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Still a Man's World: Reflections of Women Foresters in Nepal

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Abstract: The history of forest management in Nepal can be characterized over the years as a story of “men and jungles”, as forestry has been widely assumed to be a “male- sector”. Gradually, from the early 1980s, the focus of forestry shifted from protection to community management, and thus opened up spaces for women to enter forest institutions, including the Institute of Forestry. This paper brings forth perceptions and reflections of women foresters as they have tried to integrate into forestry organizations for almost three decades. Specifically, the paper analyzes the prospects and challenges of women foresters in both academic institutions of forestry and in work places. Focus group discussions were conducted with about 50 women foresters in different geographical locations of Nepal. Data was gathered through women's foresters' life stories and testimonies. The findings indicate the lack of a gender-responsive environment in both academic institutions as well as in forestry organizations throughout the country. Various patterns of covert discrimination exist in these institutions. A set of factors that largely influence women foresters' opportunities and commitment within the natural resource management sectors has been identified. Reflections by these women also point out the gradual changes in society towards women, in this case seen through the increasing recognition of women as foresters. There are also instances of women getting support from male colleagues, both within academic institutions and in the organizations of their employment. However, such instances are limited. There is an urgent need to institutionalize these supportive behaviors within a context where such good practices are seen as the norm rather than the exception.

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