower the land, capital and labour requirements of a development programme, the greater the likelihood of women's participation.
6. The more support there is from external agencies for programme activities, and the more enhanced women's confidence and self esteem are in consequence, the greater the chance of their continuing to participate in programme activities.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations relating to the formation of, and support for, women's forest committees can be made.

1. Women with leadership qualities should be motivated to organise themselves into a committee. Discussions with small groups of women at first will help to foster confidence. The committee should be composed, as far as possible, of married women aged between 20 and 50. The role of the DFC is crucial here. At this stage, it is important to gain the support of local leaders.
2. There must be a clear prospect of benefit-sharing before women will participate actively in a programme. Where forestry programmes are concerned, the prospect of more easily available fuelwood and fodder should attract them.
3. The women participants should know what they have to contribute to the programme in terms of time, labour and cash. They should not have to contribute too much labour or money.
4. A degree of social homogeneity and mutual trust among committee members are major determinants of participation. It is also a good idea to start with a small committee. As the committee's effectiveness increases, its size can also expand. The programme should also cover a small area to begin with and extend its coverage later. The committee must have proper representation either by geographical location or by user groups in the community. Early consultation with community leaders to obtain their support for a women's committee is very desirable.
5. Illiteracy among women is high, but efforts should be made to recruit at least a few literate members to deal with the committee's administrative work. These women should be provided with training to familiarise them with administrative responsibility.
6. As committee activities will require funds, a mechanism should be developed to provide the committee with a regular source of income. This could be done by collecting fees for resources extracted from the forest.

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