

**THE POWER OF NUMBERS:
The dynamics and impact of women's
participation in community forestry in South Asia**

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INTRODUCTION

- SSE tends to be about groups interacting with outside institutions and organisations
- But intra-group dynamics is central for successful cooperation within groups and for effectively dealing with institutions outside groups
- Paper focuses on within-group dynamics predicated on gender & class; impact of group's gender composition on women's effective participation & outcomes; and ways of scaling up & moving toward "solidarity".
- Context: community forestry: India & Nepal

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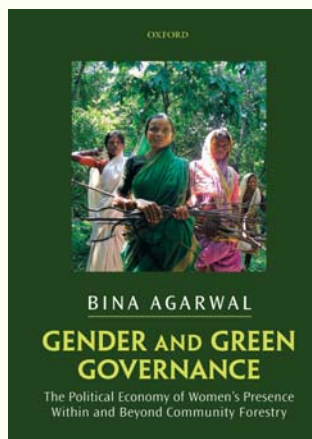
ARGUMENT: Simply inclusion of larger nos of women in mixed gender groups (“women in themselves”) can go long way, even without “women for themselves” social consciousness.

RESULTS summarised from analysis based on primary survey: in book *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: OUP, 2010)

STRUCTURE OF PAPER

- Section II – conceptual issues
- Section III: Results: impact of numbers
- Section IV: Enhancing women’s numbers, voice and group cohesion

THE IMPACT OF WOMEN’S PRESENCE



Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Critical mass
Hierarchical heterogeneity
Implicit vs explicit interests

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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CRITICAL MASS

The presence of other women enables individual women to negotiate conservative social norms and personal reticence.

What % makes for a critical mass?

- Kanter: 15% = nominal presence;
40-50% = effective presence
- Others: varying between 15-50% in western legislatures.
- Most: lobby for 1/3 quotas
- Very little empirical testing of critical mass

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“Hierarchical” heterogeneity

- Social and economic heterogeneity among women could lead to conflicting interests
E.g. Rich/landed women vs poor/landless
- Weak and strong conflict: weak conflict can be overcome
- Shared interests → strategic cooperation despite hierarchical heterogeneity

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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Implicit vs explicit interests

Implicit – shared interests due to gender division of labour and resources: hence “women *in* themselves”

Explicit – conscious sense of shared identity: hence “women *for* themselves”

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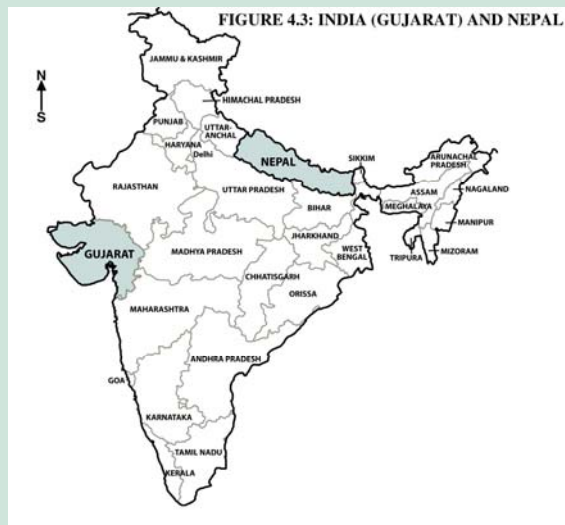
Impact of numbers: Survey

- 135 community forestry Institutions (CFIs) in India and Nepal (India=65, Nepal=70)
- Gujarat (India), 3 districts:
Sample ≤ 2 W and > 2 W in executive committee (EC)
- Nepal, 3 districts:
Sample ≤ 2 W, > 2 W (not all W), & all W in EC

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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INDIA (Gujarat) and NEPAL



For

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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PARTICIPATION Results

1. **Overall:** Higher the % of women in mixed gender groups, the greater the likelihood of women attending meetings, speaking up at them and holding office.
2. **Attending meetings** (regression analysis):
 - (a) ECs with $\geq 25-33\%$ women compared with $< 25\%$ have significantly fewer meetings with no women attending
 - (b) Attendance rate: In both Gujarat and Nepal, rate significantly higher in ECs with $\geq 25-33\%$ W relative to $< 25\%$. In Nepal we see a clear threshold effect. In Gujarat, indicative

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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Participation contd/-

3. **Speaking up** (regressions): Likelihood of at least one woman speaking up is sigf greater with $\geq 33\%$ women
e.g. Guj: Likelihood of at least 1 W speaking up is 48% greater in ECs with $\geq 33\%$ W
4. **Office bearing:** Guj: few women hold office
Nepal: many do. Likelihood of holding office rises significantly at 25% women & continues upto parity. Clear threshold effect at 25% women.
5. **Landless W:** If the women in ECs with a higher female presence are landless, it significantly increases likelihood of women attending meetings and speaking up. Landless women are less restricted by social norms and more compelled by need (e.g. firewood).

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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It helps to have more women because then women will not be dominated or feel shy. After all, if there is only one woman and ten men, how will she speak?

(Group discussion with village women, Gujarat)

I know a lot about the forest and I would speak if I was not afraid. I am scared to speak in front of so many men. If we were in a majority we would speak in the meeting.

(Group discussion with village women, Nepal)

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

FOREST USE RULES

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Results

- Rules determine what is extracted, how much and how frequently. Women have particular interest in firewood & fodder extraction
- We would expect ECs with higher % of W to make lenient rules (allow more extraction).
- **Unexpected result:** With the exception of one Gujarat district (Panchmahals), in all other districts of Gujarat and Nepal, ECs with more women make stricter rules.
- Why is Panchmahals different? It has higher % of *landless women* in its ECs with more W
- In NP, all-W groups restricted by small, poor forests. Also most W come from landed hhs

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FOREST CONSERVATION OUTCOMES Regression Results

- (1) Women's presence has a significantly positive effect on forest condition. This is so in CFIs with >2 EC women compared with ≤ 2 in Gujarat (most indicators) and all women CFIs relative to other CFIs in Nepal (all indicators).
- (2) In Nepal, the performance of all-women groups is especially notable. We find a 51% greater likelihood of forest condition improving in all-W CFIs, despite their smaller and more degraded forests, relative to CFIs with men.

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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FIREWOOD SHORTAGES Regression results

- Firewood shortages are an important marker of gender inequality. Reduction in shortages serves as a proxy for reduced inequality.
- Male-dominated CFIs tend to extract less firewood than is possible sustainably.
- In both Guj and NP, villages where ECs allow more extraction have less shortage
- ECs with more women in Gujarat tend to have significantly lower likelihood of shortages.

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CONCLUSIONS THUS FAR

1. The more women there are in the EC, the more likely that they will attend meetings, speak up at them and hold office. A critical mass effect for attending meetings lies between ≥ 25 - $< 33\%$, but the gain tapers off after $\geq 33\%$.
2. Speaking up needs $\geq 33\%$ women to make a difference, i.e. more women than needed for increasing attendance.
3. The presence of more EC women is not a sufficient condition for women holding office.
But if glass ceiling is broken, the threshold is close to 25% and gains continue till parity and then taper off.

Overall the results indicate that a critical mass is important, but range is wider than the magic 1/3rd and can lie bet ≥ 25 - $< 33\%$ women.

Source: Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and Green Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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ADDITIONAL POINTERS

4. Women's class position also matters but not in the expected way. Being poor and female does not place you at the bottom of the pyramid. In fact, landless women are less constrained by social norms, & have more stake in forest products, compelling them to participate.

This alerts us to the importance of including disadvantaged women, and not simply any women, in community institutions of governance

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ENHANCING WOMEN'S NUMBERS, VOICE AND INFLUENCE

Promote **horizontal linkages**, e.g. between
CFIs and SHGs

Beyond numbers, to promote group identity:
Forums for democratic deliberation would
help, wherein CFI women can share
information, resolve conflicts, identify
priorities, outline strategies & forge a sense
of solidarity → “women for themselves”

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Beyond the local

**Long-term environmental sustainability will require
village access to alternative fuels, building
materials, and livelihoods which are less forest
dependent.**

**This will need a change in priorities from planning
commissions which frame energy policies to
village councils which implement them locally**

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Extending vertical reach: federations

- A federation is an association of organisations, formed to realise economies of scale, increase the bargaining power of single groups, while preserving group autonomy
- Federations are a means of linking up vertically
- In India SHG federations are common within states. Rather few CFI federations
- Nepal has country-level forest federation. Rare federations of women's groups

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LATERAL AND VERTICAL ALLIANCES: A SCHEMA

