

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Blueprints to Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups in Natural Resource Governance: Lessons from Nepal and Tanzania

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Though there is an increasing trend of natural resources governed by local communities, disadvantaged groups who are highly dependent on natural resources are still far behind in terms of being involved in the natural resource governance. When the wider public is included in decision-making in natural resources governance, the ways in which people protect and cope with the changing environment in their daily lives are exposed and can advance the search for alternatives in sustainable development. This paper compares natural resources governance interventions in Nepal and Tanzania, and searches for differences and similarities in the patterns of engagement of disadvantaged groups. The special focus is on Dalits in Nepal and rural women in Tanzania. The study reveals that though disadvantaged groups are included in principle, in practice their special needs are not taken into consideration. Our findings indicate that the formal possibilities for engagement do not provide citizens with sufficient and equal space for meaningful participation. The theoretical background of the paper builds on two approaches of engagement: Chamber's view of power at the grassroots and Fung and Wright's thoughts on empowerment.

Keywords: Dalits; rural women; decision-making; natural resources; participation; responsive environmental governance

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015) is based on the assumption that no one will be left behind in the collective journey towards sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals aim to reach those who are furthest behind and make sure that the benefits of development are equally shared and that the dignity of an individual is emphasized. Managing natural resources jointly with other stakeholders in a sustainable and fair manner is a challenge for rural populations around the world who depend on the natural resources around them.

In the spirit of the SDGs, managing natural resources is a joint venture. Hardin (1968) would challenge such an idea by arguing that common usage of natural resources leads to a tragedy of the commons. Without restrictions on individual use of natural resources, the resource will inevitably be depleted. On the other hand, Ostrom (1990) states that local communities can develop governing arrangements that fit local conditions in order to successfully manage common assets. Common resources are often governed by customary, traditional, and indigenous systems of common property (Dell' Angelo *et al.* 2017), often guided by ethical beliefs of environmental stewardship (Chapin *et al.* 2010). Such systems can lead to adaptive governance based on traditional ecological knowledge that can be resilient to social and environmental disturbances (Berkes *et al.* 2000). Nevertheless, disadvantaged communities are too often seen as receivers rather than creators of their own development, even though their knowledge on adaption, mitigation and conservation can be very valuable (Hall *et al.* 2000).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) express the requirement to include all, including disadvantaged groups, in development, e.g. SDG goal number 10 concerns social justice and working to end gender discrimination. It is notable that SDGs do not specifically address discrimination based on caste systems. In

Nepal, Dalits are the most vulnerable social group whose socio-economic status is lower than the national average (Asia Dalit Rights Forum 2015). Dalits are a “*caste from whom water is not acceptable, and by virtue of caste based discrimination and so called untouchability, are most backward in the social, economic, political, educational and religious spheres, and are deprived of human dignity and social justice*” (NDC 2017). Nepal has made significant progress in development. However, despite the overall achievements, disparities remain in outcomes by gender and social group, for example for Dalits (National Planning Commission 2015). In Tanzania rural women also face several challenges in comparison to their counterparts in the cities, e.g. urban women have better access to education and more possibilities to take part in decisions affecting their lives. Rural women face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights and hamper their efforts to improve their lives as well as the lives of others around them (Lyimo-Macha & Mdoe 2002, UN Women Watch 2012).

Participation of local people in natural resource governance, particularly in forestry, emerged in the 1970s partly because of government incapability to control ongoing deforestation in developing countries and partly for sustainable management of forest resources to fulfil local people's needs (Gilmour *et al.* 1989, FAO 2016). Local communities are the key actors for the success of strategies for sustainable management of natural resources (Persha *et al.* 2011, Arts and de Koning 2017). Though people in different regions of the world have traditionally managed forest resources at the community level, the trend of formally handing over government responsibilities for forest management to local people gained momentum during the 1970s (Gilmour *et al.* 1989). It is argued that greater inclusion increases electoral and civic activity in general, improves access to information and also creates greater trust, especially towards local government (Tideman & Msami 2010). About one third of the world's forests are now under community based management of one form or another (FAO 2016). While the trend of forest resources being governed by local communities has increased, studies reveal that involvement in natural resource governance by disadvantaged communities who are highly dependent on forest resources still lags far behind (Agrawal & Gupta 2005, Adhikari *et al.* 2014, Devkota and Mustalahti 2018). Ideally, participation redistributes power to the disadvantaged people and thus enables their inclusion in the decision-making structure (Arnstein 1969). Scholars also argue that conflicts and inequalities may arise if the process through which natural resources governance is implemented does not ensure credibility, reliability, transparency, participatory decision-making processes, and equitable benefit sharing (Hirsch *et al.* 2011, Mustalahti & Rakotonarivo 2014, Cadman *et al.* 2017).

Both Nepal and Tanzania have a long history of forest resources being managed by local people. The community forestry program of Nepal has been a popular approach in forest governance, and has played a vital role in meeting the needs of rural communities (Adhikari 2005, Chhetri *et al.* 2013) and also in trying to answer the new challenges posed by the changing climate. The dependency of disadvantaged groups, such as the Dalits in Nepal and rural women in Tanzania, on natural resources for their livelihood is high, but governance power remains with the elites whose livelihoods depend less on forest resources (Devkota & Mustalahti 2018). Tanzania has a participatory framework for natural resource governance which supports comprehensive community engagement through its structures; for example, women's representation in various committees is assured through quotas. Generally, it can be said that rural women in Tanzania are the primary users of the forest, for example through collecting fuel, food, fodder, fencing and medicines for family subsistence purposes. In land use in general, the tasks of women are also related to family subsistence such as collecting water. It is important to acknowledge the aspect of power and the extent to which there is equal “access to, control over and knowledge of resources” (Aguilar 2009: 155).

This paper compares natural resource governance interventions in Nepal and Tanzania and searches for differences and similarities in patterns of the participation of disadvantaged groups. Nepal and Tanzania have been chosen due to their similar human development level: Nepal ranks at number 144 and Tanzania ranks at 151 in the human development index (UNDP 2016) and both countries have comparable community forestry programs. The special focus is on Dalits in Nepal and rural women in Tanzania. The study aims to explore citizen's engagement in the existing natural resource governance processes. Our main research question is how does natural resource governance engage disadvantaged groups such as rural women in Tanzania and Dalits in Nepal?

2. Conceptual framework

Participation is about the redistribution of power that enables citizens previously excluded in the political and economic activities to be deliberately included in the future activities. It is about enabling citizens to share the benefits in the society and about increasing public trust if a transparent process is followed during the decision making process (Arnstein 1969; Dougill *et al.* 2006; Reed 2008; Richards *et al.* 2004). Participation is at the core of the SDG agenda: the goals are about dignity of the individual and that targets

should be met for all nations and people and for all segments of society, and it is emphasized that these goals should reach those who are furthest behind.

Participatory natural resource governance is based on the premise that local people have greater interest than the state or corporate managers in the sustainability of natural resources, local communities are more cognizant of the intricacies of local ecological practices, and local people effectively manage the natural resources through local access (Brosius *et al.* 1998). Local participation in natural resource governance has taken place for different purposes, at varying scales, with an array of processes and practices that lead to different outcomes (Curtis *et al.* 2014). Although the specific aim of different participatory approaches of natural resource governance may differ, they broadly seek to address sustainable natural resource management that contributes to rural livelihood opportunities (Dyer *et al.* 2014). According to Hyle (2016), successful and sustainable environmental management is responsive and requires an active local support. However, it is important to remember that local people do not always provide solutions to their environmental challenges. However, their latent knowledge has been unjustifiably neglected (see also Ghai & Vivian, 1992). Responsive and accountable leadership can strengthen the representation of local population in decision-making (Ribot 2016) and receive local support for successful natural resource management (Hyle 2016). Such an adaptive process, which can enhance wellbeing of local people while improving governance, is often described as responsive governance with major focus on a participatory approach (Hyle 2016, Ribot 2016).

Though the intention of local participation is to make better decisions that reflect the concerns of the affected population, the realities are not uniform (Blaikie 2006, Dougill *et al.* 2006, Andersson *et al.* 2014). In natural resource governance, one of the widely recognized factors for the failure of anticipated outcomes is the imposition of initiatives as opposed to their initiation by local communities (Measham and Lumbasi 2013). Inability to consider local social-ecological context in natural resource management strategies can lead to exclusion of vulnerable populations and implementation failure (Faggin and Behagel 2018). Local actors play a key role in managing natural resources by legitimizing and adapting institutions according to their social values and beliefs (Agrawal 2007, Cleaver 2012, Faggin and Behagel 2018). This makes participatory governance a popular strategy that can increase government accountability and responsiveness (Faguet 2012, Speer 2012). Participation stresses internal efficacy, the citizen's ability to competently engage in public discussion as a free and equal member of society (Craig *et al.* 1990). People participate in decision-making processes if appropriate opportunities are available to them (Fleischman and Solaozano 2018). In the academic literature, and in development agencies' plans and documents, people's participation has become a mandatory part of what is now taken to be good development practice. In this paper engagement is understood from two different angles: blueprint engagement and empowerment.

The blueprint approach emphasizes the citizen's right to be present in decision-making forums and also emphasizes the citizen's role as a source of local information. The blueprint emphasizes the policy framework and ensures that the existing legislative structures are utilized to reform social structures and support social transformation. The blueprint, through policy frameworks, also challenges the conventional thinking behind participation, empowerment and community-based approaches, which often blame the poor for being poor and place the responsibility for poverty reduction on them (Berner & Phillips 2005). The origin of the shift to 'participation' comes from the ideas of the progressive thinker, Paulo Freire, that were based on Gandhian thinking of self-rule but which in their recent institutional form reflect particularly the work of Robert Chambers. In Chambers' work, participatory development emerged from innovations in the research methods used to mobilize different kinds of local knowledge in the conduct of development interventions. Later developments emphasized the change from 'finding out' to 'handing over of the stick', and are somewhat less 'radical' than Chambers' concept with regard to control of resources: participatory rural appraisal aims not to extract local knowledge for analysis elsewhere but to mobilize local capacities for the self-management of development interventions (Chambers 1994).

Another way to approach engagement is Fung & Wright's (2001) Empowered Deliberative Democracy which draws attention to specific innovative reforms that have the "*potential to be radically democratic in their reliance on the participation and capacities of ordinary people, deliberative because they institute reason-based decision making, empowered since they attempt to tie action to discussion*". Empowered Deliberative Democracy has an aspiration to expand the means by which ordinary people can successfully participate in and influence policies that directly affect their lives. Such an approach widens the arena of decision-making for ordinary citizens as well as giving them responsibilities, pushes for political consensus through dialogue, and ensures that all citizens benefit from the nation's wealth (Fung & Wright 2001). Several scholars (Cooke & Kothari 2001, Kumar & Corbridge 2002, Hickey & Mohan 2005) argue that participation needs to be theoretically and strategically informed by a radical notion of 'citizenship' and located within the 'critical modernist' approach to development. Participation itself is supposed to become a means of

empowerment and not only a research technique. This in turn implies changes in the relationships between powerful 'uppers' (development practitioners) and local 'lowers' (the beneficiaries/subjects of development programs). In seeking to change 'whose reality counts' (Chambers 1997), those who support participatory development argue that the worldviews of the 'lowers' should carry equal weight, and also that true participation has the potential to change power relationships dramatically within development practice (Swantz 1996).

Our conceptualized understanding of engagement is presented in **Table 1** below. It is based on Chambers' (1994) proposition of participation as a blueprint approach and Fung & Wright's (2001) thoughts on empowerment as an implementation approach. The blueprint approach describes participation in a rather quantitative way. People have a right to participate in decisions that will affect their lives. This is also Ostrom's (1990) idea of the collective choice principle. Empowerment in natural resources management, in turn, requires capacities and a quality of participation, such as clearly defined boundaries about who can use the resource and how much, and accountability measures to monitor both the users and the resource. In addition, there needs to be consequences for misbehavior (Ostrom 1990).

The tension between blueprint and empowerment is apparent. This double conceptual approach emphasizes the process of engagement. The challenge facing the intention of empowerment is that if theoretical understanding of power relations is missing, empowerment will remain a blueprint. The blueprint opens avenues for participation, and this function is fundamental for inclusion. But for true empowerment, analysis is needed of the internal, institutional and social constraints – such as unequal power structures and unequal distribution of resources – that prevent the disadvantaged from pursuing their interests. Through the above described analysis, it is possible to understand the stages of engagement in which the disadvantaged themselves turn into legitimate actors in their own empowerment (Jakimow & Kilby 2006; Pattenden 2010; DeFilippis 2001.) Kagan *et al.* (2003) argue that when a community is in search of social transformation, there is a fine balance between resistance and resilience. Being disadvantaged can lead to destruction through frustration and even vandalism as well as resistance to possibilities offered by a blueprint. On the other hand, attempts at remediation in a disadvantaged community, which is characterized by resilience, offers the prospect of an enriched, reclaimed and re-invented identity. In this kind of space the blueprint can pave the way for collective action to improve social arrangements (*Ibid.*). The blueprint and empowered engagement concepts can also provide understanding of resistance and resilience.

3. Methods

Material for this paper was gathered in Nepal and Tanzania through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and participatory observation. The content of operational plans, documentation from various meetings and other records were also used. The study is qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. Interviewees were selected through the snowball method (Noy 2008) to find key informants and identify the various groups in the communities. In practice, study respondents were often assigned by the local authorities, and since the researcher was present in the community, additional subjects could be recruited from among the acquaintances of assigned interviewees. In this way it was easier to explore the community. Both case study sites were selected because they represented border areas with disadvantaged communities where there was an on-going natural resource governance related intervention.

The Kankali Community Forest User Group (CFUG) in Nepal was selected for its large number of forest users from a heterogeneous community, and because CFUG was involved in REDD+ piloting during 2009

Table 1: The two approaches to engagement inspired by Chambers (1994) and Fung & Wright (2001).

Conceptual understanding of engagement	Description
Blueprint engagement	A person participates in an intervention but is only a passive receiver and source of information without engaging in dialogue
Empowered engagement	A person is also involved in implementation, as an actor and as part of the action, has responsibility and is accountable for actions.

to 2013 and its members were actively involved in income generating activities. 22 primary members of the Kankali CFUG were selected for face-to-face interviews using the snowball method (Noy 2008) and represented different communities, gender and socio-economic class, including Dalits. Two focus group discussions, one for Dalits (17) and another for women (11), were organized among the members of Kankali CFUG. All discussions were conducted in Nepali. Among the 22 key informant interviews, 11 were conducted with women and 7 with Dalit users in September 2013 and April-May 2014.

Angai Forest in Liwale District was the case study site in Tanzania. The Angai forest is a viable and important source of livelihoods for the surrounding communities. How to manage this forest sustainably is therefore important and the Angai forest has attracted researchers for several decades. For example Mukama (2009) has investigated participatory assessment of forest carbon stocks, Scheba (2018) has looked into REDD opportunities in Angai forest, and Brockington (2007) has re-evaluated the success of village forest reserves in general and discussed the problems of local corruption. In the intervention area of the Angai forest, interviewees were selected so as to widely represent different village level committees, leaders, ordinary community members, young and old as well as men and women. In Tanzania, 41 interviews (14 female, 27 male) were conducted using the snowball method and two focus group discussions were held (8 people and 22 people) for women between October 2013 to May 2014. In Tanzania, focus group discussions and interviews were conducted in Swahili with the aid of a translator. National level interviews were conducted in English.

The face-to-face interview is a good instrument for obtaining in-depth and detailed information that helps researchers gain valuable insights, such as what feelings are associated with a particular individual's participation or non-participation in village decision-making. Focus group discussions produce information that reveals mutual experiences and identities, such as what it means to be a woman or a Dalit in a forest-dependent community, how the community participates in village decision-making in general, and how local governance is structured. However, depending on cultural hierarchies and social norms, certain voices may be silenced during a group discussion. This is an important consideration in settings where the researcher has existing social relationships which may be compromised by public disclosure and where the dominant culture does not support the equal participation of all. Thus interviews were used to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individual participants, whereas the focus groups were used to understand group dynamics (Michel 1999).

The contents of the face-to-face interviews were transcribed and translated to English. Analysis was performed using QSR NVivo 10 which is a program for facilitating qualitative techniques for organizing and analyzing data. Initially, the operationalized concepts were tested against the conceptual understanding following the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Urquhart 2013). Then, through the back and forth approach of grounded theory, the fragmented cases were tied together to explain the specific aspects of the conceptual framework. To achieve this analysis, the English transcriptions were entered into QSR NVivo 10 software and the first cycle and second cycle of coding were done separately for all the interviews from both countries. In the first cycle, every statement of each respondent was coded under themes representing primary content. In the second cycle of the coding and organizing process, the coded data were organized using an operational conceptualization of the three key participation concepts – participation in decision-making (this is relevant for empowerment), rights to participate (this is relevant for the blueprint), and accountability (this makes participation either meaningful or ostensible). Definition and analysis of these three concepts were derived from the content of operational plans, constitutions and other recorded documents, and from the community forestry literature in general. In the third and final cycle of analysis, the coded data from both countries under the key concepts were re-organized according to the conceptual framework using two concepts – blueprints and empowerment – and subjected to final analysis and further discussion.

4. The case studies

The cases of this study are relevant and important examples for discovering how disadvantaged groups are engaged in natural resource governance. Both cases are interventions related to participatory natural resource governance, namely the REDD+ piloting initiative in community forestry in Nepal and Participatory Land Use Planning in Tanzania. Both interventions were implemented at the same time in 2013–2014 and are therefore comparable. In the case of Nepal, the case was chosen because there is a sizable proportion of the disadvantaged group, the Dalits. In Tanzania the case represents a rural area where women are often more disadvantaged than women in urban areas. Both case study areas are located in or near border areas: in Nepal towards the border with India and in Tanzania close to the Mozambique

border. The cases were also informative because research has been conducted in each area over a long time, with researchers returning to the case study areas to observe the engagement of disadvantaged groups continuously. In both case study areas, the forests are large and the valuable timber is an important source of income for the communities.

4.1. Participatory land use planning in Angai Forest, Southern Tanzania

Tanzania in Eastern Africa is one of the poorer countries in the world (human development index 0.531 in 2015). The country has a rich variety of natural resources, including forests. Tanzania spans 945 000 million km² of which 353 000 km² are forested. Tanzania has developed one of the most resilient local institutional frameworks for natural resource management based on community decision-making in Sub-Saharan Africa (Blomley & Iddi 2009) and the Tanzanian government has promoted the role of citizens and communities in forest management. However, despite the various reforms of local government, local governance continues to face challenges of corruption, transparency, responsiveness and participation (Tidemand & Msami 2010).

In Tanzania, communities need to develop forest management and harvesting plans to exploit and manage a forest. In order to develop such plans, a Land Use Plan categorizing and allocating different uses of land is needed. The Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP) process has been created to engage communities in natural resource management. PLUP has been divided into steps in the Guidelines for Participatory Village Land Use Planning Administration and Management in Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania 2011).

The Angai Forest is located in Liwale District, Southeast Tanzania (**Figure 1**). It is one of the largest remaining forest blocks in Tanzania with 140 000 ha of miombo woodland habitat, including high-value

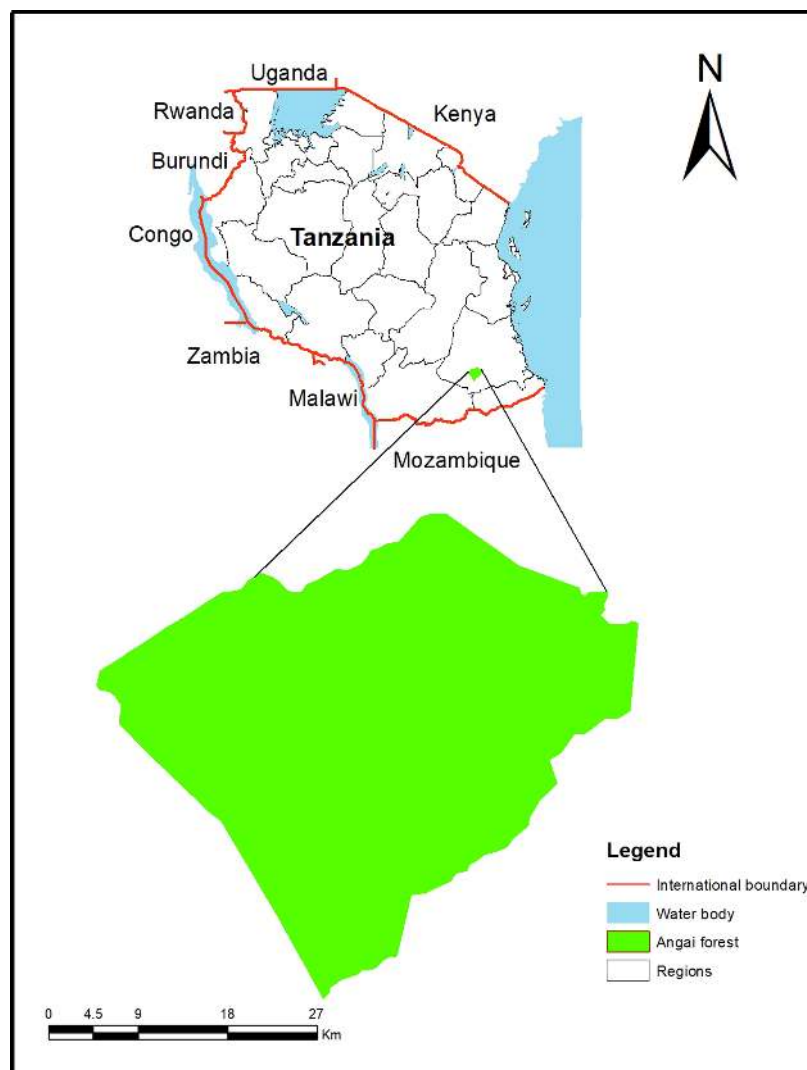


Figure 1: Map of the Angai forest, Tanzania.

hardwood timber species. Currently, there are 24 villages sharing the area of Angai forest. Several PLUP-related activities have been conducted in the Angai area over the past decades, and Participatory Forest Management interventions have been conducted in the area from as early as 1994. Mustalahti (2007, 2008) and Mustalahti and Lund (2010) have conducted long-term research on participatory forest management in the area, and Dondeyne, Kinyero & Wijffels (1998) have studied ways to include villagers in the management of the rural appraisal exercises were completed in a few villages in 2009, and the demarcation of forest without approved management plans took place in 2001 (Scheba & Mustalahti 2015). Despite these activities, the forest was not gazetted and Angai communities continued to experience restricted opportunity to generate adequate revenues from selling forest products. In 2013-2016, PLUP was completed and officially approved in 16 of the 24 Angai villages. Today these 16 Angai Forest communities are legally recognized as owners of the forest and can legally exploit their Village Land Forest Reserves (VLFs). The process was supported by Lindi Mtwara Agribusiness Support (LIMAS). LIMAS was jointly funded by the Governments of Tanzania and Finland. LIMAS primarily provided technical support and grants to entrepreneurs and business entities to support the development of sustainable and profitable agribusinesses (LIMAS 2014).

4.2. REDD+ and benefits to disadvantaged users of community forestry in Nepal's Terai region

Nepal in South Asia is a landlocked country located to the north of India. Nepal has an area of 147 181 km² and elevations ranging from around 70 meters above mean sea level (amsl) in the southern plain (Terai) to 8 848 meters amsl at the peak of Mount Everest. The economy of the country is greatly dependent on the use of natural resources. The human development index (0.558) and gender inequality index (0.497) are both low, and were even less than the South Asian average in 2015 (UNDP 2016). Nepal's Terai is rich in forest resources and is also the area with the densest human population in the country. Agriculture and forestry are the country's principal economic activity, employing 80% of the total population and contributing 35% of gross domestic product (CBS 2011).

Prior to the implementation of Private Forest Nationalization Act 1957, forests in Nepal were traditionally managed by community groups with active local leadership. Though the government nationalized all the forests with the implementation of the 1957 Act, the de facto control over the forests remained with the local people (Pandey & Paudyal 2015). The new policy was not effective, partly because the government was not able to strictly implement the act, and partly because the act undermined the rights of indigenous people who had been traditionally protecting, managing and utilizing local forest resources (Wagley & Ojha 2002). The government promulgated the Forest Act 1961 which set out strict state rules for forest management, but this act had very little positive effect. In 1973, some district forest offices in the central mid hills asked local people to join together to protect the forest (Pandey & Paudyal 2015), but it was not until 1976 that public participation in forestry was legally recognized in the National Forest Plan 1976 with the provision to establish Panchayat forest and Panchayat protected forest (Bhattarai 2016). The Forest Act 1993 and its Regulation 1995 provided the legal basis to hand over state-owned forest to community forest user groups for protection, management and utilization (Pandey & Paudyal 2015). The constitution of Nepal 2015 assured the proportional representation of the disadvantaged, the marginalized, and women and minorities in government bodies. The Community Forestry Guidelines 2014 has set quotas for the marginalized, the disadvantaged and women in the Community Forest User Group (CFUG) executive committees. Nowadays, the CFUG executive committee must have at least 50% women representatives, and the remaining 50% should include proportional representation of poor, Dalits, disadvantaged, ethnic and indigenous groups (DOF 2014).

In 2013/2014, Kankali CFUG in the Terai region of Nepal (**Figure 2**) was selected for study. Kankali community forest covers an area of 760.5 ha, and the Kankali CFUG has 1905 households as users (Kankali Community Forest User Group 2007). From 2009 to 2013, a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, Forest Conservation, Sustainable Management of Forests and Enhancement of Carbon Stocks (REDD+) pilot project was implemented with the Kankali CFUG to demonstrate the mechanism for governance and for benefit sharing of REDD+ payments in community forestry (Shrestha *et al.* 2014, Lacuna-Richman *et al.* 2016). REDD+ is the performance-based policy intervention agreed under United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and targeted to mitigate forest based contributions, e.g. deforestation rates and greenhouse gas emissions, to climate change by providing financial incentives for carbon sequestration in forests (Pandit *et al.* 2017). In the current study, interview respondents were primary users of Kankali community forest who were also involved during the implementation of the REDD+ pilot project.

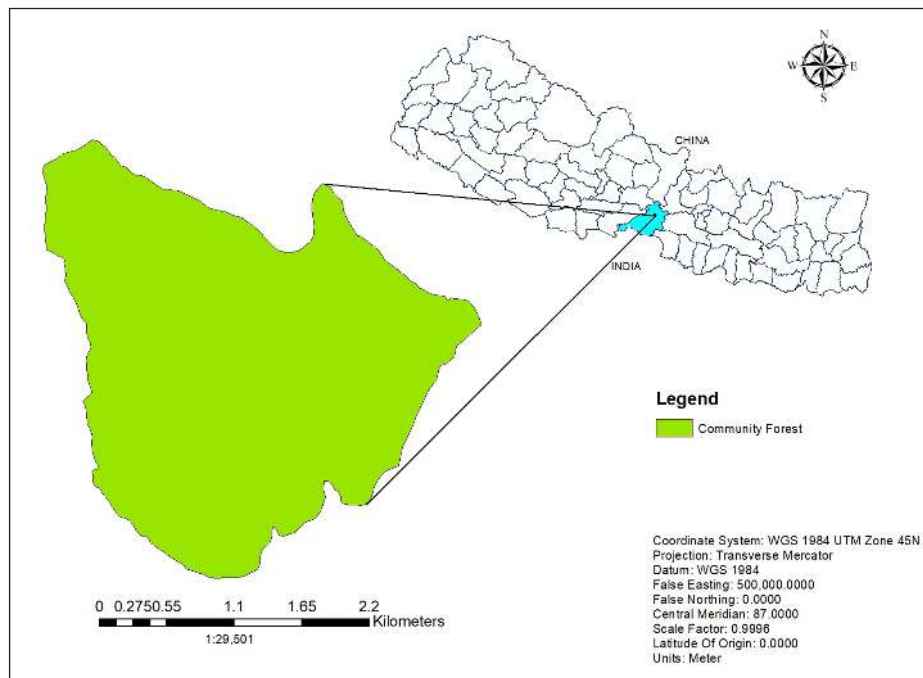


Figure 2: Map of the Kankali community forest, Nepal.

5. Findings

In both the countries, engagement of disadvantaged groups in natural resources governance was undertaken using a *blueprint* approach. *Empowerment* of Dalits and rural women is still a rarity, and from the results of this study, only a few empowered individuals were encountered.

5.1. Participation of disadvantaged groups as a blueprint approach

In both case study areas, the majority of disadvantaged groups – Dalits in Nepal and rural women in Tanzania – do not feel that their participation has been able to have a better impact on natural resource governance. The disadvantaged groups feel that their views are not taken into account. Formal representation of these groups is quite common in different committees, but these groups appear to find it difficult to put forward views and express ideas, e.g. in village assemblies mostly only men were observed speaking. One can say that this kind of blueprint approach dominates our data. It is good to remember that the blueprint is the foundation of inclusion and greater engagement because it can prevent systemic discrimination and oppression, especially through policy framework, but it does not seem to be able to change the culture nor promote active citizens in disadvantaged positions.

5.1.1. Tanzania

Most of interviewees argued that women are not vocal in public spaces because they have a lower level of education and they are less informed in general. A male villager argued: *"I think most of them (women) have a low level of understanding, so I think if we give them proper education then we can give them power to talk at the meetings"*. Also women in leadership positions confirmed this observation. The chairperson of a village (female) argued: *"give them education; it is through that that they can be knowledgeable enough"*.

One village chairman (male) argued that women were created differently and therefore were not able to participate like men. Having quotas seems to be a good way to involve disadvantaged groups in decision making because this practice breaks with the cultural norms and makes participation possible for less confident or less appreciated participants. It was also mentioned that it is important to encourage women by recognizing and appreciating their presence, as this is something new. The chairperson in one village said: *"I do thank those women who come to the PLUP process as they wanted to have 50/50 representation over the team members"*.

But quotas can also be problematic and sometimes artificial; e.g. in Angai villages there was only one female district councilor out of 24 elected at the Liwale district government level. In addition, there are special seats to which only women can be elected, but these seats do not represent any specific ward but all the women in the district. Women themselves felt that they were discriminated against in the nomination

of committee positions: *“yes we were not valued, and also during the council we were not allowed to be in the position of chair or vice chair of the full council and on top of that we were not allowed to be chair of any committee”* (Retired councilor). Even though the women in these seats seem to represent a great number of people, they are considered as second class representatives because the logic of their representation is different (i.e. representing the whole district vs. representing a certain ward) due to the process of how they were elected (i.e. quota based appointment vs competitive election). Retired councilor (female) said: *“It is too painful as I have the same positions as a male but they tend to dominate the discussion; it is like that habit of showing the males as superior over female, of course it was very bad indeed, and sometimes males tend to raise unnecessary challenges to any point you put on board.”*

Disadvantaged groups also need more education in order to present their cases credibly in public. Quota representation can easily become merely passive presence because the appointed individual's skills to participate are not at the same level as those of other participants. Position matters as well. Social structures define the possibility and sometimes even ability to participate. A villager argued that *“for a woman to be vocal depends on the questions that are asked, like how old are you, where are you born”*.

In Tanzania, in a village assembly setting, the role of women is interesting. A female interviewee holding a special seat in the district council, and who also was an employee in the district council, said that married women whose husbands also are present in the assembly do not talk. Some women were despised if they dare to express their concerns. This may be due to religion because the study area is predominantly Muslim and women are often represented in a public situation through their husbands. Non-married younger girls might talk, but their status within the community is not high. Culture is creating a boundaries for participation.

5.1.2. Nepal

In the case of Nepal, Dalits were used as a rubber stamp *“to formalize and complete process, they call us for participation as per legal procedure but decisions are made as per their interest”*, as a Dalit representative explained the situation. During the piloting of the REDD+ project in Kankali CFUG, Dalits were to implement an income generating project that could enhance their livelihoods. The community forest user committee decided to construct a fish pond for the Dalits. When the fish pond was ready, they called the Dalit community and asked them to run it. Since the Dalits had no skills in fish farming, the project was not profitable. The community forest user committee then decided to hand over the fish pond to a contractor. The Dalit community had neither demanded nor come up with the idea of constructing a fish pond. The CFUG had been obliged to allocate some money for Dalits to ensure that REDD+ benefits were felt by disadvantaged groups (Shrestha *et al.* 2014) because Dalits are the most vulnerable group within the community and traditionally excluded. The Dalits neither knew why funds had been allocated for them nor had participated in any decision making forum on its use.

Dalits are represented in the community forest user committee because it is mandatory according to policy, but their views are seldom considered. *“It is the elite who talk in the community forest user committee meetings. Particularly we don't know about the rules and regulations of the community forest, nor do we know about political matters. It may be because of our illiteracy, we don't speak. If anyone asks, we just answer. But we cannot put our opinions in detail”* (A Dalit member of community forest user committee). Due to their lower level of literacy, they cannot air their views during the decision making process though they may be present. One of the Dalit youth stated, *“We have a representative in the executive committee, but our representative cannot put opinions strongly in the meetings. So the other members of the executive committee do not feel obliged to implement our views”*. The other members of community forestry believe that Dalits do not spend sufficient time for community forest development activities. The level of understanding of forest governance issues is lower within the Dalit community, and they rarely interact with government officials.

5.2. Empowerment: Citizens as Change Makers

When considered over a longer time period, participation of disadvantaged groups has improved in the case of both Dalits and rural women. *“Rural women would not have participated at all 20 years ago”*, argued an older lady who has held a special seat in the Liwale district council. Today you can find a few role models who have taken an active stance in local decision-making, and women's views are being taken more seriously. For example the female chairperson said: *“... being a role model I can talk with other women and increase their confidence”*. Most of the Tanzanian women and Dalits interviewed felt that their awareness has increased due to participatory interventions. They have taken more action themselves though the initial decision was not necessarily theirs (e.g. fish farming in Nepal). Dalits and rural women are actively

running community activities without technical knowledge or resources from outside, which formerly were deemed a necessity.

5.2.1. Tanzania

In the Tanzania case study, a few empowered women were encountered: an old lady who through the quota system had been a representative on the district council board, and a young lady who was the chairperson of their village. The older lady represented the era when it was difficult for a woman to gain respect. But as she had been serving as a representative for several years, she had gained confidence and respect within her community. The old lady is an example of how quotas can change customs and be an instrument for inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Her views were respected and valued, especially among women.

A female ward education officer in Angai reported that people have had positive experiences because “*power is in our own hands*”; for example, they have been patrolling the community forest and have caught illegal timber operators. These empowering experiences are important because local communities are dependent on the natural resources in their vicinity and can play an important role in protecting these resources.

The young lady, as a village chairperson, is a rarity, and the village had democratically elected her. Researcher felt that she was exceptionally strong and wise. However, it was important to understand that her father had also been a village chairman so she had seen closely what leading a village entails. She had broken the glass ceiling and even men had voted for her, which shows the importance of women and men being judged on their capabilities rather than on, and is an excellent example of how the improbable can happen: “*Some people see me as an iron lady. I am proud of myself being elected even as a chair person for a committee*”, she explained.

Development interventions can enhance equity in participation and decision making. Development interventions keep equality and inclusion on the agenda and slowly affect behavior. In both case studies, progress has been linear and positive; disadvantaged groups have become more involved, but the anticipated stage has still not been reached. True empowerment is a slow process.

Sometimes individuals who have made contracultural choices in their life in general have been empowered and become more active in the village decision making as well, as the retired councillor explains: “*I got the chance of being a member of the cashew nut cooperative society, so my husband was not happy. He came to me and said you are my wife and not supposed to be in that cooperative society, I told him, I won't leave this cooperative society. He continued behaving badly, so I decided to break up the marriage and start my own life and start my own business, so from there my self-confidence started to build*”.

5.2.2. Nepal

The awareness brought by the political changes in Nepal has empowered the disadvantaged, and Dalits have been allocated special quotas in leadership positions within community forestry. Due to the government's policy of proportional representation of each ethnic and socio-economic community, at least some Dalits have been empowered. One can argue that the Dalits have started to claim their rights and take responsibility. Some Dalit youths have established non-governmental organizations within their community to empower Dalits. These Dalit youths are aware of the provisions made regarding Dalits in the national constitution, CFUG constitutions and operational plans, and are raising awareness within their communities. Though these changes may not result only from community forestry interventions, the changes these Dalits now experience also have an impact on community forest activities. Research has found a few cases that can be considered empowering. A Dalit woman from Kankali CFUG worked for three years abroad and returned. Now she is an active member, leads her community and raises issues in the meetings and assemblies. She has also led CFUG activities. The young generation of Dalits has started taking an active part in community discussions: “*Our children are now educated better than us. Our children know what is wrong and right, so they can question the activities of executive committee*” (An old Dalit user of Kankali CFUG). The participation of Dalits is slowly increasing but the pace is slow: “*The Dalits have a low awareness level and have a traditional nature, so we find it difficult to convince the Dalits to participate in development activities*” (Chairperson of Kankali CFUG).

Good intentions of empowerment might fail if there is too much focus on individual capacities and needs. Our data from both the interventions in Nepal and Tanzania confirm this similar trend of contemporary international development. Acharya (2018) says “*it seems to be that the ultimate aim of empowering poor people is to enhance the capacities of the individuals in order to enable them to engage effectively in the market, not to transform the oppressive social relationships of power*”. Being disadvantaged in a community is often

a result of a long socio-cultural and historical process of subordination, reducing also power and access to resources and opportunities. The individualistic approach is important but undermines the prospects of collective fights for equity and justice, which can lead to change in culture (Acharya 2018).

It is important to discuss how to improve donor interventions so that empowered individuals can be instruments to empower whole communities. Empowered individuals can generate wider spaces of dialogue for disadvantaged groups and in that way enhance public recognition of diversity. Such approach requires an atmosphere of respect and trust. It is important that this dialogue takes place in a safe and neutral space, and here the intervention agent (donor) could be a preferred as its best third party mediator (see International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – IDEA (2012)).

6. Discussion

In Nepal and Tanzania in the examined cases, engagement of disadvantaged groups in natural resource governance adopted a “blueprint approach” where the role of disadvantaged groups is to be present merely, nothing more. It is important to remember that the blueprint approach is a foundation for empowerment, and that it can contribute to a policy framework and ensure that the existing legislative structures of non-discrimination are being implemented. In the blueprint approach involvement of disadvantaged groups is formally secured through quotas and other participatory approaches adopted in recent national policies. According to our findings, only a few individuals have moved in the face of the prevailing customs from typical passive behavior to become change-makers and empowered actors. Development interventions adopted by government have tried to change the social order, but such change seems to be very slow. Education and knowledge help people to move from passive presence to active engagement.

One can see that social order in Tanzania and Nepal, as indicated in this study, is not fully supportive of the deliberation of the disadvantaged. Hegel (1896) described poverty as related to the access or lack of access to opportunities for citizens to participate and to develop themselves. In both case study countries, formal channels of engagement and responsive dialogue exist but the social order, which includes tradition and culture, allows participation only in a latent way – offering possibilities through the formal system only. One can argue, based on Ojha’s (2006) conceptual understanding, that community forestry and participatory land use planning are “techno-bureaucratic techniques”. This is not to challenge the intentions of these approaches in Tanzania and Nepal but rather to illustrate two cases in which the instruments of deliberation have not attained their full potential nor are able to facilitate empowerment.

In both countries, policies are supportive of the wide participation of citizens, which constitutes a supportive foundation for empowerment. Policies can change the social order but this can take a long time. In addition to the policies that emphasize inclusion, it is important that policies also stipulate the need for capacity building. Natural resource governance interventions increasingly rely on a new logic of making local users and decision makers responsible for both their own wellbeing and resource sustainability. In order to change the social order, policies should support access to information and institutionalize the rights of citizens to natural resources while ensuring inclusion.

Both case studies describe interventions in natural resource governance whose intention is to engage citizens in a process aimed at responsive environmental governance, but which fail to create empowering engagement. Responsive environmental governance calls upon local people to be part of the global community, and at its best creates a channel for people to participate in the global development discourse (Adger *et al.* 2001). Responsive environmental governance is about incorporation of citizens in internal and external decision-making directly as well as via their representatives. In focus are rights holders’ right to participate in decision-making meaningfully and competently while at the same time duty-bearers are expected to take responsibility and be responsive to the voice of people (Craig *et al.* 1990, Nabatchi 2007, Hyle 2016). We see that responsive governance that recognizes the need for accountability can support culture of participation. Accountability is a measure of to what extent people can trust that their views are taken into account when decisions are being made. If people feel that their participation makes a difference, they are most likely to participate but, as our cases show, if an individual is seen in a negative light after expressing an opinion, he or she is not motivated to participate. If there are no accountability measures, participation can be ostensible and the mere presence of the disadvantaged is already considered as an achievement while their contribution is not valued.

In Tanzania and Nepal, according to our findings, disadvantaged groups still do not or are not able to propose solutions to their environmental problems, even though they might have skills and information to contribute. The latent potential of grassroots environmental action and wide local engagement has not been recognized, and elites dominate environmental governance at local level. The means and techniques

by which disadvantaged individuals as well as communities, such as Tanzanian rural women and Dalits, cope with and protect the changing environment could contribute to the quest for sustainable development (Ghai & Vivian 1992, Hall *et al.* 2000, Collier 2016). Decision-making and the provision of possibilities for disadvantaged groups to participate in natural resource governance expand the ways in which people protect and cope with the changing environment in their daily lives. Such engagement can only advance the search for alternative ideas for sustainable development. In practice, however, the disadvantaged seem to stay disadvantaged, though in principle opportunities for deliberation are available to all but in ways that could be seen as a blueprint approach.

Both countries compared here have noteworthy areas of forest to manage, and people depend on the natural resources around them and in general they want to use them sustainably, especially if they have the right to manage them (Blomley *et al.* 2008; World Bank 2016). Despite the participatory frameworks of natural resource management, rural women and Dalits in general are not heard, though they are also using, monitoring, protecting and benefitting from the natural resources. Yet customs are slowly changing and becoming more inclusive and there are a few strong individuals (Fung and Wright's empowerment), but in general our findings indicate that the social order does not seem to support inclusive empowerment.

This research opens avenues for further research on inclusion and the level of participation in natural resource governance in Nepal and Tanzania. The Responsive Forest Governance Initiative lead by Professor Jesse Ribot¹ has been conducting extensive research on this question in several African countries. RFGI focuses on exploring Enabling Responsive and Accountable Decentralization in forestry within local-government decision making. Additionally, the impact of religion on participation, or on how culture of participation evolves from generation to another, could be interesting areas of further more detailed study.

7. Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, due to lack of education and confidence, disadvantaged people can hardly influence the decisions made. Dalits, due to social and cultural habituation, cannot go against the decisions of elites. Dalits are the taker, and unless they gain the position of giver, their decisions and participation are merely to give credence to and showcase that provision has been made for the disadvantaged during the decision-making process in developing countries like Nepal. In the current global UN framework of *no one should be left behind*, studies should be conducted to discover the quality of participation and new ways of including disadvantaged groups should be developed not only to support the blueprint approach but also to foster rights-based equal empowerment. Better access to information, increased transparency and improvement of accountability are therefore called for (Craig *et al.* 1990, Nabatchi 2007). Implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive approaches sensitive to local cultural priorities or context has proven challenging. It seems to be that countries, according to their Voluntary National Reviews on SDGs, recognize the principle of leaving no one behind but have not reported on strategies for putting the principle into practice (Sarwar and Nicolai 2018). One initiative to tackle the challenge is a UN initiative of Inclusive Systemic Evaluation (ISE) approach and the Gender Equality, Environments, and Voices from the Margins (GEMs) Framework, which bring together transdisciplinary evaluation methods to measure the inclusiveness of interventions as well as aims to give guidance on how to include marginalized groups in development processes (Stephens *et al.* 2018).

Second, a rights-based approach requires that rights holders – ordinary citizens – should be aware of their rights and demand the realization of their rights, and that duty bearers should bear their responsibilities and be held accountable for the decisions they make (see also Ostrom 1990). In a rights-based approach, which is the basis of modern development interventions in both community forestry and participatory forest management, it is of utmost importance that development interventions target both sides of the coin – rights holders and duty bearers. In the Nepal and Tanzania case studies, rights holders (rural women and Dalits) seem to be aware of their rights but duty bearers (elites and other powerful groups) have not changed their behavior and invited wider deliberation. One could also say that Ostrom's (1990) principles of governing the commons are only partly met – collective choice exists but communally agreed monitoring of the users and resources and sanctions against misbehavior do not exist. A parallel development can be seen in women's empowerment: it is not enough to make women aware of their rights if the attitude and behavior of male counterparts does not change. Dalit empowerment cannot take place unless others

¹ All research articles of RFGI can be found here: <https://www.iucn.org/theme/forests/our-work/locally-controlled-forests/responsive-forest-governance-initiative>.

are willing to share resources and power. Only equitable benefit sharing and rational power sharing can empower Dalits.

As a third conclusion of this paper, we consider that just how the processes of natural resource governance engage disadvantaged groups, such as rural women in Tanzania and Dalits in Nepal, still remains relative. Culture is becoming more inclusive, quotas have worked and it is possible to make a difference as rural women or as Dalits in deliberative processes. Nevertheless, only exceptionally brave and strong women and Dalits seem to be engaging up to an empowering level. The majority of the disadvantaged groups in the cases from these two countries remain at the 'blueprint' level of participation, and their role is merely to be present. In contrast, the stable position of elites, insufficient action to support duty bearers to be more responsive to the needs of the people, and cultural paradigms not supportive of empowerment of the disadvantaged, all contribute to making it difficult for the disadvantaged to move from blueprints to empowerment and for communities to benefit fully from their local knowledge.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Hyle, M. A., Devkota, B. P., & Mustalahti, I. (2019). From Blueprints to Empowerment of Disadvantaged Groups in Natural Resource Governance: Lessons from Nepal and Tanzania. *International Journal of the Commons*, 13(2), pp. 1062–1078. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.951>

Submitted: 20 December 2018

Accepted: 21 June 2019

Published: 30 October 2019

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