Developing policy analysis tools to measure the inclusivity of water-related policies

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Abstract: Government policies play a significant role in shaping societies. Policies establish objectives such as reducing vulnerabilities to disaster or the equitable distribution of natural resources including water. Policies also promote principles and guidelines, and often penalties, that governments use to realise objectives. We are interested in how water-related policies consider inclusivity, where inclusivity is defined as providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or ability. Governments have set targets 'to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls [where] gender equality is seen as a fundamental human right, essential for social progress, poverty reduction, food security, and a peaceful and prosperous world' (United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 5, SDG5). We argue that approaches and philosophies espoused by governments, especially in relation to seeking to include all groups of society, should be evident in their policies.

As part of a basin planning project with the Nepalese government, we analysed a selection of water-related articles (policies, strategies and acts) drawn from the agricultural, sanitation and water resources sectors for how (if at all) they reflected the government's commitment to SDG5. We drew on Feminist Policy Analysis (FPA) approaches to assist us. FPA was a new disciplinary area for us – and offered new perspectives that deepened our appreciation of how policies can progress social initiatives. In addition to providing a narrative describing our findings (Koirala et al. submitted), we developed a multi-dimensional index tool that scored the articles based on 5 dimensions that foster a gender-transformative approach (adapted from McPhail 2003 & Kanenberg et al. 2019): context (how the policy was constructed); intersectional identity; gender equality; power analysis; and material/symbolic reform (i.e. whether the policy improved the issue or was merely tokenistic).

Our analysis revealed that the articles drafted during the 1990s and early 2000s were pioneers, with mandated quotas for representation of women and Dalits on water user associations. And, while the Nepalese government has adopted an Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach which requires positive policies to empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programmes, the most recent (2020) National Water Resources Policy is silent on specific measures to empower women and other disadvantaged groups. This is regressive in comparison to earlier Water Resources Strategies and Policies that emphasised the need to balance gender participation, social equity and rural-urban growth. As a consequence, this Policy scored the lowest, its gender blindness reinforcing unbalanced norms and roles.

This presentation will describe how the index tool was formulated and how it can be adopted and adapted to analyse policies from multiple perspectives. As a modelling community, we may think that we have no role to play in driving inclusivity. This work, together with our earlier work on how to consider gender in your modelling practice (Packett et al. 2020), challenges that gender-blind assumption.

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