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Learning Brief - 2019

A rights-based approach to community conservation

Strategies for empowering marginalized groups and addressing gender inequalities in Nepal

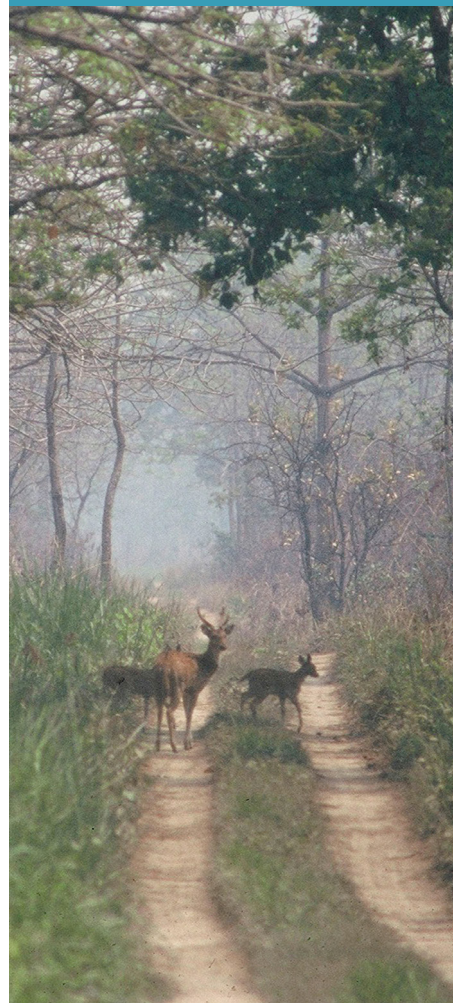
The poor, vulnerable, and socially excluded (PVSE) in Nepal, such as Dalits, indigenous groups and marginalized women, struggle to raise their voices, protect their rights and equitably access the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend. To address this challenge, the Hariyo Ban “Green Forests” Program integrates gender equality and social inclusion principles and practices across its biodiversity and climate change interventions. Working with community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations and government agencies, the program takes a rights-based approach by prioritizing human rights and dignity as an integral part of program planning and implementation and encouraging partners to address cultural and institutional drivers of poverty, like discrimination, exploitation and marginalization. The program is implemented by Alliance partners WWF and CARE in a consortium with two national organizations, the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal and the National Trust for Nature Conservation.

Mainstreaming gender through Community Learning and Action Centers

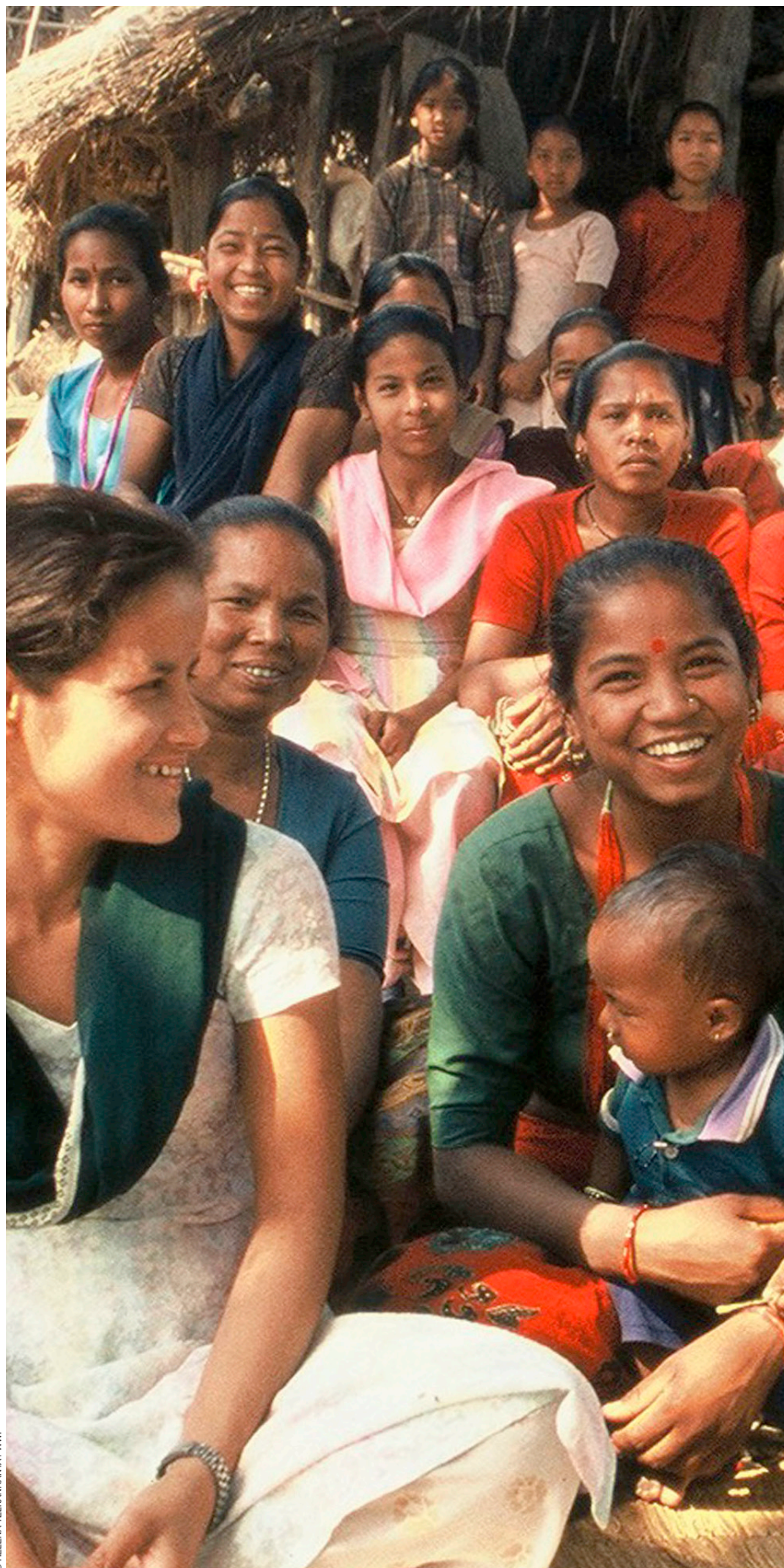
CARE Nepal first piloted Community Learning and Action Centers (CLACs) around 2012. The methodology was adapted from Paulo Freire’s pedagogical approach on adult learning and empowerment. The effectiveness of these types of forums for building the confidence and competence of poor women to assert themselves socially, economically and politically has been demonstrated around the world. In Nepal, a CLAC brings together the PVSEs of a community by creating a forum for them to learn about their rights, discuss their challenges and become empowered to address them. Empowerment involves not only improving PVSE understanding of their rights but also building the knowledge, tools and confidence they need to pursue and defend those rights. A key to CLAC success is that it also engages advocates who are influential in the community.

CLAC participants attend weekly sessions over a four-month period.

In Nepal, successful Alliance strategies entail building poor, vulnerable and socially-excluded leadership capacity and confidence alongside government capacity to monitor and enforce enabling policies.



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Sessions begin with sharing feelings and daily experiences about the issues that are important to participants; other discussion topics include rights, responsibilities, livelihood and community development, forests, climate change impacts and good governance. The program also facilitates discussions about members' roles in community conservation. Through CLACs, women have become more literate and self-confident, with many of them engaging in new income-earning activities. Their husbands' attitudes toward them have become more positive, and they have become more respected in their communities.

Empowering women in Community Forest User Groups

Gender mainstreaming through CLACs has substantially increased the effectiveness of conservation CBOs, including Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs). In Nepal, CFUGs are a highly popular movement whereby the government hands over forest land to local communities so that they can manage and benefit from their forests, based on a mutually-agreed management plan. Sound internal governance is necessary for CFUGs to work effectively, with participatory decision-making and equitable benefit sharing among their members.

Hariyo Ban has strengthened the capacity of women to play leadership roles in CFUGs through technical training. The program has also reduced barriers that women face by innovatively engaging men and elites as a critical engine for women's empowerment. Training key male members of CFUGs in women's leadership development has increased men's support for women in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) initiatives and leadership positions. Working within the existing power structures, Hariyo Ban cultivated master trainers and male champions by increasing knowledge of gender equity and social inclusion among men and elites. The approach includes sensitivity training and social networking among male change agents as well as



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Female members from the local community-based anti-poaching unit on patrol in Khata Corridor, within the Terai Arc region of Nepal.

on-the spot-mentoring and coaching and advanced refresher trainings. The program monitors change, documents knowledge, shares information, and facilitates review, reflection and refinement of approaches based on experience.

Enhancing community and government accountability to marginalized groups

Under Nepalese policy, government agencies as well as civil society organizations like CFUGs are accountable to PVSEs. The Community Forest Development Guideline of Nepal includes measures for participation of women and benefits to PVSEs. Namely, 50 percent of CFUG leadership committees, including at least one of the two top officials, should be women; and 35 percent of revenues from community forests should go to the poor. If a CFUG executive committee fails to follow the provisions of the state policy or does not inform the PVSE about them, it is the duty of state officials to enforce the PVSE provisions with the CFUG leadership. To enhance accountability,

Hariyo Ban built awareness of these rights and the responsibilities of CFUGs and government with PVSE and CFUG members through legal training in CLACs and CFUGs.

Building the capacity of PVSEs to recognize and advocate for their rights laid the groundwork for Hariyo Ban's strategy to improve government accountability. An important complementary measure was orienting government agencies on how to monitor the CBO practices in line with national guidelines. Hariyo Ban developed a participatory governance assessment tool to engage relevant actors in jointly identifying strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve internal governance of conservation CBOs. Using this tool, the program trained and coached representatives from local government agencies, alongside CFUGs and PVSEs, in methods for evaluating and improving governance practices. Gender-responsive budgeting and auditing was also introduced to evaluate the degree to which gender approaches have

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been mainstreamed, and continuously promote greater equity in CFUG and other conservation CBO initiatives.

Conclusion

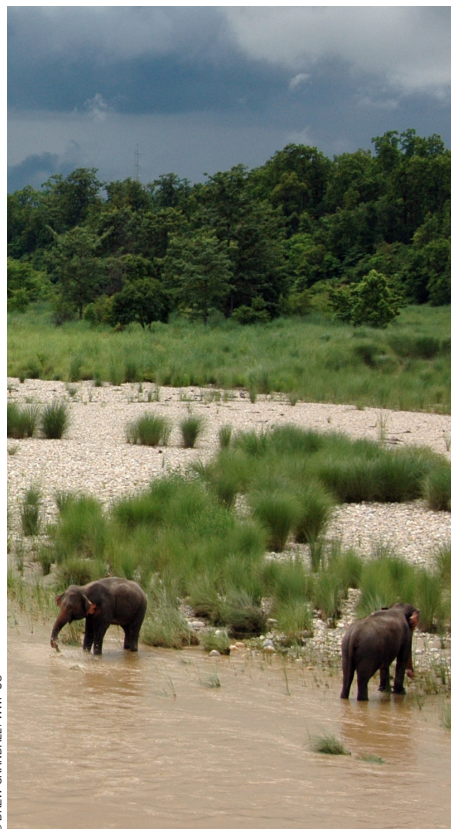
In Nepal, successful Alliance strategies entail building PVSE leadership capacity and confidence alongside government capacity to monitor and enforce enabling policies. As of 2016, Hariyo Ban had supported the formation of nearly 500 CLACs, and the consortium continues to support the approach



Devi - the secretary of the Gauri Mahila Community Forest User group in Khata Corridor, Bardia District – collects firewood from the community forest she helps to manage.

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and take it to scale. After participating in CLACs, members often identified ways in which CFUG management practices could be made more inclusive of PVSEs and attentive to their rights.



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The consortium noted and sought to strengthen this positive feedback loop between CLACs and CFUG governance. The use of the participatory governance assessment tool helped CFUG leadership to be more aware of its responsibility to be accountable to and advocate for the rights of women, Dalits, marginalized indigenous groups and other PVSEs with government agencies. Hariyo Ban is now working on ways to take CLACs to scale.

Several lessons have emerged from the CLAC experience over the past six years:

- CLACs have transformed the lives of many PVSEs, enabling them to address injustices, adapt to climate change and improve their livelihoods, while at the same time improving local forest management.
- The role of the trained CLAC facilitator

(known in Nepal as the local resource person) is essential for a successful CLAC. The challenge is retaining these young people to continue this work, as many are ambitious to develop careers beyond their communities.

- Efforts to scale up CLAC influence beyond CLAC members to other women in the community have met barriers because of geographical isolation, the premium on women's time, and limited funding. Hariyo Ban has started post-CLAC support and is finding that emerging social activities in the community can bring together more women beyond the CLAC. Especially when supported by the local government, these social activities increasingly facilitate learning and empowerment of CLAC members and a wider set of community members.

This learning series was co-authored by EcoAgriculture Partners and the Alliance.

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