

# Reproducing Vulnerability Through Climate Change Adaptation? Policy Processes, Local Power Relations and Food Insecurity in North-Western Nepal

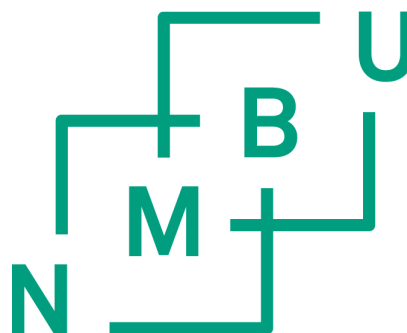
Reproduksjon av sårbarhet gjennom klimatilpasning?  
Policy-prosesser, lokale maktrelasjoner og matusikkerhet i det nordvestlige  
Nepal.

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

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## Summary in English

This dissertation examines the role of politics in driving vulnerability in rural households in western Nepal. More specifically, based on empirical data collected through extensive fieldwork in four villages in the district of Humla and in Kathmandu, it investigates how power relations influence differential vulnerability patterns at the local level and how Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) policies are influenced by and influence on key drivers of vulnerability.

The study pays particular attention to how power relations expressed through socio-political processes of marginalization and inequality determine people's vulnerability and adaptive capacity by legitimizing access to resources, decision-making and policy processes. It contributes to the nascent research agenda of politics of adaptation by using Nepal's CCA policy as a case to demonstrate how dominant narratives travel across scales to shape policies that promote technocratic and apolitical adaptation approaches that fail to address the root causes of vulnerability. The study builds upon political approaches to adaptation, and it uses household food insecurity as an entry point to analyze the implications of CCA policies and programs on local vulnerability dynamics. The analysis is based on a contextual vulnerability approach and the study situates CCA within a broader development debate concerning how social, political, economic and environmental processes interact to shape vulnerability contexts.

The main findings are presented in four papers that are presented in the Part II of the thesis.

These findings include:

- Power relations as expressed through processes of marginalization, oppression, social status and subjectivity are particularly important in driving differential vulnerability patterns within the villages.
- Current CCA approaches attempt to build adaptive capacity are limited to address vulnerability outcomes with apolitical and technocratic measures rather than the social and power relations that contribute to the vulnerability context of the most vulnerable households.
- Climate change is only one among several stressors contributing to vulnerability, and since CCA itself forms part of the local vulnerability context it interacts with local social

structures and power relations and risks reinforcing, rather than addressing, pre-existing vulnerability patterns.

- Nepal's CCA policies (the NAPA and LAPA) are limited by, and do not go beyond, existing development approaches when addressing climate vulnerability.
- The knowledge of the most vulnerable households is marginalized in the CCA policy process while the narratives of local elites converge with district and national level interests to shape policy outcomes that in turn acts to reinforce structural inequity and marginalization process at local level.

The thesis makes a strong case of how current CCA approaches may contribute to the perpetuation of intra village inequality, and thus to reinforcing rather than challenging existing vulnerability patterns in the face of climate change. It argues that for CCA to build long-term adaptive capacity, it needs to go beyond current development paradigms and be re-conceptualised as a socio-political process that aims to transform the conditions currently contributing to vulnerability. These findings point to a need for CCA policies to create new policy spaces where the knowledge of the most vulnerable is given authority to contest social and power structures currently constraining their development. To achieve this, the thesis identifies a need to further enhance our understanding of how power relations influence which knowledge counts in policy formulation and how policies can be designed to better address the contextual vulnerability of the most vulnerable households.