Gender equitable adaptation to climate change: interrogating current policy narratives in the Nepal Himalayas

Basundhara Bhattarai
PhD Scholar
University of Melbourne, Australia

Bhutan+10
Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World
Thimphu, Bhutan, 15-19 October 2012
Gender in environment policy reform

several policies have emerged incorporating gender justice in environmental management (international to national to local)

Policy recognition to incorporate gender in different ways:

• reservation/quota for women
• ensuring women’s leadership positions
• establishing women only community groups
• enhancement of women’s social position as household head parallel with men
gendered nature of forest and agricultural practices
Gender policy in practice: reproduction or transformation?

Opened up space for women to be part of public decision making processes

But

Number-focused policies are problematic in reducing gender gap

hardly considered the existing structural inequalities and root causes of gender inequality

little attention to factors that determine women’s social recognition as public decisions makers:
  - women’s low level of education and public exposure
  - existing gender division of labour
  - intra-household distribution of resources
  - social differentiation
  - low recognition of women’s knowledge is because of women’s low social position

Together these influence and determine the responsibilities, roles, rights and norms that constitute the relations that men and women have in natural resources
Gender policy in practice: reproduction or transformation

The participation narrative has become defunct. Women experience more problems when invited to participate in the existing social relations of gender.

_In some cases we simply put our signature in the meeting minutes to fulfill the quorum as we don’t have time to participate in the meeting_ (said a dalit a woman- cited in Chettri et al. 2008: 39).

Women occupy leadership position but not trusted to perform their public decision making roles

_I was the secretary of the groups but it is the men who decide everything and my concerns and other women’s concerns were always ignored which led to resign me from the post_ - ex secretary of one of the community forestry groups- cited in Chhetri et al 2008)
Gender policy in practice: reproduction or transformation

Women-only institutions are also tokenistic, and operate within the underlying gender relations - women are further excluded in a more subtle way.

I, as a chair of a women only forestry groups could not decide and select the contractor to sell the timber from our community forest due to the heavy influence of men at the village (a woman chairperson of one of the community forestry group in Dang district, Nepal- cited in Chettri et al 2008).

Current policy assumptions ignored the possibility of gendered forms of elite capture that may appear when high caste and economically better off women influence the decisions in women only institutions (Resurrection and Elmhirst, 2008)
Climate change and added challenge to gender justice

Climate change impacts are not gender neutral (IPCC, 2007)

existing structural inequalities (mentioned above) are seen as major constraints for enhancing women’s adaptive responses (MacGregor, 2010, Dankelman, 2010, Wong, 2009)

Limited research knowledge available on the impacts and possible adaptation strategies

Gender in national adaptation plans and policies?
Gendered nature of adaptation

Adaptive responses

- Gendered knowledge
- Gendered resources access
- Gendered identity and power
- Gendered networks
- Gendered divisions of labour
- Gendered decision roles
- Gendered understanding of scale
- Gendered division of ecological space
Conclusion and way forward

Almost three decades long history of gender justice discourse in NRM in Nepal

- Participation narrative- reservation policy
- Inclusion narrative
- Women-only institution narrative
- Women and men relationship narrative

Despite these attempts, gender equity outcomes are limited:

- Counting number has been the dominant practice
- Limited understanding of gender as a social construction
- Equated to women: often viewed as vulnerable and victims of cc and environmental degradation
- Gender justice is sought by sidelining wider socio-economic and cultural aspects that I talked earlier
Conclusion and way forward

- Current approach is less likely to foster gender-equitable climate change adaptation

- How can the existing CBFM institutions overcome existing structural inequalities while adapting to change?

- Fundamental rethinking is required on the part of planners and practitioners to understand and act on how the assumptions mentioned earlier has limited impacts on the ground

- How can discourses such as this forum is linked effectively to policy and practice?
References


MACGREGOR, S. 2010. 'Gender and climate change': From impacts to discourses. Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, 6, 223-238.


Mies, M. And Shiva, B. 1993

Jackson, C. 1993.

