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How Climate Change Discourses are Negotiated at Meso Level: Revisiting Annual Development Planning in Nepal

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Abstract: This article examines how climate change discourses are generated and negotiated in two parallel meso-level planning processes for annual development programmes in Nepal. This enquiry adopts a comparative analysis of district government planning and regional forestry planning around climate change issues, defined by two concepts: heterogeneous actors and interrelationship among these actors and various sectors. The findings suggest that climate change has drawn the attention of both the planning processes. However, both the processes lack the ‘communications–collaboration’ approach to planning and are overly-dominated by the top–down process. Consequently, they fail to address the practical problems and voices of the communities vulnerable to climate change. The paper argues that the persistence of feudal culture in political leadership, pre-conceived priorities of aid agencies, unscrupulous development administration and limitations of civil society are responsible of the failure of either planning to address the problems.

Key words: Climate change, planning, communication-collaboration, Nepal, local government

INTRODUCTION

The concern about how to mainstream the climate change into development plans and programmes has drawn considerable attention of policy-makers, researchers, development projects and local-level stakeholders in ‘least developed countries’ (LDCs). Under the aegis of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), LDCs have country-specific National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) to devise adaptation measures and actions at the national and local levels. While UNFCCC (2001: p8) assumes NAPAs to be ‘action oriented and country driven’, it does not specifically acknowledge the role of meso-level institutions in responding to climate change-related issues raised by climate vulnerable communities. We argue that local actions, national authorities and policies are connected through meso-level institutions in which climate change-related discourses and plans are produced and negotiated. By meso-level institutions, in this paper, we mean a combination of organizations,

structures, mechanisms, rules and practices operating at the meso level, which structurally lies between local and national levels.

This paper explores how programmes related to climate change, such as awareness, mitigation and adaptation, are taken into consideration in two meso-level development planning processes in Nepal. Specifically we look at how annual programmes responding to climate change are formulated in district government planning led by District Development Committees (DDCs) and in annual regional forestry planning led by Regional Directorates of Forests. In both the planning processes, climate change has been one of the agendas to be discussed and included in the programmes to be implemented at the district level.

These two planning processes are crucial for our analytical enquiry. First, we consider policy and legal aspects. The Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) of Nepal requires that all ‘development programmes’ (as opposed to ‘recurrent

programmes'), which also include climate change-related activities at district level, be planned and finalized annually by the respective district governments (GoN 1999). It legitimizes the scope of district government planning as a core platform to mainstream climate change programmes at the district level. Second, we consider what is being practised. Nepal's forestry sector has played a proactive role in establishing two units at the ministerial level, namely the 'Climate Change and REDD Forestry Cell' and the 'Climate Adaptation Promotion Cell', to work on climate change-related activities. Forestry sector planning can contribute to reshaping the direction of climate change policies and attendant local actions through its departmental networks and linkages with community forestry user groups (CFUGs) across the country. Nepal's NAPA underscores the need for enhancing community-based adaptation to climate change by integrating various sectors such as agriculture, water, forest and biodiversity in which district government planning and forestry planning play crucial roles (GoN 2010).

Our focus on planning in meso-level institutions (instead of those at other levels), arises from some contextual backdrops behind the issue of climate change. It is the meso institutions that can mediate both the macro (for policy and resource support) and micro (for local actions) levels for effective adaptation strategies and actions. However, we face difficulty in identifying meso-level institutions, especially when the boundaries between local, regional and national levels are fuzzy and context-specific. Bearing in mind this structural dilemma, we have picked two intermediary government institutions that claim to work in the middle between the 'local' or micro organizations and 'central' or macro authorities.

Both district government planning and regional forestry planning offer insights into how development agendas are contested and

negotiated in the same geographic locations and similar programmes. Our attention to these insights emerged from some theoretical problems in comparing these two planning processes. One of the most striking problems is the notion of 'centralised' versus 'decentralised' planning. When district government planning is considered 'decentralised' and forestry planning as 'centralised', no comparisons can be made between them since theoretically 'decentralised' planning is obviously preferred to 'centralised' one in democratic polity. However, both planning processes have been practised over more than a decade even after the legislation of the LSGA. The assumptions of centralised versus decentralised planning in this particular case are, therefore, problematic. It is only through a comparison of both the processes that we can better understand how and why some planning processes succeed or fail to address urgent issues, such as climate change adaptation.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

Our approach

We are not using 'climate lens' to examine the plans or the programmes as a product (OECD 2009), but looking at the process of making annual plans for climate change at the meso level.

First, we clarify what we mean by 'planning' in this paper. While the term 'planning process' means a combination of formulating, implementing and monitoring programmes in many cases (e.g. Briassoulis 1989), we confine the term 'planning' to mean only the formulation or making of annual plans or programmes of a given institution. In this connection, meso-level planning can be structurally understood as the planning in the middle between the micro planning (at village or user group level) and macro planning (at

national level). Nonetheless, the structural definition is not sufficient to understand its essence. Meso-level planning in the environmental sector is characterised by two fundamental attributes, namely the involvement of heterogeneous actors and interdependence of these actors in collaboration (Schenk *et al.* 2007). These two integral characteristics of meso planning are taken into account in looking at how both the planning processes provide space for various actors to take part and how various actors and sectors interact for planning, including climate change.

The web of multiple actors in development sectors requires that these actors are adequately informed of the planning process and collaborate for planning, implementation and monitoring of planned activities. This has led us to further analyse whether the planning theory of 'communications and collaboration' (Lawrence 2000) has been adopted in each of the planning processes to address the fundamental features of multiple actors and interdependency dynamics expected in meso planning. Hence, we elaborate the planning theory on 'communications and collaboration' as a crucial tool to analyse how and why multiple actors have (or have not) been communicated to, and collaborated in, planning and implementing actions concerning climate change.

The planning theory of 'communications and collaboration' identifies multiple and heterogeneous actors as the major 'planners' as opposed to the traditional view that planning should be undertaken by only technical experts (Lawrence 2000). The thrust of this concept is that there should be a collective exercise of planning by multiple actors rather than by only a planning unit having engineers and technocrats. The theory has two key aspects: the actions of communications and the actions of collaboration for planning environmental programmes. The actions of communications

include sincere, comprehensive, truthful and legitimate information flows among the actors for planning (Lawrence 2000). No information is manipulated or distorted but is made transparent for better planning. The actions of collaboration, on the other hand, seek to establish joint or collective actions among heterogeneous actors to find out a consensual or negotiated outcome following group deliberations, argumentation and discussions. Pursuant to this theory, the planning is 'radical' to challenge the status quo (Hudson *et al.* 1979) and 'participatory/consensual' to ensure democratic decision making in planning (Briassoulis 1989). By using this theoretical framework, we examine how communications are transmitted and how voices of multiple actors are considered important in both the planning processes.

The enquiry is undertaken as a case study. The data and information for the paper were collected from both secondary and primary sources. The major secondary sources are the approved annual programmes of Dhading DDC and District Forest Office (DFO)–Dhading for three consecutive fiscal years (FY), 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13. The list of participants in the planning workshops was collected from the planning minutes of the respective offices. The secondary information was substantiated by interviews with key informants from DDC, DFO, political parties and local NGOs.

The study area

Dhading is a district stretching from the mid-hill to the Himalayas in central Nepal. The elevation ranges from 300 m in the south to 7,110 m in the north, showing very sharp elevation gradients, almost similar to the country's altitudinal variations. The total area of the district is 1,924 sq km, out of which forests and agricultural lands occupy 48 and 38 percent respectively. The forests are mostly managed under a community-based regime in which there

are 628 CFUGs managing altogether 25,241 ha of community forests across the district. Community-based leasehold forests occupy 1,722 ha and are managed by 530 leasehold forest groups. High altitude pastures occupy about 9 percent of land. The annual rainfall has been recorded in a range between 1,912 mm and 3,535 mm, which is higher than the average annual rainfall of the country. Demographically, the last census carried out in 2001 recorded 66,612 households and a total population of 338,658 in the district. The indigenous ethnic people make up almost half of the population in which Tamang, Newar and Magar ethnic groups represent the top three portions, representing nearly 22, 10 and 9 percent respectively of the total population. The Brahmin and Kshetriya castes together make up approximately 30 percent of the district population.

The altitudinal and the attendants climatic, biological, social and cultural diversities were the major factors in selecting the district for this case study, given the varied meaning of climate change to these diversities.

COMPARING INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

District government planning

District government planning is held annually as a mandatory action following the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD), mainly based on the LSGA. The programmes identified at user groups and/or village development committees (VDCs) (micro level) are collected, negotiated and finalized in district government planning (meso level), followed by the approval of the National Planning Commission (NPC), a macro-level organization. The Environment Management Section of the MoLD has recently identified climate change as one of the thematic areas for sustainable local development. The Section has produced various guidelines for annual planning of VDCs, municipalities and DDCs. These guidelines were revised in 2011 to incorporate climate change as one of the considerations besides several others, including poverty reduction and environmental conservation (DDC Dhading 2012b)

Table 1: Participants and invitees in district government planning in two consecutive fiscal years

		2010/11	2011/12
Participants	Political party representatives	72	57
	NGO representatives	31	31
	VDC secretaries	14	14
	DDC staffs	33	35
	Central government staffs at district level	24	24
	Journalists	12	10
Invitee	Existing parliamentarians	4	5
	Former parliamentarians	1	1
	Former minister from the district	0	1
	Former DDC chairpersons	1	1
	Former DDC members	1	0
	Representatives from 7 major political parties	7	10

Source: DDC Dhading (2012b)

The annual planning undergoes at least 14 steps, starting at the ward level of the VDC (the local government unit at village level) before being finalized by the District Development Council, which is represented by political parties, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other line agencies at the district level (DDC Dhading 2012b) (Table 1). It provides opportunities, at least in theory, for the local people to express their voices and concerns right from the grass roots level, albeit under budget constraints and competing priorities. The major objective of the district government planning is socio-economic development, particularly for infrastructural change, redistributive justice, environmental concern and community empowerment (DDC Dhading 2012a).

Regional forestry planning

Regional forestry planning is a meso-level process in which district-level forest officers in a region gather together to finalize their annual plans. In Nepal, there are five regions, each containing districts in a range from nine to 19 to cover all 75 districts. Each district forest office brings along its annual plan of programme for the following fiscal year to the regional planning. The programmes are discussed, negotiated and finalized in the light of Departmental guidelines and within the budget ceiling for the particular fiscal year. The programmes are collected by the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation and sent to the NPC for final approval. Unlike district government planning, the forestry planning is

complex in the sense that the programmes are finalized in regional forestry planning but have to be endorsed by the district government. The timing of the regional forestry planning and district government planning is not uniform every year. Mostly, regional forestry planning precedes district government planning, which makes the endorsement of forestry programmes at district government a mere formality, as they have already been finalized at regional forestry planning.

We compare district government planning with regional forestry planning, instead of district forestry planning for three reasons. First, annual district forestry planning is not mandatory (neither in forest laws nor in practice), but the draft annual plan of programmes can be formulated in a staff meeting at the DFO. There are no obligations for DFOs to hold planning at lower levels such as Area Forest Offices or Range Posts even if some proactive District Forest Officers adhere to district forestry planning. It is only regional forestry planning that is held annually in practice, although it is not guided by any laws, as in the case of district government planning in the LSGA 1999. Second, the DFO cannot finalize its annual plan of programmes at the district level, but regional planning can. Third, DFOs, like other central government agencies at the district level, have to submit their plans to the district development council concerned for endorsement, which implies that district government planning and district forestry planning do not stand on an equal footing.

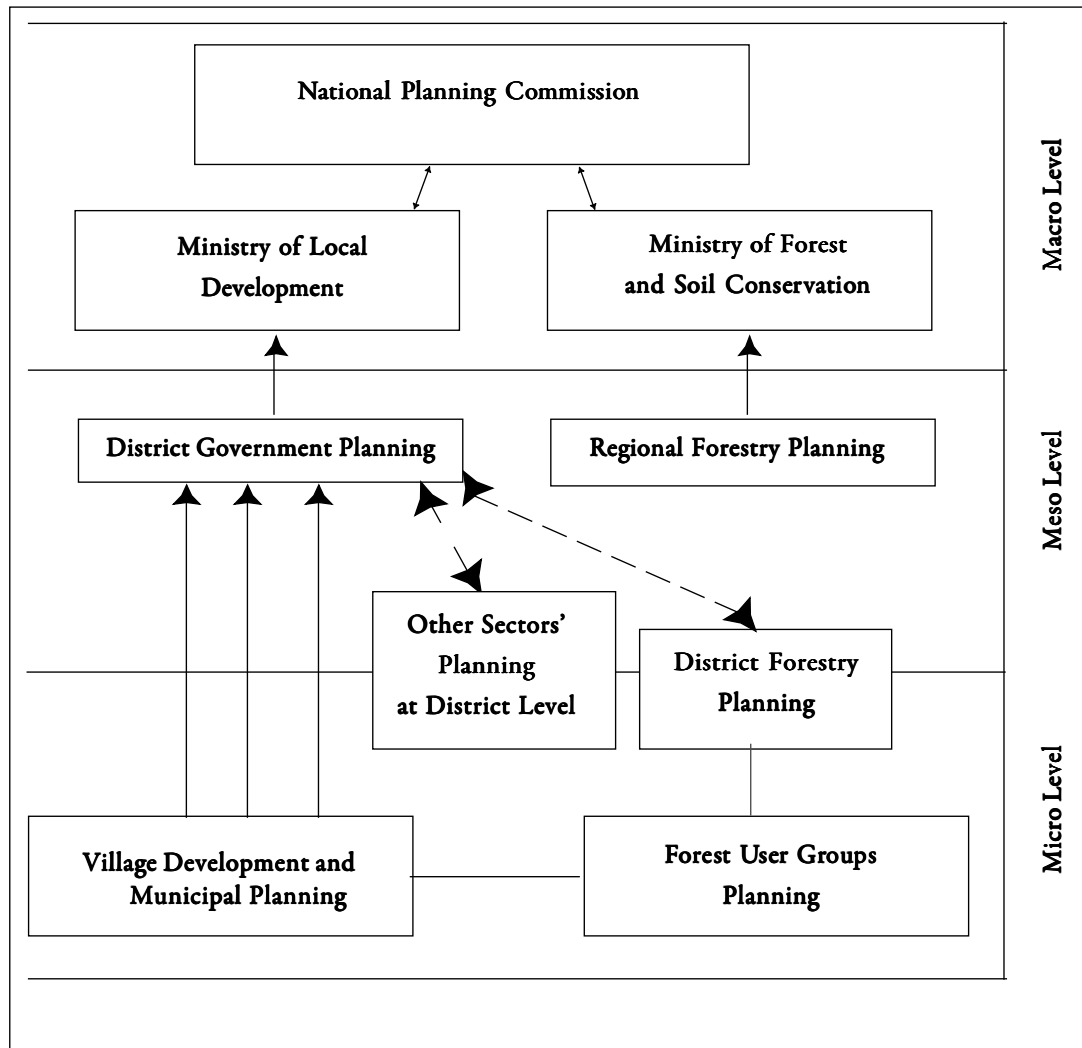


Figure 1: Schematic overview of planning process in district government and forestry agencies

Figure 1 illustrates how annual programmes are channelized and approved in district government and forestry planning. The continuous lines with arrow heads means the mandatory and strong linkages between the two institutions, while the dotted lines with arrow head means the relationship is more of a formality. The dotted lines without arrowhead indicate an optional linkage between institutions.

COMPARING INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The agenda of climate change has emerged very recently in both district government and forestry planning, particularly since 2010. The programme of climate change was, however, included only from FY 2010/11 at a token scale in terms of magnitude of budget and activities

in forestry planning and from FY 2012/13 in district government planning. Table 2 illustrates the environment and climate-related activities in the district government plan in the last two years and the proposed plan for the coming fiscal year in the study district. Those programmes

focus mainly on climate change sensitization in district government plans, while the awareness activities and improvement of community forestry operational plans are in line with climate change in forestry plans.

Table 2: Activities and budget under environment and climate change programmes in district government plan in Dhading district

Activities	Annual budget of the targeted activities (in NRs)		
	FY 2010/11	FY 2011/12	FY 2012/13
Subsidies on biogas installation (clean energy)	150,000	250,000	0
Environmental conservation programmes (as per Initial Environmental Examinations)	4,000,000	3,500,000	3,000,000
Environmental Impact Assessment for exploiting boulders, gravel and sand	100,000	750,000	0
Promotion of improved cooking stoves (clean energy)	0	50,000	50,000
Forest-based green employment programme	0	200,000	0
Interaction about climate change and its adaptation	0	0	50,000
Total	5,150,000	4,750,000	3,100,000

As all the development activities in forestry plan are in one way or another related to forest management and capacity building of staff and forest users in controlling deforestation and forest degradation, they can be interpreted as 'climate change mitigation' activities. However, the exact activity under the climate change title in forestry planning started only in FY2010/11

(DFO Dhading 2012). The 'climate change' activities in district forestry plan in the last two consecutive fiscal years are highlighted in Table 3. Over the three years, the climate change-related activities have increased every year in the plans, from which it can be assumed that the climate change-related activities are likely to increase in the years to come.

Table 3: Specific activities identified as ‘climate change’ in DFO plans

Activities	Annual Target					
	FY 2010/11		FY 2011/12		FY 2012/13	
	Quantity	Budget (NRs)	Quantity	Budget (NRs)	Quantity	Budget (NRs)
Preparation of community forest operational plans (in line with adaptation to climate change)	25	62,0500	6	30,000	15	75
Revision of community forest operational plans (in line with adaptation to climate change)	0		50	200,000	65	260
Workshop for DFO staff on the revision of community forest operational plan in line with climate change adaptation	0		0		8	80,000

There are some similarities and differences in both the planning processes to respond to climate change issues. Looking at the similarities, both the institutions have started discussing climate change very recently, mostly in the aftermath of Nepal’s NAPA. Both the institutions plan their programmes based on the guidelines provided by their respective Ministries. Both the institutions have to abide by the budget ceiling provided by their respective Ministries.

The differences between the two institutions in planning climate change-related programmes are more prominent than the similarities. We particularly look at the two fundamental features of meso planning, viz. nature of actors and interdependency of actors and sectors. The

actors in district government planning are more diverse and heterogeneous than in forestry planning. Political party leaders, local government representatives, central government agencies at the district level and NGO representatives are the major participants in district government planning. However, regional forestry planning has participation of only government officials and representatives of aid agencies in the forestry sector. Likewise, district government planning accommodates various sectoral activities ranging from infrastructure to social justice, while forestry planning can only accommodate programmes of the environmental sector. Consequently, the interdependency of various sectors is very high and required in district government planning

as opposed to forestry planning where inter-sectoral coordination is relatively low. The scope for discussion and deliberation for negotiations is relatively high in district government planning due to the presence of diverse actors from both vertical and horizontal spectrums.

The scope for discussion and deliberation of innovative ideas and programmes beyond the departmental directions is relatively low in forestry planning due to the hierarchical and mono-sector representations. The planning is just an ‘in-house discussion’ because there is no provision for any external stakeholders, such as CFUGs, networks of users, forest-based entrepreneurs and forestry NGOs to participate, let alone political party leaders, forest-dependent communities or climate activists.

These features are applicable to all issues, including climate change, in the two planning processes. However, the scope of putting climate change agenda in discussions is very high in regional forestry planning in comparison to district government planning since, with the initiation of the Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programmes, forestry has been interpreted as a key mitigation measure of climate change. The discourse of climate change is diffused in district government planning because some conventional activities, such as infrastructures and social security, often get priority for budgetary support. Table 4 provides a summary of differences between the district government and forestry planning.

Table 4: Comparative dimensions in district government and regional forestry planning

Dimensions	District Government Planning	Regional Forestry Planning
Organizers	District Development Committee	Regional Forestry Directorate
Participating actors	Political party leaders, local government representatives, central government agencies at district level, NGO representatives	Officers from district-level forestry organizations and para-statal, regional forestry directorate, representatives from forestry projects, representatives from the Ministry and Department
Nature of actors	Heterogeneous in terms of sectoral interests and representations	Homogeneous in terms of sectoral representations
Space for discussions	Relatively high and deliberative	Relatively low and confined within the given frameworks
Sectoral issues	All sectoral issues, including environment and climate change	Only forest and environment related issues, including climate change
Focus on climate change	Relatively low	Relatively high

Source: Analysed by authors based on key informant interviews and documents

Despite some scope in both the planning processes for responding to climate change, we have found substantial limitations in these processes in capturing essential issues of climate

change. Our key informant interviews provide some insights into how both the processes lack some substantive steps and actions to respond effectively to climate change, particularly from

the perspectives of climate vulnerable communities.

Although divergent actors take part in district government planning, the way local people are communicated and consulted for this process is very limited. The district government invites political parties, some selected NGOs and government agencies mostly based in the district headquarters. It is convenient for the district government to invite the elite, while political leaders are happy to represent local people without any immediate inputs or feedback from them. The lack of elected representatives in local government for more than 10 years has aggravated the misrepresentation of the voices of the local people in planning. A political leader at the district level claimed:

The planning process in district government is very democratic and rigorous. It starts right at the ward level and moves up to the district council. It is not possible to involve each and every individual who is interested to take part. The political leaders represent the voices of the local people who could not participate in the planning.

This type of response from political leadership reflects a tendency to explain every planning as highly democratic and deliberative if leaders from political parties get opportunities to take part in it irrespective of whether they are elected or self-proclaimed. When there is no elected district government, such tendency can curtail the presence of ordinary citizens in the discussions on planning. It is only elite who capture the space for discussion in planning in the name of climate vulnerable communities. The political actors taking part in the planning processes are not elected representatives. Since the last elected local governments were dissolved in 2002 (Adhikari 2010), political parties have not initiated to hold elections for the same. It reflects the tendency of the political parties to represent local people on arbitrary

basis rather than through democratic elections. The leaders who take part in planning are not directly accountable to any people in any geographic constituency since they are not elected. In other words, it is a feudal mentality or practice of political leadership ruling people without being democratically elected (Yardley 2011). People working in civil societies or community networks disagree with what political party leaders claim with respect to district government planning being held consultative. A district-level leader of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities argues:

I do not know exactly what climate change is. But we have experienced more droughts, more floods, hotter days during summer and colder days in winter than some 20 years ago. I have attended training where trainers said it is due to climate change. If this is the case, the most affected people who are poor and marginalized need to be consulted in planning. I have not seen both DDC and DFO ever consulting local people for making any climate change-related programmes.

The lack of proper communication to wider actors and absence of effective collaboration among various sectors are evident in both the planning processes. Adaptation to climate change has been adopted as an activity in planning, but not as a response to the demand of the communities impacted by the climate change. These activities have been included in the district government plan due to the instructions of the MoLD under the UNDP-funded Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP). It is rather initiated by donor communities in a top-down fashion. Forestry planning also included the improvement of community forest operational plans in line with climate change adaptation, but not as a response to the demand of CFUGs, but under the direct instructions of the DoF. The forestry organizations have also initiated

climate change-related activities under some aid programmes. A member of staff at the district government agrees:

Political leaders and people from indigenous and ethnic communities talk about climate change in their life. They ask us to propose programmes for climate change awareness and sensitization. Our response to climate change in the new plan was instigated by the LGCDP, not by what local people said. All the district-level activities have to be fitted in the guided programmes under the budget ceiling. The huge expenditures on infrastructures could also help people adapt to climate change, but we have not been able to directly link these activities to climate change.

The above quotation indicates the need for not only addressing climate change, but also adjusting the ongoing programmes in line with climate change. What they have been doing so far could help people adapt to climate change, but these programmes have not been justified in the language of climate change. The initiation of putting climate-change related activities in forestry planning is also a response to the Departmental instructions, rather than to the voices of the local people. A forestry official puts it this way:

Talking about unique programmes, such as adaptation to climate change for a particular location of a district is futile in regional planning workshops. Even if we put it from our side, the regional workshop changes the whole set of programmes and tries to make a uniform set of programmes applicable to all the districts in the region, or at worse across the country. We have to propose only those programmes that the Department guides us to propose at the regional workshop. This trend has been continued because there are only forest officers, who have to adhere to the instructions of the Department the regional planning.

There has been a practice of getting forestry plans endorsed in district government planning,

as required by the LSGA. But this process has been a mere formality for both district government and forestry sides. The district government does not own forestry programmes or endorses it as it is without engaging in discussion for two reasons. First, the district government personnel do not think forestry programmes politically as important as other programmes such as infrastructure to the local people. The sidelining of the district government to forestry programmes is likely, given that poverty reduction and economic outcome of community-based forestry has not been as effective as a positive environmental outcome to influence policymakers (DFRS 2009; Dhungana and Bhattarai 2008; Dhungana *et al.* 2008). Second, they have not been able to influence central government agencies to change the programmes considering several factors, including the separate planning processes and centrally guided programmes in those agencies. The forestry sector is also taking the endorsement of its programmes in district government planning as just a 'ceremonial activity' owing to the strict Departmental instructions, which do not offer choices to the forestry offices to engage in political deliberations to finalize their planning. The same forestry official argues:

I have never seen forestry as a priority area in district government plans. They are concerned about other environmental issues, such as Environmental Impact Assessment or improved cooking stoves. As these programmes are outsourced to NGOs, both the DDC and DFO are not directly concerned about these programmes. The Department provides guidelines for planning. So far, we have started incorporating climate change activities in the operational plans of community forests, whenever they are prepared or amended. It is due to the direction of the Department, not the demand of the community forest users or the district government to include such programmes.

The statements above suggest that neither the local government nor forestry institutions have adequately worked from the communications and collaboration approach, which is crucial for effective planning at the meso level. This is corroborated by the fact that heterogeneous actors and cross-sectoral discussions are almost absent in forestry planning, whereas these aspects are either elite-centric or too diffused to enhance the climate change dialogues in district government planning. This lacuna in planning narrows down the space for the vulnerable communities to voice their concerns and to change the process and outcomes of planning towards more climate justice.

FURTHER DISCUSSION AND PROSPECTS

The mitigation of, and adaption to, climate change are a daunting task requiring heavy amount of physical and financial resources, which needs a collaborative effort, but would be effective if led by the government in a country like Nepal, where there is a limited private sector. However, the involvement of local people in identifying needs of adaptation measures is equally important. We saw that both the district government and forestry institutions have neither adequately heard the voices of the local communities nor properly been informed by policy documents, such as NAPA. Some of the thematic areas of NAPA can be addressed by integrated efforts of different sectors, while some areas such as 'forest and biodiversity' and 'public health' need some specialized sectoral efforts. We argued that, however, both district government planning and regional forestry planning as meso-institutions have failed to adapt to effective multi-actors approach guided by the communications and collaboration theory of planning. The absence of elected representatives in the local governments has also constrained systematic channelling of discussions at various levels in the local governments from village to the district. As a

result, the voices of the local actors for climate change adaptation are left unheard in the annual plans of these institutions. Forestry planning has its own style of bringing together mostly forestry officials in the finalization of their programmes at regional workshops and endorsement of their plans at District Development Council has been a mere formality. District government planning has its own priority areas, and the climate change issue is considered something required to please aid agencies rather than the communities who are vulnerable to climate change. Both institutions have difficulty in internalizing climate change issues and actions for adaptation. They have their own sets of priorities in which climate change is not an important agenda of discussion.

We analysed how both local government and forestry planning at the meso level have failed to shape and reshape the responses of meso-level institutions to climate change, especially around the issues of heterogeneity and interdependency of actors and sectors in the light of the 'communications and collaboration' theory of planning. We now look at why these institutions have failed to consider the voices of the communities vulnerable to climate change. Our empirical studies concluded that there are four broad areas to be considered critical in this particular aspect.

First, the persistence of feudal culture and mentality in political leadership at all levels even in the post-Monarchy phase is evident in limiting democratic space for multiple actors to express their voices in both development and political agenda. The feudal paradigm of political leadership is manifested through a tendency to continue a hierarchical social structure in which the general populace is considered only followers rather than political actors (Barker 1997). This tendency precludes the voices of the poor and climate vulnerable people taking part in development dialogues. It is against the message in Nepal's NAPA that considers

‘identifying the people, communities and areas impacted by climate change and implementing adaptation and impact mitigation measures based on local knowledge, skills and technologies’ (GoN 2011: p6).

Second, the planning process in both local government and forestry are highly influenced by aid programmes, which at times collide with locally perceived priorities. The authors have some experience in how government plans and programmes are mediated by the advisors and employees of various aid programmes and projects. Ahead of each regional forestry planning event, a pre-planning workshop is often held in the presence of employees or advisors of donor-funded projects to finalize donor-specific programmes. We do not argue whether this practice is appropriate or inappropriate, but the scope for local officers to bring forth their innovative ideas or for other officers outside the project district to share their experiences for better programmes is limited. Donor-funded projects have their own log-frames to achieve tangible output within a specified time and, therefore, it is natural for them to become proactive to influence the development aid programmes towards their priority areas. Their concerns about misappropriation of funds through abuse of power or in the absence of proper monitoring could be considered genuine. However, the excessive controlling attitude of these agencies directly or indirectly contributes to creating a confusing atmosphere for the local people to participate in planning processes. This is more aggravated when some community-based organizations expect direct involvement of donor agencies in development programmes rather than through government institutions or local NGOs. In one of the district council meetings that the first author attended, a participant demanded that donor-funded programmes be directly implemented by donors rather than by government agencies and NGOs to avoid dilly-dallying and control corruption.

In this situation, the role of political parties and institutions becomes crucial to assure aid agencies about the effective and transparent utilization of funds and to bring poor and vulnerable communities to the forefront to raise voices for the plans and programmes that meet their own needs.

Third, the approach of public administration, especially development administration in Nepal is also problematic. It is criticized for being overly ‘techno-bureaucratic’ which does not fully recognize the roles of local people in development programmes such as community-based forestry (Giri and Ojha 2011). This tendency does not provide enough space for local people to engage in development discourses and actions, including those related to climate change adaptation.

Finally, civil societies, including NGOs at meso level, have also not been capacitated enough to influence development planning. They are constrained by a number of factors, including lack of funding, lack of acknowledgement on the part of state agencies and rivalries among NGOs for funded projects. More unified actions and solidarity among civil societies, including NGOs, would be desirable to influence political institutions, aid agencies and bureaucracy for social transformation, including better environmental governance and effective climate adaptation.

The four forces, namely political institutions (and parties), aid agencies, development administration and civil societies can mutually collaborate to synergize efforts in climate adaptation benefits targeted at the most vulnerable communities. Bringing the vulnerable to the forefront to engage in dialogues and discussions in both district government and forestry planning would be a crucial starting point. It is by adopting the communications and collaboration approach to planning at meso-

institutions that a space can be created for the communities vulnerable to climate change to fight for climate justice.

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