Gender Roles in Rangeland Resource Management in the Hindu Kush Himalayas: Adapting to Climate Change

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Climate change is affecting people's livelihoods in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region both upstream and downstream. The impacts associated with climate change include extreme drought and erratic precipitation, which in turn are directly affecting rangeland resources. Poor pastoral communities are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change; the key issue is whether the consequences of climate change have a different impact on women and men. A gender assessment was carried out using focus group discussions and a semi-structured questionnaire with women and men from 667 households in Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. The main focus was to identify the different roles of women and men and their participation in decision making, perceptions of work burden, and how climate change is affecting their daily lives. The results show that women and men played different roles in decision making and undertook different activities in pastoral management and daily life. Furthermore, the impacts of climate change were felt unequally, with women having less opportunity for income generating activities, less access or rights to financial and productive resources, and being more vulnerable overall. Women spent more time gathering fuelwood and fodder for cattle, and fetching drinking water. In addition, shortage of feedstock in the cold season increased women's work burden. Pastoral communities have very limited options for adapting to climate change. Thus they are leaving their traditional livelihood systems and adopting new income generating activities such as focusing on tourism and migrating to urban areas for employment. Our study highlights the urgent need to integrate gender analysis in policy making and empower women to access resources so that pastoral communities can adapt better to climate change.