

Gender Inequality in Community Forest User Group of Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality is one of the prominent issues either in developed or in developing nations. Although gender equality is the fifth goal of sustainable development, equality has not been achieved. This study aimed to examine the gender inequality in the community forest user group of Nepal. To conduct the research from quantitative research design, descriptive and explanatory research design has been used. 90 percent respondents said that there is inequality of inclusion by kindness in CFUG. 97.5 percent respondents said that the main cause of inequality is socio-cultural practices. From the research we concluded that there is gender inequality in forest user group. Among all the types of inequality that exist in CFUG the fundamental and crucial types is inclusion by kindness. The inequality is caused due to socio-cultural practices practiced from the birth. Though in modern time education system has advanced and awareness is created by various organizations still the main cause of inequality is due to socio-cultural practices. Due to gender inequality in the CFUG the consequence is social conflict among the members which create problems in management of community forest user group. The conflict among the members will led to weak management in community forest and unable to achieve the objective of community forest. From the research we can say that only education will help to reduce gender inequality in the community forest user group. Though education is expanding and access to the education is increasing there is gender inequality in the community forest user group and respondent even said that education is one of the prominent method to reduce gender inequality in CFUG. Result deduce conclusion that the major agent of gender inequality is religious organization and its religious practices.

Keywords: Gender, inequality, community forest, consequences, reduction, agent

Introduction

Gender means the social roles provided by the society on the basis of sex. Based on sex society has describe the roles they should act in society. This phenomenon happened from the time of early evolution of human being to the present information and technological society. A person should act in the society as prescribed by the society. If anyone who don't want to act according to the social role he or she is treated as unique being in society. So, by acceptance or by disagreeing a person should act and live in society according to the roles provided by the society. Gender roles vary from community to community, society to society and nation to nation. Gender roles in some society are rigid than the others.

Gender inequality refers to unequal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men and other sex. It arises from difference in socially constructed genders roles. If men and women are treated unequal in social role then that affect the living experiences of an individual, family, community, society and nation sequentially. Current globe is competitive and outperforming in deeds. Women are discriminated in their right. This type of discrimination can't be observed but be felt (Bagle & Devkota, 2015). Females are treated as an objects or machine rather than a person in Nepalese society because; gender inequality begin from the womb of a mother and still exist up to the tomb (Adhikary, 2013). Ansari, a member of national women commission Nepal, noted that if a girl goes out from home, she should ask to her parents and take permission but this is not exact in case of boy. Boy shouldn't take any permission and free as well as safer than girls to go out from the home (Addhikari, 2013). Even in case of school, both boys and girls are under the observation of school teacher but particularly girl's behavior and appearance are judged (Patel, 2019). This shows gender inequality exist basically everywhere.

The initiation of community forest in Nepal was in the late 1970s. It was implemented as effort to solve the deforestation crisis and meets basic needs of forest such as firewood, timber, grass, leaf litter etc. Here national forest was handed over the local people who are called community forest user groups. CFUGs manage, use, conserve and develop the community forest. Forrester user group (FUGs) were also entitled to all the benefits from the sale of forest products. The fundamental importance of community managed forest is its participatory approach and equal benefit sharing among the user groups. In the policy of the operational plan of community forest user group, every users should have equal rights pertaining to use of forest products, sharing of benefits and decision making. We know that our country Nepal predominantly hierarchical and patriarchal, exclusion of disadvantaged group of people such as women, poor

and low caste. The participation and equality of minority and women in community forest user group are mostly highlighted by various researchers (Lama & Buchy, 2002)

According to the Forest Act, 1993, community forests are national forest handed over to the local user groups for protection, management and utilization. The forest must be managed according to the operational plan prepared by community forest users groups and approved by the District Forest Office. According to Forest Act, the community forest users groups (CFUGs) should be formed and registered at the District Forest Office (DFO) before handed to the local people. The CFUGs can act as self-governing entities to generate, utilize and sell the forest products as per the plan formulated by CFUGs and approved by management (Kanel, 1993).

Yadav, (2000) conducted a research on the topic "Forest User Groups in Nepal: Impacts on Community Forest Management and Community Development," conclude that the community forest program has positively affect the rural people life who heavily are based on forest. The current forestry program is unable to manage the resources. Although the legal provision of the community forest is stronger but the implementation part is weak. Many forest user groups struggle with improper management of forest land, leaving marginal and open lands unused, and often attempt to regenerate timber species without a clear plan.

Agarwal,(2002) states that minimal participation of women seems to affect the organizational efficiency very often. Even law ensure 33% representation of women in any decision making bodies related to forest in Nepal. This accept the importance of women's participation at the decision making level for efficient and fair functioning of community forest management systems. Different NGOs have also been playing significant role to increase women's participation through awareness programs, workshops etc. Nonetheless, it has frequently been noted that the majority of women are "listeners rather than talkers." Lack of knowledge of the topics covered in the meetings is a major contributing factor to this passive engagement, which leads to fewer opinions being voiced. The primary reason for this lack of awareness is because women were excluded from the early stages of the processes and conversations surrounding the development of community forest user groups, which prevented them from fully comprehending the circumstances. In the same way that women must actively participate in any decision-making body, it is also critical that they be informed about recently launched programs related to forests from the outset and actively participate in the entire process

Bingeman (2003) describes that women's active involvement in monitoring, protecting and managing village forest areas in Himachal Pradesh, India, when organized in traditional village women's organization on the other hand their participation is low in the newly introduced Joint Forestry Management (JFM) projects it is due to the dominance of men in JFM. These new structures of the JFMs though might in the long run undermine the activities of women in the mahila mandals.

Levine, (2006) carried out research in Kathmandu valley of Nepal to find out the determinants of girl's school attendance. Her findings show that gender, caste, poverty, cultural prejudice and rural residence were the main reasons which prevented a majority from going to school. Those who went were forced to work at home, as wages laborers and domestic servants, or enter arranged marriages. Similarly, women don't always feel safe or have a chance to share their experiences.

Gyawali, (2009) had conducted a research entitled "Assessing Governance of Community Forest User Groups: A case study from Makwanpur District, Nepal," find that participation in decision making and benefits sharing is more effective in the Mahila Srijana CFUG compared to the Sansaremai CFUG. Strong bonding among the women users in Mahila Srijana CFUG has led to successful implementation of decisions, on the other hand lack of unity in Sansaremai CFUG results in infrequent and weakly executed decisions. Similarly, Mahila Srijana CFUG performs greater transparency in managing CFUG funds than Sansaremai CFUG. This shows that female led CFUG performs better in governance than male led Sansaremai CFUG.

Rayn and Cronin, (2013), conducted a research on "Education and Capabilities in Bangladesh" conclude that due to fear of being abused, raped, harassed, or even killed one girl refused to go to school for study. Similarly, the researcher found that most schools in Bangladesh offer co-curricular activity with gender difference. Boys get a chance to play outdoor games such as cricket, football, volleyball during their break time at school but the girls stay inside the class. If they are given permission to play they should play indoor games such as ludo and carom board. Violence at school is a major problem. Bullying, corporal punishment, verbal and emotional abuse, intimidation, sexual harassment and assault, gang activity, and the presence of weapons among students are different types of violence that occurs on school premises, in a vehicle, or online.

Devkota and Bagale, (2015) conducted a research on Social Inequality in Nepal and Right of Education. In their study they summarized that both male and female must have equal opportunity in all aspects of social life including education to obtain the goal of social development. The prominent issues and challenges they

found in their research work was low enrollment rate of girls, low percentages of female teachers, attitude of underestimating the ability of women working in education, very less involvement of girls in technical subjects like mathematics and science.

Munhoz,(2018) in her research work on the topic Women's Development in Nepal: The Myth of Empowerment found that there is favor of sons in the country. The girls are discriminated from the birth and don't have equal opportunities to achieve development. The condition of women is characterized by low levels of access to education, healthcare and economic, social, and political opportunities. She concluded that in economically weak households, parents prefer to pay for education to their son and keep their daughters at home to help mother in her household activities.

Sharma, (2020) had conducted a research on the topic "gender inequality: A case study of ward-16, Bharatpur Metropolitan City" found that the fundamental reason for inequality is access to less power which is byproduct of illiteracy and less income. An illiterate women cannot defense for herself and neither can she counter for her offspring basically girls. The result conclude that there is inequality in between male and female in ward 16 of Bharatpur Metropolitan City. This inequality can only be broken if the sphere of planning is strengthened so as to uproot the root of inequality.

Methodology

To conduct the research on the title gender inequality in the community forest user group of Nepal, Rupandehi district has been chosen as study area. Both primary and secondary data are the sources of the data for the research work. Primary data was collected by mailed questionnaire from the respondent and the secondary sources of data are website, books, journals, newspaper, published and unpublished dissertation, articles etc. For the research quantitative research design was selected. There are different types of research design within quantitative research design, among them descriptive and explanatory research design was taken. Altogether there are 97 community forest user group in Rupandehi district (DFO Rupandehi, 2016). Among them 8 community forest user group has been chosen as a sample. Among non-probability sampling purposive sampling method was used to draw the sample for the study. From each community forest user group (CFUG) 5 male and 5 female respondents was taken. Thus total respondents are 80. Among them 40 are female respondents and 40 are male respondent. Set of questions was prepared and then the questions was mailed to

the respondents. All the questions are closed in nature. The respondent are requested to fill the questionnaire and respond soon. After the response of all the participant was collected the data are tabulated, converted into percentage and then analyzed.

The research work was conducted in Rupandehi district of Lumbini Province. The sample CFUG are located in various part of Rupandehi district. The sample CFUG are handed over before 2063 B.S. First of all, researcher visited the executive committee of each CFUG and kept the proposal. After taking permission form the CFUG executive board the questionnaire are mailed to the respondents.

There are two types of research design. They are quantitative and qualitative. The study has used descriptive and explanatory research design to determine the gender inequality in community forest user group of Nepal. Descriptive research design helps to describe the data or phenomenon studied. During analysis of data the data is described whereas in explanatory research design it tries to find out why the phenomenon had happened. Thus researcher choose descriptive and explanatory research design to conduct the research on the title gender inequality in community forest user group of Nepal.

Altogether there are 97 community forest user group in Rupandehi district (DFO Rupandehi, 2016). Among them 8 community forest user group has been chosen as a sample. From each community forest user group (CFUG) 5 male and 5 female respondents was taken. Thus total respondents are 80. Among them 40 are female respondents and 40 are male respondent. Data from 40 male and 40 female members of the CFUG were collected. The total participants in the data collection is 80. First of all, a request letter was sent to the relevant executive committee explain about the research objectives. Selected members filled out the questionnaire and response was collected by the researcher.

Result and Discussion

Thus obtain data from mailed questionnaire were accumulated in excel sheet. The data were analyzed by quantitative analysis methods. The result and discussion of findings are presented below.

Types of Gender Inequality Facing

Though the world is modernize and the education system is advance the gender inequality still exist in the society. Various awareness program and access to the education has been expanded over the every corner of the Earth. The gender inequality remain like the root grass in the society. Result shows there is gender inequality in community forest also. Below table shows the type of gender inequality exist in the community forest user group.

Table 1: Types of Gender Inequality Facing

SN	Types	No. of respondents	Percentages
1	Inclusion by Kindness	72	90
2	Underrepresented in leadership	57	71.25
3	Unpaid care work	45	56.25
4	Violence	43	53.75
5	Exclusion	40	50
6	Pay gap	37	46.25
7	Sexual harassment	23	28.75

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table shows that 90 percent respondents said that there is inequality of inclusion by kindness. The policy of government and the social practice that women are weak had made people to be kind either to the male or female. Thus inclusion by kindness is one of the major type of inclusion in the community forest. This inclusion is either in the formation of executive committee or any sub-committee in the forest user group. Data shows that underrepresented in leadership is 71.25 percent, unpaid care work is 56.25 percent, violence is 53.75 percent, exclusion is 50 percent, pay gap is 46.28 percent and sexual harassment is 28.75 percent.

Causes of Gender Inequality

Table 2: Causes of Gender Inequality

SN	Causes	No. of respondents	Percentages
1	Socio-cultural practices	78	97.5
2	Society Schooling	72	90
3	Economic inequalities	67	83.75
4	Personal attitudes	56	70
5	Limit access to education	42	52.5

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows that 97.5 percent respondents said that the main cause of inequality is socio-cultural practices. Though people are educated and aware about inequality cause and consequences still in current modernized society there is gender inequality this is due to socio-cultural practices. Result even shows that the cause of gender inequality is society schooling related to inequality among men and women. 83.75 percent respondents said that the cause of gender inequality is due to economic inequalities, 70 percent said that the cause is personal attitude whereas 52.2 said that the main cause of gender inequality is due to limit access to education.

Consequences of Gender Inequality

Table 3: Consequences of Gender Inequality

SN	Consequences	No. of respondents	Percentages (%)
1	Causes social conflict	71	88.75
2	Weak management	68	85
3	Lack of active participation	67	83.75
4	Minor role is provided	62	77.5
5	Lack of our feeling	58	72.5

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that 88.75 percent respondents said that the main consequence of gender inequality is causes social conflict among the members. The conflict among the members will led to weak management in community forest. Result even shows that the consequence of gender inequality is weak management, lack of active participation, minor role is provided and lack of our feeling. Data shows 85 percent respondent said that the result of gender inequality is weak management. 83.75 Percent respondents said that the consequences of gender inequality is lack of active participation, whereas 77.5 percent said that the consequence of gender inequality is minor role is provided to the members and 72.5 percent said that the result of gender inequality is lack of our feeling.

Methods of reduction of Gender Inequality

Table 3: Methods of reduction of Gender Inequality

SN	Methods of Reduction	No.of respondents	Percentages (%)
1	Education	78	97.5
2	Awareness	72	90
3	Empowerment	70	87.5
4	Policy changes	68	85
5	Equal access to resources	65	81.25

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that 97.5 percent respondents said that the main method to reduce gender inequality is education. Though education is enhancing in our country and being advance. Still result shows there is inequality in the forest community forest user group. Survey shows majority of respondent said education will help to reduce gender inequality though education is expanding and being advance. Result even shows that the method of reduction of gender inequality is awareness, empowerment, policy changes and equal access to resources. Data shows 97.5 percent respondent said that education will help to reduce gender inequality. 90 Percent respondents said that the method of reduction of gender inequality is awareness, 87.5 percent said that the method of reduction of gender inequality is empowerment, 85 percent respondent said that the main method of reduction of gender inequality is policy changes and 81.25 percent said that the method of reduction of gender inequality is equal access to resources. Thus from research we can say that only education will help to reduce gender inequality in the community forest user group.

Agent of Gender Inequality

Table 5: Agent of Gender Inequality

SN	Agent of Gender inequality	No. of respondents	Percentages (%)
1	Religious organization	72	90
2	Peer Group	68	85
3	Family	65	81.25
4	Community	61	76.25
5	Other organizations	56	70
6	Government	34	42.5

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 shows that 90 percent respondents said that the main agent of gender inequality is religious organization. This is due to the high practice in Hinduism. Majority of respondents are Hindu and they said that their religious practice support gender inequality. Result even shows that the agent of gender inequality is peer group, family, community, other organization and even government. Data shows 90 percent respondent said that the agent of gender inequality is religious organization. 85 percent respondents said that the agent of gender inequality is peer group, 81.25 percent said that the agent of gender inequality is family, 76.25 percent said that the main agent of gender inequality is community, 70 percent respondents said that the agent of gender inequality is other organization and 42.5 percent said that the agent of gender inequality is government. Thus from the result we can say that the major agent of gender inequality is religious organization and religious practices.

Conclusion

From the research we can conclude that there is gender inequality in forest user group. The major inequality that exist is inclusion by kindness. Mostly, women even men are included in executive committee and sub-committee by the kindness of active people. Among all the types of inequality that exist in CFUG the fundamental and crucial types is inclusion by kindness. The inequality is caused due to socio-cultural practices practiced from the birth. Though in modern time education system has advanced and awareness is created by various organizations still the main cause of inequality is due to socio-cultural practices. Due to gender inequality in the CFUG it result social conflict among the members which create problems in management of community forest user group. The main consequence of gender inequality is it causes social conflict among the members in the community forest group. The conflict among the members will led to weak management in community forest and unable to achieve the objective of community forest. From the research we can say that only education will help to reduce gender inequality in the community forest user group. Though education is expanding and access to the education is increasing there is gender inequality in the community forest user group and respondent even said that education is one of the prominent method to reduce gender inequality in CFUG. Result conclude that the major agent of gender inequality is religious organization and religious practices.

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