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GENDER CONSIDERATIONS in **CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY** and **ADAPTATION FRAMEWORKS** in **NEPAL**

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It is widely acknowledged that the impacts of climate change are acutely felt by the poor in developing countries (GTZ, in Lambrou and Piana 2006: 5; Brody, Demetriades, & Espen, 2008). Since women form a disproportionate share of the poor (IRADe and ENDA, 2002) and (WEDO, ABANTU, ActionAid, ENDA, 2008), they share the vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Climate change is expected to magnify existing inequalities, and gender inequality will be among the most pervasive (WEDO, 2007).

In Nepal, from historic times, women have inherited different roles and responsibilities in their families, communities and societies; they also have different kinds of access to information resources and networks (Mainlay & Tan, 2012). The roles they play and the responsibility they bear are the two foremost factors that make women part of the vulnerable group. The vulnerability is

also accentuated by discrimination against race, age and ethnicity (Parikh, 2007).

As men and women are socially expected to play different roles & responsibilities in the society, the effects of climate change will also be borne differentially. Women will be affected more severely compared to men due to gender-based discrimination against women, unequal power relations between women and men, including in access to assets and resources, as well as intra-household inequities and related vulnerabilities, capabilities and opportunities for adjustment (Parikh J., 2009). In fact, because of climate change, women's economic insecurity and workload increases. Their working conditions progressively deteriorate, at a rate that will take a long time to recover (Lambrou & Piana, 2006).

When climate change accelerates the women's role in securing the basic resources becomes a challenge. This even exacerbates their life, as they have less time to earn income, get an education (both formal and informal), spend time in health and sanitation, or provide care to their families mainly children. They have to work harder and use more time for resource management. Also, the restricted access to resources and limited power in decision making is providing less chances of diversifying their livelihood options through knowledge and skills (WEDO, 2007). Children will also be the victims of this, as they have to drop out of school to help their mothers gather fuel wood and water (WEDO, 2007). The situation only gets worse when the poorly educated girls become young mothers in the future.

Most of the international reports also have the same tendency to portray women as victims. The IPCC report of 2007 also recognized women as the most vulnerable group, but they rarely portrayed them as powerful agents to curb the effect. Women can affect climate change issues in two different ways; either by being a vulnerable

group or by taking a strong lead in combating it. They are often portrayed as vulnerable groups and taken as unworthy and incapable of engaging themselves in environmental and climate change related negotiations and strategic planning (Baten & Khan, 2010). But from either point, their participation in climate change-related negotiations and strategic planning is very crucial. The current situation of portraying women as victims has arisen because women participation in formulating such policies is neglected. So far, international climate talk has very few women representing, but the process of including through membership of their national delegations, chairing and facilitation of formal and informal negotiating groups, in order to inform gender-responsive climate policy, is in process. Besides, the climate change led gender inequality is progressing although the gender perspectives are exclusively being incorporated in plans and policies at national and international level.

Nepal is on the verge of change and, being a climate vulnerable country, it has raised the issue of gender incorporation into its plans and



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policies. But still the gender justice has a long way to go, and Nepal is a developing country where women's rights are poorly established so far. The effects of climate change are faced by women in rural regions of the country, where access to information is poor and adaptation resources are limited. Till date, the Interim constitution of Nepal (2007) includes provision that supports gender equality and has a separate article for women's fundamental rights (article 20). Further there are sectoral policies that are trying to incorporate gender issues. Since this is the beginning phase, we expect that gender justice and a gender friendly environment will be established in the near future.



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The Constitutional and International Agreements

Nepal has signed a number of international conventions, for example the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and passed some laws which support gender equity (Nepal Law Commission, 2006). They are reinforced by the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007, which reaffirms the principle of equity and gender equality and prohibits all forms of discrimination based on gender (Section 13). However, not much has been done to apply these national laws to push for women's advancement, aside from some progressive precedents set by the Supreme Court of Nepal. In addition, some of the provisions contained in international instruments on women's rights are not reflected in national legislation.

Article 16 of the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 provides that every person has the right to live in a clean environment and the right to free basic health services. The incorporation of the right to live in a clean environment is a milestone development in the constitutional history of Nepal. It requires that the State plays a role in ensuring a healthy environment for its citizens. This is reinforced by Article 35(5) of the Interim Constitution which provides that "the State shall make necessary arrangements to maintain the natural environment. The State shall give priority to special protection of the environment, and rare wildlife, and prevent further damage due to physical development activities, by increasing awareness of the general public about environmental cleanliness. Provision shall be made for the protection of the forest, vegetation and biodiversity, their sustainable use and for equitable distribution of the benefits derived from them." How exactly these constitutional provisions should be applied to climate change is still being interpreted by the courts.

For more information see: Mainaly and Tan (2012)

GENDER AND NATIONAL ADAPTATION FRAMEWORKS IN NEPAL

1. National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)

National Adaptation Programme of action (NAPA), prepared with the motive to address the immediate action for adaptation, had several guidelines. Gender Equality has been one of the criteria, as mentioned by annex D, paragraph 4 of the Decision 28 /CP.7, as per which gender was given much importance in the NAPA document.

NAPA of Nepal has been prepared after much consultation at district, regional and national levels. The setup guidelines of NAPA, has identified gender to be one of cross cutting theme. The NAPA document mentions the need for effective consultation with gender experts to ensure the gender sensitive adaptation planning. Even workshops with indigenous women's groups were held to understand their ideas and views. But Ms. Gita Khadka, who was hired as a gender expert consultant, has expressed her deep dissatisfaction in NAPA preparation, as

The NAPA of Nepal has identified six major thematic areas that are impacted by climate change: Water Resources and Energy, Agriculture and Food Security, Forest and Biodiversity, Urban Settlement and Infrastructure, Public Health, and Climate Induced Disaster. The implications of the observed climate change impacts were assessed based on gender relations. Thematic working group has done gender sensitivity analysis of the impacts taking six major areas into consideration.

With accelerating climate change, women's access to water resources will decrease, leading to an increase in their workload with detrimental effects on their reproductive health. NAPA of Nepal has also stated that climate induced resource conflicts increase social violence, anxiety and depression in women. The effect of climate change on agriculture and the migration of men in search of better incomes will result in women taking on additional burdens. As women get limited exposure and access to outside knowledge, they have fewer opportunities to gain skills and capacity to adapt. Climate's impact on forest and biodiversity may reduce an important source of women's income through forest products. The resource deficiency can create mental stress, and if violence breaks out it will amplify the anxiety and depression. Women are underrepresented in urban projects and infrastructure planning, and hence their adaptation and development concerns are poorly addressed in urban planning and policies. Women ask risk becoming victims of gender-based violence and harassment if they migrate to a new place to escape a hazard. More women die and get injured from climate change induced health hazards than men.

It is realized that adaptation strategies need to be identified in the way to improve women's access to the resources and should be involved in all steps of planning and implementation of adaptation action. Though, one hopeful sign is that NAPA has included gender as a cross cutting theme and are considered in implementation too.

For more information see: Ministry of Environment (2010). National Adaptation Programme of Action to Climate Change, Kathmandu, Nepal pp.61.

most of the analysis was paper review and field work was inadequately done to assess the actual situation (Mainlay & Tan, 2012).

2. Local Adaptation Plan for Action (LAPA)

National Framework on LAPA was endorsed in 2011 with the mission to address the adaptation priorities set by NAPA. LAPA identified and integrated local adaptation needs on sectoral and thematic basis using participatory approach. Since its focus is to concentrate on the most vulnerable groups and to provide adaptation services in systematic and effective ways, the framework is considered as people-oriented. The guiding principle followed to formulate or develop the LAPA was bottom-up, inclusive, responsive and flexible.

LAPAs consider gender as one of main criteria for assessing and prioritising adaptation activities, and have ensured female participation while making local adaptation plans. Also in the sensitive budgeting, the gender aspect has been given priority. Since the LAPA implementation is in progress, it is yet to see the women at grassroots level realizing benefits from the implementation of local adaptation plans.

The climate change policy 2011, NAPA and LAPA categorize women as a vulnerable group, but does not assess their strength to cope with such a situation. Also gender-related risks and vulnerabilities have been assessed, but new financing, business and employment opportunities likely to be opened up by crisis have been ignored.

Opinions from Experts

Talking to a few climate change and gender experts regarding the climate change policy of Nepal, there are hopeful signs but a long way to go for gender equality. A climate change expert Mr. Raju P. Chhetri, while commenting on national policy, seems quite hopeful as he believes NAPA and LAPA have incorporated the gender issues and the implementation of LAPA might take gender issues serious. But he remains cautious that it is still a wait and watch situation. He emphasizes the need of qualitative participation of women, but to achieve it the initiation should be on equal participation.

However, gender expert Ms. Indrawati Moktan is not quite satisfied with the way climate change policy has been introduced. She underlines that the top down approach, with which the policy has been introduced, is not at all appreciative and it does not understand the problems faced by women at the grassroots level. Also, women's participation has been neglected while making this policy, as women were included at the beginning phase but not in the decision making phase. FECOFUN president Ms. Apsara Chapagain also expresses that gender issues have got some space in the policy, which is a positive sign, but still there is a question of sufficiency. She emphasizes on women's participation in decision making level in order to properly address women issues. So, participation is the first priority, whether that is in the case of awareness or in benefit sharing. Besides, it is obvious that issue-based leadership is very important. Ms. Kamala Thapa Magar, gender focal person from NEFIN, has the same view as



Photo: Keshab Thapa/LI-BIRD

the FECOFUN president that full and effective participation of women can be guaranteed only if women's issues are addressed sufficiently in policy. She also focuses on issue-based leadership. While addressing such issues she suggests that in place of addressing all women equally, it is necessary that the most vulnerable are identified and their issues be addressed first. Since the gender issue is receiving a lot of attention in the international arena, she hopes that in coming days the nation will feel the pressure and hence take the gender issue further. Similarly, Ms. Divya Devi Gurung of WOCAN feels that climate change policy documents are weak in addressing gender issues and the issue has been superficially raised. During the preparation of NAPA, efforts were made to address it, but the findings from the process were not integrated. She thinks that GESI analysis results were kept in the annex and not used to support the different components of NAPA. Ms. Gurung analyses that LAPA documents and Programme seem to be the best in integrating GESI issues. It has specific objectives, outcomes and resources allocated for GESI. According to Ms. Gurung, there is very limited understanding and capacities among service providers/institutions about the issue. Like other thematic subjects, GESI integration also requires rigorous exercise and analysis to be addressed. Without these, the piece-meal approach will not bring any change and will be a waste of resources. She suggests that focused priority should be given with rigorous exercise during consultation and appropriate analysis should be done for gender integration in the plans and policies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although women have been portrayed as the vulnerable group, they can also be powerful agents to curb the effects of climate change. Their leadership is critical, yet their effect has remained invisible (WEDO, 2007). Women's vulnerability arises from their direct relation with nature, but this relation is a powerful tool for adapting to the effects of climate change. Their active involvement in resource management over time has helped them to accumulate a strong body of knowledge and expertise regarding their surroundings, which can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster risk reduction and adaptation strategies (Baten & Khan, 2010).

Improving the ability of women to cope with ecological stresses strengthens the entire family's adaptive resilience (International Alliance of Women, Global Gender Climate Alliance, 2011) and they are most effective at mobilizing the community to respond to the worst situations (Lambrou & Piana, 2006). Hence, rather than considering women as a feeble part of the society, if they are addressed for a good cause, they will stimulate the society for acting in a better way. The usual system of portraying women as unworthy and incapable in combating climate change should be changed. This historical neglect and associated invisibility of women's role ought to be reversed (Baten & Khan, 2010).

Climate change magnifies existing inequalities, reinforcing the disparity between women and men in their vulnerability and capability to cope with climate change (UNDP, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2007 WEDO, ABANTU, ActionAid, ENDA, 2008). But this is only one side of the fact. The other side portrays women to be the powerful agents for mitigating the effect. Hence, when designing

and implementing climate change strategies and national development plans, if gender dimension is acknowledged, it will be much more successful. The point to be noted is that making climate change policy gender-friendly will not make women less vulnerable. In fact here are several other sectoral policies that need to be amended in order to make women less vulnerable to climate change.

The equal participation of women in decision making is one of the most important steps towards reducing their disproportionate vulnerability to climate change, and increasing the adaptive capacity of communities (Carvajal 2008; Laddey, Kumomoto, & Treichel, 2011). Women should be included in decision making not because they are vulnerable but because they have different perspectives and expertise to contribute with (Parikh D. J., 2007). If gender equity is practiced from the start, this will very likely lead to gender equality.

In case of Nepal, for addressing gender issues in climate change policy, further research and analysis are needed. Gender disaggregated data are required to shed more light on the level of vulnerability and coping mechanism (Parikh, 2007). A broad range of relevant data, both quantitative (education, credit and income) and qualitative (women's household bargaining power, use of time) is necessary, to fully understand the need for and impact of policies and Programmes (UNFPA and WEDO, 2009).

To achieve gender sensitive climate change policies Nepal should give a thought on the following topics:

- » The issues related to gender that are unaddressed in the NAPA, LAPA and climate change policy should be included in the medium and long term adaptation plans.
- » Women are the natural resources managers; hence their skills, views and ideas should be incorporated in further adaptation plans.
- » Climate Change policies at all levels should adopt gender equity in research, analysis, design and implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- » Meaningful and quality participation of women at all levels and in each step is required.
- » Women's role in the non-monetized sector of the economy should be addressed by the Government, and gender should be incorporated in other sector's policies.
- » Government should establish gender-sensitive benchmarks and indicators and develop practical tools to support increased attention to gender perspectives (UN WomenWatch, 2009).



UN women have recognized four possible critical building blocks while responding to gender issues: mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and financing. It believes on focussing mitigation and adaptation efforts systematically and effectively to address gender-specific impacts of climate change in the areas of, inter alia, food security, agriculture and fisheries; biodiversity; water; health; human rights; and peace and security. It sets priority in making financing mechanism flexible so as to reflect women's need and priorities. Finally, technological developments related to climate change are given emphasis to take into account women's specific priorities, needs and roles, and make full use of their knowledge and expertise, including indigenous knowledge and traditional practices.

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