Approaches to policy discursive analysis:
Examples from Mekong hydropower sector and REDD+

Why study discourses?

- Words make worlds (Cornwall, 2007)

- Assumption is that history and humans are not 'driven' by objective interests, rational calculations, social norms or overt power struggles, but by constructed realities, knowledge production and (collective) interpretations of the world

- Ideas, concepts and narratives that are institutionalized in social practices provide a lens to understand what and who drives policy change or not → and how they affect social and ecological outcomes

Why study discourses?

- Discourses are perceived as both the outcome and medium of human action (Hajer 1995)

- Discourses as communication, as texts, as frames and as social practices

- Particularly for policy analysis, discourse is defined as a shared frame of meaning → how a policy problem is framed or defined will lead to specific or particular policy solutions

- Discourse as social practice highlights the power of discourses to 'discipline' human agencies to think, speak and act in a certain way (Foucault 1984)

Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach

- Foucauldian-inspired approach to making visible the politics and power relations in how problems are framed in public policies

	Question	Goal
1	What's the problem of (eg. domestic violence, abortion, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy?	To identify the implied problem representation in specific policies
2	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?	To identify and analyse the conceptual logics that underpin specific problem representations. The term 'conceptual logic' refers to meanings that must be in place for a particular problem representation to cohere or to make sense
3	How did this representation of the 'problem' come about?	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to take shape and to assume dominance
4	What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?	To raise reflection and consideration about issues and perspectives silenced
5	What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?	To identify the effects of specific problem representations so that they can be critically assessed
6	How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?	To pay attention both to the means through which some problem representations become dominant, and to the possibility of challenging problem representations that are judged to be harmful

The vulnerable and the virtous: framings of gender in climate change

Virtue and vulnerability: Discourses on women, gender and climate change

Seema Arora-Jonsson*

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Box 7005, 750 07 Uppsala, Sweden

- Women in the global South are affected more adversely by climate change than men – and men in the global North pollute more than women

- Feminisation of poverty and feminisation of responsibility:

   "... women, but mainly poor women, are most virtuous and conscientious in relation to the environment"

- Detracts attention from problem of gender and power inequalities in decision-making in both the North and South - yet inclusion of women in forestry organizations in India and Sweden was a way of maintaining the status quo

   "... polycentric approaches and democratisation of policy could mean that decisions take more time, although lack of action to address climate change over the last 20 years suggests that economic methods are little better at achieving action"

Power is missed in research on gender and climate change

Who's voice matters ? Who's ideas count?

Beyond dichotomies: Gender and intersecting inequalities in climate change studies

Authors   Authors and affiliations

Houria Djoudi ✉ , Bruno Locatelli, Chloe Vaast, Kiran Asher, Maria Brockhaus, Bimbika Basnett Sijapati

- Literature review of climate change and gender

- Men-versus-women dichotomy

- Little attention paid to power and social and political relations

- As in other domains of development and gender research depicts a 'feminization of vulnerability' and reinforces a 'victimization' discourse

- A critical intersectional assessment would contribute to unveil agency and emancipatory pathways in the adaptation process would consider complex power dynamics of existing social and political relations.
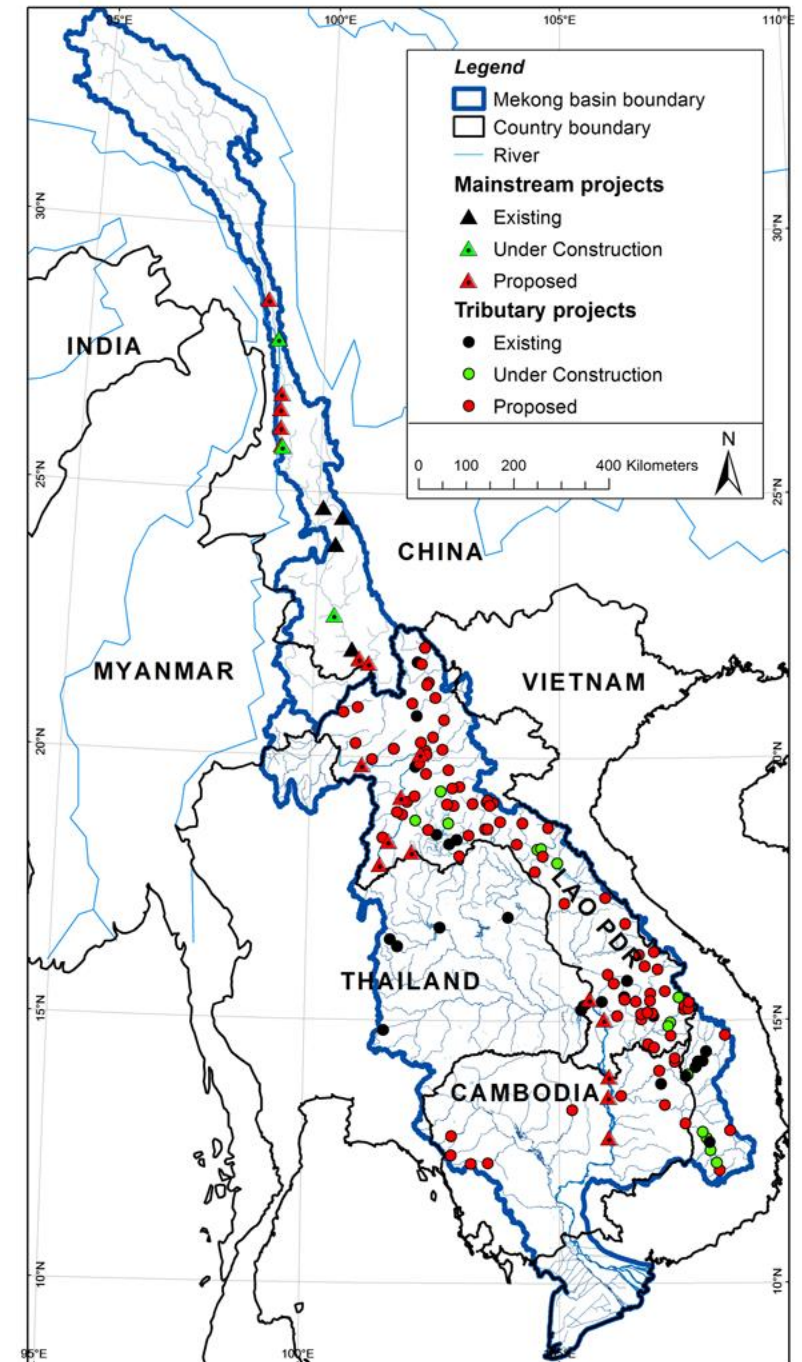
Example of method: Discourse analysis of gender and hydropower development in the Mekong region (Lebel et al. 2018)

- Four prominent gender in development discourses and strategies for women empowerment:
  - livelihoods and poverty: feminization of poverty
  - natural resources and the environment: women as "caretakers of the earth"
  - rights-based: violence, labor and land rights
  - managerial/bureaucratic: language of plans, projects and targets

Gender and hydropower

- CSOs, working alongside the 'development apparatus' of international development agencies contribute to the evolution of global discourses of 'women/gender in/and development

- Paper examines how CSOs exercise discursive power in their use of stories and arguments through analyses of text, images, and rhetoric

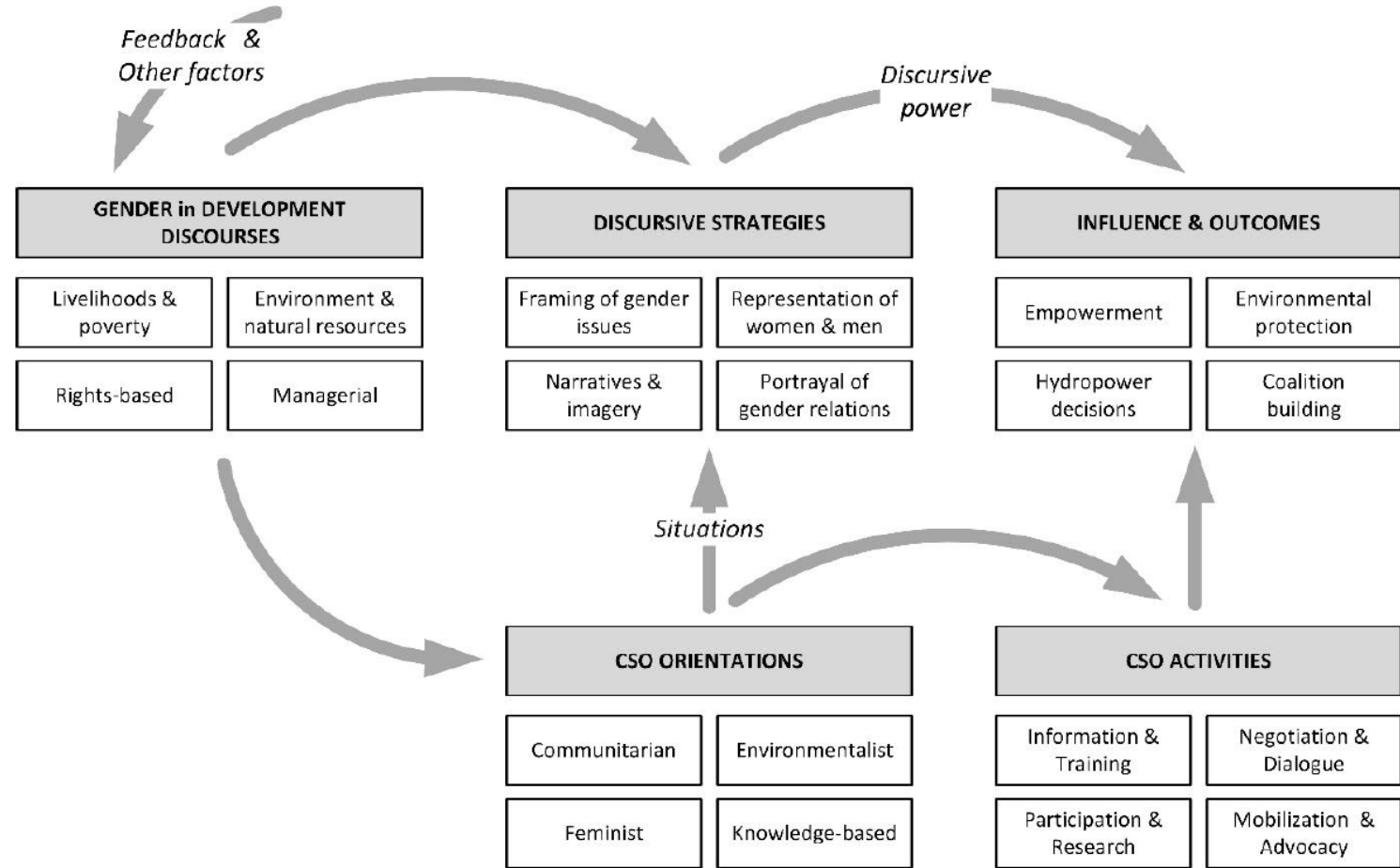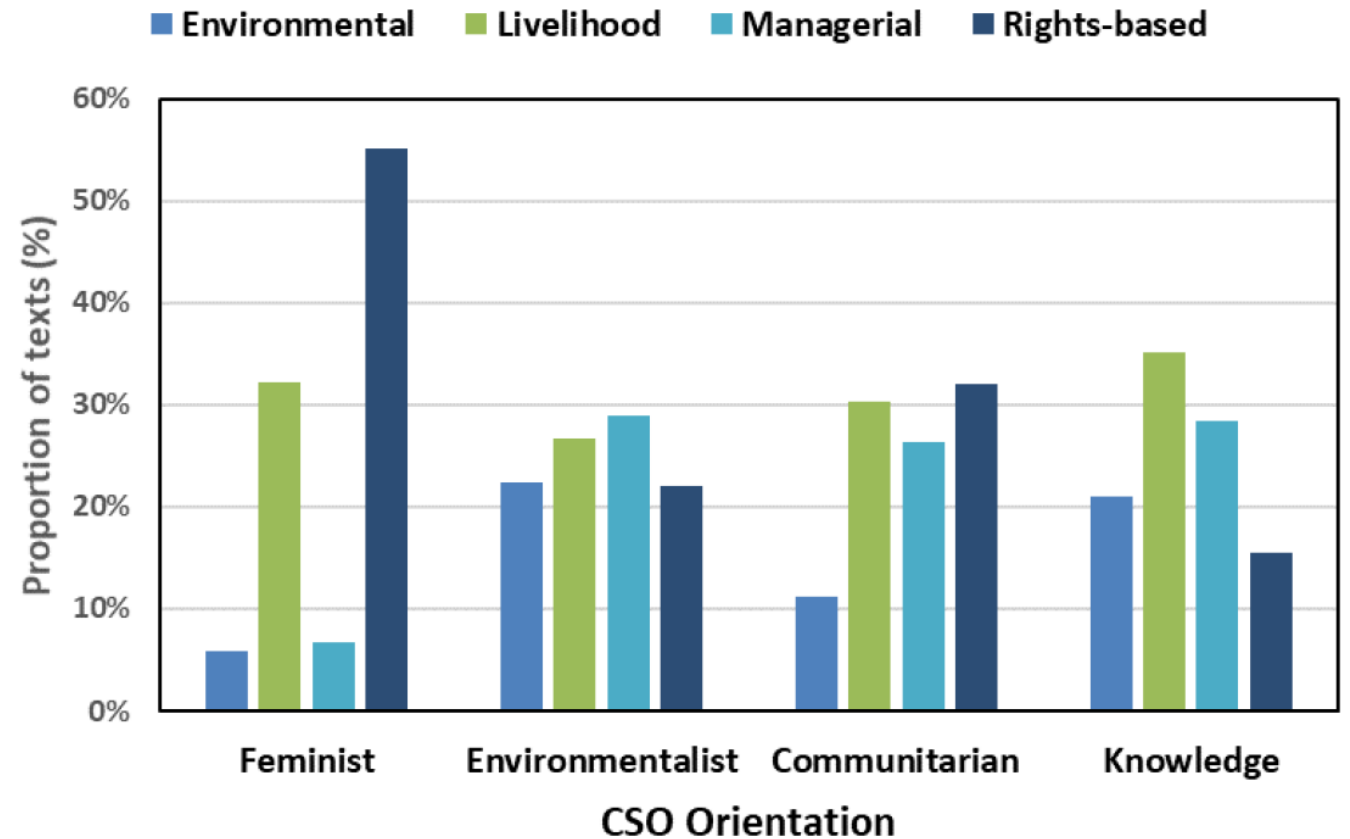- Case of hydropower development in the Mekong region

Methods

Three research questions

1. Framing: What are the main themes, narratives, and arguments in the 'gender in development' discourses of CSOs in the Mekong Region?

2. Strategies: What strategies and tactics do CSOs use to represent gender in their 'gender in development' discourses?

3. Empowerment: Are the 'gender in development' discourses of CSOs likely to further gender equality or women's empowerment?
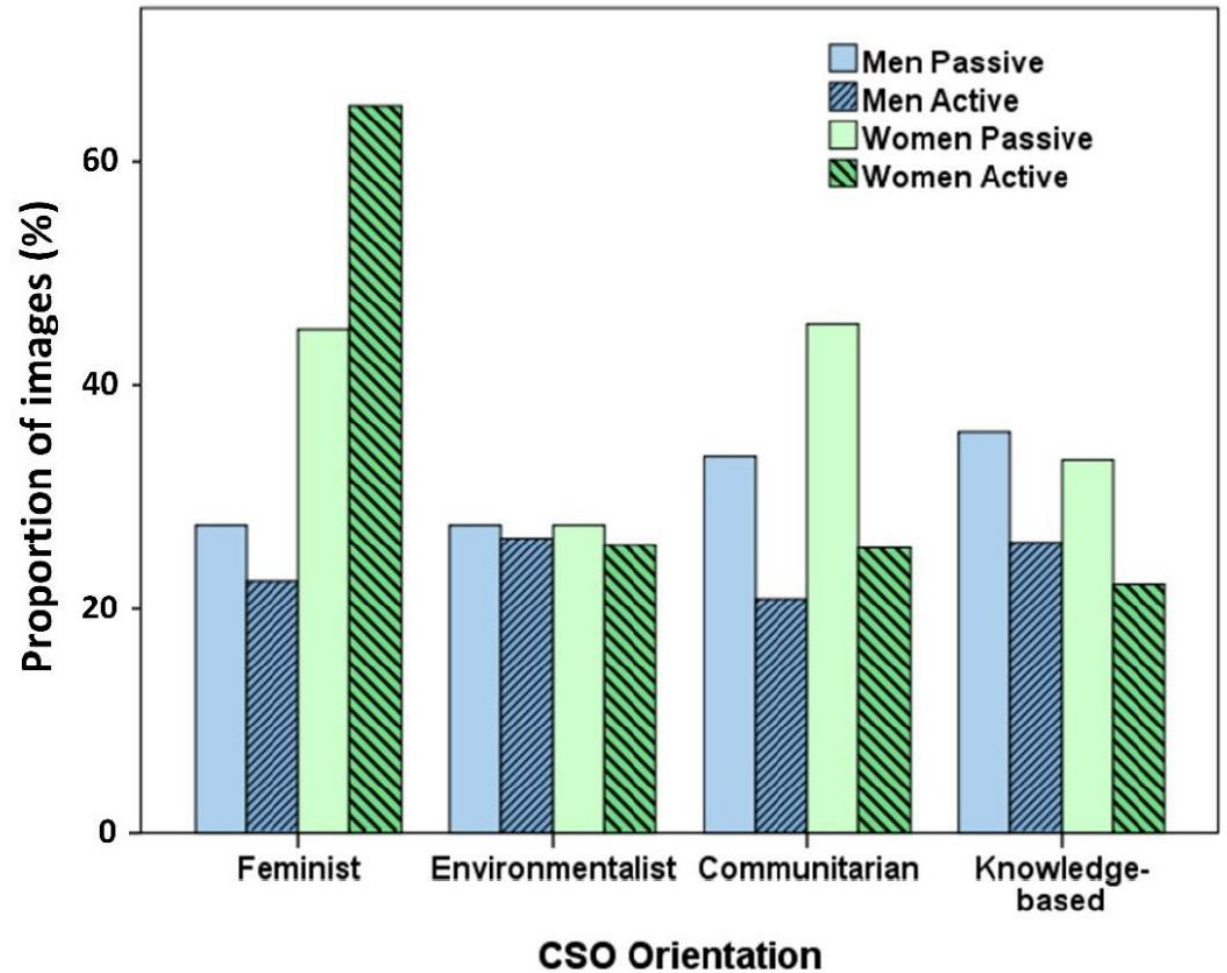
Gender and hydropower: some results

- 70 CSOs
- 32 interviews (14 men, 18 women)
- 263 documents
- 461 photos

Gender and hydropower: some results

Gender and hydropower: some results

Discursive thread	Representation of women		Representation of men	
	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Livelihoods and poverty	Invisible food providers	Acknowledged economic agents	Primary food provider	Primary income earner
Natural resources and environment	Ignored natural caretakers	Environmental stewards	Resource user and manager	Labourer
Rights and leadership	Victim or vulnerable; Unaware of rights	Heroes or change agents	Victim or vulnerable; Unaware of rights	Beneficiaries
Managerial	Unaccounted subjects	Assessed and consulted	Household heads to be informed	Informed household heads

Gender and hydropower: some results

- Livelihood discourses
  - Most often used to oppose dam development
  - Women as providers, leaders and active users of the resource within male dominated fishery sector
  - Implications for empowerment: recognizes women contribution to work; however normalizes the narrow set of skills
- Environmental discourses
  - Reduced to symbolic allegorical representations of nature: the river as *"umbilical cord that connects them to their food source"*
  - Discourse can be empowering when connected to the experiences of river-based livelihoods and natural resource management, but not when focused on more distant, middle-class concerns of conservation and environmental protection

Gender and hydropower: some results

- Rights-based discourses
  - Women as vulnerable victims
  - Strategies focus on how dams violate women rights – or to use water and land rights as entry points for integrating gender and environmental concerns
  - Implications for empowerment: normalizes women lack of agency
- Managerial/bureaucratic discourses
  - Focuses on numbers in participation or consultation
  - Acceptable to hydropower developers and bureaucracies – legitimizes process in a region where repression of dissent is common
  - Renders technical

Gender and hydropower: conclusions

- CSOs do exercise discursive power and their strategies are highly context-specific and dynamic: "*able to mix and match discourses to increase chances of influence, and to maintain their relevance and fundability*"

Some critical questions that CSOs should ask;

- *Why are we paying attention to gender in our work?*

- *Are we assuming innate and fixed gender differences?*

- *How is our ideological orientation influencing our discursive strategies?*

- *What is our position with respect to affected communities, project developers, and state organisations?*

Thank you!

Subscribe to our newsletter

www.stockholmresilience.org/subscribe

Stockholm Resilience Centre
Sustainability Science for Biosphere Stewardship

Stockholm University

THE BEIJER INSTITUTE
OF ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS

KUNGL.
VETENSKAPS-
AKADEMIEN
THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES