



The Gendered Impacts of Climate Change in Rakhine State, Myanmar

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Introduction

Rakhine State is the area of Myanmar most vulnerable to natural calamities like floods and cyclones (Malteser International). Regarding climate change effects, minorities in Rakhine State are particularly vulnerable, with poor public services and a lack of resources and institutions, increasing the risks faced by women and girls (Kapoor, Alcayna, Boer, Gleason, Bhandari & Heinrich, 2021). In addition, women and girls from various parts of Rakhine State experience disparities in participation, decision-making, domestic labor division, and employment and compensation (Kimiri, Hoffmann & Haneef, 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to highlight the importance of women participation in climate policies formulation, to understand the current status of climate change impacts. This study also contributes key policy recommendations for promoting women's participation in policymaking and solutions for gender inequality and climate change issues.

Problem Statement

Climate change has been impacting Myanmar for the past six decades, such as increasing high temperatures, increasing rainfall in most areas, and the late onset and early termination of the south-west monsoon (CARE Denmark, 2023). The impacts of climate change contribute to the increase of displaced people in Myanmar. For example, the effect of Cyclone Mocha is estimated to have affected 3.4 million people in areas such as Rakhine, Chin and Kachin states and Sagaing and Magway regions. Due to severe floods and landslides, it forces many families and children to leave their homes, with no access or limited to healthcare, education, water and sanitation services. It is noticed that Disasters affect women and girls more than boys and men (Yilma, 2023). In Myanmar, Rakhine State is primarily impacted by natural disasters (Malteser International, 2016). Cyclones, droughts, and flooding are among the natural disasters that frequently cause a 20 percent loss in harvest. In light of this, the majority of the fifty percent of women in Rakhine work in agricultural fields such as rice growing and vegetable planting and sales (International Rice Research Institute, 2021).

Regarding the impacts of climate change, in Myanmar, women are more likely to suffer from it because they mostly lack access to fundamental human rights such as the ability to freely move and possess land (McCarthy, 2020). Moreover, according to the Myanmar Climate Change Alliance (MCCA), in Myanmar, women particularly possess a lower level of education and lower participation in formal employment. All of these factors are contributing to women's lack of access to take part in decision-

making and their lack of opportunities for markets, capital, training, and technologies. As a result, the lack of women's access to resources and decision-making limits their ability to respond to the impacts of climate change (Beute, 2019). Moreover, because of the discrimination against women in Rakhine, women are frequently perceived as less capable workers than their male colleagues who are physically stronger (International Rice Research Institute, 2021) and they experience the challenges in Rakhine State, since they have more barriers than men to achieving a reasonable level of living (UNDP, Myanmar).

Analysing Myanmar Climate Change Strategy (2018-2030) under Institutionalism

With a multi-sectoral approach, the Myanmar Climate Change Strategy (MCCS, 2018–2030) is a national policy document. This strategy's ultimate objective is to promote equitable and sustainable development and that Myanmar has adopted a low-carbon growth route and become climate resilient by 2030. The Technical Working Group of the Myanmar Climate Change Alliance Programme (MCCA) coordinated and discussed climate change across ministries, cities, civil society, the private sector, the university, and the development partners in order to formulate the with the assistance of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC). Furthermore, in terms of international collaboration, MONREC was assisted by the European Union, UN-Habitat and UN Environment, and the expertise of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

In terms of formulating and making decisions, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of Myanmar's parliamentary republic are in charge of making decisions. MCCS (2018–2030) states that when it comes to inclusive decision-making, Myanmar is transitioning to political democratization and decentralization. As part of this process, the country's governance system is being reorganized, with authority being assigned to regions and states for the following roles and responsibilities:

- A. Enacting laws pertaining to certain sectors
- B. Making laws
- C. Submitting the Regions and States Budget Bill, based on the annual Union Budget
- D. Collecting taxes and revenues
- E. Spending the regional and state fund
- F. Managing, guiding, supervising and inspecting local government activities
- G. Supervising, inspecting and coordinating civil service organisations
- H. Forming civil service organisations to support regional and state governance objectives and appoint their personnel.

However, since the ongoing military coup in Myanmar makes the Myanmar Climate Change Strategy (2018–2030) more difficult to mitigate the effects of climate change, which is why government climate programs are being postponed or suspended (Lo & Hoy, 2023). In addition, the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament in Myanmar declined to 15.29 percent in 2021 (Statista, 2024). It shows that women participation in the decision making process is lower.

In terms of gender consideration, MCCS (2018–2030) states that women can take the lead in addressing the effects of climate change by, for instance, starting small-scale businesses and entrepreneurship. By maximizing energy efficiency, utilizing low-footprint energy sources and practices, and influencing a household's usage of ecosystem services, they can significantly contribute to the mitigation of climate change. Understanding these various talents, demands, and vulnerabilities is essential for efficient environmental management and protection in the face of climate change. Women should be consulted during the national implementation of climate change planning, and through best practices, they should be identified as program beneficiaries. This can involve setting aside a certain percentage of women's seats on local committees dealing with climate change, holding women-only consultation sessions, and offering secure transportation and child care so that women can attend meetings.

In conclusion, the Myanmar Climate Change Strategy does not provide a significant role for women in taking part in policy formulation. Notably, it provides only recommendations for gender consideration. When gender consideration is suggested but no concrete steps are taken to guarantee women's involvement in institutions, it frequently leads to unclear promises. The efficacy of the policies may be weakened by this lack of actual action. It is also hard to turn gender considerations into visible outcomes without specific guidelines and accountability systems. Finally, such policies may not address the structural barriers that hinder women's participation in policy formulations and institutions. Issues like discrimination, lack of access to education and resources, and cultural norms remain unsolved, limiting the overall impact.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Rakhine had one of the highest rates of poverty in all of Myanmar. In addition, Rakhine State has a history of social marginalization, conflict between various ethnic groups and the military, and climate change disasters. Women have been excluded from decision making processes and policy formulations. Based on finding and results, I would like to recommend policy suggestions for Rakhine State as follow:

- Laws that ensure women's equal rights and opportunities in policy-making processes must be put into place and upheld in order to encourage women's active engagement in the development of climate change policies at both national and regional level. Legal safeguards establish a fundamental structure that guarantees that female perspectives are acknowledged and valued. Through the implementation of strong legal measures, gender equality can be institutionalised, thereby removing structural obstacles and facilitating women's effective participation in policy development. In addition to recognizing the value of women's participation, these legislative frameworks give them the protection and assistance they need to participate meaningfully and with confidence in decision-making processes.
- In order to enable gender-responsive policy results concerning climate change, it is essential to establish inclusive governance frameworks that require the inclusion of women in decision-making entities. Making sure women are represented at important organisations can have a big impact on how policies are formulated to address the particular issues and viewpoints that women face. In addition to encouraging diversity, inclusive governance brings a wider range of perspectives and experiences to the decision-making process, resulting in more thorough and successful climate policy. We can make sure that efforts to address climate change are equitable and take account of the demands of all societal members by institutionalising women's representation.
- Building women's capacity to successfully engage in policy formulation requires providing them with focused training and educational opportunities. Giving women the tools they need to succeed improves their self-esteem and makes it easier for them to make significant contributions to policy discussions. These programs can address a variety of topics, such as negotiation methods, technical knowledge of climate issues, and leadership development, making sure that women are prepared to participate in and have an impact on decision-making processes. We can establish a more proficient and inclusive policy-making atmosphere that gains from a diversity of viewpoints and knowledge by supporting women's education and training.
- It is essential to provide safe spaces where women may freely express their opinions and work together on climate change projects, especially in areas affected by discrimination and conflict.

Safe spaces are crucial for encouraging candid conversation because they provide women the confidence to express their opinions and thoughts without worrying about discrimination or retaliation. By ensuring that women's opinions are heard and respected during policy talks, these settings assist in lowering the dangers related to women's participation. Women may be empowered to actively participate in climate action and contribute to more inclusive and effective solutions by building safe and supportive venues.

- An effective and inclusive climate action requires supporting community-based programs that actively include women in projects aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change. Participation at the grassroots level guarantees that policies are based on the experiences of people most impacted by climate change and amplifies the voices of women. Women's local knowledge and experiences can be tapped into when we involve them at the community level, resulting in deeper and long-lasting solutions. By ensuring that climate policies are influenced by the lived experiences of various community members, this strategy not only empowers women but also improves the overall resilience and effectiveness of climate initiatives.
- Gender analysis must be incorporated into climate policy creation at every level in order to address the unique demands and vulnerabilities of women. Policies can be made more effective and inclusive by making sure that gender views are taken into account at every level of the planning process, from implementation to evaluation. Policies that take gender equality into consideration lessen the disproportionate effects of climate change on women and encourage the development of equitable resilience. This strategy not only makes sure that the special experiences and difficulties faced by women are acknowledged and taken into consideration, but it also helps create more equitable and comprehensive climate solutions that benefit the whole community.
- Funding and resources must be allocated expressly for programs that encourage women to participate in the formulation of climate policy. Support from the financial community is essential to keeping women involved and empowering them to take meaningful climate action. Funding for women-focused projects can guarantee fair access to leadership, education, and training opportunities that enable women to participate productively in talks about climate policy. In addition to enhancing women's ability to tackle climate issues, this investment promotes more resilient and inclusive policy results that benefit entire communities.
- Lastly, to make sure that climate policies continue to be responsive to the evolving needs of women, it is important that monitoring and evaluation systems be established in order to evaluate the gender consequences of these policies. Ongoing assessment makes it possible to spot weaknesses and obstacles, allowing for prompt strategy modifications when necessary. We can make sure that climate policies are inclusive and flexible, increasing their impact over time, by methodically evaluating their efficacy from a gender perspective. This strategy creates a flexible policy framework that is more suited to handle the particular difficulties that women encounter in the context of climate change.

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