



Gender Mainstream and Climate Change

—A case study of Eastern Himalaya, SW Yunnan, China

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Climate change impacts men and women differently due to differences in their traditional roles, societal expectations, and livelihoods. Women, who make up the majority of the developing world's 1.4 billion poor, generally have lower incomes, less access to credit and decision making authority, and limited control over resources, increasing their vulnerability to many climate impacts. The different societal roles and responsibilities of men and women also present different opportunities for incorporating clean energy alternatives into their lives. It is crucial to understand these distinctions in order to successfully integrate climate change into development efforts. Climate change impacts women in many sectors:

- Women produce 60% to 80% of the food in developing countries. More frequent and severe drought, flooding, and pest damage due to climate change is expected to reduce crop yields, which could result in less income and food for the household.
- In many societies women have the primary responsibility for collecting water and firewood. As climate change exacerbates resource scarcity, women and girls may have to travel farther to collect water and firewood, increasing threats to their



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safety, decreasing productivity in other areas like farming, and reducing time available for schooling and child care.

- Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. During and after natural disasters, a woman's role as family caregiver is intensified, potentially leading to exhaustion and illness. Studies have also shown an increase in levels of domestic and sexual violence following disasters.

- Women are already more vulnerable to under nutrition and have less access to medical services than men; climate change can exacerbate this situation. Changing temperatures alter vectors for diseases like malaria, higher sea-surface temperatures are correlated with cholera epidemics, and more frequent droughts and floods will worsen sanitation and hygiene.



Hypothesis

The research on Gender and Climate Change in the Himalayas was initiated as the world's attention turns to changes in climate that may have consequences on natural resources and every aspect of health, food production, economic development, and our general wellbeing. Climate change in the Himalayas, the world's 'third pole', is affecting the lives of millions of people living upstream and downstream. Mountain people's livelihoods are affected by erratic rainfall, increased occurrence of droughts, and changing temperatures. As women and men generally play different roles in ensuring their livelihoods, their lives may be affected differently and they may play different roles in adapting to the changes.

The research aimed to learn how women and men may be affected differently by climate change. What do they do to respond to those stresses? How can we tap on



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mountain women and men's knowledge and capacities to support adaptation strategies to climate change? In brief, both women and men are affected by climate change impacts but are vulnerable in different ways. They also both play an essential role in adapting to their changing environment; however, women's role and capacities are often overlooked. Mechanisms to support adaptation strategies must be gender sensitive in order to address the potentially differential needs of women and men and tap their respective knowledge and skills to make those strategies efficient and sustainable.



Research area

Himalaya Mountain covers East from northeast of Yunnan Province, China, west to the north of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is one of the world's biodiversity hotspot regions, simultaneously is also the cultural multiplicity, and numerous mountain nationalities live in here. In recent years, the climate change and its impacts have become increasingly obvious that these affect not only confined to the local region, because this region is the birthplace and the upper reaches of the major Asian rivers (Mekong, the Salween and the Yangtze River, etc.) , so the impacts have spread to the lower reaches of the region. The climate change of Himalayan region has gradually become the world's hot issues of common concerns, some relevant researches and projects have been undertaken, but have greater limitations.

In the eastern Himalayan regions in Yunnan Province, it is also facing various impacts brought by climate change. From the perspectives of local Tibetan women, we will discuss the impacts of climate change on gender, agro-pastoralist livelihood, biodiversity resource and local knowledge.



Methods

- Gender disaggregated data
- Gender budgeting
- Gender impact assessment
- Gender equality audit



Results and Discussion

1. Women and men are vulnerable in different ways to disasters and the impacts of climate change.

The negative effects of climate change have definitely affected both women and men, especially those living in poverty in developing countries. However, the women are affected more adversely by disasters and the impacts of climate change due to their essential roles in agricultural and household matters. When the men of households leave for wage labour and employment, the women must assume more responsibilities in addition to their traditional socioeconomic and cultural roles.

As the climate changes, women are forced to go further for drinking water as water resources dry up and further to collect wood. Millions of people in areas suffering food scarcity may have to give up traditional crops, which could lead to social upheaval, mass migration, and conflict over water resources. These events could further increase the vulnerability of women to poverty and various forms of violence. There is a need for more research backed by clear evidence of the greater effect of climate change on women. Although a range of methodological tool kits exist to describe how to assess vulnerability and the adaptive capacity of people to climate change, none specifically focuses on the gender dimension of climate change.



2. Women's and men's assets – knowledge, skills, and capacities – can contribute to adaptation strategies.

The assets for adaptation to climate change are based on the understanding that the individual or collective has about their immediate environment and the potential impact the specific change would have.

For example, 'local' or 'traditional' knowledge is often extremely detailed and strong among remote, insular, or isolated communities; it is also crucial and critical for the sustenance and livelihood security of such remote communities. Mountain women have the knowledge to produce and preserve food for cold weather and to sustain life under such harsh conditions, but they are now searching for alternatives to increase their food security. They have the knowledge of agricultural crops, wild edibles, useful forest resources, seed selection and storage, weeds and weed management.

3. Social and economic factors may hinder women's and men's capacity to adapt to climate change impacts in the Himalayas.

Climate changes are affecting human lives physically, psychologically, socioeconomically, and culturally due to the depletion of local sources of livelihood. Other factors include rapid population growth, poverty, improper use of natural resources, and unplanned and unsustainable development practices that have contributed to escalating the magnitude of risks. This stress on livelihoods erodes family stability and results in domestic violence and criminal offences which are mostly committed against women or other vulnerable people.

The cultural norms and values of the Hindu Kush Himalayan regions have a strong influence on the capacities of women and men to adapt to climate change. As men are more able to move for employment and livelihoods, there has been a 'feminisation of agriculture' that has resulted in a 'feminisation of poverty' over the years.

As transformations take place, women's knowledge and skills are sometimes overlooked. It is essential, however, to safeguard, conserve, and build upon this rich knowledge base if effective adaptation strategies are to be formulated.

Gender issues in water resources are also contentious, and the impacts of climate change will no doubt exacerbate these issues. The adaptation capacity in water resources will only be achieved through a fully participatory approach at all levels, which includes women.



Conclusion

1. Specific measures to support mountain people's capacity to adapt to impacts.

- Building awareness of the impacts of climate change in their daily lives.
- Investing in renewable technologies, like solar energy, and wind energy while discouraging activities that lead to deforestation.
- Implementing drudgery reduction programmes to reduce the workload of women and children by providing subsidies for appropriate technology.
- Empowering women in decision making processes.
- Developing Early Warning systems for disasters.
- Protecting indigenous traditional knowledge that the farmers are applying in the changed climatic condition for food and agriculture.
- Providing access to financial services and income generating activities in the communities in remote mountains.
- Adding value to the mountain niche products, such as NTFP species, if appropriate market accesses is explored.
- Promoting/building the alliances of mountain women and men to have collective strength to better communicate their problems and strengths to the development organizations including government.

2. Actions of governmental institutions to support climate change adaptation efficiently.

- Gender must be mainstreamed in all strategies and programmes aiming to support mountain people's resilience to climate change, especially by promoting the participation of women in decision making at all levels – national to local.
- Government has an important role in coordinating the efforts of other organisations to mainstream gender in all climate change related efforts and



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development interventions, and making the working environment gender friendly through support from gender experts.

- The role of international institutions is important to enhance the capacity of governments to respond to people's issues.
- Since men and women have different knowledge and concerns about the use and management of mountain natural resources, the policy making process should involve men and women who represent different disciplines, experience, and position.

In conclusion, the knowledge and skills of women and men must be tapped in order to address their respective needs and to make mechanisms to support adaptation strategies efficient and sustainable.



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