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## Gender Issues in Natural Resources Management

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The IUFRO conference on Gender Issues in Natural Resources Management held in Dehradun, India, (fig 1)<sup>1</sup> from 16-19 November 2009 was hosted by the Forest Research Institute (FRI) and its German lecturer Dr. Ernst Kürsten (DAAD)<sup>2</sup>. Presenters from countries in the North and the South explored experiences with gender sensitivity and gender analysis in forest management as well as challenges to the sustainable livelihoods of forest dwellers and users in many countries of the world (fig 2).

### Gender issues are not just for women

Research questions and issues included concerns about the perceptions of climate change, the impact of policies on men and women, and the informal ways that forest management affects men and women. Presenters noted progress in relation to the development of self-help and entrepreneurial groups that supported women's and men's economic development. But it was also recognized that there are still many actions that could be taken to ensure equality between men and women. It was suggested that men become more directly involved in actions that benefit women and men; gender issues are not just for women. Also, there is a need for improved gender awareness and education at all levels of organizations that implement forestry policies – from the grassroots to the international agencies.

### Improving agricultural yields and reducing the workload of women

After the conference a village visit in the Mussouri hills was facilitated by the Ajeevika project officer (cf. [www.ajeevika.org.in](http://www.ajeevika.org.in)) who works with the people in this village.<sup>3</sup> The project

has been active in the village since 2006 with main objectives being the improvement of agricultural yields, reducing the workload of women and helping women to form self-help groups to institutionalize group dynamics. During the visit, the women gave examples of how the project has improved their standard of living (e.g. helping them to plant Napier grass on farmland, thereby shortening the distance they have to travel to get fodder; distributing new and improved agricultural tools). The visitors asked the villagers questions concerning agroforestry management, their educational, economic and their social lives, and were in turn asked about life in Europe and Africa.

### Helping Himalayan villagers tapping local resources

A second excursion group visited sites of activity of the WISE (Women Initiative for Self Employment) and HESCO projects (fig 3) aimed at helping "Himalayan villagers tap local resources and encouraging activities that open up new avenues to their well-being", as expressed by the well known initiator, Dr. Anil Joshi (cf. [www.hesco.in](http://www.hesco.in)). This trip included an impressive visit to one of the 150 water mills which have been technically upgraded since 1989 in the Garhwal region of Uttaranchal.

<sup>1</sup> More photos, the conference programme, abstracts, presentations and soon also the conference proceedings may be found under <http://www.iufrogenderindia.info>

<sup>2</sup> The conference was cosponsored by WOCAN (Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & NRM, cf. <http://www.wocan.org>)

<sup>3</sup> From an excursion report by Dr. Victorine Che, Freiburg



Fig 1: A group photo in front of the main building from 1929, styled in Greco Roman Architecture by C.G. Blomfield, a National Heritage, is a must at a conference in Dehradun - taken during the campus walk. (Photo by E. Kürsten)



Fig. 2: The local press took notice of the conference, here with a photo from the main hall during the key note speech of Dr. Fauzia Malik, Intercooperation Pakistan (Photo: "Garhwal Post, Dehradun")



Fig. 3: One of the field trips visited the nurseries and exhibitions of the Himalayan Environmental Studies and Conservation Organization (HESCO) near Dehradun; products from Lantana camara for demonstration to women's self-employment initiatives. (Photo by S. Lewark)