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On the realities of gender inclusion in climate change policies in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Climate change impacts are felt globally but not equally. Even within the most vulnerable groups, women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of a changing climate. This review delves into the issue of how climate change and related policy documents in Nepal have addressed the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change. Through a gendered lens, the policies are evaluated as to whether they are gender-blind or gender-aware. We have reviewed 24 documents with climate change as a thematic area of focus along with other climate change-related national policy documents on the environment, forestry and watershed, agriculture, and disaster. Out of the 24 documents reviewed, 19 were found to be gender-aware and 5 were found to be gender-blind. We recommend gender-transformative policy development as it has been made clear that unless prevalent structural inequalities are addressed, the vulnerable cannot adapt to climate change impacts.

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1. Background

Climate change impacts are felt globally but not equally as they manifest in different patterns, timings, and magnitudes in different regions. Climate change is particularly worrying for the Himalayan region due to a warming trend greater than the global average projected warming trend, low adaptive capacity, and potentially heavy socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impact (Wester, Mishra, and Mukherji 2019). Nepal, amid this climate change "hotspot" (Stocker *et al.* 2013), is consistently ranked as one of the most climate-vulnerable nations, ranking 9th in the world in terms of Long-term Climate Risk Index, 1999–2018 (Sönke *et al.* 2015).

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The average annual maximum temperature in Nepal has been increasing by 0.056 °C per year based on trend analysis from 1971 to 2014 (DHM 2017). Likewise, Nepal experiences a range of climate hazards with more than 80% property loss attributed to climate hazards, particularly water-induced events such as floods, landslides, and glacial lake outburst floods (GoN/MoFE 2018). Similarly, Nepal's Himalaya has witnessed a decrease in the total estimated ice reserve by 129 km^3 (29%) between 1977 and 2010 while the number of glacial lakes has increased by 11% and glacier retreat is occurring at a rate of 38 km^2 per year on average (GoN/MoPE 2016). Recently developed scenarios project an increase in annual mean temperature by 1.7–3.6 °C and in average annual precipitation by 11–23% by 2100 (GoN/MoFE 2019).

Climate change impacts are endangering peoples' livelihoods by compromising life support systems, environmental resources, established resource utilization patterns, socio-economic, and socio-ecological systems. In Nepal, climate change impacts manifest with an immense spatial variability in the form of food insecurity due to increased pestilence, water scarcity and crop failures, erratic weather phenomena and increased climatic hazards, greater health problems in people and livestock, dwindling resources leading to increased conflict over resources and heightened social tension, displacement of communities, and amplified socio-ecological and livelihood vulnerability of people (Pandey and Bardsley 2015).

Not all people or groups are equally vulnerable to climate change impacts (Füssel 2010). People with the least resources and adaptive capacity, those who are marginalized socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally or otherwise are the most vulnerable. These include the poor (Djoudi and Brockhaus 2011), mountain inhabitants, and indigenous communities who primarily depend on natural resources for subsistence (Devkota 2013; McDowell et al. 2013; Xu et al. 2009). Even within these highly vulnerable groups, women are disproportionately affected (Sherpa 2007; Djoudi and Brockhaus 2011). Addressing these inequalities in climate change-related plans, policies, and programs is essential for an inclusive response to climate change impacts.

2. Gender-differentiated impacts of climate change

To achieve inclusivity in the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change impacts, it is imperative to understand the vulnerability of people disaggregated across social groups and genders (Mainlay and Tan 2012). Gender-differentiated vulnerability to climate change impacts (Alston 2014; Djoudi and Brockhaus 2011; MacGregor 2010; Terry 2009) arises from the gendered nature of most systemic disparities in existing entrenched social structures (Bina 2001; Buchy and Subba 2003).

Climate change disproportionately impacts women. In societies like Nepal with a historically entrenched gender inequality (Bennett 2008), women are more directly dependent on natural resources due to their traditionally defined gender roles such as managing households and securing livelihoods through agro-pastoralism. They are rendered the vulnerable gender due to lack of education and exposure, limited access to market, credit and land rights, socio-politically constrained control over natural resources, and relative exclusion in decision making over resource management and community development (Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997; Pierce Colfer 2004; Sherpa 2007). In

Nepal where women are predominantly engaged in agriculture, the fact that only 25.7% of households are headed by women, and females own neither land nor house in 80.1% of households (CBS 2012) is a testament to the stark asymmetry between women's workload and decision-making authority. Women thus bear greater burden of work, but men enjoy the privileges of access and control over resources and decision-making authority that women are generally deprived of (Sherpa 2007).

Vulnerability is strongly linked to poverty (Nelson et al. 2002) and as women constitute the majority of the poor in Nepal (Tiwari et al. 2009), women face greater vulnerability. The effect is compounded by other gendered disparities in overlapping factors such as culture, geography, access to services and information, economy, policy, etc. (Mainlay and Tan 2012). As per the statistics compiled in CBS (2014a), women lag behind men in education with the adult literacy rate for females (62%) being much lower than that for males (80%). Only 43% and 33% of women completed secondary school and graduate education respectively (CBS 2012). Women tend to be less foreign-going with a foreign-going proportion of female population being 1.7% as compared to 13.1% in male population (CBS 2012). Also, women are generally more reliant on natural resources for employment with 73.6% of females being employed in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries as opposed to only 50.5% of males (CBS 2014a). These statistics hint at an increased workload for women on top of an increasingly demanding household and agropastoral burden as they, in the wake of a particularly male-dominated labor outmigration, also have to shoulder the workload traditionally borne by men.

Climate change worsens this lop-sided gender dynamic by further reducing women's adaptive capacity thus making them more vulnerable to climate shocks than their male counterparts (Mainlay and Tan 2012). Additional labor and increased household workload of women (as fetching water, fuelwood, and fodder becomes increasingly time-consuming) due to climate change and resource depletion hinders their engagement and productivity in other activities such as farming and education, hampers nutrition and exposes them to greater safety and health threats (Mainlay and Tan 2012; Shrestha, Chapagain, and Ghimire 2019). Increasing vulnerability to climate risk of subsistence agriculture – people's major work in Nepal (CBS, 2014b) – hits women harder as the exodus of males leads to increasing feminization of this practice (Bhattarai, Beilin, and Ford 2015).

Likewise, disasters not only displace communities but also aggravate marginalization, poverty, and vulnerability. Women face measurably greater differential impacts at all stages: pre-disaster, disaster, and post-disaster, mainly because of lack of preparedness (for instance, less access to information and participation in disaster learning skills), physiological vulnerabilities, socio-cultural and economic marginalization, and gender stereotypes (Goodrich, Manjari, and Suman 2017). Besides, the post-disaster relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction phase without gender-sensitive considerations can cause new vulnerabilities or "second phase disasters" for women such as greater exposure to physical, mental, and sexual violence, trafficking, etc. (Sherpa 2007). Migration which is generally viewed as a coping strategy during climate-induced crises such as drought, adds to women's vulnerability (Djoudi and Brockhaus 2011). Women

Table 1. Evaluation framework used for the classification of policies.

Evaluation question	Indicators	Classification
Does the policy use specific gender categories?	Policy targeting "men", "women" or their derivatives	No: Gender-blind Yes: Gender-aware
Does the policy address gender-specific needs?	Policy addressing the specific needs of different actors	No: Gender-neutral Yes: Gender-specific
Does the policy address existing gender-specific disparity?	Policy to transform social structures	Yes: Gender-transformative

report significantly higher psychological distress due to migration with regards to stress over finance and housing among others (Jarallah and Baxter 2019; Bhadra 2017).

Limited representation of women in broader socio-political stakes is reflected in mostly low proportion (12.5-14.3%) of females in decision-making levels including the Council of Ministers, National Planning Commission, and Public Service Commission with the exception of 29.4-33.3% in the parliament and National Election Commission (CBS 2018). Also, women are generally underrepresented in climate change policy-making and negotiations at the community level and beyond (Denton 2002). Women in these social settings with multi-layered disparity are destined to have a lower capacity to manage climate change impacts (Leduc 2009). Climate change, while further straining women's capacity to cope with environmental change, worsens the exclusion of women from broader social roles, and decision-making (Djoudi and Brockhaus 2011).

3. Review method

This review delves into the discussion of how climate change and related policies in Nepal have addressed the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change. It comprises three parts. First, an analysis of how inclusive the national policies are on gender dynamics is done. The second part looks into how these policies have been translated on the ground. The third part presents views on promoting inclusion in climate change policies in Nepal's context.

We have reviewed policy documents with a thematic area of focus on climate change, and national documents related to climate change on the environment, forestry and watershed, agriculture, and disaster. We acknowledge that climate change has impacts on many other sectors as well but the review focuses on these four sectors. Through a gendered lens, the policies are evaluated as gender-blind or gender-aware. For this, we searched for the documents with the terms – "gender", "women", "men", "climate change" or its derivatives. For the documents published only in Nepali language, the translation of these words were used. We then analyzed the context in which these words were used: whether or not the policies separate the roles of different actors or seek to address gender-specific needs. Gender-specific needs refer to the particular needs of males and females that are unique to their gender groups. Since women have been the traditionally overlooked or disadvantaged groups, gender-specific needs tend to highlight the needs of women.

The evaluation framework used for the study (Table 1) builds upon several terminologies that require contextualization within the study. The first such terminology is gender which should be taken to mean the roles and activities a given society considers

Table 2. Policies, plans, acts, strategies, and regulations included in the review.

Thematic area	No. of documents	Specific document
Climate change (including reports to the UNFCCC)	8	Second Nationally Determined Contribution (2020) National Climate Change Policy (2019) National Adaptation Plan Process (2018) Nationally Determined Contribution (2016) Second National Communication Report (2014) National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action (2011) National Adaptation Plan of Action (2010) Initial National Communication (2004)
Environment	3	Environment Protection Regulation (2020) Environment Protection Act (2019) National Environment Policy (2019)
Forestry and watershed	5	National Wetland Policy (2012) Forest Act (2019) National Forest Policy (2019) Nepal National REDD+ Strategy (2018) Forestry Sector Strategy 2016-25 (2016)
Agriculture	4	National Agro-Forestry Policy (2019) Agriculture Development Strategy 2015-2035 (2015) Agro Biodiversity Policy Amendment (2014) National Agriculture Policy (2004)
Disaster	4	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Regulation (2019) Disaster Risk Reduction and National Strategic Plan of Action 2018-2030 (2019) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act Amendment (2019) Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018)

appropriate for male and female members at a given time. Gender is the basis for all other terminologies used herewith.

Gender-blind policies are those which do not differentiate the roles of male and female actors whereas gender-aware policies make such a distinction. The latter category of policies is further divided into gender-neutral, gender-specific, and gender-transformative policies (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996). Gender-neutral policies do not seek to address any gender-specific needs, gender-specific policies aim to meet the gender-specific needs but do not seek to address existing gender disparity whereas gender-transformative policies promote gender equality by effecting a change in gender

Table 3. Gender dynamics of climate change and related national documents.

Gender-blind	Gender-aware		
	Gender-neutral	Gender-specific	Gender-transformative
• Initial National Communication (2004) • Nationally Determined Contribution (2016) • Environment Protection Regulation (2020) • National Wetland Policy (2012) • Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Regulation (2019)	• National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action (2011) • National Adaptation Plan of Action (2010) • Agro Biodiversity Policy Amendment (2014)	• Second Nationally Determined Contribution (2020) • National Climate Change Policy (2019) • Second National Communication Report (2014) • Environment Protection Act (2019) • National Environment Policy (2019) • Forest Act (2019) • National Forest Policy (2019) • Nepal National REDD+ Strategy (2018) • Forestry Sector Strategy 2016-25 (2016) • National Agro-Forestry Policy (2019) • Agriculture Development Strategy 2015-2035 (2015) • National Agriculture Policy (2004) • Disaster Risk Reduction and National Strategic Plan of Action 2018-2030 (2019) • Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act Amendment (2019) • Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018)	• National Adaptation Plan Process (2018)

roles. As a distinction to the various types of policies as discussed above, below are examples of agriculture policies (these examples are just a simplistic representation):

- A policy to increase agricultural production in the country by empowering the poor population is an example of a gender-blind policy. This represents a fallacy of gender-blind aggregation by the use of abstract or generic categories such as the poor, the household, etc. which disguise the extent of differentiation, and inequality within categories (Kabeer and Subrahmanian 1996).
- A policy stating that women will be involved in the sustainable use of agro-biodiversity is an example of a gender-neutral policy. This targets women as development actor in order to achieve an objective, leaving specific needs intact.
- A policy for improving access to agricultural resources and benefits to women is an example of a gender-specific policy. This targets a specific gender and aims to meet a specific gender requirement – the access to agricultural resources. But it does not address the existing gender divide in resources and responsibility.

- A policy to transform social structures at multiple scales, such as land reforms to dismantle pre-capitalist structures, is an example of gender-transformative policy (Sugden et al. 2014). This promote gender equality by effecting a change in social structure which lies at the root of vulnerability.

A total of 24 national policy documents consisting of policies, acts, strategies, regulations, and national communications published after 2000 A.D. were reviewed (Table 2). Although reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are not policies per se, we have included them in the review as they provide information and guidance on the development of climate change-related policies and other policy documents. Although the National Adaptation Plan has not been published, the document on its process is available (GoN/MoFE 2018) which we have included in our review.

4. Analysis of climate change and related national documents through a gendered lens

The policy documents included in the review all recognize climate change impacts and have provisions for climate change adaptation or climate change impact reduction. But not all documents recognize the gender-differentiated impacts. Even fewer recognize gender-differentiated impacts of climate change in particular. Out of the 24 climate change-related policies reviewed here, 19 were found to be gender-aware and 5 were found to be gender-blind (Table 3). We have reviewed each document below.

4.1. Climate change

The climate change policy documents were found to be gender-blind (2), gender-neutral (2), gender-specific (3), and gender-transformative (1).

Second Nationally Determined Contribution (2020) calls for women's participation in mitigation and adaptation components along with their inclusion in the planning process and as means of implementation. This helps to address the specific needs of women. In the mitigation component, the report stipulates 50% women representation in forests under community-based management. Likewise, it requires setting up of institutional mechanisms and structures and adequate provision of budget to ensure social and environmental safeguards including Free, Prior and Informed Consent, forest tenure, and access to finance and technology for women by 2030. Similarly, it envisages the insurance of fair and equitable benefits (carbon and non-carbon) from sustainable forest management, watershed management, and biodiversity conservation among women in addition to insurance of increased access of climate-smart agricultural technologies to women. By 2030, there are plans to develop specific programs with dedicated resources, both human and financial to ensure full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in climate change-related policy development and during the planning, monitoring, and implementation processes at all three levels of governance – local, provincial, and federal. The promotion of leadership, participation, and negotiation capacity of women in climate change forums has also been planned.

Likewise, the report further states that by 2030, all local governments will prepare and implement climate-resilient and gender-responsive adaptation plans focusing on women. Nationally Determined Contribution (2016) made no reference to gendered communication, thus making it gender-blind.

National Climate Change Policy (2019) stipulates budget appropriation for women and targets agriculture-based adaptation programs. This helps address the specific needs of women. Likewise, their concerns are stated to be addressed in matters related to climate change. Similarly, the policy gives due importance to information access including access to climate change-related information for different languages, classes, cultures, ages, and genders, as well as for people with disabilities. It further states that gender mainstreaming in the Climate Change Action Plan and other instruments related to climate change will be modified/revised as directed by this policy.

National Adaptation Plan Process (2018) has gender-transformative pathways as it calls for addressing resource access issues related to forests, water, and energy for women. Structural changes in social norms and values are also identified as adaptation pathways. Gender-specific pathways have also been outlined with the identification of options for livelihood diversification for women, the introduction of inclusive agricultural technologies, and early warning systems along with awareness programs and insurance mechanisms for women in tourism-related businesses.

Second National Communication Report (2014) is gender-specific as it recognizes the importance of a gender focus on climate change planning and sectoral adaptation plans. The report calls for consideration in socio-economy, technology, and infrastructure in sectoral plans for meaningful participation of women and socially excluded groups in decision-making, planning, and implementation. Initial National Communication (2004) is gender-blind as it does not include research and studies related to gender components in recommended research and studies (the report consists of an overview of the existing scenario in Nepal).

National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action (2011) is gender-neutral as it only enlists the inclusion of gender-sensitive budgeting as an additional tool for Local Adaptation Plans for Action formulation. National Adaptation Plan of Action (2010) is also gender-neutral as it recognizes the gendered dimension to climate change but does not integrate gender issues in the nine proposed project priority profiles.

4.2. Environment

Environmental themed policy documents in Nepal were found to be gender-blind (1) and gender-specific (2). Environment Protection Regulation (2020) is gender-blind in that it has no regulations pertaining to gender dynamics. The representation of women is mentioned only once, as a member of the managing committee for carbon trading in a panel consisting of 11 members. Environment Protection Act (2019) recognizes women as a vulnerable group and gives them a special priority in making adaptation plans. National Environment Policy (2019) also gives special priority to women seeking compensation funds for environmental justice and for capacity building in the environmental field.

4.3. Forestry and watershed

The watershed policy was found to be gender-blind (1) whilst forestry documents were found to be gender-specific (4). In National Wetland Policy (2012), the inclusion of women's concerns has been disregarded in the absence of gender-specific guidelines that enhance women's participation and representation. Women find mention only as members of the district forest area coordination committee but the membership can also be transferred upon referral to another representative.

Forest Act (2019) allocates 25% of the remaining amount for women empowerment, poverty alleviation, and entrepreneurial activities. The remaining amount is the fund left after the allocation of 25% of the annual income derived as per the work plan in the development, protection, and management of the forest funds. National Forest Policy (2019) recognizes the differential capacity of women and ensures their rights and reach on profit. It also mandates a 50% quota of female members in strategies, law formation, budget, activities, and practice. Nepal National REDD+ Strategy (2018) enlists strategies to improve resource tenure and to ensure fair and equitable sharing of carbon and non-carbon benefits of forests among women with effective implementation of safeguards measures. Likewise, it prescribes strategies to increase livelihood assets and diversify employment opportunities. Forestry Sector Strategy 2016-25 (2016) has strategies for capacity development, income diversification, job opportunities, and accredited training for various operations in the forestry sector for women. Promotion of income diversification is prioritized for enhancing women's resilience to climate change. Similarly, increasing the proportional representation of women in the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (now the Ministry of Forests and Environment) through positive discrimination is also proposed.

4.4. Agriculture

National agriculture-related policy documents were found to be gender-neutral (1), and gender-specific (3). National Agro-Forestry Policy (2019) has gender-specific provisions for arranging suitable subsidies considering the needs of organized women when implementing the policy in degraded forest areas, farm-forest areas, and fallow to semi-fallow agricultural lands. Agriculture Development Strategy 2015-2035 (2015) is also gender-specific as it enlists strategies for accelerating the growth of micro, small, and medium agro-enterprises including those headed by women. Similarly, the strategy promotes the growth of agro-enterprises led by traditionally excluded groups such as women. The Agro Biodiversity Policy Amendment (2014) has gender-neutral provisions as it states that women will be involved in the sustainable use of agro-biodiversity for increasing production, employment, and income-generating activities. It also envisages the operation of necessary programs for the involvement of women in research, promotion, and utilization of farmers' indigenous knowledge. The policy recognizes the role of women in promoting agro-biodiversity but does not address their differentiated needs. National Agriculture Policy (2004) is a gender-specific policy as it envisions improvement of access to agricultural resources and benefits to women. It also states that the involvement and participation of women in all possible fields of the operation of agricultural programs shall be raised to 50%.

4.5. Disaster

Disaster-related policy documents were found to be gender-blind (1) and gender-specific (3). Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Regulation (2019) is gender-blind as it makes no mention of women in the disaster risk reduction and management process. The rest of the reviewed documents are gender-specific. Disaster Risk Reduction and National Strategic Plan of Action 2018−2030 (2019) calls for the integration of gender, age, disability, and cultural perspective in all policies, and the promotion of women and youth leadership. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act Amendment (2019) calls for the arrangement of special plans and activities for women under disaster risk. It also states that the availability of disaster relief funds should favor women. Similarly, Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018) ensures representation and effective participation of women in all stages and structures of disaster risk reduction and management planning.

4.6. Interpretation of the gender-specific nature of these policies

Most of the policies reviewed were found to be gender-specific, but the ambiguity in the provisions leaves much to interpretation. For instance, the meaning of special priority to women in Environment Protection Act (2019) is unclear. It appears like an attempt to address the needs of women in the adaptation plans, but it is unclear as to what kind of needs it is trying to address.

There are currently no rules for formulations of policies or plans to secure women's participation and in many cases, the formulation of the policies seems to have been carried out without adequate consultation with all stakeholders. For instance, in the formulation of National Adaptation Plan of Action (2010), the authorities concerned with women's issues such as the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare or the Women's Commission were not consulted (Mainlay and Tan 2012). It is not uncommon in Nepal for experts to underline the importance of gender mainstreaming in policies but in practice, fail to be adequately consultative while formulating policies. However, Second Nationally Determined Contribution (2020) mentions that the assessments made by the team of experts have been verified through in-person and virtual consultations with stakeholders including women.

Also, the important issues raised in these policies do not seem to be effectively translated into acts and regulations. The Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018) does a remarkable job of calling for effective participation of women in all stages and structures of disaster risk reduction and management planning but the subsequent acts and regulations do not follow through with this policy. Since policies are proposed courses of action, the overlooking of this important fact renders these policies ineffective for translation to effective on-the-ground action. This also casts some doubt on whether the gender-transformative pathways listed in National Adaptation Plan Process (2018) will make it to the final document.

Most policies do not address the existing gender disparity over access to resources and responsibilities. Forest Act (2019) for instance, has provisions for allocation of funds for women empowerment, poverty alleviation, and entrepreneurial activities, but it does not address the roots of gender inequality in forest resource use

and decision power in the first place. Likewise, National Agriculture Policy (2004) has explicit provisions for promoting women's participation but fails to address the social barriers which inhibit their participation. Gender is mentioned only when it comes to portraying women as vulnerable groups, and not in the role of agency (Rai and Mainaly 2018).

Women play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. In Nepal, traditional biomass accounts for 77% of energy consumption (GoN/MoPE 2017), and women play an important role in managing and collecting these resources (Mahat 2013). Here, the lack of women's role in climate change mitigation planning impacts the formulation of effective mitigation strategies. Women harbor knowledge and skills to take action in the processes of natural resources management, adaptation, and risk reduction (Carvajal-Escobar, Quintero-Angel, and Garcia-Vargas 2008). However, the policies also appear to be missing out on the appreciation of the knowledge and skills of women that are crucial for orienting forward the adaptation processes.

5. Policy implementation effects on the ground

Achieving true inclusivity in climate change adaptation is a paramount global challenge. The poor and the vulnerable groups remain marginalized and oppressed with the adaptation programs sometimes contributing to their vulnerabilities as elites sometimes leverage even climate change to their benefit by capitalizing on policy gaps to capture resources (Sultana et al. 2019), with the politicization of new projects funneling the project benefits to the well-connected, and with threats of violence exacerbating the issue (Nagoda and Nightingale 2017). Given that formal inclusion of vulnerable households alone may not elevate their influence in decision-making beyond negligible (Ojha et al. 2014; Ojha et al. 2016), inclusion remains largely symbolic (Nagoda and Nightingale 2017), and participation itself has become a contest over social power (Nightingale 2015). Vulnerability thereby is not just the product of physical exposure to climatic change and hazards, but also of the broader political, economic, and social contexts of households and societies.

Besides, there has been a lack of effective utilization of opportunities offered by gender-responsive policies, strategies, and frameworks. According to FAO and RECOFTC (2015), even the government prescribed target of a 50% quota of female members in Community Forestry Users Group (CFUG) executive committees remains unfulfilled and stood at just 31% in 2014. In the Ministry of Forests and Environment, 24% of the positions are held by women (GoN/MoFE 2020). Although this figure is an improvement over the figure reported in 2015 which stood at 3% (FAO and RECOFTC 2015), it is still lower than the targeted minimum of 33% positions required to be allocated for women.

Despite women's role in the management of forests, most decisions are made by men, and even in women-only CFUGs, most decisions are influenced or made by their male advisors (WOCAN 2017). This phenomenon is termed as participatory exclusion (Agarwal 2001). The case study in Hanspur village in Kaski District in Nepal is a fitting example of this phenomenon – the community forest management seemed to be

reinforced by masculine order; the timber species were retained but the livelihood needs from the growth of other species on which women from smallholder households were heavily dependent were neglected (Bhattarai 2020).

Similarly, the Ministry of Forests and Environment allocates 7% of its annual budget for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) at the national level (WOCAN 2017). But there is no separate budgeting for GESI at lower levels (provincial and local government levels), and the details of their budgets are unknown.

6. Way forward in promoting gender inclusion in climate policies in Nepal

For promoting gender inclusion in climate policies in Nepal, one of the most important aspects is the collection of gender-disaggregated data in all sectors related to climate change. A lack of such data leads to gender-blind climate change policies which can have unintended effects of exacerbating gender-based vulnerability (Mainlay and Tan 2012). Such data must also be translated into programs and initiatives to address women's specific needs and interests.

Women should be included in the agenda-setting or policy formulation stage. The focus should be laid on improving women's qualitative participation to influence decisions and practices while promoting their numerical representation. This means raising both "critical mass" and "critical awareness" so that women get both numerical and qualitative representation, for instance, through better access to education and rights-based training for all genders with proactive interventions with the support organizations including the national government helps to develop "critical awareness" (Bhattarai 2020).

Portraying women as only victims of climate change and not as actors in climate change response negates their role in adapting to the impact of climate change. Hence, the role of women as actors and agents of change, and not just victims, must be realized in the policies and plans. Recognizing their pivotal role helps in promoting effective natural resource management and in orienting climate change adaptation and risk reduction processes.

Furthermore, efforts must be made to address the specific social barriers that inhibit women's participation in the suggested activities in policies. Gender-specific policies that have been formulated thus far have failed to address barriers such as lack of access to information and decision-making authority, and bureaucratic administrative procedures that have discouraged women participation. Hence, it is necessary to develop gender-transformative policies as it has been made clear that unless the prevalent structural inequalities are addressed, the vulnerable cannot adapt to climate change impacts.

7. Concluding remarks

Without true inclusion, climate change adaptation policies will falter. Crossing this barrier is difficult, nonetheless vital. True inclusion entails the inclusion of all stakeholders in all phases of policy intervention from policy planning to implementation. As discussed above, women bear a greater brunt of climate change impacts, and thus are pivotal stakeholders in climate change policy processes. Climate change related policies

are far from perfect in Nepal. Striving toward an equitable and sustainable development that is responsive to climate change necessitates the integration of gender focus into climate change policies and programs. The present practice has very little room for meaningful engagement of women – they may be consulted with but do not have an active role in decision making. There is a need to address the gaps in existing policies to pave the way for more inclusive policymaking and intervention in the future. After all, inclusive climate action is not just altruism. Through inclusivity in the process, policy, and impact, the benefits as well as burdens of climate action are equitably distributed, in effect reducing the greater brunt of climate change impacts otherwise disproportionately borne by the most vulnerable.

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