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**Why Include Women in Community Forestry: To Include
Differences or to Make a Difference?**

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Abstract

Including women in local forest management has become an essential part of the rhetoric surrounding community forestry programmes in Nepal and elsewhere. However, the rationale behind women's inclusion is often poorly defined. Often, women's participation in decision-making is argued as a way to promote ecological management by integrating women's specific, local knowledge about forest resources and thus, improving the ecological sustainability of forest management. In other cases, women are recognised as those providing a large share of the labour involved in silvicultural operations, thus women's participation ensures the economic sustainability of the community forestry. Finally, women's participation is argued as a way to develop democracy and an engaged citizenship. The wide range of reasons to include women often leads to a lack of clarity as to what framework will allow achieving them, so that disparate and isolated measures are implemented. Based on existing literature and on the result of fieldwork in two Community Forest User Groups in Nepal, I argue that women's integration in a community forest user group need to be pursued within a coherent framework. The aims cannot be solely focused on ecological and/or economic sustainability, i.e. including women to provide the labour needed to protect the forest and to collect forest products, or to include some diversity in local knowledge to manage the forest towards multiple uses. If community forests are to contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources, social sustainability needs play a central role. The socio-economic framework needed for sustainable management of community forests needs to include measures to enhance the social capital of women. Only self-confident, vocal women will be able to ensure that their voices are heard and their views are taken into consideration before reaching a decision. Ensuring women's participation can increase diversity of knowledge and thus, more sustainable management decisions, but only if the framework allows women to make a difference.

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