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REVIEW ARTICLE

Between Rhetoric and Action: Dilution of Gender Mainstreaming in India's National Climate Change Policy

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Introduction

At the 2019 Climate Change conference, state parties adopted the enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan, which was amended in subsequent years [1]. The amended gender action plan includes five priority areas. (A) Capacity-building, knowledge management, and communication (of government and other stakeholders on gender responsive formulation of policies, plans, research, indicators), (B) Gender balance, participation, and women's leadership (in national delegation including participation of young women, indigenous women and women from local communities), (C) Coherence, all constituted bodies work on gender issues as relevant to each other and in a coherent manner with each other, (D) Gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation (including engaging women's groups in at all stages), (E) Gender responsive monitoring and reporting. This framework on gender will guide the analysis.

India's National Action Plan (NAP) on Climate Change, 2008, mentions that protecting poor and vulnerable groups through a sustainable development strategy sensitive to climate change is one of the seven principles of the Action Plan. The background section of the document recognises that water and biomass shortage due to climate change adversely affects women, children, and elderly in the household, and adaptation programmes need to pay attention to gender concerns. The section on ways forward calls for addressing indoor pollution due to use of firewood and coal that affect women more than men [2]. Eight missions are proposed under the National Action Plan (e.g. solar mission), but gender concerns are not effectively mainstreamed into these.

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Overall, the approach of the National Action Plan on climate change is more welfare oriented than gender responsive or transformative. Issues of how gender and intersectionality lead to more adverse more adverse effects of climate change on Dalit women, indigenous women, single women, and women living in fragile ecosystems are not analysed. To give an example gender, caste and class intersect and lead to Dalit women experiencing adverse consequences more as they have no/little agricultural land; have little avenues for livelihood diversification; still face discrimination in some areas to access drinking water; and are left to run household when men migrate. Further, gender is seen as binary in the document.

Further, if one compares India's NAP with the standards suggested in the Gender Action Plan, Conference of Parities 28 (the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC) there is no reference to gender responsive capacity-building, knowledge management, and communication, gender balance, participation, and women's leadership, gender responsive implementation, coherence with other Ministries (including Ministry of Women/Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment), and gender responsive monitoring and reporting. As noted by the National Women's Policy, 2016, India, though climate change has gendered impact, women have been sidelined in debates about managing climate change and environment resources. The Women's Policy, 2016 argues that equitable distribution/control of resources across gender is essential to counter climate shocks. It calls for building capacities of local women, women's self-help groups, women elected to local government on the issue of climate change adaptation [3].

A review of Climate Change Adaptation Plan of four southern Indian states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu), suggest that it is the Kerala Climate Change Adaptation Plan, 2022 which is different, possibly due to

involvement of Department of Women and Child Welfare and women's rights groups, wherein a women's welfare cum rights-based lens is reflected in the CCA [4]. The Kerala CCA also recognizes that women are differently placed based on intersection of gender and other identities like caste, class, marital status, age, ethnicity, minority, location etc. It points that a gender and intersectional lens needs to be woven into structures and decisions, participatory planning and audits, intersectional budgets, and monitoring systems [5]. It is not enough if gender equality is integrated in objectives (as in CCA of Andhra Pradesh), but the commitment must be seen through in planning, governance, structures, and monitoring. Finally, gender equality in CCAs cannot be achieved without preexisting democratic values and equity, and pro-equity development pathways, wherein Kerala leads [4].

Conclusion

To conclude, India's National Action Plan on Climate Change exhibits significant gaps in gender mainstreaming standards agreed in COP 28, while Kerala offers a distinct model through its unique institutional engagement and intersectional perspective. A limitation of the study is that the analysis is restricted to Action Plans on climate change of four Indian states. It is suggested that more states are covered in the future. Further, in the coming years a national level guideline may be prepared on gender responsive/transformational mainstreaming within action plans on climate change and citizen's groups representing women of different identities may be involved in formulating these action plans and monitoring their implementation at national, state, district and local government levels.

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