



CHAPTER 14 BRIEF

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS: PERSISTENT GENDER AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN DEVELOPMENT



Climate change and extreme weather events in combination with socioeconomic processes have an especially severe impact on people living in remote mountain areas of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH). However, little is known about how changes in climate will impact the lives, livelihoods, and resources of diverse communities in the region. Given the diversity of people based on caste, class, gender and ethnicity, the impacts of climate change will not be the same for all.

This chapter highlights intersections between gender and social factors through case studies that demonstrate the complex workings of gender relations in the context of climate change in the HKH. Specifically, these case studies highlight the unique, embodied experiences of climate change and how gender and social power relations affect climate interventions.

KEY FINDINGS

- Policies and responses in Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) countries overlook the multiple forms of oppression and exclusion that women face.
- Existing laws and policies do not support the multiple ways in which women negotiate their roles in households, communities, and the market.
- Women do not have commensurate decision-making rights or control over resources despite shouldering both productive and reproductive workloads and responsibilities.

POLICY MESSAGES

- Policies that support adaptation to climate change will not succeed unless they consider gender and how it interacts with other factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, and geography, which will require disaggregated data.
- Policies to improve women's participation in decision making and climate governance must go beyond numbers and quotas to create mechanisms that ensure empowerment and promote women's rights and agency.
- All levels of government must allocate resources — financial and human — for gender responsive interventions at scale and adopt clear accountability mechanisms, such as gender budgeting, to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality enshrined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LINKS TO





OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

THE GENDERED RHETORIC OF 'FEMINIZATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES'

As more men migrate in search of livelihood options, rural women assume a disproportionate share of responsibilities — agricultural labour, reproductive work, and other work that supports community welfare, as well as responsibilities in the public sphere — giving rise to a gendered rhetoric of 'feminisation of responsibilities'. Within this, women may be assigned new 'caring' roles as 'climate agents', expected to adapt to climate change and cushion its adverse effects on their households and communities, adding climate change adaptation to the already long list of women's caring roles. There is often little attention to gendered divisions of labour and how these vary across socio-political and socio-ecological contexts, and assumptions are made, especially of what women do, and can do, in policy and practice.

Women across socioeconomic categories are disproportionately affected by inequalities in the distribution of rights, assets, resources, and power. Gender mainstreaming policies have applied the concept of gender narrowly and without differentiation.



AVAILABLE NATIONAL DATA ON WOMEN IN HKH COUNTRIES DOES NOT REFLECT THE RELATIONS OF INEQUALITY, HIERARCHY, INCLUSION, AND EXCLUSION

Gender differences intersect with other dimensions of social and geographical differentiation. Class, caste, ethnicity, and age intersect with different geographical and sociocultural settings such as upstream, midstream, and downstream communities in mountain contexts to produce differential access to resources. Women and men are thus marked by multiple, coexisting identities that create overlapping — and often conflicting — relations of inequality and hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion. However, the available national data on women in HKH countries does not reflect this diversity and intersectionality, because they rely on aggregates.

THE SHIFT IN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S RESPONSIBILITIES HAS NOT BEEN MATCHED BY A CORRESPONDING SHIFT IN POLICIES AND ATTITUDES ABOUT GENDER

There are continued assumptions made around a single homogenous class of 'mountain' women even though gender inequalities are more complex with contextual political and economic situations intersecting with class, caste, religion, age, and ethnicity. Notions of gender are simplified in policy making, and reduced to the inclusion of some "poor women". This simplistic and apolitical interpretation and way of integrating gender into climate interventions and policies poses large problems, which manifests in the assumption that engaging women on projects is taking care of women's needs and will lead to women's empowerment.

The linear, techno-managerial approach to climate governance, with simplistic one-size-fits-all solutions and 'quick fixes' for gender equality and women's empowerment, fail to recognize the complexity of women's and men's realities.

POLICYMAKING INCORRECTLY FOCUSES ON NUMBERS AND QUOTAS AS MEASURES OF CHANGE AND PROGRESS, RATHER THAN ON THE STRUCTURAL ISSUES OF INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Policies and programmes have long focused on the functional rather than the structural aspects of gender relations. Gender mainstreaming policies have applied the concept of gender narrowly, and without further differentiation of women's needs, interests, emotions, identities, and roles. There is the paradoxical positioning of homogenous categories of "mountain women" as being both "vulnerable victims" of climate change as well as "formidable champions" of climate adaptation. This has led to extreme approaches in policies: from a welfare approach in which women are taken as passive beneficiaries to one where they are seen as "fixers" of environmental problems based on assumptions about their "volunteer" time in projects as "natural care-givers". This dichotomization of women into one of two identities creates policymaking focus on numbers and quotas as measures of change and progress, rather than on the structural issues of inequality and discrimination.

PROGRAMMES THAT FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFTEN DO NOT ADDRESS THE BIGGER ISSUES LIKE UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS, EQUAL WAGES AND SHARING WORK RESPONSIBILITIES

While there are economic programmes which do include women, that involvement is generally driven by aims of economic efficiency rather than aims of gender equality. While the pursuit of economic efficiency can offer women economic opportunities, it does not fully address their unequal power relations with men, vis-à-vis equal wages for equal work, or the sharing of domestic work responsibilities.

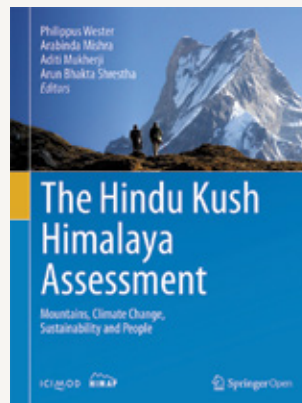


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PROGRESSIVE POLICIES NEED TO ADDRESS THE 'MASCULINE' WORKING CULTURE

Men continue to be key actors in environmental science, policy, and intervention across the HKH and the manner in which masculinity mediates environmental science, policy, and governance is important to know and address. Several fields in environmental governance have been qualified by feminist scholars as 'masculine'; for example, male professionals have traditionally dominated the fields of engineering and technology. The 'masculinity' of professional cultures in natural resources management is considered a scale challenge in environmental governance and is reason for concern in the HKH. It leads to a structural mismatch between actual realities in the field and expectations and administrative realities at the policy level. This means that complex problems in the field, such as gender inequities in irrigation, are conceptualized as technical or engineering problems, making current measures to bridge the gap between field and policy levels fall short of expectations.



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