



Environmental Justice, Gender Parity, And Climate Change Adaptation In The Himalayan Region

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Abstract:

The Himalayan regions have been most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in recent years. In this region, environmental justice, gender parity, and climate change adaptation are intertwined challenges. Women often face greater vulnerability to climate change impacts and are less likely to have access to resources needed for adaptation, hindering their ability to build resilience. The impacts of climate change are leading to severe consequences such as scarcity of resources, food insecurity and gender inequalities. Women, often bearing the brunt of climate change-related impacts due to their roles in resource management and subsistence livelihoods and face increased vulnerability and lack access to decision-making and resources, hindering their ability to adapt to changing conditions. Addressing this requires a holistic approach that integrates gender concerns into climate change policies, empowers women, and promotes equitable resource management. In this paper, the author examines environmental justice from gender perspectives and adaptation in the prevailing climate change scenario.

Key Words: Climate Change, environmental justice, gender inequality, and resource management

Introduction:

Gender equality and the role of women in resource conservation are gaining momentum worldwide as a part of achieving sustainable development goals for a better future. There is great hope and potential for gender transformative change for environmental justice. Gender parity can help create more inclusive and sustainable solutions by considering the different needs, rules, and capacities of both men and women. The Himalayan region is highly vulnerable to climate change, with impacts like glacial melting, changing rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of natural disasters. These impacts disproportionately affect marginalized communities, particularly women, due to their dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods and the pre-existing inequalities they face. Despite their exposure to environmental problems, women tend to be underrepresented in discussions and decision-making about the environment and the effects of climate

change in their communities. The marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. Loss of diversity is the price paid in the patriarchal model of progress which pushes inexorably towards monocultures' uniformity and homogeneity (Shiva, 1988).

Men and women are affected differently by change, because they have different roles in society. Although both are vulnerable to climate change, the causes of their vulnerability, and their experience of it, are different, along with their capacity to cope and adapt. Gender inequality, manifested as limited access to resources and information, and exclusion from decision making is among the factors that limit women's capacity to cope with the changing environment.

Mountain women play many roles, as farmers, natural resource managers, caregivers, and household managers to name a few. Wherever they live, mountain women are constantly coping with the heavy burden of household chores combined with farm production and livestock raising. Moreover, the mountain landscape, with its steep and fragile slopes, makes collection and carrying of water, fuelwood, and fodder even more difficult and dangerous. This burden takes a toll on the health of mountain women. But because as women they are generally less able to voice their needs, they rarely access the technologies and other essential resources that would reduce their drudgery and build their resilience to environmental changes. Nevertheless, Himalayan women hold a specific and rich knowledge and possess a variety of skills for maximising the use of the natural resources provided by the fragile mountain ecosystems and in relation to farming practices. Their knowledge also contributes to the survival and the care of their families and to their ability to adapt in extreme situations such as conflict, natural disasters, and displacement. If their role were fairly acknowledged, their experience could be an important asset for mountain communities in adapting to the new challenges presented by climate change impacts.

Environmental justice can be ensured by increased wellbeing of mountain communities and equal sharing of development and decision-making benefits among both man and woman. Integrating gender perspectives in climate policies and ensuring women's participation in decision-making are crucial for effective and equitable adaptation strategies.

Environmental Justice:

The Himalayan region is highly vulnerable to climate change, with impacts like glacial melting, changing rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of natural disasters. These impacts disproportionately affect marginalized communities, particularly women, due to their dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods and the pre-existing inequalities they face. Environmental justice seeks to address the inequitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits, ensuring that marginalized communities are not left behind in climate adaptation efforts.

However, even today, despite their daily interaction with and dependence on natural resources, women have less access to and control over them than men. The under-acknowledgement of women's roles in natural resource management has not only led to an undervaluation of the domestic sphere and unpaid work, but also an underestimation of the economic and societal benefits that women provide to the environmental

sector. Encouraging women's fair and equitable direct access to, benefits from, and governance of natural resources is a globally agreed priority and the subject of many national and international mandates. Not only does women's equitable participation and representation empower women and uphold commitments to gender equality and women empowerment, but it makes for better development and sustainability outcomes.

Gender Parity and Gendered Vulnerabilities:

Climate change can worsen pre-existing social and gender inequalities, widening existing gender gaps and compounding issues of food insecurity and poverty. Women are often left behind when men migrate for work, increasing their responsibility for household and agricultural work while facing security issues and lacking resources

Women in the Himalayas often face barriers to land ownership, access to resources, and participation in decision-making processes related to climate change. Traditional gender roles can exacerbate vulnerability, as women may bear the brunt of increased workload due to resource scarcity and climate-related disasters.

Integrating gender perspectives in climate policies means recognizing women's unique roles as farmers, natural resource managers, and community leaders, and ensuring their participation in planning and implementing adaptation strategies.

Climate Change Adaptation:

Climate change in the Himalayas, including increased temperature, altered rainfall patterns, and glacier melt, has a direct impact on livelihoods and resource availability. These changes disproportionately affect women due to their role in agriculture, resource management, and household work.

Effective climate adaptation in the Himalayan region requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses both environmental and social inequalities. This includes implementing climate-smart agricultural practices, promoting livelihood diversification, and investing in infrastructure development that considers the needs of all communities.

By ensuring that adaptation strategies are inclusive and equitable, they can enhance the resilience of the region and empower marginalized communities, including women, to build a more sustainable future.

Importance of Women's Knowledge and Connection with Nature:

Women in the Himalayan region possess vital traditional knowledge and skills related to natural resource management and adaptation strategies. Ignoring this knowledge can hinder effective climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Women manage natural resources on a daily basis in their various roles, including as farmers, seafood harvesters, and household providers, and therefore carry unique and critically important knowledge about the environment (FAO, 2014, 2013, & 2011). Typically, women are responsible for subsistence food harvesting, e.g., growing crops, collecting edible forest plants or gleaning near shore for shellfish (FAO, 2014, 2013, and 2011). Women also provide other services for the family, such as collecting fuel wood and

water, for which rural girls and women walk substantial distances in sometimes unsafe conditions (FAO, 2014).

However, even today, despite their daily interaction with and dependence on natural resources, women have less access to and control over them than men. The under-acknowledgement of women's roles in natural resource management has not only led to an undervaluation of the domestic sphere and unpaid work, but also and underestimation of the economic and societal benefits that women provide to the environmental sector. Encouraging women's fair and equitable direct access to, benefits from, and governance of natural resources, is a globally agreed priority and the subject of many national and international mandates. Not only does women's equitable participation and representation empower women and uphold commitments to gender equality and women empowerment, but it makes for better development and sustainability outcomes. Moreover, family and community livelihood are positively affected when women have their own resources and hold decision-making authority regarding those resources.

Impacts of Climate Change:

Climate change in the Himalayas, including increased temperature, altered rainfall patterns, and glacier melt, has a direct impact on livelihoods and resource availability. These changes disproportionately affect women due to their role in agriculture, resource management, and household work.

The Himalayan region is highly vulnerable to climate change, with increased frequencies of extreme weather events like landslides and floods. These events disproportionately affect communities dependent on natural resources for livelihoods, leading to economic hardship and displacement.

Mountain communities, particularly women, rely heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods, including agriculture, livestock, and forest products. Climate change impacts these resources, making it harder for women to support their families.

- **Displacement and Migration:**

Climate-induced changes can lead to the displacement of the younger masses and migration from mountain regions for better livelihood opportunities, impacting livelihoods and social structures. Climate change-induced natural disasters and resource scarcity can displace women and their families, leading to the loss of their homes and livelihoods.

- **Environmental Degradation:**

Deforestation, mining, and infrastructure development in the Himalayas can further exacerbate environmental challenges, impacting water resources, biodiversity, and the overall ecosystem.

- **Increased workload and health risks:**

Climate change leads to crop failures and reduced water availability, forcing women to work longer hours for household needs and to find alternative livelihoods.

Increased temperatures and the spread of vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue, as well as the impact of air pollution, disproportionately affect women's health, particularly during pregnancy.

- **Decline of traditional indigenous knowledge:**

Changes in farming practices and resource access can lead to the loss of traditional indigenous knowledge and skills held by women, particularly in indigenous communities. Women are always the protector of high-quality seeds.

- **Increased Burden and undervaluation of Women's work:**

Women are often shouldering the burden of climate change adaptation, including managing households, securing livelihoods, and providing care for family members. Gender-based norms and societal constraints limit women's ability to adapt to climate change, access resources, and participate in decision-making processes. Women's contributions to sustainable livelihoods and resource management are often undervalued, leading to their exclusion from decision-making processes.

- **Reduced access to resources and decision-making:**

Women in the Himalayas often have limited access to land, technology, and information, hindering their ability to adapt to climate change and participate in decision-making processes.

- **Changes in gender dynamics:**

Climate change can lead to shifts in gender roles and power dynamics, with women facing increased pressures to adapt to new situations and potentially losing their traditional roles and status.

Addressing the Challenge with Holistic Approach:

Achieving environmental justice and gender parity in the Himalayas requires acknowledging and addressing existing power imbalances and implementing policies that promote women's empowerment and participation in decision-making related to environmental issues. This includes ensuring women's equal access to resources, technologies, and information, as well as their involvement in community-based adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Addressing environmental justice and gender parity in the Himalayan Region requires a comprehensive approach that integrates gender concerns into all aspects of climate change policies and practices. This includes empowering women, promoting equitable resource management, and ensuring access to education and opportunities.

Following are few suggestions to address the issue:

- **Empowerment Initiatives for women:**

There should be greater support for women's access to education, training, and resources, enabling them to participate in decision-making and lead climate adaptation efforts.

Several initiatives are underway to empower women in the Himalayan region, including those focused on microenterprises, saving and credit groups, and disaster preparedness. These initiatives aim to enhance women's economic independence and leadership in addressing climate change and other environmental challenges.

Environmental justice and gender parity are intertwined in the Himalayan region, where climate change disproportionately impacts women due to limited access to resources and decision-making power. This vulnerability is exacerbated by pre-existing social inequalities, making women more dependent on natural resources for livelihoods and more susceptible to climate-related hazards.

- **Policy Integration and Governance:**

Climate change policies and programs should be designed with a gender perspective, ensuring that they meet the specific needs and priorities of women.

Existing laws and policies often fail to adequately address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, hindering their ability to participate in decision-making and accessing resources.

- **Capacity Building and Community-Based Approaches for Resource Management:**

Invest in capacity-building initiatives that strengthen women's leadership and ability to respond to climate change challenges. Community-based initiatives that empower local communities, including women, to develop and implement their own climate adaptation strategies for a better future.

By addressing environmental justice and gender parity in the Himalayan region, it's possible to build more resilient and equitable communities that can withstand the impacts of climate change. Equitable access to and control over natural resources, ensuring that women have the means to sustain their livelihoods and adapt to climate change impacts.

- **Sustainable Livelihoods through Community Based Adaptation:**

Promoting sustainable livelihood options that diversify income sources and reduce dependence on climate-vulnerable sectors is essential for building resilient communities. Supporting community-based adaptation initiatives that involve women in all stages of planning and implementation is crucial for ensuring successful and equitable outcomes.

In essence, addressing environmental justice and gender parity in the Himalayan region requires a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of these issues and prioritizes the needs of women in

climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. Supporting women's sustainable livelihoods and promoting diversification of income sources can help them cope with the impacts of climate change.

In the Himalayan region, gender parity and environmental justice are intertwined, with women disproportionately impacted by climate change and environmental degradation due to existing inequalities. This vulnerability stems from factors like limited access to resources, decision-making power, and information, along with increased workloads related to climate change impacts like water scarcity and food insecurity.

Environmental justice in this context refers to the equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of environmental protection and resource management. Women, particularly those from marginalized communities, are often excluded from decision-making processes related to environmental issues, leaving them vulnerable to the negative impacts of resource extraction, development projects, and climate change.

Conclusion:

Empowering women through education, access to resources, and participation in decision-making processes is crucial for building resilience to climate change.

Climate-resilient development strategies must prioritize gender equality and address the unique needs of women in the Himalayas.

There is so much work to be done, and a need for research on the specific outcomes that climate change is likely to bring to Himalayan communities. In the Himalayas, we believe that environmental justice requires recognition of the largely unacknowledged yet productive livelihood contributions of mountain women. Research and policy collaboration with local institutions will also be important to expanding forms of social capital and networks of support, in the face of livelihood uncertainty and ecological change. For researchers, increased dissemination of climate-related information and relevant research findings to all affected communities for effective dissemination of information.

Environmental Justice, biodiversity conservation and the role of women and her huge wealth of indigenous knowledge, we need to keep this in mind that, while biological resources have social, ethical, cultural and economic values it is the economic values that must be demonstrated to compete for the attention of government decision makers to consider the contribution of the women beyond tokenism.

Keeping these kinds of situations aside, it is evident that in any given scenario, women were and are the strongest of the social forces. Their role in both indoor and outdoor activities are so intricately linked that a conscious effort striking at their base is bound to bring in change in the society for good. Over the ages, women have been ably gearing and maintaining their own houses and there are much more efficient to accept, learn and suggest the ways towards a better development perspective. The need of the hour is to create awareness and provide opportunities for creating new generation of men and women working together beyond any disparity and discrimination. Working with women as partners, recognizing their wealth of

knowledge and experience, and accepting the significant role they play in environmental management is perhaps the only alternative route to relive the persistent ecological pressures, threatening the modern world of today in the face of Climate Change.

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