

A missed opportunity for transformation?  
– An analysis of climate change discourse  
and adaptation strategy in Nepal.

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## Objective:

Take stock of the existing debates in climate change and adaptation and critically examine the official climate change policies and discourse in Nepal.

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## Possible questions:

- Does the existing discourse impede imaginaries to pursue more radical but necessary socio-political and cultural change as effective adaptation measures?
- Do current adaptation measures potentially perpetuate the dominant system and thus worsen vulnerabilities of populations in the long run?



## Documents

- Climate Resilient Planning
- National Climate Change Policy

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- National Adaptation Plans of Action (NAPA) to Climate Change
- Nepal Climate Change Support Program
- National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action
- Nepal Second National Communication to UNFCCC
- Khumbu Local Adaptation Plans for Action

# International Climate Negotiation

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- Responsibility Discourse
- Transition Discourse
- Vulnerability Discourse

(Audet, 2012)

Global environmental justice movements



# Climate Justice Discourse in Nepal

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- Strong Vulnerability Discourse

“Despite having only 0.4 percent of the total global population and being responsible for only 0.025 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions in the world, Nepal will be affected disproportionately, especially from increasing atmospheric temperature.” (CCP)

- Actively Constructed:

- Kalapathar Declaration in the Himalaya

- Constantly raising the issues of climate change impacts on mountainous countries and LDCs (NCCSP)

- To explicitly justify additional funding support

- “To improve the living standard of people by maximum utilization of the opportunities created from the climate change-related conventions, protocols and agreements” (pg. 6, CCP)

- Strong Transition Discourse

- “Low carbon development and climate resilience” (pg. 6)
  - “Technology development, transfer and utilization” (pg. 8).
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- A strong advocacy for renewable energy and technology transfer

- “Annex I country parties have an obligation to support and facilitate development and transfer of environment-friendly technologies to Non-annex I Country”(SNC)

- Aligns closely with Nepal’s self-interest as a mountainous landlocked country heavily dependent on neighboring India in fossil fuel energy supply.

- “...it (Nepal) must reduce its dependency on unsustainable and expensive fossil fuel, which costs Nepal a significant share of its revenue, and seek self-reliance by promoting renewable sources of energy for fuel-sustainable development” (pg.27, CRP).



# Where is “justice”?

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- Justice was mentioned once (while 159 vulnerabilities were found)
  - Stark difference internally (Civil war, constitution-building) and externally
- Very little responsibility discourse
  - “Increased rate of greenhouse gas emissions in spite of substantial reduction commitment from developed countries” (NAPA)

# Political Ecology Approach to CC

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In place of unitary communities struggling to adapt to external stresses, local resource management and vulnerability were built upon power differentials of class, gender, caste and ethnicity (Mosse, 2007).



# “Vulnerability” in Nepali Policy

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- Defined by sectors and geographic areas.
- Follows the vulnerability assessment framework of the IPCC: Overlaying climate risk/exposure maps, sensitivity (main sectors), and adaptive capacity (HDI, food security)
- A static and unitary understanding of vulnerability, rather than a dynamic process resulting from social interaction and power relations.
- Outcome Vulnerability instead of Contextual Vulnerability

# Power relations of different groups

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- “Power relations arise between the sexes, caste and gender roles in livelihood generation...women have less influence in decision making, less secure resource rights and are more likely to experience poverty” (pg. 134, SNC).
- Indigenous groups namely Majhi, Rautes, Chepang, Satar and those dependent on herbs and non-forest timber products are specifically mentioned as disproportionately vulnerable.
- Dalits, another marginalized groups in the caste system, are very briefly mentioned once in three documents, without explanation



# Anthropological Approach to CC

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- Adaptation refers to changes in **belief and/or behavior** in response to changing circumstances to improve the conditions of existence, including a culturally meaningful life. (Oliver-Smith, 2016)
- People do not just adapt to natural features such as land or water; but also to human institutions such economics, governments (Birkmann, 2011).
- CC experienced together with many other changes (Rudiak-Gould, 2013; Connell, 2015; Crate and Nuttall, 2016; Jacka, 2016).

# Anthropological Approach to CC

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- CC might or might not exacerbate pre-existing stressors, such as water, health and food security issues (Barnes, 2015; Hans and Singer, 2009; Lynn et.al., 2014; Nading,2014),
- Focusing on CC fails to address existing systemic social vulnerability. People may be adapting more to (thus reinforcing) systemic vulnerability than to CC itself (Fiske et al., 2014).
- Recognition of local knowledge (Fiske et al., 2014).
- Emotion and Agency (Rudiak-Gold, 2013; Hermann and Kempf, 2014; Hermann, 2017).



# “Adaptation” in Nepali Policy

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- “Adoption of effective measures to address adverse impacts of climate change through technology development and transfer, public awareness raising, capacity building and access to financial resources” (pg. 5, CCP).
- A technical and financial matter, with indicators such as how many receive trainings (what about those who don't?)
- Needs, actions or options, which could be identified, prioritized and implemented, rather than a long-term socio-political process involving belief and behavior change

# Institutions and Participations

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- Climate change adaptation in Nepal also concern development of new institutions, or restructuring of existing ones, but not whether marginalized groups could easily adapt to their working, and whether they themselves could constitute the problem of inaccessibility to services and vulnerabilities of people.
- The language of people-centric, participatory, inclusive, bottom-up planning masks these institutional gaps in implementation.



# Other Changes Along CC

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- Annex 4 in the NAPA which enlists local perceptions of climate change impact also highlights socio-cultural issues such as increased mental stress and workload, urban migration, conflict over natural resources, etc., providing a more complex picture of local realities.
- However, it is not clear that such information is systematically informing a predominantly technocratic framework of CC.

# Adaptation and Development

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- Direct assumption of compatibility between climate change adaptation and national development framework.
- Cannon and Muller-Mahn (2010) posed the question -- do development processes lead to a parallel process of adaptation to climate change, or are they a part of the problem?
- Much of this “development” has been shown to increase people’s exposure to hazards and add to the vulnerability of the poor (who may then also be forced to degrade the environment to survive) (Wisner et al. 2004; UNDP 2004).



# Local Knowledge

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- The importance of local knowledge lie on its utility and transferability, rather than as the means to understand the deeper socio-cultural beliefs and institutions at the local level for better adaptation strategy.
- “Collecting, publishing, disseminating and utilizing climate adaptation and adverse impact mitigation-related traditional and local knowledge, skills, practices, and technologies” (pg. 8, CCP)
- “Puja” in Khumbu LAPA

# Conclusion

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- A heavily technocratic approach with little socio-cultural considerations.
- A lack of alternative imaginaries different from the status quo – Nepal is framed as ‘vulnerable’, positioning themselves as lack of agency for transformation
- Instead, Nepal’s agency is used in getting more fund to do whatever they have been doing, or whatever is asked by international donors.
- International framing triumph over local imaginaries – lack of acknowledgement and lessons of local resilience and experience in difficult geographical terrains, civil war, multiple disasters, etc.



Thank you.

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