

***Women's Resource Access Programme:
Voices from the Field***

***Women's Access to Land and Other Natural Resources in Nepal:
A series of five community workshops***

June-November 2001

***Listening and Learning:
Women's Access to Land and Other Natural Resources in Nepal***

It is ironic that those who are the food producers, largely farm labourers, are among those most vulnerable to food insecurity. For the rural poor, secure access to land provides the most realistic opportunity for rural people to improve their livelihoods and develop assets that can improve their resilience to shocks.¹

Introduction

How do the rural poor and especially women use and value land and other natural resources? How do they benefit from them? What processes of empowerment evolve when women's access to and control over these resources are increased and improved?

The Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP), a special programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty, set out to explore these issues within the context of a single project in Nepal, the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project, initiated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 1991. WRAP was not designed with the intention of conducting a formal evaluation of the project or of soliciting the views of the project team. Rather, it sought to give voice to the rural women affected by the project, using the simple act of listening with empathy during a series of community workshops as these women spoke about their daily lives before and during the project.²

No one had ever come to us, listened to us, eaten with us, asked us what we think, or said that what we think and say is important – participant in one of the WRAP workshops.³

Such a community-level approach is not a revolutionary one, and it is certainly not new in Nepal. At the same time, there has historically been a gap in the land-oriented

¹ *Whose Land?* 2001. This is a joint publication of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

² The workshops took place between June and November 2001 and were held in: Kampur Village, Dhading District; Sathi Bhagawati; Palanchok and Rabiopi Villages in Kavrepalanchok District; and Thakre Village, Makwanpur District.

³ The quotations in this document, with two exceptions, are the words of women participating in one of the five workshops conducted in Nepal.

literature and knowledge base as to how the rural poor and especially women use and value land. WRAP attempts to close this gap by giving voice to poor rural women in order to test and deepen our understanding of the significance of land and other natural resources to them. After all, the perceptions and experiences of these women comprise their reality; and it is from their reality that opportunities can be discerned and created by the women and their communities, as well as by the range of institutions that assist them. In essence, the focus of WRAP can be captured by the three words that lie at the heart of the Popular Coalition's mission: giving *voice*, *visibility* and *opportunity* to the rural poor.

Before we share the perceptions and experiences of these women, however, it is important to gain some understanding of the status of women in Nepal, as well as the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project that set out to empower them.

About WRAP

Launched in 2001, the Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP) is a specialized programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. Funding has been provided through Japan's contribution to IFAD's Women in Development trust fund.

WRAP provides a tool for listening to and documenting the views and opinions of poor rural women on the value and importance of secure access to land and other natural resources. In this way, WRAP helps to raise international understanding, particularly among policy-makers, of the need to improve women's access to these resources. It also provides development practitioners with a rapid, effective and low-cost participatory tool for incorporating poor women's voices in project identification, design, implementation and evaluation.

The WRAP approach is built around a series of small community workshops to offer a forum for listening to the views and perceptions of poor community women on a range of selected resource access issues. To create a suitable forum, external participation is kept to a minimum, and the workshops are held in the fields and forests in which the women work and not in the formal meeting venues that so often can inhibit participants from speaking openly and candidly. Typically, WRAP community workshops take place over three days. The first two days are spent with the community women in their fields and forests. Experience has shown that moving between a number of different locations and settings over the two days leads to richer discussions. The final day's meeting is best held away from the community. The aim is to review, summarize and synthesize the findings of the previous two days. A number of women from the community should participate in the final-day sessions in order to validate, confirm, or explain findings.

The WRAP process is driven by the local non-governmental organization (NGO) partner. This partner is selected on the basis of its strong links with communities in the area and its knowledge and understanding of the resource access issues that affect the rural poor. The NGO is responsible for identifying communities and helping participants to understand the purpose and nature of the WRAP workshops. Typically, the first WRAP workshop is slightly larger and may involve a limited number of external participants. In

most cases, the national NGO partner organizes additional WRAP workshops in different communities in order to broaden and deepen understanding. The follow-up workshops are normally smaller in size and tend not to involve participants from outside the area. Where possible, the national NGO partner is encouraged to involve women from the earlier workshops in subsequent meetings.

WRAP is built upon the same principle of active partnership that infuses all Popular Coalition activities. Community workshops involve a range of partners. Each partner contributes to the success of the process. These contributions include the time and knowledge of the community women, the skills and experiences of local community-based civil-society organizations, the technical knowledge of government officials (where appropriate) and the knowledge, experience and reporting skills of different national and international civil-society and other organizations. The documentation process is based on the principle of open and transparent exchange, leading to outputs that reflect the contributions of all participants.

In 2001, nine WRAP workshops were held in Nepal and India. New workshops are planned for Indonesia, Cambodia and elsewhere in the region in 2002 and early 2003.

Methodological guidelines and additional WRAP documents are available from the Popular Coalition.

For further information about WRAP, contact Richard Trenchard at the Popular Coalition at: coalition@ifad.org

Women in Nepal

Nepal is a land of extreme physical and cultural diversity, and this diversity is also reflected in the status of women. At one end of the spectrum, there is evidence of high levels of subjugation, especially in the lowland areas of Nepal; at the other end, relations between men and women are more equitable, as in the country's hill and mountain areas. In the latter, women are given more autonomy, freedom of movement and opportunities to assert their opinions and influence important household and community decisions.

Rural Nepalese women play predominant roles in the subsistence-based farming systems on which 90% of the population relies. Their responsibilities include all aspects of crop and food production, except ploughing. In addition, they are usually the primary collectors of water and fodder and fuel wood supplies and are responsible for the domestic housework as well. Managing livestock often falls under their daily responsibilities. Women frequently work 16 hours a day and sleep less than six hours a night.

Although women contribute directly to almost all agricultural production processes and play a major role in food production, they seldom have direct access to natural resources (land and forestry) and crucial inputs such as credit, agricultural inputs, training or extension services. However, there are two sources of income over which women,

ostensibly, have exclusive control: *daijo*, the small plots of land and other immovable property that are sometimes given to a woman by her family when she marries, and *pewa*, anything that is given to her as personal property, or that she earns herself.

The lack of access to credit is often seen by women as the largest constraint to income generation. In practice, a frequent lack of land titles in women's names makes it difficult for them to provide the necessary collateral to secure loans from formal lending institutions.

Working in Partnership

WRAP is a programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty. All of WRAP's activities are carried out with a range of national and international partners. The WRAP workshops that took place in 2001 in Nepal involved the following partners:

Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty

The Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty was established in 1995. It is a global consortium of intergovernmental, civil-society and bilateral organizations with the specific mandate to empower the rural poor by improving their access to productive assets, including land and other natural resources.

For further information, contact Bruce Moore, Coordinator, Popular Coalition, at: b.moore@ifad.org.

International Fund for Agricultural Development

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is a specialized agency of the United Nations. It was established in 1977 with a mandate to combat rural hunger and poverty in developing countries. The Fund's target groups are the poorest of the world's people: small farmers, the rural landless, nomadic pastoralists, artisanal fishermen and -women, indigenous people and, across all groups, poor rural women. In this context, IFAD provides direct funding and mobilizes additional resources for programmes designed specifically to enable the poor to overcome their poverty. This goal is built on the recognition that poverty reduction is not something that the Government, development institutions, or NGOs can do for the poor. They can forge partnerships and help promote the conditions in which the poor can use their own skills and talents to work their way out of poverty.

For further information on IFAD's programme in Asia, contact Phrang Roy, Director, Asia and the Pacific Division, at: p.roy@ifad.org.

Mode-Nepal

Mode-Nepal, a local development NGO, focuses its overall development efforts on bottom-up, integrated actions, primarily through awareness building, to promote education, employment, health, sanitation and participation in self-help activities. It endeavours to adopt and institutionalize a holistic and participatory process approach that involves individuals, their grass-roots organizations and the Government in enhancing the quality of life and sustainable development of the country.

Mode-Nepal was the national partner organization for WRAP's activities in Nepal and was responsible for the overall organization of the workshops, including identifying communities and sensitizing them to the initiative through a series of preparatory visits. A total of five WRAP community workshops were organized in the second half of 2001.

For further information on Mode-Nepal and its activities in Nepal, contact Bharat Shrestha, Director, at mode@mail.com.np.

Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project

Ms Gita Puri of the Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation in Nepal is responsible for the women group promoters within the project. She participated in the first WRAP community workshop and provided important background information on the project in general and women beneficiaries in particular.

The Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment (RMI)

Founded in 1992, RMI is a non-profit organization that aims to promote natural resource conservation in Indonesia by conducting research and field action programmes related to the protection, preservation and utilization of natural resources for community prosperity. It promotes participatory, community-based natural resource management and environmental education programmes.

For further information on the involvement of the Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment with WRAP, contact Ulfa Hidayati at: rmi@bogor.wasantara.net.id.

The Social Development Foundation

The Social Development Foundation links together a number of activists and NGOs working to defend and strengthen the land rights of dalits and tribals in Uttar Pradesh and surrounding areas. It is involved in a number of community-based activities directed at increasing the capacity of marginalized communities to understand their rights and to make effective demands for them at local, regional and national levels.

For further information about the Social Development Foundation, contact the Director, VB Rawat, at: vbrawat@vsnl.com.

Jeannette D. Gurung

Jeannette D. Gurung is a forester and gender and development professional currently living in Vientiane, Lao PDR. She worked for many years in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region as a forester and gender specialist employed by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Kathmandu. She has worked and published on a wide range of gender and development issues. Her publications include *Searching for Women's Voices in the Hindu Kush Himalayas*.

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The Project

His Majesty's Government of Nepal's Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project was created to raise the income of poor landless households by giving them secure access to natural resources. His Majesty's Government of Nepal, IFAD and the Government of The Netherlands financed the project, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has provided technical assistance. Priority has been given to disadvantaged ethnic groups such as the Tamang, Praja, Majhi and Magar. The project involves the leasing of degraded forest lands for 40 years to leasehold forestry groups made up of eight to ten landless households from poor rural communities. One household member is part of the group. The leasehold groups are granted exclusive user rights to a given forest area on the basis of an agreed management plan. The project also supports a range of related community development activities, training initiatives and off-farm income-generating activities.

The project started in 1991 in four of Nepal's 75 districts – Kavre, Makwanpur, Sindhupalchowk and Ramechhap – and by 1999 it had expanded into ten districts in the hills, covering 7 011 ha of degraded forest land and 11 253 families organized into more than 1 600 leasehold groups. The project has endeavoured to include at least as many

women as men as members in leasehold groups. Currently, 25% of the participants are women; in addition, there are 74 all-women groups and 112 women group leaders.

In 1999, the project began employing local women group promoters to organize and attend group meetings, promote the project, organize groups, give training and note problems. It is hoped that this role will continue to be supported in the future.

Why is it so difficult to improve women's access to and control over land? The basic reason is power. With land, the impact on social and economic power can be almost immediate. Therefore, giving women land means giving them power. It is not surprising that women have such a hard time obtaining control of this valuable asset. – IFAD's Rural Poverty Report 2001

Listening and Learning

Look at my grass here, it's very close to the house. Before, I had to walk four or five hours to collect it. We also produce vegetables now, which are good for the children. And with fodder so close, we can feed the animals in stalls, and the children can study instead of herding livestock. – Sanu Babu Udas

Slowly the village men and women converge. Many appear to be timid, somewhat reluctant. Some of the women fall behind, perhaps in deference to the men, or perhaps out of a sense of ambivalence or uncertainty as to whether they should be participating at all. At the same time, they know that they have a great deal that they would like to talk about and that the others would like to hear. The staff of Mode-Nepal, a local development NGO that they know and trust, have encouraged them to participate. They push on.

The setting for the discussions is informal. There are no microphones, no round tables, no flip charts with coloured markers and no computers. In fact, the setting is outdoors, in their own garden plots, on the grass and under the trees that they visit and use on a daily basis. Later, the discussions will continue during a walk into the forest areas that have been leased to them as part of this government project, as a way of making more palpable the lives that are being spoken about and the changes that are – or are not – taking place.

After several hours of walking, talking and observing, themes begin to emerge. Some of them surface again and again, introduced by one participant and enthusiastically elaborated by another and then another. Others speak with a lone voice, but a voice that is so emphatic that it cannot be discounted.

How have women benefited from their newly gained access to land and forestry?

***Listening and Learning
Time Savings***

Before I had leasehold land, for about six months a year I used to leave the house from 6 a.m. until 4 p.m. collecting ground grasses. From July to October, ground grasses are available in my small field, and from October to January they are now available in my leasehold forest plot. It takes me just three hours at most, which saves six to seven hours a day for other activities such as carrying compost, cultivating tomatoes, cleaning the children and cleaning the house. Some women are involved in sewing and tailoring activities for cash. We also have more time to meet together. – Goma Danuwar

Women in the hills of Nepal spend enormous amounts of time and energy each day collecting water and fodder or fuel wood, tending to their children and taking care of their domestic, livestock and farming activities. Additional tasks fall on them when the men migrate in search of employment.

I used to spend most of the day collecting one bundle of firewood, which usually lasts five days. Last year I was trained in pruning and thinning activities for my leasehold area, and now I have enough fuel wood available from the land and don't need to go elsewhere, which saves a lot of time. We even have excess fuel wood available – about 25 bundles of fuel wood from the leasehold land and 10 bundles from individual agricultural landholdings. – Bhawan Thapa

The biggest change noted by the women was the time it takes for them to conduct their daily tasks. Now they are able to accomplish more and different tasks, largely because of the time they save collecting grass, fodder and firewood, which are more plentiful, closer to their homes and located in places with which the women are familiar, thus minimizing the need to wander in order to gather these essential items. Many women also highlighted that their time savings have been accompanied by substantial technical assistance, knowledge and credit, which have better equipped them to use their new-found time. Several women, for example, reported that they had used credit to acquire livestock and that the time savings resulting from the leasehold forestry had enabled them to look after the cattle.

Secure access to the leasehold forest land and the significant savings in time and work that have resulted have also enabled more children to attend school. Before, children's labour was required for grazing livestock and fetching fodder. In many cases, the leasehold savings groups have contributed towards the costs of sending children to school. Several women highlighted another important factor leading to an increase in school attendance: their husbands had become more receptive to their arguments about the need to send the children to school.

***Listening and Learning
Social Empowerment***

Women's self-esteem and confidence are influenced by many things, including cultural norms and expectations, education, state-ascribed roles, exposure to the outside world, cash-earning ability, decision-making roles and their own inner sense of identity, autonomy and strength. In a part of the world, such as Nepal, where landholding is strongly associated with status and esteem, giving land to poor rural households and, in particular, poor women provides more than just a sense of security; it confers status and prestige unlike any other factor in the society.

Previously, I could not talk to men freely, especially outsiders such as government and NGO development workers. I was even scared to talk to my husband's family. Now, however, I have taken training courses and attended local meetings and workshops outside the community. I am accustomed to talking to men and strangers and am happy to do it. I can face men and can even disagree with them. – Til Maya Shrestha

Most of the women had not been exposed to development activities before the project began in 1991. Community participation has been fostered by the project through the early formation of groups, which are encouraged to hold regular meetings. These meetings provide a forum to discuss project-related issues and general community matters. There are both women's group meetings and mixed meetings.

Women's participation is generally greater at the meetings of women-only leasehold forestry groups than at the mixed groups, and it is easier to assure their participation in the women-only groups. A typical meeting lasts one or two hours, and in most cases eight to ten people participate, of whom typically one to three are men. In the all-women group meetings, extremely sensitive issues such as domestic violence are easily addressed. In this regard, many women see the group meetings as both a "protective court" – where instances of domestic violence can be brought out into the open and challenged – and a place to confront social issues and become stronger. The critical building blocks for social mobilization and solidarity are formed in these meetings and pave the way for enhanced visibility and decision-making capabilities on the part of women in community and household matters.

Going to the temple and worshipping gods is not enough – going to the community, working and mobilizing the community is what is required. – Goma Danuwar

Through the training programme, most of the women have now acquired basic literacy skills, and the group members are much more aware of their legal rights and the importance of education and adequate health, sanitation and nutrition for themselves and their families.

A few years ago, we were just cutting grass – anonymous

Many of the women said that group work makes the task lighter and that their work in the fields and forests is completed in less time. With respect to other leasehold groups, they feel competitive rather than jealous, which strengthens them as individuals and as a group. The feeling of competition has raised their awareness of the need for group solidarity, the appropriate division of labour and the sharing of benefits as well as problems.

We are all sisters. We've not had a conflict for seven years. And having forest land gives us social status and prestige. Society looks up to and respects those who have land – it gives us recognition and respect. – Mana Adhikary

The importance of women's self-confidence and self-esteem in terms of community development cannot be overstated. Once the women felt comfortable speaking with men within the community, and with those representing the Government and NGOs providing services, they were able to express their needs and hopes. The sense of hope and optimism that comes to women that experience this type of empowerment acts as a catalyst for change and produces individuals that are willing to take responsibility for their own development, despite the additional work that the development activities may require. Such women serve as powerful role models for their children and other women, who desire to imitate them once they are convinced of the benefits of such changed attitudes and behaviours.

Community development starts with self-development, which comes through 'gyan' – education and knowledge. – Jhanka Maya Magar

Listening and Learning Economic Benefits

It is no longer necessary to always resort to moneylenders for food – they charge interest rates of about 60% per year, or 5% per month. – anonymous

Food security is a problem in many areas of Nepal, at least on a seasonal basis: many households are without enough food for three to four months per year. Their only recourse is to seek out moneylenders, who not only charge extremely high interest rates, but also often require borrowers to work free on their land when requested and to give 'gifts' such as chickens and goats. Many of the workshop participants expressed their satisfaction at the increased amounts of food and livestock fodder that resulted from their access to leasehold forest land. The time they saved by using this land enabled them to initiate other income-earning activities at home, in their small fields near their houses, or by selling their labour. They were relieved that their "moneylender days" were over as a result of their access to leasehold forest land and to credit.

Even I used to think that only husbands must earn. When I think about this now, I feel guilty. – Saili Tamang

Traditionally, the husbands were the main and, in many cases, the only source of cash income for the household, and women relied entirely on male family members for any money-earning activities. Male members had the sovereign right to use household income for whatever activity they chose. In those households where women had an income, the women had to ask permission to spend it. With the acquisition of leasehold land, many women have started cultivating mulberries and vegetables and selling *chiraito* (a medicinal plant used in the production of quinine). The income they generate from this activity is used on children's school needs, medicine, food, clothing and group savings. While the men still control the majority of household income, the women are now more involved in household decision-making; their decisions are respected, and thus they have become freer to spend the money as they see fit.

My husband and I discuss each issue and decision. – Sabitri Adhikary
Women are now able to have a constructive discussion for household development at home with their family. – Saili Tamang

Sabitri received training in crop production several years ago, and she now makes many of the decisions regarding cropping for the following season. Many women members of leasehold forestry groups said that they have a greater role in deciding crops and cropping patterns in their small agricultural plots, as well as in managing the labour.

Additional income, although modest, can be deposited in the group savings account. For example, in Palanchok, thatch grass grown on the leasehold land was sold to outsiders, and last season's income of NPR 8 700 (USD 114 at the January 2002 exchange rate of NPR 76 per USD 1) was deposited in the group account. Each of the members also contributes a nominal amount (NPR 5 per month) to the account. Members may take loans at an interest rate of 18%: about four times lower than the average interest rate offered by moneylenders. All of the groups have some kind of group savings account, and by 2001 the average savings had reached NPR 17 000 (USD 224).

I bought two goats from the group loan, and I repaid the loan in eight months. Now I have nine goats, two of which I sold in the last festival for NPR 6 300 (USD 83). – Ganesh Shrestha, a male leasehold group member

Listening and Learning ***Self-confidence***

Obviously, the activities – and the workload – over the years have increased. Women accomplish more and different tasks. At the same time, they are being progressively exposed to the world around them, especially through workshops, training courses and community meetings. Several of the group leaders have even been interviewed on television and on a weekly radio programme on leasehold forestry that provides information and news.

With this exposure comes greater responsibility and a greater sense of security. Young women in particular expressed a dramatic increase in their self-confidence, which they

attributed to their group work, group discussions and decision-making abilities. They stated that their confidence has helped them to manage household activities and work with their neighbours efficiently.

We used to rely entirely on men. Today, women have developed enough skills, knowledge and vision so that we can develop ourselves independently. We now feel secure that even if our husband abandons us for a new wife, we will be okay. – Shashi Kala

The foundation of this self-confidence lies in giving these women secure access to forest land and credit under their own name. It is then strengthened by helping them acquire skills and knowledge – and an awareness of their potential.

My participation in management and nursery training, and the observations I made on my tours of various land-use practices have given me confidence. I can earn on my own. – Maili Tamang

Moreover, women have started respecting their work and each other. At the same time, they respect their husbands and the work they do and are able to suggest ways to improve the quality of their lives.

Through my training, I have started cultivating vegetables and weaving wool. I have developed a relationship with the vendor and conduct my own business. My income has gone a long way towards our children's education. – Purna Maya

Listening and Learning

What about the Men?

It takes time to introduce changes in relations between men and women both within the household and in the community. It is encouraging to witness that changes are indeed taking place, that access to natural resources is a catalyst for change and that women are the key agents.

What about the men? How are they responding to the shifts in responsibility and decision-making?

I went myself to the Land Revenue Office two years ago to obtain the land ownership certificate. My husband is pleased to have the land in my name. – Mana Adhikary

For one thing, men are more accepting of women's status and of their right to have agricultural land in their name. Women estimate that about 20% of the titles are now registered in women's names and that men have increasingly accepted – and supported – this transition and the accompanying shifts in responsibility and power. Many women attribute this to their own level of confidence, which has increased over the years because they have gained access to land and received training and credit. Their husbands are willing to support these women, who have demonstrated the many benefits that can be derived from their increased responsibility and decision-making ability. Others attribute

this to their husbands' belief that credit is more easily obtained by women and to the recognition that institutions (governmental and non-governmental) are increasingly favouring pro-poor and pro-women schemes.

When we first started working with a group of women, the men thought that we were seeing other men. They complained and were hostile. My husband fed the dinner that I had prepared for him to the dog. – anonymous

Regardless of the motivation, such a positive attitude was not always the immediate response. During the first three years of the project, many women experienced jealousy from their husbands, who resented their involvement in the leasehold groups and accused them of seeing other men or of neglecting household responsibilities. It must be recalled that, before the project began, land had only very rarely been held in women's names. Men enjoyed complete discretion with respect to how to use and dispose of their holdings, even if the holdings were being used and managed primarily by women.

We have proven our potential, and we are more trusted than before. – Rimki Sarki

Three years later, these same women say that they receive strong support from their husbands, who encourage them to participate further in meetings and discussion forums. Not only the husbands, but the other male members of the community as a whole have shown positive and helpful attitudes towards women's activities involving land use in general and the income they have earned from land use since the beginning of the project. As only one of many possible examples, several of the men recognize that women are far more systematic in guarding the forest plot against people that attempt to cut the wood and grasses.

Because of our work, and our ability to handle resources properly and efficiently, men have a different vision of women. – Krishna Pudasaini

Indeed, the women feel strongly that their roles have changed over the years. In some cases, they have even seen a partial role reversal as their husbands have become involved in the cooking and washing and look after the livestock, while the women tend the fields!

Angry men now realize that they were wrong to be angry. They are happy to see the benefits to the household. Besides, women have also developed the capacity to argue back! – many women workshop participants

A Final Word

The women documented in the preceding pages were asked to provide reasons why land is important. *What do you want to tell people in other countries about the reasons poor rural women should be given secure access to land and other natural resources?* It is well understood that, in a short time, a group of WRAP 'outsiders' cannot fully understand and capture all of the opinions and perceptions of village women. At the same time, the group believes that the statements of the women themselves reflect to a

significant degree the perceptions of a larger whole, especially in highlighting how important access to land is for women, their households and the communities in which the women live.

As talking to these women has shown us, giving women secure access to land and forestry can transform their lives. In economic terms, it can give them a more secure and stable source of income, as well as create opportunities for new ways of making money for their households. Almost all of the women expressed a clear sense of security about their future and that of their families because of the access they had gained to forest land and its grasses, fodder and fuel wood. However, the benefits go beyond economic ones. For example, the women we spoke to were almost all unequivocal – and exhibited the greatest enthusiasm – when they described how their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem had increased and, in tandem, how the respect shown to them by their husbands had grown, along with the corresponding shift in responsibilities and decision-making. We learned that all of these transformations go a long way towards generating a shift in the unequal power relations within households and communities that generate and perpetuate poverty.

I am assured that this is my forest whether the project is phased out or not. We are no longer 'mukh takne' (dependent on others). – anonymous

We have also been reminded of a simple, but crucial lesson: talking to poor households, listening to their views and perceptions and learning from their knowledge provide valuable insights that cannot be gained elsewhere. In documenting the voices of poor Nepalese women, we hope that what they have to say is given attention and respect and that their observations and insights are used as the fuel for our efforts to help create the conditions under which the poor are able to lift themselves out of poverty.

Women are now doing more – much more. The situation of women has changed dramatically. – Bhawan Thapa

WRAP is an expanding programme. If you would like further information on the programme, or should you wish to become involved, or even organize community workshops using WRAP approaches, please feel free to contact the Popular Coalition.

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