

CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTH ASIA

GOVERNANCE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Abstracts & Sessions

Session 4: Rights, Gender, Equity and Justice

“Climate Change Policy in India”

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The north south division in climate change discussion is not the only great divide that raises issues related to social and environment injustice. While the question of environment is being debated globally, little emphasis is given to the matter of how these concepts will be construed at the regional and local level and how it will be included in the policies applied. For instance, what types of distributive strategies are needed to ensure fair and equal distribution of mitigation responsibilities to different sectors of society? Research shows that benefits of climate risk mitigation at local levels are received by privileged populations. Not only marginal populations lose out on advantages they often loose their livelihood and are displaced because of their inability and lack of resources to adapt to policies employed by the state. Frameworks to balance such multiple injustices are therefore important aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation process and need detailed inquiry. This paper reviews the development of climate change mitigation policies in India over the last 50 years including the first National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC) released in June 2008 and concludes that attempts at mitigating climate change in India emphasizes on technological fixes for ecology and energy issues but misses out on the issues of ‘burden sharing’ and equity in reduction entitlements.

“Gendering Climate Change: Concerns and Realities in South Asia”

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Missing from much of the international and national policy debates and planning around climate change are discussions of adaptation and responses of impoverished communities where gender comes to play a crucial role on multiple fronts in how the impacts of climate change are felt. While exact impacts of climate change in South Asia may be difficult to predict or quantify, climate change is likely to exacerbate vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms in unequal ways amongst men and women. Gendered implications of climate change in South Asia are particularly poignant as patriarchal norms, inequities and inequalities often place women in considerably disadvantageous positions in their abilities to respond to and cope with dramatic changes in socio-ecological relations. Women and girls generally have weaker social position, less access to and control over resources, and greater vulnerabilities to external shocks. As climate change is likely to exacerbate both ecological degradation (e.g. water shortages) and natural hazards (floods, cyclones), the gendered outfalls are likely to be felt across sites and scales unevenly, where age/class/caste intersect to play critical roles in the ways that individuals will respond to and cope with climate change induced socio-ecological change. This paper looks at the multiple ways that climate change is likely to affect gender and social relations in South Asia.

“Climate Change in South Asia: Towards an Equitable Legal Response within a Framework of Sustainable Development and Human Security”

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Climate change has received unprecedented attention in recent months, from the Nobel peace prize award to the conference in Bali. While global climate change originated as an environmental problem, it now impinges on every aspect of human life. As the UNDP notes in its Human Development Report:

“millions of world’s poorest people are already being forced to cope with impacts of climate change..... But increased exposure to drought, to more intense storms, to floods and environmental stress is holding back the efforts of the world’s poor to build a better life for themselves and their children.”¹

This clearly links climate change, poverty and the protection of human rights. It also highlights that the world’s poor is bearing the brunt of climate change.

¹ See Overview, “*Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*,” Human Development Report 2007/08 (UNDP) available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008>

South Asia provides an interesting case study as their issues are wide and varied and a holistic approach to climate change would be necessary. Thus, issues relevant to India

which is fast industrializing will be different from the Maldives, which is threatened by submergence due to rising sea levels giving rise to “climate refugees.” Problems facing Sri Lanka, an island nation, will be different from Nepal which is a landlocked state. All these countries are also plagued by conflict and poverty.

My paper will discuss the challenges faced by South Asia, including the issue of climate refugees. It will discuss the rights that will be violated as a result of climate change and how South Asia could address this amidst poverty and conflict. It will propose sustainable development and human security as providing the necessary framework to address these challenges.