Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Among Community Forest User Groups In Nepal:

Who Benefits?

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INTRODUCTION

Community forestry programs in Nepal have been incredibly successful in terms of carbon sequestration, reforestation, and the local transfer of knowledge about environmental conservation practices. Nepal's community forest initiatives were propelled by national policies and PSAs over the radio and television, coupled with a decentralized method of community-based natural resource management, community forest monitoring, and participatory leadership at the local governance level.

The decentralized governance model of Nepal's community forestry initiatives has been replicated in several other developing countries, and the overall environmental benefits are numerous. However, the role of gender equity and social inclusion among these groups is less clear. Although substantial efforts in terms of gender mainstreaming and social inclusion initiatives (GESI) have been undertaken, and women can actively participate in community forest user groups (CFUGs) as well as hold leadership positions, barriers to group entry limit social inclusion. While female and marginalized caste groups can participate and make decisions in CFUGs, social differences need to be considered. Otherwise, ignoring the intersectionality of class, caste, and gender among CFUGs makes elite capture more likely, furthering systemic inequality and excluding traditionally marginalized groups.

Most Nepalese are small-holder farmers, and 80% of the population is rural[1]. With socioeconomic drivers such as migration and the flow of remittances, female-headed households are the norm for agrarian regions. As female-headed households have more responsibilities for education, household nutrition, and subsistence agriculture, this also contributes to the "double bind" these women face – increased decision-making and responsibility, but a lack of power within Nepali society. Although many gender-mainstreaming development projects seek to empower women – and many community groups consist primarily of women – women are still excluded from access to cash crop production and markets, formal agricultural training, and land ownership.

Community forest user groups (CFUGs) have emerged as a key mechanism to navigate challenges related to land use, gender, and social inclusion. Found in 74 of the 75 districts in Nepal, CFUGs are allowed to harvest non-timber forest products for fuel and fodder for animals, resulting in indirect linkages to food security/household nutrition. Nepal and India were the first countries to form community forest user groups in the early 1980s to protect against poaching,

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[1] "The DHS Program - Nepal: Standard DHS." 2016. Retrieved October 9, 2019.
(https://dhsprogram.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-472.cfm).

deforestation, and illegal logging[2]. Community forestry in Nepal developed in response to rural poverty, with the notion of "forests for the people"[3]. At the village level, individuals form CFUGs in order to practice sustainable forest management. Their main incentive to join these groups is access to fodder for their livestock and the use of non-timber forestry products.[4] Fodder and other natural resources have proven to be a more equitable method of creating buy-in for CFUGs and distributing resources among participants.[5]

Sustainable land management practices are often implemented by top-down institutions, such as centralized government and non-governmental organization (NGO) stakeholders. In the case of community forestry in Nepal, however, it began from decentralized organization – local farmers at the village level began to form community forest user groups, which have since been recognized by the government of Nepal and brought in to large-scale landscape management initiatives, such as the *Hariyo Ban,* or "green forest" program implemented by WWF-CARE and funded by USAID.[6] The *Hariyo Ban* program, covering the geographic area seen in Figure 1, has several projects centered upon community-led natural resource management, conservation, development, agroforestry, rural livelihoods, emerging markets, and climate change mitigation[7] Community forest user groups, whether in the *Hariyo Ban* program or not, play a key role in climate change mitigation with their community forest management. However, the implications for gender equity and social capital among these groups is unclear.

This paper analyzes the socioeconomic and environmental benefits of participation in community forest user groups in Nepal, with a critical lens on gender equity and social inclusion to answer two main questions:

1) To what extent, and in what ways do CFUGs influence social inclusion, especially among women?

2) To what extent is the recognition of patterns of change in GESI made explicit in current CFUG programming?

After reviewing the literature on gender and class participation in CFUGs, we propose a conceptual framework that highlights the potential tension in GESI programming. We then present findings from qualitative fieldwork gathered through observation and focus groups with female community forest user group members in Lamjung, Western Nepal and a content analysis of GESI related programming reports, we explore the extent to which gender and class are fully incorporated into CFUG programs.

[2] Skutsch, Margaret and Michael McCall. "Why Community Forest Monitoring?" Community Forest Monitoring for the Carbon Market: Opportunities Under REDD, 2011).

[3] ClientEarth. "What Can We Learn From Community Forests in Nepal?" (London, England: ClientEarth. 2018).

[4] WWF. "Hariyo Ban Program." (WWF, 2019.)

[5] Karky, Bhaskar S. and Rasul, Golam. "The Cost to Communities of Participating in   REDD+ in Nepal." Pp. 107-118 in Community Forest Monitoring for the Carbon   Market: Opportunities Under REDD, Edited by Margaret Skutsch (2011). Earthscan, London, UK.

[6] WWF. "Hariyo Ban Program." (WWF, 2019.)

[7] WWF Nepal. WWF Nepal 2018 Annual Report. (Kathmandu, Nepal: WWF, 2018).
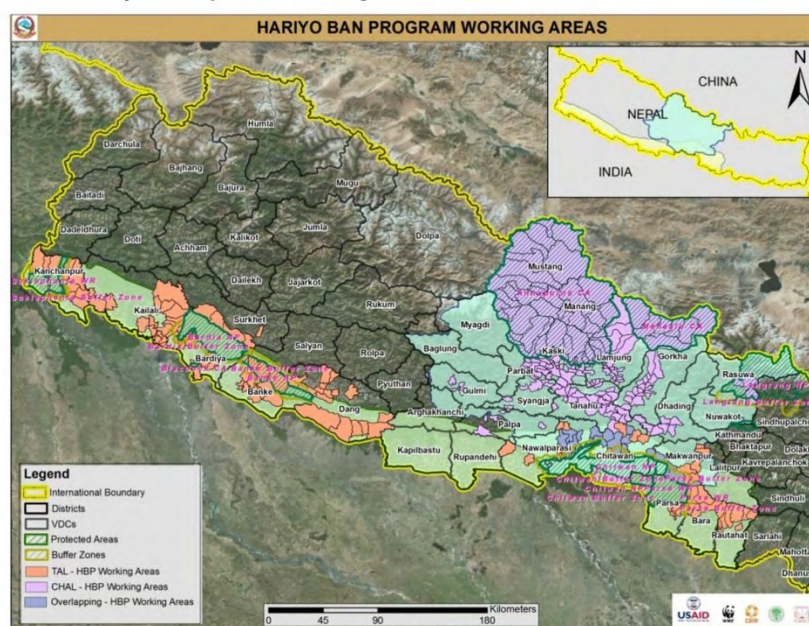
Exhibit 1. Map of Hariyo Ban Working Area

Figure 1: Hariyo Ban Area[8]

BACKGROUND

The History of Community Forest Management

Community forest management (CFM) is a component of the community-based natural resource management practices formally introduced globally in the 1970s to promote forest management in partnership with local communities using the forest. These communities are often indigenous, rural populations. According to Pelletier et al., 2016, the three main components of community forest management include 1) the involvement of local people in forest governance and management; 2) sustainable forest management for wood or non-timber forest products for ecological or social value and 3) the recognized use of forest products for subsistence and income-generating activities among indigenous populations and local communities.

Nepal in particular is highlighted as a successful model of decentralized community-based natural resource management through the local governance of public forests for both environmental and social benefits[9]. According to the FAO, the. re are 3,636,000 hectares of forested land in Nepal, and 14,335,000 hectares of total land[10]Community forests account for over 1 million hectares of land, spread out across all ecozones and all but one district[11]

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[8] USAID Nepal "Mid-Term Performance Evaluation of the Hariyo Ban Project." (2015).

[9] Karky, Bhaskar S. and Rasul, Golam. "The Cost to Communities of Participating in REDD+ in Nepal." Pp. 107-118 in Community Forest Monitoring for the Carbon Market: Opportunities Under REDD, Edited by Margaret Skutsch (2011). Earthscan, London, UK.

[10] FAO. "FAO Country Profiles: Nepal." (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2019).

[11] Singh, B. K., and D. P. Chapagain. "Trends in Forest Ownership, Forest Resources Tenure and Institutional Arrangements: Are They Contributing to Better Forest Management and Poverty Reduction?" (FAO, 2005).

While forest governance strategies differ, the CFM governance model in Nepal is participatory in nature. Nepal's community forestry model is recognized around the world as a progressive, innovative form of community-based natural resource management - for its biophysical benefits and the inclusion of rural villagers throughout the country. Community forest user groups in Nepal have increased the participation of rural women and low-caste populations, likely improving their social capital at the community level. However, the extent to which community forest management has impacted socially excluded populations such as landless tenants, who are most likely to fall under the category of "ultra-poor," is debatable.

Emerging Trends in Gender Equity & Social Inclusion (GESI) & CFM

In the past 30 years, it has become widely recognized that "women's empowerment" schemes are prone to elite capture and fail to decrease social disparities among rural, marginalized populations. Although the government of Nepal has increased gender-mainstreaming initiatives, many policies and societal practices still actively exclude marginalized caste groups, women, and the poor. Traditionally marginalized populations, which include the poor, Dalit and lower caste groups, women, and low-caste indigenous populations, tend to be socially excluded from forest governance[12] Despite Nepal's "well-established devolution of forest use rights, marginalized peoples – such as women and the poor – who rely deeply and directly on and affect forests tend to have little effective voice in community-based forest governance[13]."

Previous development approaches focused solely on women's empowerment with limited efficacy, as they ignored the male-dominated systemic factors surrounding gender inequity. Emergent trends in gender and development now prioritize gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) as the primary framework for inclusive development work.

The Government of Nepal committed to following a GESI framework, and seven ministries (Agriculture, Education, Forest, Health, Federal Affairs and Local Development, Urban Development, Water Supply and Sanitation) are implementing GESI policies and guidelines, which are being monitored by specially trained staff in each ministry.[14] Forests are under local control, and it is assumed that a greater proportion of money from income-generating non-timber forestry products (NTFP) and other benefits will reach formerly excluded marginalized groups[15]. However, this does not take into account that local forest governance in Nepal has also led to social disparity, elite capture, the exclusion of the most marginalized populations, and inequitable benefit-sharing among forest user groups.[16] While Nepal's forest groups have been inclusive of rural women and low-caste groups, restrictions on participation and limitations on firewood, fodder and non-timber forest products that can be harvested from community forests appear to have led to inequitable benefit sharing[17]. Livelihoods of local forest users have not improved to the extent expected, and funds gained from CFUG participation at

[12] Agarwal, Bina. "Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework." (World Development, 2001, 29(10):1623–48).

[13] Pelletier, Johanne, Nancy Gelinas and Margaret Skutch. "The Place of Community Forest Management in the REDD+ Landscape." (Forests, 2016, (7):170).

[14] UNDP. "UNDP Nepal Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Report." (2016).

[15] Pelletier, Johanne, Nancy Gelinas and Margaret Skutch. "The Place of Community Forest Management in the REDD+ Landscape." (Forests, 2016, (7):170).

[16] Gurung et al. "Community-Based Forest Management and Its Role in Improving Forest Conditions in Nepal." (Small-Scale Forestry, 2013, 12(3):377–88).

[17] Gurung et al. "Community-Based Forest Management and Its Role in Improving Forest Conditions in Nepal." (Small-Scale Forestry, 2013, 12(3):377–88).

the local level are not significant; current community forestry policies do not fully support the market-oriented and environmental management of community forests[18].

In the 1990s, natural resource management (NRM) development initiatives began to incorporate gender-mainstreaming techniques, with mixed results[19]. However, women faced a "double-bind": they participated more in these development projects, but there was no significant increase in women's agency and power in Nepali society[20]. This resulted in greater participation of women – as well as increased responsibilities at home and in community groups [21]. Finally, although gender-mainstreaming initiatives began to take hold in Nepal, other drivers of social exclusion – such as caste – were not considered, which served as a barrier to participation in forest management programs.

GESI and Elite Capture

Community-based development was proposed as a more effective poverty reduction method than traditional, top-down approaches to alleviating poverty in developing countries. Locally managed community user groups have a better understanding of local context as well as social capital, which Platteau (2004) describes as "the dense network of continuous interactions among individuals that constitute community life."

However, several studies have shown that community-based development initiatives caused greater social disparities within a community. In instances of high inequality, marginalized groups tend to be more easily oppressed by local power groups or those with higher socioeconomic status, who likely have larger social capital within the community as well (Platteau, 2004). This is referred to as elite capture; while this is rarely the intended outcome of community-based development initiatives, decentralized governance limits the likelihood of marginalized populations' participation in community-based development initiatives. The lower the level of government, the higher the rate of elite capture, due to the decentralized nature of community-based development[22]. Local governments tend to over-provide services to local elites, which further enhances social disparities among poorer and more affluent groups within the community.

The challenge of elite capture has been highlighted by previous studies of CFUG programming. Work by Gurung et al. (2013) showed that participation in community forest user groups led to increased income-generating activities by group members, but social disparity and inequitable benefit-sharing challenges persisted. Over the course of their research in three districts in Nepal, most of the CFUGs were led by elite groups, and socioeconomic inequality

[18] Gurung et al. "Community-Based Forest Management and Its Role in Improving Forest Conditions in Nepal." (Small-Scale Forestry, 2013, 12(3):377–88).

[19] McDougall, Cynthia L., Cees Leeuwis, Tara Bhattarai, Manik R. Maharjan, and Janice Jiggins. "Engaging Women and the Poor: Adaptive Collaborative Governance of Community Forests in Nepal." (Agriculture and Human Values;2013, Dordrecht 30(4):569–85).

[20] Bhattarai, Basundhara, Ruth Beilin, and Rebecca Ford. "Gender, Agrobiodiversity, and Climate Change: A Study of Adaptation Practices in the Nepal Himalayas." (World Development, 2015, 70:122–32).

[21] Bhattarai, Basundhara, Ruth Beilin, and Rebecca Ford. "Gender, Agrobiodiversity, and Climate Change: A Study of Adaptation Practices in the Nepal Himalayas." (World Development, 2015, 70:122–32).

[22] Platteau, Jean-Phillipe. "Community-Based Development in the Context of Within Group Heterogeneity." (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank: Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics 2004, pps. 241-255).

paired with barriers to entry for poor and marginalized groups perpetuated their exclusion from community forestry[23]. Gurung et al. (2013) also found that the community forestry programs further exacerbated economic disparities among the elite and marginalized, as policies to protect community forests limited the livelihood strategies for poor community members who previously utilized forest resources without restriction[24].While women's participation has greatly increased in community forest groups, elite capture perpetuates the social exclusion of poor, marginalized populations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The standard approaches from development actors working in the community forestry space has heavily emphasized programs that target women *and* the economically marginalized. However, programming has tended to conflate these characteristics- even the short-hand for the concept itself, GESI, (gender equality *and* social inclusion) implies that these are synergistic, and not potentially competing, social categories.

In addition, practitioners need a better conceptual understanding of GESI as a process that plays out over time and space. Paying attention to the *changing internal patterns* of participation in *both* gender and social class is critical to achieving the goals articulated by development actors working in the community forestry space. Figure 1 presents our conceptual framework, and highlights the different ways in which participation can unfold. Frame A shows the national level pattern of change in women's participation in programming, from 0% at Time 1 to 100% at Time 5. However, class-based patterns of decline can vary substantially with these same conditions. The upper scenario in Frame B describes a "class diffuse" process- where gains in gender equality are distributed evenly across all class groups within a community. For example at Time 2, 25% of women in each SES group are participating in community forest groups. Conversely, the lower scenario in Frame B outlines a "class preserving" process of change. Under these conditions, 25% of women participate at Time 2, but participation is exclusively captured by women in the high SES group.

While the Time 5 scenario is the same in both the class diffuse and class preserving examples (i.e. 100% of participation of women across all SES groups), there are two practical issues to note. First, this "full participation" state represents a hypothetical scenario that no program has yet to reach. Second, and more importantly, a rich literature has highlighted the benefits of early adoption of technology[25] Examining the transition from swidden cultivation to rubber plantations in Laos, Evans et al. (2011) find an increase in household inequality over time as a function of the variable rate of rubber adoption over time. Thus, even if lower SES groups eventually catch up, the gains from participation are likely to be reduced.
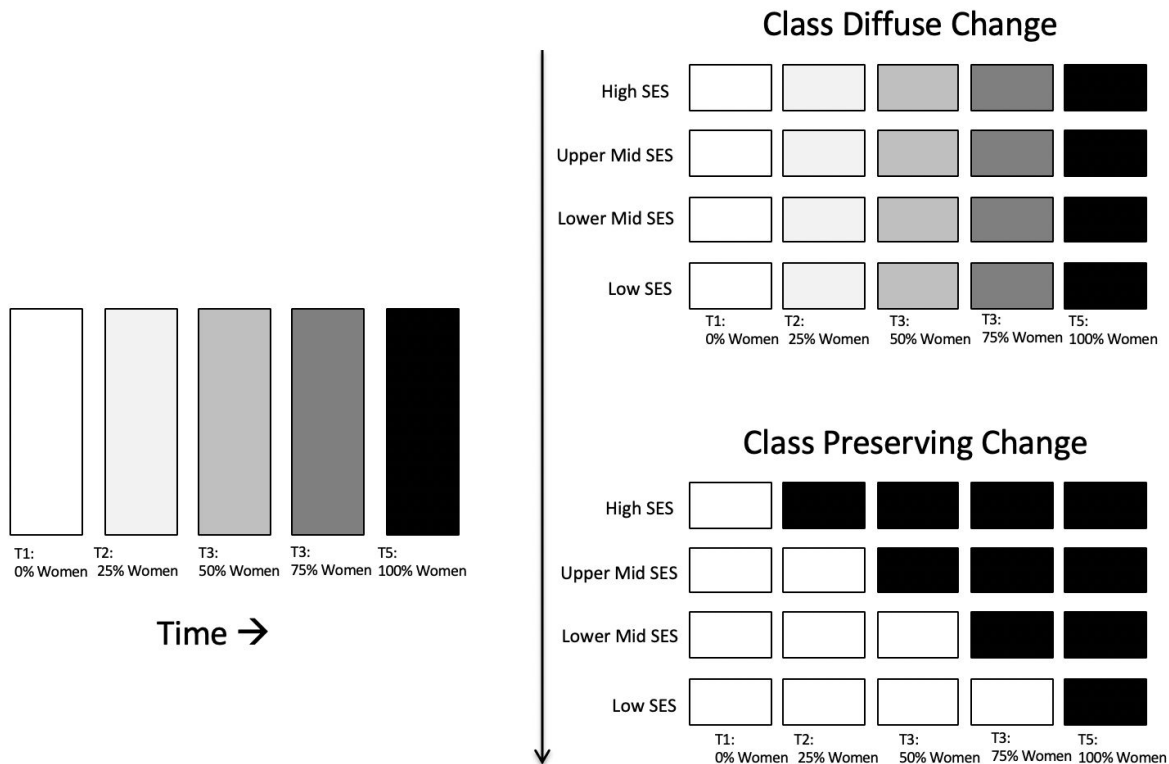
Figure 1 thus highlights the importance of explicitly monitoring the simultaneous changes in gender (GE) *and* class (SI). Yet, it is unclear whether practitioners are able to give each of these components their due. Our research project seeks to examine the extent to which this recognition of the *patterns* of change in GESI is made explicit in current CFUG programming.

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[23] Gurung et al. "Community-Based Forest Management and Its Role in Improving Forest Conditions in Nepal." (Small-Scale Forestry, 2013, 12(3):377–88).

[24] Gurung et al. "Community-Based Forest Management and Its Role in Improving Forest Conditions in Nepal." (Small-Scale Forestry, 2013, 12(3):377–88).

[25] (Abbott & Yarbrough, 1992; Evans et al. 2011; Rogers, 1962). (need to find source to cite)

Figure 1. Internal Patterns of GESI Change

Class Diffuse Change

	T1: 0% Women	T2: 25% Women	T3: 50% Women	T3: 75% Women	T5: 100% Women
High SES					
Upper Mid SES					
Lower Mid SES					
Low SES					

Class Preserving Change

	T1: 0% Women	T2: 25% Women	T3: 50% Women	T3: 75% Women	T5: 100% Women
High SES					
Upper Mid SES					
Lower Mid SES					
Low SES					

	T1: 0% Women	T2: 25% Women	T3: 50% Women	T3: 75% Women	T5: 100% Women

Time →

Frame A: National Perspective   *Frame B: Community Perspective*

DATA & METHODS

To better explore the interplay between gender equity *and* social inclusion in CFUG programming, we used two main approaches: 1) a content analysis of reports on a key Nepali CFUG program and 2) in-person interviews and focus groups with community participants in this program.

Content Analysis. Our content analysis focused on a USAID-funded community forest project in its second stage – Hariyo Ban Phase II. A content analysis was conducted to analyze the ways in which gender, caste, and class were discussed among the main program donor, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and implementing agencies involved: Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) Nepal and World Wildlife Fund. Table 1 (below) highlights the primary stakeholders and their respective roles in the implementation of the Hariyo Ban Phase II project.

The content analysis provided insight into the community forestry donor landscape. It relied on communications materials and annual reports from the international agencies involved

[26]. The main question guiding the content analysis was, "how are marginalized groups involved in community forestry in Nepal?" In each report narrative, we searched for key terms including women, gender, inclusion, class, poverty, and caste to examine how these characteristics were treated by the programs to understand the extent to which these factors they considered (discussed/monitored/evaluated) separately or whether they tended to be "lumped" together. A longer discussion of the ways in which components of gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) is included – or not – is found in the findings/discussion section of this paper.

Table 1. Hariyo Ban Partners and Roles[27]

HB Partner Roles and Responsibilities	Role
World Wildlife Fund-US (WWF)	Prime awardees Technical leadership Program management and reporting, grant management, and monitoring & evaluation Natural resource, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem-related activities Lead on biodiversity and sustainable landscape components
CARE	Lead on climate change adaptation component plus GESI and governance
National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)	Protected area and buffer zone management
Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN)	Mobilizes participation of Community Forest User Groups (CFUG) Issues-based advocacy and governance

Qualitative Interviews. Building on our insights gained from the content analysis, we conducted two qualitative focus groups during the winter of 2020 with female-headed households and CFUG members in Chiti, Lamjung, in Western Nepal. Lamjung is a medium-sized district within the mountainous agro-ecological zone[28]. Approximately 49% is covered by forestland and about 28% (18,849.96 Ha) of that land is included in the Annapurna Conservation Area, managed by the National Trust for Nature Conservation. 30% of the remaining forest land is community-managed forest land and the rest is managed by the Lamjung District Forest Department[29]. Lamjung has 317 CFUGs which manage 39.1% of the district's total forest area (DFO 2014 cited in Gyawali et al., 2017).

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[26] Local partners, Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal (FECOFUN) and National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), did not have publicly available annual reports or publications in English. Due to the lack of relevant publications to analyze, and because their work is more involved in community governance and biodiversity corridor management, they were not included in the content analysis.
[27] Gyawali, Saroj, Acharya, Sujan, Rajan Koirala, and Shrestha, Basanta. "Final Evaluation Report of CARE Nepal, Hariyo Ban Program." (Social Welfare Council Nepal. Pp. 1-126, 2017).
[28] "NepalMap Profile: Lamjung." NepalMap. (2019). Retrieved October 23, 2019 (https://nepalmap.org/profiles/district-37-lamjung/).
[29] Gyawali, Saroj, Acharya, Sujan, Rajan Koirala, and Shrestha, Basanta. "Final Evaluation Report of CARE Nepal, Hariyo Ban Program." (Social Welfare Council Nepal. Pp. 1-126, 2017).

Much like other mid-hills regions in Nepal, Lamjung is comparable to other districts of similar size in terms of household size, home/land ownership, and migration patterns[30]. Lamjung is mixed-caste, and has the largest Gurung population (ethnic minority group) in Nepal. Within Lamjung, two villages within the *nagarpalika*, or local government region, of Chiti were selected for the research setting. The villages are Siaut and Chiti Tillahar. Chiti, Lamjung is an ideal typical case for examining the research questions, as it is a mid-size area of 5,166 residents, consisting of many small villages, and a main town bazaar[31]. The demographic makeup in particular is what makes Chiti an ideal typical case study: it is very mixed-caste, comparable to Nepal's overall caste makeup, as well as mixed in terms of socioeconomic status and land ownership.

Focus group discussions were facilitated by the research assistant, who lives in the community and works at the health post. Focus group participants with diverse caste groups, age, and socioeconomic status were selected. All participants were women as well as members of the village community forest user groups of Siaut and Chiti Tillahar, respectively. Focus group questions were developed in part from the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale[32] as well as key indicators from the Nepal DHS regarding food security, gender equity, land use and tenure, and community-based forest management.

Focus group interviews were conducted with community members from two villages in Chiti, Lamjung. Participants in both focus groups had similar demographics (caste, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.). Discussions consisted of groups of 5-10 participants per session, and took place at community centers in town. Questions ranged from more general (name, age, household size) to more specific (related to forest usage and foraging habits, household dietary habits, land rights, and household-level agricultural practices).

Specifically, questions centered on two main themes:
1) How do rural smallholder women describe participation in CFUGs on their household resources and time allocation?
3) How do issues of gender and class manifest in CFUG membership?; How do the caste makeup of these CFUG groups compare with their village's caste demographics?

FINDINGS
Content Analysis
We began our project by exploring gender equity and social inclusion as the topics are discussed in the reports of three primary project implementing partners: CARE Nepal, USAID, and World Wildlife Fund. Key findings are highlighted in Table 2, and discussed below.

Table 2. Content Analysis Findings

Organization	Discussion of Gender, Caste and Class	Direct Quote

[30] "NepalMap Profile: Lamjung." NepalMap. (2019). Retrieved October 23, 2019 (https://nepalmap.org/profiles/district-37-lamjung/).
[31] "NepalMap Profile: Lamjung." NepalMap. (2019). Retrieved October 23, 2019 (https://nepalmap.org/profiles/district-37-lamjung/).
[32] Pandey, Rishikesh and Douglas K. Bardsley. "An Application of the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale to Assess Food Security in Rural Communities of Nepal." (Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies, 2019 6(2):130–50).

CARE Nepal[33]	● Lead on GESI mainstreaming for *Hariyo Ban* program ● Programmatic outcomes: improved policies that promote climate adaptation approaches that are gender sensitive and socially inclusive; greater discussion of social inclusion, emphasizes differentiated forms of marginality ● GESI mainstreaming: adopted by multiple national policies, women and traditionally socially excluded populations including youth increased their participation and decision-making within CFUGS ● GESI outcomes were stated to increase participation of poor, vulnerable women, and socially excluded groups to improve livelihoods and natural resource management ● CARE has most appropriately incorporated GESI (not just gender) as a cross-cutting theme in the *Hariyo Ban* program, as well as effectively described GESI strategy and project outcomes	"GESI is mainstreamed in the climate adaptation component through addressing differential impacts of climate change on women, poor, marginalized and other vulnerable groups." (pg 36) "CARE has vast experience and capacity in GESI, and strongly recognizes that empowerment of women and socially excluded groups are essential for strengthening their stewardship role in biodiversity conservation and climate change." (pg 60)
USAID[34]	● GESI is mentioned but gender, class and caste are conflated; for example, the quote highlights a 30% increase of leadership among women, ethnic and marginalized members – but this could refer to any of these groups; does not address issues of social exclusion, elite capture ● GESI mainstreaming is said to promote and scale up successful approaches of *Hariyo Ban* Phase I but approaches are not listed ● Conflated gender, caste and class; needs improvement	"Over 30% increase of women, ethnic and marginalized members in leadership positions of local groups" (USAID's *Hariyo Ban* Phase II Fact Sheet, page 3)
WWF[35]	● GESI's scope was limited in *Hariyo Ban* Phase I; WWF states that it has been made a cross-cutting theme for Phase II with the anticipated outcomes of improved internal GESI policies, greater rates of women, youth and marginalized populations' leadership in CFUGs, and more equitable access to community forestry, benefit sharing	"More equitable access to and benefit sharing from natural resources for women and marginalized groups" (WWF *Hariyo Ban* Fact Sheet, page 4)

[33] Gyawali, Saroj, Acharya, Sujan, Rajan Koirala, and Shrestha, Basanta. 2017. "Final Evaluation Report of CARE Nepal, Hariyo Ban Program." Social Welfare Council Nepal. Pp. 1-126.
[34] USAID Nepal. 2016. "Hariyo Ban Program: Phase II." Retrieved April 20, 2020. (https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Hariyo_Ban_II_-_Fact_Sheet_-_Draft_0914201 7.pdf).
[35] WWF Nepal. 2016. "Hariyo Ban Program." Retrieved on April 20, 2020. (http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/hariyo_ban_program_second_phase_brochure.pdf).

	● Focus on equitable benefit sharing, enhanced participation of women and marginalized populations ● Sometimes differentiates between gender, caste and class; occasionally includes them all as one group	

CARE Nepal. CARE Nepal most effectively discussed the integration of gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) within the Hariyo Ban II program (CARE Nepal Mid-Term Evaluation). CARE Nepal was the only organization to explicitly mention both gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women and marginalized populations, which makes sense as CARE took the lead on gender equity, social inclusion, and governance of the Hariyo Ban II program.

While GESI outcomes were appropriately stated throughout the report, and examples were cited that GESI led to increased participation of poor, vulnerable women, and socially excluded groups to improve livelihoods and natural resource management, the extent to which women and marginalized populations were differentially impacted by gender-mainstreaming and socially inclusive practices over the course of the project is unclear. CARE was the only organization to appropriately discuss gender equity and social inclusion as a cross-cutting theme in the Hariyo Ban program, describing the GESI strategy and project outcomes with a lens of social stratification and difference.

USAID. Although gender equity and social inclusion are mentioned throughout USAID's Hariyo Ban II reports, gender, class and caste are conflated. The quote in the table above highlights that programmatic outcomes included a 30% increase of leadership among women, ethnic and marginalized members, but this statistic could consist of any of these groups. USAID's report failed to effectively address issues of social exclusion, elite capture, and social difference among community forest user groups.

Finally, although gender-mainstreaming approaches are said to promote and scale up the successes of Hariyo Ban Phase I, there are no references to specific approaches from this phase of the program. The WWF report discussed the lack of gender inclusion in Hariyo Ban I, but the USAID publication makes a vague reference to its successes in terms of gender equity. Overall, this report conflates gender, caste and class; it fails to discuss gender equity and social inclusion, instead contributing vague statements about the increased leadership of traditionally socially excluded groups – women, ethnic minorities, and marginalized populations.

WWF. According to WWF's most recent publications, gender equity and social inclusion had a limited scope in Hariyo Ban Phase I. WWF states that it has been made a cross-cutting theme for Phase II. Anticipated outcomes are improved institutional governance, enhanced gender equity and social inclusion policies, greater leadership rates of women and marginalized populations, and more equitable access to benefit sharing of community forestry. There is an implicit focus on equitable benefit sharing and enhanced participation of women and marginalized populations throughout this publication. However, gender, class and caste are at times treated differently and other times conflated. The WWF report does a better job noting the limitations of gender inclusion in Hariyo Ban Phase I compared to USAID. But, the conflation of

gender, class and caste signifies that WWF could improve upon its discussion of gender equity and social inclusion outcomes.

Qualitative Interviews
Evidence of Direct Benefits. Focus group participants in both groups discussed several direct benefits of participating in community forest user groups in Chiti, Lamjung. The primary direct benefit mentioned by both focus groups was improved household nutrition from the availability of wild, edible foods from the forest. Income-generating activities were one of the most frequently discussed direct benefits. In addition to wild foods foraged and sold by CFUG members, other income-generating activities were mentioned, including non-timber forestry products, medicinal herbs, and the contribution of fodder to households' livestock health. Women shared that they will sustainably harvest and sell extra firewood, medicinal herbs, and non-timber forestry products for additional household income.

In terms of social benefits, women spoke about spending time outside of the home with friends, being able to learn about forest conservation during monthly meetings, being seen as knowledgeable on environmental conservation throughout the community, and the social learning that is gained through group participation.

Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Among CFUGs. Previously, women were not allowed to join community forest user groups. Focus group respondents discussed women forming their own, informal groups seven to eight years ago because they were denied entry to the local CFUGs. Women's participation and leadership among CFUG members interviewed has significantly increased in the past five to six years. This was most apparent when speaking to CFUG members of Siaut. They recalled that seven or eight years ago women were unable to participate in community forest user groups. They expressed frustration at not being able to join previously. "Compared to men, women use the forest more and get more benefits than men, so it was important for women to be able to join the group," one respondent stated.

A few respondents said they were directly involved with the establishment of early informal CFUGs for women, as well as worked to petition the male CFUGs to disband and establish new groups that allowed women to formally participate. They petitioned the previous group to disband and allow women to join, and five or six years ago women first became members. Over time, the rules have changed, and now leadership must be composed of one man and one woman. While gender mainstreaming efforts have increased women's participation, most women in the Siaut group were high-caste Brahmin, with the exception of one low-caste Dalit woman.

The other focus group, consisting of women from the more mixed-caste community of Chiti Tillahar, an area that includes the town's main bazaar, was much more integrated in terms of caste. Although a Brahmin woman was the vice president, the group was fairly diverse, and included disadvantaged groups, Dalits, and higher-caste women. Women of all caste groups were chatting and joking with one another openly.

In terms of social benefits, women from Chiti Tillahar shared that they enjoyed the social aspect of the group. They said one of the best parts of group participation was being able to meet with one another and discuss environmental/forest conservation issues. They also shared that others in the community see them as a source of knowledge on forest conservation, and that it is their responsibility to teach people about environmental issues, which they learn about during monthly forest user groups meetings.

Participatory Exclusion (Social Exclusion and Elite Capture). Although the past five or six years have seen women included in CFUGs and increased representation of Dalit women and members of disadvantaged groups is found among these groups, social exclusion still persists. An exclusive selection process of CFUG members by members of the local village government office as well as restrictions placed on participation eligibility perpetuate elite capture. In order to participate in community forest user groups, people must own their own land, either in their own name or their husband or family's name. While policies that seek to include women, Dalits, and other marginalized populations in CFUG participation exist, the exclusion of low-income, landless tenants continues to exacerbate elite capture in Chiti, Lamjung.

Landless populations, composed of low-caste and "ultra-poor" households, are ineligible for CFUG participation, which has not been discussed much in previous CFUG literature. When focus group respondents were asked about landless tenants' perceptions of CFUGs, several women shared that they did not think landless tenants would be interested in CFUG participation; this statement can likely be attributed to class-based perceptions of interest in formalized utilization of community forests in the area. Statements such as, "If anyone wants to participate, they can bring land rights documentation saying that they started living there, but they have to show documentation that they are living here in order to join," further demonstrate the requirement of land tenancy for inclusion in CFUGs. It also highlights the social norms that influence elite capture among CFUGs, and the barriers to inclusion that are normatively enforced by group members.

CONCLUSION

Community forest user groups in Nepal have significantly improved the reforestation of degraded landscapes, local communities' knowledge and prioritization of environmental conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies at the landscape level. However, gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) have had mixed results. While the participation of women, Dalits, and other marginalized groups has increased among CFUGs in the past decade, these trends are limited to middle and upper-class groups that are landowners, and landless tenants – primarily the "ultra-poor" – lack equitable benefit sharing among CFUGs. This exclusionary practice perpetuates elite capture, and is likely not limited to this particular community forestry development initiative in Nepal. Nepal's community-based forestry program has been replicated in other countries, but in terms of GESI, there is still work to be done in order for these groups to be socially inclusive, incorporating class and social difference to limit elite capture. Gender mainstreaming has allowed women to participate and lead community forest user groups, enabling environments for gender-inclusive policies and practices.

Social difference – including age, caste, class, and ethnicity – is harder to measure than gender. The conflation of gender equity and social inclusion as one term within international development makes it complicated to analyze the measurable impact. The government of Nepal, in partnership with NGO and private sector implementing organizations, should implement policies that promote gender equity and social inclusion as two different components of inclusive development. At the local level, benefit-sharing must be inclusive of caste, class, and gender, both in community forest user groups and other locally governed groups. Building upon the environmental conservation benefits of Nepal's community forestry program, incorporating gender equity and social inclusion as two distinct markers of social difference could be a powerful example used to improve inclusion in other development programs around the world.

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