

Women in National Action Plan for Climate Change of India

Avantika Singh

PhD Student, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India

***Corresponding Author:**

Avantika Singh

Email: avantika161@gmail.com

Abstract: Climate Change is receiving deserved attention after a scientific and political denial of long held view that climate change is a farce and not real. The shift in acceptance have happened specially after recently concluded COP21 Paris draft. While historical polluter debate has got its well placed meaning in Paris draft, shifting the burden to cut emissions more on developed economies, what still is missing is gender. Mary Robinson a UN special envoy for climate change accurately pointed that Paris climate summit's gender imbalance with heavy male dominance is detrimental to taking action on saving people from global warming. Analysing the women participation data, it has come on froth that woman are minimally present in any breakthrough discussion or deal. Their concerns are largely omitted in major environmental deals by governments at national and sub national level, international organisation. As a result, climate adaptation and mitigation efforts designed at these levels are targeted with a view that climate change is gender neutral, when it is not. In this paper, I am providing insight through Indian experience by introspecting role of women in India's National Action Plan for Climate Change. Climate Change is receiving deserved attention after a scientific and political denial of long held view that climate change is not real. While historical polluter debate has now received a well deserved acceptance and attention in current climate change discourse, what is still is missing is gender. Mary Robinson a UN special envoy for climate change accurately pointed that woman are minimally present in any breakthrough climate change discussion or deal. Their concerns are largely omitted in major environmental policies by governments at national and sub national level, international organisation. As a result, climate adaptation and mitigation efforts designed at these levels are targeted with a view that climate change is gender neutral, when it is not. In this paper, I am providing insight through Indian experience by introspecting role of women in India's National Action Plan for Climate Change.

Keywords: Climate Change, NAPCC, Gender Neutrality, Feminization of governance.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a major global environmental problem and with empirical evidence on its effects, it has become an issue of great concern to both developed and developing country. The earth's climate has demonstrably changed on both global and regional scales since the pre-industrial era. Growing international and national studies have pointed towards the damage accruing to the environment due to anthropogenic activities. "Human influences will continue to change atmosphere composition throughout the 21st century", "Projections suggest that the global average surface temperature is expected increase by 1.4 degree Celsius" (IPCC 2001). Various impacts include increase in global average surface temperature, change in sea level, and decrease in the Northern hemisphere snow cover. These changes are likely to threaten food production with "too much" and "too little" water scenario, rise in sea-level, damage to coastal settlements, and increase in the occurrence of diseases, such as malaria etc.

It is important to note that UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol two most important treaties which relate to global efforts to combat climate change does not mentions the words 'gender' and women. Most of the debates about climate change have revolved around countries relative responsibility for limiting the growth of greenhouse gas emissions and funding efforts to shift to low carbon energy and other green technologies system. The discussion around the issue has been overtly overloaded with technicality. It misses the complexities of structured gendered vulnerabilities. Climate change remains an overtone of gender neutrality. In purview of the tailored omission, implementation of vulnerability and adaptation related policies remains a lop sided affair.

Objective of this paper is to study National Action Plan for Climate Change of India (the federal policy to disseminate climate change impacts with implementation strategy at national and sub national level) with gender lens to answer the few raised questions in this paper about gender neutrality in

NAPCC and what can be federal route to feminise NAPCC policies.

What is NAPCC?

The National Action Plan on Climate Change of India was finalised in 2008 to identify measures that promote India's development objectives, "while also yielding co-benefits for addressing climate change effectively". Before we dwell on critical examination of NAPCC, it is to be submitted that in the Indian scenario, where vast asymmetries exist in the conditions, challenges and capacities of states and institutions, the need for a diverse and flexible approach was much required. Owing to federal demarcation, environment is perceived to be overtly centrally tilted as any environmental subject not listed in schedule VII, is centre's prerogative (*T.N Godavarman vs Union of India*). However, since Climate change has a spill over effects with cross bordering impacts, it cannot remain secluded in persistent threat of Race to the Bottom theory*, Concern over capacity of state and local government to enforce rules and manage as required. Therefore, NAPCC which was concluded in 2008 for dissemination of climate change seems to be falling in line with 2006 India's National Environment Policy, setting forth the Principle of Decentralization and Principle of Subsidiarity**, that is, "...ceding or transfer of power from a Central authority to state or local authorities, in order to empower public authorities having jurisdiction at the spatial level at which particular environmental issues are salient, to address these issues".

Despite the federal applaud hinting at cooperative federalism, it remains a matter of concern and investigation as to how gender remains a missing proposition from an iconic climate policy of India. Do we need to redefine 'cooperative' term in 'cooperative federalism'?

Missing Gender - A Curious Silence (Analysing NAPCC)

It has often been cited by feminist literature that federalism limit itself with absence of gender tone. Cynthia Enloe a stand point feminist, in her work, Bananas Beaches and Bases points out that state "overpowers" over women institution to maintain masculinity in work and governance by ensuring stark tailored differences between public and private domain. However with active feminist movement, federal countries like India have facilitated the active opening up of the different tiers of governance and special programmes have been initiated to co-opt women especially into local governance by methods like reservation. The critics see this as a scheme to contain the dissenting voice at the level of local governance, which lacks the relevance owing to absence of active political will and dearth of devolution of finances and

power etc. Critics point out that schemes of promotion of active participation is absent at the national governance structure per se which is the power house of decision making (33% reservation in Indian Parliament is still pending before the house from over many decades). Thereby, what results overall is a lower participation of women into the federal governance structure.

In view of climate change, this kind of situation can accelerate the vulnerability of women to the absolute extremes. Women limited access to resources, restricted rights, widespread patriarchal structure, limited mobility and muted voice in decision making, makes them highly vulnerable to climate change risks. For instance, dry shock or wet shock due to global climate change, can further cause difficulties for women in health, sanitation, continuation of paid labour, attendance at school by young girls, potential violence etc. Particularly women of marginalised population are doubly burdened. They not only share caste, class division with their male counterparts but additionally bear the burden of socially constructed gender image. For instance women belonging to Dalit clan in India cannot fetch water from the same well meant categorically for high caste people use, since it is assumed that it will pollute the water source. In fact instances of dowry deaths and bride trafficking also partly accrues to climate stress. All these combine to make some women more vulnerable in particular locations, situations and time since they face different condition of vulnerability than men.

However, while underscoring gender vulnerability it is important to acknowledge that rural woman support their household and community to adapt to abrupt climate change. Since rural women are largely dependent on natural resources for their household work, they have generated a great deal of environmental sustainable knowledge owing to constructed gendered division of labour. But, very scant regard has been given by policy makers to integrate their concerns and capacities in to mainstream policies. Thus, it is important to build on women's adaptive capacity to reduce their risk and vulnerability to climate change.

Examining India's key climate document NAPCC through lens of these questions in the context of gender:

- a) Does NAPCC deliberate over perceived vulnerability of women in wake of climate change?
- b) Does NAPCC encompasses in its policy the traditional knowledge system of women?

It emerges out that NAPCC was formulated by a high power male dominated council headed by Prime Minister with no involvement of practioners on the ground or NGO's who have direct intervention with

women, the most vulnerable to climate change and critical to the success of adaptation.

Women and environment are not a key focus in India's 11th Five Year Plan, which is the platform through which NAPCC Missions will be implemented.

There are two references of gender (vulnerable sections) in the climate change policy of India.

1. One of the guiding principles of national Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) reads

“Protecting the poor and vulnerable sections of society through an inclusive and sustainable development strategy, sensitive to climate change.”

2. The other very specific mention of gender is in the section 1.1 of the technical document. It says:

“The impacts of climate change could prove particularly severe for women. With climate change, there would be an increasing scarcity of water, reduction of yields in forest biomass, and increased risks to human health for children, women and the elderly in a household becoming the most vulnerable. With the possibility of decline in the availability of food grains, the threat of malnutrition may also increase. All these would add to deprivations that many women already encounter and so in each of the Adaptation programs, special attention should be paid to the aspect of gender.”

It has a para which says, “The impacts of climate change could prove severe for women. With climate change, there could be increasing scarcity of water, reduction in yields of forest biomass, and increased risks to human health with children, women and elderly in a household becoming the most vulnerable. With the possibility of decline in availability of food grains, the threat of malnutrition may also increase. All these would add to deprivations that women already encounter and so in each of the adaptation programmes, special attention should be paid to gender.” This is all that we have in the entire document of 56 pages.

The problem which emerges out is that only the word of concern has been incorporated into the document and no real plan for action. The adaptation missions ignores the central role that women need to play in being part of the solution – by being part of the vertical decision making apparatus, having ownership and control over productive resources and being the knowledge manager in climate proofing.

How NAPCC has acquired apparent masculinisation?

For this apparent masculinisation in NAPCC rhetoric, two stereotypically masculinist discourses I

have in mind are 1.) Ecological modernisation and 2.) Environmental security.

Climate change is widely advertised as a techno-scientific problem which requires technical remedies. One among the reason that gender appears to be insignificant is that, Climate change is described as a universal problem by scientists which affects all humans on earth alike.

The scientific definition of climate change has been fostered largely through the discourse of ecological modernisation (EM) that has engrossed the UK and Europe and is swiftly catching hold in the USA. Simply put, EM advocates the use of ‘technological advancement to bring about [both] better environmental performance’ and economic efficiency in a win-win situation (Schlosberg and Rinfret 2008, p. 256). Moving beyond the notion of ‘sustainable development’, EM has a supply side focus and depends on cooperation among (male dominated) governments, science and business to solve environmental problems. In this purview, Climate change provides an opportunity for this rhetoric; it asks and reduce the serious global problem as a question in hands of technicians and capitalists to be solved in a technical language. They have used this crisis as a mal development issue requiring all types of technical fixation that are economically lucrative. Thus solutions like carbon capture and storage, carbon sequestration, renewable energy (wind, solar, wave and geothermal power, bio-fuels), genetically modified crops, geo-engineering, etc are showcased as only solution to survive this catastrophe. While there is no denial that some among these solutions are important for a sustainable, the issue which remains is they justify all moves without precaution, human concerns and social aspects of life. To define the concern more with this only techno innovation approach, women’s traditional knowledge, concerns etc are totally excluded from such an approach.

Environmental security (ES) is the another prominent discourse that works to conceptualise current climate politics. While there is debate over its meaning, in its most known form it is a rhetoric that stimulates a Hobbesian predictions that climate change will inevitably lead to conflict over scarce resources between and within states (Homer-Dixon 1999). Since the early 1990s, defence ministries (traditionally the domain of men) have been interpreting environmental ‘insecurities’ in ways that call for armed and militaristic readiness, alliances and responses (Elliott 2004). Some of the scholars have criticised this overtly ‘securitising’ move which stumbles the way towards peace and cooperation that is required to exhibit knowing we share a common planet and that wars caused by militaristic fervour have only destructed environment with great

loss. However such laid caution by the critics have not been heeded any attention by people in power and as a result the posing threat of climate change have been largely viewed as war over resources. It have been portrayed as a security threat .

Ironically, the environment which was once known as a 'soft politics' issue in the field of international relations, has now become 'hardened' by the threats to national and international order that climate change is predicted to bring in its wake.

Questioning NAPCC's gender neutrality through some empirical evidences

With above theoretical base which points to non gender neutrality in NAPCC policy formulation and implementation, I am further documenting some empirical evidences (secondary literature and original research) to suggest, how these Adaptation and Mitigation strategies which have been part of NAPCC, with its non gender sensitivity may disadvantage women, even, though they seem to work well at household and community level. In Bundelkhand region of India, the continued drought years have forced farmers to sell anything against repayment of loans (taken for farming) to zamindars, even wife's. A work by Deepa Joshi in Uttrakhand region shows how an adaptation project appearing to work well on froth created and strengthen the constructed vulnerabilities specially among women of Harijan community. Government water project was built, as part of adaptation programme to suffice the water needs of the area at the location which came under the ambit of temple. People from backward castes were not allowed to access the benefits of the water project as the high caste community feared that the water and temple will be polluted. Sometimes poor women of Harijan community managed to get a bucket or so of water by planning the activity in dark night when no one can see her taking (stealing as defined by upper caste) water which was prohibited to her.

In another instance as to how women's vulnerability is not being considered by NAPCC, it is worthful to cite narrative from Jalaun District (drought affected area) of Uttar Pradesh. A group of women of Asaihna village narrated their story of managing fuel for burning chulha at their home. The reserved forest is approximately located at the distant from village, where these women go to cut wood which is prohibited and punishable act. Phoolwati said " with drought affecting our village on year to year basis, we are not left with sufficient fuel sources from the field. There is also shortage of cow dung since we have to free our domestic animals with the paucity of food to feed them. We march towards the unsafe jungle in mid night to cut trees and sometime even cut snakes . We often injure ourselves with animal attacks. Sometimes the forest inspector catch us and molest us. But we cannot raise

our voice since we have to get hold of that very essential thing "wood" for burning chulhas and thus feeding our families. Risk has become normal to our lives". (Field Narrative, 2012)

Therefore, I conclude in this section that gender remains as Omni absent variable in NAPCC policies, which is proudly said to have been tailored to serve the Indian federal complexities. The word Citizen has been compromised to include only a certain section of population which is relevant to electoral politics and confirm the domination of masculinity as natural expression of policy discourse. Any effort made via government agencies to partially empower women economically and politically are scattered since multiple activities undertaken for the empowerment of women is not integrated in comprehensive manner. This is quite visible in NAPCC, which appears to foster the tiger's language without including the concerns of tigress. Such an approach webs the federal design into a more complex web demanding further reading of federalist discourse into a gender purview. The non visibility of women's integration have created certain pot holes in NAPCC design, like non compliance with indigenous knowledge of women , owing to closer association with nature. This has also increased the price of implementation since non traditional- technical knowledge, mostly are expensive in comparison to indigenous techniques. Although NAPCC design is in conformity with needed centre's greater role in a subject having a spill over effect, with effective power to state and local level. But its decentralisation tone doesn't devolve at the gender level complexities. Such a miss in the NAPCC design, has broken an essential federal rule of effective promotion of self governance accessible to all and not few. Missing the more vulnerable population has only made the document and its planned exercise as vulnerable.

Federal Way Out - Feminization of Governance

Amid wide criticism, on the government's intension to empower women in alleged weak local federal chamber, I propose for the feminization of governance at the third tier. With 73rd and 74th amendment act, the third tyre to federal structure has gained importance in the system of governance with agreed political voice on more devolution of power to them. A MIT study by Chattopadhyay and Duflo [1] has measured the impact of the feminization of governance at the local level on the outcomes of decentralization in West Bengal. There study concludes that women leaders of village councils are prone to invest more in infrastructure that are relevant to the requirements of women in rural spaces (like drinking water, fuel, and roads). They also concluded that if the village council is being headed by woman council then it is more likely that village women will participate in the policymaking process. Therefore, if women are placed as leaders at local level, it can alter the expenditure decisions of the

local bodies and, in turn, change the types of public-good investments at the local level to correspond more to the revealed preferences (voice) by women [2]. The study, however, has confronted a few criticisms too.

The other extra - federal scheme I propose, is creation of Self Help Group. NGO's can act as a catalyst towards it. Mahila Mandal is a self-help group consisting of women. They in a collective effort help to upgrade, educate and communicate the traditional knowledge to all women in the community. They also help women to diversify their income sources through providing them small loans. In Gorakhpur district, Janakpur village, women through collective effort have adapted well to climate change risks. Meera Devi quoted 'Due to unsure rainfall, severe summer and severe winter, the women of the village formed a group with the help of GEAG (Gorakhpur environmental action group), it not only helped us to learn better techniques to grow crops in water logged lands through sharing traditional knowhow among each other, the social bond have also improved over the period' (Field Narrative, 2012) . Thus a layer of yet another local governance, not formal though provides for a greater opportunities to tackle the climate change stress. This also has the potential to cap the limitations as emerging in the governance structure at the third tier. Self Help Group, is a level more closer than the Gram Sabha unit to the people concerned. Self Help Group have its own constitutional design and decision making mechanism. For instance, SHG in Janakpur village of Uttar Pradesh tailored a lucid economic mechanism as a viable, cheap and sustainable option. Beej Bank and Food Bank were created. It ensured the food availability in every house. Infact it helped the villagers to come out of the zamindari system which burdened them and their generations. The good practice of the village empowered women in decision making process of the village (Field Narrative, 2012).

Further, NAPCC to entail its gender feature must include women's voice via providing greater legitimacy to their voice by accommodating them in all level of governance. This requires integration of many development projects as initiated by government for empowerment of women. A further devolution to cap women's concern and ideas can be promoted by government through financing, training the SHF group's efforts.

Notes :

*The principle of subsidiarity is seen as one of the bases for federalism and sharing of powers amongst Centre and states. The principle, from a common sense perspective, lays down that "*decisions should be taken at the level closest to the ordinary citizen and that action taken by the upper echelons of the body politic should be limited.*" [3].

**By race to the bottom theory I am referring to Fredricksson , who suggests that decentralisation of institution in an environmental context lead to weaker environmental policy, as state and local authorities may reduce environmental standard in order to attract more investment to the region.

REFERENCES

1. Raghavendra C, Duflo E. Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from an India-Wide Randomized Policy Experiment. Unpublished paper. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001.
2. Nicholas S. Public Finance and Policy for Development: Challenges for India, 2002.
3. European Commission. *Communication on the principle of subsidiarity*, Brussels: Principle Bulletin EC 10- 1992.