

International Women's Day

Seminar: Gender and Land - Tenure and Land Use
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Understanding the links between land use and tenure: learning from women in India and Nepal.

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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.

The Women's Resource Access Programme (WRAP), a special programme of the Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty, undertook a series of community workshops in the project area from May to November 2001.¹ The WRAP community workshops were not designed with the intention of conducting a formal evaluation of the project or of soliciting the views of the project team. Rather, they 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

Using the words and arguments of the women who participated in the community workshops, the presentation will seek to demonstrate the extent to which changes in resource access (forest land) and improved land use techniques led to dramatic changes, in the views of poor rural women, in gender relations both in the household and within the community. These findings will be reinforced by the findings from a series of WRAP workshops undertaken in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh from September-December 2001.

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¹ Report available from Secretariat, Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty

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.