

Impact of Climate Change on Livelihood of Nepalese Women



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Introduction

Climate change is a global issue and a major problem for Nepal. Globally, Nepal is ranked 4th in terms of vulnerability to climate change. Seasonal and unseasonal heavy rains across the landscape of Nepal bring landslides and floods, leaving behind destruction of costly government infrastructure, private homes and vast areas of farmland and forest. In German Watch's Climate Risk Index 2020 edition, Nepal was ranked as the 9th hardest-hit nation by climate calamities during the period 1999 to 2018. Nepal has also been ranked 4th, 11th and 30th with regard to relative vulnerability to climate change, earthquake and flood hazards respectively. (https://www.adrc.asia/countryreport/NPL/2011/FY2011B_NPL_CR.pdf) The Economic Vulnerability Report also states that Nepal exhibits the largest losses due to exposure caused by climate change. (<http://drrportal.gov.np/risk-profile-of-nepal>).

The Government of Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology found that the average annual maximum temperature increased by 0.056 °C per year, during the period between 1971 to 2014. A national-level perception-based survey on climate change reported that locals accurately perceived the shifts in temperature. Data reveals that more than 80 percent of property loss due to disasters is attributable to water-related climate hazards, specifically floods, landslides and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs). Altogether 14 glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) occurred between 1935 and 1991. In total, 21 GLOFs have been identified as being potentially dangerous at present. The floods of 2018 spread across the foothills of the Himalayas caused huge landslides destroying tens of thousands of houses, vast areas of farmland, roads with losses amounting to US\$600 million. Scientists confirm that temperature rise now cause malaria and dengue in the Himalayan areas. Science has shown climate change caused by human behavior is behind this entire climate hazard which heightens the vulnerability of the communities.

Gender also affects climate change impacts and disasters differentially. Hazardous situations caused by climate change further exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities which are compounded by variables such as poverty, racism, ethnic minority, homelessness, statelessness and disabilities. As a result of these

inequalities, girls and women are more exposed to risks and loss to livelihoods caused by disaster as they are less able to adapt to changes in climatic condition. Adaption to changes depends upon access to resources such as food, water, agriculture inputs, technologies, credit, land, education, social protection, health services and employment opportunities which women already have less access due to prevailing patriarchy.

Nepal's National Adaptation Plan process

In 2010, the Government of Nepal approved the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) and identified major integrated projects as the urgent and immediate national adaptation priority. They are:

- Promoting community-based adaptation through integrated management of agriculture, water, forest and biodiversity sector,
- Building and enhancing adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities through improved system and access to services related to agriculture development,
- Community-based disaster management for facilitating climate adaptation,
- GLOF monitoring and disaster risk reduction, and forest and ecosystem management for supporting climate-led adaptation innovations,
- Adapting to climate challenges in public health and ecosystem management, and
- Empowering vulnerable communities through sustainable management of water resource and clean energy support and promoting climate smart urban settlement.

Nepal launched its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process in September 2015 with two key objectives: i) to improve resilience and; ii) to increase adaptive capacity to reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts. The government is in the process of integrating adaptation plans into policies, programmes and development strategies in all sectors and levels of government. These strategies are community based adaptation plans for poor and vulnerable communities who are wholly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. However, the gender fine tuning of these plans require constant review and revision. The adaptation plans must take into account the fact that the women from low-income backgrounds face barriers in accessing education and vocational training that limit their employment options. Limited access to financial resources and credit impedes women's ability to start businesses or invest in income-generating activities.

Inadequate non-agricultural job opportunities in rural areas limit women's ability to diversify their income sources. Limited access to affordable childcare and social support services can further hinder women's ability to work outside the farm sector. Discrimination in the labor market can result in lower wages and limited career advancement for women. A prime example of this is the fact that Nepali women are traditionally paid less in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors despite rules of contrary.

Nepali society is pre-dominantly patriarchal which is further complicated by the caste system. Nepali women need to overcome both these barriers to be able to realize their potentialities as human being. Despite, the Constitution of Nepal 2016 guaranteeing women equal political and economic rights, the overarching societal and administrative changes are yet to visibly noted. With this as a backdrop, climate change further exacerbates women's psychological, social and economical vulnerabilities. However, in order for Nepal to achieve all its development goals including commitments to international conventions, treaties

and development plans such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it needs to ensure that climate change plans are gender sensitive.

Factors affecting Womens' Livelihood in Nepal

Multidimensional poverty in Nepal affects 28.6 percent of Nepal's population. As the majority of population depend on agriculture and forestry for livelihood, thus climate change has huge impacts of very survival and wellbeing (<https://jvs-nwp.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Number-56.pdf>). The livelihoods of more than 80% of the local people of hilly region are heavily dependent on climate sensitive areas such as agriculture, forest and livestock and on other natural resources such as water and irrigation. Women are involved in labor-intensive agricultural activities for food production and household income generation.

A large number of Nepalese men migrate to different countries seeking employment leaving behind women to head the households and take care of older and younger generations. The absence of male members during disasters caused by climate change further makes these households more vulnerable to climate change and loss in lives and livelihoods. Some clearly recorded impacts of climate change are as follows:

- Difficulties in transportation of farm produced and handicraft products to markets due to existing difficult terrain and loss of built infrastructure (road and bridge) due to climate change.
- Reduced agricultural productivity due to harsh climates and limited arable land.
- Higher vulnerability to domestic violence, exploitative employment (including trafficking) due to loss of assets (home and hearth, livestock, farmland) and livelihoods due to disasters caused by climate change.
- Food insecurity affects women's nutrition and overall well-being, potentially leading to long-term health issues. Similarly, reduced income results in poor access to healthcare and education for women families.

Recommendations in CCDR

Country Climate and Development Report (CCDR) for Nepal outlines four priority system transitions that are fundamental to addressing the risks that climate change poses to Nepal while providing opportunities for improving the quality and sustainability of economic development:

- Taking an Integrated approach to water, agriculture, and forests;
- Harnessing Nepal's significant hydropower opportunities and energy transition;
- Managing urbanization and environmental quality to build resilience and improve health;
- Strengthening Nepal's low-carbon, resilient connectivity—particularly roads—to improve the country's growth and services.

Nepal's CCDR report also outlines three key enabling themes to help a greener future for Nepal:

- Strengthening the resilience of people and community assets through early warning systems, shock-responsive safety nets, and access to quality skills training;
- Embedding disaster risk management at all tiers of government and across all sectors;
- Prioritizing funding needs by convening and coordinating financing for climate action.

All these four priority system transitions recommended by the CCDD along with the three key enabling themes to help a greener future for Nepal require a close review and rethink from the perspective of gender, diversity and inclusion. A start has already been made in this direction through initiatives such as the following:

- Nepal's policies and plans to improve women's livelihoods and promote gender equality, vulnerabilities of women and marginalized groups. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/>
- The Nepal Climate Change Policy 2019 aims to mainstream GESI in adaptation and mitigation programs across the eight sectors through guidelines and working policies.
- Sustainable Income generating opportunities through climate smart farming practices, soil conservation and water management.
- Additional required initiative is to increase women's access to new technologies for herbs processing and improvements in traditional medicines and access to new markets for goods produces by them.

In conclusion, Nepal contributes less than 1% to climate change. Nepal is also committed to conserving almost 40% of its landscape as reserves and national parks. However, the people of Nepal are paying a heavy price for green house gases and pollutants which has caused climate change, Therefore Nepal expects solidarity and increase access to resources such as (Green climate change fund, loss and damage fund) with the support and cooperation of organizations such as FWEAP and Governments of the countries whose representatives are sitting around this table.