

AGENTS OF CHANGE: A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE IMPACT OF WOMEN IN FOREST GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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BACKGROUND

Historically, men have dominated the forestry sector in Asia and the Pacific (Wagle et al., 2017, p. 213). As a result, women have been excluded from forestry-related educational and professional opportunities in the field. However, this is problematic because the active inclusion of women is pivotal to addressing conservation goals related to climate change, and achieving gender equality (Agarwal, 2009, p. 2794-2795).

In attempts to address the disproportionately low representation of women in the forestry sector, forestry institutions have implemented quotas systems.. However, these efforts target local communities. As a result, higher-level forestry institutions that are responsible for national policy creation, mitigation, and implementation continue to be dominated by men.

As such, this study examines the current status of gender-equality in higher-level forest governance institutions in Asia and the Pacific. These institutions include FAO-Forestry, forestry-International NGOs (INGO) and NGOs; the Forest Department of various countries; and the International Forestry Student Association (IFSA) This study also investigates the overall impact women have in terms of conservation and advancing women's right when they are active members of forestry institutions.

OBJECTIVES

1. Address the gender data gap which currently exists in the forestry sector in Asia and the Pacific.

2. Identify the challenges and mechanisms women use to maneuver themselves in the forestry sector to effectively contribute to forestry-related projects.

3. Investigate the overall impact women make in the forestry sector in conservation and advancing women's rights.

METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

This research used a mixed-methods approach to data collection. Grounded Theory was used to analyze the research findings.



Quantitative Data: Gender Composition

- The data was collected using official organization and government websites.
- A total of 20 forest governance institutions were analyzed.



Qualitative Data: Experiences of women

- Interviews were conducted with women and men from high-level forestry institutions.
- A total of 15 interviews were conducted with representatives from the Philippines, Nepal, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, Myanmar, and Australia.

RESULTS

Key Finding #1: Gender Composition: Despite efforts to increase the representation of women in the forestry sector, men continue to dominate the sector. Of the 20 institutions in which data was collected from, 16 institutions (80 percent) had more male members than female members (Figure 1). Moreover, when looking at the head of leadership in forestry institutions across Asia and the Pacific, 75% of the institutions were male-led, while 25% were female-led (see Figure 2).

Figure 1:

Gender Composition of Forest Governance Institutions in Asia and the Pacific

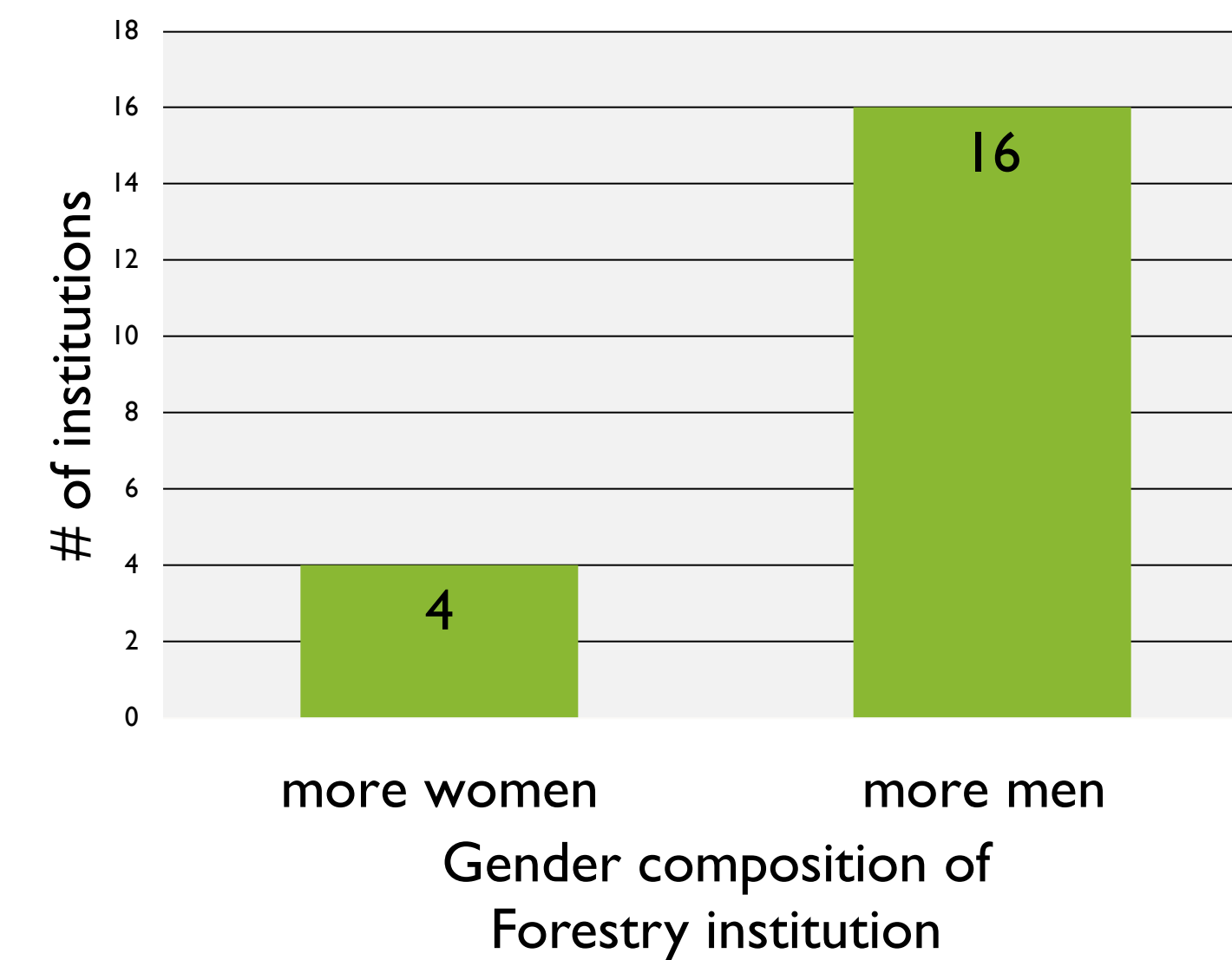
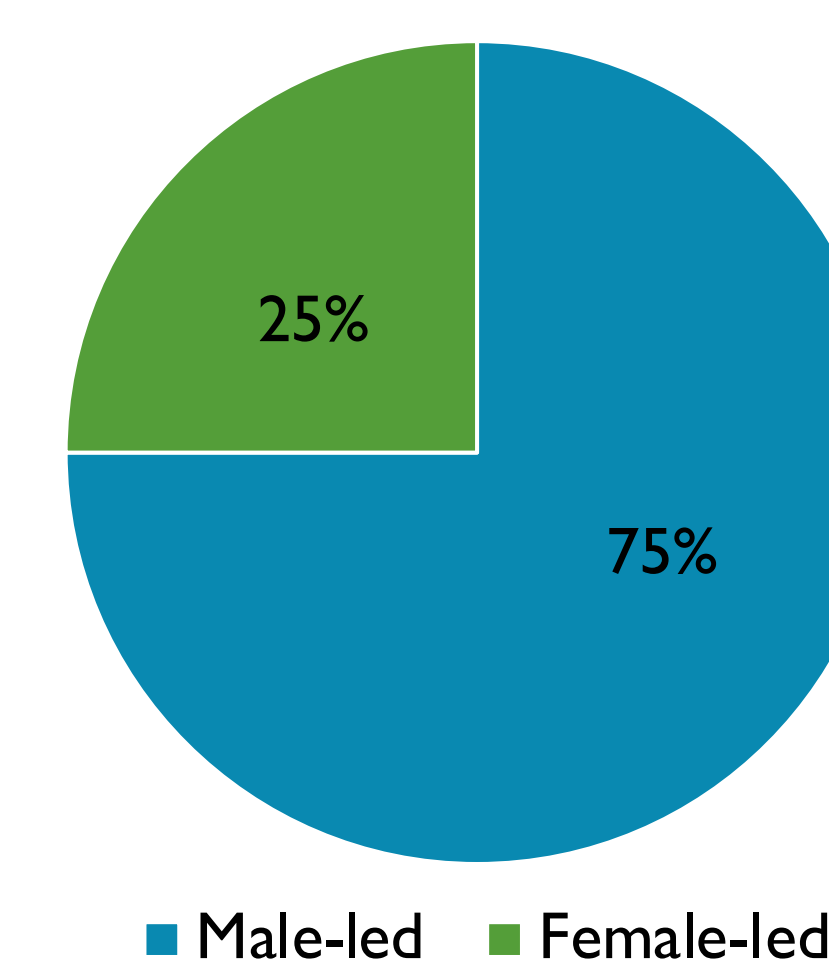


Figure 2:

Executive Leadership of Forestry Institutions in Asia and the Pacific



Key Finding #2: Stereotyping, gendered divisions of labor, and the lack of safety in the sector limit women's ability to fully engage and participate in their roles in their given forestry institution.

Key Finding #3: To help women overcome these challenges, forest governance institutions should implement gender sensitization training, conduct capacity building with women, and strengthen HR policies.

Key Finding #4: In the face of discrimination, women continued to make numerous contributions to forest conservation (Figure 3) and advancing gender equality (Figure 4) in the forestry sector in Asia and the Pacific.

Figure 3: Women's contributions to conservation activities in the forestry sector



Conducted conservation research, monitoring, and evaluation



Provided technical support for senior researchers



Raised awareness on forest conservation amongst youth



Lobbied government for stronger forest conservation policies



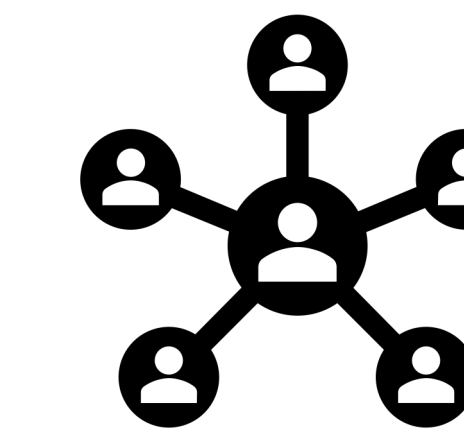
Implemented REDD+ projects and conservation projects at local community level



Trained community forest user groups on forest conservation methods

RESULTS

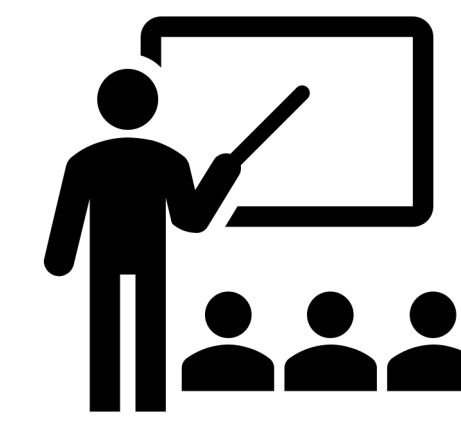
Figure 4: Women's contributions to advancing women's rights in the forestry sector



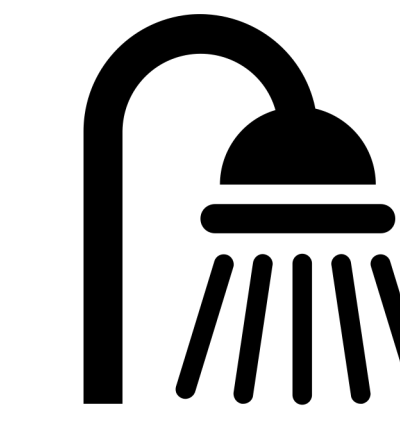
Formed a support network and safe space for women



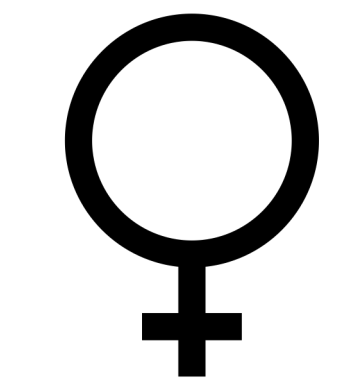
Introduced a gender-code of conduct at the Ministry of Forest (Nepal)



Conducted gender-sensitization training



Introduced gender-friendly infrastructure
Ex: women's washroom



Institutionalized gender-quotas



Empowered women to participate in local community forest committee meetings

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK APPROACH



The theoretical frameworks: critical mass, feminist political ecology, and gender and development were used to shape and critically analyze my research findings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite efforts to achieve gender equality in the forestry sector in Asia and the Pacific, women working in higher-level forestry institutions continue to face discrimination and harassment due to their gender. However, women in forest governance institutions do not view themselves as victims of the male dominated culture that heavily shapes the forestry sector. Rather, women see themselves as change makers and revolutionaries in the fight for gender equality. As a result, forestry institutions should look to further empower women such that women continue to make significant contributions to forest conservation and advancing women's rights in the forestry sector in Asia and the Pacific.

REFERENCES

Agarwal, B. (2009a). Gender and Forest Conservation: The Impact of Women's Participation in Community Forest Governance. *Ecological Economics*, 68, 2785-2799.

Wagle, R., Pillay, S., & Wright, V. (2017). Examining Nepalese forestry governance from gender perspective. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40(3), 205-225. DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2015.1091015