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Towards a Resilient Nepal



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The earthquakes of April 25 and May 12 2015 that struck Nepal were half-anticipated - due to geological reasons - but the scale of destruction showed that the possibility of such shocks was not adequately factored into how and where people chose to locate, build, live, invest and work. A Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) was conducted under the leadership of the Government, with support from the development community, and was presented at a major international donor conference, Towards a Resilient Nepal, exactly two months after the earthquake. The PDNA brought to the fore a muchneeded qualifer for growth and development, viz., resilience. Around the globe, the growing incidence of recurring and high-impact disasters in recent years has prompted countries to place greater emphasis on rebuilding for longer-term resilience, rather than simply restoring what existed before the disaster. Recovery and reconstruction methods are increasingly viewed as part of a strategic disaster risk reduction continuum, inseparable from preparedness, response, mitigation and sustainable development and taking into consideration the impact of climate change. Interventions to address these issues are often lumped under the term 'resilience'.

Resilience may be thought of as 'the ability of a system to absorb shock and maintain its structure and functions with a minimum loss and resume pre-event functionality in a relatively short time. Saying it slightly differently, resilience shortens the period of time between the disaster and full recovery of a system. For UNDP, we also include lessons learned and how human interventions during the recovery process can mitigate the impact of future disasters. In the present context of Nepal, or any post-disaster country, 'system' referred above is an intertwined fabric of social, environmental and economic elements. Thus, resilience is a comprehensive characteristic that captures the sustainability of both natural and anthropogenic systems.

Hence, resilience may be divided into at least three parts: (a) Environmental resilience: reflecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the nation in terms of resource utilisation and waste minimisation, as well as its ability to protect and nurture the natural ecosystems in which it operates; (b) Social resilience: reflecting the 'human capital' of the nation, including the capability, teamwork and dedication of its workforce, the strength of its relationships and alliances and the political and cultural engagement and cohesion, and; (c) Economic resilience: reflecting the financial strength and stability of the nation, including the economic vitality and diversity of the communities, the supply chain that it rests on, and the markets that it serves.

Thus, focusing on resilience – when referring to the three dimensions explained above – will not only improve growth or financial performance, but will also strengthen many of the intangibles that are recognized by analysts and practitioners as drivers of long-term development, encapsulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) approved in September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, as the new framework for development for the next 15 years. In short, a nation that contributes to sustainable development enhances its own sustainability as a nation. And resilience can provide a common language for measuring economic fitness, social vitality and environmental health and safety.

The development community is still grappling with qualifiers such as 'inclusive' or 'equitable' development. Does resilience complicate matters further? It may be argued that it does not. In fact, inclusive and equitable growth leads to resilience. For post-disaster human systems, resilience lies in the ability of groups, organisations and institutions to access and effectively use political, economic, cultural and natural resources for recovery, transformation and innovation. It is important to not equate post-disaster 'recovery' with 'resilience' per se. A post-disaster country can experience a high rate of recovery and reinvestment while at the same time sustaining, or even worse, creating extreme class and racial inequalities as measured by high levels of poverty, unemployment and segregation.

Resilience is achieved through the complete life cycle of a disaster, beginning with mitigation, continuing with rescue and relief and moving on to short-term, and longterm recovery. It develops and weaves through multiple scales, starting from the individual, family, neighbourhood, community, city, region - eventually to the state and federal levels. Therefore, a mitigation plan should be clear on which one of these layers is the primary target of an intervention, recognising that they all complement each other. This may help delegation of responsibilities and hence, delivery of a service.

The earthquakes remind us that unless we build back better, we are not improving resilience. A related question is 'what to rebuild (and what NOT to rebuild)'. It may make sense to rebuild only those physical infrastructure where strict enforcement of construction codes is possible and, there is a relatively lesser probability of a future disaster including its after-effects (e.g., earthquakes followed by landslides or avalanches) destroying it all over again. This is easier said than done, because abandoning an infrastructure, which cannot be rebuilt better, may imply resettling the user population elsewhere. It can be highly charged with emotional, human rights-based, economic and social sensitivities, none of which can be ignored.

As there is no predictable limit of the extent of damage that can be caused to physical capital (e.g., infrastructure) by a major disaster, it would be prudent to strengthen human capital first. Essentially, this means enabling people to be able to use their own resources first to cope with the disaster. It takes time for rescue and relief to be operational. Having savings/cash-in-hand is critical. Being healthy is important. And being educated and informed can only help.

Social protection plays an important role in strengthening and preserving development gains, especially when a significant part of the population lives outside the so-called market mechanism and are otherwise disadvantaged for several reasons. In the context of effective delivery of social protection, in normal as well as crisis situations, in any country, including Nepal in the recent scenario, the role of local bodies as the first institutional responders is critical. They are also key stakeholders in the preparedness stage, to lead activities such as community-based early warning systems. External assistance may not be fully utilised without the support of well-capacitated local bodies. Building a strong and inclusive social contract is critical for a sustainable exit from vulnerability. Political parties have an important role to play in mediating state-society relations and shaping the social contract. Therefore, timely local elections, by strengthening accountability and the social contract between citizens and their leaders, could only benefit the



efficiency of interventions by local bodies.

The status of women in the society plays a vital role in mitigating the disruptive effects of shocks especially on children and the elderly. Nepal's progress on the gender - related Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) have been less than satisfactory. Nepalese women traditionally carry responsibilities for household work and are the main caretakers of children and the elderly. However, during the conflict, women were also compelled to come out of their houses and engage in activities previously prescribed only for men, breaking the traditional and cultural barriers set up for women in Nepal. Women need to be properly informed both pre and post disaster about the available support - material, social and protective - and how they can access it. Under the emerging framework of Sustainable Development Goals, the targets and indicators on gender equality need more attention than ever before

Nepal faces natural hazards, most notably - earthquakes and the effects of climate change. The technological and workforce capacity requirements to combat these two challenges could be firmly embedded in the education curriculum of the country. Countries have been known to create niches in technology, e.g., the software industry of India, which was an integral part of the transformation of the country. A long-term education vision of Nepal may consider creating some of the best structural/earthquake engineers and a new class of experts who can tackle the dual implications of climate change and earthquakes.

Sustainable development captures the notion that development today must not jeopardise the well-being of future generations. Progress towards sustainability has so far been incremental, and global environmental

Plastering a house with mud in Khokana, Lalitpur

threats such as climate change, soil erosion, and depletion of natural resources have not abated significantly. We face some hard trade-offs. Countries, especially less developed ones, are supposed to grow faster, but the environmentalist notion of sustainability may be construed as creating binding resource constraints and advocating for status quo, rather than encouraging opportunities for continued innovation, growth and prosperity.

To add, the recent earthquakes are all the more tragic because very recently, Nepal was declared potentially eligible for graduating out of its Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2021, chiefly due to some significant progress in human development, not restricted to per capita income. In its aspiration to graduate out of LDC status in a meaningful way, Nepal needs to go through a structural transformation of its economic system, so that the graduation criterion of a certain level of per capita Gross National Income is also met. Among other things, it requires a well-diversified economic portfolio, resilient to negative global economic shocks to particular sectors (say, commodity prices or tourism).

Good governance is a prerequisite for achieving resilience, given its rather complex and multi-faceted nature. The recently concluded Sendai Framework for action links disaster risk reduction with sustainable development, emphasising that disasters are the result of poor, risk-blind development choices. Good governance can encourage actors to adopt a risk-informed approach to sustainable

development. It is also critical in protecting development gains in the aftermath of natural disasters. The onus of providing good governance, rests, by definition, on the government of a country – duly supported by development partners.

Ending the ongoing political instability in Nepal will have a direct positive impact on the country's disaster preparedness and resilience. In 2008, Nepal finalised its National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management, but the fractured political situation since then prevented progress towards implementation of rigorous governance of building practices or wide-spread public awareness related activities. The devastation caused by the recent earthquake makes it all the more critical to resolve political differences amicably and focus on rebuilding the nation. There is no time to waste, as people's lives and children's futures are at stake in one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.

One of the reasons for the less than satisfactory progress on sustainability could be the lack of an overarching societal goal of sustainable development. A growth model that is profitable in the business sense is not necessarily one that contributes to global sustainable development. The articles in this issue of Development Advocate argue that the concept of resilience provides a useful perspective as well as an operational tool for recognising, improving and measuring sustainability of development and growth.











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ON THE COVER:

Nepali youth clear Bhaktapur Durbar Square four days after the quake.

LAXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSI



UNLESS WE ARE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESILIENT, OUR DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS ARE NOT GOING TO BE SUSTAINABLE **99**

DR. KRISHNA CHANDRA POUDEL

Secretary at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, Government of Nepal

Resilience is defined differently in different contexts. When talking about environmental or climate change resilience, it is first important to understand what our vulnerabilities are, what level of threat they pose and what action can be taken to avoid or mitigate them. Managing land, water and other natural resources must be done scientifically, so as to make it sustainable. A lack of trees on a hillside can mean soil erosion and landslides. Likewise, the improper disposal of waste can pose a health hazard. That is why, in a country like ours, we must have an appropriate policy in place — with the participation of the people so that it can be implemented effectively — to build natural resilience.

The environment is the backbone of sustainable development. Any development effort that a country undertakes has to be based on a sound environmental impact assessment. The principle of sustainable development carries three basic elements — economic, social and environmental. This implies that we must hand over the earth in the same, if not better, condition to the new generation. The environment should provide a living condition for humanity and other elements of biological diversity so that their coexistence is acknowledged, balanced and continued.

At present, the Nepal government's investment in environment, science and technology, and climate change adaptation is quite dismal. The Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology gets less than one percent of the total government

budget. But considering this meagre investment, whatever steps this ministry has taken so far have been encouraging. We have been implementing a climate change policy, have participated actively and effectively in the international arena in relation to climate change, chaired the Least Developed Countries' group at the United Nations from a climate change perspective and rigorously monitored the impact of climate change in our environment. We also bear the responsibility of environmental assessments for any development project.

Recently, we established five national advisory committees on biotechnology, space science and nuclear science, among others.

These advisory committees were formed to reduce the communication gap between the government and the scientific community in the

One of the lessons from the April earthquake is that reconstruction efforts must consider the environment as a top priority, creating open spaces and maintaining greenery while working on earthquake-resilient construction techniques

country, as well as entertain and invite foreign scientists to share their expertise and knowledge on environment-friendly development.

Although we have high potential, due to our lack of resources, we have not been able to explore the benefits of science and technology. Major initiatives require large sums of money. But there are a number of activities we can carry out even with small investments, like formulating a plan and policies or amending legal provisions with changing times.

One of the reasons why we are still a developing country is that we have not prioritised science and technology. There is a misconception that lobbying for environment protection means going against development. Large-scale infrastructure projects, such as roadways, constructed without proper environment assessments can never be sustainable. In the name of development, the country is now allowing the arbitrary bulldozing of hills, the rampant extraction of sand and stone, and haphazard construction on agricultural land, all despite our concerns.

Therefore, coordination between ministries must result in a balance between environment protection and development activities. Sometimes, development may require sacrificing some elements of environmental consideration, but we have to find ways to compensate for this in other ways.

LESSONS FROM THE EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

I was personally assigned to coordinate the rescue, relief and rehabilitation process in the post-earthquake period in Bhaktapur district. I found that a lot of mistakes had been made in the past, such as settlement without wide roads, few open spaces and no gardens. The lesson here is that reconstruction efforts must consider the environment as a top priority, creating open spaces and maintaining greenery while working on earthquake-resilient construction techniques.

We were not prepared for a disaster of this magnitude; that is why we faced lots of challenges in rescue and relief. But we have initiated a rapid assessment on the impact of earthquake on the environment in the 14 most-affected districts. The report, which has been drafted after a thorough study on the status of the soil and the impact of the earthquake on land and vegetation, will be released soon. This report will provide valuable input in developing an action plan that will guide the Reconstruction Authority for sustainable reconstruction.

We have also started assessing environmental conditions, such as the level of ground water. With the assistance of experts from Japan, we are now beginning the assessment of major rivers and how they have been affected by the earthquake. We are also venturing into assessing large structures, like Singha Durbar, Shital Niwas and Bir Hospital, with support from the International Atomic Energy Agency, based in Vienna. This will definitely help while starting reconstruction.

Environmental resilience and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. Unless we are environmentally resilient, our development efforts are not going to be sustainable. The role of our ministry is definitely going to be crucial as we move into the reconstruction phase. We will help identify areas for new settlements through geo-hazard mapping, as reconstruction should be avoided in vulnerable areas. The ministry can also play a constructive role in designing different models of earthquake-resilient houses, depending on the terrain. Our ministry will work in coordination with the Reconstruction Authority for resilient and sustainable development. //

(As told to Development Advocate)



Social Protection and Household Resilience

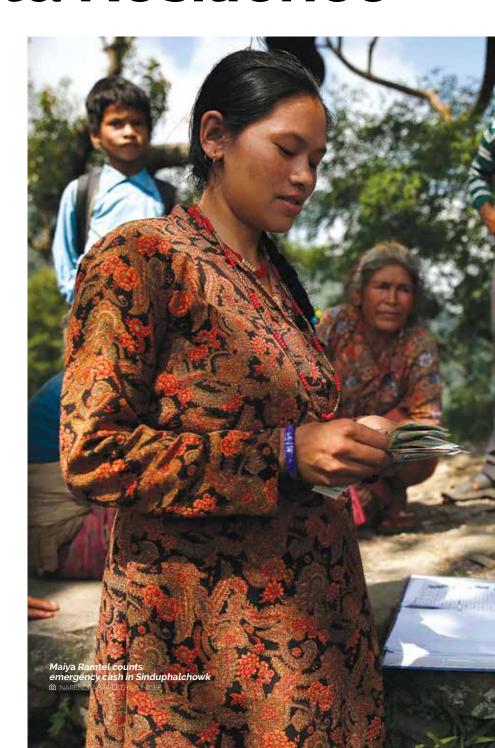
in Nepal



» NICHOLAS MATHERS Cash Transfer Specialist, UNICEF Nepal

NEPAL'S RECENT EARTHQUAKES are estimated to have pushed between 700,000 and nearly 1 million people below the extreme poverty line of \$1.25 per day, exposing the fragility of the country's recent progress in poverty reduction.¹ This brings in to question the resilience of the affected population - their ability to prepare for, absorb, and bounce back from shocks - and how public policy can support resilience building. More specifically, how can we understand the current role, and potential, of social protection in strengthening the resilience of poor households to shocks and stresses?

Broadly speaking, the objectives of social protection are to address poverty and vulnerability through non-contributory social assistance, social insurance and provision of other social services and policies. Social protection alleviates poverty by protecting household consumption and mitigating the need to adopt harmful coping strategies; reduces vulnerabilities by smoothing consumption in periods of unemployment; and can enable households to step out of poverty by supporting investment in livelihoods and human capital. For insights into the current state of social protection in Nepal, the 2014 mid-year issue of Development Advocate is a good place to start.



POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY

Before turning to the issue of resilience, it is useful to remind ourselves that household poverty and vulnerability are related, but distinct, concepts. Poverty is defined in terms of lack of (access to) resources, monetary or otherwise, and includes psychosocial dimensions such as dignity. Vulnerability, on the other hand, relates to a household's level of exposure and sensitivity to risk and the ability to cope in the face of shocks and stresses. Vulnerability is often presumed to mean the risk

of falling (further) into poverty. However, we must also recognise social vulnerabilities, both in terms of who is vulnerable - the very young or old, marginalised social groups and so on - and what they are vulnerable to, for example malnutrition, ill-health and school drop-out. Poverty tends to contribute to vulnerability: poorer households are often more exposed to risk, for example living in flood-prone areas; and are less able to cope, with fewer assets and capacities to fall back on.

Conceptualisations of resilience come from many disciplines, most notably ecology, and more recently from the study of the societal effects of climate change. Common elements of resilience definitions include taking a systems perspective and recognising the capacity of the system to absorb, recover from, and adapt in response to, shocks and stresses.²

Here, we are concerned with household resilience. More specifically, we focus on the resilience of the system, at different levels, on which households depend for their livelihoods and well-being. For any given household, this system consists of the available stock of resources (physical, human, social, financial, environmental and political) and opportunities that are shaped by the formal and informal institutions in which it is situated.3 The household is resilient if, in the face of shocks or stresses, it is able to return to its pre-shock state. Unlike ecological resilience, however, which concerns the capacity of the system to maintain a steady-state, a household or society can be judged in terms of its resilience to deviations from a developmental trajectory, however this is measured.4 How different will future poverty reduction trends be in the earthquake affected districts compared to the rest of the country?

Household resilience can be broken down into four dynamic stages: the capacity to cope when a shock occurs and to recover to at least the pre-shock state; the ability to incrementally adapt localised aspects of the system; the potential to transform,more fundamentally, the wider system on which the household depends; and the ability to anticipate and prepare for future shocks and stresses. If resilience is low - the ability to prepare, cope and adapt is limited - then a household may find itself crossing a threshold



¹Government of Nepal (2015) Nepal earthquake 2015 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Vol. A: Key Findings. National Planning Commission. Kathmandu, Nepal.

²Béné, C., Godfrey Wood, R., Newsham, A. and Davies, M. (2012) Resilience: New Utopia or New Tyranny? IDS Working Paper 405, Brighton, UK.

³Scoones, I. (1998) Sustainable rural livelihoods: A framework for analysis. IDS Working Paper 72. Brighton, UK; DFID (2011) Defining disaster resilience: A DFID approach paper. London, UK.

⁴Mitchell, T. and Harris, K. (2012) Resilience: A risk management approach. ODI Background Note. London, UK. from which it is unable to return to the original state. One family's story from the recent earthquakes provides a simple illustration. Having lost their agricultural land due to landslides, a family of nine from Golchein Sindulpalchowk district had to relocate and sell their goats and an ox to survive. Sut off from their community support network and without other means to recover, they are at risk of a permanently lower income and standard of living.

What should be clear is that resilience is also related to, but distinct from, poverty and vulnerability. While there are clearly benefits

to focusing on household resilience as a developmental outcome, we must also sound a few notes of caution. First. individual households may be able to adapt their circumstance, for example by seeking alternative employment; but by themselves, lack the agency to fundamentally transform the wider societal system on which they depend. Second, pursuit of increased resilience may have negative as well as positive consequences for different people. Recent data analysis by UNICEF has found that adult male migration, an adaptive income diversification strategy, may come at the cost of certain care outcomes for young children.⁶ Finally, Amartya Sen warns us of adaptive preferences: already poor households may display resilience by accepting their poorer post-shock circumstances as the new normal and adjust their expectations accordingly.7

Recognising that there are many interrelated elements to the economic, social, legal and political system on which a household relies for its livelihood and well-being, how can social protection contribute to household resilience?

First, let's start with the point at which vulnerability, which is central to social protection objectives, overlaps with resilience: the capacity to absorb, cope and recover from shocks and stresses. Numerous social assistance and public works schemes in Nepal already play a role in alleviating some of the daily stresses of poverty. Research by ODI and UNICEF has shown that the majority of child grant recipients spend the money on food, health and education for their children and are less likely to borrow food or money from others during a shortfall. However, the low benefit amount (NPR 200 per month per child), delays in registration and payments, limited coverage and other implementation challenges, mean that more sustainable impacts on household coping capacity and children's well-being are limited.



Evidence from other countries has shown that, with the right policy design, social transfers can reduce both acute and chronic malnutrition in young children.⁹

Social protection also supports households to cope following major crises, when informal community coping mechanisms are more likely to fail. In response to the earthquakes, UNICEF and the Government of Nepal are providing cash top-ups of NPR 3,000 to vulnerable groups who already benefit from social assistance schemes including young Dalit children, pensioners and people with disabilities. Early indications suggest that this additional money is supporting basic needs in a context where many have lost significant assets and income.

- ← People receive assistance in Godamchaur, Lalitpur
- ↓ People share rice received as relief in Dolakha



That said, further economic support, whether in the form of cash transfers or other livelihoods inputs, will be needed to promote longer-term recovery.

Several social insurance schemes including pensions and unemployment and work injury benefits are active in Nepal, but only for a small minority of the population. More wide-reaching is the provision of basic health and education services, which are free at the point of need, helping to ensure access even when personal income is limited. Evidence from elsewhere has shown that non-contributory cash transfers can also provide insurance against the social risks associated with shocks. For example recipients of Mexico's conditional cash transfer, Oportunidades, were less likely to withdraw children from school during periods

of illness and unemployment.10 Similar effects were found among beneficiaries of social protection schemes introduced in Indonesia during the most recent global financial crisis.11

Second, social protection can support the adaptive capacity of households in response to shocks and stresses. Schemes such as the Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction (CFPR) programme in Bangladesh aim to 'graduate' households out of poverty by combining regular income transfers with asset building activities. Other social transfer programmes have shown that poor households that receive small, but regular and predicable cash payments are more likely to invest in productive assets or activities and are better able to save and access credit and other financial services.¹² In Nepal, a minority of recipients of the old age pension and the child grant use some of the income towards productive investment, and anecdotally report increased credit-worthiness. However, the low transfer value means that most households tend to prioritise short-term basic needs.13

Diversification is also an important adaptive livelihood strategy for increasing household resilience. Recipients of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) in India were found to invest in new higher risk but higher return activities.¹⁴ Likewise, in certain contexts, cash transfers are used to fund the costs of job seeking and migration. Indeed, far from being negative for productivity and labour market participation, regular and predictable social transfers in low income contexts tend to contribute directly to the economic development of households and stimulate local economies through spill-over effects.15

Third, the link between social protection and the transformational dimension of household resilience is more indirect. At a societal

5UNICEF Nepal Field Report, 20th August 2015.

⁶Schwarz, M. (2015) International migration of fathers: who are the children left behind? Discussion document, UNICEF, Kathmandu, Nepal.

7Sen. A. (1999) Development as freedom, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK

BHagen-Zanker, J., Mallet, R. and Ghimere, A. (2015) How does Nepal's Child Grant work for Dalit Children and their families? An assessment of the effects of the Child Grant and effectiveness of programme delivery in Bajura and Saptari, Nepal. ODI. London, UK.

9Manley, J., Gitter, S. and Slavchevska, V. (2012) How effective are cash transfer programmes at improving nutritional status? A rapid evidence assessment of programmes' effects on anthropometric outcomes. IOE, University of London.

10de Janvry, A., Finan, F., Sadoulet, E. and Vakis, R. (2006) Can Conditional Cash Transfer Programs Serve as Safety Nets in Keeping Children at School and from Working when Exposed to Shocks?, Journal of Development Economics 79: 349-373.

¹¹Grosh, M., delNinno, C., Tesliuc, E. andOuerghi, A.(2008) For protection and promotion: the design and implementation of effective safety nets. World Bank, Washington

¹²Mathers, N. and Slater, R. (2014) Social Protection and growth: research synthesis. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Canberra, Australia.

¹³Hagen-Zanker et al. (forthcoming); Uprety, L.P. (2011) The effectiveness of non-contributory social pension in Nepal. NEPAN. Kathmandu, Nepal

¹⁴Devereux, S.(2002)Social protection for the poorest: lessons from recent experience. Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, Sussex

15Mathers and Slater (2014)



level we may see inter-generational shifts in resilience as households are better able to invest in their children's nutrition. health and education. These long-term social benefits can result in improvements in individual future earnings, and potentially in national productivity.16 Social protection may lead to the empowerment of people who are normally excluded from other informal support networks. In Nepal, several programmes have been designed specifically to address geographic, social and gender exclusion, although there is a risk that this approach will increase social divisions. Social protection programmes have also been found to have positive effects on dimensions of women's empowerment, including financial independence, decision making and self-respect, but can also reinforce traditional gendered roles, depending on the context and programme design.¹⁷ Taking a wider view of what social protection encompasses, one can also argue that other social and redistributive policies such as land reform can lead to transformative changes across society.

Fourth, in its simplest interpretation, the capacity to anticipate and prepare means that adaptive and transformative processes are not just reactive, but can occur prior to shocks in risk prone environments. However, more than this, well-designed and implemented social protection programmes contribute to one of the most important preconditions for adaptive and transformative capacity—stability. At the household level, regular and predictable income support for poor households, and reliable social security for the various life contingencies, allows households to plan and allocate resources more effectively. At the national level, having an effective social protection system already in place can contribute to economic stability and recovery by stimulating aggregate demand.¹⁸

The impact of the recent earthquakes in Nepal has been devastating for many families and their resilience is being tested to the full. As we have seen, social protection is already

playing a role in supporting the coping capacity and recovery of households. However, the extent to which the current social protection system, alongside other policies, can support households to fully bounce back, become more resilient, and restore the positive poverty reduction trends of the past two decades, is clearly limited by a number of factors.

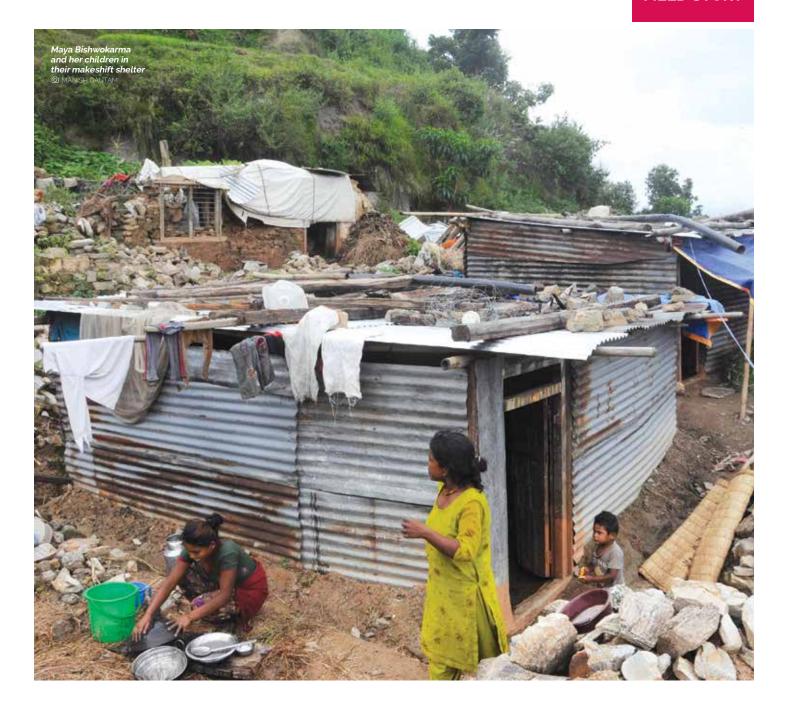
To this end, strengthening and developing a more shock-responsive social protection system should form part of Nepal's national development and disaster preparedness strategies. This could mean, for instance, extending the coverage of social protection to all poor and vulnerable groups in a progressive manner, in line with the draft Social Protection Framework; enhancing benefit levels and linking with other sector programmes to maximise positive social and economic impacts; putting in place mechanisms for rapid scale up (and scale down) in terms of both coverage and transfer amounts in the case of shocks; moving towards rolling registration and advance budgeting to ensure timely access to payments; and ensuring that delivery systems are fit-for-purpose by modernising management information and extending the use of electronic payments.

Social protection is not, and should not be, the only response to improving household resilience. Nor should we be distracted from the objectives of reducing poverty and vulnerability. Nonetheless, we have a real opportunity to learn from this current disaster, to build on the foundations of the social protection schemes already in place and to move towards a more resilient Nepal. //

¹⁶ Maters and Slater (2014)

¹⁷Holmes, R. and Jones, N. (2010) Social protection programming: the need for a gender lens. ODI Briefing Paper 63, London, UK.

¹⁸Alderman, H. And Yemtsov, R. (2012) How can safety-nets contribute to economic growth? Policy Research Working Paper no. 6437, World Bank, Washington.



DOUBLY MARGINALISED



>> MANISH GAUTAM Reporter, The Kathmandu Post Dalits and marginalised communities bore the brunt of the April earthquake and are now suffering even more in its aftermath



A house in Kavre destroyed by the earthquake MANISH GAUTAM

AFTER A THREE-HOUR drive from Kathmandu and a 15-minute walk, a dirt track slick with rain ends and a narrow crevasse begins. A steep stony climb leads to a sparse settlement of Bishwokarmas in the lap of the Brahmayani temple hillock in Deupur of Kavre district.

On a rainy August Tuesday, Nanu Maya Bishwokarma, 30, rests with her back to a zinc sheet, staring at the debris of mud left behind by a landslip the previous night. A large chunk of land had swept down the hillock and all around them, even as Nanu Maya's family clung together. When a flood of water entered their house, Nanu Maya was certain that the stream would sweep them all away. She clutched her four-year-old son to her bosom and together, they cried the whole night.

On April 25, when the first large earthquake struck, Nanu Maya was building a fire to cook their meal for the day while her husband was out in the fields helping a neighbour. Initially, Nanu Maya ignored the shaking. However, when the house began to shake violently, she bolted outside. On the way, she was hit by a falling wooden plank, but she managed to crawl out with bruises all over her body.

"I have to work very hard in the daytime but I can't sleep at night," says Nanu Maya. "My whole body shivers and my heart pounds all the time."

Nanu Maya's temporary zinc shelter offers little safety against the elements, as was evident during the landslide. But she is a Bishwokarma, a member



of the Dalit community, historically considered 'untouchables'. Although Nepal's laws forbid castebased discrimination and untouchability, the practice has persisted in rural areas.

Already living on the edges of society, the earthquake only pushed them further to the brink.

In the April earthquake, Dalits and Tamangs were among the worst affected; yet, they were once again discriminated against during relief distribution. Many Dalit families say that government officials who bore relief rarely visited Dalit settlements. An Amnesty International report published in June stated that "longstanding patterns of discrimination against Dalits resulted in unequal access to relief."

"I heard that people are being given sacks of rice. I don't know why I was given so little," she laments.

There have been accusations that relief materials were often redirected to the constituencies of powerful political leaders. As a result, Dalits, Tamangs and other marginalised groups were often overlooked or ignored, as few have representatives in Kathmandu's power circles.

This problem, however, isn't unique to Nepal. Across the world, racial and ethnic minority groups have often been found to be poorly prepared for disasters, unlike privileged groups.

"Marginalised groups often live in areas that are prone to disasters," says Deepak KC of UNDP's Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme. "They also have very little access to information on disaster preparedness."

That Dalit and Tamang settlements are often in rugged terrain and inaccessible by road only compounded their woes, says Pradip Pariyar, a Dalit activist.

"Most relief materials were either distributed at district headquarters or at places where vehicles could reach. In Dhading district, I recently discovered that many people had not even received the interim relief of NPR. 15,000," he says.

He believes that the Reconstruction Authority should include representation of people from marginalised communities to ensure that they don't get excluded once again from the state's reach, especially in the run-up to post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Man Bahadur Nepali, chairperson of the Dalit Commission, says over 450 Dalits perished in the earthquake while a majority of their houses and livelihoods were impacted. "We fear that poverty among the Dalit community is likely to increase after this disaster," Nepali said.

Meanwhile, Nanu Maya and her family are struggling to return to normalcy. Subsistence farming on a small plot of land feeds the family for barely four months and her husband, who is a carpenter, never seem to earn enough.

"This time around, we were able to farm only a third of our land," says Nanu Maya. "Most of the saplings on the farm were all buried by the landslide and there are few around to help us."

The government's meagre cash relief of NPR 15,000 was all spent on purchasing and transporting the zinc sheet. Nanu Maya's husband had assured them that he would build a complete house out of those sheets, but it no longer looks possible.

"I expect the government to build my house. If not, my sons will make money someday and build one for us," she says wistfully.

Some 150 kilometres south-west from Nanu Maya's community, there is a sizeable settlement of Tamang and Lama families in nearby Makwanpur district. In Salle of Kulekhani VDC, the first floor of Shyam Prasad Ghising's home lies in ruins. In front of the destroyed home is a makeshift shelter similar to Nanu Maya's. Inside the zinc sheet shelter, Shyam Prasad brews pungent homemade liquor.

Shyam Prasad, 62, saw the bricks of his house fall apart angrily on April 25. One of the bricks struck his

wife on her head but she was able to escape safely. The Ghising family recently received NPR 8,000 in compensation for their partially destroyed home and the VDC office has promised to pay them an additional NPR 15,000.

"I am not sure how to go about reconstructing my house," says Shyam Prasad. "The money that has been pledged is simply not enough."

Shyam Prasad's neighbour, Maili Lama, also has a similar story to share. Maili was grazing her cattle near the Kulekhani dam when the ground started to shake. She heard a loud noise, similar to that of a large motorcade and saw falling boulders. When she returned to her village, she discovered that the earthquake had destroyed her house. Now, she too shelters her family of 10 under a zinc sheet shelter.

The NPR 8,000 that Maili received from the VDC office was all spent on paying the labourers who constructed her zinc shelter. She also received five kilograms of rice but with 10 mouths to feed, the rice only lasted two days.

"I heard that people are being given sacks of rice. I don't know why I was given so little," she laments.

Maili has also heard that the government will provide NPR 200,000 as support to reconstruct destroyed houses. If that money ever materialises, she hopes to build a small hut. //

Shyam Prasad Ghising looks back at his destroyed home







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RESILIENCE THROUGH INCLUSIVE POLICIES

Resilience to unanticipated crises can be strengthened by inclusive development policies

TWO TYPES OF unanticipated shocks have dotted the development path of nearly every country in our planet; one that is natural — such as earthquakes, typhoons and floods — and the other manufactured, including financial and economic crises, wars and conflicts. The impact of natural shocks is immediate on human lives while the impact of manufactured crises pans out over a longer period of time. Both result in significant reversals of development gains, particularly in poorer countries. Often, the poorest persons are the most affected by these shocks. This is because the poor often have no option but to live in areas susceptible to natural disasters and are often unable to anticipate and plan for risks. They also have few savings and a limited ability to recover from a shock, whether it is to rebuild lost property, recover lost livelihoods or manage sharp increases in the prices of daily amenities.

In recent times, countries in the Asia-Pacific have become increasingly vulnerable to such shocks. Studies suggest that the Asia-Pacific accounts for most disaster-related events and deaths in the world (e.g., 85 percent of deaths due to natural disasters in the last 30 years) and a recent Natural Disasters Risk Index that ranked countries based on vulnerability to natural disasters placed seven Asia-Pacific countries in the top 12 highest risk category. In the face of increasing globalisation, interconnectedness and global warming, the frequency and intensity of natural and manufactured crises as well as their impact will escalate further. In this context, strengthening resilience is becoming a top development priority. This involves learning to better manage risks as well as investing in adaptive capacity for unexpected risks.



BUILDING RESILIENCE

The question that confronts policymakers is, how can a developing country like Nepal become more resilient to shocks, in the sense of absorbing it and getting back on its feet as quickly as possible?

There is no one-size-fits-all resilience strategy. The strategy needs to be embedded in the country context. But some broad approaches, namely (i) a more robust, intensive, inclusive and sustainable growth path and (ii) effective and inclusive socioeconomic policies and institutions can help countries and communities improve their resilience.

Many Asia-Pacific countries have achieved remarkable economic growth in the last three decades. As a result, many countries in

the region also became middle income countries. Many countries have also made impressive gains across several MDG targets. But while extreme poverty continues to fall, income inequality has risen in many of these countries. Such rising inequality can be detrimental to social, economic and institutional resilience. It also undermines social cohesion and the sustainability of strong growth while reducing trust and confidence in public institutions. Many of the forces that are contributing to rapid growth in the region are also the same forces shaping unevenness in growth and inequality in incomes. Income inequality and other forms of inequalities, such as unequal access to, and quality of education, health, drinking water, sanitation, etc. increase the vulnerabilities of populations to natural disasters and economic shocks. When a shock strikes, poor and vulnerable populations fall below acceptable benchmarks of development (such as the poverty line), which affects social and political harmony.



INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE

There are some good examples from across the world where countries in certain periods experienced growth that was 'friendlier' to the poor. China's remarkable success in poverty reduction during the initial years after the systemic land reforms in 1979 was largely because of a sharp improvement in agriculture's terms of trade and an increase in public expenditure for the rural economy.

Similarly, when India experienced relatively fast agricultural growth, mainly due to the 'green revolution' in the 1970s and in the first half of the 1980s, poverty declined despite a relatively low rate of overall economic growth.

Poverty alleviating growth in Indonesia during the 1970s and the 1980s was principally due to a diversion of a high proportion of public investment towards the rural areas, and to reforms of the domestic trade and marketing regime, which led to an improvement of the agricultural terms of trade.

Similarly, Vietnam achieved almost 8 percent growth in the 1990s and 2000s due to rapid agricultural growth, which enabled the country to achieve rapid growth with very little increase in inequality.

These examples reveal that if growth is to be inclusive, then it should have a pattern that directs resources to sectors in which the poor work, areas where they live, and factors of production that they possess. In the context of developing countries with a predominant agricultural sector, these examples underline the importance of the rural economy in generating equitable growth. Thus, it has direct relevance for Nepal where the share of agriculture dominates the GDP, the majority of people are employed in that sector and the majority of Nepalis live in rural areas. Unfortunately, in many countries, the share of public investment allocated to agriculture has declined. Moreover, agriculture's share in ODA may be declining globally. These trends need to be reversed.

The first and foremost requirement for inclusive and resilient growth in a country such as Nepal is a significant increase in the allocation of investment in the rural economy in the context of improving agricultural and rural productivity. In this context, such investment need not be limited to farm activities alone: rural non-farm activities supported by micro-credit schemes, of the type in Bangladesh, can also endow the poor, especially women, with economic assets. Resilience can also be enhanced by new sources of growth, especially if driven by investment in innovation and knowledge-based activities in urban areas, which have strong spillover benefits. Recent experience suggests that such knowledge-based activities seem to be crisis-resilient, but in turn impose particular requirements in terms of education, skills and appropriate labour market policies.

THE ROLE OF REMITTANCE

In the face of slow growth, persistent inequality and the associated lack of adequate employment opportunities at home, remittances sent by migrant workers, mostly to the rural parts of countries, also provide a path out of poverty and build resilience through possible accumulation of physical and human assets. A striking example of success in poverty reduction, despite slow growth (under 2 percent) and rising inequality is that of Pakistan during the decade of the 1970s and currently, Nepal. Research also shows that remittances from migrants have contributed to resilience in Africa, a continent that has been disaster and conflict-prone. This may be attributed to several reasons. First, the outbreak of conflict or a global economic crisis does not have any significant negative impact on remittances to African countries over the short-term. Thus, remittances do not move in

For a developing country like Nepal to become more resilient to shocks, the strategy needs to be embedded in the country context. But some broad approaches, namely (i) a more robust, intensive, inclusive and sustainable growth path and (ii) effective and inclusive socio-economic policies and institutions can help countries and communities improve their resilience.

tune with manufactured disasters. By contrast, remittances to Africa do seem to increase significantly after a natural disaster, such as drought. Remittances tend to be much more stable than other financial flows, including aid, especially over the short-term.

The positive impact of remittances can be improved, on the one hand, through better employment security of migrants in their host countries so that crises of longer duration do not lead to drastic or overnight reductions in migrant employment in host countries. On the other, the home country needs to focus on imparting its aspiring emigrants with the kind of skills that are in demand in the host countries. Often, there are costs associated with acquiring the required level of skills, which precludes the poorest of the unemployed from availing of foreign employment opportunities. Thus, remittances have a proven record of reducing poverty and improving resilience on average. To ensure that poverty reduction is also inclusive — in the sense of opening up this opportunity to the poorest section of the population — appropriate interventions by governments in skills development are necessary.

INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Inclusive socio-economic policies and institutions also play a key role in strengthening resilience. Recent experience shows that social protection programmes, with adequate coverage and effective implementation, can improve resilience of vulnerable population before, during and after crises. Conditional transfers, temporary employment programmes and micro-insurance schemes are examples of such mechanisms, which can increase household resilience and act as a buffer against the impacts of disasters. Several Latin American and some Asian countries are using conditional cash transfers programmes to protect the education of children and offset the negative impacts of shocks. Moreover, social protection schemes like India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which assures employment

during crises, has a major, positive effect on the economy by stabilising aggregate demand while having no negative effect on economic growth. Finally, open, transparent, and inclusive policymaking institutions and processes are at the heart of resilient societies because they ensure that policies match citizens' needs as well as improve institutional capacity to respond and rebound from shocks.

Gainful employment, by far, is the most important requirement for reducing poverty as well as inequality, thereby promoting inclusive growth and building resilience. But the latter requires more, and it has to do with the management of risk. Typically, the relatively well-off and predominantly urban sections of the population have adequate insurance against risks of different origins. People below or just above the poverty line — the vulnerable zone — rarely come under the risk insurance network. There are two reasons for this. First, the poor simply do not have enough disposable income to pay premiums for standard insurance products, which, additionally, are typically urban needs based. Second, there is often a lack of effective institutions to facilitate risk insurance for the poor.

Having said that, there are some commendable initiatives that address this shortcoming. The World Food Programme and Oxfam America introduced the Rural Resilience Initiative (R4) in 2011 to provide vulnerable rural households with food and income security in the face of increasing climate risks. R4 builds on the success of the Horn of Africa Risk Transfer for Adaptation initiative, pioneered in Ethiopia by Oxfam America, the Relief Society of Tigray and Swiss Re. R4 currently reaches over 26,000 smallholder farmers in Ethiopia and Senegal through a combination of four risk management strategies: improved resource management through asset creation (risk reduction), insurance (risk transfer), livelihoods diversification and microcredit (prudent risk taking), and savings (risk reserves). In Malawi and Zambia, R4 aims to reach around 4,000 households by 2017, during the first phase of implementation.

Comprehensive risk management schemes such as R4 make communities stronger in the face of disasters. With insurance, families facing a drought or any other shock are not forced into desperate measures, such as selling their farm animals or taking their children out of school — steps that have negative implications for the propagation of vulnerability and inequality.

To conclude, inclusive development and resilience are inseparable from each other. They may be jointly strengthened by expanding the employment base of an economy. In the context of a predominantly rural economy, it requires significant increase in the allocation of resources towards the modernisation of agriculture and the promotion of agro-based industries. In addition, these communities must be included in the risk management policy and institutional framework of a country by designing insurance products that are compatible with their income levels and livelihood options. //

Governance & Resilience



» AJAYA BHADRA KHANAL Former Editor-in-Chief of The Himalayan Times

RESILIENCE COULD MEAN many things. In the broadest sense, it means a person's capacity to deal with a disaster and its aftermath. It also refers to the ability of discrete individuals to come together, employing the resources and skills available to overcome adversity. At the next level, resilience can be further boosted if the relationship between the state and the community — which is characterised by their interdependence — is robust.

However, as we saw in the few days following the recent earthquake, that relationship proved very fragile, and in the absence of timely state support, Nepali people were forced to resort to helping themselves.

Local governance is an important issue when it comes to disaster response, and it is directly related to the concept of resilience. There are two sides — the state mechanism and civil services on one hand, and civil society and self-help groups, on the other that are presently working to extend services to the grassroots level. But these sides need to coordinate better with one another and indulge in collective action in post-disaster risk management and relief works. Had local elections been conducted, the government's presence and purview could've extended to the local level — local representatives could have facilitated response efforts, addressing communities' needs more effectively.

Unfortunately, the country is still suffering from vacuums in the local administrative structure.

The most visible impact of this has been on the state's decision-making system — hobbled by political instability and the divergent interests of different parties and groups. The situation is further compounded by the fact that there are a host of actors eager to take advantage of the perceived laxity. Complicated alliances between political, business and other elements, and loyalty to vested interests, have posed a major hurdle to the government's response in the post-earthquake period.

To be fair, Nepal boasts some good policies and experts; it is only when it comes time to make the right decisions, and implement these, that problems arise. Our crippled democratic culture has encouraged the emergence of a patronage network, characterised by nexuses between politicians and businessmen and other vested groups that run very deep. It is owing to these affiliations that, despite being fully cognizant of what the best possible options are for the country, our leaders are unable to follow through. Even when the right choice is made, implementation comprises a whole different ballgame, and many a well-designed policy has been relegated to the dark in this way.

The bureaucracy and local people at the ground level are well aware of the real issues and problems dogging their communities, because they have direct experience of the difficulties. But an adamantly centralised, top-down decision-making structure means that this home-grown knowledge never quite makes it to the top. To alleviate this, development agencies and even the government do sometimes carry out knowledge-generating exercises; field researchers are hired, evaluations done and discussions held to locate the real problem, but again, these findings tend to fizzle out by the time they reach the main decision-makers.

Another problem related to disaster management has to do with the capacity of the state mechanism. One of the concerns here is procurement, which the government has tried to resolve through a policy for the National Reconstruction Authority that envisions expediting decision-making and bureaucratic processes. But, at the same time, the centralised system could very well exert a negative impact, which is why we need some guarantee of transparency and accountability.

The next issue is in trying not to focus only on addressing problems in the 14 districts that were most affected by the earthquake, but looking at the bigger picture — what happens in case of another earthquake like this one? This means integrating latest technologies in the development and construction of public places like schools. We need to be farsighted.

But again, when we examine the mechanism behind the formation of the National Reconstruction Authority, we can definitely see skewed priorities. Political leaders have been pushing members of their respective patronage networks for appointment. The institution was meant to be inclusive — every Nepali was supposed to have direct access equal opportunity to become a member. That, sadly, did not happen, and such cases are sure to arise as the country enters the reconstruction phase.

There are a number of mechanisms that could possibly turn things around. The first has to do with representation — ordinary people or civil society members who are not part of the patronage network should be better incorporated into the process. There must be wide and objective representation. The second has to do with ensuring transparency, and the third with putting in place a system of accountability.

It's admirable how a lot of communities around the country took the initiative to help themselves in the wake of the earthquake. But not everyone will have the resources or capability to raise themselves up, and it is ultimately the state's responsibility to give them a hand. //

(As told to Binod Ghimire, a journalist)

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT & GENDER EQUALITY IN RESILIENCE



Much available evidence shows that it is important to ensure that gender equality and women empowerment become essential to building meaningful resilience in households and communities



Senior GenCap Adviser, Nepal; (IASC Gender Standby Capacity)



» ANU PILLAY Senior GenCap Adviser, Afghanistan (IASC Gender Standby Capacity)

THE 2004 TSUNAMI that devastated parts of Asia with unprecedented force provided the world with overwhelming evidence of the gender dimension of natural disasters. Over 70 percent of fatalities in the tsunami were female. This statistic shocked the humanitarian system into a fuller realisation of the global trend that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters at every level, including death, even while male fatalities far outnumber females in armed conflict.

The disasters that have hit since then, have provided even more evidence to support this trend. The earthquake in Nepal on April 25 2015, took 8,881 lives, out of which 55 percent were women. A recent study from the Philippines shows that over the last two decades, of infants who died in the 24 months following typhoon events, most were baby girls. An estimated 87 percent of unmarried women and 100 percent of married women lost their main source of income when Cyclone Nargis hit the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in Myanmar in 2008.

GENDERED ROLES AND RESPONSES

Studies proliferated to investigate this ghastly phenomenon have showed that the ability to cope with the disaster is proportional to the level of access to economic and social resources, assets and information. This clearly highlighted that gender inequalities as they manifested in different contexts largely excluded women and girls from these essential coping components, thus exposing them to much higher levels of risk. As a result of these gender discriminatory practices, women and girls have limited avenues to protect themselves and are hampered by limited access to early warning information technology and formal information networks, as well as having limited mobility and lower literacy levels. A good example is messaging during the 2004 tsunami, which was not accessible to women as it was provided as announcements in public spaces where men were more likely to gather; or often, these systems rely on written messaging, which excludes illiterate men and women. Women's clothes (sarees and hijabs), their long hair, their wish to save children and their relative inability to swim or climb trees compared to men became other factors leading to their deaths.

Their gendered roles also affected the impact. For e.g., Aceh, Indonesia traditionally has a high level of women's participation in the labour force, but the wave struck on a Sunday morning, when most women were at home and the men were out on errands away from the seafront. Similarly, in India, when the tsunami hit, many men were fishing at sea while women were waiting near the shoreline for boats to come in with the catch, which they would collect, clean and then take to the market to sell. The tsunami travelled relatively calmly out at sea, passing

under the boats, but swelled as it reached shore. Many women also lost their lives in attempts to save their children and elderly relatives who were with them at the time². By overlooking specific barriers, needs and capacities of at risk populations in the developing of an effective disaster preparedness system, including early warning, we risk endangering vulnerable groups and missing out on their potential contributions, particularly women's potential contributions, to more comprehensive information. While men and boys are also negatively affected by gendered expectations, such as protection and saving of family members, which might force them to take more risks, the most vulnerable groups in natural disaster are women-headed households, single women, widows, older women and women living with disabilities due to the inherent gender inequalities that limits their avenues to access resources.

Equally of significance are the coping mechanisms that reflect the differential impact across gender and age. Unable to protect their families, the guilt and sense of helplessness may force men and boys into negative coping mechanisms, including self-harm. Following Nepal's April earthquake, there has been increased use of drugs and alcohol consumption by men as they feel there is nothing left to live for, having their house and assets built over years of hard work, destroyed in a few seconds. This means, in addition to their personal grief and pain, women have to meet additional demands — emotional, physical and income generation responsibilities, in contexts where gender roles may already be stretched.

Studies also demonstrate significant differences in how households headed by women and those headed by men cope with shocks, in term of their access to resources for rebuilding shelters, income generation opportunities and food security. Often, women-headed households are excluded from formal channels of communication and are not aware of their right to relief items, distribution timings, financial aid, shelter support and income generation opportunities. In other contexts, the first assets to be sold for survival are smaller livestock, frequently owned by women / women-headed households. These factors increase their vulnerability to further risks, including sexual and financial exploitation and abuse from brokers or borrowing through informal channels, given the limited access to legal / formal financial assistance. There is also an increased reporting in domestic violence post disasters, along with the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and rape in camps and temporary housing locations that are overcrowded, without adequate safety, privacy and protection measures

¹Humanitarian Action: Facts and Figures, UN Women, 2015

²The Tsunami's Impact on Women; Oxfam Briefing Note, March 2005

AGAINST THE VICTIM NARRATIVE

While disaster response plans are often developed at higher-levels, the implementation of it is localised. At the community-level response, though women and men both contribute to building disaster-resilient communities, women's roles as key actors in mitigation and response approaches is often unacknowledged and not integrated into the development of national level plans. The primary narrative of women and girls in disaster contexts is that they are primarily victims. Women and girls are consistently categorised as vulnerable, without clearly articulated definitions of vulnerability. Such slotting has allowed women's capacities, knowledge and leadership skills to be excluded from the relief design. It also reflects how humanitarian communities see their role as offering immediate lifesaving relief, without challenging discriminatory practices and often wiping away years of hard work and successes of women's NGOs and civil society groups.

This dominant victim narrative also disadvantages male members by pegging them as protectors, deepening existing unequal gender roles and discrimination, both in formal and informal processes. Their capacities and often innovative ways of responding to disaster have not been central to strategies developed across programmes globally. An example of the

impact of changing such mindsets is evidenced by a 2011 pilot DRR project in a southern coastal disaster-prone village of Bangladesh. Women were included in disaster preparedness training. When a tropical storm struck, shortly after the end of the project, the women protected their lives and livelihoods, on their own initiative, without the intervention of the national disaster management system⁴.

Gender roles also play a significant part in how women and men from different backgrounds perceive an oncoming disaster. For example, women are able to identify a change in weather patterns earlier through their proximity to smaller animals and livestock by the shifting behavior and restlessness of livestock. Similarly, in Niger, women were the only ones to identify diseases that affect poultry as one of the most important threats in their community, most likely because chickens are among the few resources they control and use for income generation. Selling (or eating) poultry is often the first line of defence for households facing a crisis⁵. In Fiji, because women rise much earlier than anyone else in the household to prepare packed

⁴Women's Leadership in Risk Resilient Development, Good Practices and Lessons Learnt, UNISDR, 2015



lunches for schoolchildren, they were the first to see and respond to the rising water as the river flooded its banks in 2012, and save their families from drowning.

Against the background of such available evidence, it is important to ensure gender equality and women empowerment become essential to building meaningful resilience in households and communities.

Consistent advocacy over the last 10 years has resulted in increasing acknowledgement of the leadership and knowledge of women in disaster risk reduction. This period has witnessed a strong focus on gender equality and women's rights in disaster risk reduction. These commitments are grounded in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) resolutions 56/2 and resolution 58/2 on gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters. The Hygo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015, emphasised the importance of a gender perspective for building resilience, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training.

WOMEN AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

Despite these normative frameworks, there is a failure to articulate the potential contribution that women can and do make to recovery, and the potential transformational nature of focusing on and actively supporting such contributions. A recent study of six countries on the South Asia Women's Resilience Index (WRI) identified that the commitment of governments to investing in gender sensitive disaster management and response has been extremely below average. In the WRI index of 1-100, none scored more than 46.6. The cycle of vulnerability and disempowerment leads to the voices of women and girls, most at risk, not being included in disaster definitions and response plans, making them the easiest victims of disaster.

Women and men in communities always have their own preexisting resilience strategies and it is important that the national level plans build upon these to strengthen existing capacities as well as encouraging new, creative and innovative methods. This approach is articulated in the Sendai Framework 2015-2030 that takes the commitment of HFA forward and emphasises the "importance of a gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership promoted."

Disasters are also opportunities that challenge these gender roles as women and men take up roles outside the traditional

construct. When men as heads of households are killed or injured, women take up those roles in public space, negotiate with local authorities and aid agencies and develop their strong social networks for survival and to care for their families' needs. Widowed men with children also take up the responsibility of being a single parent, a role often new to them. Recognition of this is a significant dimension that the Sendai Framework brings to the centre of the dialogue on DRR — that gender roles are not static; they change over time and environment. It opens up the space to rescript gender-based inequalities, including constructs of masculinity by encouraging men to take leadership or share caring roles. Thus 'build back better' is not confined to the material plane. It should include building back better power relations, attitudes and mindsets that will not discriminate based on age, sex, ability and other diversities and render those members of the community more vulnerable to the shock of disaster. Informing programming through consistent gender sensitive assessments and gender analysis of sex and age disaggregated data is thus imperative.

Recommendations include partnerships with local women's NGOs, civil society groups, both formal and informal, in implementing peace and security programming and also to building community resilience. An opportunity here is with the developing of community-based gender responsive early warning systems that are responsive to conflict⁶ as well as natural disasters. Another is in policy and planning to ensure they reach out to these front-line responders / women whose knowledge will enable a meaningful planning and response mechanism and strengthen resilience.

There is an emerging and growing discussion regarding linkages between the increasing negative impact of climate change, risks of disasters and resilience that makes gender equality significant to its strategic and operational thought. Such thinking encourages bridges between different aspects of gender equality transformation especially to straddle the development-humanitarian divide. One of these is to more intentionally explore linkages with the implementation of UNSCR 1325, of which women's participation and empowerment is central. This significant framework calls for the transformation of gender roles and the leverage of gains on women's leadership across community-based structures, offering a much needed challenge to the singular narrative of women as vulnerable groups and victims of disasters. //

Resilience Thinking: Prioritizing Gender Integration to Enhance Household and Community Resilience to Food Insecurity in Sahel, Mercy Corps

[®]The Conflict and Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) is an initiative of the seven-member Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for horn of Africa, Gender Responsive Early Warning System: Overview and How to Guide, UN Women, 2012

Nepal's earthquake provides lessons on responding to gender needs for more resilient reconstruction in the aftermath of disasters

AGENDERED



» DR. BIMALA RAI PAUDYAL Member, National Planning Commission

IN THE WAKE OF the April earthquake in Nepal, post-disaster recovery and reconstruction aims not only to provide relief and rehabilitation to the affected, but also build a society that is more resilient to similar disasters in the future. Resilience is the ability of a country, communities or households to manage change by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of disasters, without compromising on their long-term prospects¹. This means that all policies and interventions aimed at post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction should enable communities, households and individuals to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of any disaster in a timely and efficient manner.

Disasters compound social and economic inequities and vulnerabilities in society by disproportionately affecting the poor, those who live on marginal land, women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. This was also the case in Nepal's earthquake. Out of an affected population of 5.7 million, 48 percent were men while 52 percent (2.8 million) were women. Among the nearly 9,000 who died, nearly 55 percent were women and girls. This larger share of women among the dead can be attributed to traditional gender roles that tend to confine women inside the house for household chores. It has also been reported that women who were inside houses delayed escape, as they were busy searching and rescuing children and the elderly. The earthquake hit near noon. Casualties among women would have been greater if the earthquake had hit in the morning or the evening, which are usually when women are inside their homes performing household chores.



RESPONSE

Women in Kavrepalanchowk visit a mobile reproductive health camp for post-natal check-ups

(a) UNFPA Nepa

Interventions for post-earthquake relief and recovery are therefore required to meet the specific needs and priorities of women and strategise interventions that enable them to become resilient on their own. With lessons from the early recovery period, this article highlights the specific needs of women and girls during and after the natural disaster and suggests ways to respond to those needs in order to achieve resilient reconstruction.

GENDER SPECIFIC NEEDS IN RELIEF AND RECOVERY

Earthquakes are said to be neutral, in the sense that they hit all at the same scale and in the same manner. But in reality, because of differences in roles and responsibilities, because of unequal access to assets and capabilities, and because of the social and cultural dimensions of inequities that exist in society, the earthquake has produced disproportionate effects and magnified pre-existing poverty and vulnerabilities. Rural communities, poor households, and women and girls suffered more, compared to urban/city areas, non-poor and men.

Children wait in line for food relief distributed after the earthquake in Tundikhel, Kathmandu

LAXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSI

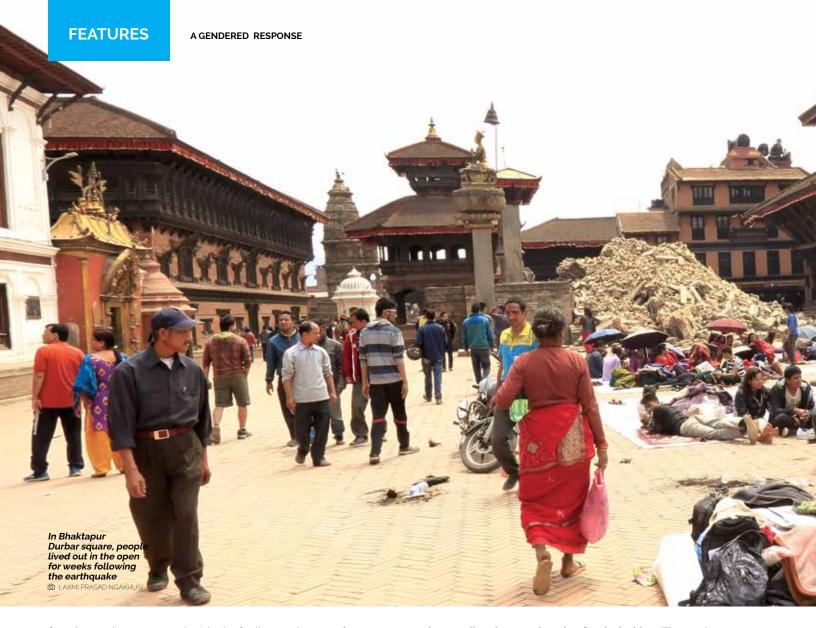


Among the survivors, the biological and practical needs of women and girls differ from that of men and boys. The earthquake affected 39 districts out of 74 and 14 of them are crisis hit. The Nepal government's Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) has estimated that these 14 districts consist of 2.8 million women, out of which 140,819 are of reproductive age. Significant numbers of women are pregnant and lactating mothers. Similarly, a total of 10,328 babies are born every month in the 14 districts, adding more number of women who need access to birth centres, reproductive health services, obstetric care and proper food. A total of 794,000 girls are below 14 years of age and a significant number of those above 14 years are adolescents.

Gender specificity of needs and priorities is evident in terms of shelter, clothes, food, security, sanitation, health and communication. Gender sensitivity in preparation of relief packages and procedures is important while responding to these specific needs and priorities of women and girls. Unless gender-specific needs are addressed during the relief and recovery period, the affected population cannot be prepared to actively participate in reconstruction, which is an important aspect of resilience.

The following are some gender-specific needs to be addressed during the 'building back better' phase.

a) Shelter: The need for shelter is equal for men and women, boys and girls, but privacy and the security needs of women and girls are much higher and more sensitive than for men and boys. When temporary shelters are provided for more than one family to live in together, it is important that a separate space for women is created where girls and women can change clothes, feed babies or take naps when tired or stressed. When a shelter is provided for a family separately, it is important to ensure that space and bedding materials are adequate for males and



females to sleep separately. A lack of toilets or the use of common toilets in open spaces adds additional vulnerability for women and girls. Therefore, temporary shelters should have provisions for an adequate number of toilets and sanitation arrangements specifically for women and girls. It is important to ensure that there is light in and around the shelter to enhance security.

b) Communication: The PDNA estimates that about 26 percent of households are headed by women in the 14 crisis hit districts and the trend is similar throughout Nepal. Women heads of households face specific challenges of access to information and mobility. It is therefore important that any relief-specific information reaches the female heads of these households and that procedures to access these packages are womenfriendly. Gender balance in the human resource deputed in the relief and recovery operations would help address specific communication needs of women and girls.

c) Immediate items related to food, clothing: Those whose houses collapsed in the earthquake also suffer from the loss of food grains, livestock, vegetables, clothes and so on. But pregnant women, lactating mothers, children and the elderly are more vulnerable due to a lack of adequate food. Therefore, it is important that the food provided during the relief period is right for pregnant women and lactating mothers. Also important is to ensure that there is food specific to babies and children under five, who are usually women's responsibility. Apart from food and general clothing, the relief pack should also include specific clothes needed for adolescent girls and women. Regular household chores, such as cooking, sanitation and washing, are specific responsibilities of women and girls and this applies even in temporary shelters. Appropriate measures need to be taken so that women and girls don't have to collect firewood and water from remote/dangerous places where there are threats to physical security and of sexual harassment.

d) Health and sanitation: Most birth centres have been damaged. The health needs of newborn babies and pregnant women need



to be arranged through mobile and temporary health camps with adequate facilities. It is important to arrange for women doctors and gynaecologists to attend such mobile clinics. It is often women and girls who look after the sick and injured and therefore, there are risks of infection. They need to be informed about personal safety and hygiene during such emergencies. Revitalising local mother groups and networks would help identify and reach women in need of such reproductive health care and sanitation.

e) Schooling and counselling: When schools are damaged, all children suffer. But in the transition period, it is usually girls who are the first to be dropped from school. The drop-out of girls is usually associated with a lack of safe and girlfriendly environment in temporary schools (such as a lack of separate toilets) and also with a need to help mothers manage household chores and take care of babies in a new environment. Experience suggests that girls who drop out from school during the post-earthquake period are exposed to greater risk of early marriage, child labour, sexual harassment and trafficking. Post-earthquake relief and recovery need to be responsive to the specific needs of girl children and adolescents so that they are retained in school, even in the transition period. Similarly, disasters also result in the loss of family members and property and can cause trauma. Revitalising community selfhelp groups and approaches that encourage women, girls and adolescents to participate as active agents during recovery can help them deal with their trauma and prepare mentally for longterm reconstruction.

f) Security and violence: Women and girls are more vulnerable to violence during disasters. Trafficking, child labour, domestic violence and verbal and physical harassment without and under the influence of alcohol are some instances that can arise during disasters. Relief and recovery initiatives need to ensure that there is enough information for all women and girls about the possible risks of violence and ways to mitigate them. It is also important to ensure that security personnel are deployed; that they are aware of possible types of violence; are accessible to women; and are well-equipped with the right policies, resources and authority to protect women and girls at risk.



GOOD PRACTICES AND LEARNING FROM RELIEF AND RECOVERY

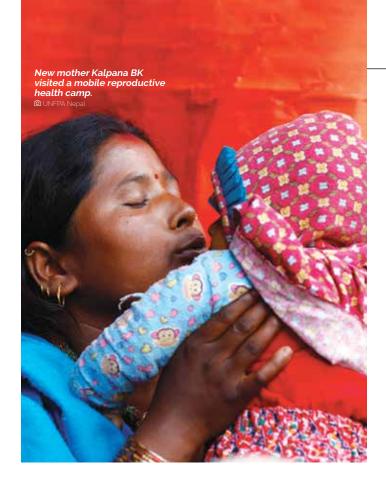
One of the major challenges to mainstream gender responsiveness in early relief and recovery was the lack of participation of women in central and district-level decision-making regarding what relief packages and processes should look like. The next challenge was the limited capacity of the protection cluster in the districts in terms of material and human resources to reach the affected in time, along with limited influence in the district to mainstream gender responsiveness throughout. A clear strategy and arrangement for the mobilisation of women's groups, cooperatives and self-help networks in communities would have capitalised on the local human resource and increased the effectiveness and coverage of gender responsive relief and recovery initiatives. This mostly remained a missed opportunity and must be adequately addressed while building a more resilient Nepal.

Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) during the PDNA was one good practice that not only assessed gender-specific loss and damage in all major sectors, but also identified gender and inclusion-specific needs and recovery strategies. The PDNA applied a two-prong approach to mainstream GESI. A stand-alone approach looked at specific vulnerabilities, challenges and needs of vulnerable segments of the population, such as women, children, people with disabilities, the elderly and marginalised caste and ethnic groups. It then recommended a number of recovery and reconstruction strategies to protect these groups and allow them to live with dignity. The next crosscutting approach looked at specific challenges faced by women

Gender specificity of needs and priorities is evident in terms of shelter, clothes, food, security, sanitation, health and communication. Unless gender-specific needs are addressed during the relief and recovery period, the affected population cannot be prepared to actively participate in reconstruction, which is an important aspect of resilience.

and other vulnerable groups and outlined gender-specific recovery strategies in different sectors, including agriculture, employment, forestry, infrastructure, health, education and tourism.

The PDNA provides a solid basis for gender-responsive reconstruction that is resilient. The reconstruction should also apply a similar two-prong approach i.e., targeted interventions to meet specific needs and priorities of women and other vulnerable groups on the one hand, and mainstreaming the approach in all other sectors, including infrastructure, production, social and disaster risk reduction, on the other.



As discussed earlier, men and women have specific needs that are more prominent during disasters. A blanket approach to relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction is not sufficient to build resilience. Often, relief and recovery interventions that seem neutral in principle are not so. They can increase, reinforce or reduce existing inequalities. Gender responsiveness in relief and recovery requires an institutional mechanism, with clear responsibility, authority and an adequate stock of materials to reach women and respond to the practical gender needs. In addition, addressing inequities in general will minimise the disproportionate impact of disasters on women. Therefore, post earthquake reconstruction should go together with broader equitable development initiatives.

Gender responsiveness for resilient reconstruction can be achieved through the following broad strategies:

- The response to disasters during relief, rescue and recovery needs to identify and respond to the practical needs of women and girls (especially related to security, shelter, food, clothes and reproductive health, together with livelihood reconstruction) and help them live with dignity;
- When new public buildings are constructed or retrofitted, ensure that the infrastructures are designed and built to be inclusive and accessible to women, children and people living with disabilities:
- Reconstruction creates job opportunities. Ensure that women receive the skill-based training required for reconstruction and

are offered jobs that enable women to earn cash, work beyond traditional gender roles and promote equality in the long run;

- When reviving livelihoods and productive sectors, ensure that the specific needs and priorities of women farmers, women entrepreneurs and women workers in informal and service sectors are identified and responded to;
- If reconstruction involves creating new settlements and asset building, ensure that the ownership of these infrastructure and assets does not perpetuate existing inequities. The new tenure arrangement should promote women's ownership or at least joint ownership between men and women;
- Relief, recovery and reconstruction interventions succeed when local people participate, not only in implementation as the labour force, but equally during the process of identifying needs, designing interventions, implementation and monitoring;
- Women-specific needs are better identified when they are involved in needs assessment. Similarly, when women's organisations such as women's cooperatives and women's groups are mobilised, the implementation and monitoring of interventions can become more effective and relevant. More importantly, when disasters hit, many women and children suffer from trauma. Therefore, it is important to ensure that women are not only seen as receivers of relief and rehabilitation but are also active agents for rescue, relief and rehabilitation. This not only enables them to earn (if cash for work is applied) but also help them engage in productive activities, rebuild social capital and move away from trauma;
- Build and strengthen women's organisations and equip them with knowledge, skills and the technology required to prevent disaster and manage it when it occurs. This not only builds community resilience but also empowers women socially and politically. In addition, the management capacity of women needs to be strengthened in every sector, considering the fact that this improves efficiency and empowers women in the long run as well as addresses the vacuum created in the rural population due to the out-migration of men;
- During disasters, community cohesiveness increases and people from all classes, castes and ethnicities tend to live and eat together. Reconstruction interventions can capitalise and promote this culture as it contributes to rebuilding social capital, which is an important element for resilient reconstruction. //

HOW WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE DEALING WITH THE EARTHQUAKE AND ITS AFTERMATH

Much research has shown that women and children are always more vulnerable during times of disaster. In the recent spring earthquakes in Nepal too, the proportion of women and children affected was significantly higher — 55 percent of those who died in the quakes were women and children, according to the Nepal Police. How have the survivors dealt with the disaster and its aftermath? Development Advocate spoke to a number of women and children from the districts most-affected by the quakes about how they are coping with the disaster.



On April 25, I was attending a Village Development Committee meeting to discuss allowances and a family's problems with land division. As the house shook, we all escaped to a safe place, but the owner of the house and his son did not make it. We attempted to search for them in the rubble but to no avail. In my family of seven members, no one was hurt, but our home collapsed. In my neighbourhood alone, 23 people perished; I helped pull many corpses from the rubble.

At present, my family lives in a makeshift shelter. We were granted NPR 15,000 by the government but it was all spent on buying zinc sheets to build the shelter. Every day, whenever I look at the place where my house used to stand, I feel like crying. Life has been hard ever since the earthquake. I don't know how we are going to rebuild our home and provide a better shelter for my children and grandchildren.

PATALI MAJHI, 50
Female Community Health Volunteer,
Bhimtar, Sindhupalchowk





On April 25, I was in the fields helping my mother. When we realised there had been an earthquake, I decided to remain in the fields for some time as I knew it was safest place I could be. My grandfather and two sisters were inside our home. Since the house did not collapse, they were able to escape to a safe place. We have now built a small cottage out of zinc sheets to live in. My house is standing but it is completely damaged and unfit to live in. We still feel tremors from aftershocks and that scares me. After my school resumed, my teachers said that it was natural to have aftershocks following a big earthquake. They instructed us to remain in a safe place. Recently too, there was a big jolt when I was in class. All of us huddled outside on the school grounds.

My father passed away when I was very young and my mother works in the fields. We don't know how we are going to build new home.



PRAJIT GIRI, 14 Student, Shree Jana Bikash Secondary School, Sindhupalchowk

I was inside my house with my four daughters and my mother-in-law. When the earthquake struck, I managed to get my family members out of the house. The upper portion of the house collapsed just as we escaped. My daughters are still very scared; they were not able to sleep properly for some time after the earthquake. They would constantly cry and yell in their sleep. My husband is a driver. He was able to collect NPR 15,000 from the government although it was not enough to buy corrugated zinc sheets to build a shelter for the family.

My husband later told me that many people had presented fake documents to get extra money. Even people whose houses had been not been damaged managed to get hold of government money. The government should monitor and regulate such malpractices and ensure that the poor and the affected get a major portion of the relief provided.



KUMARI TAMANG, 40

House manager Kunchowk, Sindhupalchowk

I work for the Department of Roads, clearing weeds by the side of the road. I got this job following the death of my husband. On the day of the earthquake, I was on duty clearing some stones from a road in the middle of a forest. Suddenly, the ground beneath shook violently. I ran back to my house only to find that it had been partially damaged. My family lived in a tent for a month but with the monsoon rains, it became impossible to live under a tent. Water seeped in from all sides and we had to stand or sit on our haunches for whole nights at a time. Now, we have shifted back into our damaged home. We have no alternative but to live in this dilapidated house. I hope another big earthquake does not strike anytime soon or else, this entire house is certain to collapse. The government offered us NPR 8,000 but it was all gone just making ends meet.



SITA THAPA MAGAR, 45
Menial labourer, Kulekhani, Makwanpur

I had gone along with my friend to fetch mud with which to plaster the house. As the ground shook, we could not stand still and began crying and yelling. We threw away the collected mud and ran home. A portion of my house had collapsed and that made me sad. I could see my neighbours crying all around. Those times were really scary, although I am not that afraid of earthquakes now.

My school was shut for a month but now that it has resumed, all my friends talk about the earthquake. My teachers told me that it is better to go outside when there are jolts than to remain inside a cracked house. My parents have begun building another home nearby and want to complete it soon. Right now, we are living in a shelter made of zinc sheets. It is really hot inside during the day. I want to live inside my house soon.



SIMRIKA LAMA, 13 Student, Shree Panchakanya Secondary School, Makwanpur I don't want to remember the day when the earthquake struck. I was playing with my little brother when rocks began to fall from the hill slopes. I was able to escape unhurt but I am afraid each time I recall the rocks falling. I could have been easily crushed by those boulders. My little brother too was scared. That day, my parents had gone to attend a funeral ceremony and we were anxiously awaiting their return. We returned to our home only to find that it had been damaged. Although the building was standing, some people came and said that it was unsafe to live in. At school, my teacher informed me that houses that are completely damaged and unlivable get a red sticker and I realised that my house falls under this category.

At present, we are living a shelter built some distance from our home. But I still dread earthquakes. Every time I try to sleep, I feel like the ground is shaking.



SARITA GOLE, 13Student, Shree Kalika Secondary School, Makwanpur

I was in the fields when the earthquake struck. When I returned home, my house had been reduced to rubble. We were able to salvage some of our belongings but most were completely unusable. Luckily, my husband and son had gone out to the market and they only returned later. My son puts up stalls during melas and we make our living out of his earnings and the land we till. The government provided us with NPR 15,000 as compensation but all that money was spent buying essentials for the house. Our land is still occupied by the destroyed house as we have not been able to clear the debris. We also have some farmland but that needs to be divided among my husband's brothers. We don't make nearly enough money to construct another house immediately. Life has never been this hard.



CHIRI MAI MAHARJAN, 50 Farmer, Harisiddhi, Lalitpur

My husband works on poultry farm and we live nearby. When the earthquake hit, I was attending a funeral ceremony for one of our neighbours. Suddenly, we heard a thud and the ground shook. I had never before witnessed and earthquake before. Our house was completely damaged. My elder son goes to school, although I fear for his safety. We have a small piece of land and the food grown is only enough for some months. There is no way we can rebuild our house. I hope the government provides us with money.



MAYA LAMA, 24 Ghattekhola, Makwanpur

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE 2015 APRIL EARTHQUAKE?



» SEETA GIRI Early Recovery Advisor, UNDP Bangladesh



MAN BAHADUR THAPA UNDP Bangladesh

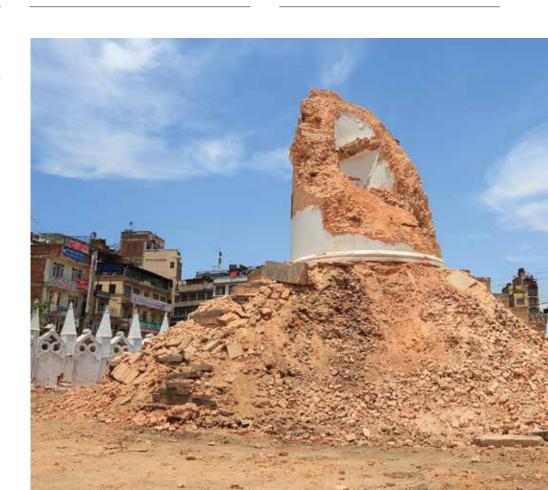


CHRIS WHITEHOUSEEditing Consultant, miniAID

THE 7.8 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE that struck Nepal on April 25, 2015 resulted in over 8,790 deaths and 22,300 injuries, with over eight million people affected. The response to the disaster, both domestic and international, was impressive, and demonstrated not only the overwhelming goodwill and support for Nepal from across the world — both state and non-state — but also the strength and resilience of the Nepali people themselves.

Major weaknesses were also exposed, however, in the nature of response provided, in the channelling of humanitarian aid and in getting the right help to the right people in the right places at the right time.

With the dust now settling, but with the disaster still fresh in our minds, it is time to review the response, to reflect on what went well and what could have been done better, the lessons learned, and



Given the scale of the disaster and the challenges the country faced in light of its topography, infrastructure and political climate, it is not surprising that the Nepal government's response was found wanting

recommend actions to be taken in the future, both in preparing for disasters and in planning responses for the days and weeks immediately following. These recommendations may apply not only to Nepal, but in many other countries also.

EARTHQUAKE PREPAREDNESS

On a 2009 list of countries most prone to earthquakes compiled by UNDP, Nepal ranked eleventh. The country straddles a fault line where the Indian tectonic plate is pressing against, and driving under, the Eurasian tectonic plate of Central Asia, converging at a rate of about 5cm (two inches) a year.

The last major earthquake in Nepal, measuring magnitude 8.4, occurred on January 15, 1934, with a death toll of over 8,500. A report published later that year by Major General Brahman Shumsher and Jung Bahadur Rana described in detail the disaster, the immediate response and the subsequent reconstruction efforts. There were useful lessons which, had they been fully used, could have saved lives and helped reduce the social and economic losses that Nepal incurred in the 2015 earthquake. The Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium, a coalition of partners working on disaster risk reduction (DRR), has been assisting the Government of Nepal to develop policies, legislation and building codes aimed at addressing vulnerabilities to natural hazards. The first programme dedicated to disaster management was jointly implemented by the Government of Nepal and UNDP in 1996, after the 1993 floods in central Nepal.

More recently, in July 2013, the government put in place a National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF), with the objective of providing guidance for a more effective and coordinated national response in case of a large disaster. While this was a positive step in preparedness, the full benefits of the NDRF for the April 2015 earthquake were not realised, partly because of the sheer scale of the disaster

and the weak governance in place, and partly because too little time had elapsed since the NDRF had been developed, meaning that some elements were yet to be fully established, especially at the sub-national level.

THE IMPACT OF THE APRIL 2015 **EARTHQUAKE**

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on Saturday, April 25, 2015 at 11:56 am local time, causing widespread damage and a number of landslides and avalanches. Strong aftershocks, including a 6.7 magnitude quake the following day, further damaged buildings and infrastructure. Over the next six weeks, there were more than 300 aftershocks greater than magnitude 4.0. This greatly affected the relief work and triggered more landslides, making it difficult to get relief to remote and most-affected districts. Thirty-one of the country's 75 districts were affected.

The destruction was widespread, with residential and government buildings, heritage sites, schools and health posts, rural roads, bridges, water supply systems, agricultural land, trekking routes, hydropower plants and sports facilities all affected. Rural areas in the central and western regions were particularly badly hit.

Hundreds of historical and cultural monuments were destroyed or extensively damaged. Over half a million houses collapsed. The damage exposed the weaknesses of houses that did not have seismic-resistant features or did not comply with building codes. The disaster also highlighted aspects of inequities in Nepali society spanning geography, income and gender. Poorer, rural areas were particularly badly affected due to the inferior quality of houses, and a disproportionate number of women and girls died, partly because of gendered roles that traditionally assign indoor chores to women.

Remains of the Dharahara, a sight-seeing tower that collapsed during the earthquake

AXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSI



BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

Although the quake caused large-scale death and destruction, it could have been so much worse. Had it occurred at night, many more would have been trapped in their houses; had it occurred on a weekday (rather than a Saturday), many children would have been at school — and the death toll of young people could have been much higher, considering that nearly 7,000 schools were completely or significantly damaged. For those in rural areas, too, the timing was fortunate — it was the time of year, and the time of day, that many farmers were out in the open, working in their fields.



A Garud statute among the rubble of the Kalmochan Temple in Tripureshwor, Kathmandu

RESPONSE TO THE EARTHQUAKE

Within 48 hours of the April earthquake, the Government of Nepal had declared a state of emergency for the affected areas and made an official request for international assistance. The government identified priority needs as search-and-rescue capacity, medical assistance, rubble-removal equipment, and logistical support for transport to difficult-to-access areas. Nepal's National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF) served as a key tool for the coordination of earthquake response, facilitating decisions and instructions from the central government.

The first meeting of the Central Disaster Relief Committee (CDRC) was held two hours after the first earthquake, with the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) providing an initial report to the CDRC, recommending a focus on search and rescue, and lifesaving actions.

Financial resources from the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund were immediately allocated and the government's cluster mechanisms, comprising 11 sectors, were activated within three days. Though Nepal did not have an integrated national search and rescue capacity formed prior to the event, the trained human resource of the Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force carried out search and rescue. According to a report by the Chief Secretary of the Government of Nepal, overall 22,500 civil servants, 65,059 army personnel, 41,776 police and 24,775 armed police were at work by Sunday afternoon, 24 hours after the earthquake.

The Indian National Disaster Response Force, the Indian Air Force and the Indian Army Medical Corps were the first foreign contingents to land in Kathmandu, arriving within six hours of the disaster to help launch relief operations. Over time, 134 international search-and-rescue teams from 34 countries were mobilised. Emergency relief and humanitarian assistance to the affected population was provided with the active support of and contributions from over 60 countries as well as the United Nations and other international agencies. Meanwhile, community members, particularly youths, were galvanised into action, digging out neighbours from the rubble and providing whatever assistance they could before the arrival of rescue and relief teams: much of the coordination for this was spontaneous and informal, with social media playing a key role. The network of NGOs and local affiliates of INGOs based in Nepal swiftly rallied to support community rescue and relief efforts, and volunteer groups helped treat the wounded, build temporary shelters, supply food and attend to vital needs.

Getting relief materials to the affected people proved challenging. Many rural communities were without road access even in normal times. Where parts of the journey to a community could

normally be made by road, the earthquake and its aftershocks in many areas both damaged the roads directly and triggered landslides that blocked roads; Rasuwa district headquarters, for example, was cut off.

SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

Although there are, as discussed later, aspects where performance in the response effort met or even exceeded expectations, there were many areas where performance was less than satisfactory.

Problem 1: Coordination. Often identified as a major challenge in any post-disaster situation, poor information flow and weak coordination in the immediate aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake was felt at all levels. Many government officials as well as officials working with non-government agencies have stated that, if there had been a

nodal agency to look after disaster management in Nepal, the situation would have been better. "The government should enact a comprehensive Disaster Management Act and establish a dedicated Disaster Risk Management institution in Nepal," Rameshowar Dangal, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs told the BBC Nepali service.

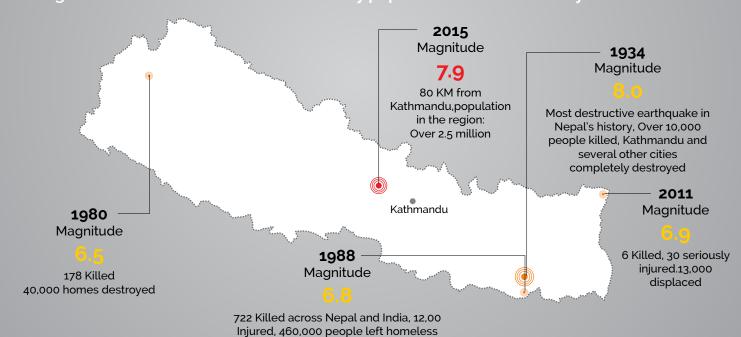
Problem 2: Urban/rural scenario. It was initially assumed that the Nepal earthquake would be a largely urban disaster, where most of those trapped would be in the larger multi-storey buildings of the cities. It was only as news from districts started to reach the capital that it became clear that the disaster was in fact a predominantly rural one. This resulted in a delayed response to rural areas. As it turned out, over 80 percent of deaths and over 86 percent of collapsed houses occurred outside the Kathmandu Valley, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

¹Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Nepal

Timeline - Nepal Earthquake

Nepal has been struck by the biggest earthquake in over 80 years.

The Region that has been hit hardest is the very populous Kathmandu valley.



Often identified as a major challenge in any post-disaster situation, poor information flow and weak coordination in the immediate aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake was felt at all levels. Many officials have stated that, if there had been a nodal agency to look after disaster management in Nepal, the situation would have been better.

Problem 3: Mismatch of needs on the ground and relief assistance. This mismatch was found to be most significant in two aspects.

- Over 1,309 foreign medical teams and 134 search and rescue teams were deployed. Even after the Government of Nepal announced that search-and-rescue assistance was no longer needed, foreign teams continued to arrive. For each person rescued, 117 rescuers had been deployed. The focus was on search and rescue in the Kathmandu Valley; the greater need, however, was for relief and response in the more rural and remote areas of the country.
- A priority need was tarpaulin. Thousands of houses were damaged and the families living there made effectively homeless, but there were also many more families whose houses were intact, but who continued to sleep outside for fear of another major earthquake. The effect of this second group on demands for tarpaulins had not been anticipated and thousands of families were left without shelter.

Problem 4: Access to rural areas, and the role of local level leadership. Getting relief materials to affected people in the most impacted rural areas proved a challenge. Relief trucks were able to deliver relief materials to the 'road heads' (where mule-tracks or footpaths connected communities to nearest roads). However, there was a lack of coordination at the district level to distribute the relief items to those in greatest need, and in many cases, the items ended up with the communities nearest to the road head. Furthermore, with no

elections held in the past 13 years, the districts were without effective leadership and this seriously affected the response efforts.

Problem 5: Media goal — news or publicity stunt? Many foreign relief teams came with their own media. The media, although valued for alerting the rest of the world to the extent of the disaster, were at times insensitive to the affected people and focused heavily on the rescues of those trapped in fallen buildings in Kathmandu Valley, gave little coverage to the broader situation (most notably, the plight of untrapped survivors in rural areas), and made little mention of the rescue and relief efforts made by Nepali people, groups and organisations.

Problem 6: Customs clearance of relief goods. There was a serious lack of capacity and a lack of a relevant regulatory framework to manage relief goods and their proper distribution. Great stocks of relief items were stacked at the airport, awaiting customs clearance. While tarpaulin was tax-free, other essential items, such as ropes needed to hold the tarpaulin in place, were taxed up to 20 percent.

Problem 7: Building codes and their implementation. Building codes were in place but there was inadequate capacity for implementation and monitoring. Ninety-nine percent of houses made of mud were damaged or destroyed, while only three percent of the houses made of cement were damaged. New buildings constructed in accordance with building codes were intact whereas many old buildings that did not follow building codes collapsed.



Problem 8: Weaknesses in governance and leadership. Effective governance and leadership is crucial for risk reduction and response coordination. Multi-party democracy introduced in 1990 brought a highly unstable political system with frequent changes in government. As such, there were few incentives for leaders to invest in long-term and potentially unpopular measures, such as land use planning or the enforcement of building codes. The problem was further exacerbated by the Maoist conflict in rural areas. Although the conflict ended in 2006, there were still no elected representatives in VDCs without local elections, and they were left poorly equipped with junior-level staff to coordinate immediate relief operations in the affected districts.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

There were also a number of positives witnessed in this mega disaster.

Plus-point 1: Community volunteerism and selfhelp. In a disaster situation, local communities become the first responders by default, a fact that disaster-planning too frequently overlooks or even dismisses as the 'involvement of amateurs'. In the aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake, collective

community action was the first response in terms of saving lives, caring for injuries and providing shelter and food for victims.

Plus-point 2: Role of informal sector/actors and social media. Local people and volunteers, both incountry and international, played a huge part in the response efforts. Social media played a significant role in enabling victims and helpers to connect and communicate, in helping local groups coordinate their efforts, and in enabling them to target their assistance more effectively. Facebook enabled people to sign in to show they are safe and share this information with their friends and family, and it was through Facebook and other social media that volunteer groups were able to form, act and respond; indeed, their response was in many cases faster and better targeted than the 'professionals' in the first few days of search/rescue/relief.

Plus-point 3: Crowd funding. Crowd funding has become a popular method of raising money from a large number of people for a good cause, typically via the internet, and its use for the Nepal earthquake was unprecedented, with thousands of fund-raising appeals posted on dozens of sites.

The Government of Nepal organised an international donors' conference on Nepal's reconstruction, asking the international community for help in rebuilding the country on June 25 2015

(Q) I AXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSI



Goods being ferried to various earthquakeaffected districts from the Humanitarian Staging Centre on the premises of the Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu

For many Nepali people working and living around the world, and non-Nepalis who had been to the country as tourists or expatriates, it was regarded as an effective way to mobilise or contribute financial support. Research is needed, however, to assess the extent to which this kind of fundraising leads to effective support for earthquake survivors, as there is little in the way of monitoring or evaluation of crowd funding campaigns such as these, and it is possible that some of the campaigns will have been dishonest.

Plus-point 4: Preparedness paid off but could have been better. The NDRF served as a key tool for the coordination of earthquake response, facilitating decisions and instructions from the central government. The first meeting of the CDRC was held two hours after the first earthquake. However, it was evident that the NDRF could not be utilised effectively due to weak dissemination. The Local Self Governance Act (1999) provisions that local

bodies (VDCs, DDCs, municipalities) are responsible for disaster preparedness and response. Without the local elections for over a decade and in the absence of leadership at the local level, there was a huge vacuum in responding effectively at the sub-national level.

WAY FORWARD

Another earthquake could strike any moment! Faults are unlocked by earthquakes. Analysis of seismic data from the 2015 Nepal earthquake shows only one part of the Main Himalayan Thrust fault was unzipped by the quake, leaving much of the fault locked and ready to slip in a future event. The following recommendations therefore need to be implemented as a matter of urgency.

1. Policies and institutional framework for disaster management

In light of the lessons learned from the April 2015 earthquake, it is clear that development of a Disaster Management Act should be a priority. The existing Act — Natural Calamity Relief Act, 1982 — focuses on post-disaster activities such as rescue, relief and response, but does nothing to promote DRR. There is a National Disaster Management Strategy (2009), but it is without a policy or act. The Disaster Management Law should be supplemented with appropriate regulations to provide guidance to the relevant government agencies and authorities. Disaster management laws and regulations should incorporate at least the following to enhance resilience of the national disaster management system and local communities to future risks:

- Establishment of a dedicated national nodal agency responsible for coordinating DRR activities from a development perspective in Nepal;
- Provision for compulsory training on DRR and preparedness at national, district and community levels;
- Instructions for key authorities and personnel (police, army, customs officials, VDCs) and key sectors (health, electricity, water, public transport, civil aviation, administration and procurement, banks, NGOs, volunteer organisations, etc.) on their responsibilities in the event of an emergency being declared;



- Establishment of a financing mechanism for DRR, response and recovery;
- Guidelines for mass media communications and broadcastings:
- Establishment of protocol for receiving and managing international assistance;
- Establishment of a monitoring system to ensure DRR guidelines are followed through by the responsible parties;
- Systematic documentation and analysis of disaster data to facilitate risk informed development.

2. Capacity development both national and local level

Policies and regulations should be complemented by appropriate capacity development initiatives to ensure implementation of policies and regulations, including a robust mechanism for monitoring. In the absence of a comprehensive Disaster Management Act and a dedicated institution, technical and functional capacity of development actors and civil servants in the field of disaster risk management is weak. A few academic institutions are running long- and short-term training courses on disaster management. The National Administrative Staff College has incorporated DRR

in its curriculum. However, these initiatives are not sufficient to cater to the current and future needs of the country.

Efforts must also be made to develop capacity at the local level on DRR and preparedness, with a focus on community-based disaster preparedness and response capacity, which will be less costly but more sustainable and effective.

Nepal has adequate experience in responding to disasters like floods and earthquakes, but each time, it struggles with the same difficulties in coordination, information management and planning. With each new disaster, Nepal should invest in learning lessons, to help improve the disaster management system. The current NDRF (2013) should be reviewed and updated, incorporating lessons from the recent disaster.

3. Effective recovery and resilience building

There has been tremendous international support for immediate relief and commitment for recovery. The Government of Nepal together with key stakeholders should put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure effective use of resources for recovery and reconstruction. A three-track approach is needed, and it is important to recognise that not only is it possible (and recommended) but also that the three elements of recovery (early recovery, medium- and long-term

Stone statues are all that remain in the ruins of the Ram Mandir temple in Lalitpur

recovery, and resilience building) can and should be carried out in parallel.

Early recovery enables affected people to restore their livelihoods and have access to safe shelter and sanitation, especially protection from the monsoon rains and the upcoming winter. The government needs to rapidly mobilise capacity and resources to provide basic services to affected communities to bring them onto the recovery track. Incidences of theft have increased in many villages after the earthquake, which requires stepping up security through security forces and local community volunteers.

While prioritising early recovery, begin to use the momentum and opportunity to facilitate medium- and long-term recovery and resilience building. Earthquake resilient housing design for urban and rural settings; training of masons and artisans; providing access to housing grants and credit lines

should be initiated urgently before the affected families start reconstruction using the same substandard materials and designs that will collapse again during the next earthquake. Affected people should be supported with skills and resources to restore their livelihoods. The recovery effort will be effective if it takes into account the different needs of women, girls, boys and men.

4. Mobilising non-traditional actors in recovery and reconstruction

Recalling the tremendous response from nonformal actors immediately after the April 2015 earthquake, government and development partners should be ready to build upon such responses in future disasters. The private sector, too, can play a major role in expediting recovery and reconstruction if appropriate policies are in place to facilitate private sector investment. Similarly, during recovery and reconstruction, priority should be given to engaging community



organisations with the aim of building local capacity for disaster preparedness and resilience.

5. Consolidating the peace process, cementing social cohesion and promoting inclusive development

Mega disasters such as this can also bring together communities, peoples and the government, reinforcing national unity while promoting goodwill and new energy to build back better. Building back better is not only about structural aspects but also non-structural social aspects.

The earthquake of April 2015 exposed underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities. Post-disaster assessments following flood and other natural hazard events (India water portal 21/09/2012) also showed that Dalits have been systematically excluded from relief and rehabilitation efforts. This recovery process should facilitate participatory and inclusive planning, implementation and monitoring, ensuring that all segments of society can

participate in, contribute to and benefit from the recovery programming. This is also an opportunity for the current government to step up recovery and development efforts after decades of political unrest and peace negotiations.

CONCLUSION

Given the sheer scale of the disaster of April 2015 and the challenges the country faced in light of its topography, infrastructure and political climate, it is not surprising that the government's response was found wanting in some aspects. There was much that the country can be proud of, however, not least the resilience of the people and their impressive enthusiasm to help their fellow citizens at this time of great need.

It is important, however, that lessons are learned, and that, from these, improvements made to the country's preparedness for future disasters. It is hoped that this paper can assist, albeit in a small way, in this endeavour.

A man demolishes his house that sustained severe damage in the April earthquake in Bhattedanda, Lalitpur

🙆 LAXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSI



MORE THAN JUST PHYSICAL REBUILDING

DR. GOVIND POKHREL

Vice Chairman, National Planning Comission

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE EARTHQUAKES, and pending the establishment of a National Authority for Reconstruction (NAR), the Nepal Government has requested the National Planning Commission and its Vice Chair Govind Raj Pokhrel to coordinate first the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and its follow up. Development Advocate spoke to Mr. Pokhrel on the challenges in reconstruction and how to go about making Nepal more resilient to future shocks. Excerpts:

As Vice-Chair of the National Planning Commission, which has long been working on resilience and sustainable development in Nepal, how will the reconstruction process contribute to increasing resilience in Nepal?

Reconstruction is broadly defined. We want to rebuild a resilient Nepal. In the reconstruction process, we will follow guidelines to establish resilient physical infrastructure. However, building social and economic resilience is more challenging, because a new Nepal is not possible with resilient infrastructure alone. There are three types of infrastructure — physical, social and economic — and all three should be taken into consideration while reconstructing new Nepal.





In various statements made by the Government of Nepal since the earthquake, and also in the PDNA report, the emphasis was on humancentric inclusive recovery and growth. How would you define the links between resilient development and inclusive growth? How will the current process of recovery and reconstruction contribute to inclusion? And how will you ensure that reconstruction efforts do not further marginalise already marginalised communities?

When we start the reconstruction process, all these components of inclusiveness, that is, concern for women, children, people with disabilities, among others, will be incorporated. For example, when we design a school building, it should be friendly to women and people with disabilities. There have to be proper drinking water facilities and toilets that are accessible to all. So this is the way in which we will incorporate an inclusive agenda. Another way is, if we opt for resettlement, it has to be linked with livelihood activities, which could include agriculture, animal husbandry or tourism. This means that rebuilding in Nepal is not just going to be focused on infrastructure development.

Will there be any specific approach or strategy to address the issues of marginalised communities like Dalits or people with disabilities?

If you actually take a need-based approach, the ratio might be different for each group. For example, the destroyed houses of Dalits would have been worth NPR 400,000 while that of 'richer' communities would be worth NPR 1.5 million, but the government will provide the same amount of support — NPR 200,000 each. As around 50

percent of debris can be reused for reconstruction, the house of someone who is poor can be reconstructed relatively easier, with the support the government provides. But when it comes to richer sections of society, they will have to contribute more out of their own pockets.

We aim to strengthen the capacity of local people and use them in reconstruction work. We will be providing training to masons, plumbers, electricians and carpenters. While providing these trainings, Dalits, women and people from marginalised communities will be prioritised. Since locals will be mobilised in the reconstruction effort itself, it will supplement their income. There are social barriers for poor and marginalised people and providing them with dignity is very important.

The current role of the NPC is to kick start the reconstruction effort pending the establishment of the NAR. What would you see as the immediate priorities for the NAR? When will we see NRA working on the ground?

It will take at least two to three months, as we are trying to institute a more robust, inclusive and just system for reconstruction. For that, we need to have our delivery mechanisms, guidelines, working modalities and by-laws in place — all of which take time. We also need human resource for the Reconstruction Authority itself and in the field. After Tihar (mid-November), you will see us on the ground.

How will the required human resources be managed?

Some of our staff will be brought in under deputation from different ministries, while we will select some from open competition. I think 50 percent will be managed internally while the remaining will be hired through open competition. As I mentioned before, we are preparing to train local people for reconstruction work at the ground level.

The reconstruction will probably include line ministries. What capacities will have to be built within the line ministries and what role will the ministries play?

All the line ministries will definitely have their roles in reconstruction. There are primarily three challenges — first is the management of human resource at the Authority itself and in the reconstruction process. Second is the coordination of government agencies from top to bottom, along with NGOs, INGOs and the local community, as many cultural heritage sites are managed by local communities or trusts. Third is the management of construction material and resources (funds) as that varies with the infrastructure we are reconstructing. For example, construction materials needed for temples are quite different from that needed for a house in a rural area.

How will you ensure the transparency in the reconstruction process?

We will give high priority to transparency. It will be mandatory to report on how every paisa has been spent.

And monitoring and evaluation systems?

There will be a high-level monitoring mechanism in place, which will include representatives from the government, development partners and civil society.

The NPC is also leading Nepal's bid for graduation from LDC status. How will reconstruction align with the graduation goal?

All our reconstruction activities will be aligned with our LDC graduation agenda, vision 2022 and 2030. They will also be in line with sustainable development goals and our 14th periodic plan (the sevenyear plan), which envisions productive investment for inclusive prosperity.

There are many countries in the Asia-Pacific region that have established a Reconstruction Authority in the aftermath of a major disaster. What should Nepal be drawing on from their experiences?

We will study the experiences of Gujarat, Pakistan and Indonesia, among others, and their successful practices will be definitely adopted in our context.

Development partners have shown solidarity after the disaster. What kind of specific technical or human resource support does the Authority require from them to function effectively?

We need expertise in planning, developing robust monitoring and accountability systems, and also in strengthening the capacity of various stakeholders.

Do you have any expectations from the UN and UNDP, in particular?

Yes, I do. I expect our partners to help us in capacity building and providing experts to support our work. We will definitely need the UN's support in monitoring and evaluation and in coordination.

Coming back again to implementation, how will reconstruction actually be implemented on the ground?

There are two ultimate objectives of reconstruction. First is attaining the reconstruction target — meaning

rebuilding physical, social and economic infrastructure. Second, during this process, we also have to build the capacity of delivering institutions, be they government, private or civil society. This will be extremely useful for future rebuilding should a similar disaster occur. For this, we need to give preference to line ministries, departments and local institutions. But this alone may not be sufficient and it may require us to work directly with the private sector and civil society organisations.

There is also a big concern about government's spending capacity. We will have to fast-track rules for procurement and delivery, while still

adhering to the principles of accountability

Women clear debris in Bungmati, Lalitpur

and transparency. //



IN THE FTERMATH

Deprived of homes and livelihoods, people in the worst-affected districts still struggle to bring their lives back on track



» BINOD GHIMIRE

Reporter, The Kathmandu Post

FROM ACROSS the Indrawati river in Bhimtar, Sindhupalchowk, the sun glinting off of hundreds of zinc sheets catches the eye. These gleams come from makeshift shelters constructed out of zinc sheets in Dhotar-3 of Bhimtar, where the entire Majhi community has huddled together to live following the spring earthquakes.

Among those dislocated is Machheri Majhi, who is attempting to prepare a meal for the day. Under her zinc-sheet shelter, the summer heat is almost unbearable, even as Machheri struggles to light a wood fire. She tries to get the wood burning by pouring some kerosene on it but a gust of wind rushes in and snuffs out the flames.

Machheri's shelter is adjacent to where her home once stood. On April 25, Machheri was preparing lunch for the helpers in their field when the ground began to shake. She bolted outside, but her husband and 24-year-old son did not make it.

For days after the funeral rites of her husband and son were over, all Machheri could do was sit at the rubble of her home and cry. Even now, Machheri's heart breaks every time she looks at her widowed daughter-in-law, who is only in her early twenties. Her daughter-in-law is still distraught and Machheri still hears

her weeping in the night, even as her toddler grandson clings to her.

Over four months since the earthquakes, Machheri's family is still struggling to make ends meet. The family received NPR 80,000 from the government to conduct the final rites and an additional NPR 100,000 each for the deceased. According to Majhi culture, the family of the deceased conduct a special ritual called *pitri nachaune*, and the compensation that Machheri received will all be spent on this unique ceremony.

Machheri's family made its living farming on a small portion of their land. "We were able to plant maize two months late," says Machheri. "How could I expect a better harvest this time around?"

Just like Machheri, many others from farming and fishing backgrounds in the worst-hit 14 districts have been struggling to cope with the aftermath of the disaster. As food reserves were buried when houses collapsed, and with the food relief depleting quick, these people lead uncertain lives.

In Chautara, the headquarters of Sindhupalchowk district, almost every house collapsed or was rendered uninhabitable in the quake. The house of Sita Maya Shrestha, 65, in Chautara is also gone. On April 25, Sita was buried in the rubble when her home collapsed as she was taking a nap. Neighbours managed to pull her out. Sita was provided NPR 15,000 in relief by the government, which she has already spent on her daily needs. At present, she is living in a small shed.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), a total of 63,885 private houses were damaged in Sindhupalchowk. In Chautara,

people are still demolishing houses while others are still building temporary shelters. Across the country, some 602,592 houses were damaged, according to MoHA.

In Lalitpur, one of the three districts comprising the Kathmandu Valley, the house of Ratna Raj Shakya lies in ruins. Shakya and his wife were on the fourth-floor when quake struck. The two sought shelter under a doorframe. Luckily, they got out alive. The Shakya family of five now lives in a tent in Harisiddhi, Lalitpur. Shakya, a pensioner, is awaiting support to rebuild his house.

Shyam Krishna Maharjan too occupies the same open space in Harisiddhi as Shakya. Maharjan was on his farm clearing weeds when the ground shook. His wife, 39, and his daughter, 21, were both trapped under rubble when their home collapsed. By the time rescuers dug them out, it was too late.

This open space in Harisiddhi now hosts over 50 makeshift zinc sheet shelters and tents, all in close proximity. Harisiddhi is among the worst-affected areas in Lalitpur — 22 people died in the initial quake.

Laxmi Dhakal, MoHA spokesperson, says that they have prepared 16 model houses for rehabilitation and are also preparing to distribute NPR 200,000 to each affected family as a grant. "This money is not enough to reconstruct a home, but we are discussing another modality to provide loans at low interest rates," said Dhakal.

More than four months since the disaster, many victims in the affected districts continue to languish in unsafe conditions. Many remain under tents and with few other alternatives, temporary shelters are beginning to turn into permanent homes. Now that the worst of the monsoon rains has passed, these survivors look warily towards the approaching winter.



PEOPLE IN THE WORST-HIT 14 DISTRICTS HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH THE AFTERMATH OF THE EARTHQUAKE.



AFTER THE DISASTER, BUILDING BACK BETTER

H.E. MASASHI OGAWA

Japanese Ambassador to Nepal

Despite being prone to so many different kinds of natural hazards, Japan is very resilient and well prepared for disasters. Especially, after the 2011 Great East Earthquake, the world was watching how resilient the country as well as its people were, and how quickly the country has been recovering. What is necessary to become a resilient nation and is there anything that Nepal can learn from Japan to improve resilience?

As you pointed out, Japan has been suffering from various kinds of natural disasters, including mega earthquakes. Recently, a concentrated heavy rain caused by a typhoon burst banks of a river running along the Tokyo suburbs. Many houses were flooded and seven people were killed. In addition, Mt. Aso, a big volcano in Kyushu area, is about to erupt and residents around the mountain were all sheltered. Those disasters occurred in one week in Japan. No one can prevent outbreaks of natural disasters. In Japan, the government has made its best effort to mitigate the effects of many disasters in advance. In addition, once a disaster occurs, we launch rescue services, help the affected residents and provide restoration works as soon as possible. Our knowledge and technologies accumulated from experiences of natural disasters were introduced at the UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai in March this year. We addressed three principles at the conference: (i) in order to reduce disaster risks, it is important to invest in disaster prevention before the disaster occurs; (ii) when disaster occurs, to carry out reconstruction by applying the principle of build back better in order to create a society that is more resilient to future disasters, based on





the lessons learned from disasters; and (iii) it is necessary that all stakeholders, such as the national government, local governments, private companies, local communities and civil society, engage in disaster risk reduction in a responsible manner.

All these principles also apply to Nepal. About 9,000 people were killed and more than 22,000 people were injured by the mega earthquake that occurred on April 25 and its aftershocks. Almost 800,000 houses were completely or partly destroyed. Many Japanese were shocked and deeply grieved to hear the news. The Japanese government immediately decided to provide rapid and consistent support to Nepal from the emergency assistance phase to the restoration and reconstruction phase.

How do you observe ongoing recovery efforts from the Government of Nepal and other actors in the aftermath of the earthquake?

We highly appreciate the efforts of the Nepal government and UN agencies and other international organisation at the beginning of the reconstruction phase. Nepal's National Planning Commission (NPC) took the initiative to come up with the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) under the cooperation of the European Union (EU), World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the UN. The Japanese government also supported the NPC by, for example, dispatching three specialists to work together on the PDNA. JICA also sent emergency needs assessment missions. Based on this PDNA, the International Donor Conference was held in Kathmandu on June 25. A large number of representatives from different countries

and international organisations attended the conference. Mr. Minoru Kiuchi, State Minister of Foreign Affairs, attended the conference from Japan and promised support amounting to \$260 million, as well as technical assistance for reconstruction. The conference was a successful one, with the cooperation of WB, ADB, UNDP and JICA, and the Nepal government won a lot of support, worth \$4.4 billion.

First, JICA placed an emergency needs assessment mission to assess reconstruction needs. Second, Japan dispatched three experts to the NPC for two months for technical advice towards formulation of the PDNA. Third, at the International Donor Conference. we expressed that schools, housing and infrastructure would be our three pillars of support during reconstruction and pledged \$260 million dollars for them.

What is the biggest challenge you see for Nepal in becoming a disaster resilient nation?

It is regrettable to say that even more than two months since the International Donor Conference, the engagement of the Nepal government with reconstruction activities is not proceeding. The Nepal Reconstruction Authority, which is expected to play the central role in the reconstruction process, has not been fully organised and is not operational yet. In addition, the mid- and long-term reconstruction policy of the Nepal government has not yet been established. We strongly expect early action from the Nepal government on these issues.

How is Japan supporting Nepal in reconstruction in the aftermath of the disaster?

Nepal is an important friend of Japan. We have continuously and rapidly helped Nepal as much as possible from the emergency assistance phase to the restoration and reconstruction phase. During the emergency phase, Japan concentrated on humanitarian aid. From the beginning of the restoration and reconstruction phase, Japan has provided considerable assistance to Nepal. First, JICA placed an emergency needs assessment mission to assess reconstruction needs. Second, Japan dispatched three experts to the NPC for two months for technical advice towards formulation of the PDNA. Third. at the International Donor Conference. we expressed that schools, housing and infrastructure would be our three pillars of support during reconstruction and pledged \$260 million dollars for them.

Nepal is an important friend of Japan. We have continuously and rapidly helped Nepal as much as possible from the emergency assistance phase to the restoration and reconstruction phase.

In terms of amount of aid, Japan is third in this respect, after India and China. Furthermore, in the technical session of the Conference, Japanese presenters introduced the concept of build back better, which was widely recognised at the Sendai Conference.

At present, with regards to the above three pillars, we are in discussion with other donors such as ADB, the World Bank and the Nepal government about institutional design. In addition, we are implementing emergency rehabilitation of infrastructure facilities which Japan had provided prior to the earthquake.

Japan has been a major development partner for Nepal for long. Where do you see Nepal in the next 10 years?

First, the new democratic constitution will be promulgated soon. This is what Nepali people waited eight long years for. The constitution is the backbone of the country, I strongly expect Nepali people will be united and make further efforts to develop the country under this constitution. Second, I expect the new constitution will bring about a lot of changes in Nepal society. The legal system will be improved, including the establishment of a new Criminal Code and Civil Code. Reform of administration will be conducted to make the government much more efficient and responsible. Local elections will also be carried out. It is difficult to say these reforms will be completed within 10 years; however, those are essential elements for the development of the country. Third, political leaders will hand over power to the younger generation. I see there are many young politicians in this country who are highly motivated and have wide horizons.

They will lead this country in the right direction. Fourth, Nepal is rich in natural

resources such as hydro power, many spots of scenic beauty and diligent manpower. If it can utilise these resources, it is easy to graduate out of LDC status within 10 years. In order to do so, it should make efforts to invite foreign investment and improve infrastructure such as roads, airports and hydropower stations.

How do you observe UNDP's role as a development partner in Nepal?

UNDP has made a big contribution to Nepal in many fields such as poverty eradication, facilitating the peace building process, capacity building of the government, and so on. UNDP is a good partner of the Embassy of Japan and JICA. We strongly hope to maintain and strengthen good relations with UNDP and support Nepal's development together.

Building community house in Khokana, Lalitpur

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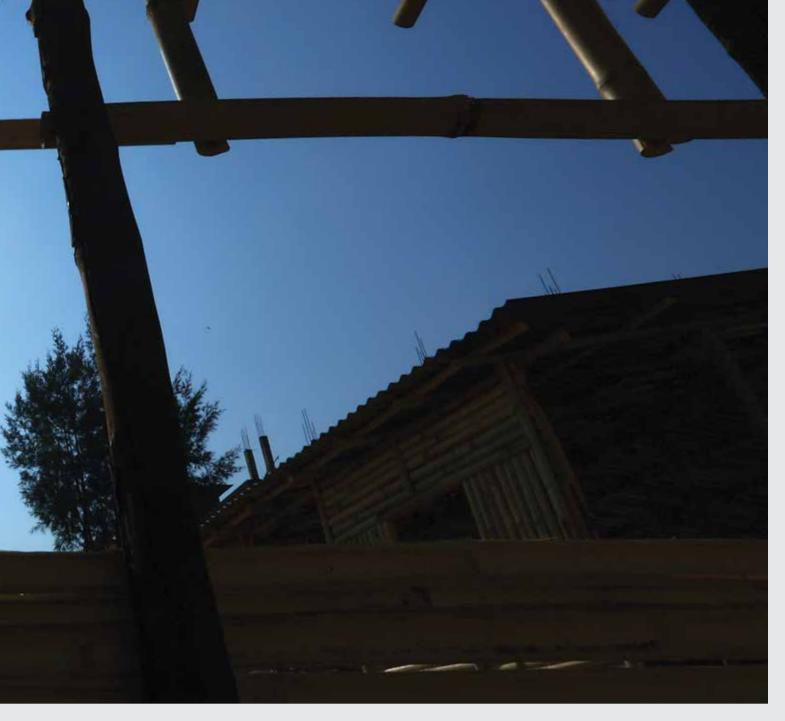
>>> VIVEK RAWAL Director, People in Centre, Ahmedabad (India)

Advisor , Housing Reconstruction, UNDP Nepal

As important as it is to ensure compliance with building codes and ensure access to safe and secure land, traditional construction practices must also be strengthened and refined with scientific approaches

THERE IS AN INCREASING realisation of the need for improving the resilience of human settlements against disasters. Every natural disaster that humanity faces further reinforces this need, as housing damage and collapse are usually the major causes of a loss of life during disasters. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to understand the existing vulnerabilities of our communities and identify ways to make them more resilient.

While discussing resilient habitats, it is also important to understand the wider context of the concept. The resilience



of habitats is not only about the construction of a structure; it also depends on factors such as human activities, social structures, culture, economy, climate, topography, geology, hydrology and natural resources. What is important is sustainable interaction between these factors to ensure that habitats continue to be resilient. It is well recognised that people with stronger asset bases are less vulnerable and in turn, more resilient. Therefore, the cornerstone of a recovery strategy during post-disaster reconstruction should be to help the poor and vulnerable accumulate assets — land, livestock, house, etc. Resilience can also be further enhanced by strengthening human capital in terms of improved skills and knowledge.

This essay points to four aspects of the resilience of human settlements — a) compliance of housing to building codes and by-laws; b) awareness and capacity building on disaster-resistant construction; c) improving traditional construction practices; and d) ensuring access to safe and secure land.

COMPLYING WITH THE CODE

Most rural houses in Nepal have been constructed by the people themselves, involving local artisans and using easily available materials. These houses have been constructed over a period of time in an incremental manner. They are thus a cumulative expression of a culture and its people. They represent the values and

A woman prepares a temporary shelter in Khokana, Lalitpur

ways in which the people engage with nature and society. But at the same time, factors like socioeconomic constraints, changes induced by modern development, shrinking environmental resources, changing occupational patterns and almost nonexistent techno-legal regimes in rural areas are some of the many reasons that have led to the poor quality of houses, making them vulnerable to disasters. Such housing stock has repeatedly led to devastating consequences for human life during floods, earthquakes and storms. In developing countries, particularly in South Asia, the design and construction of buildings, even when using modern materials, is largely based on practice rather than engineering design as per building codes. As a result, even modern houses are not necessarily safe.

Rampant unplanned urbanisation, along with the weak enforcement of building by-laws and building codes, greatly impacts the resilience of human settlements. As the process of urbanisation with high-density settlements accelerates given current migration rates, it becomes critical to evaluate how resilient our towns are. One can only shudder at the thought of a possible earthquake with its epicentre in a high-density town. The scarcity of buildable land in hilly terrain adds to the pressure on existing land and has often spurred unsafe construction. Lack of expertise and trained human resources to enforce existing regulations further compromise the resilience of human settlements. Compliance to by-laws by the public is also low, due to a lack of awareness and general apathy towards disaster

risk management issues. The strengthening of local government authorities as well as public awareness need to be undertaken in parallel to improve compliance to building by-laws. This is assuming that by-laws have been made contextual, keeping in mind disaster risks and the people's needs.

In most urban areas, migrant workers constitute a significant portion of the construction industry labour force, often employed by building contractors. To improve the resilience of human settlements, it is critical that the knowledge and skill levels of artisans as well as the contractors who employ them are enhanced.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

While discussing issues that lead to vulnerability, it is only to fair to also recognise that traditions and culture play critical roles in making local communities resilient. It is this resilience that has helped communities not only to cope with disasters but also rebuild their lives with remarkable spirit. Past post-disaster recovery experiences in many South Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, corroborate this. Communities, whenever facilitated on the basis of their own traditional skills and knowledge, have recovered much faster and achieved greater resilience. There may be an initial impulse of local communities, the state and external agencies to reject traditional materials, skills and wisdom in favour of modern technologies

A man sets up a solar panel to provide electricity in his temporary shelter in Khokana, Lalitpur





and professional knowledge and adopt external technologies. However, these need to be dispelled by the judicious use of science and technology to strengthen local knowledge systems. This can greatly enhance the potential of people to take greater control of their reconstruction and improve long-term resilience.

Invariably, solutions rooted in cultural traditions are more cost effective and have smaller ecological footprints. Modern science, academia and state policies have generally done little to include these traditional solutions into the regular vocabulary of disaster resilient housing. Local artisanal skills of stone masons, carpenters and bamboo workers, when strengthened through scientifically validated guidelines and training, can make their local habitats safer. It is important to invest in traditional artisanal skills, include them in formal systems of governance by approving their use, initiate a process to refine these options by using analytical scientific approaches and take back these improvements to the community through training programmes. Such initiatives can strengthen community capacities for mitigating disaster risks.

SAFE AND SECURE LAND

As mentioned earlier, assets provide critical strength to families to cope with disasters. Land

is one critical asset, particularly for the resilience of habitats. Many disasters like floods, landslides or earthquake can impact land. Land tenure is particularly complex in Asian countries. Forms of land tenure range from freehold ownership to informal possession of land with varying degrees of legitimacy.

Another aspect to be considered for safe habitats is that it is generally poor and vulnerable families who end up living on unsafe land. This is usually due to their inability to afford land in the cities due to biased market forces and a lack of government support. Post-disaster reconstruction can provide opportunities to deal and straighten out these issues and ensure the poor's access to secure and safe land. India has undertaken processes to provide entitlement to tribal and Dalit families while Indonesia has involved the local population in establishing property rights through community vetting. Such processes lead to higher community resilience in the future.

It is critical that all of these issues be delved into while considering resilience and reconstruction. The resilience of habitats is not only for ensuring the dignity of life for citizens; it is critical for livelihood and safety during disasters.

A man clears debris from his damaged home in Chautara, Sindhupalchowk

LAXMI PRASAD NGAKHUS

The Role of Migration and Remittances in Building Resilience



Migrants and diaspora have become instrumental in developing the well-being of Kosovo's citizens and in the financing of the economy by stimulating consumption and private investment



Remittance has helped many families limp back to normal lives. LAXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSI



» ADRIAN SPAHIU Project Manager, Diaspora Engagement in Economic Development

THERE ARE NOW 215 MILLION first-generation migrants around the world: that's 3 percent of the world's population. Small concentrations of ethnic and linguistic groups have always been found in surprising places — Lebanese in West Africa, Japanese in Brazil and Welsh in Patagonia, for instance — but they have been joined by newer ones, such as West Africans in southern China.1 The Kosovar migrants and diaspora (up to 90 percent Albanian) are no different. They are at least a couple of hundred years old and a result of fear and uncertainty during several times of the history, the most recent one being just 16 years ago. Like in any other place, Kosovo migrants and diaspora have played a vital role throughout recent history and remain one of the greatest potentials for development that the country has.

But first, when does a migrant cease to be one and becomes a part of the diaspora or vice-versa? To answer that, we should rather simplify the notion — by keeping in mind the increase in circular migration. It is difficult today to limit the notion of diaspora to those who are settled in a country other than where they were born. The modern notion of

role in reducing poverty and meeting the needs of families in Kosovo, all of UNDP's remittance studies have shown and confirmed that approximately 60 percent of remittances are used for consumption while only 4 percent are invested and less than that is saved, which is a similar development in most, if not all, countries with large diasporas.

While remittances play an important

diaspora has lost its dimension of irreversibility and of exile. Migrants go to work abroad, sometimes under specific government schemes, some decide to stay longer, to return and to leave again. It appears that countries supporting temporary labour migration are also concerned with diaspora contributions, such as the Philippines, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda², or many of the Balkan countries, such as Kosovo.

Although spread across almost all continents, but mostly in North America and Europe (including the Asian part of Turkey), Albanian migrants and diaspora (from Kosovo, Albania, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) are believed to be between 5 and 7 million, a number that yet needs to be confirmed with a registration process initiated by the Kosovo government under the Kosovo Diaspora Registry³, a process launched only a year ago. Nonetheless, if one takes into consideration that in Kosovo, Albania, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia there live around 7 million Albanians with 8 million making up more than 50 percent of the entire Albanian population worldwide, the number of migrants and diaspora

¹The Economist / The magic of diasporas -http://www.economist. com/node/21538742

²Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers Dina Ionescu - http://jamaicandiaspora.co.uk/Engaging%20Diasporas%20as%20 Developing%20Partners

³ DEED Project - http://deed-ks.org/index.php/what-we-do/81english/what-we-do/technical-assistance/diaspora-register

⁴Kosovo Remittance Study 2013 - http://deed-ks.org/images/ Reports/reports/Remittances/Remitencat_eng-2013.pdf



is one that deserves attention from domestic policymakers. Especially considering that during political and economic downturns, all sectors of Kosovo's economy have depended on and been revived by its diaspora and migrant entrepreneurs, who, through their remittances or through direct investments earned in their countries of residence, have helped to create jobs back home.

As with the surveys of the two previous years conducted by UNDP,4 data from the Kosovo Remittance study (KRS) in 2013 confirmed that remittances continue to play an important role in the improvement of the well-being of many citizens in Kosovo and in the financing of the economy by stimulating consumption and private investment. Survey data indicates that 43 percent of Kosovo citizens have family members who live abroad while 22.4 percent of Kosovo families received remittances from their family members in 2012. Besides the 15-20 percent of the GDP that consists of financial transfers from the diaspora, Kosovars living abroad have a wealth of skills and knowledge that can help Kosovo overcome many of the persistent challenges it faces.5 While remittances play an important role in reducing poverty and meeting the needs of families in Kosovo, all of UNDP's remittance studies have shown and confirmed that approximately 60 percent of remittances are used for consumption while only 4 percent are invested and less than that is saved, which is a similar development in most, if not all, countries with large diasporas. With this in mind, it would have been irresponsible of the Kosovo government to do nothing to engage this immense potential in the economic development of Kosovo.

The first step taken by the Kosovo government was the establishment of its newest Ministry for Diaspora, of the youngest nation in Europe,⁶ seeking strategies to promote the use of formal channels for remittance transfers, and at the same time, with the help of UNDP and IOM and financed by the Government of Finland, hold financial literacy trainings in order to educate women and men to better manage their finances and dedicate a part of their budget to savings and investments; conduct feasibility studies on select banking products and services with suggestions on how to attract remittance receiving households to use these products and services; and thus, encourage the investment of received remittances into business start-ups or business expansion. This helps and encourages banks to promote long-term saving behaviour of remittance recipients by applying identified mechanisms for investments.

The government also established 'Diaspora Business Networks' in each country where migrants and diaspora reside. These networks of kinship and language make it easier to do business across borders and most importantly, with their country of origin. Diaspora networks — of Huguenots, Scots, Jews, Albanians and many others — have always been a potent economic force, but the cheapness and ease of modern travel has made them larger and more numerous than ever before. Hence, an organised network will benefit everyone.

The Kosovo government has also been instrumental in supporting the private sector to take concrete measures to engage with diaspora as potential clientele. Measures include the successful organisation of public conferences on investment and banking services for diaspora and remittance recipients as well as concrete investment promotion with tangible projects, creating synergy between potential investors from diaspora and private sector actors in Kosovo, especially those involved in the financial sector.

Kosovo's migrants and diaspora are linked very closely with Kosovo and this is apparent not only from the money they send back to their homeland, but also by the frequency of their visits. Although the majority of immigrant families live with close families, they still have other family members back home. Therefore, as long as these ties exist — and they should be maintained for mutual benefit — they will remain one of most important pillars of the domestic economy, because of their skills, knowledge and innovative mindset, for the remittances which come in as savings or investment, and because they are seen as ultimate direct investors.

⁷The magic of diasporas - http://www.economist.com/ node/21538742

⁸OP Cit. - Kosovo Remittance Study 2013

⁵Op-Cit. http://deed-ks.org/index.php

⁶Kosovo's Independence - http://www.kosovothanksyou.com/



DR. POSH RAJ PANDEY

Executive Chairman, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)

Our biggest vulnerability lies in the area of remittance

Vulnerability is understood, in general, as the risk of a system, such as a household, region or country, of being negatively affected by the 'specific perturbations that impinge on the system', or the probability of a system undergoing a negative change due to a perturbation. As the Nepali economy is moderately exposed to the global economy, there is a risk that projected slower growth in the world economy — including emerging market economies and developing countries, largely due to lower commodity prices and tighter financial conditions, structural bottlenecks, rebalancing in China and economic distress related to geopolitical factors — will affect the Nepali economy. Any fluctuation in the global economy is transmitted to domestic economies through flows of goods and services; capital, including foreign direct investment, loans and grants; labour; and knowledge and technology. Nepal's exposure to the world economy through exports is low, as the share of exports in the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is 4 percent. However, Nepal's share of imports is quite high, at 37 percent. Similarly, shares of foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign aid in the GDP are 0.8 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively. The contribution of remittances flow, on the other hand, which stands at about 30 percent of the GDP, is more than three times larger than the joint contribution of exports, foreign investment and foreign aid.

Nepal's foreign economic interaction is concentrated with India, particularly in areas of exports and imports and FDI. Furthermore, Nepal's exchange rate is pegged to Indian currency without capital account convertibility. India, therefore, has long been acting as an external shock absorber for the Nepali economy. The experience of the 2007 food crisis and the 2009 financial crisis has illustrated how Nepal did not suffer much from adverse impacts, as the shocks were first felt in the Indian economy before they made their way into the Nepali economy. Despite a slowdown in the global economy, the Indian economy is expected to grow at 7.5 percent in 2015.

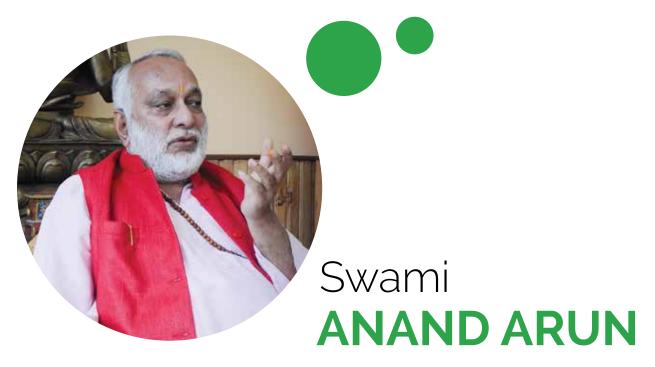
Thus, one can argue that there will not be much adverse impact of the current global slowdown on the Nepali economy via international trade, except for the impacts of the volatility of commodity prices. The effect of commodity prices will be more intense, as the task of reconstruction and rehabilitation of earthquake-ravaged infrastructure and buildings moves on. Coupled with external shocks, breakdown in supply chains and disruptions in the labour market because of the earthquake, inflation will be fueled and exports will suffer.

As the flows of FDI and foreign aid in relation to the size of Nepali economy are small, transmission of external shocks through these mechanisms will be minuscule. However, our biggest vulnerability lies in the area of remittances. This is due not only to its dominant role in the national economy as a source of foreign exchange that has increased vulnerability but also as a major source of employment and consumption at the household level, a key contributor in the liquidity of the financial system and a source of government revenue.

Any disruption in remittance flows runs the risk of bringing the economy to a standstill. Sources of remittances are highly concentrated in a few countries - Malaysia and countries in the Middle East contribute more than 60 percent of remittances and absorb more than 50 percent of migrant workers. Declining commodity prices, including oil prices, would affect economic activities in these countries and consequently, their demand for labour, the wage rate and remittance flows.

It is not only the economic vulnerability of remittances that requires us to rethink our foreign employment policy and priorities. We also need to consider other social costs and the great health burdens on migrant workers. For me, the outside flow of productive youth is equivalent to capital flight. Foreign employment can be a transitional arrangement for the shortto medium-term but we have to create domestic employment and be selective about foreign employment in the long run. In order to create domestic employment, we need to 'rebalance the structure of our economy' by converting our import-based economy into a domestic productionfueled economy while pursuing economic growth. Improving our productive capacity, developing infrastructure, especially energy and transport, ensuring political and policy stability, creating a proper investment climate, improving human resources, and increasing technological knowhow would go a long way in this regard. //

(As told to Manish Gautam, a journalist)



Spiritual teacher and founder of the Osho Tapoban, a spiritual commune and forest retreat on the outskirts of Kathmandu

When confronted with a great disaster, the human mind often finds it difficult to cope. With the physical world in shambles around them, people often turn to spirituality for comfort. As disasters are often an act of nature and thus, beyond our control, turning inwards to our inner selves can help us come to terms with the situation at hand.

Coping with disasters requires a balanced mind that is capable of handling the situation in a calm and focussed manner. This is a characteristic of spiritual people, who are ready to accept life as it comes. **Spirituality frees a person of expectations** and ambitions. They suffer less pain and are able to endure more suffering.

In this sense, spirituality can help individuals become more resilient to shocks like natural disasters. They are able to cope better as spirituality provides a rationale for the losses they have suffered.

Spirituality is a large part of Eastern culture and philosophy. Though not everybody in the East is religious, aspects of spirituality and religion often permeate daily lives in a manner that is uncommon in the West. For instance, regardless of whether one visits a religious temple, mosque or shrine, there is

SPIRITUALITY AS A MEANS OF HEALING

Yoga and meditation can help reduce stress and make individuals more resilient during times of great disasters

some sort of faith in the existence of god. Fatalism, too, is a big part of Eastern culture. Perhaps this has helped Nepalis accept and cope with devastating events like the recent earthquakes in the spring. In its essence, fatalism is a belief that the events that occur are the output of our past karma (deeds). What we face now is a result of what we have done in the past. Similarly, if one does good in the present, the future will be brighter. Unfortunately, this has also led people to blame fate for everything that happens, even those things that are in their control.

There are techniques in Eastern culture that can help reduce stress and help individuals become more resilient. Yoga and meditation are great techniques to strengthen the inner self. In this modern age, we devote so much time to our professional and material life that we are hesitant to spare even an hour a day pursuing our inner lives. Even one hour of meditation and yoga can bring about dramatic results.

This is the reason that I been advocating the Nepali government to mainstream yoga as an effective means to manage stress. Unfortunately, our government has not yet accepted that spirituality can be a powerful means to solve many of our modern-day problems. The government is attempting to resolve problems through physical means, like providing material and financial support. Material support is definitely important, but without spiritual support, the help provided does not become holistic.

It is a tragedy that we try to emulate the West in every field and disregard important aspects of our philosophy. There is a mistaken belief that everything is perfect in developed countries. We think that a good social security system, proper education and proper healthcare can make us happy. But it is my belief that even if all the wealth of the world is given to one person, they will not be happy without spiritual fulfilment. Material support can make life comfortable, but it doesn't ensure contentment. Through my own humble observations, I have seen that Nepalis may lack basic amenities, but they are happier than many people in developed countries.

After the spring earthquakes, we received many people at the Tapoban ashram. They were understandably quite

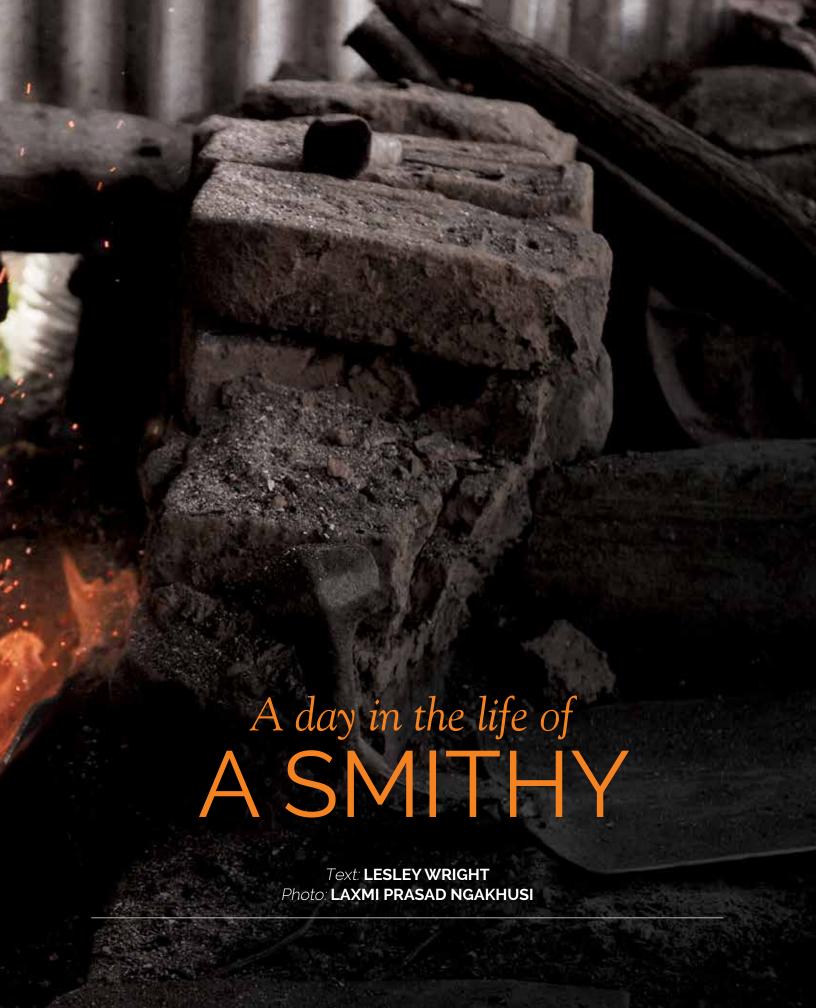
disturbed, as disasters are harbingers of great loss. People who have witnessed the loss of their loved ones find it difficult to fathom the reason behind their suffering. But life is full of problems like these. Coping with disasters requires a balanced mind that is capable of handling the situation in a calm and focussed manner. This is a characteristic of spiritual people, who are ready to accept life as it comes. Spirituality frees a person of expectations and ambitions. They suffer less pain and are able to endure more suffering.

At Tapoban, we tried to console distraught people by teaching them to control their minds through yoga, pranayama and meditation. And for many, this has really worked.

Natural events are not under our control, but we can prevent these events from becoming psychological burdens. While physical preparations can help make society more physically resilient, psychological and spiritual preparations can make society internally resilient. //

(As told to Binod Ghimire, a journalist)











On April 25, Gajaraj's life turned upside down. His house collapsed and his workshop was buried under the rubble. He saved himself by running out of the house, but he was not able to save everyone. One of his daughters-in-law died after she was buried under their collapsed house. With his home and workshop destroyed, Gajaraj didn't know how he could ever get back to normal.

Three months later, however, Gajaraj has new hopes, as his workshop has been rebuilt with support from UNDP and MEDEP. Once again, he is able to provide for his family by working as a blacksmith.

When the workday is done, Gajaraj and his grandson walk home where dinner awaits. His family gathers in the temporary shelter he built after the quake using metal sheets and tarpaulin. The one-room shelter serves as the lounge,















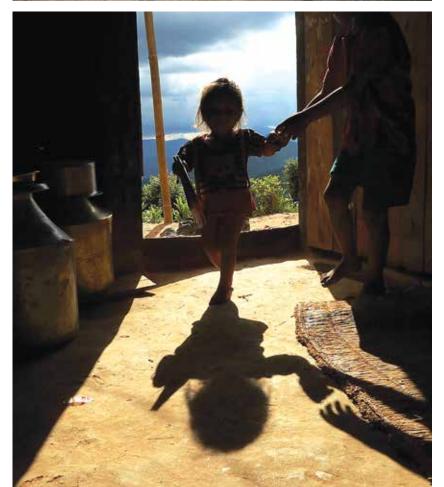




the dining room and the bedroom. As they eat, the family talks about what happened that day. They talk about the workshop, the farm and the village. They rarely discuss anything outside their own community.

The disaster severely affected beneficiaries of UNDP's Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP), a long-term project funded by the Australian government. In June 2015, Australia donated a further \$5.4 million to UNDP to revitalise these lost and damaged livelihoods. UNDP will build on its 15 years of MEDEP experience to help thousands of micro-entrepreneurs get back to business. //





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