Environmental Science and Policy 81 (2018) 77–85

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Environmental Science and Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/envsci

Changing climate policy paradigms in Bangladesh and Nepal

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Climate change adaptation
Changing policy paradigms
Drivers of change
Modes of change
Bangladesh
Nepal

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to explain and compare the changes in climate policy paradigms (CPPs) of Bangladesh and Nepal. Climate policies are shaped by the underlying CPPs that refer to a dominant set of prevailing and institutionalized ideas and strategies to reduce the impacts of climate change. We focus the analysis on the timeframe between 1997 and 2016, using policy documents (n = 46) and semi-structured interviews (n = 43) with key policy actors. We find that in both countries several CPPs have emerged: disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, mainstreaming, and localized action for adaptation. In Bangladesh, specific policy goals and instruments for each CPP have emerged, whereas in Nepal the government has been struggling to develop specific policy instruments to implement the paradigms. We conclude that competing CPPs currently exist which creates diversified policy responses to climate change impacts in both countries. This 'layering' of different CPPs can be attributed to drivers such as unstable political situation, lack of financial support, influence of national and international non-governmental organizations and global policy frameworks. The findings in our study are relevant to further discussions on how to design future climate policy responses to adapt to climate change.

1. Introduction

Adaptation is necessary to lessen the current and future climate impacts. Particularly in highly vulnerable countries like Bangladesh and Nepal additional efforts are needed to increase adaptive capacity and reduce social vulnerability (Adger et al., 2003; Huq et al., 2004). Since 2000, the governments in these two countries have implemented various policies and plans to systematically reduce climate impacts (Vij et al., 2017). Underlying the design and implementation of these policies and plans are climate policy paradigms (CPPs), which refer to a comprehensive set of prevailing and institutionalized ideas and strategies of (policy) actors. The CPPs circumscribe the ways in which policy actors choose to frame particular policy issues, select types of instruments or allocate resources (Hall, 1993). One policy issue can be addressed by multiple paradigms, although tensions and trade-offs are then likely to emerge between competing policy paradigms (de Leon and Pittock, 2017).

The rapidly evolving debates on how to address the climate change impacts have resulted in a mushrooming of CPPs and policies in various policy arena's (Fankhauser et al., 2015). Particularly for least developed countries (LDCs), literature suggests that the CPPs are strongly influenced by the international arenas, particularly the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), bilateral organizations, and donor agencies (Rahman and Giessen, 2017). Apart from global drivers, the interests and knowledge of national policy actors drive the emergence and shape the CPPs. For instance, vested interests of national NGOs to capture foreign funding and political leaders to meet the interests of voters further shapes the CPPs (Barr et al., 2005). National policy drivers influence CPPs as much as the CPPs influence the drivers of change. So far, we know little about the CPPs and the drivers of CPP change and what this means for Bangladesh and Nepal aiming to reduce climate change vulnerabilities. Drivers of CPP change may include financial support, technical and social knowledge, political willingness, and global policy frameworks.

To design and implement effective climate policies in countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, it is pertinent to understand the past and current CPPs as these inform future policy actions. The article, therefore, aims to address two related questions: *1) What are the different CPPs that have emerged in the last two decades in Bangladesh and Nepal? 2) What drives the emergence and change of CPPs in these two LDCs?* Better understanding of policy paradigms and how this relates to policy actions is instrumental to future climate policies.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 elaborates the conceptual framework to operationalize the concept of CPPs and drivers of policy paradigm change. The methodology section introduces the selection of cases, data collection methods, and analysis. Section 4 presents the findings by demonstrating the emergence and

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.12.010
Received 6 November 2017; Received in revised form 15 December 2017; Accepted 16 December 2017

Table 1
Indicators of climate policy paradigms.

	Indicators	Description and key question
Climate policy paradigm (CPP)	Framing	How is the policy issue framed in terms of policy language used in the policy documents?
	Policy goal(s)	What are the climate specific policy goal(s) mentioned in the policy documents?
	Meso-level area(s)	Which are the relevant policy sectors for the implementation of climate policy?
	Financial policy instrument(s)	What are the financial policy instruments that are introduced at the ministry level to routinize the policy?

change of different CPPs in Bangladesh and Nepal, and describing the drivers that have influenced the change from one CPP to another. The discussion section compares the two cases, reflecting on the modes of CPP change and policy progress.

2. Policy paradigms and drivers of change

The conceptual underpinning of this article is inspired by Hall's seminal work on policy paradigms. He defines policy paradigm as "*a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing*" (Hall, 1993). Rooted in historical institutionalism, the argument is that paradigms are the underlying forces that determine the ways in which governments address policy issues such as climate change (Béland and Cox, 2013). Building on Hall's work, Howlett (2009) argues that policy paradigms strongly influence the formulation of policy goals and objectives, selection of instruments, and set the preference for implementation by actors. The existence of policy paradigms, therefore, influences the ways in which actors respond to particular issues as it sets prevailing ideas about what is considered logical, acceptable, appropriate and desirable.

2.1. Operationalizing policy paradigms

To operationalize this conceptualization of climate policy paradigms, we deconstruct it into a (1) prevalent set of ideas that is framed to reduce climate change impacts; (2) resulting in specific policy goal (s); (3) involves certain meso-level policy areas to achieve the goal(s); and (4) is operationalized and routinized by the government through certain financial policy instrument(s) (Table 1). We argue that a policy paradigm is in place when all four components are present and interlinked to each other.

The first indicator, **framing**, refers to how policy actors interpret, giving meaning to the problem of climate change impacts and which solutions are proposed (Dewulf, 2013). For example, climate change can be framed as a negative externality to the human system that can affect the health, education and other development aspects (human vulnerability-centered framing), while it can also be framed as a biophysical challenge damaging the ecosystem (climate-centered framing) (O'Brien et al., 2007). These two different frames can result in different policy goals and instruments to reduce the impacts of climate change.

The second indicator, **policy goal(s)**, refers to the main objective of a climate policy and indicates the integration of climate change in the governance system. The policy goals are often influenced by the framing of the problem and set the scope for further implementation through the choice of instruments (Candel and Biesbroek, 2016). Different policy goals can co-exist within the same climate policy. For example, to reduce the impacts of short-term disasters, goals are designed, emphasizing on flood-resistant infrastructure and disaster relief. Also, to improve the adaptive capacity of the communities, separate goals are developed stressing education and health sectors.

Third, **meso-level areas** are policy sectors that have specific goals to tackle climate change impacts. Whilst there can be overarching goals in how to address climate change impacts across sectors, each sector is expected to integrate climate responses in their own policy portfolio. Identifying meso-level areas is, therefore, necessary as it helps to operationalize the policy goals and select instruments used within the sector (Howlett, 2009). Important meso-level areas for climate change include agriculture, water, forests, and energy policy sectors.

Finally, **policy instruments** are the resources at the disposal by government(s) to intervene and implement policy action, so as to achieve the set policy goals. Various policy instruments have been reported such as knowledge, treasure, authority, and organization (Henstra, 2016). Emphasis in this study is on financial policy instruments, as they can clearly demarcate the services rendered by climate policies in an abstract or a specific way (Howlett, 2009). The range of financial policy instruments to achieve climate policy goals may include funds, subsidies, taxation, tax benefits, grants, interest free credit, and credit waivers.

2.2. Drivers of change

While generally stable, policy paradigms can change, as a result of various drivers, such as institutional and political failures of the existing system or through social learning (Hall, 1993). Some scholars argue that the changes are abrupt and sudden (punctuated equilibrium theory) whereas others emphasize on gradual changes (incrementalism). Baumgartner and Jones (1991) explained policy change processes as periods of marginal changes with critical junctures. In the context of climate change, it is often attributed to external shocks, such as flooding or droughts. However, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue that there are internal governmental dynamics that create gradual changes of the system. In reality, it is often a combination of drivers from different sources that are responsible for change.

Various categories of possible drivers have been developed. One distinction is between endogenous and exogenous drivers of policy change. Williams (2009) suggests that exogenous drivers such as globalization and international economic crisis are responsible for bringing policy paradigm change. Carmin et al. (2012) discusses endogenous forces, such as the role of civil society actors in pushing the public servants to implement the climate mitigation plans along with adaptation strategies in the urban areas. Another categorization is based on governance levels by distinguishing between domestic and international drivers (Capano and Howlett, 2009).

In this article, however, we do not constrain ourselves to such classifications, but rather empirically investigate the causal conditions to drivers of the empirically observed change that follows from changes in the indicators of Table 1.

2.3. Modes of change

The changes in paradigms can manifest in various ways, often following similar patterns. Frequently used modes to characterize changes in policy paradigms include layering, drift and conversion (Van der Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2017). *Layering* refers to a process of gradual change in which new frames, goals and instruments are added to existing institutions without replacing the pre-existing one (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). *Drift* refers to a process where there is a change of the existing institutions or elements due to shifts in the external environment (Hacker and Pierson, 2010). Finally, *conversion* is understood as redeployment of existing elements of an institution for new purposes