The Vulnerable State and Technical Fixes: An Analysis of Official Climate Change Discourses in Nepal

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I conduct discourse analysis of seven selected official climate change policies and documents of Nepal. In the first part of my analysis, I draw from international climate justice discourses to analyze how policy makers construct Nepal's position in the global arena, in relation to the issue of climate change. In the second part, I draw from political ecology and anthropological understandings of 'vulnerability' and 'adaptation' to analyze how policy makers construct those terms in the context of Nepal. The result shows that Nepal has adhered to the 'vulnerability' and 'transition' discourses, which serve as important tools to advocate for financial support from the international climate change regime. Driven primarily by international processes and guidelines, the climate change policies and documents in Nepal project a heavily technocratic approach with little socio-cultural considerations. Vulnerability is understood as a static property and assessed based on sectors and geographic areas, while adaptation is understood as series of actions to be implemented. Overall, the policies are at risk of perpetuating the existing systemic ills, as well as impeding imaginaries to pursue more radical socio-political and cultural change as effective adaptation measures.

Keywords: climate change, Nepal, discourse, vulnerability, adaptation.

Introduction

"Nepal has negligible contribution on global greenhouse gas emissions but impacts of climate change are tremendous, long-lasting and multi-fold both at uplands and lowlands. Hence, climate change adaptation is our national priority." (Government of Nepal (GoN) 2010b: i)

Nepal is a predominantly agrarian, socially stratified society with fragile mountain ecosystems in the Himalaya. The opening quote is by Madhav Kumar Nepal, the Prime Minister of Nepal from 2009 to 2011, in the *National Adaptation Program of Action to Climate Change* (NAPA), represents the country as 'highly vulnerable' to climate change and thus requires international support to cope with climate change. For the past decade, Nepal has been actively producing policy documents related to climate change. For instance, in a brief submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the country listed seventeen major climate change related policies and instruments.[1]

A post-structuralist perspective understands discourses as integral with power, which act to constrain people's life choices. Discourses in official national-level policies especially could have real impacts in shaping the planning and implementation of future governance and actions. In this paper, I conduct a discourse analysis of selected official climate change policies and documents of Nepal. Particularly, I look at how policy makers construct Nepal's position in the global arena in relation to the issue of climate change, to better understand policy making in the context of international climate negotiation. I also look at how policy makers construct 'vulnerability' and 'adaptation' in the context of Nepal. These two terms are especially important, as the definition of 'vulnerability' determines who are being included or excluded in climate change adaptation efforts. Similarly, written 'adaptation' measures could result in certain pathways to be pursued over others in face of climate change. Critical climate change discourse analysis thus could help illuminate two aspects: (1) whether current adaptation measures potentially perpetuate the dominant system and thus worsen vulnerabilities of populations in the long run and (2) whether the existing discourses impedes imaginaries to pursue more radical but necessary socio-political and cultural change as effective adaptation measures.

I argue that Nepal's positioning in the international arena affects its policy discourses. In the policy makers' attempt to draw climate change funding support through the positioning of Nepal as a vulnerable country, they have prioritized international guidelines and frameworks, resulting in the dominance of depoliticized, technical understandings

and fixes. These discourses neither adequately address the stratified, heterogenous nature of the Nepali society, nor sufficiently consider the Nepali people as active agents experiencing challenges from multiple socio-political and cultural processes. Instead, they potentially perpetuate aid and policy dependence of Nepal, and the status quo approach to development as economic and technological growth.

Methods and Framework

My analysis comprises two parts. First, I explore how the Nepali state is being characterized and positioned in selected climate change documents. This helps to provide some clues on the contexts in which these policies are made. Audet (2013) has identified three discourses in international climate change negotiations. I classify the discourses used by Nepal in reference to these three discourses: (1) the responsibility discourse which emphasizes responsibility for climate change and for reducing emissions first, (2) the transition discourse, led by the European Union, which considers 'transition to a low-carbon economy' as the means to mitigate climate change and to reduce climate injustice, and (3) the vulnerability discourse which focuses on uneven consequences of climate change on different countries and regions, which serves as basis for demanding compensation and funding (Audet 2013). I will also examine whether the Nepali discourses are affected by non-state actors in the international arena, such as the global climate justice movements. These movements differ from the three discourses, primarily in their explicit appeal to address the issue of equity, as well as transforming the status quo, such as by "keeping fossil fuels in the ground" (Bond 2012: 205).

Second, I critically analyze what constitutes 'vulnerability' and 'adaptation' in those same documents. I draw from the political ecology approach to 'vulnerability' and anthropological approach to 'adaptation' in doing this. These two approaches are critical responses to the usual apolitical and technical policy process assumed in the international efforts in integrating climate change adaptation and development (Tanner and Allouche 2011). International policy guidelines largely assume vulnerability to be determined by biophysical change and marginalization (Nightingale 2017), and adaptation to be policy interventions decreasing risk or deriving benefits from these changes (Klein et al. 2007; Smit and Pilifosova 2001). The political ecology tradition, however, shows that biophysical change is always mediated through a variety of social and political mechanisms (Forsyth 2014; Ribot 1995; Taylor 2015; Nightingale 2017). It emphasizes how vulnerabilities are built upon power differentials of class, gender, caste, and

ethnicity (Mosse 2007). Anthropology, on the other hand, refers adaptation to changes in belief and/or behavior in response to changing circumstances (Oliver-Smith 2016). People do not just adapt to natural features, but also to human institutions, including all climate change governance mechanisms to be established (Birkmann 2011). Many ethnographies on climate change demonstrate that, along with climate change, communities worldwide are undergoing changing cultural, social, and material lives following capitalist globalization and environmental change (Rudiak-Gould 2013; Connell 2015; Crate and Nuttall 2016; Jacka 2016). Thus, adaptation should be conceptualized as a social-political process that mediates how individuals and collectives address multiple types of simultaneously occurring changes (Eriksen, Nightingale, and Eakin 2015).

Using the frameworks above as my reference, I follow Tonkiss's (2012) guidelines in doing discourse analysis. My purpose is not to describe in detail the selected documents, but to understand how the country of Nepal, as well as the terms 'vulnerability' and 'adaptation' are constructed in them. I review shorter documents thoroughly and use an open-source, text analysis tool (voyant-tools.org) for longer documents to search and analyze Nepal's positioning in the document, and each context under which the terms 'climate change', 'vulnerability', and 'adaptation' are being used. Many of these contexts are simply names of institutions and policies. After taking away those, I identify recurring key themes in the rest and classify them under 'responsibility', 'vulnerability', and 'transition' for the first part of my analysis; and 'apolitical, technical', 'political ecology' or 'anthropological' perspectives for the second part (see Figures 1 and 2). These help me to see which perspectives are being emphasized and which perspectives are absent. I will discuss each of these themes in my analysis, drawing quotations from the documents as examples.

For some themes (such as participatory process and local knowledge, see Figure 2), it is not immediately evident to which category it belongs. My analysis will provide a closer look at the sentences and contexts to determine their underlying discourses.

Documents Selection

I focus on seven climate change related documents by the country for critical analysis (See Table 1). As previously mentioned, Nepal, in a brief submitted to UNFCCC, has listed seventeen climate change related policies and instruments. As my focus is on climate change policy discourses, particularly how vulnerability and adaptation are represented, I select those which are explicitly focusing on climate change strategies. I eliminate those with a broader focus (e.g. Sustainable Development Agenda of Nepal, Thirteenth Plan), those with a narrower, sectoral focus (e.g. Agricultural Development Strategy, Forest Policy, etc.), and those addressing merely the 'status' of climate change (e.g. Climate change: status paper for COP15, Status of Climate Change in Nepal). I also include Climate Resilient Planning, which is not in that list, but seems rather important in guiding the integration of climatic risks in Nepal's development plans and programs. These choices might be subjected to some limitations. For instance, as my research does not involve any fieldwork with policy makers, I am unable to select documents based on how and why they are produced, though I am aware that many of them are produced in response to international climate regime (e.g. Climate Change Policy 2011, NAPA and LAPA) (Helvetas and RRI 2011). Nonetheless, as my analysis shows, these selected documents have served my purpose of providing insights into Nepal's own positioning and how 'vulnerability' and 'adaptation' are constructed in the official policy discourses.
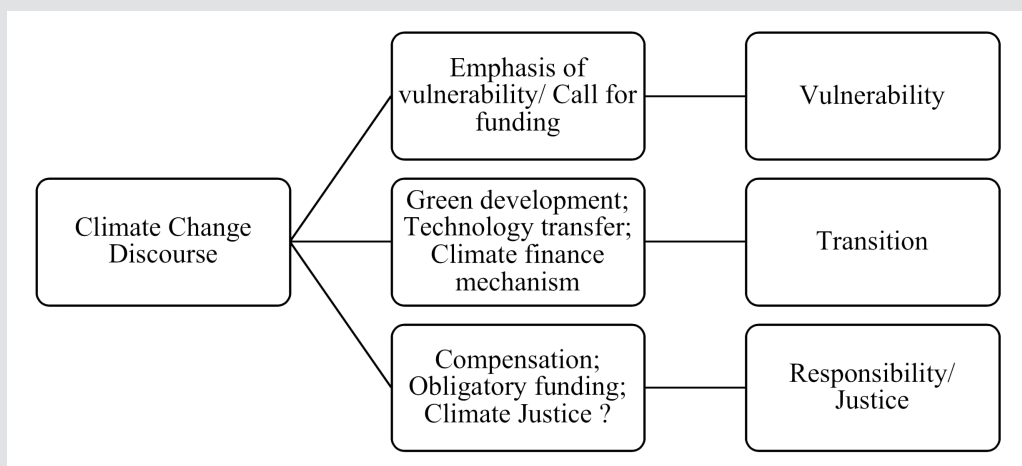

Figure 1. Part 1 of my analysis identifies and classifies recurring themes in policy discourses under vulnerability, transition or responsibility.
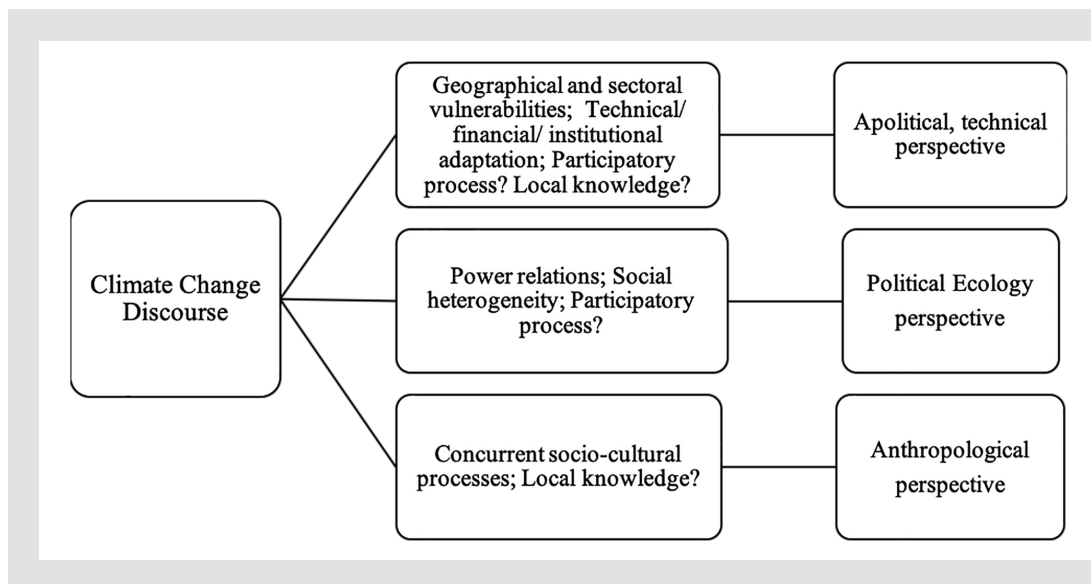
Figure 2. Part 2 of my analysis identifies and classifies recurring themes in policy discourses under 'technical', 'political ecology' and 'anthropological' perspectives.

Results and Analysis:

Part 1: Vulnerability and Transition Discourses

A strong vulnerability discourse is evident in Nepal climate-change documents examined. For instance, in the CCP, a statement reads: "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" (GoN 2011b: 3). The document does not delve into the question on who are indeed responsible for climate change but rather focuses on how Nepal is affected disproportionately. By juxtaposing Nepal's lack of responsibility in causing climate change and the impacts suffered by it, the policy discourses actively establish and present an image of Nepal as a vulnerable victim for its international audience. Such vulnerability discourses are occasionally presented in conjunction with a weak responsibility discourse. The latter is usually to endorse an existing idea of receiving compensation from historically greenhouse gases emitting countries, rather than an overt criticizing of them or the status quo. For example, in the Kalapathar document, the fifth declaration is to "obtain support of the world community to effectively implement projects in accordance with Nepal's needs... Also endorse the proposal requiring developed nations to contribute at least 1.5 percent of their GDP to the Climate Change Fund" (GoN 2009: 2). The tenth declaration reads "Call to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases...draw attention of everyone to obtain compensation from the countries emitting greenhouse gases, and relief for poor nations and people adversely affected" (ibid).

The language of vulnerability can be viewed as a necessary tool or justification to advocate for financial and technical support by the international climate change regime. After all, Nepal has been highly reliant on international development aid for the pass decades. The GoN makes such intention clear through multiple statements. For example, one of the objectives of policies stated in the CCP is "To improve the living standard of people by maximum utilization of the opportunities created from the climate change-related conventions, protocols and agreements" (GoN 2011a: 6). In the NAPA document, a paragraph reads "the NAPA prioritization process serves as a basis for the development of an adaptation strategy that will be able to draw financial resources for implementation from national as well as various global, multilateral and bilateral sources" (GoN 2011b: xi). The same document expresses Nepal's expectation for additional funding in addition to existing international aid commitment, as such cost was not factored in when the commitments were made. Such expectation also aligns with the interests of development agencies supporting the making of these documents, as they rely on funding allocation to the country to demonstrate their relevance and sustain their offices.

Another strong, consistent discourse apparent throughout the documents is the transition discourse. Transition into low-carbon development or growth is well embraced by the Nepali government and appears consistently in every major document. "Low carbon development and climate resilience" (GoN 2011b: 6) is explicitly listed as a set of policies to be devised in the CCP, along with "Technology development, transfer and utilization" (ibid: 8).

Document	Abbreviation	Year	Objective/Content
Kalapathar Declaration	–	2009	Declaration on collective commitments on climate change and areas of cooperation
Climate Resilient Planning	CRP	2011	Integration of climatic risks in development plans and programs to ensure the sustainability of development interventions
National Climate Change Policy	CCP	2011	Enlisting overall adaptation and mitigation policies and goals in Nepal
National Adaptation Plans of Action to Climate Change	NAPA	2010	Documenting the NAPA preparation processes, methods, and criteria for prioritizing interventions, key adaptation needs, and priority adaptation actions
Nepal Climate Change Support Program	NCCSP	2012	Providing contexts, strategy, framework for management, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable in Nepal are able to adapt to climate change
National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action	LAPA	2011	Providing principles and stepwise guidance for local adaptation framework
Nepal Second National Communication to UNFCCC	SNC	2014	A comprehensive national-level report on climate change including national status, mitigation and vulnerability assessment, adaptation measures, gaps, etc.

Table 1. Details of selected climate change policy documents.

This coincides with the Three-Year Development Plan 2010/11-2013/14 of the country, with the objectives of green development and making development activities climate-friendly and resilient. Such moves align closely with Nepal's self-interest as a mountainous landlocked country heavily dependent on neighboring India in fossil fuel energy supply. As mentioned in the CRP document:

> ...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" (GoN 2011a: 27). This foresight is proven relevant with the nine-month blockade of imports from India in post-earthquake Nepal in Winter 2015 that caused a country-wide fuel crisis, adding to the pain of already suffering earthquake victims (Pattison 2015).

Accompanying these vulnerability and transition discourses, then, is a strong advocacy for technology transfer and potential climate finance mechanisms. In the Kalapathar Declaration, a paragraph reads:

> With the confidence that by developing clean energy, we can reduce carbon emission in the region, draw attention of developed and neighboring countries for the appropriate, modern technology, its easily accessible transfer and investment (GoN 2009: 2).

Another important agenda outlined in the CCP is to take advantage and "mobilize additional technical and financial resources from clean and renewable energy development, carbon trade and other mechanisms related to reducing the impacts of climate change."(GoN 2011b: 4) Related policies include "Generating financial resources by promoting carbon trade and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)", and "Generating financial resources through the implementation of the "polluter pays principle" and the payment for environmental services concept" (GoN 2011b: 7). Market instruments such as CDM or REDD+ are consistently mentioned in national level policy documents.

The GoN shows a notable amount of agency through their climate change discourses. As discussed by Mathews (2015) on the roles of the Mexican government in the REDD and REDD+ program as an international broker, similar roles are being taken by the GoN, by presenting the good candidacy of Nepal as a funding recipient. For instance, the NCCSP document, a project supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), compliments Nepal for actively taking part in global negotiations and constantly raising the issues of climate change impacts on mountainous countries and LDCs. The GoN itself often mentions their own efforts in fulfilling international commitments. For instance, 'commitment' to various global initiatives by the GoN is mentioned in both the CRP and the CCP documents. Nepal also builds its good candidacy through its adherence to the 'transition' and 'vulnerability' discourses—consensus discourses embraced by the European Union as well as the developing countries.

However, the official discourses lack the perspectives of a strong responsibility discourse or a justice discourse of the global environmental justice movements. The word 'justice' was only mentioned once in the CCP in terms of 'climate justice' as part of the vision, with no further explanation and elaboration in the rest of the document, and once in the NCCSP document, as an elaboration of the importance of participatory approach. This deemphasis curiously manifests a disconnect with Nepal's internal politics. Internally, the country has undergone a ten-year armed conflict between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M) and the GoN, which ended a mere few years prior to these documents. The war radically shaped a new political awareness on social and redistributive justice (Shneiderman 2009; Ojha et al. 2016; Nightingale 2017). Externally, however, the GoN has been highly reliant on international aid in the past decades, and thus demonstrates a very pragmatic and externally oriented positioning. There is no demonstration of strong, specific advocacy for those responsible to reduce GHG emission. Instead, in the NAPA document, the statement: "Increased rate of greenhouse gas emissions in spite of substantial reduction commitment from developed countries" (GoN 2010b: i) seems to create an impression that the developed countries have indeed tried their best. There is also no agency shown in acquiring the language of global environmental justice movement to formulate a transformative development pathway against the international status quo.

These discourses used by Nepal, along with information from existing literature, provide some clues on the contexts of climate change policy processes in Nepal. From the perspective of developing states like Nepal, the main concerns during international climate change negotiations, are the possible restrictions imposed on their development efforts, and on securing additional funding and resources. Countries of 'high vulnerability', such as the Least-Developing Countries and the Small Island States, group themselves to highlight their needs for support in terms of adaptation and mitigation finance, technology transfer, and compensation of loss and damage in face of climate change (Tanner and Allouche 2011). The Nepali state has been in transition after the 1996-2006 Maoist Civil War and highly reliant on external donors and civil society

to fulfill its functions. Climate change policies such as the CCP, NAPA, and LAPA are prepared in direct response to international climate regime to which Nepal is also a signatory party, to ensure eligibility for funding from UNFCCC (Helvetas and RRI 2011). With international donors as the specific audience in mind, Nepal did little beyond the global guidelines and depended heavily on scientific and technological definitions of climate change vulnerabilities and solutions (Ojha et al. 2016). Donors and development agencies play decisive roles in these policy processes. For instance, the NAPA development process involved two senior governmental officials and three donor representatives in its project executive board. Though multiple consultations are supposedly involved, the entire process was in English and thus excluding those who do not have proficiencies (Ojha et al. 2016). As a result, western and technocratic views of climate change are prioritized over local perspectives and realities. This will be evident in Part 2 of my analysis.

Part 2a: 'Vulnerability' in the Nepali Policy Discourses

In all Nepali policy documents, the concept of 'vulnerability' has been used extensively in conjunction with climate change adaptation. In most contexts, the word 'vulnerability' refers to susceptibility towards climate change impacts. The vulnerable populations are typically defined by sectors and geographic areas. For instance, in the NAPA document, the mid- and far-western mountains and hills and six key sectors (i.e. agriculture and food security, water resources and energy, climate-induced disasters, forests and biodiversity, public health and urban settlement, and infrastructure) are identified as vulnerable. Vulnerability is assessed at the district level by overlaying climate risk/exposure maps, sensitivity maps (defined by sectors and livelihood), and adaptive capacity maps (defined by human development index and food security status) following the vulnerability assessment framework of the IPCC. Such assessment projects a static and unitary understanding of vulnerability, rather than a dynamic process resulting from social interaction and power relations.

Yet, previous studies on community forestry in Nepal, for instance, found that power structures affect local dynamic in natural resource management, and that the poor are usually disadvantaged in the decision-making processes (Acharya 2002; Adhikari, Di Falco, and Lovett 2004; Thoms 2008). As climate change adaptation is about access and control of natural resources for natural resource-dependent communities, these existing power differentials matter. Vulnerabilities are not static and unitary properties of communities, but an expression of complex socio-ecological relations (Taylor 2015). Work by Pasang

Sherpa (2014) in Pharak, Nepal, for instance, also shows that while some people are saturated with information on climate change, others are not at all. Hence, social heterogeneity and social networks play a role in climate change adaptation.

Such awareness of social heterogeneity within communities is not entirely absent in the policy discourses. The NAPA document recognizes that the degree of vulnerability within the low scored districts may be high due to the disparity among the population. It thus calls for vulnerability assessment at the Village Development Committees level. However, this suggestion only shifts the unitary and static understanding to a smaller scale. Moreover, the GoN chose pilot districts for LAPA based on vulnerability depicted by NAPA Vulnerability Map (GoN 2010a), pre-excluding low-vulnerability districts, along with its differential vulnerable populations from pilot initiatives. Some documents also attempt to highlight how poor people are particularly vulnerable to climate change and recognize the socio-cultural diversity in the country. The NAPA (GoN 2011b: 2), citing Pradhan and Shrestha (2005), reads:

> Although intermingling between the various groups has occurred, they differ widely in the details of cultures and adaptations... resettlement of the hill and mountain people into the Terai since the 1960 ...resulting in an extremely heterogeneous and complex Terai population." The NCCSP document further acknowledges that "an unclear/generalized definition of vulnerability has led to the dilution of gender and social inclusion issues (GoN 2012: 22).

Curiously, the documents explicitly mention a relation between power and vulnerability only when it comes to women. For instance, the NAPA document acknowledges that women are more vulnerable than men in face of climate change. Its annex enlists twenty-four ways that women are disproportionately impacted by climate change in six different sectors. Section 4.12 of the SNC is dedicated to gender and social inclusion: "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" (GoN 2014: 134). The same section further elaborates that "climate change, may in fact, worsen gender inequalities by creating extra work for women, and aggravating their vulnerability in poor and socially excluded household" (ibid). The NAPA also mentions indigenous groups, namely the Majhi, Rautes, Chepang, and Satar, as disproportionately vulnerable, not due to power, but due to livelihood sectors they are typically involved in. *Dalit*, another marginalized

groups in the caste system, are very briefly mentioned once in three documents, without explanation of how they are especially vulnerable.

The emphasis on women is unsurprising. Gender equality has always been an important agenda by multilateral institutions such as the United Nations in Nepal (UNCT Nepal 2007; 2012; 2017). Indigenous peoples are also getting attention due to international recognition as well as Nepal's own political context.[2] In comparison, *dalit*, as a regional and ethnically linked minority issue, is less prominent to donors and policy makers, even when there are various ongoing ethnic movements in the country (Lawoti and Hangen 2013; Upadhyay 2013).

In short, the Nepali discourses align with the apolitical, technical perspective in identifying vulnerable sectors and geographic areas. Some understandings of vulnerabilities based on power relations can be traced in the examined documents, but not explicitly, and with little effects on how climate change adaptation measures are planned or implemented. Apart from gender relations, there are no frameworks explaining how the complex social and power relations in highly heterogeneous and stratified societies of Nepal could result in different vulnerabilities in face of climate change.

Part 2b: 'Adaptation' in the Nepali Policy Discourses

The CCP summarizes Nepal's climate change adaptation strategy in one of its goals—"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" (GoN 2011a: 5). Such a discourse approximates the dominant, international approach to adaptation as a technical and financial matter.[3] All the 250 adaptation options documented in the NAPA are seemingly concrete, straight-forward actions given required resources. The NAPA and CRP documents rightly mention adaptive capacity as access to services, information, technology, finance, livelihood options, etc. Yet, there is a lack of engagement in the text on addressing the possible factors behind differential access.

Languages in selected documents often frame adaptation as skills/activities transmitted from external actors rather than a long-term socio-political process involving belief and behavior change in the locales. This concurs with the perspectives of donors, who often must justify their interventions based on the expertise they can bring to their beneficiaries. Examples of indicators of adaptation activities as outlined by the NCCSP document are: "14,300 vul-

nerable men and 21,450 most vulnerable women received training on climate change" and "18,000 climate vulnerable poor people benefitted from adaptation services" (GoN and UNDP 2012: 38). The focus is on people who gain access to these trainings or services, not on those who were left out. The importance of understanding behavioral change is only briefly recognized in the LAPA framework. Socio-political aspects, such as ensuring equity of access, social, and cultural acceptance, addressing existing or potential resource conflicts, potential to use local knowledge and technology, etc., do not constitute adaptation strategies themselves, but are limited as criteria for prioritizing adaptation actions in the NAPA document.

Climate change adaptation policy in Nepal also focuses on the development of new institutions[4] or restructuring of existing ones, but not whether marginalized groups could easily adapt to their working, and whether they could themselves constitute the problem of inaccessibility to services and vulnerabilities of people. This is, again, a manifestation of the technocratic approach underlying most development interventions that ignores local disparities in stratified societies. A study by Tiwari et al. (2014) found existing mechanisms, institutional arrangement, and capacity of the service provider government institutions questionable in achieving goals and objectives of the CCP. The language of people-centric, participatory, inclusive, bottom-up planning masks these institutional gaps in implementation. Instead of employing a framework of 'justice', the policies use the language of 'inclusion' and 'participation'—long applied keywords in the field of international development—which create consent without challenging existing power relations. A participatory approach is claimed in the preparation of three different documents.[5] For instance, the NCCSP document reads: "representation of *dalit*, ethnic groups and minorities will be ensured in various committees at the village level and in all cases at least 50% of them" (UNDP and GoN 2012: 28). The CCP lists: "Capacity building, people's participation and empowerment" (GoN 2011b: 7) as a set of policies, among which include "Ensuring the participation of poor people, *dalit*, marginalized indigenous communities, women, children and youth in the implementation of climate adaptation and climate change-related programs." In multiple documents,[6] it is stated that 80% of the climate change adaptation fund should be delegated to the local level, even though there is no clear statement on who should make decision about its allocation (Helvetas and RRI 2011).

There is a broad acceptance within anthropology that populations around the world possess intimate knowledge about their surrounding environment, allowing them to

utilize their resources for social reproduction and physical sustenance (Fiske et al. 2014). While local knowledge has also been emphasized in the Nepali documents, the understanding of the importance of local knowledge seems to 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. For instance, the CCP states as one of its policies: "Collecting, publishing, disseminating and utilizing climate adaptation and adverse impact mitigation-related traditional and local knowledge, skills, practices, and technologies" (GoN 2011b: 8); and the NAPA calls to integrate technical data with local knowledge related to understand vulnerability and coping strategies. A number of other documents show the recurring themes of local knowledge.[7]

In many localities, there are pre-existing stressors, such as water, health, and food security issues (Barnes 2015; Lynn et al. 2014; Nading 2014), which might or might not be exacerbated by climate change. For instance, the Annex 4 in the NAPA enlisting 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. In Nepal, both food insecurity and flood have long plagued the country's population in some districts. The district of Humla has been the target of food security interventions for decades (Adhikari 2008), before its identification as a district vulnerable to climate change (GoN 2010a). Focusing solely on effects of climate change fails to address systemically imposed social vulnerability (Fiske et al. 2014). In fact, people may be adapting more to (and thus reinforcing) systemic vulnerability than to climate change itself. Mathur (2015), through a case study of the Indian Himalayas, demonstrates that climate change could be potentially used to distract wider, pre-existing structural problems such as negligence of a segment of its population. In Nepal, a strong coupling of natural disasters and climate change in the national discourses potentially masks government incompetence in managing long-existing social and structural factors of disasters.

Discourses in the examined documents also make a direct assumption of the compatibility between climate change adaptation and national development framework. References to the major national development agenda, which is poverty reduction through sustainable economic growth, are evident in most documents including the NAPA, the SNC, and the NCCSP documents as the guiding framework for adaptation policies. While it is true that climate change could undermine development efforts, some development work can exacerbate people's vulnerabilities to climate change. Cannon and Muller-Mahn (2010: 624) posed the

question: "do development processes lead to a parallel process of adaptation to climate change, or are they a part of the problem?" Many development projects have been shown to increase people's risk to hazard (Wisner et al. 2004; UNDP 2004). Failure to address such question shows the lack of consideration and comprehension of the drivers of vulnerabilities.

Overall, climate change adaptation in these documents is a technical and financial matter, and series of actions to be conducted, rather than changes in the existing system. 'Local participation', 'inclusion', and 'bottom-up', popular terms appealing to development partners, are heavily applied. Local knowledge is emphasized, not as a primary vehicle towards formulating contextualized strategy, but as an additional tool/knowledge emphasized in the technocratic tradition. While traces of socio-cultural dimensions could be found in these documents, they do not seem to constitute the major framework or influence adaptation measures systematically.

Conclusion

The first part of my analysis shows that the Nepali policy makers and donors have actively projected Nepal as a vulnerable but cooperative country, which is eligible for climate change funding and support for transition to new technology. There are a relatively lack of 'responsibility' or 'justice' discourses that seek to achieve equity and transform the status quo. Due to the current international structure and the logic of aid economy, policy makers view the concern on climate change as the opportunity to procure more resources for the development of the country, and avoid overtly criticizing their donors or altering international frameworks. From the international donors' perspective, Nepal has done a remarkable job in fulfilling their expectations, with its LAPA being globally praised for its emphasis on consultative, bottom-up approach (Ayers and Forsyth 2009; Nightingale 2017). This mutual interest of both donors and Nepal as an aid recipient, has impeded imaginaries of Nepali policy makers to pursue alternatives involving radical but necessary socio-political and cultural change as effective adaptation measures for all.

The second part of my analysis shows that climate change policies and documents in Nepal project a heavily technocratic approach with little socio-cultural considerations. Whenever traced, the social, political, and cultural dimensions do not seem to have markedly affected the major framework. This shows that policy makers are not completely unaware of local realities, but these understandings have not been used to systematically challenge the inter-

national guidelines and framework in addressing climate change. From the political ecology perspective, Nepal's NAPA and LAPA, consistently address "outcome vulnerability" at the expense of "contextual vulnerability" (Nagoda 2015: 570), and do not consider structural causes and power-relations in the highly stratified society. From the anthropological perspective, the official climate change discourses in Nepal fail to understand adaptation as a long-term change in people's belief system and behavior, rather than project activities to be conducted and check listed. As there have not been any recognition and discussion on systemic ills and institutional obstacles for marginalized groups, climate change discourses in Nepal are at risk of perpetuating problems in the existing system and worsen vulnerabilities of its population in the long run.

Both parts of my analysis, when viewed together, show that Nepal's positioning in the international arena affects its policy discourses. The policy-makers' intention to paint the picture of Nepal as an ideal funding recipient to international donors, could reasonably explain why western and technical perspectives dominate those discourses. However, Nepal has been dependent on development aid for decades without evident success. Some have characterized Nepal's development as failing and harmful (Shrestha 1997; Pandey 1999). Viewed from this perspective, the global crisis of climate change could have been an opportunity for the Nepali state to learn how development in industrialized countries has incurred enormous costs on the rest of the humanity. Nepali policy makers and civil society for that matter,[8] could have taken this crisis as a premise to push for autonomy in paving a different, self-reliant pathway—one that connects climate change issues with the internal political struggles for social inclusion. As Nightingale (2017: 15) argues, "climate change in Nepal could be framed in terms other than 'vulnerable' which could lead to alternative priorities and imaginations." Nepal's geography and recent changes offer a wealth of contextualized knowledge and experience to illuminate its own path forward. Ecologically, the diverse ecological contexts in Nepal means that its population has been adapting to some of the harshest environment for centuries, including recurring floods, landslides, glacier outbursts, and the recent 2015 earthquake. Institutionally, Nepal has experienced a decade of Maoist Civil War, a transition from monarchy to federalism, followed by substantial social and political changes. These experiences, if wisely used and reflected upon, could spell out a very different policy future than an internationally driven one.

As the country is transitioning into a decentralized, federal system, there could be new opportunities at the provincial and municipal level. Lessons about the shortcomings of the current policies could be useful for community actors, researchers or policy makers who will work at the sub-national level in the future. At the local level, actors could be free from international aid politics, and directly engage each other for a more contextualized understanding of local vulnerability and possible long-term adaptation strategy. However, such engagement must build on an understanding of the existing discourses and their criticisms. This is where I hope this paper can contribute.

Endnotes

1. The brief can be accessed from the UNFCCC portal at <https://unfccc.int>. The complete list of climate change related documents include Sustainable Development Agenda of Nepal (SDAN), 2003; Initial National Communication, 2004; Everest Declaration (Kalapathar Cabinet Meeting), 2009; Climate change: status paper for COP15; National Adaptation Program of Action to Climate Change, 2010; Climate Change Vulnerability Mapping in Nepal, 2010; Climate Change Policy, 2011; National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action, 2011; Status of Climate Change in Nepal, 2011; Low Carbon and Economic Development Strategy (LCEDS) draft; Environment Friendly Local Government Framework, 2013 (EFLG); Agriculture Development Strategy, 2015; Thirteenth Plan (TP) (2013/14-2015/16); Nepal Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), 2014; Forest Policy, 2015; Second National Communication, 2015, Technology Needs Assessment, 2015.

2. Nepal has adopted the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ratified the Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the International Labour Organization (ILO, Convention no 169). During Nepal's transition to a federal system after the Maoist civil war, various ethnic and indigenous groups have exerted significant influence in the constitution-drafting process.

3. In many cases, climate change adaptation in Nepal is about Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) pertaining to Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), flood, and landslides. DRR has been considered as a climate change adaptation strategy in the CCP, SNC, and CRP reports.

4. Examples include new national-level mechanisms such as the Climate Change Council and the Multi Stakeholder Initiative Coordination Committee (MCCICC) for coordination in planning, the Climate Change and Development online portal to facilitate knowledge exchange, and the Climate Change Division and the Program Monitoring and Evaluation Unit within the Ministry of Education to support climate change policies implementation.

5. The NAPA framework uses a participatory approach in vulnerability mapping. The LAPA framework also claims an inclusive approach, involving those most risk to climate change, economically poor, deprived of public services and socially disadvantaged.

6. NAPA, LAPA, NCCSP, and CCP.

7. Examples include the LAPA Framework which claims a bottom-up approach that considers local resources such as knowledge, skill and practices in the planning process. An entire section 5.2 of the SNC report is dedicated in explaining existing indigenous knowledge related to climate risk, ongoing studies and documentation, as well as reasons for integrating indigenous knowledge in climate change adaptation policy.

8. There have been no major concerns or public contestation in Nepal regarding climate change, even when hot debates emerged around other policies such as the Forest Act and Agricultural Development Strategy (Ojha et al. 2016).

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