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# Policy without politics: technocratic control of climate change adaptation policy making in Nepal

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# Policy without politics: technocratic control of climate change adaptation policy making in Nepal

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As developing countries around the world formulate policies to address climate change, concerns remain as to whether the voices of those most exposed to climate risk are represented in those policies. Developing countries face significant challenges for contextualizing global-scale scientific research into national political dynamics and downscaling global frameworks to sub-national levels, where the most affected are presumed to live. This article critiques the ways in which the politics of representation and climate science are framed and pursued in the process of climate policy development, and contributes to an understanding of the relative effectiveness of globally framed, generic policy mechanisms in vulnerable and politically volatile contexts. Based on this analysis, it also outlines opportunities for the possibility of improving climate policy processes to contest technocratic framing and generic international adaptation solutions.

**Policy relevance**

Nepal's position as one of the countries most at risk from climate change in the Himalayas has spurred significant international support to craft climate policy responses over the past few years. Focusing on the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and the Climate Change Policy, this article examines the extent to which internationally and scientifically framed climate policy in Nepal recognizes the unfolding political mobilizations around the demand for a representative state and equitable adaptation to climate risks. This is particularly important in Nepal, where political unrest in the post-conflict transition after the end of the civil war in 2006 has focused around struggles over representation for those historically on the political margins. Arguing that vulnerability to climate risk is produced in conjunction with social and political conditions, and that not everyone in the same locality is equally vulnerable, we demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of the politics of representation for climate policy making in Nepal. However, so far, this policy making has primarily been shaped through a technocratic framing that avoids political contestations and downplays the demand for inclusive and deliberative processes. Based on this analysis, we identify the need for a flexible, contextually grounded, and multi-scalar approach to political representation while also emphasizing the need for downscaling climate science that can inform policy development and implementation to achieve fair and effective adaptation to climate change.

*Keywords*: adaptation; National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA); Nepal; public policy; representation

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## 1. Introduction

Nepal developed a National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2010 and a Climate Change Policy in 2011. At a time of a growing urgency to adapt to climate risks, the introduction of such policies, with their potential to bring some positive benefits, could be considered better than inaction. Given the high level of risks foreseen, one might justify expediency even if that involves compromising full participation by climate-affected communities (Few, Brown, & Tompkins, 2007). However, in the context of a heightened demand for the inclusive restructuring of the Nepalese state (Lawoti, 2008; Tamang, 2011), and a history of repeated political upheavals triggered by a system of social exclusion (Deraniyagala, 2005), whether and to what extent climate policy processes become inclusive and fair to climate-affected people becomes a crucial issue. Indeed, Nepal's own history of environmental policy making suggests that policies that ignore the concerns of the affected people are likely to fail, irrespective of whether or not there is immediate resistance to policies at the time of formulation.[1]

However, such normative ideals of inclusion and participatory governance are not always straightforward and achievable in the context of climate policy making. As Few et al. (2007) argue, the normative demand for participation faces added challenges in relation to climate policy development, given that policy makers have to deal with anticipatory risks rather than contemporary or *ex post* issues that policy processes usually address. Yet, in Nepal's case, the issue of representation in climate policy making is critical due to the coupling of two key factors: the climate policy debate is framed by the international response to the Himalayan hotspot of climate risk, and contentious politics is ongoing within a society characterized by historically rooted exclusionary institutions. In such a situation, the pressing questions are (1) to what extent are climate policy processes inclusive and (2) how responsive are they to the politics of inclusion around the state restructuring that is currently under way?

It is particularly surprising that policy responses to climate change have emerged without noticeable public contestation in Nepal – almost through consensus among those who participated – at a time when almost every public issue[2] is rife with contested policy narratives and the demand for inclusive restructuring of the entire political system (von Einsiedel, Malone, & Pradhan, 2012). Around the same time that the NAPA and other related climate policy instruments were being developed, hot public debate emerged in Nepal over the proposed amendment to the Forest Act (1993/1995), the establishment of new protected areas, and the formulation of a new Agricultural Development Strategy. Such a stark contrast between the consensus on the NAPA and Climate Change Policy and the contentious politics over other policy initiatives in Nepal during the past few years thus offers a puzzle for climate policy researchers: why has climate policy remained uncontested and under-debated when it is also about making fundamental political choices, such as allocating resources for adaptation and investing public resources in building resilience? A study into the climate policy responses that are unfolding in Nepal offers important lessons regarding how issues of inclusion, international actor involvement, and science play out in shaping the boundaries and modalities of representation for climate-affected groups in the policy process.

This analysis draws upon ongoing work from several research projects relating to climate change, development, and natural resources policy in Nepal over the last five years, as well as ethnographic observations of the policy process by the article authors, acting both as researchers and policy community participants. In particular, it draws on (1) three rounds of fieldwork conducted by Sweden- and

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Denmark-based co-authors during 2009–2013 as part of their research on climate change and local institutions in Nepal; (2) observation of and participation in various climate policy events in Nepal by four of the co-authors who are Kathmandu-based researchers working in climate and development issues; (3) field work and interviews with major government and donor officials driving the NAPA process (by all co-authors); (4) longitudinal participant observation on environmental and climate policy in Nepal by the first and fourth co-authors (who have published extensively on these topics already); (5) a wider review of literature around policy process, political representation, and climate change conducted at three universities in Europe and Australia to which the authors are affiliated; and (6) a critical review of NAPA texts as part of a multi-country research project on institutions and adaptation. This article emerged from the shared concern among the co-authors conducting independent as well as collaborative studies in Nepal that the biophysical emphasis of global climate science and the international framing of climate policy through ongoing aid delivery practices have together depoliticized the climate policy process in Nepal. This shared concern animated a cross-scale, ethnographic, and integrative study to pull evidence and ongoing analysis together to formulate the coherent analysis that is presented in this article. The epistemological approach employed avoids embracing the dualism between the theoretical and the empirical, and actually forges a dialogue between the specific empirical reality and wider theoretical argument using an 'abductive approach' and 'systematic combining', in which the analytical emphasis is on the recursive dialogue between the conceptual and the empirical domains (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Our aim in this article is to demonstrate that the current ways of framing climate problems and formulating policy responses do not adhere to the general wisdom on representative governance (e.g. Young, 2000, p. 133). We also show that climate policy questions pose additional challenges to standard modes of political representation and inclusion, which are particularly critical in the context of unsettled politics fuelled by the widespread sense of exclusion within Nepal. After briefly reviewing the climate policy literature in Section 2, we examine how climate policies evolved in Nepal, focusing on the NAPA in Section 3. We argue, in Section 4, that the dominance of global scientific knowledge that drives the policy process has undermined political representation within Nepal. In Section 5, we show how the international framing of Nepal's climate policy process has led to a representational deficit. Section 6 reveals the disconnect between the ways climate decisions are made using science, and the way demands for inclusive governance are being articulated in the political arena. In the final section, we draw key conclusions. Through this analysis, we seek to advance theorizing on the interplay among climate change science, climate policy processes, and international aid governance, exploring barriers to achieving policy processes that are not only sensitive to climate risks, but are also linked to ongoing political mobilizations demanding more inclusive policy politics.

## 2. Contextualizing the Nepal case in the wider climate policy debate

The term 'policy' has different meanings and needs some clarification on how it is used in this article. We use it in the most generic sense: a policy is a decision system for the public organized through some form of political representation (Stone, 1997). Policy in this article particularly focuses on process aspects – including politics and contestation at different stages of decision making, and thus we tend to prefer the term 'policy processes' (McConnell, 2010; Orr, 2006). 'Politics' we use in the

widest social science sense to refer to the contestations between groups of people for power and influence, in this case related to how climate change policies are formulated.

It is generally accepted that climate adaptation policy cannot be effective without the involvement of the groups who are most affected (Bunce, Brown, & Rosendo, 2010). In Nepal's case, vulnerability to climate risks is essentially bound up with processes of exclusion in society in terms of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location. Despite rich studies on state formation and excluded groups in society (Lawoti, 2008), there is little evidence in the literature on how climate policies incorporate the concerns of such groups. The question, in a more fundamental sense, becomes how and to what extent climate policy processes recognize and respond to the underlying politics of representation at play in a particular society and how that (lack of) recognition emerges in part from the hegemony of global-scale climate science in framing, bounding, and justifying policy decisions. Partly due to the political nature of climate policy and partly due to its complex and multi-scalar nature (Massey & Huitema, 2012), it has become increasingly challenging to achieve negotiated policy arrangements that are fair both in terms of processes *and* substantive outcomes.

Climate policy responses around the developing world are animated by the wisdom that proactive adaptation is a promising solution to the problem of vulnerability to climate change (Fussel, 2007). The concept of adaptation is a widely researched area (Berrang-Ford, Ford, & Paterson, 2011), and the idea encompasses making decisions both to maintain the current capacity to deal with climate risks as well as to minimize the predicted and future effects of change in particular places (Nelson, Adger, & Brown, 2007). In the broadest sense of the term, adaptation needs to address three concerns simultaneously: reducing the vulnerability of people to climate change, enhancing their resilience to future and unknown changes, and enabling people to take advantage of new opportunities (Nelson et al., 2007, p. 399).

How a society is able to achieve these adaptation goals depends to a large extent on the way the politics of climate policy and practice are organized. Obviously, for fair and inclusive adaptation to happen, people and groups most vulnerable to current and future risks must be able to have a voice in the decision-making process. However, a key challenge is that the people who are vulnerable to climate change are usually the ones who have limited access to livelihood assets or to the decision-making processes (Moser & Ekstrom, 2010; Schlosberg, 2012). As Adger argues, 'vulnerable people and places are often excluded from decision-making and from access to power and resources' (2006, p. 276). So, how the voices of those vulnerable to climate change can find their way into policy debates has become an important issue in adaptation policy making. This question of representation is particularly critical as climate policy problems are framed within the global knowledge arena, heavily dominated by the biophysical sciences, and solutions are often predetermined in the adaptation financing industry. Such complex policy politics can explain to a significant degree why a particular community is vulnerable – as any climate risks falling from the sky are filtered, mediated, and reallocated by such politics on the ground (Ribot, 2010, p. 47).

In the developing world, the construction of knowledge about climate change vulnerability, and the consequent framing of adaptation policy, is largely driven by international actors and their generic world views. These 'out-of-the-context' framings shape the policy and planning practices through which aid and technical assistance are provided. This means that questions such as who is vulnerable and who is not, and what measures can enable their adaptation, are determined by a technocratic logic and implemented through specific cycles of programmatic actions, with limited opportunity for local

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cultural adjustment to climate vulnerability (Ribot, 2014; see also Nightingale & Ojha, 2013). Although there is now a widespread recognition of the need to go beyond the narrowly conceived biophysical approach to vulnerability (McLaughlin & Dietz, 2008), much of the climate change discourse is still dominated by a science that focuses on vulnerability as an outcome of biophysical climate change and the risks of natural hazards. Critical and alternative explanations of vulnerability emphasize deeper social, political, and environmental determinants (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 2004). They emphasize the role of context and the role of local politics in the production of vulnerability beyond the simple outcome of a climatic event (O'Brien, Eriksen, Nygaard, & Schjolden, 2007).

Despite such conceptual innovations in framing vulnerability, climate policy often starts with the technocratic definition of climate risks, ignoring local contexts and alternative world views. These multi-scalar dynamics make climate adaptation policy more challenging than the usual policy cycles, especially if achieving fairness and inclusion in both procedural and substantive senses is set as a core goal (Schlosberg, 2012). We argue that the procedural aspect in adaptation policy making is critical, and we concur with Adger (2006) that an effective policy to address vulnerability is not possible if the voices of the vulnerable to climate change are ignored. However, this is not an easy task. Getting their voices into the policy process is particularly challenging as such groups may by necessity greatly discount the future in order to survive in the present (Wood, 2003) and are unable to engage with longer-term climatic risks. Thus, it may be difficult for them to appreciate the need for a policy response, let alone participate in such processes. Accordingly, the question that is posed in the Nepal case is how the voices of climate-vulnerable groups can be best represented when framing adaptation policy.

We recognize that a utopian view of democracy and inclusion – in which every affected citizen enjoys full control over policy – does not exist in the real world. This is particularly true with climate policy processes, which are essentially global regimes (Orr, 2006). Climate is a global commons around which a whole range of state and non-state actors fight to secure their interests. Local and national policy responses are integral to the global climate field, and hence the investigation into the question of representation cannot be achieved through conventional approaches that emphasize interpersonal relationships or direct participation. Rather, if we follow Dryzek and Niemeyer's (2008) discursive approaches to representation, we can capture whether and how actors and networks organize to represent the views of marginalized groups while recognizing that such efforts will always be incomplete.

## 3. Adaptation policy responses in Nepal: what happened and how?

Situated in the Himalayas, Nepal is regarded as one of the countries in the world most vulnerable to climate change risks.[3] Increasing temperatures and changes in moisture regimes are projected to cause significant glacial melting and seasonality changes (Xu et al., 2009). This vulnerability to climate change is further aggravated by social and political conditions, characterized by the persistence of deep patterns of social exclusion, state incapacity, and the protracted political transition following a decade-long civil war launched by the Maoists. Local communities in Nepal are among the most vulnerable to the effects of uncertain and variable climate, not only because of the intense biophysical impact of climate change, but more importantly because of the weak institutions and exclusionary

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governance at different scales. While local communities have been able to cope with gradual risks and with some level of natural hazards in the past, the emerging climate change crisis is by no means avoidable through the actions of local communities alone, especially in the context of active political and social drivers that result in exclusion and marginalization. Questions such as how socially excluded groups, usually living in remote and natural-hazard-prone areas, can participate in the policy process have become pressing (Lawoti, 2008). Moreover, in the context of climate policy, how such groups can have a voice and how the channels and pathways of representation can ensure reflection of subjective and objective realities underlying vulnerability has become an additional challenge.

The decade-long Maoist War ended in 2006, and Nepal is now moving through the politics of restructuring the state to address demands for inclusive democracy (Tamang, 2011). At the same time, studies show that climate upheavals have already impacted social life (Xu et al., 2009). Through engagement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations and with assistance from major bilateral and multilateral donors, Nepal has been active in formulating climate policies (Dhungana, Pain, Khatri, Gurung, & Ojha, 2013; Helvetas & RRI, 2011). Key policies that have emerged in Nepal include the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) (2010), the Climate Change Policy (2011), and the subsequent policy implementation framework. Most emerged during 2008–2011, a period when the country also elected its first Constituent Assembly tasked with rewriting the Constitution. The NAPA is primarily an adaptation policy, and it uses the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) definition of adaptation that emphasizes understanding human response to the biophysical stress of climate change. The Climate Change Policy has been interpreted by policy makers as an elaboration of the NAPA to define more concrete actions to promote adaptation and mitigation. However, the two policies have emerged through different coalitions of climate policy making (the former being supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the latter by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)), rather than through the national and local political deliberations among the affected people and political representatives.

Integral to these climate policy development initiatives are some notable institutional responses. At the time of the study (2011–2013) there were two major institutional structures operating at the governmental level for coordination and climate change policy making in Nepal: the Climate Change Council (CCC) and the Multi-stakeholder Climate Change Initiatives Coordination Committee (MCCICC). The CCC is the highest-level body, chaired by the Prime Minister and with members from various ministries and independent experts, the private sector, and NGOs.[4] It was instituted in July 2009. It aims to provide long-term policy and strategic guidelines for climate change activities in the country. The MCCICC was formed under the Ministry of Environment during the NAPA process in July 2010, with the aim of contributing to climate change-related programmes in Nepal.[5] It includes representatives from various line ministries, local government, donors, and civil society. These kinds of participatory bodies are seen as crucial for accountability in the transition period, when who has the authority to make what decisions is hotly contested (Nightingale, 2015).

The NAPA is the Nepal government's first policy document directly addressing the issue of climate risks. It is also a reflection of the requirement of the UNFCCC for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to secure international funding for adaptation (particularly the LDC fund).[6] The document was

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developed primarily to ensure eligibility for funding, and was structured according to the UNFCCC international guidelines (UNFCCC, 2002). The process was steered by international agencies from the beginning, and there was some delay in starting the NAPA process. This was due to a lack of understanding among the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (the donor), the UNDP (acting as a facilitator), and Nepal's Ministry of Environment (the implementer) on the modalities for funding and consultancy services – misunderstandings that were also embedded in the uncertain political context (Khadka, 2009). The climate policy of 2011 was initiated by WWF Nepal, which began the formulation of the policy in February 2007 and submitted a draft policy in 2008 as part of a WWF project output (WWF Nepal, 2008, p. 18). It was later discussed and approved in a meeting of a newly formed coordination committee chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment. WWF Nepal provided the financial and technical support to the Ministry. The policy was endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the Nepal Government on 17 January 2011. These delays and shifting constellation of actors and institutions engaged in the policy process has been characteristic of the political transition period.

Government officials and international agencies involved in the NAPA preparation process claim that it was participatory and inclusive, but commentators argue that this has been largely a ritualized, top-down endeavour, with no consideration of genuine channels of representation (Ghimire, 2011; Helvetas & RRI, 2011). Likewise, the Climate Change Policy (2011) was also developed in relation to Nepal's commitment to the UNFCCC. The document states that such a policy was urgently needed in order to inform the parties of the UNFCCC about the institutionalized implementation of the convention and response to climate change through formal policy processes in Nepal. These policy formation processes in Nepal, therefore, did little to move beyond the generic global guidelines for their completion and relied heavily on scientific and technological definitions of climate change vulnerabilities and solutions.

When the NAPA was being developed, climate project managers in Nepal realized the need for a Local Adaptation Programme of Action (LAPA) to implement the NAPA priorities. A National Framework for LAPA was then formulated with the involvement of donor projects and consultants and NGOs working on climate change issues in Nepal. As the secretaries of two ministries related to local government and climate change highlight in the preface to this document, the LAPA was developed to 'implement NAPA priorities ... and provide adaptation services under NAPA' (GoN, 2011). The LAPA was an important innovation in terms of the effort involved in downscaling the science and improving representation in adaptation processes. However, it was still primarily driven by aid agencies, without the underlying agenda being communicated to or appreciated by the political decision makers at different levels. Despite the intention to anchor LAPA with local governments, LAPA projects failed to understand the political questions surrounding institutional ownership. This was further complicated by a lack of elected local governments since 2002. Moreover, as researchers on LAPA have observed, the local process was framed nationally. The LAPA documents do not address either a robust local-scale science or processes of political articulation at the local level (Nightingale, 2015). All this suggests that the process of moving down from NAPA to LAPA has not been straightforward, and the politics of science and aid continues to undermine the politics of representation in the adaptation policy cycle. In the next section we analyze how a global version of vulnerability science acted in the background to effectively exclude the voices of Nepal's most marginalized people when these policies were framed and implemented, although the focus of the article is not an examination of the LAPA.

## 4. Vulnerability science in adaptation policy

A policy process is not independent but is embedded in a particular regime of truth, and an attempt to explore democratic possibilities must expose such underlying forms of knowledge (Fischer, 2003). It is also important to understand the ways in which policy actors exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' in the domain of discourses which can serve to shut out the voices of excluded people (Ball, 1993). Our engagement with key actors in Nepal's climate policy field reveal that they have largely accepted the global narratives of biophysical effects in framing climate policy. Any opportunities created for participation were predetermined according to the standard and technocratic framing of the policy problem and possible solutions.

For example, in a meeting of NAPA actors in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu in early 2013, one of us was present and raised a question about how the NAPA actors understood climate vulnerability. The answer came from a noted climate policy expert who was also sitting on the panel in the meeting: 'We need to be serious on understanding the biophysical impact of climate change'. Another participant also added, 'We are talking about climate policy and their implementation. Without local governments, who is going to own these policies at the local level? I suspect we are just wasting money.'[7] The fact that these two statements were given in response to our question about how Nepal's policy makers understand climate vulnerability is telling. They flag up the need for more science on the one hand, and the empowerment of local government on the other. Very little appreciation was given to the need to understand the interaction between climate and society, and in particular the experience of groups vulnerable to climate change. Clearly, the discussion was driven by a science of climate, and not by a science of climate and society. There was hardly an appreciation of local social structures, governance, institutions, or politics beyond a rather naïve interpretation of how local governments can be effective in the domain of climate adaptation.

Another example of how generic climate vulnerability science was hegemonic in framing adaptation to what and with what means can be seen in the policy documents. A reading of the NAPA shows that what characterizes the discussion, analyses, and proposed responses to climate change is a view of vulnerability that firmly frames it as 'outcome vulnerability' (O'Brien et al., 2007). From this stance, vulnerability is seen as a property of locations or districts and not people, in relation to what are seen to be the main climate hazards. In this case, glacier lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and landslides feature prominently in the weighting and ranking procedures for district vulnerability. The NAPA process conducted what was termed a 'vulnerability assessment' using transect walks by professionals in three major geographic regions, complemented by a GIS (Geographic Information System)-based assessment. The assessment estimated that almost 1.9 million of Nepal's population were highly vulnerable and 10 million were at risk in relation to climate change. The assessment identified nine districts[8], which were labelled as highly vulnerable to climate change.

Evidence from the field, however, suggests that the NAPA's vulnerability assessment is too limited, partial, and even neglectful of actual climate risks faced by vulnerable groups. For example, Dolakha district (central Nepal) was identified as one of the most vulnerable districts based on the threat of Tsho Rolpa GLOF. However, the local communities and stakeholders see landslides as the priority climate-change-induced hazard in the district given their recent experiences. Similarly, the incidence of a GLOF in Humla in 2011 indicates a flaw in the vulnerability assessment of the NAPA, in which Humla is depicted as a district having no or very low risk of GLOF (Khadka, 2011).

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Underpinning the logic of the NAPA is not only a firm focus on vulnerability as an outcome of climate risks – the document is totally silent on the causes of poverty, livelihood insecurity, and exclusion (Nightingale, 2015) – but also the privileging of a very specific knowledge framework. For the authors only one reality exists: that which is observable and measurable, an epistemological approach that is highly deductive and positivistic, transposing global climate change research conclusions to local contexts. Although to some this may sound like 'good science', drawing from social science critiques, we argue that this kind of deductive reasoning is inappropriate for the complex socio-ecological transformations perpetuated by climate change (Latour, 1987; Longino, 1990).

We believe this is particularly salient because how the science is framed has a bearing on the political process. Here, the issue is whether policy processes adopt an empirical analytic approach (presenting facts) or what Flybvjerg calls 'a phronetic social science' – in which both scientists and policy actors interact in the mutual process of learning and revelation (Flyvbjerg, 2001). As an example of the former, historically, various strands of environmental sciences have evolved to become the legitimate way to define the truth and inform policy decisions, cutting out other ways of knowing in the process (Blaikie & Muldavin, 2004). For example, the forest policy system has often marginalized the poor by maintaining exclusionary policy spaces (Larson & Ribot, 2007). As Edmund and Wollenberg (2001) argue, 'disadvantaged groups of people often feel that scientific methods are not transparent to them and do not make use of their experiential knowledge'. Thus, recourse to science does not eliminate the political quality of knowledge claims.

Critical scholarship has taken issue with the way science itself is organized and highlighted the need for democratizing scientific practices (Latour, 1987) – such as the one in the context of forest governance in Nepal (Ojha, Paudel, Banjade, McDougall, & Cameron, 2010). In the wider debate on science–democracy links, much has been written about how the tension can be reconciled, through a democratic and transparent division of labour between scientists and citizens (Bohman, 1999; Fischer, 1993). Yet these policy debates have not been translated on the ground in the climate change arena in Nepal. In Nepal's climate policy process experts have dominated, and there has been limited participation of the affected communities as citizens. Clearly, the opportunity for genuine dialogue between experts and communities has been missed, an aspect that has been seen as crucial in advancing democratic governance (Bohman, 1999).

In addition, the technocratic narrative of vulnerability cannot do justice to the many smaller socio-ecological regions and communities that are exposed to climate risks in different ways. Nepal has three physiographic regions[9], which experience climate stresses differently: the Terai is prone to floods, the Hills to landslides, and the High Mountains are affected most by erratic precipitation and snowfall (Dhungana et al., 2013). Moreover, people on a hillside experiences risks differently as one moves from the valley floor to the ridge top. People who engage in off-farm employment have different forms of risks from people who live on subsistence farming. Community vulnerability is also mediated by culture, and the over 100 ethnic groups are related to the environment in different ways. It is also important to recognize that local farming communities in Nepal have survived and coped with waves of environmental shocks for generations, and hence have accumulated a rich repertoire of local knowledge that can potentially provide much richer insights to local-level climate change adaptation than global climate science. Nepal's ability to create an inclusive climate policy response is thus almost impossible without engaging these diverse cultural groups, and addressing different livelihood strategies, and ecological contexts. Framing vulnerability as a direct

outcome of biophysical change fails to account for these intertwined socio-ecological drivers of vulnerability.

The hegemony of a technocratic approach to vulnerability research also has effects on policy outcomes through written texts, with political representation being contingent upon who writes, produces, and interprets the policy text. Policy has a textual dimension and the text itself is a product of compromise, negotiation, and articulation of socio-political relations, thus affecting whose views are represented and whose are suppressed (Ball, 1993). How and which type of texts are crafted also depends on who frames the agenda and the nature of representation in policy process. We see the language and texts of policy as an expression of power relations and asymmetries in the policy process, requiring a critical reading of texts that can unravel 'ideological claims' (Dryzek, 2006). The structure of a text can also be related to the degree of misinterpretation during implementation (Ball, 1993). The climate policy texts we have analyzed in Nepal address experts, donors, and international actors, hardly speaking to vulnerable groups at all. Even the 'foreword' given by the then Prime Minister of Nepal focuses on the physical science aspects of climate change, highlighting that 'the obvious effect of climate change . . . is increased rate of snow-melt and threat of glacial lake outburst floods with profound impact on habitation and physical infrastructures'. Likewise, the 'Framework for Adaptation' programme presented in Chapter 2 of the NAPA document completely misses out the social and political conditions contributing to vulnerability, as the task of crafting policy moves through the sequential analysis of 'observed climate variability and change', 'projected climate change', 'climate change and vulnerability', and 'impacts of climate change'. Nowhere in the document is the recognition of Ribot's widely accepted view that vulnerability is produced as much on the ground (i.e within society) as in the sky (Ribot, 2010).

## 5. International framing of policy processes

Climate policy processes in Nepal, as with other environment and development policy making, have never been determined entirely from within the country (Blaikie & Muldavin, 2004; Ojha et al., 2014). For Nepal and more generally in the developing world, it is donors and their 'service providers' who shape and construct spaces for participation, negotiation, and research around climate policy. Studies have shown, for example, how Nepalese forest policies have been driven by global environmental discourses (Ojha, 2008). The role of development agencies has often been decisive in climate policy making, through the use of financing and privileging the western and scientific world views on climate change. There are two issues here: (1) climate policy processes are embedded within these international development and environmental discourses, and (2) the claims made by international development actors to promote participatory and 'good governance' spaces are too technocratic to empower the local groups most at risk. This is evident from studies that have highlighted how development aid has either strengthened the status quo (Metz, 1995) or reinforced inequality contributing to social conflicts in Nepal (Sharma, 2006; Upreti, 2004). Moreover, given the political and social differences that exist in Nepal, creating some space for participation is not enough (Tamang, 2011) as this can in itself lead to 'participatory exclusion' (Agarwal, 2001); more critical to representation in policy making is how the underlying power relations are addressed (Gaventa, 2004;

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Kothari & Cook, 2001) and what opportunities for transformative deliberation are created (Nightingale & Ojha, 2013; Ojha et al., 2014).

To understand how effective 'representation' is within consultation processes, two key aspects are important in Nepal. The first is the ways in which progressive notions like 'participation' and 'multi-stakeholder deliberation' are mobilized and enacted by the dominant players of the policy field (Nightingale & Ojha, 2013). Those who shape and define policy processes often appear self-conscious about the need to take a participatory approach and involve communities – as demanded by the UNFCCC guideline itself (UNFCCC, 2002). This guideline for NAPA preparation advises that it should be 'country-driven', 'easy to understand', and with 'clear priorities for urgent and immediate action' (UNFCCC, 2002). It identifies several steps and elements necessary to ground the NAPA in participatory practices, by emphasizing the involvement of stakeholders, taking a multi-disciplinary approach, making NAPA complementary to existing plans and programmes, ensuring gender equality, and maintaining simplicity and flexibility. There is hardly anything left to add to the list of criteria for an ideal participation. Invoking these terms gave credence to the international process, but there is no way these are or can be practised at the national policy process (Nightingale, 2015). Setting procedural ideals at the international level is not necessarily a workable way to achieve community participation in national contexts.

Such influence of the aid environment and culture is evident in Nepal's climate change policy development (particularly NAPA). The GEF, which is managing the LDCs' Fund for climate change adaptation, initiated Nepal's NAPA preparation process in 2007. The UNDP Nepal office took responsibility for the implementation of the project, but it took almost two years before the process began because of a 'fight for supremacy' between the UNDP and GEF (Khadka, 2011). The process finally kicked off in 2009 with financial support from some other donors.[10] The NAPA document was drafted by a team of consultants hired by the project (as facilitators). The NAPA project structure had an advisory board of eight Joint Secretaries (from line ministries), two donor representatives, and one representative each from academic and civil society. The five-member NAPA project executive board consisted of two senior government officials and three donor representatives. There was an absence of social scientists, activists, and politicians in the team. There was also an apparent lack of representation of local voices (including the local government) in the NAPA development process, as there was limited demand for representation on the part of civil society and politically mobilized groups. Few of those participating seemed able to articulate alternative views in relation to the global framing of climate adaptation policy. Although the document was finalized and validated through somewhat scripted consultation meetings, given that the entire process was conducted in English it was obviously difficult for the ordinary Nepalese with no or limited English skills to read and comment on the draft before it was finalized.

Consultation meetings for NAPA document preparation were held across different levels and with diverse actors. The document claims that about 3000 people and 200 organizations were consulted during the NAPA development process. However, the question is whether the voices of the most affected people were reflected in the NAPA document and how that was achieved. Our studies revealed that most of the consultation workshops took place in Kathmandu and were attended by government officials, donor representatives, experts, and few Civil Society Organizations. These consultations did not serve to effectively understand local peoples' perspectives on changing climate and the implications for their lives. 'In Makawanpur, no one knows what the NAPA is', said a grassroots women's

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representative at a roundtable organized in Kathmandu to take stock of the implementation status of NAPA (Ojha, 2013). Makawanpur is one of 75 districts in Nepal, and is close to Kathmandu. Yet, the woman's view indicates that people are not aware of the policy process. At no point in the documents are the concerns of the most affected people directly represented – either by flagging them as an issue for a particular group or including results from research with affected groups. Instead, all the priority areas are framed and discussed around biophysical concerns with suggestions to include 'community user-groups' as generic solutions that will ensure effectiveness and social inclusion, from energy efficiency to biodiversity (Nightingale, 2015). The climate-affected people had very limited chance to participate in the process. Their voices in the document are faint and, where present, appear 'ventriloquised' in Cornwall and Fujita's term (2012). More importantly, the ways in which questions were structured and predetermined allowed limited space for people to express their concerns.

The second aspect of representation that is crucial in Nepal's NAPA is the underlying role of aid politics which simultaneously serve to disinterest political actors, and attract aid consultants and NGOs. As our interviews with the political actors show, not only have the leaders of the NAPA process disregarded political actors, political leaders (including the parliamentarians) themselves have become disinterested in climate policy processes.[11] As one review asserts, '[NAPA] misses identifying the main agents of implementation. In the absence of executers, it is highly likely that the policy will have no one taking ownership over the specific objectives and activities' (Helvetas & RRI, 2011, p. 6). The report adds: 'The policy identifies local communities as the stakeholders and earmarks up to 80% of the climate funds for the local communities. However, these communities are regarded as passive beneficiaries instead of active partners in development' (p. 6). The reviewers further argue that 'This document seems to have provisions to meet the requirements of international conventions for more upward accountability and not so much for local and downward accountability', and that its effective implementation is possible 'only through local ownership', which is lacking. The development of the LAPA framework to implement the NAPA has failed to correct the problem of a representational deficit and technocratic practices. Our field studies show that many LAPA documents are actually 'cut and paste' versions of generic templates provided by donor projects, as local NGOs and consultants aim to maximize targets tied to aid money. As one of our key informants told us, 'the LAPA initiative in Nepal started with good intentions but has now ended up as donor project game wherein multiple NGOs and consultants compete unfairly for the money in a bid to delivery quantity rather than quality'. Clearly, the overt and covert politics that go around accessing aid money is the most important factor in determining the fate of climate policy and practice in Nepal.

## 6. Disconnect with national politics

As Nepal's political system is now moving through post-conflict transition, triggered by demands for social and political inclusion (Hachhethu, Kumar, & Subedi, 2008), the issue of who makes decisions for whom is central to political representation in climate policy, and cannot be overlooked. Following the peace accord between the government and the Maoist rebels in 2006, a number of social and identity movements erupted, demanding inclusion and representation in various spheres of governance and public policy. The country is moving through a protracted transition, in which the legitimacy of various claims to represent vulnerable communities and citizens at large is increasingly

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questionable. The state bureaucracy is shaping decisions on less contentious issues (or even making the issues less contentious), but with poor political oversight and without adequate public debate (Stone, Manandhar, Ojha, & Dhungana, 2010).

The issue of who makes decisions for whom – so fundamental to the question of democratic representation – is particularly critical in unstable societies. Key climate policies including the NAPA and LAPA were formulated at a time when the country was moving through one of the most painful political transitions in its history (between 2008 and 2011), yet the 'climate agenda' received little political attention in the sphere of party politics. However, the lack of political contestation around climate policy is not surprising given the prior history of environmental policy making in Nepal, with 'developmentalist cultural codes' remaining predominant in framing national policy outcomes (Nightingale & Ojha, 2013). While other policy processes like agricultural development strategy (2012–2013) and decisions about the extension of protected area (2010) have remained highly contested among various actors, extending the debate among the political parties, climate policy processes escaped such debate. Due to the technocratic framing of the agenda, there was little connection between the major political mobilization happening in the country and the climate policy process. From agenda setting through crafting and final decision, the NAPA and Climate Change Policy (2011) were couched in insulated technical language opaque to political debate, and were legitimized through orchestrated spaces of participation for selected stakeholders. The fact that climate policy processes have escaped the messy politics which have stalled other policy issues in everyday public life indicates a crisis in political representation, although it may be interpreted in a technocratic perspective as a successful policy outcome without 'political interference'.

Such a lack of political representation in the climate policy process has wider significance for climate change and society. Scholars on democratic inclusion argue that political representation is contingent on how and to what extent citizens are able to find ways to make their problems and needs known to elected leaders and government officials and to find a way to make demands on officials to use the government to address their problems (Eulau & Karps, 1977; Young, 2000). The issue of representation, as Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) have outlined, is also related to the extent discourse and indirect networks articulate the concerns of the most affected people. In an increasingly media-driven and discursive society (Hajer, 2009), the prospect of democratic articulation should not just be limited to direct elections and participation of citizens. How civil society mobilizations occur is also crucial; in particular, the extent to which critical knowledge and evidence is articulated within these movements is an important aspect of political representation (Fals-Borda, 1987). As climate policy involves multiscalar processes of understanding and responding to vulnerability in which diverse actors have stakes, disadvantaged communities are not likely to be recognized by the policy actors, as found in the case of climate policy development in Nepal. It is even harder for the most vulnerable groups to hold powerful leaders and officials accountable. For example, in Nepal, the civil society group most engaged in climate change debates has been the Federation of Community Forestry User-Groups (FECOFUN). Although they have agitated for rights over resources in other domains such as forests, in climate change policy domains they have failed to articulate the voices of marginalized people.[12] The increasing role played by NGOs and community networks may have supported some 'discursive representations' in Dryzek and Niemeyer's sense (2008), but again within the limits imposed by the knowledge and accountability requirements of the donors and international actors involved in national climate policy processes. Thus, in Nepal, the vibrant and at times radical politics has remained

disengaged from the subtle political meanings and ramifications of the climate policy process, a process that has been primarily driven by international framings of science and the narrow view of representation in the policy process.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper has explored how politics plays out in climate policy development in Nepal in the context of an international aid regime pushing for policies based on global climate science, and also at a time of high in-country demand for inclusive public policy processes. By reviewing policy texts and drawing on the evidence collected through longitudinal field research, we have shown how a technocratic framing of climate change vulnerability and adaptation underpinned the formulation of the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and related climate policies in Nepal, effectively preempting the space for democratic representation of vulnerable groups in climate policy processes. The dominant biophysical framing of 'climate change' has served to avoid meaningful debates over what it might mean for Nepal to adapt to climate change. While the global scientific framings of climate policy have remained extremely relevant in international policy debate, such framings have become too simplistic, generic, and out of context at the national level. The technocratic, top-down, and aid-driven adaptation policy is not sufficiently capable of capturing locally specific – and often contested – realities of biophysical change, social dynamics, and the vulnerability of people on the ground.

The technocratic climate policy process has missed out on opportunities to foster inclusive climate change responses, particularly to accommodate the concerns of many different community groups affected by climate change in diverse geographic regions and socio-economic locations in the country. In Nepal, people who are particularly vulnerable to climate change are also usually the ones disadvantaged within society. The NAPA invited some people to comment and contribute, but such attempts at 'inclusion' through consultation resulted in a few elites from local areas being involved in meetings in Kathmandu. There were a few field visits, but these were not effective mechanisms to represent the views of the many vulnerable groups. There was also talk about downscaling the climate science to fit the national context, but this was essentially a mechanistic application of global climate science, leading to political exclusion in the climate policy process. While the issue of inclusion is essentially bound up in the local political economy, international climate change discourse, and patterns of socio-environmental mobilization, the global scientific framing of climate change as it was articulated in the national policy process contributed to the representational crisis in climate policy development.

We conclude that greater representation in climate policy processes, and a potentially fairer and more equitable response to climate risk, is contingent on how the problems are framed, how community voices are represented at multiple scales, and to what extent the international regime of climate policy enables and recognizes political expressions and mobilizations at national-level policy debates. Although the extent and scope of the politics of representation in climate policy development is highly contextual, this analysis points to the need for enhanced politics of representation for improving policy processes and outcomes. This means that in order to enhance equity and fairness in climate change adaptation, it is important to rethink the ways that local politics and international regimes interact in fostering or undermining representative and responsive climate policy processes. This is

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particularly important because, despite expanding struggles for democratic and inclusive governance in Nepal, climate policy processes have not been a matter of concern in the national political arena. This finding from Nepal challenges the view that an effective climate policy does not necessarily require effective participation (Burton & Mustelin, 2013). It is likely that the politics could be divisive and delay action on urgent adaptation issues, but in Nepal there was not even a minimal level of political engagement, a deliberate situation engineered to serve the interests of those driving the process.

At least three messages are of relevance to developing countries as they aim to improve climate change adaptation policies and practices. First, there is a strong international impetus to make climate policy at the national rather than the local level, both in terms of translating science and providing finance. Thus, future research should explore the links between science, the international climate regime, and national politics to explore more transformative ways of developing and implementing adaptation policies. Second, facilitators of climate policy processes should not treat political contention as unnecessary interference to the policy process. Rather, they should actively catalyse debates across the science–policy interface so as to arrive at robust policy decisions that have wider ownership and commitment to implementation. Third, policy systems should be treated as flexible and adaptive, with an explicit commitment to act on opportunities for revision and improvement as and when new lessons emerge or when excluded voices are recognized. Finally, country-based research capacity needs to be improved to integrate global climate science and in-country evidence, in order to stimulate a national policy debate.

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## Notes

1. Several examples can be identified: the failed hydro-electric project (Arun III) in eastern Nepal in the mid-1990s, the failed Bara Forest management plan in the central Terai region in the mid-1990s, the failed attempt to amend the Forest Act 1993 (twice, in 1998 and 2010), and so on.
2. Noticeable policy contestations are common, for example, in relation to forestry (Sunam, Paudel, & Paudel, 2013) and agricultural (Paudel, 2013) issues.
3. There are a number of analyses measuring climate change vulnerability and ranking countries accordingly. Not surprisingly, in some analyses Nepal's position is worse and in some it is better. For example, Maplecroft's 2010 ranking places Nepal as the fourth most vulnerable country in the world, whereas the Global Adaptation Institute's (GAIN) ranking of 2011 for vulnerability placed Nepal at 151st (out of 183). It is interesting to note that

Maplecroft's ranking is more frequently quoted by Nepal's climate change scholars and practitioners than the GAIN index.

4. Deputy Prime Minister–Vice Chair members include ministers from eleven line ministries, a Vice Chair and a member from the National Planning Commission (NPC), Chief Secretary of the Government of Nepal (GoN), and eight experts nominated by GoN. The Secretary of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment is Member Secretary.
5. MCCICC members include six NAPA thematic working group coordinators, representatives from NPC, the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's office, two national project directors from climate change-related projects, three academics, three representatives from local government, and donor representatives.
6. The Marrakesh Accord, agreed at the 7th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP 7) in 2001, pledges international support for instituting NAPAs and also for their subsequent implementation in LDCs.
7. Dr J. C. Baral, former official of the Government of Nepal.
8. These are Kathmandu, Udaypur, Ramechhap, Lamjung, Mugu, Bhaktapur, Dolakha, Saptari, and Jajarkot.
9. Nepal's three physiographic regions include the Terai region (including the southern belt of the low-lying region bordering India (up to about 600 m in altitude), middle hills up to around 3000 m, and high hills or mountains above the middle hills, reaching up to the height of Mount Everest.
10. The total fund for the NAPA project is US$1.325 million. The Global Environment Fund provided $200,000 and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided $50,000 to implement it. Other funding agencies include DFID ($875,000) and the Embassy of Denmark in Kathmandu ($200,000), among others (Shahi, 2010).
11. This is based on a personal communication with then Constitutent Assembly member Sunil Babu Pant on 26 July 2011, in Kathmandu, Nepal.
12. Personal communication of the first author with Naya Shrma, senior researcher at ForestAction Nepal (7 February 2014, Kathmandu Nepal).

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