

SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS

The State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Nepal

Photo: Nawraj Pradhan

Introduction

The State of Gender Equality and Climate Change assessment reports cover countries across the Asia-Pacific region and highlight areas where gender-responsive climate action is needed to realize the objectives of key global commitments such as the Paris Agreement.

The Nepal country report was prepared by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and UN Women. It describes the country-driven processes and the linkages between gender equality and climate change across four key sectors: forestry, agriculture, energy, and water. There are two main reasons for the focus on these sectors: (a) they fall within the eight priority sectors identified by the National Climate Change Policy 2019 and (b) communities are highly dependent upon these sectors for their livelihoods. The report aims to guide government action towards achieving climate goals at the country level, particularly related to the Paris Agreement on climate change. Policy actors

can use the analysis to address the gaps that hinder climate adaptation and mitigation interventions from addressing gendered vulnerabilities and social barriers to women's agency, which are critical to ensuring a sustainable future.

This summary presents the key findings and recommendations on addressing structural barriers, strengthening institutional mechanisms, and building the capacities of women and men to achieve gender-transformative change within climate action across the sectors.

Nepal's position on gender equality and climate change

The Government of Nepal (GoN) has been committed to addressing gender issues since its first five-year plan (1956–1961). This commitment was further strengthened in the new Constitution (2018), which enshrines equal rights for women, the poor, the vulnerable, and people from various social groups. The GoN has taken several measures to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, undertaking



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structural reforms and passing policy directives to guide its programmes and ensure institutional arrangements from the national to local levels.

To address climate change and integrate gender across its programmes, the GoN in 2010 developed the National Adaptation Programme of Action identifying gender as a cross-cutting issue. In 2012, the National Climate Change Gender Action Plan operationalized gender concerns in climate change efforts to enhance implementation and promote gender equality. This also led to the introduction of a climate budget code to track public expenditure on climate action. The Nepal Climate Change Policy 2019 is considered a significant milestone in integrating gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) within climate change and across the development sector.

Integrating gender equality and social inclusion in climate policies and action plans

Nepal Climate Change Policy 2019 recognizes the need to integrate GESI

The Nepal Climate Change Policy 2019 aims to mainstream GESI in adaptation and mitigation programmes across the eightⁱ sectors through

guidelines and working policies. The policy also focuses on addressing the vulnerabilities of women and marginalized groups. It has outlined the institutional mechanisms for integrating climate change and GESI at the national and sub-national levels.

GESI integration in Nationally Determined Contributions

The first Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) 2016 did not make specific reference to gender, nor were the targets explicitly gender sensitive.ⁱⁱ However, the second NDC of 2020 addressed these shortcomings both in the mitigation and adaptation components by identifying GESI as a crosscutting area. Further, it also called for integrating GESI in the NDC targets and developing an action plan for such integration. Significant efforts are being made to mainstream GESI particularly in areas such as clean energy generation, mini and micro hydropower, sustainable forest management, and promotion of sustainable agriculture. Some actions in this regard include the setting up of quotas for women and marginalized communities in community user groups, including at the executive level, targeting them for training and, in some cases, for financial and in-kind support.

GESI integration mechanism in the National Climate Change Action Plan

The objective of the National Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2012 was to operationalize gender concerns in climate change efforts to enhance implementation and contribute to the promotion of gender equality in Nepal. It outlined the institutional mechanisms for integrating gender in climate change under which it proposed the formulation of Gender Clusters in the ministries headed by a Gender Focal Point.

Summary of gender equality and climate change issues

Gaps in GESI integration in policies

GESI is well understood to be a cross cutting issue. However, an intersectional approach to the forms, types, and levels of power relations between different groups of women and men, and excluded groups, is still missing in policies related to climate change. Consequently, sectoral policies do not consider the differential vulnerabilities and exclusions faced by different groups based on gender, social norms, caste, and other forms of discrimination.

Furthermore, while the policies do focus on addressing the vulnerabilities of women and marginalized groups, they fail to consider them as primary stakeholders and agents of change. They continue to regard these groups as vulnerable and lacking the knowledge and experience to address the impacts of climate change. This view of women and marginalized groups as beneficiaries or passive recipients of policy formulation and projects, rather than as influencers and agents of change, ignores the critical role that women play in addressing everyday impacts of climate change, denies them agency, and leads to low investments in budgetary allocations for human resources and capacity building.

Gaps in GESI integration within institutions

GESI guidelines and institutional mechanisms have been set up across the sectoral ministries and their departments to implement the GESI approach. However, the approach continues to remain unclear in functional linkages, especially with the restructuring of the national administrative structure in 2015. In the new federal restructuring, there are no precise



Photo: Menaka



Photo: Alex Treadway

mechanisms and systems for integrating climate change and GESI at the provincial and local levels. This has resulted in a lack of coordination and ambiguities in performing GESI roles and responsibilities in relation to climate change, thereby increasing inter- and intra-institutional gaps. Due to such vagueness in strategic design, the programmes and activities across the sectors related to gender and climate change at the district and local levels remain fragmented.ⁱⁱⁱ

Additionally, within the sectoral ministries and departments, the GESI sections face several challenges that prevent them from making important interventions that would contribute towards GESI, such as (a) lack of clarity in their roles and responsibilities, which often sidelines GESI-related responsibilities as an “additional task” for technical staff; (b) lack of or limited capacity of these staff in integrating gender activities; (c) low budget allocation; and (d) subordinate positions of the GESI staff with limited authority within the institutional hierarchy.

Domination by technical and technocratic activities

The priority at the moment has been on climate change-related technical activities (e.g. testing adaptation technologies, collection of carbon data) with much less focus on strategies, plans, and actions to integrate GESI in climate-related programmes and activities. Consequently, there is a lack of or limited gender and socially disaggregated data, dearth of adequate consultative processes, and limited stakeholder participation, which is critical to monitoring impacts, progress, and change.

Key findings by sectors

Forestry

- Forestry represents a key sector in Nepal associated with women and poor and marginalized groups. Women in the sector are often engaged in unpaid, labour-intensive activities (plantation, weeding, collection) and are absent in leadership and decision making. Thus, women are only able to access resources to meet practical needs but fail to secure resources to achieve strategic interests (improved income, status, and decision-making authority).



Photo: Nabin Baral

- The forestry sector is one of the first sectors in Nepal to have formulated sectoral GESI policies. Key forest policies such as the Forest Sector Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy 2008; Community Forestry Development Program Guidelines 2014; Forest Sector Strategy 2016–2025; Nepal National REDD+ Strategy 2018; the most recently amended National Forestry Policy 2019; draft Gender and Climate Strategy; and draft Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan of Forest and Environment Sector 2020–2030 all integrate GESI to some degree and have explicitly defined the beneficiary groups in terms of gender, caste, ethnicity, and geography.
- Currently, the Ministry of Forests and Environment and its departments do not have a specific monitoring system for tracking GESI outputs and outcomes, except for tracking gender-responsive budgets during planning, which is a requirement of the Ministry of Finance.
- Formal and informal processes among women foresters and networks within and outside the government structures play a significant role in addressing the patriarchal social structures that

support and sustain gender-based violence and sexual harassment at the workplace.

- The forestry sector is gradually seeing an increasing number of women professionals within institutional settings, but it lacks diversity in terms of caste and ethnicity.

Agriculture

- More women are engaged in agriculture than men. However, their contribution is unrecognized, resulting in lower wages, limited land ownership^{iv}, limited access to knowledge or first-hand information from extension officers, and lack of or limited control over the sales or management of productive assets and agricultural produce.
- The rise in new and aggressive forms of pests, weeds, and diseases, along with increasing water shortage, is impacting farming systems. Since women's work in the agriculture sector relates closely to these issues and with increasing male outmigration from rural settings, the inequitable gender division of labour is likely to be exacerbated, thereby feminizing labour



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in the agriculture sector. The current strategy on agriculture development is silent on the differential impacts of climate change on women farmers and does not explicitly provide gender-specific measures to respond to these impacts.

- The agriculture sector has seen some progressive policies at the intersection of GESI and climate change impacts, such as setting budgetary provisions for activities aimed at empowering women, improving their access to and control over productive resources, and setting a target of 50% farmland ownership by women. The Nepal Agriculture Development Strategy 2015 recognizes women and excluded groups as a key impact group that requires more engagement. However, there is a need to further strengthen policy implementation to effectively meet gender- and agriculture-related targets. Furthermore, the sectoral policies lack sex-disaggregated data to monitor and evaluate gender outcomes.
- On the positive side, there is significant progress at the federal level in women's representation in higher technical positions as senior gazetted officers (from 13% in 2016 to 33% in 2020).

Energy

- The primary energy resources in Nepal are biomass, hydropower, and coal. About 58% of the population are connected to grid energy, and 82% of the population still use solid fuels such as wood, dung cakes, rice husk, and coal for cooking.
- Inequitable gender and social power relations in the energy sector have resulted in unequal access and control over energy resources and modern fuels. The implication of lack of energy disproportionately falls onto women and girls, resulting in them missing out on employment and education opportunities; experiencing negative health impacts; and limiting their self-improvement, including skills development and leadership training.
- The Renewable Energy Subsidy Policy 2016 addresses GESI concerns and focuses on reducing regional disparities, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing livelihoods. The policy provides subsidy schemes for single women and low-income households, victims of natural disasters, and disadvantaged groups. However, it does not emphasize the barriers to participation

and exclusion that women, the poor, and excluded communities (Dalits) face.

- The energy policies and programmes that advocate GESI issues are more often donor-driven and fail to support the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming.
- The Ministry of Energy and Water Resources and Irrigation and its major institutions^v do not have a dedicated GESI section or a gender focal person.
- At the local level, the Alternative Energy Promotion Center project monitoring and evaluation have gender-specific indicators incorporated in the results framework. However, they only focus on risk mitigation and do not address structural inequalities.

Water

- Impacts of climate change are likely to exacerbate water shortages, increasing competing demands on water usage and conflict over water rights.
- Growing water scarcity and high demand for irrigation water have resulted in night irrigation, putting women-headed households at a disadvantage and increasing gender-based violence.
- Women have the responsibility to meet household water needs, where they usually spend 30% of their time fetching water, and when resources dry up or there is reduced water discharge, they spend 3–4 hours every day meeting the household water needs. Such conditions increase women's drudgery and reduce the time to engage in economic activities.
- There is no dedicated sectoral GESI policy, strategy, or guideline.
- The water sector (drinking and irrigation) policies adopt a quota system to enhance women's participation within institutions at the local level but do not address women's multiple water uses. Since women's use of water is often only linked to domestic use and consumption, women lack legitimate recognition as irrigators in their families. Furthermore, the needs and interests of socially excluded caste groups are often not considered by national policies and programmes.
- At the institutional level, the professional culture supports hegemonic masculine attitudes and



practices, resulting in water management viewed as a technical task to be dealt by technicians and engineers. Such practice undermines organizational commitment towards GESI issues.

Recommendations to ensure gender equality integration across sectors affected by climate change

Strengthening institutional mechanisms for GESI and climate action

- *Ensure provision of trained human resources with GESI-related academic background or experience within ministries. Along with this, roll out GESI strategy with annual appraisal system for the staff, set up gendered outcome monitoring and evaluation, and gender-responsive budgeting for programs and activities.*
- *Develop need-based climate information systems across sectors so that differential needs of women, men, the poor, and marginalized groups are taken*

into account. This requires institutionalizing a system to conduct GESI and climate change-based impact analysis and development of action plans consistent with the targets under the NDCs. In addition, adequate financial and technical resources need to be provided to promote gender-sensitive and gender-responsive practices and innovations.

- *Develop and institutionalize collaboration with agencies, networks, and experts on gender and climate change for technical and financial investments to ensure that the meaningful inclusion of GESI issues in climate-related national documents such as NDCs and NAPs is strengthened across sectors and followed up with implementation/operationalization on the ground.*
- *Recognize and address the institutional culture, values, and norms that perpetuate patriarchy and harmful and discriminatory practices against women; girls; LGBTQI; and socially excluded groups including people with disability, Dalits, ethnic groups, single women, children-headed families, etc. at the workplace and communities, negatively affecting such individuals and groups.*
- *Support women professionals and leaders to realize their potentials by creating an enabling environment, building men's alliances that are supportive as part of the GESI responsive programming. This requires institutions to engage with men by recognizing and strengthening gender champions who are men to address gender issues.*

Building gender-responsive policies in forestry

- The forest sector has revised the GESI strategy and action for the period 2020–2030 and developed a separate chapter on gender and climate change strategy.
- The National Forest Policy 2019 directs all forestry-related government, non-government bodies and the private sector to include 50% women in their respective organizations with leadership responsibilities. In community forest user groups, at least one of the two decision-making positions (chairperson/secretary) is held by a woman.

Building gender-responsive policy and monitoring systems

- *Adopt an intersectionality perspective/framework and gender analysis frameworks to understand the differential needs, priorities, gaps, aspirations, and impacts of climate change on diverse groups of women, men, the poor, and marginalized groups. Women and marginalized groups are currently framed and defined across the sectors and in climate change discourses as vulnerable groups; reframe this to also look at them as active stakeholders and agents of change.*
- *An intersectional approach is critical as gender, political affiliation, geographical location, caste, ethnicity, age, economic status, literacy, and disabilities determine who participates where or at which level.*
- *Develop action plans to integrate GESI in the NDC targets. Such an action plan should outline the objectives, outcomes, and activities which will guide the sector to elevate their programmes in addressing emerging issues in the contexts of transition to the federal system and the changing climate. Further, this would help move beyond numbers to address the structural barriers for achieving gender and social transformative change.*
- *Develop GESI-integrated outcome and output monitoring, evaluation, and learning system to capture gendered outcomes and enhance knowledge management. This should include collection, monitoring, and evaluation of sex- and socially-disaggregated data.*
- *Allocate adequate investments to strengthen qualitative, quantitative, and action research on key and emerging GESI- and climate change-related issues and changing gender and social nuances. As part of this, apply gender responsive budget principle of Nepal government in climate change programming.*

Strengthening capacities of professionals and community members across the federal system

- *Understand the power dynamics between women and men and recognize the different types and layers of power relations and leadership practices within institutions and community groups that hinder the participation and growth of women professionals*

Enhancing capacities for improved knowledge and collective action

- CARE Nepal's SAMARTHYA project helped reduce vulnerabilities and increase adaptive capacities in relation to climate change through the promotion of collective responsibilities and creating opportunities to enhance income among the land-poor women farmers.
- IFAD's High Value Agriculture project engaged women, the poor, and marginalized groups in value chains through business literacy class, poverty inclusion funds, and GESI training for farmers. The approach enhanced their knowledge and awareness on market information.

and community members related to climate change discourses, decision making, and access to resources. This would pave the way for promoting leadership of women and disadvantaged groups.

- *Support in developing comprehensive capacity-building packages for different stakeholders* focused on: a) building technical skills and knowledge related to climate change adaptation of women and marginalized groups; b) developing social skills, knowledge, and participatory approaches of both women and men staffs of sectoral ministries, civil society organizations, and community members; and c) building confidence, self-esteem, and leadership skills of women and marginalized groups.
- *Identify and promote tested women-friendly and climate-smart technologies and practices at the household and farm levels.* This includes recognizing and strengthening indigenous knowledge and practices for adaptation.

This should be done in partnership with technologically specialized government and non-governmental institutions, local resource persons, and cooperatives (preferably women-led cooperatives) to reduce poor and marginalized women's time poverty.

- *Enhance the capacity of the poor and marginalized women to raise their income and employability by linking them with various institutions such as local cooperatives, women-run cooperatives, and micro-enterprises that are already established and successful (e.g. link with the Micro-Enterprise Development Programme for Poverty Alleviation and the Agriculture Research Centre - Pakhribas and their groups and networks).*

ENDNOTES

- i The Nepal Climate Change Policy 2019 lists eight priority sectors: 1) agriculture and food security; 2) forests, biodiversity and watershed conservation; 3) water resources and energy; 4) rural and urban habitats; 5) industry, transport, and physical infrastructure; 6) tourism and natural and cultural heritage; 7) health, drinking water, and sanitation; and 8) disaster risk reduction and management.
- ii Sharma, Shankar Prasad. (2019). Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) implementation in Nepal: A Pathway towards Climate Friendly Development. Clean Energy Nepal.
- iii GoN (2016). The Sixth Periodic Report of Government of Nepal on Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal. MoALMC (2018). Impact of Climate Finance in Agriculture on the Poor. MoALMC and UNDP Kathmandu.
- iv Women hold only around 8%–10% of the total ownership certificate, with an average landholding of less than 0.1 hectares per holding.
- v. Water and Energy Commission, Nepal Electricity Authority, and Hydroelectricity Investment and Development Company Limited

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