Rising from the Rubble? Examining Post-Disaster Recovery and (Re-)Development in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Nepal, a landlocked country between India and China, experienced a powerful earthquake (7.8 M_w) in April 2015 that claimed nearly 9,000 lives and injured more than 20,000 people. Half a million houses were destroyed. The catastrophe triggered massive emergency relief needs due to widespread poverty in the earthquake-affected districts. Given the scale of devastation, the need to rebuild livelihoods and reconstruct homes was obvious. Poor and marginalised groups are typically the most impacted when disasters occur. They face complex challenges in recovering from the devastation. The body of knowledge on casteism, ethnic marginality, and disasters is still limited. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to such disaster scholarship.

Using qualitative research methods, this study aims to critically examine the post-disaster *emergency response*, *livelihood recovery*, and *housing reconstruction* process in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, with reference to the marginalised and disadvantaged social groups—specifically Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti. Interviews were conducted with disaster survivors, government representatives, and humanitarian and development workers in international and national non-government organisations. The theoretical concepts of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu—*capital*, *field*, *habitus*, and *symbolic capital*—were applied to understand the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction phenomenon.

The findings show that humanitarian assistance was crucial in addressing several unmet needs of disaster-affected rural households in resource-poor settings in Nepal. However, the interventions were generally fragmented, insufficient, neoliberal-led (forcing market dependencies), and largely business-as-usual in their orientation. The research found that caste-based discrimination and social exclusion were perpetuated in the aftermath of the earthquake. Similarly, the “replacement” or “restoration” concept (the idea of regaining what was lost or damaged by a disaster) is problematic as it overlooks the pre-disaster vulnerability of poor and marginalised households who experience disproportionate disaster impacts.

The findings suggest that the housing reconstruction process was *rendered technical*, fixating on the technical details of buildings generated far away. This ignored the local realities

of everyday rural life, compromised people's agency and participation in planning and decision-making processes. As a result, the reconstruction resulted in the rebuilding of concrete houses which, while technically safer than many they replaced, are spatially insufficient, climatically unsuitable, and practically inconvenient for local people.

The research shows that without *pro-poor* targeted recovery policies and programmes, pre-disaster inequalities between the haves and have-nots are likely to continue, if not grow, in post-disaster environments. Finally, in contrast to what may commonly be believed, the findings suggest that disaster survivors are not passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. They should be recognised and encouraged for their willingness and ability to bring positive changes to their lives/families following a crisis.

Keywords: *Bourdieu, caste/ethnicity, disaster–development nexus, relief, housing reconstruction, livelihoods recovery, Nepal Earthquake, social vulnerability, social reproduction*

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Doing a PhD reminded me of a young man in the mountain of Nepal who begins his long journey to a far-flung village where he has never been before. He begins the trek or journey alone but needs the help of others to reach the destination. The tiring several days of the walk become easier if he is fortunate to find a companion(s) on the way who can engage in conversations or share a sip of water from their bottle when his bottle is empty! If the man loses track, he needs someone there—before he goes too far away—to help him correct the mistake and show the right direction. The man needs a kind-hearted householder to allow him to stay overnight before he sets off again the next day. Like this trekker in the Himalayas, I would have never completed my PhD journey in the first place had I not met some wonderful people who helped me in many ways to complete the course. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to extend my deep gratitude to each of them for their profound support.

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This doctoral research was undertaken during the most challenging periods in our recent memory. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the coronavirus

(Covid-19) a pandemic, and the announcement was followed by a sense of alarm across the globe. The pandemic dominated 2020 and subsequent years, causing millions of infections and deaths, impacting well-being, and threatening the livelihoods of people around the world. Due to the pandemic, international border closures and travel restrictions were enforced constraining my ability to execute the original study/research plans. At this juncture, I must thank a few people here who helped with my fieldwork; without their support, the research would never have been completed. I am indebted to Madhusudan Rupakheti, Pralhad Chalise, and Suman Shrestha for their field assistance in interviews with community people. Thanks also to Madhab (Neupane) *dai* for helping me transcribe the interviews.

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DEDICATION

To Nisha, I cannot possibly thank you enough.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBS	: Centre Bureau of Statistics
CGI	: Corrugated galvanised iron
Covid	: Coronavirus disease
DDR	: Donor-driven reconstruction
DRR	: Disaster risk reduction
DUDBC	: Department of Urban Development and Building Construction
EHRP	: Earthquake Housing Reconstruction Project
GoN	: Government of Nepal
HDI	: Human Development Index
INGO	: International non-government organisation
IDSN	: International Dalit Solidarity Network
IFRC	: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LRRD	: Linking relief, rehabilitation, and development
MDTF	: Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Nepal Earthquake Housing Reconstruction
MFI	: Micro-finance institution
MoHA	: Ministry of Foreign Affairs
M_w	: Moment magnitude
NGO	: Non-governmental organisation
NPC	: National Planning Commission
NPR	: Nepali rupees
NRA	: National Reconstruction Authority
OCHA	: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODR	: Owner-driven reconstruction
PDNA	: Post-disaster needs assessment

RCC	: Reinforced cement concrete
SAR	: Search-and-rescue
SWC	: Social Welfare Council
UNDP	: United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	: UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNIDSR	: United Nations international strategy for disaster reduction
VDC	: Village Development Committee
WHO	: World Health Organisation

A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND NEPALI USAGE

A diacritic ā is placed over the vowel to indicate long vowels, as in ‘bubā’, the Nepali word for ‘father’. A tilde (˜) is placed over the vowel to indicate nasalisation, as in ‘nayã’, the Nepali word for ‘new’. However, original spellings have been retained for the name of persons (such as Ram), surnames or castes (such as Tamang), and places (such as Gorkha).

Nepali words–unless they are proper nouns–and phrases are italicised when they appear for the first time in the document. If the same word or phrase is used later, it is written without italics.

GLOSSARY OF KEY NEPALI TERMS

Term	Meaning
āfno mānchhe	close circles or relatives
ali-ali	meagre, a little or a small amount
bikās	development
bikāse	developmental
chineko mānchhe	acquaintance person
dukha	sorrow, suffering
gāunpālikā	rural municipality
jāt	caste
karma	fate, reincarnation
parma	labour exchange tradition
rāhat	relief
rāmro	nice or beautiful
sahayog	help
sāhu	a local money lender
sewā	service, charity

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE SCENE

This chapter provides an overview of my research. I begin by depicting my personal experience of disasters and prior engagement working in the development and disaster space. Together, these provided the impetus for my research examining the post-disaster recovery from the 2015 Nepal Earthquake among the poor and marginalised social groups in four of the most earthquake-affected districts in the country. I then discuss what I refer to as "unnatural disasters" in Nepal. Here, I argue that Nepal is a multiple-hazard-prone state, making it one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Hazard casualties and impacts are driven by poverty, injustice, and the state's failure to create a just society.

I problematise the research agenda on the post-disaster response and recovery process in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, arguing that Nepal's case remains unique in understanding disasters and recovery processes due to the complexities of caste and ethnicity, poverty, and disaster recovery and reconstruction approaches adopted by different state and non-state actors. I argue that it is important to critically examine the humanitarian response and recovery process to understand how and why they succeeded or failed to reach the poor and marginalised social groups who are at the bottom of the development pyramid. In addition, I contend that Nepal's recovery and (re-)development process was informed or influenced by the *bikās* (a popular Nepali term to denote development) agenda to a large extent; thus, further exploration of the linked (or delinked) relationships between relief, recovery, and bikās is

essential. Therefore, I reiterate that Nepal's post-disaster recovery is challenging and complex and provides an important case for disaster scholarship.

Background: Personal Experience of Disasters and Research Motivation

Living in a hazard-prone underdeveloped society, I have seen and experienced natural hazards, vulnerability, and disasters in various forms and scales. I witnessed and experienced a life of (extreme) poverty in Nepal, where I was born and raised. Growing up in the Tarai (the southern plains of Nepal), I observed floods and their devastating impact on many villages.

After completing university in 2006, I went on to work in Mugu, one of Nepal's most underdeveloped districts, and saw extreme forms of poverty. I witnessed drought, hunger, and a lack of helpful response from state and non-state actors to address these problems. I found several houses or even a whole village in hazardous locations susceptible to landslides. Villagers had no financial resources to draw on for relocating to a safer place, and the government seemed unconcerned about the community's vulnerability and potential disasters that could impact them in the near future. Furthermore, food insecurity was rampant in villages due to low agricultural production caused by drought and lack of irrigation facilities. The average life expectancy of the local people was just 40 years!

While I was there, I felt the jolts of earthquakes a couple of times. Thankfully, these were minor tremors. During my childhood, I had experienced similar minor shakes occasionally, but they were sufficient to frighten me and other young family members. Whenever such incidents took place, the older people used to talk about their experiences in the past of *nabbe sālko*

bhuichālo (The earthquake in the year '90'[1]) *or thulo bhuichālo* (mega earthquake). They used to recall what they were doing then, how they ran away to save their own lives, and what they experienced in the aftermath. All the adults in my family and in the village used to speculate that there might be another thulo bhuichālo in the future. In the last decade or so, I have heard more speculations that thulo bhuichālo might occur soon. Some experts have analysed the pattern of a mega earthquake in Nepal, identifying 80 to 100-year intervals. It should be noted that Nepal lies near the two massive tectonic plates (the Indo-Australian and Asian plates) that collide from time to time causing tremors. Despite its seismic vulnerability, earthquake preparedness was not a priority in the country. Neither the government nor the donor communities had any significant plans or programmes to address this.

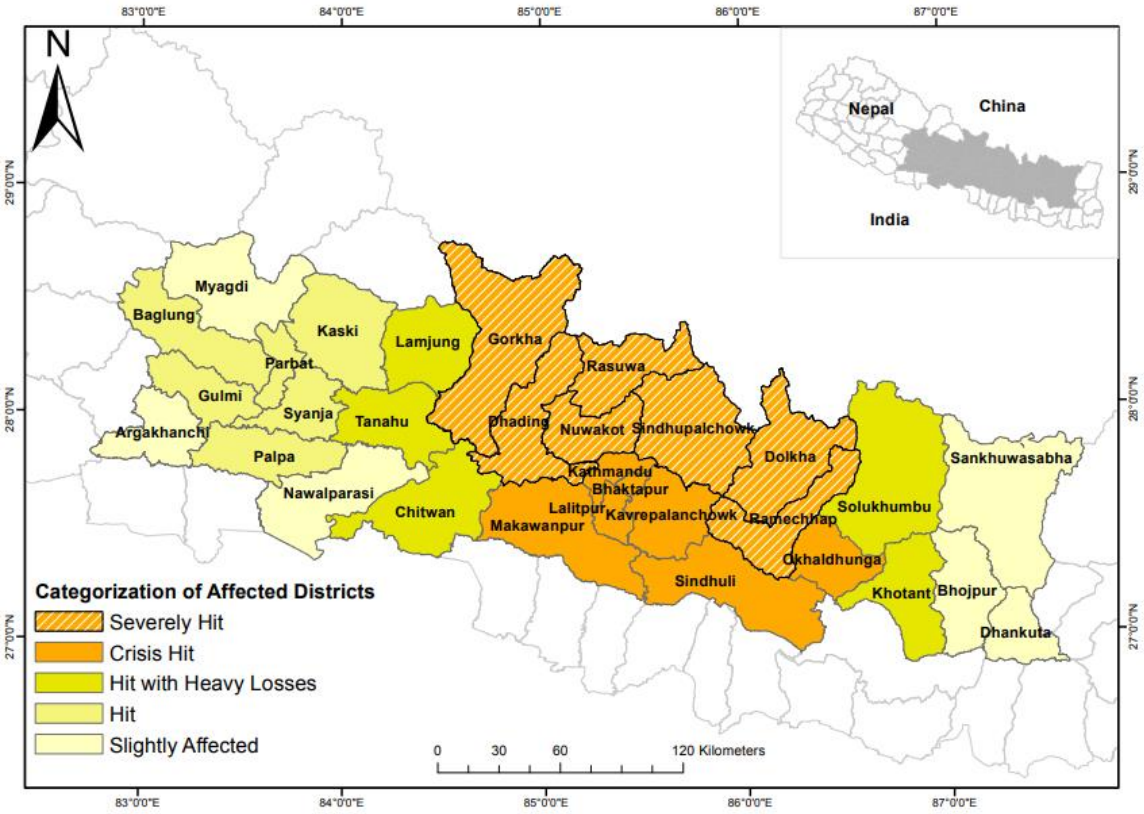
The day finally, once again, arrived! Nepal was struck with a 7.8 M_w earthquake, with its epicentre in the Gorkha District, affecting 31 (out of 75)[2] districts (see Figure 1). A total of 14 districts were declared "crisis hit" and were prioritised for rescue and relief operations.

[1] The '90' here refers to the year 1990 according to the *Bikram Sambat* calendar. Bikram Sambat is the Nepali official calendar which is about 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar.

[2] The number of districts increased to 77 after the 2015 federal restructuring of Nepal's unitary state.

Figure 1

The 2015 Nepal Earthquake Affected-Districts



Source: NPC/GoN 2015a, p. xi.

The building where my family were living in Kathmandu (the capital) on that day (25 April 2015) survived! We ran outside the building. The aftershocks continued. After the quake, I saw buildings collapse; people were injured and died due to the earthquake. Those who were found safe were afraid of returning to their house, and so were we, fearing that the structure may collapse in the aftershocks. My family and our neighbours sheltered in the open space of a church near home. Kathmandu is a highly populated and unplanned city. There were/are hardly any public or open areas; if one was spotted anywhere, people utilised it fully as a safe location

to live temporarily. In the meantime, various television and radio stations had already started broadcasting the devastations in the Kathmandu valley.

A few days later, it was revealed that the devastation was even worse in rural areas. People's houses had collapsed, family members and relatives (including ours) lost their lives, and many livestock died or were injured. Serving as a rural development worker for several years, my heart went out to the poorest people, those most likely to have been impacted by the devastating earthquake. There was news criticising the relief operations for not reaching the remote places and poorest households. As the weeks, months, and years passed by, I wondered about the effectiveness of the recovery process for the marginalised social groups. I gained some understanding and made some observations, but I did not have time to delve more deeply into the recovery experiences of the poor and disadvantaged communities.

In 2019, the door to undertaking doctoral study opened for me. I decided to explore this topic further: the earthquake and the lived experience of oppressed and marginalised social groups in the highly affected districts. My research aimed to understand the experiences of these groups, particularly how the earthquakes impacted them and how they recovered livelihoods and rebuilt homes following the calamity.

Understanding the Context of Vulnerability and Disasters in Nepal

The State of "Natural Disasters" in Nepal

Nepal, a medium-sized[3] landlocked country (some call it land-linked [see Nikku et al. 2021]) between China and India, is a multi-hazards-prone country, vulnerable to various disasters, viz. avalanches, cold waves, drought, earthquakes, fires (wildfire and housefire), floods/inundations,

[3] The total area of the country is 147,181 sq. km ("Nepal: facts and stats", n.d.).

heat waves, and landslides. Nepal is the 20th most disaster-prone country in the world and the 4th most vulnerable nation to climate change risk (UNDRR 2019). The torrential rainfall during the monsoon season (June to September) triggers landslides and flash floods in the hilly regions. It causes flooding in the southern Tarai region that constitutes 17 per cent of the total area of the country. Every year, floods and landslides not only cause significant damage to people's land, housing, and livelihoods, but also result in the deaths of hundreds of people.

The country lies in a seismically active region, making it the 11th most earthquake-vulnerable country in the world (MoHA/GoN 2017; Prakash et al. 2016). Small-scale earthquakes occur from time to time; however, the country has experienced five big earthquakes since the 1930s (see Table 1). While three of these had relatively fewer casualties, the quakes in 1934 (Nepal–Bihar Earthquake 8.4 Mw, the quake mentioned above which was recalled by elders during my childhood) and 2015 (Gorkha Earthquake 7.8 M_w) had a significant impact. These two events claimed the lives of more than 17,000 people and massively impacted housing, infrastructure, and livelihoods. I elaborate on the effects of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, which is the case of my research, in Chapters V to VII, focusing on the immediate impact that required emergency relief and long-term needs of livelihood recovery and housing reconstruction.

Table 1

Major Earthquakes in Nepal Since 1900

Timeline/year	Magnitude level	Epicentre	**Casualties**
1934	8.4 M_w	Eastern Nepal	8,519
1980	6.5 M_w	Chainpur (Far Western Nepal)	103
1988	6.5 M_w	Udaypur (Eastern Nepal)	721
2011	6.9 M_w	Sikkim-Nepal border	6
2015	7.8 M_w	Barpak/Gorkha (Western Region)	8,790

Source: Based on Chaulagain et al. 2018.

The State of Unnatural Disasters in Nepal

I define *unnatural disasters* as the significant deaths, injuries, and damage following a natural hazard or a crisis due to social inequality and social vulnerability resulting from current or historical actions/processes of public authorities as well as the failure of development and public policy. The thesis of unnatural disasters here is that social structure and susceptibility determine the impact of a natural hazard on the population. This suggests that people are impacted disproportionately in a disaster and poor and marginalised social groups face the brunt of the calamity.

Poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion are everyday unnatural disasters in Nepal. This Himalayan nation is one of the least developed countries in the world. The country ranked 142nd in the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI), the lowest in South Asia except for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although Nepal made remarkable progress in reducing absolute poverty from 42 per cent in 1996 to 19 per cent in 2018, income inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient) has remained persistent (GoN/UNDP 2020, p. 105). Further, the incidence of poverty is disproportionately distributed in different geographical regions and among marginalised and ethnic groups. Dalit and marginalised ethnic communities have the lowest incomes and human development index scores (see UNDP 2014; Wagle 2017). Caste discrimination persists. Casteism and social exclusion is a historical phenomenon in Nepal and was reproduced in the aftermath of the earthquake (see Chapter VIII for the detailed discussion on historical marginalisation and social vulnerability to disasters).

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), about 19 per cent of youth aged between 15–29 years (which constitutes about 60 per cent of the population) are still unemployed in Nepal. This does not convey the whole picture, however, as a significant

proportion of people are self-employed in the informal economy on a casual or seasonal basis. This suggests that large numbers of people are under-employed.

The disaster was waiting to happen. People were compelled to live in vulnerable or hazard-prone terrains. This issue was made worse by the fact that the physical resilience of housing and public infrastructure could not be guaranteed because the state bureaucracy failed to enforce the building code strictly. Accountability and oversight of the state were lacking here more than the policy per se (see "Enforcement more important" 2015; Gautam et al. 2016b). Corruption in infrastructure development was a significant issue in the country (see Shrestha 2007). Nepal's latest Corruption Perception Index, prepared by Transparency International (TI), reveals the extent of the problem. According to TI, Nepal scores 117th out of 180 countries and territories.

Disaster preparedness was merely a slogan. The households/families were not prepared to withstand the shocks. Disaster preparedness programmes and emergency plans were rare at the local level. They only existed in policy documents. Insurance schemes were not introduced.

As a consequence, following the earthquake (2015), the human casualties and property damage were significant. The 9,000 lives lost, more than 20,000 injuries, more than half a million houses damaged, and billions of dollars of damage to property and community infrastructures cannot simply be attributed to the natural hazard of the earthquake. The unnatural disasters—acute poverty and inequality, social exclusion/injustice, and state management of the country's political economy—determined the extent of the impact.

Locating the Research Context: The 2015 Nepal Earthquake

The 2015 Nepal Earthquake was the country's worst natural disaster since the 1934 Nepal–Bihar Earthquake (Paul et al. 2017). As discussed earlier, it had a devastating impact, claiming thousands of lives and destroying millions of homes. It is thought that the death toll and damage would be significantly higher had the earthquake occurred at night (while people were sleeping inside fragile housing structures). Likewise, if the incident had happened on a weekday or school-day, the fatalities among young people could have been unimaginable, considering that nearly 7,000 schools were significantly or completely damaged due to the earthquake (NPC/GoN 2015b). Moreover, the earthquake ruined agriculture and animal husbandry. It significantly damaged public infrastructure (such as schools, health posts, roads and bridges, water supply systems, and hydropower plants), which will require billions of dollars to repair and reconstruct (NPC/GoN 2015a,b).

After the humanitarian relief distribution work was completed, the government carried out a post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA). Based on the findings of the PDNA, the *Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (2016–2020)* was developed with the notions of resilience, social inclusion, and building back better in mind (see NRA/GoN 2016a). Then the Government of Nepal (GoN) and different national and international non-government organisations (I/NGOs) implemented various post-disaster recovery programmes in the disaster-affected districts.

Nepal has very challenging contexts for disaster recovery and provides an important case for disaster scholarship. The post-disaster recovery process of Nepal's earthquake should be understood in conjunction with the local complexities of caste and ethnicity, the long-term impact of humanitarian interventions in the name of recovery, and decades of bikās mantra or

bikās apparatus (Ferguson 1994). In the subsequent sections, I elaborate on these three complexities of the recovery process.

Understanding the Complexity of Caste and Ethnicity

Caste and ethnicity are still dominant factors of social stratification in Nepal and other South Asian societies[4] (Gellner 2007; Sharma 2012; Subedi 2016). Therefore, the caste and ethnic discrimination practices prevailing for centuries in Nepali culture still widely exist in different forms in the country. However, caste-based discrimination is believed to have weakened in recent decades.

The caste system divides people into an unequal and hierarchical structure. The people belonging to the lower hierarchy are considered impure and untouchable. They are subject to the untouchability practice, which entails prohibition from using public places such as roads, temples, and tea shops, or public services such as water taps, healthcare, and education, to name a few. Historically, *Ādibāsi-Janajātis*[5] were positioned in the lower order of the caste hierarchy and *Dalits*[6] at the lowest level; both continue to undergo various forms of discrimination and social exclusion (see Gurung 2006, p. 11). Dalit and Ādibasi-Janajāti people, who make up 47.6 per cent (12.6 per cent and 34.97 per cent respectively) of the 26.5 million population of Nepal (CBS/GoN 2014), experience deep structural marginalisation. Therefore, the highest rate of

[4] Although the caste system is predominantly practised in South Asian societies, this system exists in various forms in several countries in Asia and Africa.

[5] *Ādibāsi-Janajāti* is an umbrella term to refer to ethnic groups in Nepal who have their distinctive collective identity of language, custom, and culture.

[6] The literal translation of *Dalit* is oppressed or downtrodden. Dalits are socially and economically oppressed and marginalised social groups in Nepal and other countries in the South Asian region. According to the official 2011 census of Nepal, Dalits constitute 13.6 per cent of the total population in the country. Caste discrimination affects 260 million people worldwide, the vast majority in South Asia (IDSN 2009, p. 1).

chronic and structural poverty is found among Dalits and Ādibāsi-Janajātis in Nepal (Wagle 2017).

Caste and ethnicity have been recognised as significant factors of social vulnerability; however, these aspects are often neglected in disaster research (Bolin 2007; Gaillard 2011). Although a limited literature discusses the race, class, and disaster vulnerabilities nexus (see Bolin 2007; Bolin and Bolton 1986; Dash 2010; Peacock et al. 1997), ethnicity and caste (particularly the latter) are rare. Again, most of these ethnicity and disaster discussions are in a western context, thus leaving us with a paucity of understanding of casteism in Nepal and other South Asian countries. Aldrich (2010, p. 1386) underscores that "… social science must work to uncover the factors that speed up (or impede) recovery following crisis". Therefore, it is urgent to understand how ethnic and caste people, who are often disadvantaged and experience multiple exclusions as well as marginalisation in society, are affected by disasters and recover following the devastation.

The study of Arora (2022) expanded our understanding of the social/intersectional vulnerabilities of Dalit women in post-earthquake environments. Similarly, Bownas and Bishokarma (2018) analysed how Dalit peoples in the Sindhupalchok District were denied or had trouble accessing relief and recovery/reconstruction assistance due to their geographical isolation, caste-based discrimination and social exclusion, and their lack of strong personal/social connections. The scope of my research covers other severely earthquake-affected districts and focuses on the lived experience of both Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples. Moreover, my research complements other studies which have focused on disaster relief and humanitarianism in Nepal (e.g., Cook et al. 2018; Lord and Murton 2017; Paul et al. 2017) and the lived

experience of the oppressed and disadvantaged communities in the country (e.g., Arora 2022; Bownas and Bishokarma 2018).

Humanitarian Relief, Recovery, and Bikās

An unprecedented number of I/NGOs and government institutions carried out humanitarian relief assistance in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. The government took ownership of assisting the disaster survivors in rebuilding their homes. As I noted earlier, this was the largest humanitarian relief and reconstruction operation in Nepal's recent history. Scholars have warned that an ineffective disaster recovery process can perpetuate social inequality and people become more vulnerable (Anderson and Woodrow 1991; D'Souza 1986; Sovacool 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian action for the most marginalised communities. Moreover, if the recovery process is ineffective and unsustainable, the basis for the next disaster is reproduced; people are left as vulnerable as they were in the past (Anderson and Woodrow 1989; Wisner 1993).

For decades, bikās has remained a major quest for the Nepali state, and thus the country's priority has been to bring about bikās since the 1950s (Des Chene 1996; Fujikura 2013; Gyawali et al. 2016; Panday 1999; Pigg 1992, 1993; Shrestha 1997). It is an integral part of Nepali social discourse. The Nepali state has relied upon the utopian promise of bikās as a source of its legacy, which in turn has opened the floodgates to an unprecedented influx of foreign aid into the country (Lim 2008, p.196). As a result, there is a significant presence of I/NGOs in various parts of the country undertaking *bikāse* (developmental) and humanitarian work. The presence of I/NGOs has proliferated only since the restoration of democracy in 1990. According to the website of the Social Welfare Council (SWC) of Nepal, there were more than 50,000 NGOs (as

of July 2019)[7] and more than 250 INGOs (as of July 2016)[8] affiliated with the SWC and working in various regions of the country.

To bring about the promised bikās, both government and I/NGOs have introduced different community interventions. Following the earthquake in 2015, these bikāse I/NGOs provided recovery aid. However, it is unknown how they perceived recovery and (re-) development interventions (how similar or different interventions were carried out in the aftermath of the earthquake and why). Nor is it known what kind of policies and criteria were administered for selecting the target population ("beneficiaries") and how successful they were in addressing the unmet needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable disaster survivors. Moreover, studies carried out in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake have not dealt with the nature and object of the recovery programmes and the linkages/disconnections between relief, recovery, and bikās.

Housing reconstruction was a major task to be undertaken in the aftermath of the earthquake. In order to "build back better", the Government of Nepal adopted the owner-driven reconstruction (ODR) process along with the 'blanket approach' (which favours e*qual* distribution or assistance to all affected households *regardless* of their economic status and social vulnerabilities). As of October 2021, more than 93 per cent of people had either completed reconstruction or taken the final tranche of the housing cash support disbursed by the state. In this regard, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), which was primarily responsible for undertaking the country's reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, declared the housing

[7] The number of NGOs could be higher than this as it is not obligatory for local NGOs to affiliate with the SWC.

[8] The number of INGOs after 2016 could not be found on the SWC website. The current figure might be slightly lower as of now (January 2020) as some of the INGOs may have left the country after completing their recovery and reconstruction project(s).

reconstruction programme a success and an important source of pride. As Sushil Gyawali, [then] Chief Executive Officer in the NRA, said in a press conference in April 2021: “We have now reached a point where we can proudly present our achievement…We have made satisfactory achievement in reconstruction and rehabilitation…” (“NRA has made” 2021).

Compared to other post-disaster interventions, such as livelihood recovery, housing reconstruction is often highlighted and publicised even after construction. Samuels (2020, p. 47) critiques this phenomenon as the *visibility bias*. She suggests that:

> To critically assess the claim of successful recovery, however, we should look beyond the bird’s eye image of neat rows of houses, both to what we might see if we come close (such as crumbling walls and unfinished bathrooms) and to what remains mostly invisible in this narrative of reconstruction, including persistent social inequality, extreme poverty in rural areas, former brokers and many others gone jobless, and proposals that never received a response.

Congruent with such thinking, my research focuses on the reconstruction work at the household level to deepen our understanding of the housing reconstruction programme in Nepal. I therefore centre the lived experience of those in newly constructed dwellings. My research seeks to understand the survivors’ perceptions of housing: the bureaucracy, securing finances for rebuilding (the strategies people have adopted), and the pain and gain of post-disaster housing reconstruction. I then use a theoretical lens, including sociologist Bourdieu’s theories and anthropologist Li’s (2007) concept of *rendering technical* to understand the political economy and social significance of housing reconstruction in the post-disaster fields in Nepal.

Research Questions

Based on the abovementioned problems, my research examines how socially and economically disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups recover (or do not recover) after a crisis and how the humanitarian and (re-)development interventions interact or intersect in this process. My specific aim is to analyse humanitarian relief, livelihood recovery, and housing reconstruction interventions from the perspective and lived experience of Nepal's marginalised and disadvantaged disaster survivors. To achieve this aim, I establish the following research questions:

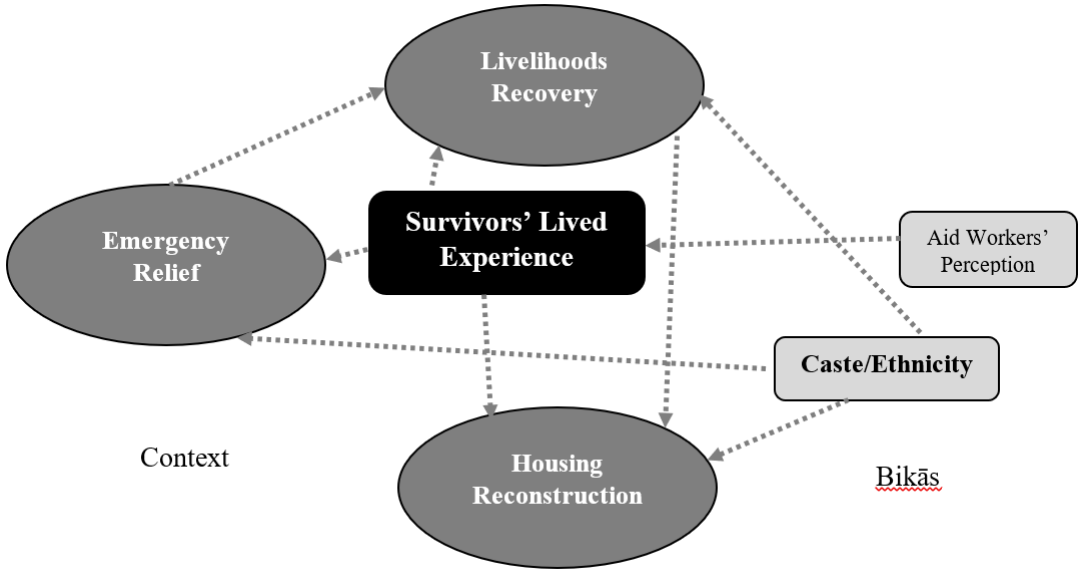
1. How did the disadvantaged and marginalised social groups, specifically Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti, in Nepal experience, respond to, and cope with the immediate impact of the 2015 Earthquake? How did they perceive or assess the humanitarian relief assistance by state and non-state actors?
2. How were the livelihoods of Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples affected due to the earthquake? To what extent was the assistance provided by government and non-government organisations successful in reaching out or helping these groups recover their livelihoods?
3. How did Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples rebuild the post-earthquake houses despite the limited aid they received? What were the short-term and long-term issues or implications of housing reconstruction projects?
4. How were casteism and ethnicity interconnected and how was social inequality reproduced in the post-disaster environments?

The relationships between research contexts and issues or research questions are summarised in Figure 2. As shown in the diagram, humanitarian relief, livelihood recovery, and post-disaster

housing reconstruction are interrelated or connected where caste and ethnicity cross-cut these various issues and the lived experience of survivors. Further, state and non-state aid are depicted as key players in the humanitarian response and recovery process in the aftermath of the earthquake in Nepal. Their policies, approaches, and actions matter for efficient and effective relief and recovery operations.

Figure 2

Post-Earthquake Fields in Nepal and Relationships Between Research Issues/Topics



Significance of the Research

The research contributes to the area of building knowledge regarding social vulnerability, post-disaster devastation, and recovery process in resource-poor settings. The significance of my research can be summarised in the following points:

1. Casteism and disaster remains an under-researched area in disaster scholarship. My research addresses this important issue.

2. The humanitarian response and recovery process based on affected household's narratives and lived experiences is critically underscored in my research. I therefore adds to the literature on critical disaster studies (Uekusa et al. 2022), but with a focus on marginalised and disadvantaged social groups.

3. Recovery remains the least researched aspect of the hazard cycle (Tierney 2019, p. 203). A better understanding of the recovery process based on this Nepal disaster research will remain crucial for the country's present and future societies and other parts of the world which are vulnerable to various disasters.

4. Furthermore, my research employs sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories, which are not so common in disaster studies but are of growing interest among disaster researchers. By using Bourdieu's field theory, my helps to deepen understanding of the post-disaster fields as a social (beyond physical) arena for struggle, competition, and profit maximisation reproducing social inequality. Further, my research utilises the Bourdieusian lens to understand how concrete houses (despite their physical limitations) serve as a symbol of social status and symbolic power. I also theorise caste as a habitus to explain why casteism was so rigid and prevailed even after the powerful mega-earthquake. The research uses Bourdieu's capital and habitus concepts to strengthen our understanding of the recovery process and its complexities, forms of capital, (im-) mobilisation of capital, and the agency of disaster survivors.

5. My research will show how the reconstruction process was *rendered technical* (Li 2007), compromising people's agency and participation in planning and decision-making processes, and that in fixating on the technical details of buildings generated far away, it ignored the local realities of everyday rural life. As a result, the reconstruction resulted in rebuilding concrete houses which, while technically safer, are spatially insufficient, climatically unsuitable, and practically inconvenient for local people.

6. Finally, I hope that the research can provide an evidence-informed basis for state and non-state actors to improve their current and future recovery strategies, policies, and programmes. If this is the case, the poor and marginalised people will benefit in society. We aspire for them to have resilient and sustainable recoveries from disasters.

Delimitations

Since the proposed research is interested in capturing insiders' perspectives and lived experiences of recovering from the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, the non-positivistic paradigm and qualitative form of inquiry were more relevant. I used open questions in context rather than setting out to test a predetermined hypothesis (Carter and Little 2007, p. 1316). Since the research aimed at understanding the lived experiences of marginalised and disadvantaged communities in rebuilding homes following the disaster, quantification and generalisation are beyond the scope of the research due to the nature of the interpretative qualitative research paradigm my research adopted (Braun and Clarke 2013; Ten Have 2004).

Similarly, the meanings and scope of post-disaster recovery are vast and may encompass a wide range of recoveries such as agriculture/farming recovery, economic or business recovery, social recovery, and psycho-social recovery. In this regard, this research focused on emergency response, reviving livelihoods (or means of living), and rebuilding the housing of disadvantaged and marginalised social groups—specifically Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti–in the research locations. Working definitions and conceptual understandings of these issues in the given context are provided in Chapters VI and VII.

The research was carried out in selected communities of Nepal's earthquake-affected districts because it was impossible to cover larger geographical areas due to the constraints of time and financial resources. But at the same time it suited the nature of my inquiry because

exploring an issue in terms of depth rather than breadth accords with qualitative research. Further, the research process was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic restricting the data collection process and methods (for details see Chapter IV).

Similarly, based on Li (2007), the rendering technical analysis that I undertook in the housing reconstruction discussion (see Chapter VII) is based on publicly available project-related documents. Therefore, any internal changes or amendments to the project activities may limit my evaluation and reflections on the subject.

Summary and Structure of the Dissertation

In this introductory chapter, I discussed my exposure to and encounter with various hazards and disasters in Nepal (see Chapter II for the differences between hazards and disasters). The traumatic experience of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake and my concerns about understanding its impact on the lives and livelihoods of the marginalised and disadvantaged social groups led me to undertake this doctoral study. I showed that Nepal is a multi-hazard country. Therefore, different types of geophysical hazards and risks threaten the lives and property of people every year. Nonetheless, “unnatural disasters” (e.g., acute poverty, injustice, and corruption) are more serious as they determine the magnitude of casualties and damage when a disaster strikes.

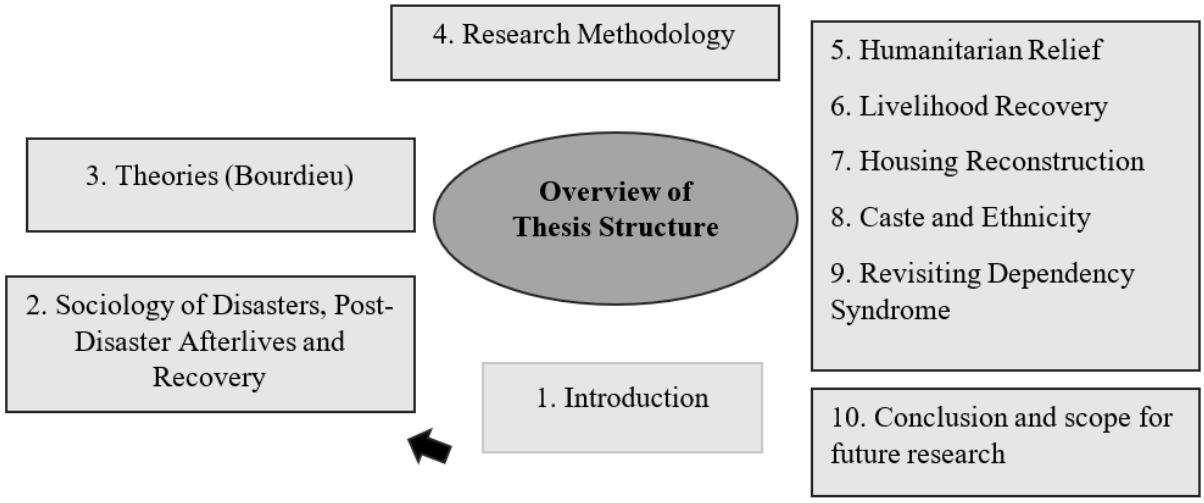
Further, I provided an overview of the research context and problematised the impact and recovery process among the marginalised and disadvantaged social groups in Nepal. At this juncture, I argued that Nepal’s post-disaster response and recovery are complicated due to the scale of the damage, inequality and social exclusions informed by caste and ethnicity as well as post-disaster response and recovery policies and interventions in the country. Due to all of this, I argued that Nepal would provide a unique case for disaster scholarship.

Moreover, I showed the significance of my research, highlighting that the findings will contribute to disaster scholarship and have practical implications which could help improve the disaster response and recovery process, particularly in developing countries.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the thesis structure. Chapter II reviews the relevant literature. It revisits the sociology of disasters literature, capturing its origin and historical development, key focuses and paradigm shifts, and future directions. Further, I discuss the relief and development discourse by exploring the gap between them and efforts made over the years to narrow down the gulf. I also consolidate the current knowledge on recovery and post-disaster afterlives.

Figure 3

Overview of the Thesis Structure



In Chapter III, I theorise disasters through sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories. Bourdieu's theories in disaster studies are not commonly used; however, a growing number of researchers in recent years have used a Bourdieusian lens in their disaster research. Interest in Bourdieu seems to be growing. In this chapter, I argue that Bourdieu's theories offer unique perspectives on understanding social vulnerability and, after disaster, recovery and reconstruction. Post-disaster

fields are more than sites for reconstruction; they are also social arenas where struggles, capital accumulation, and profit maximisation occur. People's agency, understanding of different forms of capital and their transferability or conversion, and symbolic capital also provide new perspectives for understanding disaster and recovery processes. Further, this chapter discusses the key concepts in Bourdieu's theories, chiefly habitus, field, and capital, in relation to disasters.

In Chapter IV, I elaborate on my research paradigm and study design and research methods. I provide an overview of the study area/research location, research participants, methods for data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. Further, I reflect upon my experience of doing research during the pandemic and using digital/online interviews, particularly its benefits and challenges in a developing country context.

Chapter V critically examines the post-disaster emergency response with regard to marginalised and disadvantaged social groups. In particular, the chapter critically examines the actions taken by disaster survivors and humanitarian organisations to address the emergency needs in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. I draw on the notion of *mobile sovereignty* to understand how the power and domination of different actors were in play in the post-earthquake humanitarian space.

Chapter VI examines the post-disaster livelihoods recovery process. The chapter explores how different aid organisations and government agencies implemented various livelihood recovery programmes after the earthquake. The discussion contests the "replacement" and "restoration" concepts as they do not capture the pre-disaster vulnerability of poor and marginalised households. The research also presents a model that links relief, rehabilitation, and recovery/development.

Chapter VII deals with post-earthquake housing reconstruction. Housing reconstruction is a major and critical task to be carried out in the aftermath of a mega-disaster like earthquakes

and tsunamis in developing countries. The agencies responsible for managing and implementing these programmes tend to promote the success of the interventions. Guided by the Bourdieusian framework and the lived experiences of the research participants, I go beyond the narratives of a successful reconstruction programme to show how reconstruction is a complex and contested socio-political field. Despite raising many concerns, most participants felt the post-earthquake housing to be *rāmro* (nice or beautiful); however, this paradox has not been addressed sufficiently in previous studies. My research engages with Bourdieu's theory of habitus and symbolic capital to understand the contradictions. I show how the post-disaster housing reconstruction was *rendered technical* (Li 2007) and compromised people's aspirations and participation in the reconstruction process by rebuilding concrete houses unfit for purpose. Further, I demonstrate that disaster-stricken locations are not only sites for rebuilding and reconstruction but also social arenas for struggles, competition, and profit maximisation. Therefore, the discussion builds on debates on disaster profiteering through a Bourdieusian lens.

Chapter VIII examines caste and ethnicity and their relationship with social vulnerability, disaster experience, and afterlives. The chapter discusses how caste-based discrimination and social exclusion were perpetuated in the aftermath of the earthquake. The chapter analyses how *caste as habitus* was embodied and reproduced in both pre-and-post-disaster environments. Further, the chapter shows how the historical/structural marginalisation process (re-)produced vulnerability among the subaltern groups who experienced disproportionate impacts and unjust recovery-and-relief assistance after the earthquake.

Chapter IX unpacks the perceptions of the humanitarian dependency syndrome. Disaster survivors are often criticised for relying on humanitarian (and development) assistance. This dependency is perceived pejoratively by government civil servants and other elites, including NGO staff. Officials offered such narratives in relation to the disaster response and recovery

programmes following the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. This chapter contrasts the official narratives of dependency syndrome with people's perspectives and lived experiences. I problematise official discourse. Aid was frequently insufficient, poorly targeted, or non-existent. Moreover, the Bourdieusian framing highlights the agency of disaster survivors, as their habitus predisposed them to help others. It broadens the notion of assistance and dependence, suggesting that social and cultural capital (as well as economic capital) are vital resources for recovery. Finally, it shows that dependencies are not necessarily wrong. Greater attention to these non-economic capitals and 'good dependencies' could expedite recoveries from future disasters.

Chapter X consolidates the findings and discussions. It also highlights the scope for future research.

The next chapter will discuss the sociology of disasters and post-disaster recovery.

CHAPTER II

SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTER, AFTERLIVES, AND RECOVERY

In this chapter, I aim to consolidate current understandings of the sociology of disasters, post-disaster afterlives, and recovery. I also trace the history of sociological and social science research and show that it has evolved over time. Further, I discuss the importance of sociological research on disasters. I explain what it means to be sociological when studying disaster-related issues. Here, I build on the discussion in the literature concerning the concepts of social vulnerability and intersectionality concepts, both of which are fundamental to analysing social systems and structures that put certain social groups in a more vulnerable position than others. Here, I argue that disasters disproportionately impact specific groups of people, those in society who tend to be poor, marginalised, oppressed, and excluded. In addition, I intend to identify the research implications for the sociology of disasters.

Then, my discussion focuses on recovery themes. In this regard, I consolidate the current knowledge on recovery and identify some research gaps. Here, I note that disaster recovery is contested and is the least understood aspect of the disaster cycle. Further, I examine the gulf between relief and recovery or development, how this gap was created and reproduced over the time, and what efforts have been made to bridge it. My research further analyses this disaster–development nexus debate and shows how relief and recovery or development may be linked.

The Sociology of Disasters

Social disruptions caused by forces of nature, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or man-made hazards, have long been studied by sociologists (Drabek 2017; Peek et al. 2021; Tierney 2019). Scholars seem to agree that Samuel Henry Prince wrote the first sociological—broadly speaking, social sciences—research in English in 1920 based on the 1917 explosion in Halifax (Canada) that claimed nearly 2,000 lives and injured 9,000 people. While now recognised as a pioneer, his work took decades to gain this accolade (see Scanlon 1988).

There is a rich body of literature on the history of disaster research in sociology (and the broader social sciences) in the United States (see Peek et al. 2021; Tierney 2019); however, such documentation in other country-contexts remains scant. Sociological research in the States is said to have begun in the 1940s with a limited scope; funding from the US government used disasters as a proxy for public responses to a nuclear attack (see Tierney 2007). Tierney (2007) notes that sociological research initially concentrated on studying people's organised behaviour during and immediately following the disaster impact. Several pioneering social science disaster centres/institutions were established in the U.S. during the 1960s. For example, the Disaster Research Centre (DRC) at Ohio State University[9] was founded in 1963 under the leadership of sociologists E.L. Quarantelli, Russell Dynes, and J. Eugene Haas. Disaster institutions and scholars were also emerging in other countries during that period. An increased level of collaboration was observed in the 1970s and 1980s between US-based researchers and international counterparts in other countries (see Tierney 2019). The formation of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on the Sociology of Disasters (RC39) in 1986 is also an important milestone in strengthening disaster research with a

[9] DRC was later moved to the University of Delaware in 1985.

sociological lens and methods. The *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* is a flagship publication of the Sociology of Disasters (ISA RC39).

Reconceptualising Disasters Sociologically

Sociologists have challenged the term and notion of a *"natural disaster"*, arguing that there is no such thing. First of all, they differentiated between disasters and hazards (or natural hazards). The idea here is that for a hazard to be deemed a disaster, humans must be impacted in some way. Suppose an avalanche in the mountains, a tremor in the middle of the sea, or volcanic activity in the middle of a far-flung forest has no human consequences. In that case, they are not disasters in the sociological sense. Therefore, geophysical activities or hazards are of interest to seismologists or volcanologists but not to sociologists. In this sense, hazards are differentiated from disasters; the latter are social processes. Thus, according to this idea, a "hazard turns into a disaster by its *social effects*" (italics in original) (Guggenheim 2014, p. 3). Guggenheim (p. 3) further clarifies with the example below:

> An earthquake happening in a region where no humans live is not a disaster, it is just a trembling of the earth. This definition, then, is not about separating the human from the non-human but instead about trying to account for the fact that some natural events relevant for natural scientists−earthquakes where nobody is harmed−are not relevant for a sociology of disasters.

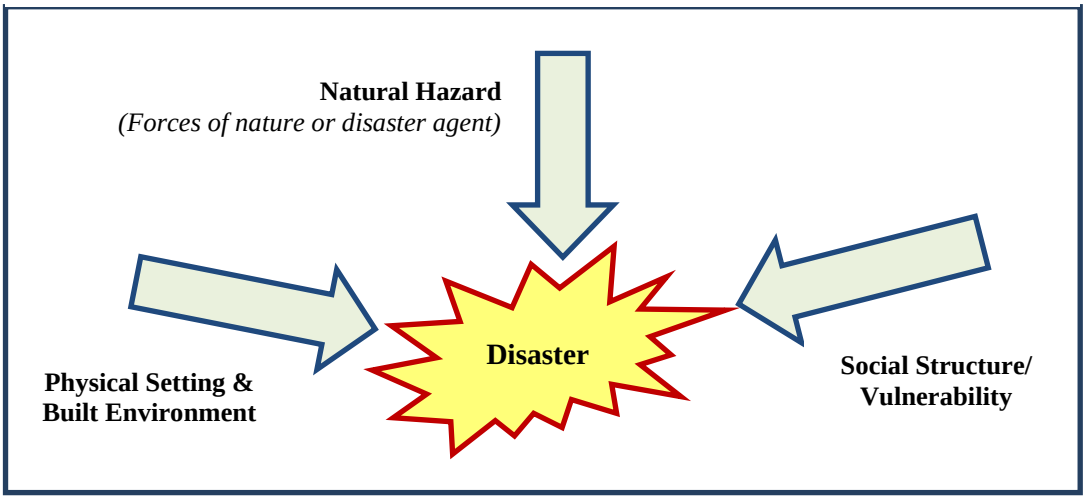
Therefore, a disaster in a sociological sense is understood as an "event in which societies or their larger subunits (such as communities or regions) incur damages, losses, and disruptions of their routine functioning" (Peek et al. 2021, p. 220). The sociology of disasters is interested in understanding how a hazard-triggered crisis impacts our interactions and relationships and social

structure and institutions. Similarly, it wants to unpack the power and history that (re-)produce the disaster and the severity of its impact.

Further, sociologists have argued that the notion of natural disasters deflects attention from the historical, economic, and socio-political root causes of the disaster (i.e., social arrangements), making nature the culprit instead (see Peek et al. 2021). The forces of nature—such as floods or earthquakes—trigger disaster, but the severity is determined by the nature of both the social structure and the built environment. As Peek et al. (2021, p. 219) explains, it is the "interaction between the natural hazards, the condition of the built environment, and the status of the social structure that shapes the landscape of risk".

Figure 4

Disasters Through a Sociological Lens



Source: Based on the text by Peek et al. (2021, p. 219) and Tierney (2019 pp. 4–12)

On Being Sociological: Analysing Social Vulnerability and Intersectionality

When disasters occur, the focus is primarily on *who* is affected and their ability to withstand, mitigate, and recover from the effects (Hewitt 1997, p. 141). Some groups in society are more prone than others to disasters and their subsequent impact in terms of damage, loss, and suffering (Wisner et al. 2004). Therefore, when disasters occur, some groups of people are more likely to be affected and suffer more than others. Generally speaking, socially vulnerable people suffer the most in disasters. For example, more women (e.g., four times more in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India) than men died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan (MacDonald 2005; Seager 2006, p. 2; Tierney 2019). Similarly, in the latter disaster, over 50 per cent of the dead were over 60 years of age (Seager 2006, p. 2). Likewise, socially vulnerable groups may find recovery more difficult in the aftermath of a disaster.

The ones who suffer and lose the most tend to be poor and marginalised people, women, children, older people, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities (Lord et al. 2016; Tierney 2019, pp. 127-136). However, within a social group itself, some are more vulnerable than others to disasters and their impacts. For example, a Dalit single woman with a disability living in poverty in Nepal or India may suffer more in disasters and find it harder to recover in their aftermath than an educated Brahmin (the so-called “high caste”) woman in a relatively better-off family. Therefore, the concept of *intersectionality* is necessary to identify the most vulnerable or needy social groups. “It is not that children, people with disabilities, women, and other social groups are vulnerable as such; it is a particular amalgamation of factors in place and time that dictates that some groups will be harder hit and less able to recover successfully” (Fordham et al. as cited in Tierney 2019, p. 128).

Wisner et al. (2004) argue that rich people often have resources to protect themselves and safeguard their properties in potential disasters and can recover faster due to their financial resources–for example, savings or cash reserves and insurance–and other opportunities available to them, for example, credit facilities. In contrast, the poor and marginalised people are likely to have fewer financial resources and opportunities to draw upon when emergencies occur (Tierney 2019).

There are, however, some exceptions. For instance, coastal zones in many countries are inhabited by wealthy people, which leaves them more vulnerable to coastal hazards. They may live on sloping land or near the forest for aesthetic reasons: a good view, fresh air, or tranquillity. When disasters occur, their loss and damage may also be very significant. For example, a few years ago, thousands of acres of land and hundreds of homes and businesses were burnt by Tubbs Fire in the Sonoma and Napa wine counties in California (see Davis 2017). Nevertheless, the various losses incurred by poor and marginalised families in disasters are significantly higher in absolute terms than those of the rich, and the recovery strategies the poor are compelled to choose are often riskier. For example, following the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, several people sold their kidneys in order to buy food (Klein 2007; Mulligan and Nadarajah 2012). Similarly, in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake in 2015, many people sold their kidneys to help recover from that disaster (Cousins 2016; Fleckner 2015).

Although certain groups in society may be more impacted by disaster, their knowledge and ability to cope with and recover from, disaster should not be undermined. Hewitt (1997) argues that often they possess remarkable adaptive and coping capacities in the face of stress or damage. For instance, vulnerable social groups, as Hewitt argues, may know how to take advantage of social safety nets more readily than others.

Future Directions of the Sociology of Disasters

Some sociologists have expressed concerns about the limited use or development of sociological and social theories in disaster studies. Tierney (2019) argues that there are only mid-range theories; there is no meta-theory development in the sociology of disasters field. I agree that sociological theories and theoretical lenses are crucial not only to making this field distinct from other disaster studies but also to contribute to the field. Therefore, the starting point is to utilise the classical and contemporary sociological and social sciences theories in sociological disaster research. I argue that the sociology of disasters should not be divorced from the core interests of the sociological discipline, viz. social relationships and interactions, social structure and institutions, power and inequality, and social stratification (race, ethnicity, class, etc.). The next big task is to develop sociological theories, that is, new theories that may help reveal new ideas and thoughts on understanding disasters, vulnerability, and disaster response and recovery. On the other hand, the disaster field has become increasingly interdisciplinary over time, a development that the sociology of disaster appreciates and to which it can add value. To put it another way, disaster sociologists should recognise the added value (niche) of the sociology of disasters field to contribute to the interdisciplinary disaster research space.

Aftermath and Recovery

When mega-disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis occur in developing countries, they create a vast need for response and recovery The objective of the emergency response is to save lives. Search-and-rescue (SAR) and humanitarian relief assistance, such as food and non-food items, are the primary tasks during the emergency response period. Providing timely aid is crucial at this stage, as any unnecessary delay causes many casualties or deaths and injuries. A proper and efficient system and structure and the ability to pull resources together are critical in this period.

After this phase is more or less settled, the next step is to help people recover from the crisis. This may include restoring livelihoods, rebuilding homes, regaining wellbeing, and restoring hope for the future.

Disaster recovery is often the least understood and most contested term in the disaster cycle, viz. mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (Berke et al. 1993b; Tierney 2019). It is often wrongly equated with restoration and reconstruction of the built environment following a disaster, or to phrase it differently: it attends to physical structures but ignores social ones (Tierney 2019, p. 11). *Disaster recovery* can be defined as "the differential process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions" (Smith and Wenger 2007 as cited in Tierney 2019, p. 279). Similarly, the United Nations international strategy for disaster risk reduction (UNISDR) defines *recovery* as "the restoration, and improvement where appropriate, of facilities, livelihoods and living conditions of disaster-affected communities including efforts to reduce disaster risk factors" (UNISDR 2009, p. 23). The recovery process should also aim at reducing future risks. Therefore, any effective recovery process should also embed a disaster risk reduction (DRR) component.

The term recovery has been used synonymously or interchangeably with reconstruction, restoration, rehabilitation, restitution, and post-disaster (re-)development, but they are not always indicating the same thing (Mileti 1999; Quarantelli 1999). Recovery can be a broad term that may encompass several aspects, such as economic or social recovery, psychological recovery (which is to say recovering from trauma), livelihood recovery, or regaining a sense of community (Tierney 2019).

Disaster recovery is commonly understood as the process of restoring the state of normalcy as quickly as possible. However, this view is challenged by many scholars because the situation considered "normal" in a pre-disaster context may already be "abnormal" in the first place; that is, it may be characterised by poverty, injustice, vulnerability, and conflict. Therefore, many scholars have argued that returning to that so-called normal state makes little sense. Also, it should be noted that it is impossible to get back to life as fully as before. For this reason, much of the literature suggests adjusting to "the new normal" (Matthewman 2015, p. 4; Tierney and Oliver-Smith 2012, p. 127). Consequently, the concept of "build back better"[10] or "resilient communities" in the aftermath of a disaster is often conceptualised as part of recovery programming. In this sense, disasters are acknowledged as opportunities to *improve* pre-disaster conditions and increase resilience rather than returning to pre-disaster levels of vulnerability (Chang 2010; Mileti 1999; Wisner et al. 2004).

Humanitarian assistance is crucial in resource-poor settings to help people meet emergency needs and recover from the impact of the disaster. However, several issues and malpractices in the aid industry limit the effectiveness of disaster relief support. The following section unpacks these issues to improve the practices in the emergency response and recovery process.

[10] Although "Build back better" is widely used today, the concept has been around for decades. For example, 'make this city better than ever' was commonly used in the 1970s (see Haas, Kates and Bowden, 1977, p. XV).

How (Not) to Recover: Key Concerns of Humanitarian Assistance for Post-Disaster Recovery

International humanitarian assistance continues to increase. Between 2014 and 2018, total international humanitarian aid grew by 30 per cent globally (Development Initiatives 2019). Humanitarian assistance—when timely and used effectively—can help save lives and restore livelihoods following devastation. However, it can sometimes harm people and their livelihoods more than benefit them despite good intentions.

Humanitarian actions have been criticised on several grounds: the assistance is irrelevant to local people and contexts; an ineffective or inappropriate approach/process is adopted; there is a lack of efficiency and social accountability; and neoliberal doctrines and predatory practices are often adopted in the aftermath of the crisis (as captured, for instance, in the disaster capitalism literature). I discuss these criticisms in the subsequent paragraphs.

Humanitarian interventions have been criticised for their top-down approach. In this regard, Daly and Brassard (2011) argue that despite the emphasis on community involvement, inclusive and participatory processes for post-disaster reconstruction by I/NGOs often remain an unrealised aspiration. It does not present as practice on the ground. In their study, they found that there was a lack of people's participation in the programme cycle in the disaster housing reconstruction in Aceh, Indonesia. Similarly, Liu et al. (2018) discuss how recovery interventions did not consider people's needs after the Sichuan earthquake (2008) in China. Further, they depict NGOs' failure to ensure peasants' participation and how their views and needs were undermined in the post-disaster recovery process.

Humanitarian actions have also been criticised for failing to respond in a timely way and demonstrate accountability to the people they serve. The study undertaken in the post-disaster

situation in Haiti found that even after three years of catastrophe, the most basic needs of clean water, food, and protection were not met (Doucet and Dublin 2012, p. 2). A similar pattern was observed in New Orleans in the United States. Here Adams et al. (2009) discovered that many New Orleanians who were displaced in 2005 by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were not rehabilitated even after four years. Indeed, the disaster was used to evict the poor from New Orleans—more than fifty per cent of displaced poor people could not return due to the lack of affordable houses. Similarly, Daly and Brassard (2011) observed that downward accountability (or accountability to the target people or communities) was weak in the disaster housing reconstruction of Aceh, Indonesia.

Some other studies have analysed resilience after a disaster and how the rehabilitation and reconstruction work was made (or not made) possible. In this regard, Snarr and Brown (1984) studied disaster aid in rural Honduras. They identified no difference between those who received aid and those who did not in terms of their financial situation five years later. Similarly, Green's (2005) study of three major earthquakes from 1999–2002 in Turkey found that the commitment to build back better was merely political rhetoric. The promise was never delivered upon. In fact, corruption was discovered to be rife, and thus unsafe buildings continued to be built. The author concluded that no lessons were learnt from those devastating disasters.

The concept of resilience is at the centre of debates in development and humanitarian aid (Levine et al. 2012; Manyena et al. 2011; United Nations 2019) and has been accepted by key international policies for DRR and development such as the Sendai Framework and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The etymological meaning of resilience is "to jump back" derived from the Latin word *resilio* (Klein et al. 2003, p. 35) or *resiliere* (Sudmeier-Rieux 2014, p. 69). Resilience is, therefore, commonly viewed as the ability to "absorb the shocks" and "bounce

back" from disasters; however, Manyena et al. (2011) argue that it should be (re-)defined as the ability to 'bounce forward' and 'move on' following a disaster. They argue that bouncing back to the previous condition may mean returning to the vulnerabilities that caused the disaster in the first place. Some other scholars have expressed similar views, emphasising that resilience should not only be viewed as the capacity to absorb shocks and still maintain function, but the idea of resilience should also concern the capacity for renewal, re-organisation, and (re-)development (see Gunderson and Holling 2002 and Berkes et al. 2003 as cited in Folke 2006).

Although the notion of resilience is promoted in post-disaster contexts by government and humanitarian organisations, it has drawn criticism in disaster scholarship. There are unresolved questions and ongoing debates. The way that resilience is understood and practised is confusing. It is unclear whether resilience is a state/condition in the present or an aspiration for the desired future. If this is not a current state, it leaves us with a question—why are the survivors of recent disasters appreciated for their resilience? For example, such was the case for the people of Haiti following the earthquake (see Svistova and Pyles 2018). Following Nepal's earthquake in 2015, the same was observed (see, for example, Blake 2015; Bubriski 2015; Schaller 2015; Hume 2016; "Resilient Nepal" 2016; "Program assists" 2015). People continued their everyday life without any major complaints during the 18-hour daily electricity shortage in the country and stood in long queues–often without being angry–for hours to get one or two litres of petrol during the Indo-Nepal border blockade in 2015 just a few weeks after the earthquake. I have heard people, often foreigners, saying Nepali people are very resilient. However, most Nepali, as I would argue, saw no alternative–at least in the near future–other than to accept their reality, thereby adapting or compromising their needs or life, and often expressing a common phrase *"Ke garne?"* (What to do?).

The criticism of resilience discourse is that it is aligned with the neoliberal project. In this regard, the idea of resilience can be invoked by the state to shift away from its duties and instead responsibilise victims for preparing for disasters, managing the trauma of the post-disaster situation, and ultimately recovering on their own (Davoudi 2018; Hilhorst 2018; Tierney 2015). I have discussed above how the disaster victims were expected to carry the burden on their shoulders, normalise the crisis, and self-recover in due course in the face of multiple challenges. Davoudi's (2018, p. 4) comment is most powerful here: "Living with threat, insecurity and vulnerability and standing on our own two feet is what the neoliberal interpretation of resilience is advocating". Therefore, the *politics of resilience* can translate into the *politics of abandonment* (Hilhorst 2018).

The (Dis-)Connection Between Relief and Development

There is a gap between humanitarian relief and development. The gap is at different levels: conception (ideology), funding mechanism, and implementation structure and process. In this section, I will show how the gap between relief and recovery/development came into effect and continued over time (*mind the gap)*, the efforts made to reduce the divide (*mending the gap*), and some practical examples on how relief and development may be linked (*good thinking/practices on disaster–development nexus).*

Mind the Gap

The gap between disaster and development comes divergent understandings of disaster or humanitarian relief and development. Development is a contested idea; however, it is generally understood as a good thing: a picture of progress and advancement of society, denoting a positive change, and improved living standards. It is a positive change in people's socio-economic situation in a given community or country. At base, development is an "organised intervention in

collective affairs according to a standard of improvement" (Pieterse 2010, p. 3) and the "movement upward of the entire social system" (Myrdal 1975). It should be noted that development has been a primary agenda in developing countries since the 1950s. Government and non-government organisations are considered key players in undertaking development interventions in underdeveloped countries.

The current view of development or international development is relatively new. It started about 70 years ago, after the Second World War. United States' foreign policy during the presidency of Harry Truman and the newly formed United Nations organisations were credited for taking initiatives in international development. Therefore, the late 1940s is considered the landmark of the genesis of international cooperation as well as aid from developed to developing countries. However, various scholars have contrasting views on foreign aid. Jaffrey Sachs (2006) sees development aid or foreign aid as the panacea to end extreme poverty worldwide. However, Dambisa Moyo and William Easterly see no value in such gestures. Moyo (2010) argues that aid has hurt Africa, and Easterly (2001, 2006) is critical of foreign aid and western ideas solving the problems in developing nations. Similarly, Bano (2012) shows that ineffective aid can damage the community's system, volunteerism, and self-help traditions in society. Escobar (1995) is even critical of the very origin of the idea of "development" and "underdevelopment", arguing that this project was manufactured to create a new space (neo-colonialism) of western domination over the rest of the world.

The provision of social support during calamities and suffering may be as old as civilisation itself. However, the organised form of humanitarian assistance during traumatic times such as wars, famines, and suffering is a relatively new phenomenon which commenced only about 160 years ago with the advent of the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) and the Geneva Convention (see Chapter V for a detailed discussion on humanitarian interventions and critical reflection). Disasters are understood as outliers that hinder the development pathway of society. Therefore, disasters are taken as *barriers/obstacles/hindrances* to development. Development is seen as a normal phenomenon, a sound or desirable thing, but disasters are perceived as an abnormal phenomenon, a bad thing. A disaster is perceived as a sudden crisis assumed to have been short-lived or that which should be managed/addressed in the foreseeable future. However, scholars have shown why this understanding or premise is wrong, which I discuss next.

I have encountered organisations who want to sustain or maintain the distinction between a "development organisation" and a "relief (humanitarian) organisation". Their typical expressions referring to this distinction are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Remarks of Humanitarian and Development Workers that Reveal the Development–Disaster Divide

Assertions by humanitarian and development professionals	Implication in practice
1. We are a development organisation but not a relief organisation.	These types of organisations do not provide aid/assistance for disaster response and recovery efforts.
2. We are a relief organisation but not a development organisation.	These organisations provide emergency relief and are uninterested in carrying out recoveries and reconstruction tasks.
3. We are only a humanitarian organisation.	These organisations work in disaster contexts only. They also engage in emergency relief and may carry out rehabilitation and recovery programmes.

Source: Based on author's experience/reflection.

Manyena (2012), drawing on Ellis and Biggs (2001), created a table to show the Development and Disaster paradigms since the 1950s (see Appendix 1). While the policies, strategies, and emphasis of the development and disaster paradigms are different, there are common themes which could bridge the gap. For example, vulnerability, resilience, and climate change appear as themes in both paradigms. Mena and Hilhorst (2022) also produced a useful comparison between relief and development (see Table 3).

Table 3

A Comparison Between Relief and Development

Dimensions	Relief/immediate disaster relief	Development
Objective	Meeting immediate basic needs	Improvement of the standard of living
Nature of needs	Physical, psychological	Economic, social, political
Types of intervention	Delivery of materials, provisions, and construction	Quantitative and qualitative changes in ongoing socioeconomic processes
Aid characteristics	Short-term, temporary (external)	Long-term (embedded)
	Incident-related	Structural
	Relief of acute needs	Changes in vulnerability and entitlements
Management characteristics	Donor-driven	Recipient-focused
	Top-down, directing	Bottom-up, participation
Main foci	Delivery, speed, logistics, and output	Underlying processes, causalities, long-term impact
Key context variables	Lack of infrastructure and counterparts (failed states)	Infrastructure and counterparts available
	Lack of knowledge and documentation	Knowledge and documentation available
	Media attention, fundraising	Less public attention

Source: Mena and Hilhorst 2022, p. 105

The Table shows that the scope, focus, and strategies of humanitarian and development intervention are different. On the other hand, it reveals how crucial it is to link them to meet emergency needs in the short-run and transform communities to prepare for, cope with, and recover from disasters in the long run. Therefore, a discourse to mend the gap between relief and development exists, which I elaborate on in the next sub-section.

Mending the Gap

In the late 1970s, the interlinkage between development and disasters was recognised, and the discourse to link them was started in the 1980s (Audet 2015; Cuny 1994). As a result, the discourse of "linking relief, rehabilitation, and development" (LRRD) emerged.

As the overall conversation is constantly evolving, different names for this discourse have been proposed or used to denote the concept of bridging disaster relief and development interventions. In addition to the LRRD discourse, various popular terms used in the literature include: "disaster and development nexus", "humanitarian–development nexus", "double nexus", and "disaster–development continuum". Recently, the aid industry upgraded its terminology. It now speaks of the "triple nexus" in the context of conflict, disaster emergencies, and underdevelopment to interlink humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors (see Oxfam 2019). In my thesis, I use LRRD, humanitarian–development nexus, or humanitarian–disaster nexus interchangeably.

There is a close link between disaster and development. Table 4 summarises the relationship between them in relation to the social and economic development.

Table 4

Disaster–Development Nexus and its Relation to Economic and Social Development

Disaster–development nexus	Economic development	Social development
Disaster limits development	Destruction of fixed assets. Loss of production capacity, market access or material inputs. Damage to transport, communications or energy infrastructure. Erosion of livelihoods, savings, and physical capital.	Destruction of health or education infrastructure and personnel. Death, disablement, or migration of key social actors leads to social capital erosion.
Disaster causes development risk	Unsustainable development practices that create wealth for some at the expense of unsafe working or living conditions for others or degrade the environment.	Development paths generating cultural norms that promote social isolation or political exclusion.
Development reduces disaster risk	Access to adequate drinking water, food, waste management, and a secure dwelling increases people's resiliency. Trade and technology can reduce poverty. Investing in financial mechanisms and social security can cushion against vulnerability.	Building community cohesion, recognising excluded individuals or social groups (such as women), and providing opportunities for greater involvement in decision-making, enhanced educational and health capacity increases resilience.

Source: Pelling et al. 2004, p. 20

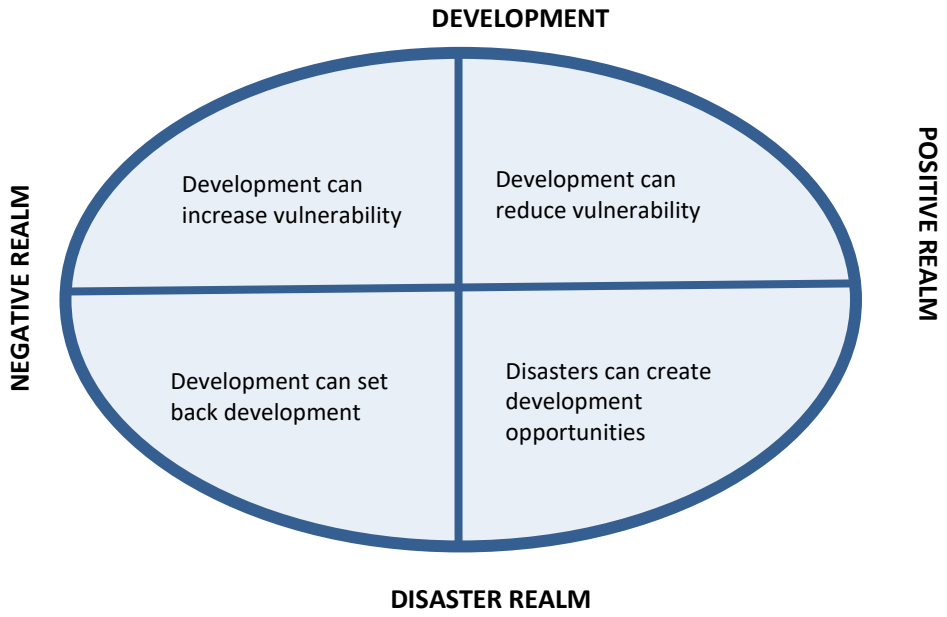
Further, failure(s) of development intervention may cause disasters and increase the magnitude of impacts. For example, the torrential rainfall and landslides caused by Hurricane Mitch (2008) destroyed more than 1,500 homes and killed an estimated 2,500 people in the agricultural town of Posoltega, Nicaragua. This was taken as a failure of the development model (Bacon 2011). The development model adopted by Nicaragua was centred on agricultural exports, resulting in

an expansion of extensive cattle ranching and deforestation. With the forest gone, the place turned into a hazardous landscape which put people's lives and property at risk.

Therefore, disasters are, in this view, understood as indicators of unsolved development problems or failed development (Anderson 1985, p. 46). On the other hand, disasters can undermine the development achievements made over the years or decades, and humanitarian interventions can impact the long-term development of the affected communities (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Relationship Between Disaster and Development



Source: Based on Davis and Alexander, 2016, p. 43)

The discourse of linking humanitarian and development interventions is a relatively recent phenomenon. It started in the 1980s as scholars and practitioners were seeking to understand the food crisis in Africa (Audet 2015; Mosel and Levine 2014; Otto and Weingartner 2013; Van Dijkhorst 2013). Although it attracted much attention as a discourse in the humanitarian and development field in the 1980s and 1990s, practice and writings on the subject were unable to

produce and build on the knowledge of the idea (Mosel and Simon 2014, p. 1). More recently, the disaster–development nexus received renewed attention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 (see Brusset et al. 2009) and with the emergence of the resilience concept, which is believed by many as a promising notion that might link humanitarian and development (Mosel and Simon 2014, p. 1). However, as discussed earlier, the resilience concept is not free from criticism and thus falls short of bridging the gulf between relief and development.

Initially, linking humanitarian and development interventions were understood as the linear thinking (continuum) whereby operations in disaster or conflict contexts pass through a relief, rehabilitation, and development path. However, the linear thought of the humanitarian–development nexus (continuum) was challenged by the alternative idea of "contiguum" (Audet 2015; Mosel and Levine 2014). The concept of contiguum holds that it is not necessary to follow a linear path of relief, rehabilitation, and development. These may all take place at the same time depending upon local circumstances. In addition, disasters and conflict were considered outliers affecting the normal development path. Later, this thought was also challenged because a community could have already been in the context of extreme poverty and inequality where there was no normalcy.

Linking disaster and development may look like a straightforward concept at first glance; nevertheless, it is a contested and complicated idea in many respects as various humanitarian organisations have different views, and there are multiple challenges to operationalising the concept effectively and efficiently in real contexts. Relief and development operations were traditionally considered conflicting ideas, for they were treated as different mandates of respective specialised organisations (Schutte and Kreutzmann 2010, p. 5).

Relief and development seem to have different mandates, priorities, working cultures, language, and implementation strategy (Otto and Weingartner 2013, pp. 33–34). The continuum

of relief, rehabilitation, and development assistance encompasses a range of institutions, activities, and objectives that can be complementary but also often confusing and conflicting (Audet 2015, p. 115). In addition, it is difficult to secure to secure funding for the continuum concept, as the funding window falls within either an emergency or development sphere (Audet 2015; Otto and Weingartner 2013).

The gap between disaster and development is being narrowed down, but the two are still considered opposite sides of the same coin. Sen's Theory of Entitlement, the Pressure and Release model, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and policy guidelines such as the Hyogo Framework have played a crucial role in bringing the two paradigms closer (Manyena 2012, p. 342). Although many of the fundamental challenges are still present today at the disaster–development nexus, there have been some changes in the way that relief is conceptualised and delivered, particularly with the introduction of cash transfer programmes and a sharper focus on exit strategies, sustainability, and resilience (Mosel and Levine 2014; p. 4).

Some Good Thinking/Practices on Humanitarian–Development Nexus

Mena and Hilhorst (2022) have pointed out the good practice of a Dutch INGO, Cordaid, in linking relief and development. For Cordaid, the situations in the field—the reality—determine whether a development-oriented or relief-oriented intervention is necessary in that particular space and time. Therefore, they believe development organisations should be prepared to initiate emergency plans and offer humanitarian assistance and vice-versa. When providing life-saving humanitarian aid, organisations should be able to combine this with long-term improvement. Cordaid sees development and relief programmes as interventions that need to expand or compress, depending on the context, in order to do "the right thing at the right time" (see Mena and Hilhorst 2022, p. 1053).

There is additional literature, mostly reports and grey literature, that identified and collated some good practices in different organisations, for example UNICEF (Shusterman

2021), German aid organisations (VENRO 2006), a number of INGO's practices such as CARE, Oxfam, Handicap International, and Save the Children (CONCORD 2012), and field practices of bilateral and multi-lateral donors such as the European Commission and USAID (see "Linking relief, rehabilitation", n.d.). While such collections of "best practices" are necessary for learning and making a case for LRRD, most of the practices seem ad hoc without any fundamental change or paradigm shift in the relief–development nexus. With some exceptions (e.g., Shusterman 2021), these documentations also lack details or depth of LRRD practices.

On the other hand, some scholars, such as Daly et al. 2020 and Rasul et al. (2015), have suggested a potential model for linking relief, rehabilitation, and recovery. Daly and his colleagues argue that the recovery process should relate to housing construction and indicate the number of potential activities that may be carried out in the relief, rehabilitation, and recovery stages. In my current research, I intend to build on this LRRD debate based on my fieldwork in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake (see Chapter VI). While my discussion is based on Nepal's response and recovery process, the model or examples may be adapted to other contexts.

Locating My Study in the 2015 Nepal Earthquake Research Landscape

Several empirical studies have been carried out on the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. These works fall under various fields/sub-fields, such as engineering, health, and social science disciplines. Hundreds of journal articles, books, and chapters have been written on the subject.[11] Table 5 shows the volume of available literature on, or close to, my research themes. It also shows the added value or contribution of my research where disaster scholarship on that particular area is scant, or a research gap exists (see the shaded box in Table 5). The relevant literature listed in this Table is referred to in the corresponding chapters of this thesis.

[11]See Baniya and Gautam (2022) for a detailed bibliographic resource guide on the 2015 Nepal Earthquake and its aftermath.

Table 5

Situatedness of My Research in the 2015 Nepal Earthquake Research Landscape

Theme	Sub-theme	Volume of literature (ref. Nepal Earthquake 2015)			Notes
		Relative. high	Few	Rare or none	
Bourdieu	*Habitus, capital theory, field, symbolic capital*			√	Fehr (2022) used Bourdieu's *doxa* concept.
Caste and ethnicity			√		See Spoon et al. 2020, 2021; Although empirical studies are few, many commentaries and reports are available—see, for example, Folmar et al. (2015) and Barron (2017).
	Caste and gender			√	See Arora (2022).
	Caste/ethnicity focused			√	See Bownas and Bishokarma 2018; DeYoung and Penta 2017.
Disaster governance		√	√		See Bennike (2017), Lam and Kuipers (2019), and Daly et al. (2017). Disaster governance did not emerge as the primary focus. There are some discussions or references in my research.
Emergency relief			√		Cook et al. (2018); Lord and Murton (2017), Paul et al. (2017); Parajulee et al. (2020); Shivakoti (2019); Spoon et al. (2020, 2021).
	Mobile sovereignty			√	
	Humanitarian dependency			√	
Gender/women			√		Bista and Sharma (2019); KC and Hilhorst (2022); Standing et al. (2016).
Housing reconstruction		√			See Baniya (2021); Daly et al. (2017); Gautam et al. (2016a,b); Kotani et al. (2020), Limbu et al. (2019, 2022); Rawal et al. (2021).

Theme	Sub-theme	Volume of literature (ref. Nepal Earthquake 2015)			Notes
		Relative. high	Few	Rare or none	
	Bourdieu and Building			√	
	Rendering technical			√	
Livelihoods recovery		√			Chatterjee and Okazaki (2017); DiCarlo et al. (2018); Epstein et al. (2018).
	Linking relief, recovery and (re-) development			√	
	Humanitarian objects			√	
Disaster capitalism	Disaster profiteering		√		Le Billon et al. (2020); Matthew and Upreti (2018); Paudel and Le Billon (2020); Paudel et al. (2020).
Social capital		√			Devkota et al. (2016); Panday et al. (2021); Gautam and Cortés (2021).
	Exclusionary social capital		√		
Humanitarian aid	*Dependency syndrome*			√	
Resilience		√			See Epstein et al. (2017); Forbes 2018; Khattri (2022), Lam and Kuipers (2019); Mishra et al. (2017); Paudel (2020); Rushton et al. (2021); Sherpa (2017); Shrestha et al. (2019); Sijapati et al. (2015); Song et al. (2022); Timalsina et al. (2022); Watson (2016).

Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, I conceptualised the idea of *post-disaster recovery*, suggesting that it is generally misunderstood as the restoration and reconstruction of the built environment following disaster. I also showed that the notion of returning to the status quo ante following a crisis is contested in two ways: Firstly, it makes little sense to return to the previous condition, which may be characterised by poverty, injustice, social exclusions, and the very types of vulnerability that caused the disaster in the first place. My research further elaborates on these issues in the findings sections (Chapters V to X). Secondly, people cannot return to normalcy; instead, they must adjust their lives to the "new normal".

While spatial vulnerability and built-environment vulnerability are critical dimensions to take into account, it is the social dimensions of vulnerability that (should) matter the most; it is society, rather than nature, that decides who is more likely to be exposed to hazards and, when disasters occur, certain groups of people suffer more than others. Those people who live at the "worse end of the spectrum" (a phrase used by Wisner et al. 2004) in society have the least resources, capital, and choices to prevent and mitigate disasters, and they experience complex webs of obstacles to recovery in their aftermath. Nevertheless, the vulnerable groups are not, and therefore should not, be taken as passive recipients waiting for external help to recover from disasters because they may have *earned strengths*, as argued by Uekusa and Matthewman (2017), and adaptive and coping capacity in the face of loss and distress.

In addition, I analysed how the humanitarian initiatives carried out in various parts of the world have received criticisms on several grounds: being irrelevant to local people and contexts; ineffective or inappropriate approach/process adopted; lack of efficiency and social accountability; and promoting neoliberal doctrines and disaster capitalism in the aftermath of the

crisis. My research connects to many of these themes, such as humanitarian goods and their relevancy and disaster profiteering.

Finally, I discussed the discourse of the humanitarian-development nexus. Disaster and development were understood as separate things in the past; thus, different funding mechanisms were created. The gap between disaster and development was created and has been reproduced over the decades. This issue is particularly relevant in Nepal and other developing countries, where development and disaster risk reduction (DRR) have been the focus and the mantra of government plans and policies for decades.

At the end of the chapter, I showed the contribution of my research in the 2015 Nepal Earthquake research landscape.

The next chapter presents the theoretical lens that I adopted in this research.

CHAPTER III

THEORISING DISASTER: BOURDIEU

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was an influential French sociologist and philosopher. He has been most influential in explaining the embodied nature of social positions, cultural capital, and symbolic violence. Although his theories are not commonly used in disaster scholarship, there is growing interest in researchers using his lens in understanding the disaster and recovery process (see, for example, Graham 2008; Hernández Aguilar and Rivera 2016; Hollenbach and Ruwanpura 2011; Santos-Hernandez 2007; Uekusa 2017; Wilson 2012). Despite the limited use, I argue that Bourdieu's theories offer unique perspectives for understanding social vulnerability and disaster. In this regard, I want to highlight three points.

Firstly, Bourdieu's field theory helps us to see a disaster site as more than a physical place: it is also a social space where the action happens, and it is a field of domination and struggle. This concept is useful for analysing power relationships and access to resources or capitals among different social groups in the post-disaster context. I elaborate on this field concept in the next section.

Secondly, Bourdieu's habitus concept recognises the agency of the disaster-affected population. Habitus theory helps us to understand that individuals are active agents who act and react, primarily based on acquired and socially constituted dispositions, corresponding with the changing context (Bourdieu 1990a, pp. 12-13; Swartz 2002). Here it should be noted that Bourdieu has been, however, criticised by several authors (e.g., Jenkins 2006; King 2000) for

ignoring the agency of individuals. It is argued that the concept of habitus—understood as the internalisation of social structure ingrained primarily by the socialisation process and education or schooling and thus maintains the status-quo. However, other scholars (e.g., Burke 2015; France 2015; France et al. 2013; Li 2015; Stahl 2015; Swartz 1997; Uekusa 2018a) have argued that these views misrepresent Bourdieu's position. They reiterate that habitus comprises norms, values, or dispositions that direct one's agency or practice. Bourdieu (1992, p. 133) warns that habitus should not be read as one's pre-determined fate but an "*open system of dispositions* [italics in original] that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structure". Habitus is thus not a static or closed disposition but a dynamic one. In this regard, Bourdieu (1992, p. 133) reminds us that habitus is "durable but not eternal!". Nevertheless, if the field is highly regulated, then the habitus is less influential (France et al. 2013, p. 16).

Two types of habitus are significant: I call them *old habitus* and *renewed or reformed habitus*. Old (i.e., original) habitus is historical and embodied or ingrained within an individual by socialisation and training and remains incorporated in the mind in the form of long-term dispositions (Bourdieu 1993, p. 86). Renewed or reformed habitus is generated by necessity and the unpredictable confrontation or dialectical relationships between the old habitus and a challenging event, such as is created by disaster (see Bourdieu 1990b, pp. 55, 60). Bourdieu (1990b, p. 55) reminds us that habitus is continually defined and redefined based on existing social realities. Further, it can be *forgotten*, *adapted*, or *replaced* by a new or reformed habitus by realising the changing structure or field (p. 56). Habitus adapts, corresponding to new experiences and realities.

Thirdly, Bourdieu's capital theory provides a holistic view of capital (beyond economic capital) and the inter-relationship between different forms of capital. His notion of capital in disaster research is particularly helpful for thinking beyond economic recovery. On the other hand, it also makes a compelling case for the significance of social and cultural capital in coping with the impact of a disaster and recovering in its aftermath.

And, finally, Bourdieu's symbolic capital and symbolic violence, help us to analyse how influential people or elites legitimise their position and dominate the weakest subalterns in society, thus reproducing disaster vulnerability. The concept of symbolic violence is particularly relevant to Nepal, where the society is inequal, and the post-disaster context. The elite and high-caste people are likely to influence the disaster response and recovery decision-making process due to their socio-economic privilege. The concept of symbolic capital has not been utilised in disaster research so far; therefore, it is rare to find empirical examples in the current literature (Uekusa 2018b, p. 96). Hence, this research—which aims to contribute to the knowledge of the topic—is valuable.

Outlining Bourdieu's Key Theoretical Concepts

Field, *habitus*, and *capital* are the three fundamental concepts that lie at the heart of Bourdieu's theory. These are widely recognised today as Bourdieu's master concepts (Swartz 2008).

Habitus

Today, Bourdieusian habitus has been used in various disciplines, including art, anthropology, cultural studies, education, and sociology; however, habitus is also one of the most misunderstood, misused, and contested of Bourdieu's ideas (Maton 2012, p. 49; Swartz 1997,

p. 96). In this section, firstly I demystify the notion of habitus unpacking the definition given by Bourdieu (1990b). Secondly, I elaborate on the habitus concept in disaster contexts.

Habitus is an old philosophical idea that dates back to Aristotle (Bourdieu 1993, p. 86; Navarro 2006, p. 16)[12]. Etymologically speaking, the term *habitus* is derived from the Latin verb *habere*, which means "to have" or "to hold" (Swartz 2002, p. 61s). The concept focuses on what we think, feel, or do, and why we do so in specific ways (Maton 2012, p. 51). Habitus is, therefore, everyday behaviour and actions undertaken by individuals without making a conscious effort. The notion of habitus is close to the idea of habit; however, it is not a habit *per se*. Bourdieu (1990b, p. 53) defines *habitus* as:

> … a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

Let us unpack this definition given by Bourdieu:

a) Durable, transposable disposition. Habitus is long-lasting. Habitus is durable because it is ingrained within an individual over a long period by socialisation processes. It is, therefore, acquired and internalised by individuals and remains incorporated in the mind in the form of long-term dispositions (Bourdieu 1993, p. 86). For this reason, habitus is reasonably resistant to change. After all, it seems to be *natural.* No conscious effort is made.

However, habitus should not be taken to mean *permanent* dispositions. Rather, there is an ongoing adaptation as habitus encounters a new situation; however, this process tends to be

[12] The notion of habitus has also been utilised, before Bourdieu, by other scholars and philosophers using different terms, namely by Durkheim, Hegel (under the name *haxis, ethos*), Husserl (under the name *habitualität*), Mauss (under the name *haxis*), Saussure, and Weber (see Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 12; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 86; Bourdieu, 1992, p. 121). Nevertheless, Bourdieu's notion remains distinct from other scholars in many respects.

rather slow (Swartz 1997, p. 107). In this regard, Bourdieu (1990a, p. 11) argues that habitus is "immediately adjusted to the immanent demands of the game".[13] Here, "game" is a metaphor that refers to the dynamic nature of the field, the rules that govern behaviour and actions, and the competition and struggle that takes place to secure capital(s) and one's stake in society. This analogy of the game is elaborated in the field section a little later.

Habitus is also *transposable* or *transferable*, corresponding with the environment or context. It has the capacity to act and modify the acts as per the changing context. The adjustments of habitus are required constantly due to the "new and unforeseen situations" (Bourdieu 1993, p. 87). Further, habitus can also be transmitted intergenerationally through the socialisation process (Swartz 1997).

b) *Structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.* Bourdieu (1990b, p. 56) reiterates that habitus is an "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history…". Moreover, Bourdieu (1993, p. 86) argues that habitus is "historical, linked to individual history". Therefore, any immediate actions of an individual could be primarily due to dispositions *structured in the past* as a socialisation process. In this sense, habitus is based upon its historical and social conditions, which have an effect on actions and decisions in the present and may also influence, to some extent, the future as well, although it cannot be fully predicted due to the adaptive nature of habitus.

c) *Without presupposing a conscious aiming*. Habitus is a built-in subconscious thing that we perform without knowing that we are doing it. In other words, habitus acts spontaneously as

[13] There seems to be a contradiction here: Swartz says it is slow, but Bourdieu says it is immediate. Nevertheless, it is not a discrepancy—although it may look so at first glance—for the authors seem to be referring to different contexts affecting habitus. When the changing context or environment is not significant, habitus is slow to adjust. In addition, it also changes slowly or gradually over a long historical period (Navarro 2016, p. 16). However, habitus may be quick to be adjusted if the changing context or environment is significant.

natural, common sense or practical judgement. Habitus is, therefore, a taken-for-granted acceptance of the primary conditions of existence (Swartz 1997, p. 105). However, it is not a set of *consciously* held beliefs, worldviews, and values.

Habitus and disasters

Desmond (2007) carried out an ethnographic study to understand why some people get attracted to risk-taking occupations (firefighting in his case study), and how they see and continue their profession. The motivation (or passion) and efficacy of fighting wildfires were not just because of the organisational orientation and training programmes per se, as the author argues, but "something in the background, something alive, though invisible, and present in nearly every action of wildland firefighting; this 'something' is the country-masculine habitus" (p. 172). The country-masculine habitus was equated to the firefighters' dispositions acquired from their rural, masculine, and working-class upbringing. Desmond observed that the country-masculine habitus divides the world into two types of people—indoor people and outdoor people, country people and city people wherein outdoors (or the forest) represent freedom, wilderness, and working-class masculinity. In contrast, indoors is symbolised as a dull, predictable, and sanitary desk. Therefore, the crew members rejected any indoor jobs and were ready to fight the blaze long before they joined the Forest Service. The organisation only needed a subtle modification of the dispositions and skills because the boys had already laid the groundwork, thanks to the rural working-class masculine habitus, for battling a wildfire.

In many communities around the world, habitus in the form of local or Indigenous Knowledge is embedded within individuals, helps people prepare for disaster mitigation, gives them coping strategies during disasters, and assists with recovery processes. In such contexts,

individuals react to their environment reasonably well without any conscious planning (Zaumseil and Schwarz 2014, p. 74). I have witnessed the rural people living in the eastern region of Nepal anticipate a storm's approach within the coming hours, predict rain to take place in a few days, or know if a snake is in the immediate vicinity. The people would sense these risks without any conscious effort.

However, habitus is also a dynamic system which corresponds with the environment or contexts. It changes as they change. In this regard, unexpected or dramatic events like disasters can modify the habitus to the point at which it no longer corresponds with reality (Zaumseil and Schwarz 2014, p. 68). Therefore, individuals need to renew and reconstruct their orientation in the changing context. For Bourdieu, "habitus is not only the product of what we receive and are taught, but also of our everyday actions and social encounters or practice and thus is subject to innovation and change" (Scandlyn et al. 2010, p. 40).

Following the devastating Nepal Earthquake in 2015, the rising tide of volunteering was observed in the rescue operations and humanitarian relief distribution in the communities (Barnett and Walker 2015, p. 134; see Ekin 2015). This phenomenon can be understood from the perspective of habitus. One possible interpretation of this extraordinary volunteerism was, arguably, due to the *sahayog* (help) habitus and *sewā* (service) habitus ingrained in Nepali families or society to be actioned whenever community members face *mahā dukha* (great misery or suffering). Children have been inculcated with the notion they must furnish assistance when a friend or neighbour faces a major loss in their lives or their families. Therefore, when one faces sudden misfortune or disaster (e.g., a housefire), others in the village tend to provide support,

often in the form of materials or labour, to help restore the household. The sewā habitus may have been manifested at a larger scale in the mahā dukha of the Nepal earthquake in 2015.[14]

Unfortunately, habitus continues to reproduce social hierarchy and domination even after devastating disasters. For example, the ingrained upper-caste habitus was reflected in South Asian disasters, such as in the 2011 Gujarat (India) earthquake and the 2004 tsunami in India and Sri Lanka, where the "upper caste" groups discouraged the "low-caste" people from accessing relief provision and temporary shelter in the aftermath of the crisis (IDSN 2013, p. 4; Price and Bhatt 2009). In the same manner, Dalits in Nepal were denied access to water from the public tap stand in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake 2015 (Barron 2017)[15]. This discriminatory practice led to violence that eventually had to be quelled by police intervention (The Asia Foundation 2016).

Field

The field is a social space of struggle. A field, in Bourdieu's sense, is a social arena within which struggles take place over specific resources (Jenkins 2006, p. 84). Bourdieu defines *field* as-

> …a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 97)

[14] This is one of the ways of seeing, through a Bourdieusian perspective, the unprecedented level of volunteerism witnessed in the aftermath of the crisis; however, there could be other factors (for example, the influence of media and social media). An empirical study on post-disaster volunteerism in Nepal could not be located.

[15] Water became a scarce resource following the disaster, and in many parts of the country Dalits are still considered a source of pollution for other castes.

Bourdieu compares field to the notion of ‘market’; however, his concept should not be seen as the equivalent of the neo-classical market. Instead, his concept suggests a force field wherein the distribution of capital in the market reflects a hierarchical set of power relations among the competing individuals, groups, and organisations.

On the other hand, Bourdieu also compares his field concept to games. In a game (e.g., football), there are a space or field, players, and rules to play the game. Each player has got a position based on talent or skills (capital), and they struggle to maintain that position in the face of competition from others. The various agents use different tactics to maintain or improve their position (Thomson 2012, p. 67). Therefore, a field is a ‘system’ or a structured ‘space’ of positions and power (Lahire 2015, p. 66).

Field struggles centre around particular forms of capital: economic, cultural, scientific, or religious (Swartz 1997, p. 124). Fields are also arenas of legitimation to monopolise the symbolic capital in order to main position and status. Therefore, the principal field in Bourdieu’s work is the *field of power*. Fields are structured in terms of domination, where individuals in the social arena aim to have access to, and control over capital (Peillon 1998, p. 215). In terms of the field as power and a site of struggles, Bourdieu (1996 as cited in Peillon, p. 216) explains:

> The field of power is the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural). It is the site of struggles between holders of different powers (or kinds of capital) which, like the symbolic struggles between artists and the ‘bourgeois’ in the nineteenth century, have at stake the transformation or conservation of the relative value of different kinds of capital, which itself determines, at any moment, the forces liable to be engaged in these struggles.

Capital is unequally distributed within the field, so there are *dominant* and *dominated* agents (Lahire 2015, p. 66). Thus, the exchange of relations, negotiations, and conversion of capital occur in the field. Also, fields are sites of resistance and domination: "…fields capture struggle within the logic of reproduction; they seldom become sites of social transformation" (Swartz 1997, p. 121).

Applying field theory across disciplines and seeing post-disaster sites as field

Bourdieu recognised and investigated different fields in his writing, such as education, culture, television, literature, science, housing, and bureaucracy (Thomson 2012, p. 68). Other scholars have explored a range of fields which are structured according to relations of domination and the struggle that takes place therein to access and gain control over capital—for example, the welfare field (Peillon 1998) and the organisational field (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Grayman (2016) used the notion of Bourdieu's field (and the games played upon it) as a starting point for looking at the recovery processes in post-conflict Aceh, Indonesia. The field concept in his research was used to navigate the players (or actors) in the field and how those players exercised their narratives or agency for legitimising and accumulating capital, or failing to do so, in the changing post-conflict and post-disaster contexts in Aceh.

I conceptualise a post-disaster site as a Bourdieusian field. Disaster sites are social arenas of struggle for survival, rehabilitation, and recovery in the aftermath of devastation. The disaster-affected people do not act in isolation but depend on a wide range of actors or stakeholders occupying various positions in the post-disaster context. The rich and subalterns compete to secure or increase their capitals (e.g., economic capital or social capital) and their position in the post-disaster situation. In this process, the poor and marginalised people may continue to experience domination and social exclusion in the recovery process and eventually may become more vulnerable and deprived. Moreover, the disaster-affected people and other actors act or

react in the disaster response and recovery process as they acquire a ‘feel for the game’. Wealthy powerful elites, however, are likely to legitimise their voice and agenda by harnessing their symbolic capital.

Capital

Bourdieu extends the idea of capital beyond economic and material forms. He discusses four types of capital: *economic capital* (material wealth and financial assets), *cultural capital* (educational credentials, cultural goods and services), *social capital* (networks, acquaintances, group association or membership), and *symbolic capital* (legitimation). Like Marx, Bourdieu sees capital as an important means of obtaining and perpetuating power and position in society. However, the key contribution of Bourdieu, beyond Marx, is to see a much broader range of labour (social, cultural, political, and religious) and extend the idea of capital to all forms of power. Therefore, much of Bourdieu’s work focuses on the interplay among what he distinguishes as social, cultural, and economic capital. He analyses how individuals and groups employ different strategies to accumulate, invest, and convert various types of capital.

Bourdieu argues that cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital are interchangeable. Therefore, he talks about the conversion of capital. For example, investment of economic capital (e.g., in education) is made to secure cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that “the field of power determines the relative value of different kinds of capital (for instance, the ‘rate of exchange’ between cultural and economic capital)” (Bourdieu 1994 as cited in Peillon 1998, p. 219). This notion of interchangeability and conversion is also one of Bourdieu’s key contributions to sociological study.

Next, I discuss each of Bourdieu’s capital concepts in detail and relate them to disaster contexts.

Economic Capital

For Bourdieu, economic capital is central. It is the root of all other types of capital. This is because economic capital is the most efficient and stable form of capital. It can be immediately and directly converted into money. However, while some goods and services can be obtained directly and immediately through economic capital, he also acknowledges that other goods and services are accessible only through social and cultural capital (Swartz 1997). Bourdieu also notes that economic capital can be converted more readily into cultural capital and social capital than vice-versa (Swartz 1997).

The significance of economic capital, such as money or material wealth, in post-disaster recovery, is understandable and obvious. People with a higher level of economic capital (the wealthy) are likely to recover quicker than those with little (Dash et al. 2010, pp. 83–93; Wisner et al. 2004, pp. 12–13). Rich people are likely to have significant resources and appropriate technology to protect and safeguard them (including living in safer places) and are likely to have far more options and opportunities to both escape and recover from disaster than low-income families do (Wisner et al. 2004, pp. 12–13; Tierney 2019, pp. 128–133). Official statistics show us that poor and marginalised people are far more likely to be injured or killed in disasters than the wealthy (Peeters et al. 2019). Further, the poor have fewer financial resources and opportunities on which to draw when emergencies occur (Tierney 2019, p. 133), and the recovery strategies that the poor are compelled to choose are often riskier. For example, following the Nepal Earthquake in 2015, many people sold their kidneys to help recover from that crisis (Cousins 2016; Fleckner 2015).

Rich people may also receive preferential or special attention in disaster emergencies. For instance, Dalits in Nepal have noted that the affluent neighbourhoods were prioritised for rescue

operations in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake due to a predefined attitude that the Dalit households have “nothing to lose” for they have poor housing and low levels of household belongings and material wealth (Sob et al., nd). In this way, Dalits who generally have the *least* material capital in comparison with other caste people in the community are likely to *lose everything*. Similarly, during the Kosi floods of Bihar (India) in 2008, wealthy people used their cemented or concrete houses to wait for the rescue boats to arrive (the poor have thatched-roof huts). Once the boats arrived, the wealthy were the first ones to be evacuated. Their economic capital made this possible. The poor had no such opportunity. They did not have money to secure passage (Jha 2015). These examples show how the discriminatory post-disaster response and recovery process further marginalises the already marginalised people in society.

People who possess economic capital are not only likely to recover faster, but they may also take actions in the aftermath of a disaster that marginalise poor people, making them even more vulnerable and deprived. For example, following the 2015 Earthquake, the poorest people in Nepal were compelled to take high-interest loans from landlords (The Asia Foundation 2016). In the same manner, Neef (2019) and Neef et al. (2019) documented how the Moken Indigenous community in Southern Thailand lost their right to land and natural resources following the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami. They observed that in pursuit of developing tourism activities, stricter state regulations were introduced on the Moken community thereby drastically reducing their access to the forest, coastal, and marine resources, which had been their prime source of livelihood for generations. Moreover, their dwellings were confined to a designated area or zone which Neef (2019, p. 50) referred to as a “human zoo, appropriating the profitable parts of their culture and heavily restricting their customary livelihood practices”.

This neoliberal displacement phenomenon in the aftermath of a disaster can be seen in developed countries as well. Adams et al. (2009) discussed how the 2005 Hurricane Katrina (and the subsequent levee failures) in New Orleans was used as a means to evict the poor from their original place and make private companies profitable. Insurance rates were increased for homeowners after Katrina, which made them challenging to pay, whereas the insurance companies made record profits. The federal government made excessive payments to private companies which supplied trailers to the evacuees for temporary housing. Each trailer was estimated to cost approximately $14,000–$20,000 to manufacture, but the government paid nearly $230,000 per trailer to the contractors.

Similarly, private firms were given contracts for rebuilding houses, but they did not build affordable new houses for the displaced people to return to. As a consequence, about 50 per cent of displaced people—predominantly poor and African American—could not return and were still living in the trailers, even three years after the hurricane. Indeed, survivors were subsequently asked to vacate their trailers (within a given timeframe). As a result, homelessness nearly doubled from the pre-Katrina level and was four times that of any other U.S. city. In this way, in the aftermath of the disaster, the rich (private companies and contractors) became richer at the expense of the poor who became poorer.

All these examples reveal that the weakest subalterns suffer the most in disasters, whereas people with higher economic capital are in a better position to remain safe from hazards and recover faster in the aftermath of a crisis—and private companies are likely to make a profit out of the disaster.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is the accumulation of education, knowledge, skills, and behaviours by individuals or groups in society. It relates to one's choices or preferences, personality, manners, taste (e.g., in art, music, food), accent or vocabulary, clothing, posture, material belongings, and educational degrees or credentials. One's position in society is affected, for example, by having or adopting a certain accent and style of dress. For this reason, cultural capital is a major source of social divisions, hierarchies, and inequality. Class, race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, for example, often determine who has access to cultural capital in any given context.

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in three forms—*embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalised*. The embodied state of cultural capital such as personality and language or speech exists within people and is acquired primarily through socialisation and education. Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) claims that cultural capital in the embodied state exists in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. Cultural capital in the objectified state tends to signal one's economic and social class in society. This form of capital is demonstrated or objectified through visible and material belongings such as a luxury car or branded clothing. Lastly, cultural capital in the institutionalised state is authenticated or accredited through formal means. Examples include academic degrees, job titles, social roles, political offices, and bureaucratic positions.

Bourdieu argues that cultural capital can be a powerful means to accumulate economic and social capital and to perpetuate the status quo and hence inequality in society. An example could be someone going to a high-decile or elite school. They are more likely to get admission to a prestigious university. Having graduated from such a university, they are likely to get a high-salaried job. Their mannerisms, language, and gestures (embodied cultural capital), the networks

and connections of the friends gained in their elite school and at university (social capital), and the degrees from reputable academic institutions (institutionalised cultural capital) can all play a vital role in securing a high level of economic position and status. On the other hand, someone attending a low-decile school may have an entirely different story, ending up in "low-skilled jobs" and remaining forever in the working class. Thus, education reproduces class inequalities.

Cultural capital has been used in various studies such as education, migration, race/ethnicity, and development. Furthermore, it is a relevant concept in disaster research as well. Studies on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and management around the world have shown strong evidence for the role of cultural capital in the form of Indigenous Knowledge and practices in preparing for, coping with, and surviving disasters from generation to generation (Hasteh and Cunningham 2013; see also Quilo et al. 2015, p. 105). Longstanding local traditions and knowledge have helped people to recognise safer or more hazardous places, sense hazards and risks beforehand, mitigate hazards, and respond to—and survive—disasters when they occur. For example, people in earthquake-prone areas in the Kashmir region (India) have learnt for years to build earthquake-resilient traditional houses (Khan 2008). For generations, the local people have adopted the *Taq* system (timber-laced masonry) and the *Dhajji-Dewari* technique (timber frame with infill walls) to build their houses which were able to withstand the earthquakes. Similarly, people in the eastern Tarai of Nepal have considerable knowledge and practices relating to flood risk mitigation—such as anticipating floods by observing natural phenomena, identifying safe places for both humans and cattle, and building structures to store grains or keeping important personal documents safe (Dekens 2007).

Moreover, people living in Matanag village in the Philippines have considerable local knowledge about warning signs and how to predict eruptions from the Mayon volcano (Cerdena

2008). Some of these signs include observing rivers and creeks running dry and looking at the unusual behaviour or activities of pets and wild animals. Similarly, not a single individual in the Moken tribe in the Surin Island of Thailand lost their lives during the 2004 tsunami even though their entire village was swept away by the disaster. Based on the legend of the *Laboon* (or seven roller waves), which was passed down for generations, the Moken tribe observed the changes in the ocean and went to higher ground, leaving their coastal villages before the tsunami struck and destroyed their villages (Stevens 2009).

Indigenous Knowledge may exist in embedded form inculcated by family or community as a part of the socialisation and learning process, passed from generation to generation through verbal or oral traditions in various forms such as life skills lessons, folklore, songs, cultural norms, and proverbs. On the other hand, Indigenous Knowledge may also be objectified through cultural artefacts carved on stones, metals, and wood. For example, natural disasters—namely floods, thunderbolt fires, and an earthquake—which took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were found recorded in old (historical) wood in the two World Heritage buildings in central Spain (Genova et al. 2018).

While studies have appreciated the role of cultural capital to prepare for, cope with, and recover from disasters, very few researchers have discussed how some cultural norms and beliefs may increase the vulnerability of people to hazards. In fact, culture in the vulnerable context is a neglected factor (IFRC 2014). Unequal power relations (e.g., gender inequality in a patriarchal society), social exclusions and discriminatory practices (e.g., caste-based discrimination in the South Asian region), and fatalism (the belief that one has no control over one's life circumstances) are also part of the culture in many societies around the world which allocate risks unequally between different groups of people in society. Oppressed and marginalised

groups may accept the way they are treated as a culture rather than a discriminatory and exploitative practice.

Cultural norms on gender in some societies may put people at risk during and after disasters. Gender-based discrimination is seen as a major reason for the significant number of women's deaths compared to men's in recent disasters. For example, four times more women than men died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 60–80 per cent of those killed in India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka were women. Many women died because they stayed behind to look for their children and other relatives, and women, unlike men, lacked swimming or tree-climbing skills because they were denied learning such life-saving skills due to prevailing gender norms (Oxfam 2005). Similarly, women are generally the caregivers in developing countries, and their responsibility for children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled can delay or complicate evacuations. In this regard, when an earthquake hit south-eastern Turkey in 2011, the casualties of women and children were significantly higher than men because so many caregivers were at home when it struck (Sadasivam 2018). In 1991, during the cyclone disaster in Bangladesh, between 68,000 to 138,0000 people were estimated to have been killed, and most of them were women (Begum 1993; Ikeda 1995). Due to the cultural norms, women's mobility or spatial movement was restricted, and they also risked their lives saving their children and guarding the family property, including the house and livestock, fearing that they would be blamed and punished for damage to the house or loss of property (Begum 1993, p. 34). Additionally, women's garments also prevent ease of movement, especially in water (Ikeda 1995, p. 180). Sadly, the "effects of gender and gender relations have been virtually ignored in most disaster research" (Enarson and Morrow 1997, p. 117).

Due to the belief in *karma* or reincarnation, some people in a Cambodian village refused to help those who had been severely affected by flood, claiming that those people were being punished for what they had done in a previous life (Williams 2003 as cited in IFRC 2014, p. 22). As such, it would be wrong to help them. Likewise, due to their belief in the caste system, the Dalits were discriminated against in humanitarian relief distribution in Tamil Nadu in India because they were deemed less worthy (Gill 2007).

Social Capital

Social capital is generally defined as social trust, networks, and relationships. The role of social capital in disaster response and recovery has received much attention in recent years. Although social capital has been used in research and DRR programming, Bourdieu's notion has been less utilised. Instead, most of the scholars have applied Putnam's (1995, p. 67) concept which is defined as "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". A simple, clear, and practical definition and useful typology of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking)[16] may be attributed to the widespread use of Putnam's notion of social capital. However, Putnam's model tends to reify the concept a little too much, as if social capital is "yet another thing" that can be leveraged, enhanced, counted or calculated, and replicated (see Li 2011).

While Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital has some shared features, such as the role of acquaintances and networks, his notion differs in significant ways. Unlike Putnam,

[16] Aldrich (2012a) provided a good illustration with examples to clarify this typology of capital. *Bonding social capital* is ties within and between community members. This type of social capital may include the relations between family members, close friends, and neighbours. *Bridging social capital* is about connections of the group or network to extra-local networks beyond ethnic, racial, and religious divides. And, *linking social capital* is vertical relationships between people or groups who are interacting across formal and institutionalised power or authority such as government and political office.

Bourdieu's idea of social capital involves power dynamics in society (Field 2008, p. 46). Bourdieu (1986) also insists that an individual's agency and access to a network and its resourcefulness matter more than the network per se (pp. 249–250). Most importantly, Bourdieusian social capital cannot be understood without his broader sociological framework of field, habitus, and other forms of capital.

Much research has acknowledged the effectiveness of social capital in the disaster response and recovery process. In this regard, the role of social capital was found critical in recovering in the aftermath of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake (Aldrich 2012b). Aldrich reveals that due to the strong social connections and trust, the Tokyoites came together for clearing debris, erecting damaged public facilities (such as neighbourhood bulletin boards to transmit information, and share their knowledge and advice on how to rebuild damaged houses effectively), where to find inexpensive places to eat and lodge in, and where new job opportunities were available. Nakagawa and Shaw's (2004) study also revealed that communities with a high level of trust, norms, participation, and networks in the Gujarat (India) and Kobe (Japan) earthquakes were able to recover quickly from the crisis. Similarly, social capital was found instrumental in aiding survivors during and after the 1934 earthquake in Nepal (Bhandari 2014).

Moreover, Yila et al. (2013) identified four distinct benefits of social capital. Firstly, social capital was crucial in search-and-rescue (SAR) operations after the floods. The researchers found that a large part of these operations was made by the local people even after the humanitarian experts arrived for this express purpose. Secondly, social capital was useful for learning about services and facilities such as relief goods distribution provided by various agencies. Thirdly, social capital proved to be vital for receiving mutual assistance in the

rehabilitation and recovery process where community members provided, for example, short-term loans, free housing and shelter, tools and equipment, and engaged in exchange of labour. Lastly, the authors found that social capital was also useful in terms of a socio-commercial aspect: some businesses extended credit to their customers and provided advance payment to their workers. Most importantly, the local business operators created a space for social interactions and exchanged practical advice following the disasters.

Nevertheless, the concept of social capital is not free from criticism. It would be a mistake to see social capital as a panacea for reducing disaster vulnerability in communities. An interplay of social capital with other resources and tools should be recognised to help people recover from disasters. In this regard, many scholars have increasingly reiterated that social capital alone is not enough to make a family or neighbourhood resilient. For instance, social capital with proactive and democratic local leadership (Bankoff 2015) and with political involvement or power (Roberts 2019) would be more useful for post-disaster recovery than relying on social capital alone. One of the strongest criticisms of social capital is that it is a tool of neoliberalism whereby the role of social capital is emphasised to shift attention away from the state's role in people's welfare.

Furthermore, social capital can be an *obstacle*, not an asset, for recovery and (re-) development when this capital is unequally distributed. In this context, rich people in the community are likely to gain an advantage from social capital at the expense of poor and marginalised groups. Social capital is, therefore, likely to reproduce social inequality rather than break its bondage in unequal societies. In this regard, Levien (2015) conducted a study in rural Rajasthan in India and found that social capital was unequally distributed between wealthy upper-caste groups (such as landlords and better-connected *jāt* farmers) and poor low-caste

groups. With the help of their robust network, the upper-caste groups exploited the connections among lower caste groups and were able to broker land at a nominal price from the latter. In contrast, the lower caste groups' network was weak or less resourceful, thus failed to generate significant benefits for the members.

While many studies have investigated the traditional, Indigenous, and existing social capital in the humanitarian and development field, research on *induced social capital* is rare. While government and non-government organisations, particularly in the "third world", have promoted social capital for decades through self-help groups, interest groups, and community cooperatives or networks for DRR and community development, studies on the effectiveness of such induced-social-capital for post-disaster recovery and (re-)development is scant. Therefore, the current research pays equal attention to the existing or traditional social capital as well as induced social capital.

Moreover, while the significance and use of social capital in coping with the stress of disaster and healing trauma and recovery has been underscored, how social capital itself may get affected due to humanitarian interventions has not been adequately investigated.

Symbolic Capital, Symbolic Power, and Symbolic Violence

The concepts of symbolic capital, symbolic power, and symbolic violence are key contributions of Bourdieu to the field of sociology. Bourdieu distances himself from Marxism by arguing for the role of symbolic forms and processes in the reproduction of social inequality (Swartz 1997, p. 82). Symbolic capital comes with social position and legitimises this position. For example, narratives, actions, or decisions of dominant people—for example, a priest among religious

communities, by a *Khas* (a dominant caste group) in rural Nepal, or a male in a patriarchal society—are typically recognised and legitimised by other dominated groups.

Symbolic capital has unique relationships with other capitals. First of all, symbolic power becomes virtually impossible to distinguish from other capitals because it is obtained from the successful use of other capitals (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 122). Bourdieu (1998, p. 47) explains:

> Symbolic capital is any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value.

Symbolic capital, like material capital, can be accumulated, and under certain conditions and at a specific rate or price, be exchanged for material capital (Swartz 1997, p. 92). This form of capital can be used, for example, as a credit or a kind of advance to gain economic capital (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 120). "Symbolic capital functions to mask the economic domination of the dominant class and socially legitimate hierarchy by essentialising and naturalising social position" (Postone et al. 1993, p. 5).

Symbolic power legitimises economic and political power relations and social structure through symbolic forms. Further, this is also an imposed power by dominant groups or institutions upon powerless people. In this sense, it is a power of domination which is usually used to reproduce unequal power relations within the social structure (see Bourdieu 1990a, p. 135).

Symbolic violence is an act of imposing values, norms, and beliefs of dominant groups and institutions upon dominated groups in society (Swartz 2013, p. 84). This form of violence refers to a situation in which more powerful actors in society enjoy unchallenged privileges in accessing resources and power through which they dominate social relations and interactions

(Nightingale and Ojha 2013, p. 34). Therefore, symbolic power, used as an instrument to dominate subjugated groups, is usually only available to dominant groups or powerful institutions such as the state.

Unlike physical violence, symbolic violence, as the name suggests, is not easily seen or recognised. Instead, this type of violence is subtle and taken for granted as a naturalised process. In this regard, Bourdieu (1990b, p. 133) notes that symbolic violence is the "gentle, disguised form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible…". Further, Krais (1993, p. 172) clarifies that this form of violence is a "subtle, euphemized, invisible mode of domination that prevents domination from being recognized as such and, therefore, as misrecognized domination, is socially recognised". Masculine domination—misrecognised and thus accepted by both males and females—is a typical example.

Operationalising Bourdieusian Perspectives in the Research

Bourdieu's theories have not been used holistically in disaster scholarship. However, aspects of them have found a place in research, particularly habitus and social capital. Any one of Bourdieu's practice theory elements can function as an effective thinking tool. Integrating Bourdieusian concepts, however, is beneficial because they do not function in isolation but in relation to capitals and fields (Swartz 2008). This claim is supported by the following equation provided by Bourdieu (1996b, p. 101):

[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice.

This equation can be interpreted as: "one's practice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)" (Maton 2012, p. 50). By acknowledging the interconnected concepts of

habitus, capital, and field, my proposed research aims to apply Bourdieu's theory of practice more holistically.

Bourdieu's concepts allow us to bring fresh insights to disaster research. The following points summarise how I applied Bourdieusian perspectives in my research to understand the post-disaster field and recovery process:

a) I investigated what different types of capital (including natural capital[17]) exist in the community and how these capitals have been used or mobilised in the recovery process. It was crucial to understand the state of capital distribution and accumulation by different groups, with particular reference to poor and marginalised people. There is a close relationship between power and capital. Therefore, I analysed if there was any elite capture of capital in the post-disaster context to benefit themselves and marginalise powerless people in society.

b) I investigated each form of Bourdieu's capital in detail. I assessed the state of people's economic capital in the research location and how poor and disadvantaged people cope with disasters when they lack this capital. In addition to economic capital, other forms of capital also played a crucial role in the disaster recovery process. In this respect, the study assessed the state of social capital and cultural capital among subaltern groups, Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti, and how these forms of capital are embodied, objectified, and institutionalised in the post-disaster context. Using Bourdieu's capital theory, the research examined how the capital was exchanged, negotiated, and converted (from one form of capital to another) in the process of recovering from a disaster. In addition, this study explored how social and cultural capitals were a "two-edged sword" (a boon or bane) for the recovery and (re-)development process in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake.

[17] Bourdieu's capital theory is silent on natural capital; however, it is crucial in a disaster context; I discuss this in the next section.

c) Symbolic capital was also analysed. In this connection, my study examined how position and dispositions were legitimised by various agents/actors in the process of post-disaster recovery. While the concept of symbolic violence has been applied in a number of fields such as education, politics and international relations, gender studies (e.g., Krais 1993), and natural resource management (e.g., Nightingale and Ojha 2013; Ojha 2008), the notion of symbolic capital is rarely used in disaster research (Uekusa 2018b, p. 96). Nevertheless, symbolic capital functioned as a useful framework for understanding the paradox that the research participants perceived the cement house as *rāmro* (beautiful) yet emphasised its negative aspects.

Summary

This chapter discussed the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories that were adopted for the research. I argued that Bourdieu's theories hold much promise for our understanding of social vulnerability and post-disaster impact and recovery complexities. I explained that the Bourdieusian lens is useful in disaster research for three reasons. Firstly, Bourdieu's field theory helps us to see that disaster sites are more than physical places and sites for reconstruction; they are social arenas where struggles take place to secure capital(s) and positions in the post-disaster field, and where disaster profiteering may occur. Secondly, Bourdieu's habitus concept is helpful in understanding agency, which is a positive thing, and at the same time, enables us to discern discriminatory practices. Thirdly, Bourdieu's views on capital are holistic. He conceptualises capital as including not only the economic but also the social, cultural, and symbolic. Most importantly, this conceptualisation enables an exploration of how these different forms of capital are interlinked and how interchangeability is possible in order to secure more reliable and desirable capital.

I also elaborated on the core concepts of Bourdieu's theories: habitus, field, and capital. Further, I discussed symbolic capital and symbolic power. I then considered all of these concepts in relation to the disaster field.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of my research design and methodology. I argue that qualitative interpretive inquiry was the most relevant approach for my research which aimed to examine disaster response and recovery process through the lived experience of the most marginalised and disadvantaged social groups. I provide the details of research locations and participants and describe the methods used to collect, analyse, and interpret the data, detailing the step-by-step process. I then elaborate on the ethical research process followed in this research.

Reflection/reflexivity on the adopted research strategy helps to recognise its strengths and limitations and identify ways to improve the research process (see, e.g., Childs et al. 2017). Thus, toward the end of the chapter, I give an account of the "new"—remote interviews—methodology adopted by this research project to meet the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, I reflect on how this interview method was useful but not without limitations. Remote interviews were indeed a gain but at the expense of face-to-face conversations.

Research Design, Study Locations and Participants

My purpose in doing the research was to have a close-up view and a richer understanding of the post-disaster recovery and (re-)development state in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. I became interested in insider accounts, the lived experience of people, and how they make sense of their lives and worlds in the process of post-disaster recovery. Hence, a qualitative form of research is relevant here (Merriam 2002; Yin 2011).

The research was carried out five years after the earthquake. This timeframe remains important in terms of examining the mid-term or long-term livelihoods recovery and housing reconstruction following the earthquake. However, the data collection was being conducted during another disaster, this time the global pandemic (Covid-19). The pandemic disrupted people's livelihood journey and the plans that were underway. As for me (researcher), the original research methodology had to be reviewed and changed due to travel restrictions and disruptions in the respective communities brought about by the pandemic.

The research was primarily carried out in Dhading, Gorkha (which was the epicentre of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake), Rasuwa, and Sindhupalchok Districts (see Figure 6). These geographical locations located on the hills or at the foot of the mountains of central Nepal were among the worst-hit districts by the earthquake. The disaster survivors/community people and local NGO humanitarian and development workers were from these four districts. Government officials and some aid workers were based in Kathmandu, the capital city. A brief description of the four research districts, including the earthquake impact, is provided in Table 6.

Table 6

Situation of Human Development and the Impact of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake on Human Casualties and Injuries and Private/Residential Housing in the Research Districts

District	State of human development[(1)]			Casualties and damage due to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake[(2)]		
	Human Dev. Index (HDI)	Life exp. (years)	Adult lit. (%)	Death	Injuries	Houses fully damaged
Dhading	0.41 *(0.490)*	70.6 *(68.80)*	53.26 *(59.57)*	680	1,218	81,313
Gorkha	0.481	71.7	58.17	450	952	68,537
Rasuwa	0.461	70.91	41.32	681	771	11,950
Sindhupalchok	0.455	69.57	49.51	3,570	1,569	89,884

Source: [(1)]National Planning Commission (https://www.npc.gov.np/human_development_indicators_by_district/) [(2)]The Government of Nepal's DRR portal (http://drrportal.gov.np/). The figures in parentheses indicate the national average.

The research participants were purposefully selected from disadvantaged and marginalised social groups: Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples. The Government of Nepal has recognised the current state of marginalisation and exclusion of different social groups from the mainstream of development ("Indigenous nationalities of Nepal…", n.d.).

Both Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples have experienced structural marginalisation and social exclusion since the unification of greater Nepal (see Gurung 2006; Hachhethu 2003; Tamang 2011). As a result, the highest rate of chronic and structural poverty today is found among Dalits and Ādibāsi-Janajātis in Nepal (Wagle 2017). Moreover, Dalit people, particularly Tarai Dalits, have the country's lowest human development index (UNDP 2014). Therefore, the research identified both Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples as marginalised groups due to their shared history of marginalisation and disadvantaged positions in society and unequal development outcomes, with both sitting at the bottom of the socio-economic indices.

Forty-six qualitative interviews were conducted with local people, humanitarian and development workers in I/NGOs, and government representatives. Thirty-five of them were community people/disaster survivors, eight were humanitarian and development workers based in the research districts and Kathmandu (the capital city), and three were government representatives responsible for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. The details of the research participants are cited in Table 7.

Table 7

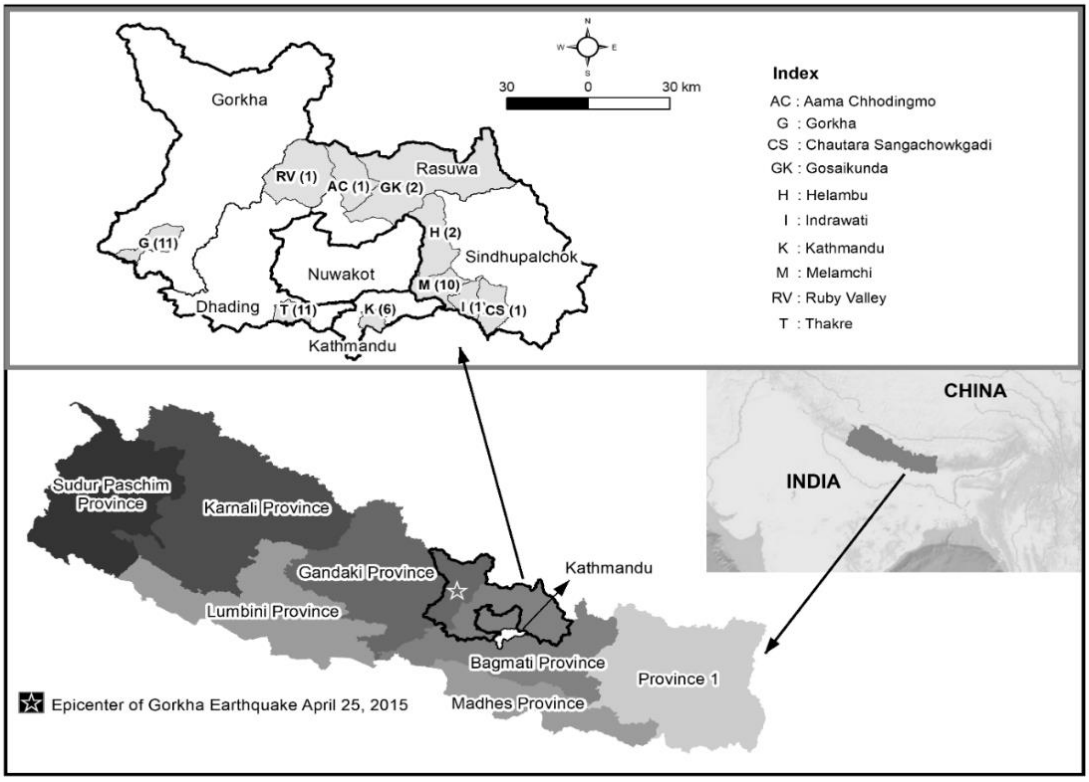
Types of Research Participants

Types of research participants	Female	Male	Total
Disaster survivors (community members)	13	22	35
Humanitarian and development workers	1	7	8
Government representatives	-	3	3
TOTAL	14	32	46

Similarly, Figure 6 depicts the research districts and *gāunpālikā/nagarpālikā* (rural municipality/municipality) and the number of research participants from those locations.

Figure 6

Map of Nepal and Research Districts



The figures in parentheses denote the number of people interviewed from those regions. The map and its boundaries are for illustrative purpose only.

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

The research followed qualitative research method principles. A relatively small number of cases were studied in-depth in order to explore the complexity of their situations and explain their "webs of meaning" (Merriam 2002; Ten Have 2004). Moreover, qualitative research tends to be flexible, informant-led, and consequently emergent in context (Marvasti 2004; Yin 2011). Indeed, the original research methodology had to be reviewed and changed due to travel restrictions and disruption in the communities brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic (Kobakhidze et al. 2021).

The research utilised multiple approaches to collect data from June 2020 to April 2021. Online interviews were conducted through digital technology, such as Zoom and also via telephone. Interviews in remote locations or with people who did not have access to internet or phone facilities were undertaken and digitally recorded by field interviewers. The interviews were limited to a one-off event due to the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic for travelling (international and local restrictions) and meetings (social distancing). Further, public angst was sensed or reported due to the overwhelming experiences of the unexpected pandemic.

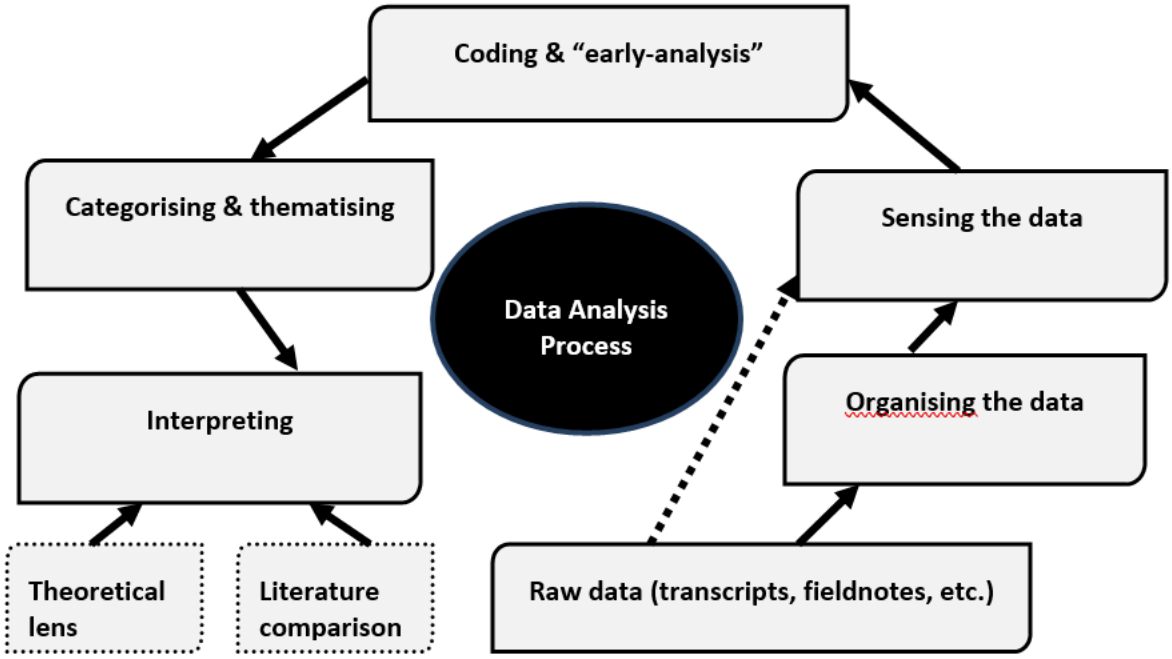
In the interview, disaster survivors were asked how the earthquake impacted their means of living and how they could manage or sustain their livelihoods afterwards. Further, I explored what kinds of livelihood and housing reconstruction assistance they received from government and non-government organisations and how such support was helpful (or not helpful). The participants were also asked to compare and contrast their livelihood and housing situation (before and after the earthquake) and opportunities in relation to other castes in their communities. With government and humanitarian/development I/NGOs, I sought to understand

the nature and rationale of livelihood recovery and housing reconstruction interventions and the process of beneficiaries' selection and project implementation in the communities.

The participants' interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then transferred to NVivo software. I used an open coding process that included a close reading of the transcripts. Figure 7 depicts the data analysis process adopted in this research.

Figure 7

Data Analysis and Interpretation Process



Source: Adapted from Creswell and Creswell 2018, p. 194.

Step 1: Organising and preparing the data for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews, optically scanning materials, sorting and arranging data, and typing field notes.

Step 2: Reading through all the data to obtain a general sense. Here, the overall meaning of ideas and the way in which they were expressed were reflected upon. A general sense of the data had already been acquired at the raw data stage.

Step 3: Starting the coding process. NVivo software programme was used for coding.

Step 4: Categorising and thematising. The open coding was then grouped into categories and themes.

Step 5: Interpreting the data. Meanings were extracted based on the identified categories and themes.

I acknowledge that data analysis is not a linear process as analysis may take place at any or every stage of the process (see Figure 7). Some level of data analysis may even take place while collecting the data itself, such as when undertaking interviews and making observations, and data-gathering can be a simultaneous process (Gibbs 2007, p. 3; Merriam 2009; Patton 1990). Further, data analysis is not a unidirectional event, but a two-way (or even multidirectional) process, which involves moving back and forth between the steps or stages between listening or reading raw data, coding, categorising and thematising, and analysing the data.

Moreover, secondary data and grey literature (project reports, policy documents, and project publicity documents) were scrutinised as part of the analysis (Ten Have 2004). Therefore, some of the findings are derived from those materials. In these instances, I acknowledged my integrated presentation of data to show that data derived from both interviewees and secondary sources.

Institutional ethics approval for the research was obtained from the university.

Ethical Consideration and Informed Consent

Ethical issues are critical in qualitative research. To a large extent, concerns about research ethics revolve around issues of confidentiality, informed consent, the right to withdraw, and the potential for harm.

Confidentiality

The information of the research participants remain private or confidential with the researcher and field interviewers. When the information provided is reported/published, it is done so in such a manner that its source cannot be identified (e.g., pseudonyms).

In this research, the rights, dignity, and diversity of participants were duly respected, and the confidentiality of the participants who shared the information was maintained. This was achieved using pseudonyms. However, the surname (family name) of the community participants was retained because it denotes the caste background and ethnic identity (in some cases, ethnic marginality as well) of an individual.

Informed Consent and the Right to Withdraw

Interviews were conducted with individuals who gave informed consent in writing or verbally. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw during interviews without giving a reason. Similarly, the participants could withdraw their interview data up to six weeks after the interview date without giving a reason. This decision of withdrawal could be communicated to me (the researcher) by sending an email/text message or contacting me on my local mobile number dedicated to this study.

Potential of Harm

Harm was not anticipated to either the researcher or the participants. However, the study could potentially raise issues that would cause psychological discomfort as the research deals with disasters and disaster recovery. If interviewees felt discomfort and needed further socio-psychological assistance, an arrangement for referral to a local mental health service provider or social worker who could provide additional professional support was in place. This was also noted in the Participant Information Sheet (PIS).

The researcher and field interviewers were aware of the power inequalities between them and participants and, thus, used culturally sensitive approaches. The researcher and field interviewers had prior experience working closely with socially vulnerable populations.

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly of the "New" Methodology: Reflection on the Remote Interviews

The WHO's declaration (on 11 March 2020) of the Covid-19 as a pandemic changed the research landscape due to the mobility/travel restrictions and social distancing provisions administered by (national, federal, or local) governments in different countries. Researchers had to find alternative ways of undertaking fieldwork or collecting data. Most of these researchers found digital technology to be a viable option for continuing their research projects. While it was not a "new" methodology in the research field—online surveys and telephone interviews have been widely used for decades—social science researchers, or at least researchers in the sociology and anthropology disciplines, would not typically have considered collecting data/information through digital technology prior to the pandemic.

Like many other researchers, I too considered remote interviews as one of the methods of data collection. During this time, some scholars also compiled different methods and techniques

of researching remotely. Remote digital research methods have many benefits. I am glad that I was not doing this research 30 years ago; otherwise, it would have been extremely difficult to carry out the project. I am sure we would have found a solution, but I also presume that it would have been more challenging and overwhelming than now.

Nonetheless, I found online interviews extremely challenging in developing country contexts. For example, my interview meetings were disrupted due to internet-related issues associated with the low bandwidth. When I (with my family) used to live in the university family apartment in Aotearoa New Zealand, I had access to a reliable Wi-Fi facility. But, for this research, conducting interviews from the other side of the world was terrible. Therefore, I had to ask participants several times to repeat what they had just said. The flow or the momentum of the interview was lost. It was frustrating for both of parties at times. While I was generally thankful for the technological innovations, I could not stop thinking of having a face-to-face conversation with the research participants.

Remote interview process was frustrating! I had to reschedule video (e.g., Zoom) meetings many times due to poor internet connections. At other times, I could never regain contact with participants (mostly government officials and NGO workers) after the first connection was lost. On other occasions, some people (potential research participants), especially those who were in authority, agreed to be interviewed for this research but did not appear in the arranged video meeting. The follow-up emails did not receive any replies. This type of challenge might occur in physical or in-person fieldwork too. For example, a bureaucrat or a politician may not be present at the agreed place or time, or over time they may ignore the researcher and be busy (or pretend to be busy) on other matters in their office. However, I felt that physical fieldwork would at least be satisfying; I could visit their office and show my face. I thought that

this action might change their mind or mood if not this time then one day! At the bare minimum, I could have a sense that something was happening, or I was doing something here. I might spot another person who might be interested in having an interview, or there might be something to observe which could be useful for the research.

The other challenge I faced was deciding on when was the right time to initiate the interview during the pandemic times. When I was ready or willing to carry out interviews, the participants in Nepal were not so due to the pandemic or the new Covid virus variants that were circulating. The contexts were overwhelming due to lockdown and social distancing. I felt it might not be the right time. So, I decided to wait until the situation became "normal" and people might feel more relaxed. On other occasions, while the potential research participants were ready, I was not quite ready because Aotearoa New Zealand had its new record cases, and lockdown measures were enforced. I was also overwhelmed due to learning and administering new (online) ways of carrying out my part-time teaching assistant job at the university, looking after the children at home (as their schools were closed down) and overseeing their home-based learning, and managing my own study and research project. After a while, when I wanted to restart the interviews, Nepal was going through another round of tougher lockdowns. I was wondering whether it was ethical to initiate the research interviews during these times.

On a fine evening, I was talking to my friend in Nepal and shared my reluctance to initiate my research interviews as I had assumed that it may not be the right time for undertaking the task—I might overwhelm them at a time when they might already be overwhelmed. The friend suggested that some people would love to talk during the lockdown period as they are restricted at home, and they may appreciate the opportunity to talk. Following his advice, I invited a research participant for an interview through a gatekeeper. The meeting went well; the

participant appreciated the time we had together on Zoom. After this positive experience, I continued approaching and recruiting more participants who were available or willing to talk to me for the research.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the research methodology. I explained that qualitative research methodology was the most relevant research approach for this project, as I wanted to explore the lived experience of disadvantaged groups following the earthquake. Further, I provided an overview of the research locations and participants.

I discussed how Covid-19 impacted the research process, reflecting on the challenges, opportunities, and limitations of undertaking research posed by the pandemic. Further, I discussed how alternative strategies were adopted/adapted in carrying out the research. Likewise, I outlined the research ethics adhered to in this project and explained the methods of data collection and analysis.

The following five chapters present the research findings. The first of these focuses on post-earthquake emergency and humanitarian relief assistance.

CHAPTER V

RĀHAT-SAHAYOG (RELIEF SUPPORT)[18]

Large-scale disasters in developing countries can cause massive damage to private property and community infrastructures and claim thousands of lives. Further, such catastrophes usually trigger massive emergency relief needs due to the widespread poverty in the affected communities. Most importantly, mega crises often limit the government of many developing countries to respond to the emergency needs swiftly due to limited financial resources and capacities not being readily available (Paul 2006).

Following Nepal's 2015 Earthquake, the immediate relief needs of the affected populations were massive. According to the United Nations Flash Appeal document, 3.5 million people required immediate food assistance, over four million people were in need of medical care and access to health facilities, and about half a million children needed nutritional supplements (UN-OCHA 2015b). The Flash Appeal requested US$423 million to respond to the most urgent needs in the three months after the earthquake.

In response to the urgent humanitarian needs, several stakeholders—including government, non-government organisations (NGOs), bilateral or multilateral agencies such as UNICEF and World Food Organisations (WFO), and private sectors—carried out emergency relief operations in the affected communities. Nevertheless, the government and I/NGOs

[18] This chapter has been extracted from Karki J, Matthewman S and Grayman JH (2022) *Rahat-sahayog* (relief support): Examining disaster emergency response in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake 2015. *Disaster Prevention and Management*, *31*(5), 494–507. The two anonymous reviewers are sincerely acknowledged for their valuable comments, which greatly improved the quality of the manuscript.

(including multilateral agencies) were the key players in providing humanitarian relief (see Paul et al. 2017, p. 1179).

Disaster scholars have argued that ineffective response and recovery processes can perpetuate social inequality and put people in more vulnerable positions (Anderson and Woodrow 1991; Gaillard and Cadag 2009). Hence, it is crucial to analyse the relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian actions for the most marginalised communities. This chapter critically examines the actions taken by disaster survivors and humanitarian organisations to address the emergency needs in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. Similarly, I draw on the notion of *mobile sovereignty* (which I elaborate in the subsequent section) to understand how the power and domination of different actors were in play in the post-earthquake humanitarian space.

The Context of Post-Earthquake Emergency Relief Needs

As I discussed in Chapter I, The 7.8 M_w earthquake that struck the country in April 2015 claimed the lives of thousands of people and destroyed half a million houses. Losing family members is an irreparable loss. Half a million houses were destroyed. Over 17,000 cattle, about 40,000 smaller livestock, and more than 500,000 poultry animals died when buildings collapsed due to the quake (ICIMOD 2015). The earthquake also destroyed stockpiles of stored seeds, grains, and foodstuffs such as maize, millet, potatoes, rice, and wheat (FAO et al. 2015). Affected households experienced economic shock, losing farmland, livestock, assets, and employment opportunities which would take months and years to restore (He et al. 2018; Spoon et al. 2020).

Within hours of the earthquake, the Government of Nepal (GoN) made an official request for international assistance. Several donor meetings were held to seek international aid/assistance

for search-and-rescue (SAR) and emergency relief operations. As a result, over 100 international SAR and medical teams arrived in the country within 24 hours (UN-OCHA 2015a, para. 2). The 2015 Nepal Earthquake was the country's worst natural disaster since the 1934 Nepal–Bihar Earthquake (Paul et al. 2017), and the post-earthquake humanitarian and disaster response was one of the biggest operations in the recent history of the nation (Cook et al. 2018). An unprecedented number of INGOs arrived in the country after the earthquake to respond to emergency needs (Gurung and Baniya 2021), with over 450 aid organisations in total (UN-OCHA 2015a, para. 2). Many in-country INGOs who were already working in Nepal before the earthquake shifted their focus to humanitarian response and recovery. Thus, a wide range of local, national, and international stakeholders were involved in the humanitarian emergency response.

The initial few days were hectic with the lack of coordination, and there was no elected local government[3]. Many believed that local government elections[19] would make a difference in coordinating and managing the relief assistance in a timely and effective manner (Manandhar et al. 2017; Neupane 2015).

[19] The last local election was held in 1997, and the next election was supposed to be held in 2002. However, it was postponed due to the ongoing civil war which only ended in 2006. Nonetheless, the local election could not be planned soon after due to the post-war transition and constitution-making process. The election was finally held, after 20 years, in 2017.

Emergency Relief in Times of Crisis: Some Critical Reflections

The history of humanitarianism is contested. “Modern humanitarianism”, which is characterised by organised transnational assistance to the distant others, has a recent history that only began about 160 years ago with the emergence of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Geneva Convention. However, the meanings and focus of humanitarianism have evolved over the time—from the Dunantist tradition of charity during the war to relief assistance affected by conflict or natural disasters or actions toward protracted crisis and injustice (see Barnett 2011). However, if we equate humanitarianism with generosity and compassion, the idea and practices are as old as civilisation. There is a long history of charitable gestures in different faith groups such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism (see Barnett and Weiss 2011). Therefore, it is not uncommon to believe that every society has always had a mechanism to support and care for people in need or experiencing suffering.

When large-scale disasters strike a country, there is often a claim of a humanitarian emergency and urgency (Lord and Murton 2017, p. 89). Images and narratives of suffering are circulated in the media. The humanitarian emergency, created through such images and narrations, informs people worldwide about the sudden devastation, helps produce sympathy for the affected population, and demands an urgent response (Calhoun 2013, p. 33).

However, this emergency imaginary has its dark sides. For instance, there may be a political economy of crisis in play. In this connection, the study of Amy Moran-Thomas (2015) in Ghana shows that some humanitarian actors use constructions of emergency to justify their own packaged or pre-determined programmes while ignoring the genuine problem(s) in these communities. The urgency and rupture narratives were used to create a “do something syndrome” (Pandolfi 2003). Moran-Thomas’ research shows how pertinent health needs, for

example, the diabetes epidemic in the villages in Ghana, were undermined, but another humanitarian emergency was created, by Carter Centre and its stakeholders, to implement a guinea worm eradication programme. The construction of emergency was used to legitimise Carter Centre's humanitarian actions, that is, the distribution of water filters.

Moreover, the media framing of the emergency imaginary is temporary: a disaster is only news for a limited time! As soon as the media leaves the site, the "theatre of generosity loses its actors" (Pandolfi 2003, p. 378) even though the "emergency of everyday life" goes on (Moran-Thomas 2015, p. 222). The emergency imaginary, then, can do more harm than good, as localised and recurring events and shocks hardly gain attention in mainstream media even though their effects are still disastrous (Matthewman 2015, p. 6). Relatedly, they often cherry-pick a particular crisis, and offer a quick-fix solution rather than addressing interconnected issues or root causes. Certain locations of interest only become worthy of news for the international spotlight. For example, the earthquake damage in Kathmandu (capital city), UNESCO World Heritage sites and the iconic monuments in the capital city as well as the Everest Base Camp soon garnered international media attention (Lord and Murton 2017, p. 89). Scholars have warned that there is often—wittingly and unwittingly—a *politics of life* in play in humanitarianism: only some people, only some places, and only some narratives (may) get valued, prioritised, confirmed, and served at the cost of subaltern survivors (see Fassin 2007; Malkki 1996).

Similarly, anthropologist Mariella Pandolfi (2003) builds on Arjun Appadurai's (1996) notion of mobile sovereignty in the humanitarian space. Mobile sovereignty in disaster or crisis contexts is understood as a phenomenon in which transboundary humanitarian agents create and maintain transnational forms of domination over local actors, processes, or practices. For

instance, international actors dominate decisions to enter disaster sites, they undertake humanitarian interventions (of their preference), and leave the humanitarian space without following a formal exit process or accomplishing any significant tasks at all. In the discussion section of this chapter, I show how different forms of mobile sovereignty were in play in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake.

In sum, humanitarian relief assistance is no longer taken for granted as an act of kindness but has become a subject of scrutiny. A critical assessment of the *persons* (agents), *programmes*, *process*, and *politics* of humanitarian assistance is necessary for effective and efficient emergency response following a crisis in the future. Some scholars (e.g., Uekusa et al. 2022) see the value of critical disaster studies here.

Emergency Needs and Local Initiatives

The survivors' houses were damaged in the earthquake, and their grains were buried under the ground. Further, many households lost their loved ones or had seriously injured family members. Moreover, people lost their property and belongings in the rubble. To refer to such a big loss, Juntara (44), a male Dalit in the Sindhupalchok District, remarked, "The earthquake buried my whole world".

Without waiting for outside help to arrive in the village, the survivors started to help one another. They assisted in rescuing trapped people or livestock. Further, they installed makeshift tents or made temporary shelters and shared grains to prepare meals. In some places, the community members cooked food collectively and ate together. In this connection, Shukra (31), a male Ādibāsi-Janajāti in the Sindhupalchok District, shared, "We were about ten to twelve

families living together in one place. Some had one or two items, and others had something else. We collected them and prepared meals for all of us. This way we lived together".

Later, emergency relief goods donated by the government, NGOs/INGOs, and other groups started to arrive. There was an unprecedented level of volunteerism in relief distribution. These organisations began distributing relief packages or assistance, rapidly assessing the damage and loss. However, the relief operation was a challenging task for those local NGOs who did not have prior experience of dealing with a disaster of this scale. Bhakta Raj, a humanitarian development worker in the Gorkha District, said:

> At that time [when the earthquake struck], we got lost. We were confused about what to do and what not to do. None of us had any [concrete] idea…I realised that we did not have any preparedness [to address such a massive disaster]. We had never imagined that we have to face such a big scale of disaster and destruction. I wish we had a good preparation beforehand.

Bhakta Raj highlighted that the experience of other organisations, such as UN-OCHA, was helpful in establishing a system for undertaking emergency response and collect information on the damage or loss of lives and property. He also found the initiative of the District Chief Officer (government official) instrumental in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake for bringing different stakeholders into one platform for the coordination and instant actions required at that time. Further, the facilities (e.g., communication equipment) of security or military offices in the district were, as Bhakta Raj noted, advantageous in learning about the scale of destruction in different locations and carrying out rescue operations in a short time.

The emergency relief operations started to expand in villages as days passed by but not without limitations or criticisms. I unpack these issues in the next section.

The "Good, the Bad and the Ugly" of the Emergency Relief Goods

Following the earthquake, several entities were involved in providing emergency disaster relief. I/NGOs, government, private sectors, religious institutions, political parties, and even private citizens (Nepali or expatriates) individually or collectively provided relief goods. Further, the Nepali diaspora populations living in various foreign countries donated through different networks and channels for disaster response and recovery tasks (see Parajulee et al. 2020; Shivakoti 2019). Therefore, there were at least three different scales of response at work here: *intra*, *inter* and *diasporic*.

Nonetheless, I/NGOs and the government were the major players in humanitarian relief distribution (see Paul et al. 2017). Many in-country I/NGOs, regardless of their previous experience in humanitarian work, participated in both the relief distribution and the subsequent recovery process. The changing context and funding availability compelled these organisations to be involved in disaster response and recovery work. Further, several new INGOs arrived in Nepal to provide assistance in emergency response. Many of these organisations or their humanitarian assistance disappeared quickly, as they were involved in providing emergency relief and short-term interventions rather than undertaking long-term recovery and (re-) development programmes (see Spoon et al. 2021). Tracy Fehr (2022), in her fieldwork in the Gorkha District, recorded a Gurung woman's statement that best captures this surge of INGOs in post-earthquake Nepal. The woman commented: "*hururu aayo ra gayo*—which roughly means something came in like a gust of wind and quickly left, similar to a whirlwind" (Fehr 2022, p. 10).

Following the earthquake, the relief items distributed in the communities included food and non-food items. However, there was no uniformity in terms of what was distributed. Some

distributed only one or two items, others a variety. The interviews with the participants also revealed differing quantities of relief. An overview of relief goods provided to disaster survivors is provided in Table 8.

Table 8

List of Humanitarian Relief Goods Distributed in the Research Locations by Government and NGOs

Type of assistance	Examples of relief items
Food items	Rice, *chiurā* (beaten rice), *dāl* (pulse), *masalā* (spices), biscuits, salt, cooking oil, *chāu-chāu* (instant noodles), and infant supplementary food.
Educational materials	Stationery, recreational materials, and toys.
Water, sanitation, and hygiene materials	Soap, shampoo, razor, sanitary pad, and dignity kit.
Financial assistance	Cash assistance, cremation cost, and cash grant for winterisation assistance.
Shelter and housing	Tarpaulin, blanket, CGI sheets and assistance for making temporary shelters.
Cooking appliances	Utensils and stoves.
Garments	Clothing and winterisation assistance items (e.g., woollen cap and blanket)[20].

Source: Based on the interviews with local NGOs and disaster survivors. It is not an exhaustive list. It should be noted that not everyone received all of the listed relief items.

The disaster survivors generally appreciated the assistance. One of the community members, Anita (39), a female Majhi ethnic minority in Sindhupalchok, compared the assistance with that sent by God. She remarked, “There was no grain in our family [after the earthquake]. So, when we received the relief, we were extremely happy. We felt the relief was sent by God”.

[20] Save the Children’s (n.d.) winterisation programme gives an account of winterisation assistance. However, it has been found that there were variations in the assistance from one organisation to another. Some had distributed a blanket/quilt only (see “Report on nyano”, n.d.). The government provided NRP 10,000 (USD100) cash assistance to buy warm clothes, blankets, and fuel.

Phul Maya (41), a female Chepang ethnic minority in the Dhading District, was pleased to receive emergency relief assistance. She particularly appreciated the food and sheltering items as they were invaluable. Phul Maya said, "…the food, tarpaulin, and blankets were the most important and necessary things for us at that time. We had lost everything in the earthquake. Therefore, we felt very happy when we received them". Prem (29), a male Dalit in the Dhading District, found the tarpaulin was the most helpful item considering the family's need. He remarked:

> I think all the things [we were given] were useful, but the most useful, out of all the things, was the tarpaulin. Then it was raining, and the hurricane was coming. The aftershocks were going time and again after the earthquake. At that time, we could set up four sticks and put up the tent [tarpaulin] and stay inside. That was wonderful.

Some of the relief materials, however, contradicted local traditions and cultural norms despite good intentions. For example, *sāri* (a long piece of garment wrapped around the body) items were distributed in the Gorkha District, but the ethnic communities wear *lungi* (a garment wrapped around the waist and extending to the ankles). Bhakta Raj, a local humanitarian worker in the Gorkha District, stated:

> And some of the things were not relevant. In Barpak [a village in the Gorkha District], some clothes were delivered, and these items were sāri. You know, Barpak is the settlement of Ghale and Gurung [ethnic peoples], and women never wear a sāri here. They wear lungi and t-shirts. What is the use of sāri here? If it was a lungi, people could use it.

Similarly, miniskirts were found to have been distributed in Rasuwa, a mountain district, yet this type of clothing is neither culturally appropriate nor climatically suitable in that region. Angrita

Lama, a local humanitarian worker in the Rasuwa District, remarked, “They also distributed miniskirts to people living in the Tamang community of Rasuwa District in the Himalayan region. It [the costume] is not suitable in this place—women here do not wear such clothes”. Similarly, Biru (53), a Chepang ethnic minority in the Dhading District, said his family received old garments distributed by a humanitarian organisation. Second-hand clothes are uncommon in Nepal, unlike in the charity shops in western countries. Therefore, they are not accepted generally (Cook et al. 2018).

Furthermore, Dalit people in the Dhading District said that they did not receive information about the distribution of relief goods as people from other castes kept this information to themselves. These Dalit experiences show that the earthquakes failed to unsettle longstanding caste discrimination.

Ali-ali Rāhat (Meagre Relief)

One of the most common themes that emerged from the interviews was *ali-ali rāhat* (meagre relief, literally little or few). The participants shared that they got some minimal food items, which lasted for only a few days. Similarly, they received few non-food items. In this regard, Juntara stated, “Some gave clothes, some gave rice, and some gave utensils. But they gave little *(ali-ali)*”. The other participants, Thule Sunar, Dhan Kumari BK, Bakhat Tamang, and Som Maya Tamang, all had the same experience: the humanitarian assistance was minimal in quantity. Bakhat (35), a male Tamang ethnic minority in the Sindhupalchok District, recalled, “They had come carrying something like woollen bags. And salt, oil, and rice were in that bags, sir, but ali-ali (a little-little)”.

I elaborate on this issue of meagre relief in the discussion section.

Recurrence of the Old Story: Weak Coordination and Communication

Bhakta Raj, an NGO worker in the Gorkha District, shared how an instant and effective coordination mechanism emerged immediately following the earthquake. He noted how the government line agencies, security forces such as the army's office, and some local NGOs met immediately after the earthquake and collectively agreed to collaborate and mobilise their human resource, equipment, and connections to identify the casualties and damage. They agreed that the Nepal Army (NA) and Nepal Red Cross (NRC) should lead the efforts, as they had more experienced or trained people than other organisations in the district. Other offices or teams agreed to support the efforts led by NA and NRC.

However, such coordination seemed to fade away once the relief operations from various actors started to kick off in the district. As a result, duplication of relief assistance was reported. Some participants received the same item from different humanitarian agencies. Anita (39), a female Majhi ethnic minority in the Sindhupalchok District, shared, "The stove came from two or three places…". She further added:

> I wish I had given something else. The stove was not necessary. We do not cook inside the house but make a separate kitchen outside the house using [big] stones. Anyway, just one stove would be sufficient. It would have been better to give other things [instead of several stoves].

Some participants expressed frustration that they had no idea where and who was distributing relief. Biru said, "Many times we couldn't get the relief because we had no idea where the distribution was being done. On another occasion, the villagers were talking about it, and we went there". Further, Biru reported that different organisations came at different times and provided all sorts of different things.

Researchers have pointed out that coordination is an area of concern in disaster response and recovery processes (see Drabek and McEntire 2002; Raju and Becker 2013). I elaborate on the discussion concerning coordination in the subsequent section.

Discussion

My study in the four worst-hit districts of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake found that community members were the first responders to free people trapped in the rubble of collapsed houses and to help rescue injured livestock, which are valuable assets and sources of income for rural households in Nepal. This finding is consistent with other studies (see Takazawa and Williams 2011; Vallance and Carlton 2015) which have underscored the significance of local communities in emergency response and recovery processes. Further, I found that remarkable cooperation among disaster survivors emerged after the earthquake. They assisted in installing tarp tents for each other in open areas and shared grain, vegetables, and dāl (lentils or pulses) to prepare meals. In some places, they even set up community kitchens. This phenomenon of mutual cooperation in the aftermath of a disaster is conceptualised as social capital by several authors (see Akbar and Aldrich 2018; Bhandari 2014; Panday et al. 2021). However, other disaster scholars prefer to call it *disaster communitas* to indicate that this form of cooperation, which is temporally emergent, could unexpectedly or suddenly emerge in the wake of disasters even where pre-existing social bonds do not exist (for a detailed discussion on disaster communitas see Matthewman and Uekusa 2021 and Uekusa et al. 2022; see Turner 1969 for seminal work on communitas).

Such disaster communitas was seen or manifested in the form of volunteerism on an unprecedented scale in the rescue and relief operations in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake. One possible explanation for this rise in volunteerism is due to the influence of the media. The various forms of mainstream media (television, radio, print/online newspapers) along with social

media (such as Facebook), all of which had proliferated in Nepal before the earthquake, proceeded to continuously share images of suffering, search-and-rescue efforts, and relief operations being undertaken in the earthquake-hit communities. For some people, the imagery of the earthquake's destruction or the elevation of suffering through relief distribution prompted a sense of responsibility or duty to donate or volunteer during those difficult times. In this connection, some people even travelled from non-affected districts to help relief operations in earthquake-hit locations. This is an interesting finding as previous studies have mostly documented mutual aid within and among communities.

Besides community initiatives, there were several institutions engaged in the Nepal's earthquake emergency response efforts, and among these, the I/NGO engagement was significant. Several hundred INGOs and thousands of local NGOs were involved in relief operations following the earthquake, thanks to the general non-restrictive policy of the government, especially in the immediate aftermath. However, it should be noted that within weeks of the initial disaster the government asserted that all contributions must flow through the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund, and it created a complicated set of regulations making it much harder for I/NGOs to continue their work. These regulations (e.g., the "one-door policy") introduced to control, channel, and distribute humanitarian aid through one government body created tensions and mistrust between the government and other non-state humanitarian actors (see Melis 2022).

Nevertheless, the scale of damage and the emergency imagery/imaginary possibly helped these INGOs raise funds or collect relief goods expeditiously on the international stage. As a result, many INGOs were able to provide emergency relief instantly. Their relief operations implemented in partnership with local NGOs can be appreciated on various grounds. First of all,

the relief package was localised. Local food items such as *chiurā* (beaten rice) and *masalā* (spices) were included. The relief assistance was adapted in accordance with the changing environments. For example, when winter arrived, seven months after the earthquake, and people were still living in tents or temporary shelters, these I/NGOs carried out winterisation programmes to distribute warm clothes and blankets. The government also furnished cash to address the needs arising due to the winter cold.

However, there were several issues with the emergency response. Dalit and non-Dalit discriminatory social relations continued after the disaster. Dalits and non-Dalits lived separately in displaced locations, and cooperation was predominantly limited within caste groups. Further, the accounts of Dalits in the Sindhupalchok District revealed that they did not get help from other caste groups to rescue livestock or manage the carcasses.

My research also found that the emergency relief assistance was insufficient (ali-ali). Above all, it must be acknowledged that it was the worst disaster in the country in more than 80 years. The scale of devastation and magnitude was so big that, according to the United Nations Flash Appeal, more than three million people required immediate food assistance. However, there were other issues that caused the disproportionate distribution of humanitarian aid. The relief was distributed in relatively accessible places that disadvantaged people in remoter locations. This finding correlates with other studies on humanitarian relief in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake (Bownas and Bishokarma 2018; Lord and Murton 2017; Spoon et al. 2021). Further, in another study, some villagers perceived that certain geographical locations were prioritised for relief and recovery interventions, not based on the extent of the devastation or the area's needs but due to the influential profile such places enjoyed, such as tourism destinations or the settlements (see Spoon et al. 2020). Therefore, some locations received aid

disproportionately. At this juncture, it is important to note that previous studies have also shown the correlation between the volume of humanitarian relief and the extent of the media coverage (see Paul 2011). Moreover, in some places, the relief distribution was politicised or mediated/controlled by political representatives, which disadvantaged Dalit and other marginalised social groups in accessing relief aid (see Bownas and Bishokarma 2018; Shrestha et al. 2019). Finally, the relief packages were also distributed by individuals and non-institutional stakeholders out of their own generosity or "will to help" without any knowledge of, or adherence to, minimum humanitarian standards.

Furthermore, distribution information was not disseminated widely, causing people to roam around to find relief. My findings revealed that many Dalit households could not access information about relief distribution through their neighbours from other caste groups. Non-Dalit households kept the information to themselves. Spoon et al. (2020) also documented this social exclusion in their study following the earthquake in Nepal. Together, such findings suggest that that the oppressed and marginalised people are likely to suffer most due to their geographical isolation and social exclusion when public dissemination of relief distribution is weak. Notably, several of the Dalit and ethnic group participants stated that the *tātho-bātho* (educated or clever people) had a good idea of relief and recovery aid (who is giving, what and where) and enjoyed this privilege. This finding is in line with Bownas and Bishokarma (2018) and Spoon et al. (2020). Moreover, some individuals perceived that households who had *chineko mānchhe* (acquaintance person) or *āfno mānchhe* (close circles or relatives) received relief and recovery assistance easily, or even more aid (see Bista [1991] for seminal discussion on social and economic privileges through āfno mānchhe social affiliations in Nepali bureaucracy and society).

Therefore, social vulnerability-based interventions and consideration of intersectionality could help navigate the relief assistance to the most-needy survivors, like Dalit and disadvantaged communities.

Furthermore, due to the lack of a robust coordination mechanism, duplication of the relief items was observed. And some relief materials contradicted local traditions or cultural norms and climatic conditions. This finding is consistent with Cook et al. (2018), who reported on the distribution of food items that are insensitive to local culture or faith, such as some food items including beef, which is taboo or prohibited in the Hindu dominant country. I believe that some of these issues could be prevented by either purchasing the relief materials locally or within the country or adopting cash/voucher transfers. Cash/voucher transfer gives people the choice and flexibility to decide what and how much they should spend the money on (Harvey 2007). However, several scholars have warned that this non-conventional scheme should not be understood as a panacea to solve all the problems in humanitarian response because such assistance may not be relevant or helpful in all circumstances (see Harvey 2007). For example, banking infrastructure/services and market functionality are essential factors limiting or facilitating cash transfer schemes.

The coordination landscape was also often mentioned, referring to interaction and sharing between I/NGOs and government actors but excluding other actors such as private sector philanthropy. The coordination and communication gaps between security forces (who were primarily involved in the search-and-rescue operations) and public bureaucracy were reported (see also Cook et al. 2018); however, such separation was not observed at the district level (in this case Gorkha District), particularly immediately after the earthquake. This is an important finding in terms of understanding coordination at different levels. One possible explanation for

this state of affairs is that the coordination among security personnel, bureaucrats, and I/NGOs was the usual practice in pre-disaster environments, which resulted in instant and better coordination mechanisms at the local level compared to the national stage. I acknowledge that this (single) case is insufficient to draw a strong conclusion. I therefore recognise the need for further study to explore localised and organic coordination mechanisms at the local level (District and Gāunpālikā). The local coordination mechanism and its best practices and learnings should be institutionalised for future use, and the government's role is important here (Raju and Becker 2013).

Several INGOs were working in the disaster-affected districts. Some of these INGOs were accused of operating without obtaining permission from the Social Welfare Council (SWC), a government body that regulates I/NGOs' work in Nepal (Pokhrel 2015). This case resonates with Mariella Pandolfi's (2003) notion of mobile sovereignty. Transnational power is in play here. Nevertheless, several other INGOs in Nepal instead negotiated the process and relief and early recovery operations with the frames set by national and local government authorities. This situation is similar to Good et al. (2015) who argued that mobile sovereignty operates differently in other contexts (in their case, a strong-state environment in Indonesia) in which international humanitarian actors need to depend upon local actors, comply with local governance structures, and deal with the everyday reality of strong-state institutions in the post-crisis environment.

Likewise, political parties and private entities distributed post-earthquake relief materials of their preference[21]. That means the institutions themselves determined the type of relief items, quantity, and geographical locations for emergency relief distribution. Therefore, this case

[21] The renowned private company in Nepal, Chaudhary Group (CG), distributed its signature brand *Wai Wai* instant noodles packets. Other food companies in India also supplied their products to Nepal.

suggests that there could also be a chance of exercising a kind of mobile sovereignty by *intra*national actors (not only by *inter*national agencies) during or in the aftermath of humanitarian crises and when the government structure and its processes are weak or overwhelmed.

Summary

The research found that disaster survivors demonstrated remarkable cooperation in the aftermath of the disaster; however, caste-based discrimination still manifested in post-earthquake emergency environments. Further, the findings showed that the engagement of government and local and international humanitarian organisations was noteworthy in the earthquake emergency response in Nepal, as it localised relief packages and adapted the assistance to the fast-changing post-disaster environments. However, some relief materials were culturally inappropriate and climatically unsuitable. The results also showed that the poor dissemination of relief distribution plans, resource duplication, and ineffective targeting disproportionately impacted the oppressed and marginalised households for humanitarian assistance.

After *saving lives* and addressing emergency needs following a crisis, the next important step is to help people *secure livelihoods* for recovery. The next chapter discusses the post-earthquake livelihood recovery processes.

CHAPTER VI

FROM GOODS TO GOATS: POST-DISASTER LIVELIHOOD RECOVERY[22]

Disasters can have a significant impact on rural livelihoods. They can inflict substantial damage on the farmland or resources (natural or physical) which people depend on for their subsistence or income (Epstein et al. 2018; Lebel et al. 2006). Disasters can kill or injure livestock that are valuable assets in developing countries, disrupt markets and supply chains, and damage lifeline utilities (such as electricity or telecommunications), all of which are essential for farming or micro-entrepreneurial activities (Daly et al. 2020; Epstein et al. 2018). People adapt to their post-disaster everyday life using different Indigenous or local coping strategies in the short-run (see Gaillard et al. 2009); however, delays or ineffective recoveries may have several unexpected socio-economic consequences for disaster-affected households (ADPC 2015, p. 10). For example, poor parents may decide to take their children out of school due to a lack of money. These out-of-school children are likely to be recruited into child labour (Sassi 2021; UN-OCHA 2016).

Similarly, people may sell their assets, making them further vulnerable, and cases of human trafficking (particularly girls) or forced/unsafe labour migration might increase in the aftermath of disasters or acute crises (Bishokarma 2012; UN-OCHA 2021). Moreover, many low-income families may find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of debt following a crisis

[22] This chapter has been extracted from Karki J, Matthewman S and Grayman, JH (2022) *From goods to goats*: Examining post-disaster livelihood recovery in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake 2015. *Natural Hazards*, *114*, 3787–3809. The two anonymous reviewers are sincerely acknowledged for their valuable comments which greatly improved the quality of the manuscript.

(Gunasekara et al. 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to help the most disadvantaged households in the communities restore their livelihoods as early and effectively as possible.

However, restoring livelihoods in developing countries, like Nepal, and in rural contexts is quite complex. The recovery process is affected by several factors such as place-based determinants (geographies that shape everyday economies such as rural tourism or farming; market-centre or hinterland), the informal nature of the economy, the diverse needs of disaster survivors, and intersectional issues (such as caste, ethnicity, and gender). Further, poverty is generally pervasive and embedded in rural households. Rural people generally lack the necessary assets and financial resources to restore their livelihoods in the aftermath of recovery. Moreover, insurance for micro-enterprises, livestock or crops, and assets is rare in developing countries (De Mel et al. 2012; Devkota et al. 2021), which makes post-disaster livelihoods restoration even more challenging. Aid or external assistance plays a vital role at this juncture to help disaster survivors restore livelihoods following calamity (Coate et al. 2006; Daly et al. 2020; Khan et al. 2015).

The Earthquake's Impact on Livelihoods

The earthquake's immediate effect on livelihoods and potential long-term consequences were well documented in the *Nepal Earthquake 2015: Post Disaster Needs Assessment* report prepared by the National Planning Commission of Nepal Government (NPC/GoN 2015b). The report was extensive despite being prepared within a month of the earthquake. This section draws from this report and the findings of subsequent research studies.

According to the PDNA report, the earthquakes impacted the livelihoods of about 2.29 million households and 5.6 million workers (NPC/GoN 2015a, p. 215). The majority of the people in the earthquake-affected districts, except the Kathmandu Valley and other urban centres, are primarily dependent on the agricultural sector for livelihoods. This sector was

severely impacted. The earthquake destroyed stockpiles of stored grains and killed and injured livestock. The PDNA estimated that over 17,000 cattle and about 40,000 smaller domesticated animals perished. Rural people lost their livestock, planting seeds, and agricultural tools. The grazing and crop fields considerably deteriorated by erosion in several communities after the earthquake, and agricultural inputs and services (such as irrigation) were unavailable, damaged, or inaccessible.

Additionally, the earthquake damaged irrigation facilities and triggered landslides in different locations, rendering nearly 1,000 hectares of land useless, as documented by the report. The field research of Epstein et al. (2018) and He et al. (2018) confirmed the findings of the PDNA report. Spoon et al. (2020 2021) further documented farmers being unable to access grazing land areas and fodder for almost a year after the earthquake due to trail/road damage and landslides, which caused many farmers to sell their livestock altogether. In the Gorkha District, He et al. (2018) noted that the average number of animals decreased from 7.65 to 4.5 heads per household after the earthquake.

Similarly, the earthquake substantially impacted local small businesses, micro-enterprises, and tourism. There was damage to entrepreneurial machinery and tools and disruption to the supply chain. Tourism infrastructure such as hotels and trekking routes were damaged, and the number of local and international tourists reduced dramatically. In the tourism sector, it was estimated that about 200,000 people lost their employment due to the earthquake (NPC/GoN 2015b, p. 63). Therefore, there was a significant loss of livelihoods as a result of the mega-earthquake in 2015. The total estimated budget required for the recovery of employment and livelihoods was estimated to be NPR12.5 billion[23] (NPC/GoN 2015a, p. 213).

[23] The exchange rate 1 USD = NPR 100 has been used in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report.

Conceptualising Livelihood Recovery

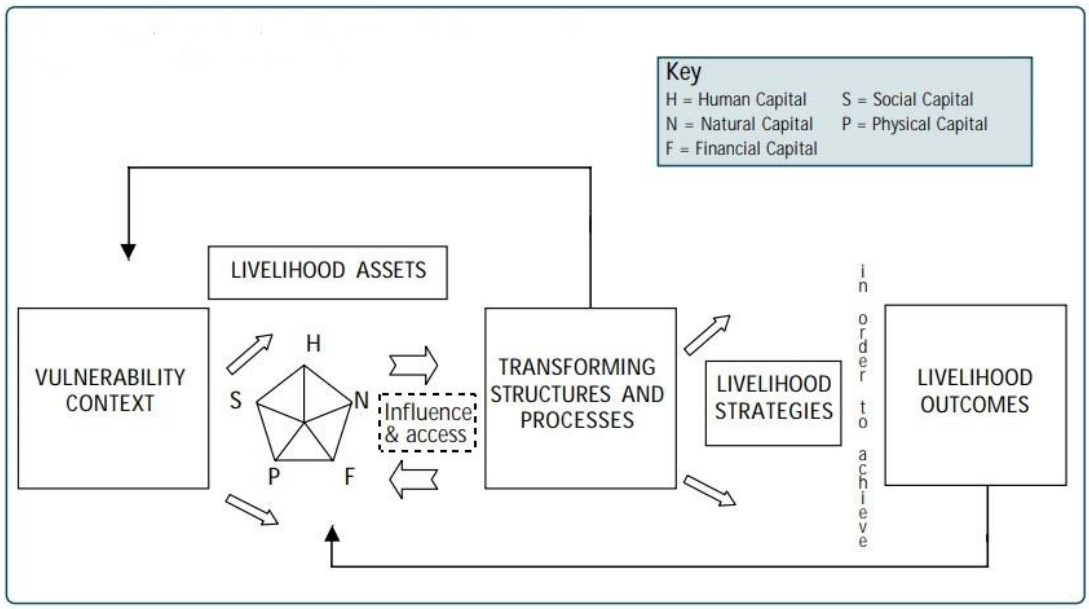
Various definitions of *livelihoods* or *sustainable livelihoods* are offered in the literature; however, a simple and comprehensive definition is provided by Robert Chambers and Gordon R. Conway, who are influential thinkers in the field of development. Based on their work, the Department for International Development (DFID) conceptualised the Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) Framework (see Figure 8), which has been widely used in the aid and development sector. DFID (2001, p. 1.1) defines livelihood and sustainable livelihoods as follows:

> A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future while not undermining the natural resource base.

The concept of capitals/assets, which is referred to as the *asset pentagon* (viz. human, natural, financial, social, and physical capital), lies at the heart of the SL Framework (see DFID 2001). The framework encourages exploring opportunities for strengthening, interchanging, exchanging, or substituting different forms of capital. It can also be applauded for putting people at the centre of development, considering the circumstances of their vulnerability, and taking a holistic approach to improving people's livelihood and wellbeing. However, some scholars are critical of the livelihoods approach for lacking an appraisal of (or not being explicit about) power and politics in its framework for designing and implementing community development or disaster recovery programmes (Kapadia 2014; Scoones 2009).

Figure 8

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework



Source: DFID 2001, p. 1.1

In addition to the SL Framework, social vulnerability, resilience, and social capital—which have become dominant concepts in disaster scholarship—provide a helpful supplementary framework for understanding the impacts on, and recoveries of, livelihoods following disasters. Wisner et al. (2004, p. 11) define *vulnerability* as "the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of natural hazards" (italics in original). The social vulnerability literature shows that some groups in society are more exposed than others to disasters and, therefore, more likely to suffer from their impacts (Wisner et al. 2004; Hewitt 1997). Thus, disasters are seen to exacerbate already existing inequalities. The disadvantaged and marginalised households in the communities are likely to have limited resources to safeguard their livelihood assets and may have fewer financial resources and opportunities to return to the status quo ante (Tierney 2019; Wisner et al. 2004).

However, vulnerability scholarship can pathologise people and overlook their agency and adaptive coping capacities which they can use in the disaster recovery process (Hewitt 1997). Indeed, having already lived in miserable conditions, they may have developed everyday resilience to cope with such hardships and, thus, generated resources to draw on during a disaster (see Uekusa and Matthewman 2017).

Similarly, the concept of resilience has also become a mantra in recent years in the aid and development sector and is central to debates within the field (Levine et al. 2012; Manyena et al. 2011). It gained popularity due to its strengths-based conception in contradistinction to the concept of vulnerability. While various definitions have been offered by different scholars and organisations, I use the following in this thesis (DFID 2011, p. 6):

> Disaster Resilience is the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses–such as earthquakes, drought or violent conflict–without compromising their long-term prospects.

Resilience has been accepted by key international policies for DRR and development, such as the Sendai Framework and Sustainable Development Goals. Nevertheless, it has become a buzzword in the humanitarian–development sector (see Alexander 2013). The strongest criticism of resilience discourse is that it is aligned with the neoliberal project. In this regard, the idea of resilience is orchestrated to deflect the state's responsibilities to its citizens. Instead, victims are responsibilised. They must prepare for disasters, manage post-disaster trauma, and recover on their own (Davoudi 2018; Tierney 2015), often absent adequate resourcing.

As with resilience thinking, the role of social capital in disaster recovery has received much attention in recent years (Uekusa et al. 2022). Several studies (see, for example, Akbar and

Aldrich 2018; Aldrich 2011a; Bhandari 2014; Nakagawa and Shaw 2004) have shown that such communities with strong social connections and high levels of trust are likely to exchange knowledge, skills, finances, or material resources (including labour) for rebuilding and recovery efforts and provide emotional support to cope with the stress. Hence, social capital is considered a crucial component of disaster resilience. However, social capital is also predicated on exclusions: only some people are able to connect, only some are allowed to belong, and only some are trusted.

Rethinking Livelihoods and Recovery in Developing Countries

Livelihoods in developing countries are generally informal, subsistence-based, and farming or agro-entrepreneurship centred. Therefore, a high proportion of the population in developing countries engage in the informal sector economy, predominantly in agriculture, including livestock and fisheries (see Coate et al. 2006; Daly et al. 2020; NPC/GoN 2015a; Thorburn 2009). Further, their livelihood strategies are diversified (see Chatterjee and Okazaki 2018; Chhotray and Few 2012; Daly et al. 2020). Therefore, people in developing countries have multiple sources of livelihoods, such as agriculture, small/micro-enterprises, wage labour or employment (temporary or permanent), and remittances (Eadie et al. 2020; He et al. 2018).

Historically, agriculture was a male-dominant sector in many parts of the world; the major decisions and key tasks were taken or assigned by male members. However, this pattern seems to be gradually changing over the decades in many parts of the world. Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as the “feminisation of agriculture” (Tamang et al. 2014; Zhllima et al. 2021). In many countries, this paradigm shift is due to the absence of male members in the family because of labour migration (Pandey 2021; Tamang et al. 2014). Also, adult male members in the households tend to leave their families if a conflict or armed insurgency breaks

out at the local level or in the region (Menon and Rodgers 2015). In this connection, most young or adult male members left their village during the Maoist insurgency in Nepal to work, study or live in cities. Many of them left the country itself to work as labour migrants in Malaysia or the Gulf states. The young men in the conflict-affected villages developed a fear that they might be recruited by Maoist insurgents or suspected by the state to be associated with Maoist militias. Furthermore, the increased involvement of female members in economic activity is also due to the policies and strategies of government and I/NGOs, which tend to focus on women as beneficiaries of their income-generating programmes.

Marginal farmers' lives are usually most affected by disasters as their livelihood activities are generally unprotected, they have limited options or alternatives to restore/revitalise them, and they lack capital for reinvestment (Lebel et al. 2006). Physical or economic livelihood assets are scarce in poor and disadvantaged households. Therefore, many of them take the risk of protecting livelihood goods or assets at the expense of their own lives (see Eadie et al. 2020). For example, instead of evacuating during a disaster, some family members might stay back to protect assets such as livestock or stored food grains.

After a catastrophe, livelihood recovery is often initiated with aspirations to build back better and strengthen resilience; however, many cases around the world reveal that such slogans tend to fade away quickly, and survivors return to their previous state of vulnerability due to the status quo or business-as-usual phenomenon (see Chhotray and Few 2012). In this regard, Chhotray and Few argue that repetitive or recurring hazard contexts, poor institutional support, weak grassroots adaptive capacity, and a lack of sustained support are the main reasons for the lack of transformative changes to livelihoods even long after the calamity has taken place.

State and non-state actors, particularly aid organisations, are key players in many developing countries for helping people restore their livelihoods following disasters (see Coate et al. 2006; Daly et al. 2020). Nevertheless, researchers have continually suggested that improving post-disaster livelihoods recovery assistance has several problems. One common problem is the duplication of resources. Following Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, the same household received fishing boats from multiple humanitarian organisations, whereas some other families did not receive anything at all (Eadie et al. 2020). Further, Chhotray and Few (2012) and Daly et al. (2020) argue that rather than piecemeal or fragmented interventions, a sustained effort is necessary to help the most vulnerable disaster-affected households restore their livelihoods effectively and sustainably.

Finally, housing reconstruction and livelihoods are strongly interlinked. Therefore, housing reconstruction and livelihoods recovery should be integrated because livestock management and harvest storage are associated with rural life in Nepal, and domestic space may be used for income-generating activities; however, such an approach failed in Nepal's reconstruction and recovery process (see Karki et al. 2022a). Overall, the housing reconstruction programme has drawn criticism for undermining people's voices and participation in the planning and decision-making process and for replacing vernacular design with concrete houses that are spatially insufficient for family members, climatically unsuitable for their location, and practically inconvenient for everyday rural life (see Karki et al. 2022a).

Types/typology of post-disaster recovery assistance

Table 9 below summarises a variety of post-earthquake recovery interventions undertaken by various I/NGOs and state agencies in the research districts. The table reveals that the livelihood assistance programmes included a wide range of activities: goods or material support, a goat support scheme, cash assistance, and skills/capacity enhancement.

Table 9

Post-Disaster Recovery Assistance Examples

Sector	Examples of recovery assistance
Farming	Vegetable seed distribution, irrigation maintenance assistance, cash crop production, plastic tunnel support for commercial vegetable farming, hand-tractor, beekeeping training, organic farming, high-value medicinal plants introduction, modern beehive support, paddy seeds, maise corn seeds.
Livestock	Goat distribution, buck/billy goats (for mating or breeding purpose), financial assistance for livestock rearing, goat/cattle sheds management training, pastureland improvement training.
Cash/voucher distribution	Cash/voucher assistance in exchange for labour undertaken for the community infrastructure recovery, such as rural trail repair and irrigation facility maintenance. Or cash assistance for post-disaster needs or livelihood recovery.
Tourism	Trekking guide training, hotel management training, food hygiene and accommodation sanitation training, assistance to replace the lost or damaged tourist information signage.
Skills development/Capacity building	Cell phone repair training, motorbike maintenance training, beautician training, tailoring.

Source: Based on the interviews with local NGOs and disaster survivors. This list is indicative rather than exhaustive.

Although most of the disaster survivors reported that they received some of the abovementioned items of assistance, fully one-third of the research participants reported receiving no livelihood

or recovery-related assistance except for the government's grant for housing reconstruction that was available to those who lost their homes in the earthquake.

While there were some overlaps between government and non-government assistance with livelihood recovery, most of the above-listed interventions were carried out by I/NGOs. The government officials from the National Reconstruction Authority revealed in interviews that their priority was on achieving housing reconstruction targets. Livelihood activities were therefore eclipsed. However, other relevant government authorities, such as the agriculture development office and the livestock development office, extended their programmes to support disaster survivors by providing seeds, livestock (such as goats), farming tools and technologies. Even so, the assistance seems to have been limited or one-off. Some participants articulated their frustration at failing to receive any assistance despite their frequent requests (to the officials) or receiving a minimal amount of seeds.

Apart from the *goods* (materials) or *goats* (livestock) assistance, some organisations also disbursed cash (see below "Cash Transfer for Recovery" section for further details on cash-based interventions).

Targeting/Selection Processes

The humanitarian NGO workers shared that they were advised by the government authorities to use the equal assistance principle (which was locally known or popularised as the *blanket approach*) while extending livelihood assistance to the community members. In this regard, Kalyan KC, an I/NGO worker in the Gorkha District, said his organisation wanted to support the affected households who were most in need and vulnerable. Vulnerable populations were identified by considering gender, age, disability, and caste/ethnicity. However, the NGO could

not implement the targeted interventions as the government favoured a general approach. Kalyan stated:

> We wanted to assist the targeted vulnerable peoples selected based on our selection criteria. However, the local government allocated a specific ward (geographical area) for us to work with and advised us to implement programmes intensively in that specified area. Therefore, we distributed seeds to everyone in that ward through our livelihood programme.

However, as Kalyan says, the NGO could not sustain this approach as financial resources were limited. Therefore, Kalyan and his team implemented other livelihood activities (in addition to seed distribution) with targeted households. This also shows that the government authorities did not strictly control, implement, or monitor their own blanket approach.

Some other I/NGOs asked disaster survivors to demonstrate prior experience of undertaking entrepreneurship or micro-enterprises before they received assistance. As a result, relatively well-off people in the communities benefitted more from the entrepreneurship interventions. Similarly, an independent project evaluation indicated that some beneficiaries were established farmers in a livelihood recovery project (Christian Aid 2018).

Farming Interventions

Some NGOs had specific activities for households and livelihood recovery, such as entrepreneurship development; however, most NGOs engaged in a wide range of activities. Kalyan stated that his organisation considered several livelihood-related interventions based on the needs of the local communities. He said:

> Some communities we work with live close to the market centres; therefore, we decided to help them with commercial vegetable farming. We distributed plastics

> for tunnel farming. We provided knowledge and techniques [for commercial farming] … Moreover, we also helped the communities with cash crops, such as providing citrus saplings. For others, we provided beehives. Oh yes, those who wanted to rear goats, we provided goats as well as training [on goat farming]. We also distributed maise seeds and soybean seeds.

These interventions were also confirmed in the interviews with the communities' disaster-affected households. Biru (53), a male Chepang ethnic minority in the Dhading District, said, "…we were given vegetable seeds [to grow in our garden]. There were seeds of cauliflower and many other different kinds of vegetables. We grew them and ate. We were also able to sell some". Sarala (62), a female Dalit from the same district, had a similar experience. She stated:

> We did not have money to buy anything. From the agriculture office, we got some seeds. We planted them, looked after them and ate the vegetables when they were ready. The staff from the agriculture office came and saw it [our vegetable garden], and they encouraged us to continue.

The vegetable and crop seeds that people had stored in their home were often buried under rubble caused by the earthquake, and it was expected that farmers may lack the money to buy new seeds or that the seeds may not be available in local markets (NPC/GoN 2015b). Therefore, seeds assistance was a reasonable response from the government and non-government humanitarian organisations.

However, Sagar (33), a male Majhi ethnic minority in the Sindhupalchok District shared that often the assistance was so meagre and insufficient. He said, "...one organisation comes and gives little seeds. They come and distribute 10 grams or 5 grams and advise us to sow them. That's all. Then, they organise a few [community] meetings. This does not help!". He added,

"...everyone says *sipmulak-sipmulak* (skills-based, skills-based), but I found them not that useful. And, they give you just a goat [for generating incomes]".

Some participants noted the unintended consequences of aid, stating that the assistance invited new types of problems. Phul Maya (41), a female Chepang ethnic minority in Dhading, who had received a hand-tiller shared her experience:

> We were given hand-tiller [for ploughing our land]. But if something happens to it, I mean, if the tiller breaks down, it will be challenging to repair. The repair centre is also far away to take it there for repair and bring back when it is done. The tiller thing turns out to be more complex than the oxen plough we used to have.

Entrepreneurship for Recovery?

One aid organisation supported specific disaster-affected individuals in the Rasuwa District for entrepreneurial development. One of the selection criteria for participants was that the people needed to have previous experience of undertaking small business or entrepreneurship-related activities. At a bare minimum, the aid organisation wanted someone with enough confidence and a strong desire to be an entrepreneur. This policy had a direct consequence of rewarding relatively better-off households. Samir Sagar, a staff member in the INGO, commented:

> Anyone could become an entrepreneur; however, those doing some business [currently or before] on some scale came forward [to receive our support]. They already ran [or had] small businesses in their village. We desired to cover everyone [through our programmes], but those who were already entrepreneurs and those who owned land became the beneficiaries.

Most of the poorest and marginalised households did not have prior business experience due to lack of capital and other factors. As a result, they were considered inexperienced and thus

believed to lack the necessary skills and confidence to undertake entrepreneurial initiatives. Above all, the potential beneficiaries needed to contribute a specified amount of capital for entrepreneurship. The project would provide necessary training and specified costs for machinery purchases, and the rest of the costs needed to be borne by the selected beneficiaries themselves. However, the poor and marginalised households, living in precarious situations, lacked the physical and financial assets to do so. On this point, Phul Maya said:

> What property can a poor Chepang own! They [our people] have got two goats and one or two cows. If they were rich, they might have a water buffalo. That's all we have got! ... Others [caste households] were already better off than us. They had plenty of food [in their house]. They had cattle. They are the *sāhu* (money lenders). There were a lot of people who had better conditions than ours. They had a good income and therefore had a good lifestyle: they used to eat good food and wear nice clothes. However, our situation was pathetic at that time [when the earthquake hit]. We were *kamjor* (financially weak or poor). Our husbands used to go out for toiling labour and bring wages and two or four kilos of rice in the evening.

Further, the people who had productive assets—such as buildings, hotels, and vehicles/jeeps—benefitted remarkably as their services could be rented or hired. Kapadia (2014) observed a similar phenomenon in post-tsunami Sri Lanka where the entrepreneurship programmes reinforced inequitable power relations between poor and wealthy people in the communities because the more affluent households were able to access financial resources conveniently.

Agency and Community Contributions

Sarala further explained her story of recovery, returning to farming and selling vegetables. The income was used to fulfil the family's needs. She recalled, "… we started farming again. Now we have our farming back, and we started getting some income [by selling the products in the market]. With that income, we started buying the food and spices needed at home". Thule Sunar (59), a Dalit male in the Dhading District, had a similar experience. He stated, "I ploughed the land [with oxen] and hoed the farmland and met the needs of the family". Phul Maya Praja likewise noted, "We were given seeds for off-seasonal vegetable production. We produced tomatoes. After selling them in the market, we sowed bitter gourds and tomatoes".

Almost every research participant had stories of working in collaboration with other families in the village, providing labour to collectively rebuild community infrastructures damaged by the earthquake. This labour was voluntary and free, and focused on such things as the repair and rebuilding of drinking water tanks and rural trails. These contributions to the collective could last anywhere from several days to several weeks. Phul Maya Praja's family volunteered for five days to rebuild a small irrigation system, known locally as *kulo*. Sapana (36), a female Chepang ethnic minority, stated, "We all *dāju-bhāi* and *didi-bahini*[24] [brothers and sisters] in the village got together and rebuilt the damaged drinking water scheme. We donated some money, bought the pipe, brought it and joined it".

[24] *Didi-bahini* and *Dāju-bhāi* are literally translated as sisters and brothers respectively, but they are not blood relatives. Nepali society is very kinship and relation oriented. For example, residents in the village are considered dāju-bhāi and didi-bahini in a general sense. In contrast to the western world, where someone may be referred to as a man (or gentleman) or lady, or by their given name, people in Nepali society are addressed as close relations or relatives, such as *hajurāmā* or *baje* (grandma), *hajurbā* or *bāje* (grandpa) for any old women or men in the neighbourhood even though they are not biologically someone's grandmother or grandfather.

Biru Chepang (53) in the Dhading District shared how he worked to help rebuild essential infrastructure. He said, “We rebuilt the drinking water scheme which was damaged by the earthquake. We got some budget from the rural municipality office [for repairing or rebuilding the scheme] and contributed our labour. We worked daily for more than two weeks”.

Cash Transfer for Recovery

An NGO in the Sindhupalchok District distributed NRP25,000 (USD250) for 2,500 households in the selected eight Village Development Committees (VDCs) as part of their non-conditional cash support scheme[25] for recovery. The programme was targeted at the people who were most impacted by the earthquake. Regarding the beneficiary selection, Parasmani Sharma, an NGO worker who led or managed this programme, clarified that different criteria were considered to reach out to the neediest households for cash support. Examples of the selection criteria included: households that had lost family members in the earthquake; households that were dependent on livestock where some of their cattle or goats had been killed in the quake or households that had lost relatively more livestock than their neighbours; and households experiencing food insecurity (marginal farmers with low agricultural production).

The organisation sought feedback from the district and local government authorities to develop the beneficiary selection criteria for the cash assistance programme. Further, the local government office was asked to select the beneficiaries for the project. In this regard, Parasmani said, “After the criteria were finalised, we requested the VDC representatives to help select the households that meet these criteria. They identified the 2,500 households, and we supported them, providing each family rupees 25,000”. It seems that the NGO wanted to stay away from

[25] The implementing organisation mentioned that it was an unconditional cash support scheme; however, it would seem that it was not unconditional as the beneficiaries were asked to utilise the assistance for improving livelihoods (their economic situation) following the earthquake.

the complexity and controversy of beneficiary selection by giving that opportunity to the local political representatives in the VDC office. However, any bias in the selection process could not be explored further.

According to the implementing organisation, it was a targeted and unconditional cash support scheme. However, it seems that it was not completely unconditional as the beneficiaries were asked to utilise the assistance for improving livelihoods (their economic situation) following the earthquake. At this juncture, Parasmani added:

> To recover their livelihoods, some bought goats, some bought buffalo-calf, and some bought a pair of oxen. Some invested in agriculture and started earning. We did not ask [force] them to do anything. We did not put conditions [on the people] for the cash support. We told them that they could spend on whatever needs they might have, but it should help their livelihoods. It should help for economic recovery. We told them to do whatever they like to do.

Similarly, an NGO in the Gorkha District carried out a cash-for-work programme. the disaster-affected households had to renovate village paths, repair small irrigation facilities, repair damaged suspensions bridges/crossings, clear roads after landslides, or undertake similar repair and maintenance tasks after the earthquake. Then, each household was entitled to work for nine or ten days and received money based on the local daily wage rate. After some weeks of the earthquake, the local shops started to become operational again, and people needed cash to buy household items at the market. In this context, cash assistance seems to be both relevant and timely; however, the beneficiary selection process and distribution mechanism can be contested, which I discussed in the “Targeting/Selection Processes” section above.

Arko Dasā (Another Misfortune): The Covid-19 Pandemic

The coronavirus disease (Covid-19) was another misfortune for the earthquake-affected people. Due to the pandemic, many family members of the disaster-affected households were made redundant in their foreign labour employment, such as in India, Malaysia, and the Gulf countries. In this regard, Phul Maya Praja (41) in the Dhading District said:

> Our son had gone *bidesh* [abroad], but he is back home now for he lost his job after Covid. My husband used to earn some money, but he also can't go out [of home] these days to work. He is compelled to stay at home[26] [due to the lockdown].

Further, the disaster survivors working within the country lost their wages and income sources due to the lockdown measures which lasted several months. Dhan Kumari BK (46), a Dalit female in the Dhading District, commented, "We were severely affected by the earthquake. [Following the disaster] our sons in the family were earning well. Our lives were gradually improving but it is destroyed by corona again". The situation of Sarala Sunar was devastating. Her family were struggling for basic survival. She remarked:

> Our *chhora* [son] had a good income in Kathmandu [the capital city]. Life was going well then. But he has no job right now due to Covid. Now we are facing hardships and lots of challenges. It is even difficult to light a fire on the *chulo* (stove)[27].

[26] "Staying at home" also refers to being jobless.

[27] Chulo is a traditional stove made up of stones and mud. However, the expression here is a metaphor which means to cook food.

Similarly, income-generating activities, such as small businesses and micro-entrepreneurship, which played a crucial role for some households in the earthquake recovery process, were also impacted by the pandemic. In this regard, Sapana Chepang (36) shared:

> My husband used to make *mādal* (a folk drum)[28] and I used to grow vegetables. Due to the prolonged lockdown, we have not been able to sell even a single mādal for months. We were able to resume our business after the earthquake. But these days our business has stopped completely! My husband stays at home all the time [becoming jobless] … There is no market to sell the vegetables [that I grow] either.

Several participants also said that they were struggling to repay the loans taken to support their families and rebuild homes following the earthquake. In this regard, Prem Sunar (29), a male Dalit in the Dhading District, remarked:

> I had taken a bank loan by keeping this piece of land as collateral. Now I am being pressurised time and again by the bank staff to repay the loan. What shall I do? I can go nowhere to earn money.

Discussion

The research findings showed that recovery programmes from different stakeholders were necessary, given the aforementioned earthquake impacts, widespread poverty, and social inequality. These interventions provided essential help that addressed several unmet needs in disaster-affected households. However, these interventions could be improved. They were generally fragmented, insufficient, and neoliberal in orientation (prioritising market solutions), and proffered business-as-usual practices. Consequently, the enterprise/entrepreneur-related

[28] A double-headed traditional folk drum in Nepal.

interventions failed to benefit the poorest and most marginalised households in these communities.

I explored how different aid organisations and government agencies implemented various types of livelihood recovery programmes in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. The benefits of these efforts for the affected households were twofold: addressing the issue of consumption (food security); and providing a means of earning through restoring on-farm and off-farm activities affected by the earthquake. My research found that the livelihood recovery assistance from humanitarian and aid organisations along with the government's provisions remained crucial in the recovery process; however, several issues were observed that are of concern. I turn to these text and under apposite headings, apply a critical lens.

Insufficient and Fragmented Livelihood Assistance: How to Join the Missing Links?

In the earlier section on types of post-disaster recovery assistance, I provided a list of livelihood recovery activities implemented by different humanitarian and development organisations and government authorities (see Table 9). The livelihood assistance varied: goods/materials support (e.g., seeds/seedlings and beehives); animal/livestock support (e.g., she-goats and buck/billy goats); tools (e.g., a hand-tiller); and capacity building (e.g., training events). Similarly, the assistance was either for farm-based livelihood recovery (e.g., commercial vegetable production) or off-farm income-generating activities such as entrepreneurship development and hotel management skills. If we plot these activities in the livelihood asset pentagon discussed earlier, they fall under human capital, physical capital, and financial capital (a few). However, the identification and mobilisation of natural capital and social capital in the livelihood recovery programming/process were limited or rare. This result is consistent with those of Nikku et al. (2021), who found that Indigenous strengths and capitals in the Rasuwa District, one of the

research locations, went unrecognised in the post-disaster livelihood recovery and reconstruction process in the aftermath of the earthquake. Further, as I discussed earlier, labour outmigration or remittances was a key livelihood strategy for many households. This area remained untouched by the state and non-state actors in the study area. There was an opportunity for these aid agencies to strengthen this sector by making the migration process safer or enhancing the skills of youth survivors for increasing their chance of employability.

Furthermore, my findings showed that livelihood assistance was limited or incapable of sufficiently raising incomes. As one research participant commented, supporting households with a single goat barely helps improve a family's lot. Similarly, the income-generating activities that would take multiple years to yield a return are not helpful either. Income-generating activities such as cardamom, coffee, and orange cultivation were not beneficial for survivors, as these were enormous time-consuming initiatives. Instead, it would have been preferable to consider income-generating activities that can quickly start generating incomes, rather than waiting years to harness the benefits.

Regarding the livelihood assistance activities discussed above, I want to put forth two arguments. Firstly, I argue that the "normative bikās apparatus" was in play in the Nepal's post-earthquake field. The normative bikās practices in the country assume that the bikās takes time and it is a slow and gradual process. The types of post-disaster recovery assistance provided in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake was a *standard bikās package* of bikāse organisations in the country. Therefore, I argue that the post-disaster recovery was seen from the same or the standardised bikāse lens.

Secondly, there was a missing link between the relief and recovery stages. In this regard, The discourse of linking relief to rehabilitation to development (LRRD) already exists.[29]

[29] For details, please refer to my discussion on LRRD in Chapter II.

However, this discourse, to a large extent, lacks practical examples and cases to show how it may function on the ground or in real life. One of the best illustrations I have found was given by Daly et al. (2020). I build on this disaster–bikās nexus by contributing additional scenarios and practical examples. At this juncture, I argue that there was an opportunity to link the relief (saving lives) and recovery (restoring/rebuilding lives/livelihoods) related interventions and synchronising the activities for short, medium, and long-term impact. My argument, that systematic and synchronised livelihood activities would be more effective for sustained change, is presented in Table 10.

To elaborate on the LRRD concept for the post-disaster recovery context, disaster scholarship (see, e.g., Daly et al. 2020[30]; Rasul et al. 2015) has recommended that livelihood recovery be implemented in three overlapping stages: *livelihood provision* (which includes relief-based assistance or short-term measures), *livelihood protection* (which includes early to medium and long-term livelihood recovery), and *livelihood promotion* (which includes transforming livelihoods by reducing the structural vulnerability of the whole livelihood system). Thus, a synchronised effort is crucial to bringing about sustainable livelihood recovery in poor and marginalised disaster-affected households. Daly et al. (2020, p. 12) presented a model for livelihood recovery, illustrating the types of assistance needed at different stages of recovery in relation to housing reconstruction. I build on this model in Table 10 by contributing additional scenarios and practical examples. However, my proposal slightly differs from Daly et al. (2020), as I envision the livelihood promotion (their livelihood development) stage as long-term livelihood change or transformation addressing structural marginality, social vulnerability, and equity issues in these communities.

[30] It should be noted that Daly et al. (2020) have rephrased the terms as *livelihood stabilisation*, *livelihood restoration*, and *livelihood development*, respectively. However, I retained the original terms (*livelihood provision*, *livelihood protection* and *livelihood promotion*) commonly used by other agencies.

Table 10

Examples of Systematic and Synchronised Livelihood Recovery Through the LRRD Perspective

Emergency relief assistance *(provision)*	Medium and long-term recovery assistance *(protection)*	Development/transformation facilitation *(promotion)*
• Food and non-food relief assistance. • Cash/voucher assistance for meeting immediate livelihood needs. • *Provision of cash-for-work for low-skilled reconstruction tasks* such as clearing debris, repairing damaged village footpaths, and clearing landslides. • Provision for financial services/credit facilities for meeting immediate needs. • Temporary suspension of loan reimbursement by financial institutions for affected households. • Provision of seeds/seedlings that can grow fast in the local environment and basic farming tools for such task; or seeds/seedlings and basic farming tools that are immediately needed due to the ongoing and soon-to-begin sowing or farming time. • Assistance for temporary shelters for people and livestock.	• *Provision of assets, capital, and stock* to assist in resuming pre-disaster livelihoods or starting a new initiative for marginalised and disadvantaged households. • *Prioritising restoration of vital permanent infrastructure (market, water management facilities, roads, etc.).* • Provision of cash-for-work for infrastructure reconstruction, such as irrigation facilities, drinking water reconstruction schemes or school building reconstruction projects. • Provision of seeds/seedlings (considering short, medium, and long timeframe to yield or give returns). • Provision of financial services/credit facilities for undertaking income-generating activities (on-farm/off-farm). • Vocational skills (basic ones for early recovery and advanced vocational training). • Provision for livestock development support, such as buck/billy goat distribution, livestock rearing training, and seedling/samplings for fodder. • Forming and building capacity of people's organisations. • *Vocational and small business training including financial literacy training.*	• *Targeted provision of assets and capital to scale up.* • *Inclusive employment.* • Assistance for livelihood diversification. • Dealing with issues of gender and access to resources, assets, or property. • Effective or just management of natural resources or common-pool resources. • Disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives. • Address poverty and other social vulnerability issues, including caste and ethnic discrimination. • Advocacy and policy change on livelihood issues. • Engaging to address market barriers/trade negotiations. • Land reform.

Note: The text in italics is adapted from Daly et al. 2020, but it may feature in a different livelihood stage here.

Examining Humanitarian Objects: Mini-Tillers in Focus

Some disaster affected households, like Phul Maya in Dhading, were supported with mini-tillers to restore agriculture or food production through the use of modern farming technology (this machine is an example of *physical capital* from the perspective of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework). However, the participants told us about the challenges of maintaining this technology in rural settings. I build on the insights of Phul Maya to argue that this initiative perpetuates vulnerability in new forms by making people dependent on an external source or agent and, thus, undermines resilience as well.

Several scholars have scrutinised humanitarian materials/objects, such as canned meat (Fountain 2014), humanitarian kit (Redfield 2008), personal protective equipment (Pallister-Wilkins 2016), and Plumpy'nut nutritional supplements (Scott-Smith 2013). Their scholarly contributions help us understand the history, political-economy, and biopolitics of humanitarian interventions, using the social lives of material tools and commodities utilised in the aid industry as points of entry for social analysis. They have also suggested that humanitarian objects are often taken for granted and remain under-studied. In agreement with their argument, my discussion focuses on the political economy of the modern technology mini-tillers (also known as hand-tillers or power tillers) distributed to earthquake-affected households for ploughing land. I note that this machine has several benefits. It is more efficient than traditional methods for ploughing the land, for example, using oxen. Women can use a tiller, whereas they are not culturally permitted to plough with oxen. However, the power tiller has some drawbacks in the context of rural Nepal.

First of all, people must rely on the market for purchasing and repairing their machines, which benefits dealerships and ultimately the multi-national companies that manufacture them.

This displaces ownership of livestock given that many farmers raise oxen and bullocks. Sometimes they buy or sell the oxen in the village or the local market, and this contributes to the local economy. Local farmers also sell and buy an ox or oxen among themselves or even exchange, sometimes with some agreed upon monetary compensation. This retains wealth within the community, whereas tiller purchases send money to multi-national companies. Further, tillers are expensive. They cost more than NPR50,000.[31] Tillers also need fuel, and this must be procured in urban market centres, meaning that farmers must commute beyond their immediate locales. Most importantly, the fuel price fluctuates and becomes scarce because Nepal relies on India for fuel. When there was a Nepal-India border blockade five months after the Nepal Earthquake, the fuel supplies to Nepal ceased for several months (BBC 2015)[32]. Some would argue that tillers only need fuel while being used, yet families need to feed the oxen all year round regardless. There is validity to this argument; however, cash and sometimes fuel are scarce in rural Nepal, while fodder is freely available. Moreover, livestock in rural Nepal are part and parcel of rural life.

Research participants also shared their dissatisfaction with the need to take tillers to distant repair shops. Given the distance to such places and the sheer weight of the machine, this was a great inconvenience. The fact that research participants were unable to repair these machines themselves indicates that the repair/maintenance training was either insufficient and/or that refresher courses are necessary. Further, even if the training was sufficient, the households

[31] According to the USAID funded Feed the Future INGENAES project, the price of the mini-tiller was NPR50,000 at the time of distribution.

[32] The border blockade created a humanitarian crisis affecting people's everyday life (such as lack of LPG bottles for cooking)—commuting to work or travelling, transportation of essential services—and impacted the supply chain of essential goods and medical supplies. This crisis also halted Nepal's post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction work (see BBC, 2015).

would still need to occasionally procure replacement parts, which requires money and travel to distant vendors that sell them.

The power-tiller was not a replacement for technology that was lost in the disaster, but a new thing introduced in the aftermath of the earthquake. I argue that any new technology (or new practices) introduced into developing countries—especially in sites of disaster recovery—should be done carefully. Unintended consequences abound. With regards to the power tiller, these questions are worth asking—what is the cost of the new technology, who decides, who benefits (more), will it be (un-)sustainable, and finally, will it create market dependency or help people to have control over goods/technology? Finally, humanitarian objects like power-tillers are often fetishised, presenting themselves as a magic bullet to solve existing problems; however, food insecurity and hunger in disaster-affected places cannot be solved by a power-tiller alone (see Scott-Smith 2013). Rather, interventions should address the complex and interconnected causes that create social vulnerabilities: unjust distribution of land and other resources between different castes and ethnic groups, lack of irrigation, acute poverty, and lack of access to agriculture extension services. At this juncture, I am making explicit my own position on LRRD debates. I am in favour of addressing root causes and bringing about sustained change, not just immediate relief (Audet 2014; Mosel and Levine 2014; Rose et al. 2013).

Material Support More Common than Cash Transfer

As previously highlighted in this discussion of findings, Table 9 listed livelihood recovery activities implemented by different humanitarian and development organisations. The livelihood assistance varied: goods/materials support (e.g., seeds/seedlings and beehives); animal/livestock support (e.g., she-goats and buck/billy goats); tools (e.g., a hand-tiller); and capacity building (e.g., training). Similarly, the assistance was either for farm-based livelihood recovery (e.g.,

commercial vegetable production) or off-farm income-generating activities such as entrepreneurship development and hotel management skills. However, I discovered that the links between different activities at different stages were missing, which I discuss in the next sub-section.

In addition, I found only a few organisations were carrying out cash transfer programmes for livelihood recovery. Here, I make two observations. The first is that cash transfer programmes, whether conditional or unconditional, were helpful for recovery. The second relates to the politics of implementation. I found that there were layers of authority in the selection of beneficiaries. Third parties (local political representatives and bureaucrats in this case) were involved in the selection of beneficiaries, and the activities were implemented by the project staff. Although this may look like a coordinated effort, this mechanism can be problematic. Firstly, there is a possibility of politicising the programme, especially if an election is approaching. Secondly, questions of accountability arise if too many actors are involved (who answers to whom?). Above all, cash transfer projects designed by INGOs or donors, with beneficiaries selected by political representatives, and implementation undertaken by local NGOs, are perhaps a good recipe for project failure due to lack of clarity, ownership, and accountability.

Market Focused Livelihood Programmes Served Neoliberal Interests

The findings highlighted that livelihood recovery programmes, to a large extent, were market-led or market-oriented. Therefore, disaster survivor dependencies were created on the market. For example, humanitarian agencies distributed hybrid seeds to earthquake-affected households, causing them to rely on the market every new season when they need to sow the seeds. Similarly, commercial farming and cash crops remained the focus of assistance in several disaster-affected

communities. Further, the aid agencies introduced new technology, which replaced traditional farming methods. These types of assistance also entrench new market dependencies. Therefore, the income-generation activities served neoliberal market agendas rather than addressing the unjust distribution of productive assets, such as land, among different caste and ethnic peoples in the village.

I further argue that livelihood activities/assistance that creates too much market or *exogenous* dependency are likely to put people in a vulnerable state by eroding local institutions and systems which certainly impact people's local reliance, resilience, and recovery capabilities (see Bano 2012). In this regard, the discourse on Indigenous resilience is important because its focus is on helping people reconnect with their natural capital, social institutions, and local systems to improve livelihoods and enhance resilience (see Nikku et al. 2021).

Elite People Benefitting More from Some Livelihood Programmes

My research found that pre-earthquake inequality was reproduced following the disaster. An independent project evaluation indicated that some beneficiaries were established farmers in a livelihood recovery project (Christian Aid 2018). Similarly, my findings showed that relatively well-off people in communities benefitted more from the entrepreneurship interventions than the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups. The participant selection criteria (that required prior business experience plus the ability to contribute partial capital investment) disadvantaged the poor and marginalised households. They could not participate in this scheme. As a result, village elites and relatively better-off people could take advantage of the entrepreneurship/micro-enterprise project. Further, the people who had productive assets—such as buildings, hotels, and vehicles/jeeps—benefitted significantly as their services could be rented or hired. Kapadia (2014) observed a similar phenomenon in post-tsunami Sri Lanka, where the entrepreneurship

programmes reinforced inequitable power relations between poor and wealthy people in the communities because the more affluent households were able to access financial resources conveniently.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the earthquake's impact on livelihoods. I showed that the disaster had a substantial effect on local livelihoods. Further, I reconceptualised the livelihoods recovery. At this juncture, I argued that livelihood recovery in developing countries like Nepal is complex due to spatial or place-based factors such as hinterland, highland, and market accessibility, the diverse needs of disaster survivors following the earthquake, and the informal nature of the economy. Further, people in rural areas generally lack assets and gender and caste-based factors are also in play.

I documented the various forms of livelihood assistance provided to the disaster survivors in the research districts. It was found that natural capital and social capital were underestimated in the recovery process. Social capital received significant attention and praise in the disaster emergency, but this form of capital was not capitalised on later.

I discussed the findings on entrepreneurship for recovery. I showed how the local elites benefitted from this intervention more than the poor households, as the latter needed to demonstrate their experience of undertaking such ventures before the earthquake and also be able to contribute to the cost of the machine to be given for entrepreneurship.

The livelihoods assistance was limited to raising income sufficiently. There were no linking or transitional activities from relief to long-term recovery. In this regard, I analysed how relief, recovery, and long-term development may be linked.

Further, I critically analysed the livelihood recovery tools and technologies with particular reference to mini-tillers. I challenged this assistance on the grounds their relevancy and sustainability. I argued that such aid creates market dependency and cannot help build resilience in the communities.

Rebuilding homes was another major concern in the aftermath of the earthquake. The next chapter discusses the political economy of the post-disaster housing reconstruction processes in the research districts.

CHAPTER VII

NAYÃ GHAR (A NEW HOUSE)[33]

Housing reconstruction and rehabilitation are major tasks following a disaster in developing countries (Ahmed 2011). In such contexts, post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation is a complex socio-political process impacted by numerous variables, including people's social vulnerability, the state's financing capability, and reconstruction programmes' modalities and approaches adopted by the government or donors along with their respective bureaucratic procedures (see Johnson and Lizarralde 2012; Limbu et al. 2019; Oliver-Smith 1991).

Nepal experienced a powerful earthquake (7.8 M_w) in April 2015. The tremor claimed nearly 9,000 lives and injured more than 20,000 people. Approximately eight million people were impacted, and over half a million houses were destroyed. Altogether, almost one-third of the country's total population was affected (NPC/GoN 2015a).

Most of the houses destroyed in the Nepal Earthquake were made of mud mortar with stone masonry. They lacked earthquake-resilient features (NPC/GoN 2015a, p. 3). These were the vernacular homes generally owned by poor and marginalised people. Gautam and Rodrigues (2021) observed that urban vernacular buildings, with reference to the city of Bhaktapur in Nepal, are highly vulnerable even in minor to moderate tremors. Having seen more vernacular

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homes destroyed, community members perceived concrete houses to have an advantage over traditional homes, being stronger and more durable (Limbu et al. 2019).

That said, concrete-framed structures were also significantly damaged (Adhikary 2016; NPC/GoN 2015a). The reinforced cement concrete (RCC) houses and cement-mortared masonry that had compromised construction materials or designs still suffered significantly in the earthquake (NPC/GoN 2015a, p. 3) for they were non-engineered. Moreover, many of the building sites were geologically weak for settlements and house construction (see Gautam et al. 2016b). Such was observed in the district headquarters of Sindhupalchok and Dolakha and specific locations in the capital city (Adhikary 2016, p. 535). More accurately, I should state that vernacular or modern buildings with compromised earthquake-resistance features were damaged, but those incorporating resilient features survived the earthquake (see Adhikary 2016; Gautam et al. 2016a; Gautam and Rodrigues 2021).

An Overview of Housing in Nepal

As in most societies around the world, houses are an important and valuable asset for people in Nepal. Two types of settlement and housing patterns are notable in the country. They manifest as an urban-rural divide. Cities and small towns predominantly have concrete (or RCC) buildings, while rural areas have vernacular homes. Reinforced cement concrete construction of private homes in Nepal is a recent phenomenon that started only a few decades ago (Bodach et al. 2014).

Although urbanisation is rapidly increasing and RCC construction has been growing in recent years in Nepal (CBS/GoN 2017; UN-HABITAT 2010), three-quarters of the country's population still live in traditional or vernacular homes (Adhikary 2016). Vernacular architecture in Nepal is informed by construction traditions and Indigenous Knowledge that is centuries old

(Adhikary 2016; Bodach et al. 2014; Gautam and Rodrigues 2021). These homes vary significantly from one place (region) to another, responding to geography, climatic conditions, and the natural resources and construction materials available in each particular region. Architecture and design are also informed by the cultural groups the people belong to. Such homes are typically built with stone masonry, adobe, and timber. Vernacular homes used to have tiles/slated roofs and straw/thatch roofs, but, corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) sheets have started to replace them over the past few decades. Consequently, today more than one-third of the houses in Nepal have CGI sheets roofs (CBS/GoN 2017).

Vernacular homes are constructed locally utilising available building materials, traditional techniques, and local masonry skills. Thus, the construction technology is relatively unsophisticated and does not require specialised human resources (Gautam et al. 2016a). The architecture reflects the cultural significance and ethnic identity or values that are attached to them. Like vernacular houses in other parts of the world, the traditional houses in Nepal are adapted to the climatic conditions by optimising natural resources like solar radiation and wind efficiently and using local resources and technology that help maintain room temperature (Bodach et al. 2014). As a result, the rooms are fit for purpose: warm in winter and cool in summer.

When constructing traditional houses in Nepal, many households had incorporated specific features to cope with common local and natural hazards such as inundation, snake bites, landslides, and earthquakes (see Adhikary 2016; Bodach et al. 2014; Gautam et al. 2016a). Nevertheless, location-specific disaster-resistance features were not given due consideration when western construction technologies were imported (UN-HABITAT 2010, p. 93). The disaster resistance features were compromised in the construction of homes due to the short

supply of timber for a few decades (Adhikary 2016) and the correspondingly high price for it. Consequently, people made concessions to their construction practices by building at a smaller scale, using young poor-quality timber rather than traditional durable hardwood, or omitting the use of timber altogether (Forbes 2018).

Issues and Themes in Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction

Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction Approaches

Researchers have documented housing reconstruction approaches used in various places following disasters. The donor-driven reconstruction (DDR) approach has been practised for a long time; however, a relatively new approach in post-disaster reconstruction known as owner-driven reconstruction (ODR) has become more widespread in recent years (Schilderman and Lyons 2011; Vahanvati 2018). Donor-driven reconstruction here refers to agencies that rebuild private homes *for* or *on-behalf-of* disaster-affected people. The donors could be anyone: the state, national or international non-government organisations (I/NGOs), private companies, or even individuals or private groups that donate and rebuild homes *for* people. In this approach, the donors are prioritised. Therefore, the participation of disaster survivors in the decision-making process is partial to non-existent. On the other hand, ODR refers to the process where owners can participate and make decisions. However, it should be clear that ODR is not necessarily owner built. Anyone can build a house, but the owners have to decide (Schilderman and Lyons 2011). Further, ODR does not mean an absence of a donor (assistance of the state and non-state actors), but the disaster survivors (not the donors) are in the driver's seat for reconstruction.

Several researchers have carried out scholarly studies on the ODR or a comparison of the ODR and DDR in different disaster contexts, for example, in the aftermath of the Pakistan earthquake in 2005 (van Leersum and Arora 2011), following the Bihar (India) flood in 2008

(Vahanvati and Beza 2017), after the Gujarat (India) earthquake in 2001 (Barenstein 2006), and in the aftermath of the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004 (Karunasena and Rameezdeen 2010; Lyons 2009). These scholars are in accord. They argue that the ODR approach is more efficient and cost-effective, and that it is likely to result in better quality builds that meet the requirements and aspirations of their inhabitants.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that donors are not always available (whether the DDR or ODR approach is taken) to assist with housing when disasters strike—particularly smaller, or localised, or remote disasters that do not get sufficient national or international attention.

Process in Housing Reconstruction: Participation

Daly and Brassard (2011) argue that despite the emphasis upon community involvement, inclusive and participatory processes for post-disaster reconstruction by international non-government organisations often remains an idea that goes unrealised. Their study found a lack of people's participation in the programme cycle in the disaster housing reconstruction in Aceh, Indonesia. Moreover, they also found weak downward accountability (which is to say accountability to the communities) by those implementing agencies in the post-tsunami reconstruction process.

Dhungana (2021) has similar findings from his study in Nepal. He analysed governance and participation in the post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction process and concluded that state mechanisms have largely failed to effectively ensure people's voices and participation in the rebuild. He noted that some spaces for civic participation and deliberative disaster governance did exist, but powerholders manipulated these forums to justify their own decisions and actions. Nevertheless, some windows of engagement were opened by the government, for

example, a mechanism for hearing complaints or grievances about the housing reconstruction was instituted by the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA).

Baniya (2021) observed only tokenistic participation in the integrated settlement reconstruction led by a non-government organisation (NGO) in the Majhi (an Indigenous) community in the Sindhupalchok District of Nepal following the earthquake in 2015. The community were invited to meetings, but no detailed plans and activities were shared with them, and housing construction was contracted to a private company. This housing reconstruction paid no heed to local resources, undermining agency and the traditions, cultural norms, and connections of the Indigenous people. The resulting houses had several issues: a lack of sufficient rooms, no place to store food grains, and the replacement of traditional cooking oven/space making it difficult to use firewood or make homemade beverages (*jānd* and *raksi*). Eventually, some people amended these structures, making additional shelter in their other land nearby for storing grain and for sleeping purposes.

Shrestha et al. (2023) have found in their study of post-earthquake Nepal that freedom of choice in the reconstruction process is a key determinant factor for satisfaction than the built structure (e.g., post-disaster housing) per se. Likewise, many scholars have emphasised that the participation of people in their own recovery is an empowering process (Gaillard et al. 2019; Hore et al. 2020). Chambers (1994) uses a phrase which is popular in the development field to refer to this phenomenon: “handover the stick”. He argues that elite and powerful actors must first change their behaviour and attitude to relinquish control. Unfortunately, disaster-affected citizens were not viewed as actors but as *beneficiaries,* and these beneficiaries eventually become a *commodity* in the humanitarian market (Krause 2014). This even though disaster scholarship warns that failing to engage disaster survivors in the reconstruction process is a

"recipe for failure in terms of sustainability", as such practice ignores people's needs and aspirations (Svistova and Pyles 2018, p. 154). Therefore, an effective disaster recovery and reconstruction process should deepen the "agency of the disaster-affected, not that of the disaster experts" (Liechty and Hutt 2021, p. 16).

Build Back Better?

Former US President Bill Clinton issued a report entitled "Key Propositions for Building Back Better" on the second anniversary of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Since then, the usage of "build back better" has assumed a position of orthodoxy for those charged with recovery (Fernandez and Ahmed 2019). The Sendai Framework for Disaster Reduction has incorporated and emphasised build back better, and it is frequently invoked by governments (e.g., in the United Kingdom and the United States) in terms of post-Covid-19 recovery. Although the phrase is widely used today, the concept is by no means novel, having been used for decades. For example, "make this city better than ever" was a common refrain throughout the 1970s (see Haas et al. 1977, p. XV).

Overall, disaster scholarship is critical of the notion of build back better (see Paudel et al. 2020; Rahmayati 2016; Su and Le Dé 2020). To begin with, Build Back Better is such a broad term that it can mean vastly different things to different people. Some people might interpret it in an aesthetic sense, rather than in terms of more resilient or safer structures (Su and Le Dé 2020). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that terms like *build back better* and *resilience* have become both a "buzzword" and "fuzzword" in the humanitarian and development field (Alexander 2013; Brown 2015; Cornwall and Eade 2010). Consensus is therefore elusive (see Matthewman and Goode 2020). Disaster researchers have also critiqued the idea for being used too narrowly, referring to only physical or infrastructure recovery, thus downplaying social,

economic, environmental (Tierney and Oliver-Smith 2012; Mannakkara and Wilkinson 2014) and (geo)political dimensions (Boyle and Shneiderman 2020). Above all, scholars are sceptical that the concept is deployed in the sense of “back to” or “return to” the status quo ante. Furthermore, Paudel et al. (2020, p. 143) argue that building back better strategy embraces neoliberal policies with the “promotion of consumption-oriented modern subjectivities”. Thus the build-back better phenomenon may leave populations in continued states of vulnerability.

In reality, post-disaster reconstruction work often results in worse or undesirable outcomes for communities, both technically and socially speaking. For example, post-disaster housing reconstruction in locations in Gujarat (India) and Aceh (Indonesia) yielded inferior quality, unsafe, and unhealthy dwellings because of the inappropriate construction materials used (Powell 2011; Samuels 2020). Similarly, Green’s (2005) study of three major earthquakes from 1999–2002 in Turkey found that build back better was nothing more than an empty political promise that failed to materialise. Amid corruption, the only thing that grew was the number of unsafe buildings.

The post-tsunami houses in Aceh, Indonesia, were small and inappropriate for large extended families. This led to splitting families into smaller nuclear family fragments, thus disrupting the domestic fabric and overall cohesion (Kitzbichler 2011). Similarly, the reconstruction process in Taiwan after the Typhoon Morakot failed to consider Indigenous people’s cultural identity while developing the reconstruction plan (Lin and Lin 2016). Indigenous people were resettled far from their ancestral land and relatives, disrupting the social structure, family clan relationships, and their cultural lifestyle.

Capitalising on Catastrophe: Profiteering from Pain

There are numerous instances in different disasters worldwide where elites and corporations have capitalised on catastrophes for private gain (see Gunewardena and Schuller 2008; Klein 2007; Schuller and Maldonado 2016). Disaster survivors have been relocated to more vulnerable or unsuitable places, and their former places of habitation have been taken over by political elites, rich people, and the private sector. The latter have gained from the former's pain. In the worst cases, disaster survivors have been rendered more vulnerable and have worse lives and prospects in the aftermath of the so-called recovery and reconstruction process (see Adams et al. 2009; Baniya 2021; Le Billon et al. 2020; Limbu et al. 2019, 2022; Linder 2017; Linder and Murton 2021; Paudel et al. 2020; Shneiderman 2023; Spoon et al. 2020; Spoon et al. 2021).

Klein (2007), who popularised the concept of "disaster capitalism", discusses how the business community and wealthy hoteliers in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami benefitted by grabbing prime coastal areas, displacing poor fishing families from their historical location, Arugam Bay, and moving them to unproductive locations. She argues that similar patterns of the rich and powerful prospering from law-and-land grabs at the expense of poor and marginalised families can be found in other countries after disaster. For instance, following this same disaster in 2004, new regulations creating "buffer zones" were imposed in Indonesia and the Maldives, preventing people from rebuilding near the coastline in order to free up the land for tourism. In this regard, as I discussed earlier, Neef et al. (2019) found this occurred also in Thailand: Indigenous people's land used for decades for livelihood purposes was encroached upon by beach villas and resorts following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

The Sociology of Built Space: Bourdieu and Buildings

Built space is fundamental to human existence, as "a large portion of our human experience and social interaction occurs in the buildings in which we live and work" (Beaman 2002, p. 7). Therefore, these constructions are more than physical objects; they are also facilitators of social interactions and relationships. Indeed, human and built space are mutually constitutive; they reinforce each other. People shape the physical environment in various ways, such as building houses, parks, and roads. In turn, the built space shapes human actions, relations, and behavioural patterns. As Gieryn (2002, p. 65) puts it: "We mould buildings, they mould us, we mould them anew". Gieryn argues that buildings anchor social life. They give form to social institutions; they help make social networks resilient, and they provide defence against time and change. But he adds a qualifier: "Buildings stabilise social life… yet [they] stabilise *imperfectly*" (p. 35). It can also be argued that "architecture embodies and symbolises the economic, social, and cultural structures of a given society" (Löw and Steets 2014, p. 215). Therefore, amongst other things, built space reflects prosperity or poverty, equality or injustice in society: big bungalows versus small houses in a neighbourhood or slum houses behind the shining high-rise buildings in the city.

Of all types of built space, a home is perhaps the most valued by individuals and their closest others. Urry (2004) argues that a home is a metaphor for intimacy, family relationships and dynamics. He also argues that a house/home is also a space of memory. We build a house in our mind before we physically construct it. After we build and live in that house, we collect memories of that built space. Urry has it that, "Houses are within us, and we reside in houses" (p. 11).

For Bourdieu, the built space or physical space that an individual or a group occupies is a site to understand social domination and power structures within that family or society. Bourdieu (1970; 2018) argues that social structure and relationships are objectified or materialised in the built environment. In his 1970 article, Bourdieu shows how the social structure—its power distribution or social hierarchy—is reproduced in the family through building structure, symbols or artefacts, and physical layout (e.g., of the Kabyle house he observed in Algeria). Therefore, acquired physical space displays one's position or status in social space (Löw 2016, p. 154). For example, land or housing property exhibits one's class position in society. For this reason, agents strategise to accumulate capital and improve spatial position in the field. To put it another way, acquired physical space is used as a means to achieve social dominance and reproduce social inequality in society.

Furthermore, Bourdieu deals with two forms of space—social space and physical space (specifically acquired physical space, also referred to as reified social space). In the Bourdieusian sense, physical space and social space are imbricated. Regarding the relationship between these two forms of space, Bourdieu (2018, pp. 108–109) elucidates:

> Though *social space* is not a physical space, it tends to realise itself in a more or less complete and accurate fashion in that space. This explains why we have so much difficulty thinking it as such. Space as we inhabit it and as we know it is socially constructed and marked. Physical space can be thought as such only through an abstraction (physical geography), that is, by deliberately ignoring everything it owes to the fact that it is an inhabited and appropriated space, that is, a social fabrication and projection of social space, a social structure in an objectified state (viz. a Kabyle house, or the map of a city), the objectification and naturalisation of past and present social relations.

In addition to the space concepts discussed above, Bourdieu's theories of habitus and symbolic capital are relevant for understanding post-disaster housing and built space.

Habitus: Habitus is the internalisation of social structure. It incorporates an individual's embodied and cognitive predispositions, their ways of acting and thinking (Bourdieu 1996b, p. 17). Habitus, therefore, provides a way of understanding interactions between individuals, cultures, and social arrangements. Further, habitus is ingrained within an individual over a prolonged period by socialisation processes. As such, it is acquired and internalised by individuals and remains incorporated in the mind in the form of long-term dispositions (Bourdieu 1993, p. 86). Bourdieu (1990b, p. 55) reminds us that habitus is continually defined and redefined based on existing social realities. Further, it can be forgotten, adapted, or replaced by a new or reformed habitus by realising the changing structure or field (p. 56). Habitus adapts in accordance with new experiences and realities.

Bourdieu (1999; 2018) argues that habitus and built space reinforce and sustain each other. Therefore, the predispositions embodied within individuals shape the making of a house or physical infrastructure and the built environment shapes social pattern (re-)forming habitus. Or to put it another way, habitus and habitat are both strongly associated and mutually reinforced.

Symbolic Capital: Bourdieu (1998, p. 47) explains that "symbolic capital is any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognise it, to give it value". Symbolic capital comes with social position and legitimises this position. For example, narratives, actions, or decisions of dominant people—say a priest among religious communities, a *Khas* (a dominant caste group) in rural Nepal, or a male in a patriarchal society—are typically recognised and legitimised by dominated groups. Symbolic capital has

unique relationships with other capitals. First, symbolic power becomes virtually impossible to distinguish from other capitals because it is obtained from the successful use of other capitals (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 122). Symbolic capital, like material capital, can be accumulated and, under certain conditions and at a specific rate or price, can be exchanged for material capital (Swartz 1997, p. 92). "Symbolic capital functions to mask the economic domination of the dominant class and socially legitimate hierarchy by essentialising and naturalising social position" (Postone et al. 1993, p. 5).

In the Bourdieusian sense, buildings are symbolic capital. Thus, one's power and capital are perceived through symbolic capital in society, and power and domination are further legitimised through symbolic capital (Malone 2020; Pinçon-Charlot and Pinçon 2018). In the discussion section below, I use this perspective of social position being achieved through symbolic capital objectified in acquired physical space to understand the desire for a *pakki* (concrete) house in Nepal.

The Government's Provisions and Process for Housing Reconstruction

A sense of urgency in the state's response was lacking in the recovery and reconstruction work following the Nepal Earthquake. Due to political power tussles, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) was only established eight months after the disaster. Moreover, the reconstruction act was not approved until 2016. A year after the earthquake, more than 600,000 people were still living in tents, temporary shelters, or unsafe housing (Taylor 2016, para.1), and other families who could afford to do so had either rebuilt or repaired their damaged houses (Shrestha et al. 2021).

The Government of Nepal implemented the multimillion-dollar (USD700 million) Earthquake Housing Reconstruction Project (EHRP) with support from the World Bank and bilateral assistance from the governments of Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States (see MDTF and World Bank portals). The reconstruction project accepted the notion of building back better as the guiding principle to through which to achieve resilience in the new structures. To accomplish this objective, 17 different post-earthquake housing designs were prepared that owners could use when rebuilding their homes (see DUDBC/GoN 2015). The first two suggested home designs were stone masonry with mud mortar and brick masonry, and the other 15 models were stone or brick masonry in cement mortar with reinforced bar (see Sharma et al. 2018). Although the government allowed mud-mortar housing reconstruction, it was limited to single-storey houses; however, this provision is not suitable in hilly and mountainous terrain where space is limited. It should be added that the prescribed models are different from the traditional houses, which are typically two-storey buildings (Adhikary 2016, p. 539) with a *buigal* (attic). In the research locations, three-storey houses were found: the first floor is used for a kitchen and a portion of that floor is also used as a goat shed. The first floor may be further extended outside of the house for a byre[34]. The middle floor is used for living and also keeping valuable utensils. The third floor, buigal, is used for storing food grains. In some houses, rice grains are stored on the second floor, making a *bhakāri* (storage).

Similarly, the owner-driven reconstruction (ODR) approach was adopted for the reconstruction of private houses. This means the disaster survivors who lost their homes in the

[34] In rural Nepal, each household keeps livestock in small numbers unlike in the western world. Every family may, for example, own a few goats, a pair of oxen, and one or two cows. Considering the small herd numbers, a goat shed is generally constructed on a dedicated floor area, and a byre is constructed attached to the house. Keeping these livestock shelters close to the house also helps protect the animals from predators such as leopards (if the settlement is near the forest). Further, a byre near the house is also meant to protect the livestock from theft as cattle rustling may be high in some places, especially the Tarai region.

earthquake would receive partial financial support with technical guidance. The onus was on owners to build the houses themselves following the guidelines provided. Further, the government utilised a blanket approach, which meant everyone affected received the same (equal) assistance. Each household received an allocation of NPR300,000 (approximately USD3,000) to build their post-earthquake homes. The first tranche, NPR50,000, was given after signing an agreement, the second tranche, NPR150,000, was given after construction up to the plinth level (1st inspection) was completed, and the third tranche, NPR100,000, was released after construction up to the roof band level (2nd inspection) was completed. Those who needed to retrofit their dwelling instead of building a new home would receive NPR100,000.

This blanket approach that treated everyone the same regardless of their socio-economic situation resulted in vulnerable households falling behind schedule in their housing reconstruction. In this regard, Kalyan KC, a humanitarian worker in the Gorkha District, stated:

> Some people were left behind. They could not build their houses. These people who were old and separated from their children, those who did not have stable income sources or were very poor, those households that had single women [women headed households] or who were disabled people, lagged behind. As a result, these people were forced to live in a *katero* [a small fragile hut]. Years later, the government allowed the I/NGOs to top up rupees 50,000 to help these vulnerable peoples complete their housing construction.

On the other hand, disaster survivors were not allowed to receive housing reconstruction assistance from more than one source. So, if a family received money for reconstruction from a humanitarian agency, they would not get the allocated support from government (GoN 2073 v.s., Article 5.2). Therefore, most I/NGOs opted out of their reserved housing reconstruction donations and diverted their resources to other activities such as livelihood support or

community infrastructure rebuilding programmes. Nevertheless, some I/NGOs had already started to help disaster survivors build their post-earthquake houses before the government's detailed reconstruction guideline as it took more than a year to finalise it (see "Setting firm foundation", 2016).

Indeed, many I/NGOs felt the reconstruction bureaucracy was complex and slow and did not welcome or support their proposed reconstruction assistance plans (see Lam and Kuipers 2019). As these organisations could not help the disaster survivors build their houses, some of them identified gaps in housing reconstruction. So, they extended financial help to disaster survivors for transporting construction materials from the district headquarters or market centre to their villages. Some helped the people build toilets. Eventually, these types of assistance won the approval of government as well. In addition, some I/NGOs built prototype or model houses in the communities for demonstration and learning purposes; however, they could not be used for the intended purpose as the plan was not communicated clearly with the recipients and other communities in the village (Progress Inc. 2018). Further, many of these houses lacked the essential features required to claim the status of exemplary housing. For example, the model houses intended for households with disabled family members did not have disability-friendly features, such as handrails or ramps to assist with mobility.

People's Perceptions on Government Assistance and Bureaucracy

"The government gave us rice but not curry" - Sher Bahadur, Sindhupalchok

Nepali meals that include rice should consider curry at a bare minimum (of course, other items such as pickle or lentil soup could be added as available or affordable). Sher Bahadur's statement of giving rice without curry reveals that the assistance provided by the state was partial and

inadequate. So, Sher Bahadur had to prepare curry by himself; the point being that the curry (or ingredients required to make it) is far more expensive than the rice.

To cover the additional costs of rebuilding a house after the earthquake, disaster survivors like Sher Bahadur borrowed loans from local money lenders/landlords, banks, and micro-finance institutions (MFIs). (The painful consequences of this will be discussed shortly in "Borrowing Debt and Dukha" section.) In addition to local loans, disaster survivors had multiple strategies for rebuilding their post-earthquake houses. They exchanged *parma* to build their respective places. Parma is an exchange of labour among neighbours or community members. This tradition has existed in Nepal for generations; however, it should be noted that this system is diminishing in many communities (see Shneiderman 2023). Moreover, the disaster survivors reused the debris for housing reconstruction, which helped reduce construction costs, especially for poor households. Wood was the most common item reused for door and window panels. Other researchers have carried out detailed studies on debris and construction waste management in Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction (see Khanal et al. 2021).

Most of the disaster survivors said that they did not face bureaucratic difficulties when accessing financial provisions allocated by the government for permanent housing reconstruction. Sarala (62), a female Dalit disaster survivor in the Dhading District, said, "It [the process] was easy for me. I didn't have to return empty-handed [when I went to receive the tranche]. I received it without any difficulty". She further added, "I had my *nagarikta* [citizenship card] and *purja* [land ownership certificate] with me. I showed these [to the government officer], and I got the money easily".

Sarala did not face any bureaucratic impediments to get her tranches because she had all the necessary documents with her; however, she witnessed other people struggling to access the

official grants. She stated that those who did not have citizenship proof or land ownership certificates (which were buried or lost in the earthquake destruction of their homes) had a much more challenging time. They often had to repeatedly visit government offices over a period of weeks or months.

Not everyone found this process wearisome. Biru (53), a male Chepang (ethnic) minority in the Dhading District, stated, "…we had a need of money. We needed to build [our house] as soon as possible…we visited [the government offices] four or five times. Trouble? What is the trouble? It didn't bother [me] much". The comments of Biru, who was unworried by multiple visits to the government office, may have been informed by his previous experience of accessing government services, which are usually delayed due to red tape. Everyday bureaucracy in Nepal is broadly criticised for not providing timely public services and for being biased in service delivery (see Bista 1991; Jamil and Dangal 2009; Subedi 2014; Uprety 1997).

Nonetheless, some people did find the bureaucratic challenges for accessing housing assistance from the government offices burdensome. Sani Maya (45), a female Dalit disaster survivor in the Sindhupalchok District, said:

> It was difficult. I had to take a photograph. Then I needed to visit the VDC [Village Development Committee; local government office] taking my photograph and other documents. I had to take them with me and present them [in front of the government officer]. The money did not arrive in two to three months.

The bureaucratic process or requirement may not look complicated through the description of Sani Maya, as it appears to have involved only a few requirements and steps. However, many experienced unanticipated delays when it came to receiving financial help. Biru said he was not familiar with the system and the process which followed, which led to trouble. He stated:

> It was difficult to receive [the housing support] for a layperson like me. For smart people who knew the system, it was faster. For an ignorant person, it is hard to know what documents are required, where [in which office] to submit, and from where we can receive it.

Some local NGOs assisted people like Biru and Sani Maya to prepare necessary documentation and help apply for the government grant.

Borrowing: Debt and *Dukha*

Dukha in Nepali refers to sorrow, pain, or suffering. The disaster survivors shared that they were experiencing great dukha due to the debt taken on to rebuild their post-earthquake housing. The majority of the participants noted that they had taken loans from individuals and financial organisations (banks and MFIs) to build their houses. People became burdened with debt following the earthquake. Sagar (33), a Majhi (ethnic) minority disaster survivor in the Sindhupalchok District, said, "We did not have much debt [before the earthquake]. But now, it seems that not only me, but everyone in the village is in debt".

Parmila (42), a female Dalit disaster survivor in the Gorkha District said, "…we borrowed some loan. We hoped to repay it by doing *dukha* and performing *melapat* [working as labourers in others' farms]".

Biru in Dhading took loans from two micro-finance institutions (MFIs). He shared:

> ... the money given by the government was not enough. Therefore, I borrowed one-lakh [NPR100,000] each from two sources. I was [a member] in two different groups of micro-finance companies from which I borrowed loans to build our house.

Like Biru, Sagar took loans from more than one MFI. He stated, “I am in two or three [MFI] groups. I took out a loan from one group. To repay the first group, I took out a loan from another group. This debt has made my life very miserable and restless”.

Further, taking a loan from the public or commercial banking sector was not easy either. The survivors said that their loan was sanctioned only following incredible difficulty. Some survivors confessed that they even had to bribe someone to get their bank loan. Sani Maya in the Sindhupalchok District revealed, “The bank was not cooperative. It was very difficult for us. It took about six months. Finally, I had to give bribe rupees 18,000/19,000 to get my loan approved”.

Repaying the loan was even more challenging for poor people. Anita (39), a female Majhi ethnic minority in the Sindhupalchok District, stated, “Oh, loan! The [financial] institutions will not leave without collecting [reimbursing] the loan. If you repay the loan, there will be no food on the plate”. Phul Maya (41), a female Chepang ethnic minority in Dhading, recalled that her family were living happily before the earthquake, but the earthquake and its aftermath changed everything. She had to repay a huge debt, one that was incurred to build the house. She was not hopeful that her family’s situation would ever improve. As she explained:

> We’ve finished building our house. Before the earthquake, we were able to eat [live] very well, whatever we had [in the family]. We were content with it. Then we built this house borrowing loans. At that time, we thought that if we had a house, everything would be fine. Now, we’ve got a house but have a huge debt. Due to this debt, it feels we have invited an epidemic [disaster]. Our income is not sufficient to feed our family. It seems we will never progress in life just because of the debt.

The exceptionally high interest rates of loans were found to be crippling disaster survivors, pushing them into debt and causing them to suffer more in everyday life. Their repayment plan

was also shattered because of Covid-19—family members lost foreign employment and remittances as well as income opportunities to sell vegetables and handicrafts or to go out and work as a mason, carpenter, or wage labourer. The interest charged by both village moneylenders and MFIs was found to be excessive. Gopal (33), a male Chepang ethnic minority in Dhading, was furious about the pressure from MFI staff to repay loan instalments. He said, "the interest rate is very high… they charged us 16 per cent, 18 per cent, and 20 per cent interest in our loan. Now they [the staff] are giving me pain pressurising to repay". The interest repayments scared Sapana (36), a female Chepang ethnic minority in Dhading, as she feared her family may die from starvation. She stated, "The interest of the loan is 36 per cent [per annum]. I sometimes think, what is the use of building a house out of such an [high] interest loan? We are going to live without food soon due to repaying the loan".

A Feeling for Home? Comparing the Old with the New

Shukra (31), a male Tamang ethnic minority disaster survivor, said, "I feel very safe [in the new house]". "Feeling safe" in the post-disaster housing was a common perception among the disaster survivors interviewed. The disaster survivors shared that they learned how to build earthquake-resilient homes while working with skilled masons to build their houses. They recognised why their previous homes had fallen apart. These developments bode well for the prevention and mitigation of future disasters.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, most houses made up of mud-and-stone were damaged; those which remained standing were concrete (or RCC) houses. Therefore, the villagers developed perceptions that traditional homes are weak and unsafe, whereas concrete structures are robust and earthquake-resilient (Adhikary 2016). In this regard, Prem (29), a male Dalit disaster survivor in Dhading stated, "Cement house is better. If an earthquake ever occurs again, I believe this house will stand strong". Dhan Kumari (46), a female Dalit disaster survivor

in the Dhading District, also had a similar sense of trust in the post-disaster house; she remarked, "…the house is robust now. It will not fall down easily with small earthquakes".

However, soon after living in their new houses, people realised that the brick-and-cement constructions also have disadvantages. They are not good for health, unlike the mud-and-stone ones. Also, they realised that such houses are not suitable for local climatic conditions. In this regard, Bal Bahadur (46), a male ethnic minority member in the Gorkha District, stated:

> I grew up in the *dhungāmātoko ghar* (a house made up of mud and stones). After living in this house [made up of bricks, cement, and CGI sheets], I experienced that this is not good for health. In summer, the rooms get very hot, and in winter, they remain freezing cold.

A male Dalit in the Sindhupalchok District, Bhola, had a similar experience. Unlike the thatched roofs in his old house, he found the CGI sheet roof unconducive to the climate. He stated:

> It gets extremely hot on a sunny day, and we have to roam around to find a cool place. Now in winter, the dews fall down [from the roof], causing a great difficulty to protect children from sickness…

Bal Bahadur (46), a male Magar ethnic minority in the Gorkha District, noted that the new style house is also unsuitable for storing seeds and grains after harvesting. He remarked:

> …we are farmers, we need to store [grains] after harvesting, whatever amount-either more or less, we could produce. If you store in a cemented house [unlike our traditional homes], half of our grains, um let's say twenty-five per cent, is eaten up by the damp caused by the cement.

Sagar in the Sindhupalchok District had the same experience. He stated:

> We have been told that this [new house] is strong [earthquake resistant]. But the other thing is that as far as I can see, the grains stored there keep germinating and is no longer suitable for eating. If we keep blanket over there [in the room], the

> mould will come, and you will not be able to use that blanket again… the grains stored in the room get spoiled quickly perhaps it is due to the cold temperature in the room [caused by cement]. If you bring flour and keep it there, it gets spoiled, and it can no longer be used for consumption.

Alina Anjan, a humanitarian worker in the Rasuwa District, said, "What is the point of making a cemented house in the mountain? We needed such a house that is warm enough in the winter…". She also noted that houses in rural Nepal are not for humans but for livestock as well; however, this was not thought through in the post-earthquake housing. Similarly, people also pointed out that the new houses were less spacious than their previous homes. Bhakta Raj, an NGO humanitarian worker in the Gorkha District, said, "The rebuilt new houses have two rooms or one room. The space is therefore not enough [for the family]. Several other homeowners told us that their house was too small for their family numbers.

Partially damaged homes still existed in some places, having not been replaced after the earthquake. Bhakta Raj said that the local people used the old-damaged homes for other purposes such as a kitchen or for storage. He remarked, "… people live there [in the new house] but cook food in the old home. They use the old home as storage… So, they frequently go there to take out or keep the stuff there". Similar practices have been documented by other researchers (see Kotani et al. 2020).

Discussion

This section critically examines the post-disaster reconstruction process in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake based on the findings presented above. Table 11 summarises my theoretical and empirical discussion points, , and these are elaborated on in the following sub-sections.

Table 11

Overview of the Discussion

The focus of the discussion	The added value of the discussion in relation to the past studies
Housing reconstruction rendered technical and its social consequences	Previous studies, such as Baniya (2021) and Rawal et al. (2021), have pointed out how post-disaster housing reconstruction has failed to address the needs of the rural people. My research collects further evidence in this area and builds on this debate by employing the rendering technical lens to show how this thinking overlooks the complex socio-economic and political dimensions of housing reconstruction.
Disproportionate impact of the earthquake and subsequent housing assistance contested	I discuss how the housing reconstruction aid failed to recognise the post-disaster vulnerability of poor and marginalised households. The findings are in line with those of previous studies by Barber (2016), Boyle and Shneiderman 2020; Lam and Kuipers (2019), Limbu et al. (2019,2022), and Rawal et al. (2021).
Concrete structure as symbolic power and status gain	The disaster survivors criticised the post-earthquake houses but also praised them as *ramro* (nice or beautiful). The discussion here deals with this paradox by using sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus and symbolic power.
Post-disaster locations beyond physical sites of reconstruction	Previous studies—for example, Adams et al. (2009), Gunewardena and Schuller (2008), Klein (2007), Le Billon et al. (2020), Neef (2021) and Paudel et al. (2020)—have discussed how disaster profiteering can emerge following a crisis, benefitting elites at the expense of the poor. My discussion builds on this debate using the Bourdieusian lens, which reveals that disaster-stricken fields are more than sites for reconstruction but are also social arenas of struggle and competition to secure positions and capital. I also show how these issues can be mitigated in the disaster recovery and reconstruction process.

Housing Reconstruction Rendered Technical

I argue that Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction was rendered technical. This concept was developed by anthropologist Tania Murray Li in her book *The Will to Improve* (2007) and refers to a process of translating socio-political issues into technical problems. As such, they require technical solutions. Authorities or implementing agencies identify problems and establish needs; interventions then proceed on the basis of that which is "knowable, improvable and technical" (Li 2007, p. 154). The authorities consider activities that are demonstratable (in physical terms), achievable, and reportable within the constraints of the given project's deadline. Thus, complexity is simplified such that larger socio-political issues are elided. The following evidential vignettes indicate how the housing reconstruction was rendered technical.

Following Li (2007 2011), I turn my attention to scrutinising the Earthquake Housing Reconstruction Project (EHRP), jointly funded by the World Bank and other bilateral agencies and implemented by the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), to understand how the housing reconstruction intervention was rendered technical in the project formulation and delivery. I examine which components or elements were included and which excluded in the project plan.

The project description of the EHRP referred to the *Post Disaster Needs Assessment* (PDNA) report (NPC/GoN 2015b) for justifying the needs of the housing reconstruction intervention. However, in line with rendered technical strategies, the project document overlooked other complex social issues discussed in the report. For example, gender disparity in terms of land and housing ownership was not included in the project plan. Further, women's participation was confined to attending orientation, awareness, and training programmes.

Women were considered for masonry training, but there was no reference to, or report on, whether equal pay was ensured to address the wage gap between the male and female workers.

Further, the *Post Disaster Needs Assessment (*PDNA) report depicted the social vulnerability of Dalit and some ethnic peoples as well as households with people living with disability and elderly people. It recommended adopting the equity principle while supporting them (see NPC/GoN 2015b, p. 13). However, uniform assistance was proposed irrespective of the differential impacts of the disaster on households and their differences in terms of marginalisation and social vulnerability. These issues were only addressed years after project implementation. But again, the assistance was limited to a very small number of households categorised as the most vulnerable beneficiaries, namely single women above 65 years, senior citizens above 70 years, people living with disabilities (red or blue cardholders), and minor (under 16 years) heads of households (NRA/GoN 2020, para. 4). At this juncture, more than 18,000 vulnerable people were identified to provide an additional top-up cash grant of NPR50,000 (USD500) along with technical assistance as necessary.

The preference for seeking technical solutions to the housing construction was clearly visible. The specified housing designs were prescribed without prior consultation with the disaster-affected communities. In order to materialise the design, various documents of a technical nature were produced, including a construction manual, technical guidelines, assessment forms, and technical monitoring and supervision formats. Further, many technical human resources were recruited or mobilised in the construction sites. Within one year of the earthquake, more than 2,300 engineers (including sub-engineers and assistant sub-engineers) had already been hired by the government to carry out the housing reconstruction efforts (see

NRA/GoN 2016b). Around two years after the earthquake, more than 14,000 engineers were deployed in the 14 hardest-hit districts alone (see “Program update” 2017).

Rendering reconstruction as technical came with obvious consequences. The agency of the disaster-affected people was overlooked, and their participation in the design process was ignored. The reconstruction process failed to comply with the core principles of being owner-driven. Socially and climatically less suitable houses resulted. The research participants expressed their concerns that the new houses lack space for large families, are impractical for everyday use, and are inappropriate for the local climate. My findings also showed that use of the cement and concrete housing structure in higher altitudes made children sick. Baniya (2021) has shown how the reconstruction plan failed to recognise the context of rural life in Nepal, overlooking the need for a hearth. I also found such a failing—the overlooking of a goat shed, a byre, and a space for storing food grains after harvesting.

Moreover, vernacular designs and traditional construction techniques were replaced in the post-earthquake reconstruction, with consequent losses of practicality and cultural heritage (The Asia Foundation 2019). However, the gain may be a safer home, as scholars have argued that it is possible to achieve structural resilience in the Nepali vernacular homes (Adhikary 2016; Forbes 2018; Gautam et al. 2016a; Gautam and Rodrigues).

The Blanket Approach

Blanket assistance is generally used in the immediate aftermath of rapid-onset emergencies, but a targeted approach should then be administered later in the recovery and reconstruction programmes after a detailed assessment has been carried out (Barber 2016). The blanket approach adopted by the state in this instance provided uniform reconstruction assistance to everyone. This cannot be justified in an unequal society. The earthquake disproportionately

impacted poorer people. Marginalised social groups, people with disabilities, women-headed households, and senior-citizen-headed households bore the brunt of the earthquake and found it harder to rebuild homes due to their pre-and-post socio-economic vulnerabilities (see Lam and Kuipers 2019). Furthermore, the blanket approach failed to recognise the spatial situatedness of people. Disaster survivors living in remote locations had to spend a significant amount of time and money transporting goods from market centres to their villages. Moreover, some people, especially those who lacked sufficient information due to geographical remoteness, were illiterate, or had low confidence and communication skills, found it more challenging to access the cash grant on time. Therefore, they were amongst the very last to receive the grant. This situation also suggests that a more targeted approach is necessary to reach the poorest, most vulnerable, and socially excluded groups.

Concrete Building as Symbolic Power and Status Gain

Some people thought that their new house was beautiful because of its concrete structure. Dhan Kumari in Dhading said, "A house made up of bricks is 'rāmro' (nice or beautiful)". We also saw in the previous section one of the participants saying that a cement house is better. Despite raising many concerns, most participants viewed the post-earthquake housing as rāmro; this, however, presents a paradox that has not been addressed in previous studies.

Pakki-ghar (a concrete house) has been a symbol of *ādhunik* (modernity) and social status in Nepal for several decades. Concrete buildings are also associated with progress and *dhani* people (wealthy/rich or prosperous). In the past, larger traditional/vernacular homes indicated a higher economic class and thus enjoyed higher social status and prestige. Following the Nepal Earthquake 2015, the meaning of pakki-ghar even expanded, representing a permanent, robust, earthquake-resistant, and durable house. By way of contrast, vernacular

homes have seen their status degraded to *kachchi*, denoting fragile, non-durable, and non-resistant to shocks.

Therefore, in line with Bourdieu's observations, buildings hold symbolic power. Further, social power and domination are legitimised through symbolic power. Social status is achieved and recognised in Nepal through the type of building (kachchi or pakki) one owns. As I recall, until some decades ago, the village elites used to have bigger vernacular homes, and poor people used to have smaller ones (this is still true today in remote and underdeveloped villages). Of course, financial wealth (economic capital) and buildings (symbolic capital) were always interlinked. However, even if some families were less affluent, they used to enjoy some degree of social prestige if they owned a larger house. Social status correlated with building size. Then, a new trend started after the 1990s. People started to build concrete houses. By this time, it was already getting hard to procure timber for house construction due to several factors, including deforestation, increased patrolling by forest security personnel, and more stringent community forestry regulations. People therefore had to find alternatives for building homes. At first, they used *kukāth* (literally bad timber; weak timber), unlike the hard (durable) timber in the past. Gradually, there was a shift in housing construction. For example, the people who needed a dwelling—people migrating from other parts of the country or family members splitting from the joint family—started to build concrete houses.

The cities and peri-urban places had already witnessed building concrete houses and rental or commercial buildings. Then many of the village elites also built concrete homes. Even a smaller concrete home started to garner higher social and economic value than the large vernacular homes. Concrete houses were desirable. Therefore, the preference for these structures in the post-earthquake reconstruction should not be a surprise. People had already heard, seen,

and experienced a concrete house's social and symbolic significance. Therefore, the habitus shapes the habitat, and the habitat shapes the habitus (Bourdieu 1999, p. 28; Bourdieu 2018, p.111). The predispositions of individuals informed by their history, or past experience, shape the structure of a building, and then the building eventually shapes the everyday life and social pattern in the house.

Reconstruction: Field of Struggles, Capital Accumulation, and Profit Maximisation

Bourdieu (1992, pp. 98–101) defines a *field* as a social space where interactions, competitions, and struggles occur over specific resources or profits. Using Bourdieu's field theory, I argue that disaster-stricken locations are not only sites for rebuilding and reconstruction. They are also social arenas where struggles occur between different actors to accumulate specific capitals and secure or improve a dominant position in the post-disaster field. In this regard, Radimská (2002) affirms that "individual actors are motivated by unconscious strategies of profit maximisation". My research reinforced this theoretical proposition. I observed that specific agents such as sāhu (money lenders), landlords, and micro-finance institutions (MFIs)[35] successfully capitalised on the catastrophe, thereby gaining control over capitals and occupying the dominant position (economic or social) in the post-disaster field (Bourdieu 1996b, p. 215). The sāhu in the village charged as high as 36 per cent interest on loans. Micro-finance institutions (MFIs) also lured people into taking loans and charged as high as 18 per cent interest on them. This MFI interest

[35] MFIs and micro-lending, which used to be recognised as the panacea for poverty reduction and a means to women's empowerment in the 1990s, have received severe criticism in recent years. The major claims are that they fail to reach the poorest and most marginalised peoples, charge high interest rates pushing people into debt, and apply coercive methods of repayment enforcement directed at the poor (Ali, 2014; Cons and Paprocki, 2010; Karim, 2011; Karnani, 2007). The lived experiences of disaster survivors in this study support some of these claims. Further, the narratives of disaster survivors in this study revealed that MFIs have continued to charge high interest on micro-lending despite people's suffering resulting from the crisis. Not only that, the survivors even had to face coercive actions such as threats (one of them described it as *pain*) from the MFI staff to enforce loan repayments.

rate would be higher as the interest is charged on the capital loan received. Similarly, some landlords massively increased the price of their land when they knew that landless people had received money for purchasing land for housing reconstruction. Sometimes people even had to bribe staff to have their bank loans approved. No strong measures were taken to prevent these actions. As a result, many are trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty and debt. This post-disaster debt trap is by no means restricted to Nepal. For example, following the end of the decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka, internally displaced persons, victims of conflict, were supported to return and construct housing, only to be re-victimised, this time as victims of debt (see Gunasekara et al. 2016). Bourdieu warns that capital is unequally distributed within the field so that there are dominant and dominated agents, and these relations of exploitation reproduce social inequality (Lahire 2015; Peillon 1998).

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of housing in Nepal. I showed that houses in Nepal are generally vernacular; however, housing preferences and building structures are changing fast due to rapid urbanisation. I also showed how housing reconstruction was a major task in Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake, as more than half a million houses were destroyed.

I discussed the different types of reconstruction approaches—mainly owner-driven reconstruction and donor-driven reconstruction—and highlighted some key issues in housing reconstruction. I applied Bourdieu's theories in housing reconstruction space. Moreover, I discussed the findings on the post-disaster housing reconstruction in Nepal. At this juncture, I presented people's perceptions of government assistance and bureaucracy, noting that they had to borrow from individuals and financial institutions to rebuild their homes and that government assistance was insufficient. This borrowing has been an ongoing painful experience for them. I

also documented people's views on the new house in comparison to the old ones and underlined the paradox of the new house being seen as rāmro despite occupants pointing to its considerable limitations. Using Bourdieu's symbolic power theory to understand this paradox revealed that a pakki-ghar (a concrete house) has been a symbol of modernity and social status in Nepal for decades. Similarly, I showed that the blanket assistance was a colour blind approach that overlooked the caste and class situation in the communities. The poor and marginalised people and households living in remote locations were disproportionately affected due to this provision.

I demonstrated that housing reconstruction was rendered technical. Thus, a technical and bureaucratic process followed: housing design was prepared by engineers and approved by bureaucrats without consultation with the local people; more civil overseers and engineers were hired to oversee the housing reconstruction; and concrete houses were erected. As a result, the earthquake reconstruction produced houses unfit for purpose. They essentially replaced vernacular design and traditional construction technologies with concrete houses that are spatially insufficient, climatically unsuitable, and practically inconvenient for everyday rural life. Moreover, I showed that disaster-stricken locations are not only sites for rebuilding and reconstruction, but they are also social arenas for struggles, competition, and profit maximisation.

CHAPTER VIII

CASTE AND ETHNIC MARGINALISATION AND POST-DISASTER AFTERLIVES[36]

Disaster scholarships on caste/casteism in relation to natural hazards and disaster experience and recovery are scant (Gaillard 2011). It is crucial to understand how the historical marginalisation process reproduces poverty and vulnerability and impacts marginalised caste and ethnic people disproportionately in disasters.

As I discussed in Chapter I, caste and ethnicity are still a dominant factor of social stratification in Nepal, as well as in other South Asian societies (Gellner 2007; Sharma 2012; Subedi 2016). Caste and ethnic discrimination practices imposed in Nepali in the 19th century still widely exist in Nepal, casteism is believed to have weakened in recent decades. Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples, who make up nearly 48 per cent of the 26.5 million population of Nepal, experience deep historical structural marginalisation (CBS)/Government of Nepal 2014). Therefore, the highest rate of chronic and structural poverty is found among Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples in Nepal. Due to such vulnerability, these marginalised social groups were disproportionately impacted by the earthquake in 2015. I argue that it is crucial to analyse the relevance and effectiveness of the humanitarian actions for the most marginalised communities, such as Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples, because an ineffective response and recovery process

[36] This chapter has been extracted from Karki J (2022) Caste, Ethnic Marginalisation and Post-Disaster Afterlives in Nepal. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. The two anonymous reviewers are sincerely acknowledged for their valuable comments which greatly improved the quality of the manuscript.

can perpetuate social inequality and put people in more vulnerable conditions (Gaillard and Cadag 2009; D'Souza 1986).

A number of studies have been undertaken on the 2015 Nepal Earthquake. Only a few, however, have focused on the lived experience of Dalit groups. These include the studies by Arora (2015) and Bownas and Bishokarma (2019). Bownas and Bishokarma analysed the micro-politics of casteism in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake in Sindhupalchok, one of the worst-hit districts in Nepal. Similarly, Arora has documented the lived experience of Dalit women facing discriminatory practices and abuses in the post-earthquake relief and rehabilitation process in the Kathmandu Valley and Sindhupalchok District of Nepal. The research sheds light on caste/ethnic marginalisation and disasters using a Bourdieusian theoretical framework and historical analysis.

This chapter intends to unpack the lived experience of Dalit and other Ādibāsi-Janajāti in the response and recovery process following the earthquake. I also revisit the history of domination and marginalisation of the Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti people and link it to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake and its aftermath contexts. In this regard, I analyse the historical marginalisation process reproducing social and economic vulnerability among Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples. I argue that these social groups were more vulnerable before the earthquake and were impacted disproportionately by the 2015 Nepal Earthquake.

I begin by providing an overview of the historical contexts of casteism and ethnic marginalisation process that have reproduced social vulnerability, keeping Dalit and marginalised ethnic groups more vulnerable than others. Then I move on to tracing previous studies conducted on the themes of marginalisation, caste, ethnicity, and disasters. After that, I present my findings related to the lived experience of Dalit following the 2015 Nepal Earthquake.

An Overview of the Caste System and Historical Marginalisation Process in Nepal

Revisiting the Caste System in Nepal: One more time

Caste is a complex issue intertwined with religion and politics, thus I provide here a basic overview of the caste system with specific reference to Nepal.[37] I introduce the caste system and trace its history and developments since the unification of small principalities to become greater Nepal. Then I examine the historical marginalisation process of Dalit and and Ādibāsi-Janajātis which resulted in them remaining at the bottom of the socio-economic indices over the period. In the discussion section, I link this state of pre-disaster marginalisation and vulnerabilities to the disaster and aftermath lifeworld.

Caste system stratifies people into an unequal and hierarchical structure in society.[38] The people belonging to the lower hierarchy are considered as impure and are subject to the untouchability practice.[39] The caste structure and ritual purity are static and, unlike class, ascribed at birth. The caste ascription is considered as one's *karma* (fate). According to this caste system, Brahmins are at the top of the caste hierarchy followed by the Chhetri/Thakuri castes. Ādibāsi-Janajāti are planted in the lower strata and Dalit people are placed at the lowest order, with the latter undergoing the most severe forms of discrimination and social exclusion (Gurung

[37] The caste system in Nepal is different from India for it incorporates non-Hindu ethnic groups into the caste system and hierarchy; see Gurung, 2006, p. 11.

[38] Classic or ancient Hindu texts are attributed to have introduced and legitimised the caste system. Therefore, this form of social stratification is common among Hindu. However, the caste-like hierarchy is also found among some Muslim and Buddhist communities in the South Asian countries (see Jodhka and Shah, 2010).

[39] The untouchability practice entails prohibition from using public services/resources such as temples, tea shops, and public water-taps. The people in this lower hierarchy may face discrimination in accessing public services such as schooling. These social exclusions have been gradually decreasing over the years due to increased education and awareness, Dalit activism, and legal reformation, but many have argued the change is slow.

2006; Khatiwada et al. 2021). Hence, the caste system is a Brahminical social order or Brahminism.

Nepal has remained an exclusionary state since its unification in the late 18th century. After unifying Nepal from the smaller principalities, the King of Gorkha principality Prithvi Narayan (PN) Shah created the national caste system to unite the new heterogenous Nepali society (Nepali-speaking Hindu population, Tibeto-Burman-speaking population, and peoples of Tibetan ethnicity on the northern border) (Höfer 2005). In this regard, some scholars have suggested that King PN Shah used the caste system as a means to unite the subjects under one rule and reign over the unified nation, and the Hindu religion would legitimise the monarch's divine right (Hachhethu 2003). Moreover, the caste system was also necessary for his ambition to create an *asli Hindustān* (a pure land of Hindus) national identity in order to make the nation distinct from Mughal (Muslim) and British Raj (which is considered to have been influenced by Christianity) neighbours (Gurung 2006).[40]

Casteism was legitimised during the Rana regime by formulating the nation's legal code called *Muluki Ain* in 1854 based on Hindu orthodoxy (Gurung 2006). The MA ranked the entire population into caste hierarchy: *Tāgādhāri* (wearers of holy cord) castes such as Brahmin and Chhetri at the top, Indigenous and ethnic peoples (known today as Ādibāsi-Janajāti) at the middle level, artisan castes (known today as Dalit), and Newar scavenger castes at the bottom.[41] Unlike in India, where the Ādibāsi and non-Hindu groups were excluded in the caste system, Nepal's caste system, legalised by the Muluki Ain, added all social and religious groups under the caste hierarchy (see Gurung 2006 p. 40; Höfer 2005). Hence, following the unification

[40] However, it should be noted that some forms of caste system already existed centuries ago during the Malla reign in the Kathmandu valley (in the 13th century) and in the Gorkha principality (16th century) (see Hachhethu, 2003).

[41] See Appendix 2 for a detailed list.

project, the caste system was used as an instrument to integrate the population (Hachhethu 2003). To put it another way, the caste system was imposed as a state rule—a *technology of governmentality* as Foucault (1979) would call it—in order to govern/regulate the caste subjects across all territories under the unified kingdom.[42]

The Panchayat regime of the 1960s[43] promoted the monocultural and monolingual nationalism of the Nepali-speaking dominant Khas people in the name of nation building and national unity—but at the linguistic and cultural expense of the Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples. The Panchayat regime undermined the pluralistic character of the Nepali society by inculcating the ideology of *ek bhāsa, ek bhesh, ek dharma, ek desh* (one language, one way of dress, one religion, one nation), which further created inequality and disparity among different social groups, placing Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti at the bottom of the development over the decades.[44] The highest rate of chronic and structural poverty is found among Dalits and Ādibāsi-Janajātis in Nepal (Wagle 2017). Dalit, particularly Tarai Dalit, have the lowest human development indicator (HDI) in the country (UNDP 2014).

Today caste-based discrimination is legally prohibited in Nepal and therefore has legal consequences such as financial penalties and imprisonment. However, caste-based

[42] I warmly thank one reviewer for providing this helpful comment on the journal article manuscript which assisted me in articulating these points.

[43] The Panchayat regime, which lasted for about 30 years in Nepal, was a party-less democratic system (or guided democracy) retaining power with the king.

[44] It should be noted that many ethnic groups, such as Limbu in east Nepal, were once resourceful with significant land assets. The gradual loss of landownership is attributed to the state's policies and political control favouring the king or state's technocrats, loyalists, and non-ethnic elite caste people by marginalising ethnic groups to own and maintain their traditional tenure or customary land (see Regmi 1963, 1964, 1968; Caplan 1991, 2004).

discrimination is still practised, predominantly in remote communities.[45] Lawsuits filed by Dalit members against the dominant caste people (and generally from a high class too) for discrimination based on caste are rare. Further, law enforcement is not effective (Aahuti 2014; Bishwakarma 2019). Therefore, caste discrimination is still a major issue in the country.

Landownership and Historical Structural Marginalisation Process in Nepal

Land is a crucial resource in the agrarian society of Nepal because it is strongly associated with the welfare, wellbeing, and dignity of individuals and families (Aryal and Holden 2013). However, a significant proportion of Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples in Nepal either have a smaller size of landholding or have no land at all.[46] This state of near landlessness or landlessness was produced due to the historical marginalisation process that barred these subaltern groups from acquiring land.

Historically, land used to be owned by either the state or ethnic community (cooperatively) in Nepal. The state landlordship was called *raikar*, and the communal land ownership was called *kipat* (particularly among Limbus in eastern Nepal) and *guthi* (land tenure passed on to religious, educational, charitable, or philanthropic institutions) (Regmi 1963). The raikar land was granted to priests, religious teachers (refers to Hindu teachers), soldiers, and members of the nobility and royal family (Regmi 1964). These people normally would be from high castes such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, and Ranas. As a result, Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti people were deprived of landownership. Further, *jagir* was a common practice until 1951 before the Rana regime ended (Regmi 1963). The government assigned *raikar* land in the form of jagir

[45] It is generally believed that caste-based discrimination is decreased in the cities. However, this can be contested. I argue that discriminatory practices are difficult to trace in the cities, as the caste identity can be kept confidential and cannot be easily revealed unlike in the villages where no one is a stranger.

[46] Most of the landless people of Nepal, which account for about 29 per cent of the population, are Dalits and highly marginalised Ādibāsi-Janajāti. In fact, most Dalits are landless (see Adhikari 2008; UNDP 2004)

for a long time as an emolument or a salary to civil and military employees (Regmi 1963). The jagir system was abolished in 1951 after the downfall of the Rana regime. Similarly, the *birta* system helped to create a feudalistic class and served the social and political interest of the rulers (Regmi 1968, 1976). The Limbu ethnic groups lost their traditional landownership known as kipat after the state abolished such system and introduced the system of state landlordship (Levine 1987).

Furthermore, Dalit people were barred from owning productive assets, such as land, and from having access to public education and decent employment. Cultivable and productive land in the hills was generally occupied by high-caste people, [47] who were literate and possessed the resources to travel to the capital for registering their land (Cameron 1993). Dalits became the victim of the land tenure system. If by chance a Dalit could afford to buy land, high-caste landowners would refuse to sell land to them, preferring to sell to other high caste families for political and social advantage (Cameron 1993, pp. 53-54).

Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Disasters

The people who suffer and lose the most during disasters tend to be poor and marginalised people (Tierney 2019). For example, a Dalit household may suffer more in disasters and find it harder to recover in the aftermath of disasters than an educated elite Bahun/Brahmin household. Similarly, dominant elite households, like Bahun, may also receive preferential or special attention in disaster emergencies. For instance, Dalit households in Nepal noted that the affluent neighbourhoods were prioritised for rescue operations in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, based on a predefined attitude that Dalit households have "nothing to lose" for they have poor housing and low levels of household belongings and material wealth (Sob et al. 2015, p. 15). In

[47] See the ethnographic research in Humla District by Levine, 1987.

this way, Dalit households who generally have the *least* material capitals in comparison to other caste people in the community are likely to *lose everything* (see Lord et al. 2016; Sob et al. 2015).

Similarly, the dominant caste groups in India and Sri Lanka discouraged the oppressed caste people from accessing relief provision and temporary shelter in the aftermath of the 2011 Gujarat Earthquake (India) and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (IDSN 2013; see also Price and Bhatt 2009). In the same manner, Dalit people in Nepal were denied access to water from the public tap-stand[48] in the aftermath of the Nepal Earthquake 2015 (Barron 2017). This discriminatory practice led to violence, which eventually had to be quelled by police intervention (The Asia Foundation 2016).

Jha (2015), too, has documented caste based social exclusion during the rescue and relief process in the aftermath of the Kosi floods of Bihar (India) in 2008. In the time of this crisis, dominant caste people had the privilege of living on the terrace of their *pucca* (cemented or concrete) houses while waiting for the rescue boats to arrive.[49] Once the boats arrived, the dominant caste people had the opportunity to be evacuated, as they could influence the *Panchayat* (local government) administration due to their caste and class privilege. The poor Dalit households, however, had no such opportunity. They did not have money to secure passage. These examples show how the discriminatory post-disaster response and recovery process further marginalises the already marginalised people in society. Likewise, Timothy Gill (2007) reported several incidences of caste-based discrimination against the Dalit people—who

[48] Water became a scarce resource following the disaster and in many parts of the country Dalit people are still considered a source of pollution for other castes.

[49] Due to the widespread material/economic poverty among Dalit households, they normally have huts or fragile dwelling structures.

were deemed less worthy—in the emergency response and recovery process along the Indian coast of Tamil Nadu following the tsunami in 2004.

Caste-Based Discrimination in Aftermath of the Earthquake

Most people in the villages lost their homes due to the earthquake. Some houses stood strong, but the household members did not dare to go inside due to the frequent aftershocks. Therefore, they installed tarp tents in an open area with the assistance of neighbours. Further, the survivors shared grains, vegetables, and dāl (lentils or pulses) to prepare meals. In some places, they even set up a community kitchen. However, this encampment was largely based on the caste groups, and mutual cooperation was largely limited to within each group. In this regard, Bhola, a male Dalit in the Sindhupalchok District, said:

> At that time of sorrow when that earthquake devastated us, we did not think about the caste. We were not many, and we did not go to the place where the Bāhun [Brahmin people] were living [after the earthquake] and they also did not come to our place of residence. We [Dalit people] were about 32–34 families living in one place.

Similarly, the livestock of Juntara (44), a male Dalit in the Sindhupalchok District, were killed in the earthquake, and he did not receive any help to rescue or manage the dead bodies of animals. This lived experience contrasts with that of non-Dalit participants, who, often living in homogenous community, received support from other community members.

Caste Discrimination and Social Exclusion in the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Process

Sarala (62), a female Dalit in the Dhading District, said, ‘We are a Dalit caste. Because we are Dalit, other people did not even look at us…we heard that other people got a lot of relief support, but we didn't get it.’ Similarly, Dalit people in the research villages shared that they did not receive information about the relief distribution, as the upper-caste people kept the information among themselves—purposely excluding Dalit households.

In Sindhupalchok, the upper-caste families prevented the Dalit households from constructing a new drinking water facility. There was mutual agreement made between the Dalit and Brahmin families about 20 years prior to provide the source of drinking water to the Dalit community as well. But later, when the drinking water facility was damaged by the earthquake, the Dalit people got an opportunity to rebuild it with the help of the army. However, the high-caste family denied access to the source of water. The army personnel insisted that the source has been used for generations and that the work had already begun and must be completed. Some army personnel also insisted that Dalit people should not be discriminated against. So, the water project was completed. If powerful actors support the cause of the minority, the change is faster!

Dalit and Marginal Ethnic Groups’ Access to Productive Assets

Most participants said that everyone experienced the impact of the earthquake regardless of their caste and class. However, some participants reflected more deeply and shared how the consequences of the disaster were disproportionately distributed among different households, being most severe among marginalised/oppressed social groups. Sagar (33), a male Majhi in the Sindhupalchok District, said:

> We are Majhi [fishing community]. First of all, we do not have enough food to eat and clothes to wear. The Bāhun and Chhetri people had some earning and had more land than us. Therefore, our situation was worse when the earthquake hit us. They did experience some impact, but not as bad as we had to go through.

Further, dominated social groups, like Dalit people, not only tend to have limited landownership but live in an inhospitable landscape, characterised as steep, unproductive, and hazardous. Juntara (44), a male Dalit in the Sindhupalchol District, explained:

> …Dalit, umm…how can Dalit people get a privilege to dwell in a good land? From the beginning, it has remained the same—they [Dalit people] have been living in a slopy terrain and bad [unproductive and/or hazardous] landscape. We were entitled to such land. I do not know whether it was due to our bad luck, or our ancestors were asked to live in such land. You see, we are living in such place and sustaining our livelihoods.

Further, the marginalised ethnic communities in the Dhading District said that they do not own productive assets. In this regard, Tilak (33), a male Chepang in the Dhading District, shared, "We have very few assets and very small land. We just have four ana land. That's all we've got. We've built a house on this land and surviving". Further, he emphasised the importance of capital or assets in restoring livelihoods. Tilak pointed out that households like his cannot initiate small activities, whereas dominant caste groups or wealthy households could easily recover:

> We have lower status. We are at a lower level. We can't [afford to] do. If other [rich] people raise [water] buffaloes, we cannot raise buffaloes. If we wanted to rear goats, we cannot do so. We cannot raise even chickens. Sir, we are at a lower level.

Phul Maya (41), a female Chepang in the Dhading District, underscored the vast distance between her people's situation—one of disadvantage—and that of dominant caste groups:

> We were completely different from other castes. We can only survive if we could earn on that day. We toil our labour every day for our survival and eat whatever is available [for the day]. Our situation is different from other castes…We are the *dukhako jāti* (people of poverty and sorrow).

Further, Phul Maya explained that Chepang community owns few assets and are dependent on precarious casual employment:

> What property can a poor Chepang own! They [our people] have got two goats and one or two cows. If they were rich, they may have a water buffalo. That's all we have got!... Others [caste households] were already better off than us. They had plenty of food [in their house]. They had cattle. They are the 'sāhu'[50]. There were a lot of people who had better conditions than ours. They had good income and therefore had good lifestyle: they used to eat good food and wear nice clothes. But our situation was pathetic at that time [when the earthquake hit]. We were weak. Our husbands used to go out for toiling labour and bring wage and two or four kilos of rice in the evening.

Bhakta Raj, a humanitarian and development worker in the Gorkha District, shared that many Dalit households did not have a citizenship or landownership certificate (either they did not have them or lost them in the rubbles). As a result, there was a delay in receiving the housing reconstruction grant.

[50] A moneylender or someone who has an ability to lend money for other people.

Similarly, many of the recovery activities were not targeted to the Dalit or other marginalised social groups. Therefore, such assistance could not reach these groups, or they were excluded from the start as the criteria did not work for them.

Discussion

Dalit and non-Dalit social relations continued in the same way in the aftermath of the disaster; that is caste-based discrimination and social exclusion were perpetuated. As discussed above, Dalit and non-Dalit households lived separately in the makeshift camps. However, many of the Dalit families living there did not recognise this segregation. In other words, the division was accepted as natural. This incident reveals how caste discrimination operates in everyday life; the exclusionary practices are *naturalised* and *normalised*. Therefore, several Dalit households in villages received less attention or cooperation from their neighbours in the emergency and relief process. Further, the much-appreciated mutual cooperation, known as social capital, demonstrated by the sharing of food, resources, and relief-related information was largely limited to within each caste group. For example, I found that the dominant caste groups withheld the humanitarian aid information from the Dalit families. This finding can be correlated with the dark side of social capital observed by social scientist Daniel Aldrich (2011b) in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami. In his study, Aldrich shows how the dominant social groups who had strong social capital disadvantaged other marginalised caste groups in accessing emergency and recovery aid. Although some studies have shown caste-based discrimination and social exclusion in the disaster relief and recovery process (see, for example, Arora 2022; Bownas and Bishokarma 2018; Jha 2015), very few studies have paid attention to understanding why the caste-system was so rigid that even such a mega earthquake could not shake it. While it can be

interpreted from various perspectives, here I draw on French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's habitus concept to examine *caste as habitus*.

Habitus is the embodied and cognitive predispositions which influences one's way of thinking and acting in the context of social arrangements and interactions between individuals or groups (Bourdieu 1996a, p. 17). Further, Bourdieu explains that habitus is ingrained within an individual over a prolonged period by socialisation processes. Therefore, it is acquired and internalised by individuals and remains incorporated in the mind in the form of long-term dispositions (Bourdieu 1993). Therefore, Bourdieu calls it a *durable disposition* (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 53). Further, habitus can also be transmitted intergenerationally through the socialisation process (see Swartz 1997, p. 104). Therefore, Bourdieu states that habitus is an *embodied history* (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 56).

Bourdieu reiterates that habitus is internalised as a *second nature* (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 56). After all, it seems to be *natural*. No conscious effort is made. This was revealed in my finding regarding the segregated makeshift camps. Both groups–Dalit and non-Dalit–acted in a similar manner: the caste-based partition was made without any conscious effort. Therefore, habitus is a built-in subconscious thing that we perform without knowing that we are doing it. In other words, habitus acts spontaneously as natural, common sense or practical judgement (Swartz 1997, p. 105). As a result, the caste habitus continued to reproduce social hierarchy and domination even after the devastating earthquake.

In the previous section, I discussed how the Dalit and other dominated social groups were historically and structurally marginalised, which resulted in them being in a more vulnerable state than dominant caste groups. The Dalit and marginalised Ādibāsi-Janajāti peoples had relatively fewer (or nil) resources to utilise for recovery. However, a blanket approach (which

favours e*qual* distribution or assistance to all affected households *regardless* of their economic status and social vulnerabilities) was used in the relief, recovery, and reconstruction process. Blanket assistance is generally used in the immediate aftermath of rapid-onset emergencies, but a targeted approach is administered later in the recovery and reconstruction programmes after a detailed assessment has been carried out (Barber 2016). The blanket approach adopted by the state in this instance provided uniform reconstruction assistance to everyone. This cannot be justified in an unequal society. The earthquakes disproportionately impacted poorer people. Marginalised social groups, people with disabilities, female-headed households, and senior-headed households suffered the most and found it harder to rebuild homes due to their pre-and-post socio-economic vulnerabilities (see Lam and Kuipers 2019; Lord et al. 2016). Furthermore, the blanket approach failed to recognise the spatial situatedness of people. Disaster survivors living in remote locations had to spend a significant amount of time and money transporting goods from market centres to their villages. Moreover, some people, especially those who lacked sufficient information due to geographical remoteness, were illiterate, or had low confidence and communication skills, found it more challenging to access the cash grant on time. Therefore, they were amongst the very last to receive the grant. This situation also suggests that a more targeted approach is necessary to reach the poorest, most vulnerable, and socially excluded groups.

Further, the idea of *restoring* livelihoods was unhelpful for Dalit and other dominated/marginalised social groups. Most of the poorest and marginalised households did not have prior business experience due to lack of capital and other factors. As a result, they were considered inexperienced and lacking the necessary skills and confidence to undertake entrepreneurial initiatives. Above all, the potential beneficiaries needed to contribute a specified

amount of capital for entrepreneurship. The restoration project provided the necessary training and partially covered the cost of machinery purchases, with the rest of the cost to be borne by the selected beneficiaries. Consequently, the poorest and most marginalised groups of people, who had no business experience and who lacked capital for investment, were apparently excluded from the project, exacerbating inequalities. However, Samir, an INGO staff, explained that there was one exception to this rule—one disability group in the village did not have upfront money but had high levels of confidence. Nevertheless, it was not known why or how this groups' confidence was scored higher. Similarly, an INGO working in the mountain region supported a group of hotel owners and tourism entrepreneurs to restore their business ventures. However, there was no initiative for developing new business operators from marginalised households and communities. Nonetheless, some assistance was provided to upskill or become tourist guides, and this benefitted some impoverished households; however, eligibility for assistance was based on pre-disaster occupations and not on level of vulnerability. These two cases reveal that elites in communities generally benefitted more than the poorest and most marginalised people, reproducing, if not magnifying, pre-disaster inequalities in the post-disaster environments.[51] Higher-caste people were able to restore their livelihood activities, but Dalits and marginalised people were given no such suitable opportunity. So, I argue that, for them, restoration equated to the restoration of poverty and vulnerability.

[51] Class was also at play here; however, caste and class are generally correlated in Nepal. Poverty is found widespread among Dalit and marginalised social groups (see Wagle 2017).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed marginalisation and caste in the context of disasters. I reviewed the literature on this subject and showed that the empirical research on disasters and Dalits remains limited.

I provided an overview of the caste system in Nepal, observing that the seed of casteism was sowed during the unification process of the country and legalised as a system by subsequent rulers. Caste based-discrimination is deeply rooted in Nepali society. I then discussed the landownership and historical and structural marginalisation process that resulted in meagre landownership or landlessness among the Dalit and oppressed social groups. I explained that these groups were resource poor and vulnerable before the earthquake and, thus, were significantly impacted by this disastrous event. Further, I showed how caste-based discrimination was perpetuated in the post-earthquake environments. In this regard, I used Bourdieu's habitus concept to situate *caste as habitus.*

CHAPTER IX

PARANIRVAR MĀNIS (DEPENDENT PEOPLE)?[52]

Humanitarian (and development) assistance is frequently criticised for creating instances of dependency—or even a deep-set dependency syndrome—among local communities. Such a perception has persisted for decades (see Banskota 1989; Bradbury 1998; de Waal 1989; Jaspars 2018; Shahi 2005). The dependency concept is generally portrayed as *negative* in public discourse (Harvey and Lind 2005, p. 3); as such, humanitarian and development workers are sensitive to the topic and aim to avoid or reduce it as much as possible in their programmes. However, this research questions the assumption that dependency is necessarily a negative thing, and thus worthy of stigma. Instead, I argue that dependency is an inescapable element of the human condition, and that there are *good* dependencies. Disaster recovery programmes should seek to identify and strengthen these dependencies. I identify instances of good dependencies that have existed in Nepali society for generations and show how these dependencies benefit survivors in the aftermath of a disaster. This research therefore contributes to ongoing discussions on dependency syndrome in humanitarian and development settings and has relevance for humanitarian and development actors for policy and practice decisions.

[52] This chapter has been extracted from Karki J, Matthewman S and Grayman JH (2023) *Paranirvar mānis* (dependent people)? Rethinking humanitarian dependency syndrome: A Bourdieusian perspective. *Disasters, 47*(3), 630–650. The three anonymous reviewers are sincerely acknowledged for their valuable comments which greatly improved the quality of the manuscript.

I begin from the standpoint that dependence on humanitarian aid is not necessarily a bad thing. Appropriate relief dependency can make a massive positive difference for disaster-affected poor households in developing countries. For example, it can help children in poor families continue their education in school, stopping them from dropping out and engaging in household work or child labour (Sassi 2021; UN-OCHA 2016). Relief dependency can also prevent human trafficking in the aftermath of disasters (UN-OCHA 2021). Further, it can help avoid undesirable or forced labour migration out of the country, leaving the families who remain behind in more vulnerable positions during difficult times (see Bishokarma 2012). Humanitarian aid can also help people avoid exploitative debt from village landlords or moneylenders or at least helps not to worsen their debt situation (Nabulsi et al. 2020). Moreover, humanitarian assistance remains critical to protect people from desperate situations, such as survivors being forced into prostitution or forced to sell vital organs such as kidneys on the black market (Mulligan and Nadarajah 2012).

In saying this, I am not arguing that humanitarian and development dependency is always a good thing. Rather, I am calling for a more nuanced appreciation of conditions on the ground. Humanitarian and development workers should be mindful of interventions and their consequences to ensure that the assistance is helping (rather than hurting) the people and their local systems. My primary concern with the notion of dependency syndrome is that it tends to blame the poor and marginalised, demonising disaster victims while downplaying their agency and contributions to their families and broader society. Such actions can and do affect positive transformations.

The discussion focuses on my research on post-disaster response and recovery in the aftermath of the earthquake. Dependency syndrome is one of the pre-eminent themes to have emerged from it. It was regularly invoked by humanitarian and development workers and government officials. I present these official narratives here and counterpose them with examples of people's agency in contributing toward post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction.

Dependency Revisited

The concept of dependency is identified and discussed in relation to a broad range of topics and variety of fields, including forced migration and displacement (see Easton-Calabria and Herson 2020), hunger and food insecurity (Bishokarma 2012*;* Gautam 2019), and disaster relief (Islam and Walkerden 2015). It has also been used in different contexts, such as welfare dependency, aid dependency, and public policy dependency (Ferguson 2013; Ferguson 2015; Harvey and Lind 2005, p. 9). Dependency in the humanitarian emergency and development field is understood as a condition in which individuals or community groups cannot meet their (basic) needs without "external" help (adapted from Harvey and Lind 2005, p. 3).

Irrespective of the domain in which it is applied, dependency is typically stigmatised. People are alleged to forsake their own agency and become idle on account of external assistance (as we shall see in the case at hand). They subsequently lack the initiative to benefit themselves, their family or community. Although academics have critiqued the stigmatisation and victimisation inherent in this approach–blaming individuals and community groups–the dependency concept is still the dominant view among humanitarian and development practitioners and stakeholders (Harvey and Lind 2005).

Paradoxically, development and humanitarian organisations/practitioners have been found to appreciate dependencies on things other than their aid, for example: of the community members with their relatives and kinships, on their government (local, provincial, or central), and on the local capitals and resources available in the community. The cure for dependency on aid is taken to be *self-reliance*. This has become a catchword in international development discourse over the past few decades (Easton-Calabria and Omata 2018). Indeed, self-reliance discourse has provided the pretext for some international donor communities to downsize their programmes or reduce their financial spend on, for example, refugees in protracted crises (Jaspars 2018; Omata 2017, p. 146).

The opposite of dependence is independence, autonomy. Yet there is a growing body of scholarly literature which positions self-reliance as part of the neoliberal project (see Bhagat 2020). In this sense, self-reliance is used to reinforce the neoliberal notion that we are all sovereign individuals (and entrepreneurs of the self in line with their *homo economicus* model of humanity). As The Care Collective (2020, p. 12) put it: "The ideal citizen under neoliberalism is autonomous, entrepreneurial, and endlessly resilient, a self-sufficient figure whose active promotion helped to justify the dismantling of the welfare state and the unravelling of democratic institutions and civic engagement". But this self-reliant, independent individual is a mythical figure. To be human is to be vulnerable (Butler 2015, p. 65), socially embedded, and dependent (Elias 2001, p. 20). We all must rely upon various social and physical infrastructures in order to survive (Mohorčich 2021). And as Easton-Calabria and Herson (2020, pp. 45–46) have rightly argued, those who are regarded as being most independent usually have the strongest and most reliable sources to depend upon.

My work enters into a productive dialogue with that of Easton-Calabria and Herson (2020) and Harvey and Lind (2005). These works critique humanitarian orthodoxies: the belief that assistance necessarily creates dependence and that dependency is necessarily a bad thing. I concur that dependencies are inescapable—part of what it is to be human—and that many of our dependencies are both positive and healthy. Thus, I engage with different forms of capital (such as economic, social, and cultural capital) and disaster survivors' agency and contributions in the post-disaster field. I explore the traditional or organic system of mutual dependency in the local cultural context. While I see dependency in mostly positive terms, I do identify both good and harmful dependencies, advocating the former to build a stronger and more resilient society.

Good Dependencies

Although dependency has historically held negative connotations, many scholars have begun to view it in positive ways. Harvey and Lind (2005) argue that when local people's lives are devastated, their livelihoods are acutely threatened, and their coping mechanisms and capacities are overwhelmed. Under such precarious conditions, any opportunity to depend on relief and assistance should be viewed positively. In a similar vein, Islam and Walkerden (2015) argue that relief dependency is a logical strategy for many disaster-affected households as it may be the most viable (benign) option compared to other available coping strategies, such as taking loans from local moneylenders.

Easton-Calabria and Herson (2020) also offer a positive interpretation of dependency in the context of forced-migration and displacement, borrowing the notion of "dispersed dependencies", an idea developed by George Kelly (1905–1967), from the field of psychology. For Kelly, dispersed dependencies are relationships through which an individual has practical, emotional, social, physical, and other dependencies. The fundamental propositions, as Kelly

argues, are that: “all humans have their various needs met through a set of dispersed dependencies; the most independent or self-sufficient persons are those who have the most reliable and most dispersed set of dependencies to suit their circumstances” (pp. 45–46).

Several studies have found that individuals or neighbourhoods having a higher level of mutual dependence characterised by frequent social interactions, high levels of trust, strong network links and relationships—in other words social capital—are likely to bounce back quicker after disaster (Akbar and Aldrich 2018; Aldrich 2012b; Bhandari 2014; Dynes 2002; Nakagawa and Shaw 2004). Yila et al. (2013) observed that the mutual dependence of community members helped with the rehabilitation and recovery process after the floods in Fiji in 2009 and 2012. When disaster struck, community members provided short-term loans, free housing and shelter, tools, and equipment, in addition to exchanging labour. In both flooding events, mutual dependence turned into mutual obligation.

Good Dependencies in the Cultural Context of Nepal

In Nepal, people have traditionally benefitted from their (mutual) dependence on social institutions and other people in the society, although some of these practices are being eroded by modernisation and globalisation. For example, *guthi*, which may be translated as assembly or association, is a cultural institution which has been an integral part of social life among the Newar[53] community in Nepal. Affiliation with guthi has been found beneficial not only for everyday socio-cultural aspects of life such as conducting cultural/religious ceremonies (*pujā or jātrā*), conducting communal feasts *(bhoj)*, or performing death rituals, but also conducting social work and dealing with loss and trauma in the aftermath of a major crisis. Bhandari (2014)

[53] *Newars* are one of the ethnic groups (called *Ādibāsi-Janajāti*) in Nepal. They are the Indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley. While most of them live there, the population is spread across the country.

investigated how guthi was mobilised in Kathmandu following the 1934 mega-earthquake (8.4 Richter scale) in which thousands of people lost their lives. He found that the *guthiyārs* (guthi members) exchanged emotional support, food supplies, and financial assistance to cope with the stress and recover from the earthquake (Bhandari 2014).

Similar to guthi, there are a number of other social customs and traditional cultural institutions in Nepal which people rely upon. People are likely to suffer more in everyday life if they fail to maintain this system of dependence. For example, during the busy agricultural season in Nepal, such as rice planting or harvesting time, households depend on other families in the village to overcome their labour shortage. Consequently, farmers and their families exchange labour in order to complete each other's agricultural activity in a timely manner, otherwise the rice paddies, for example, would be wasted or their harvests severely reduced because of delays in planting. This mutually dependent system of exchange is called parma[54]. In the same manner, people have been found to benefit from *sāpat* or *sāpati* and *paincho*[55] customs by which people borrow money or properties/commodities from neighbours or close circles when they are in need. This collective safety net is a source of great relief: all within this social circle can benefit from it and all are obligated to reciprocate.

Similarly, several studies have highlighted the significance of *dhukuti*[56], a social institution of rotating credit, which effectively collects capital for starting or continuing micro-

[54] *Parma* is especially relevant in the rural context in Nepal when cash is in short supply and people cannot hire additional labour to complete necessary tasks. Here dependence on other families and the exchange of labour seems to be commonplace and practical. In addition, this phenomenon also promotes social interactions which strengthen relationships, trust, and cohesion among parma-households.

[55] *Sāpat* or *sāpati* (borrowing money) and *paincho* (borrowing goods) are generally for a short duration. No interest is involved in sāpat/ sāpati. Borrowers should typically commit when they shall or expect to return the borrowed items.

[56] In other parts of the country, the names *dhikuti*, *dhikur*, and *dhikuri* refer to this institution. Dhukuti was traditionally found among the Thakali community in Nepal in the central highlands from where it later spread to

enterprise or small business (Chhetri 1995; Messerschmidt 1979; Rogers 2006). Dhukuti is organised amongst a group of trusted friends[57] who deposit the agreed amount in the group account, and the individual members have access to the pooled capital. Once again, the positives of this dependency are tangible. As with the other systems under discussion, collective membership trumps individual achievement: "each member is able to access at one time much greater financial resource than would be possible individually, thereby enabling each member to make an investment in a business venture, [and] meet a pressing monetary need" (Rogers 2006, p. 109).

My discussion shows that mechanisms of dependence are part of normal life. Indeed, those who do not (or cannot) rely on such system(s) suffer more in a crisis, just as they do in everyday life (see Klinenberg 2020).

The country has had a history of receiving foreign aid and assistance in the name of bikās (development) for more than six decades, a period marked by some successes and many failures (see Gyawali et al. 2016). Since Nepal has received so much aid across the last six decades it serves as an ideal laboratory in which to examine dependency issues.

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other parts of the country (Rogers 2006, p. 114; Masserschmidt 1979, pp. 155–156). Originally, in the Manang District, it used to be called dhu-kor in the local language, which means "rotation of grain" (Rogers 2006, p. 112). The Nepali term dhukuti is widely popular, meaning storehouse, barn, or treasury (Masserschmidt 1979). It is traditionally operated among trusted friends, relatives, or neighbours.

[57] When *dhukuti* is operated among members who do not have strong social bonds and high levels of trust, instances of cheating and defaulting have been reported. Under such conditions it is hard to hold one another accountable. The defaulter consequently experiences little social stigma, unlike that which is observed in the dhukuti operated among close circles (Rogers 2006, p. 126).

The Official Narratives: Dependency Syndrome!

Previous work on humanitarian interventions has shown that there are always more than the official narratives of recovery at work (Grayman 2016). In this chapter, I consider both official and unofficial narratives, contrasting the statements of those in authority with statements from community members and disaster survivors.

I found that the narratives of dependency syndrome are the *official narratives* claimed by (most) humanitarian and development workers and government bureaucrats. At times, aid workers talked about the resilience of disaster survivors, but far more often their narratives of survivors described an over-reliance on humanitarian aid. The prevalent feeling was that people received a wide variety of humanitarian assistance from the government and various non-government organisations in the aftermath of the earthquake and that this created dependency among the disaster affected. Humanitarian and development workers expressed frustration that those impacted by the disaster left their agricultural activities in order to spend days roaming around office buildings of I/NGOs and government and other distribution centres with expectations of relief assistance.

The government and humanitarian actors claimed that several organisations distributed everything from minor to major goods for everyone in the family, some of which were relevant to children, some for men, some for women or breastfeeding mothers, and some for the whole family. They felt that because “everything” was given to community members, dependency syndrome in the form of indolence arose. In this regard, Angrita Lama, an NGO humanitarian worker in the Rasuwa District, said:

> All the things have been provided to the people [survivors]—for a child [infant] a Cerelac,[58] for a woman a dignity kit or a sanitary pad, then for a man a razor to shave his beard; and rice, tarpaulin, utensils [for everyone]. CGI sheets are distributed, bamboos are distributed for making temporary shelters, timbers are distributed, nails are distributed. Therefore, I feel dependency has gone up among people.

He added:

> Everything has arrived. Relief has come in the name of gumba (monastery), in the name of political parties, government, and NGOs. Therefore, I feel the dependency has gone suddenly up here. No one needs to work—sacks after sacks of rice were distributed [in the village]. The relief was sufficient for six months for a simple family.

Bhakta Raj, an NGO humanitarian worker in the Gorkha District also criticised the humanitarian relief and recovery assistance for the same reason. With such levels of aid, people abandoned their own farming, remaining idle. He stated:

> People affected by the earthquake were given food, cooking, and utensils, and assistance to build toilets, houses and schools. Similarly, almost everything was provided for children: food, books, stationery, and school bags. These acts of giving made people dependent [on humanitarian organisations/aid]. As a result, people abandoned their own [household and farming] work and rushed here and there to find out if any organisation is distributing relief in their community. We had quite a large number of people who did not pay attention to their work but only on relief assistance... dependency [on outsiders] was increased.

[58] *Cerelac* is a brand name of an instant cereal package food for infants produced by the multinational company Nestlé. Although Cerelac is popular in the urban and peri-urban locations of Nepal, it is not common in rural places.

The survivors were accused of wandering around expecting to receive relief items. The NGO humanitarian worker Angrita Lama in the Rasuwa District remarked:

> People rush to the VDC [local government] office in the hope of getting relief or go to a community building because that is a place where NGO, INGO and government distribute [the relief items]. People kept visiting these places often. Some people even walked several days out of their village with a hope to receive rice.

The strongest motif within the official narrative of dependency was that people become lazy and disempowered. They stopped taking the initiative to improve their own condition. Officials repeatedly claimed that farming was abandoned. Kalyan KC, a humanitarian worker based in Gorkha and Kathmandu, said:

> Several humanitarian organisations distributed the food [in the communities]. Therefore, the people went to receive relief items leaving their farming. They did not plant vegetables, did not cultivate crops. Some even waited for the whole year expecting someone would come and build their houses.

He also noted:

> People's dependency [on humanitarian aid] has increased. They kept on waiting [for external help] even for the matters that they could do themselves. They lamented that they have nothing with them. They did not plant the seeds [on their land] and build their house. They kept on thinking that some assistance might arrive or someone might provide money. Some felt that if they built their house on their own, they might not be granted the money or provisions they are entitled to. They thought someone might come with a housing reconstruction project. Therefore, they did not initiate building the house for the whole year.

This lack of initiative, then, was said by officials to be tied to the belief that villagers could rely on outsiders for everything. Alok Krishna, a government bureaucrat, said:

> They don't take initiatives [for changing their lives] but only depend on outsiders' assistance. That is a negative thing. Anything [a disaster or misfortune] could happen tomorrow [in the future]. But instead of getting prepared for it, these people dream of someone coming to rescue them. This is a bad culture.

Indra Sharma, a humanitarian and development worker and social leader in the Dhading District, argued that the post-disaster relief and recovery assistance changed local people's attitude. They now relied on government support for everyday life and in small scale crises as well. As he put it:

> … the negative impact invited by this earthquake is that people are attracted to relief-oriented concepts: that is, the government will do [for us], others will do, I should be given that by the government; the government should give us relief. In case a small landslide takes place nearby, people think that they shouldn't do anything about it, but the government should come and address it; others should do....

Samir Sagar, a humanitarian and development worker in Kathmandu, also expressed the view that people's expectations and reliance on external agencies have increased following the post-disaster response and recovery interventions:

> If you go to talk to the beneficiaries, then they will say, "Sir, you built a house for us, now you should also set up a shop for us or provide financial support to do so". Or they would tell to provide them plastic for making plastic tunnel [for vegetable farming]. You know, they have such a level of dependency. The people think that they [external agencies] have helped them to build houses, now these

> organisations should do everything for them: establish a shop, do farming, give a machine [for micro-enterprise development].

Moreover, in the official narratives concerning dependency syndrome, I identified a number of key Nepali terms that carried negative connotations. These are listed in Table 12.

Table 12

Negative Connotations Attached to Dependency Following the 2015 Nepal Earthquake

Negative connotations of dependency in local (Nepali) language	English translation
alchhe	lazy; lethargic
āfno kām nagarne	shirker
ashāmukhi	having the attitude that someone else will provide something, especially in material or monetary terms
māgi khāne	begging for a living
paranirvar	someone who relies on others; dependent
bhikāri pārā	a beggar's mentality
magante pārā	begging attitude
parajeebi	parasite

Source: Based on field research interviews.

Survivors' Narratives

Vastly different narratives were articulated by the disaster survivors. They appreciated the help from humanitarian and development organisations and from the government. One of the participants in the Sindhupalchok District, Anita Majhi (39), believed that the relief was nothing short of miraculous, as if sent by God. She felt extremely happy when she found the relief package as her households had no grain to prepare food. Similarly, Prem Sunar (29) in the Dhading District gratefully received relief items. He said, "… it was raining, and the hurricane

was coming. The aftershocks were going on time and again. At that time, we could put up the tent [tarpaulin] and stay inside. That was wonderful". Similarly, Biru Chepang (53), a farmer and Indigenous minority member in the Dhading District, said that his family utilised the assistance to improve their situation. He stated, "when we didn't have anything to eat, we got food. We were also given vegetable seeds of cauliflower and many other different kinds of vegetables. We grew and consumed the vegetables. We also sold some in the market".

However, they disputed the notion that relief was so generous and so constant as to induce a state of dependency. Almost all research participants stated that the relief and recovery aid and housing reconstruction support was minimal. The Government of Nepal had provided NPR300,000 (about USD2,500) to help rebuild houses. For the majority of the families, this support was something like 25 per cent to 50 per cent of the funds required to fully rebuild, depending upon house size. On this point, Sher Bahadur Tamang (51), a farmer and disaster survivor in the Sindhupalchok District, said, "The government gave us rice but not curry".

One of the strongest themes to have emerged from the interviews was that of ali-ali rahat (meagre relief, literally little or few). The participants shared that they got some or minimal food items, which lasted for only a few days. Similarly, they received few non-food items. Several participants said that they had no idea who was distributing *what, when* and *where* in the earthquake-affected areas. Biru Chepang's (53) experience in the Dhading District was relayed as follows: "Many times we couldn't get the relief goods because we missed the information [about it]. We had no idea where the distribution was being carried out. On another occasion, the villagers were talking about it, and we went there".

The views of humanitarian and development workers and government officials were that there were abundant resources. If the relief and recovery assistance was as modest as the

villagers said, it does beg the question: how were the survivors able to recover livelihoods and rebuild their houses? This takes us into the realm that the official narratives deny: the story of people's initiatives and contributions courtesy of their habitus, and reliance on traditional and existing economic, social, and cultural systems and capitals.

Agency and Community Contributions

With levels of official financial support for rebuilding houses being so minimal, communities took the initiative to rebuild by seeking out loans from local moneylenders and financial institutions. They exchanged labour among neighbours, they collected local resources such as sand, stones, or timber either by payment or by extracting locally wherever it was possible. They also provided (unskilled) labour.

Sarala Sunar (62), a local resident in the Dhading District, communicated how she worked hard collecting necessary materials for housing reconstruction:

> We could no longer live in that [damaged] house, so we put up a hut [temporary shelter]. To build our new house, I broke the stones[59] [at the riverbank] myself, extracted the sand [out of the river] by myself…and bought wooden panels for windows and doors [at my own expense].

Similarly, Dhan Kumari BK (46), a resident in the Dhading District, observed that the women and girls in the village contributed significantly, carrying heavy loads of construction materials. She stated:

> We didi-bahini (sisters in the village) did a lot of work by doing dukha [hard labour or suffering]. We carried the sand and dropped there [at the construction

[59] The large stones are gathered from the river and are broken into smaller stones or pebbles by a giant hammer. These are then used in house construction.

> site]. We brought it from far away—we carried this heavy load for an hour [walking distance] …we toiled our labour for fourteen days.

Sarala further explained her story of recovery, returning to farming and selling vegetables in the local market. She used the income to buy food and spices needed at her home. Phul Maya Praja (41), in the Dhading District, had a similar experience. She noted, "We were given seeds [by humanitarian organisations] for off-seasonal vegetable production. We produced tomatoes. After selling them in the market, we sowed bitter gourds and tomatoes". Thule Sunar in the Dhading District was also proud of his achievement. Thule explained how he ploughed the land (with oxen), hoed the farmland, and met the family's needs.

I found that almost every research participant had something to tell us about working cooperatively with other families in their village. In this regard, they collectively contributed their labour to rebuild community infrastructures damaged by the earthquake. This labour was voluntary, geared to the repair and rebuilding of drinking water tanks and rural trails. These contributions to the collective could last anywhere from several days to several weeks. Phul Maya Praja's family in the Dhading District volunteered for five days to rebuild a small irrigation system, known locally as kulo. Biru Chepang (53), also from the Dhading District, shared how he and other households worked freely for weeks to help rebuild essential village infrastructure. Likewise, Thulobhai Praja (53) and his family members provided more than ten days of free labour to help rebuild the drinking water scheme: "All our family members went to help repair the damaged drinking water scheme… all the villagers worked together and fixed the problem, and we got water to drink, you see".

Further, Sapana Chepang (36) in the Dhading District shared how the dāju-bhāi and didi-bahini (men and women; literally brothers and sisters) in her village united to rebuild the quake-

damaged drinking water scheme. Besides their voluntary labour contributions[60], villagers also donated money to buy equipment and materials, such as pipes, needed for the repair and maintenance of critical infrastructures.

Social Capital: The Power of Social Connections

In the research districts, it was found that the disaster-affected people helped each other to cope with the disaster. They revealed that they shared their food and time and helped one another rebuild their respective houses by exchanging skills, labour, and even financial resources. My research demonstrated that the survivors were not particularly dependent upon top-down aid from official quarters (the government and I/NGOs); rather, they were dependent on their neighbours, relatives, and other people in the village to fulfil their needs after the disaster. Sapana Chepang (36) in the Dhading District said, "Our relatives gave us some money. They gave some cash to buy *rasan-pani* [ration or food; literally, food and water]. That [act] was very kind and helpful though little it was".

Thule Sunar (59), also from the Dhading District, had a similar experience. His family received some financial assistance from relatives. Thule recalled one of his family members saying, "take some money if you have need. Take it and you don't need to repay [me]. That generosity helped us to survive". Moreover, after the earthquake, the neighbours shared their food around, organising a shared kitchen in the field. One of the neighbours donated a sack of

[60] Shneiderman (2023) observed that the state of "community contribution" in bikāse work and post-disaster infrastructural development was shifting in many communities where the local people may expect or negotiate for paid work instead, which she would call a "new form of agency". This change was, for example, due to competing labour needs to build their own homes following the disaster instead of providing volunteer contributions to the community infrastructure development projects. Further, the scarcity of labour force in the village due to the high male outmigration may also be attributed to this changing landscape of community contribution (see Shneiderman 2023 for a detailed discussion).

rice to Prem Sunar (29) in Dhading. He recalled his neighbour saying, “I should look after you while you suffer, and you should look after me while I suffer”.

The survivors also exchanged parma (labour exchange system) to help rebuild and repair each other’s houses following the earthquake. Juntara Ramtel (44) in the Sindhupalchok District said:

> It [the earthquake] affected everyone at the same time. They needed to build their own house and I needed to build ours… so we [our family] went to help them [to build their house] and they came to help us. We completed it [building the new house] helping each other.

Likewise, Sher Bahadur Tamang (51) in the Sindhupalchowk District highlighted the significance of community assistance. He was helped by his neighbours to build his house following the earthquake. He supplied details: “Some donated wood, some helped to transport them [in his place, some helped to cut the wood/timber]. Some others helped to carry stones [from the river]. They have helped me a lot”.

Discussion

International humanitarianism has recently moved toward *resilience humanitarianism* from the Dunantist *classic humanitarianism* (see Hilhorst 2018). The resilience paradigm has drawn both support and criticism. In terms of praise, it tends to view the disaster-affected as *survivors* and *responders* (rather than as *victims*). It therefore recognises survivors’ agency, underscores the roles of local actors/stakeholders in humanitarian interventions, and, to this end, is believed to narrow the gulf between relief and development (Hilhorst 2018; Manyena 2012). Resilience has already been incorporated into the international humanitarian and development policies by donors and development partners such as by UKAID, USAID, and the United Nations, and in the

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. In contradistinction to this embrace of resilience discourse, the official narratives I analysed in my research suggest that such beliefs do not inform practice on the ground. I found that, to a large extent, disaster relief was informed by the classic paradigm that pathologises disaster survivors as mere *beneficiaries* or *victims* awaiting help. My study therefore illuminates the gap between global policy rhetoric and the perceptions of aid workers involved in delivering humanitarian assistance on the ground.

I draw on key notions of Pierre Bourdieu to understand these issues of dependency. Bourdieusian theory provides a helpful framework to understand the complex nature of humanitarian dependency, in particular his concepts of *habitus* and *capital*. I argue that both the inculcation process and the appropriation process of habitus are necessary in contexts where people's everyday lives are threatened by poverty, vulnerability, and disasters. Further, I show how both habitus spur agency within the vulnerable population in order to deal with disaster and other crises. Habitus can also help explain why aid workers and villagers have divergent opinions of aid, its efficacy, and questions of dependency. If aid workers are cultural outsiders, they will not share the same habitus and will thus have different cultural values, including notions of duty and obligation, and the requirement for mutual aid.

As I discussed in Chapter III, Bourdieu extends the idea of capital beyond economic and material forms. He discusses four types of capital: *economic capital* (material wealth and financial assets), *cultural capital* (educational credentials, cultural goods and services), *social capital* (networks, acquaintances, group association or membership), and *symbolic capital* (legitimation, recognition). Much of Bourdieu's work focuses on the interplay among what he distinguishes as social, cultural, and economic capital. He analyses how individuals and groups

employ different strategies to accumulate, invest, and convert various types of capital. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital are interchangeable.

Using Bourdieu's notions, I argue that disaster survivors do not rely on economic or material capital alone (e.g., materials and cash support from humanitarian agencies) but actively utilise other forms of capital such as social and cultural capital for their survival (see Bourdieu 1986). As we saw in the previous section, the survivors' social capital was vital for their everyday survival and rebuilding of their houses after the earthquake. These social connections proved to be invaluable when disaster struck. They can also be interpreted in terms of habitus: internalised norms, expectations, and cultural values predisposed people to help each other. People duly received financial assistance from their neighbours and relatives and undertook parma (exchange of labour; cultural capital) in their neighbourhood to rebuild one another's houses. Other authors (see, e.g., Gautam and Cortés 2021; Karki et al. 2022a; Spoon et al. 2021) have also documented how the parma culture proved to be crucial in post-earthquake housing reconstruction in Nepal. Furthermore, the community members also shared food, setting up a communal or shared kitchen in the field immediately after the quakes. As discussed in Chapter V, this is an example of *disaster communitas*, the solidarity of mutual sharing and support that is typically seen to emerge in the aftermath of disasters (see Matthewman and Uekusa 2021; Uekusa et al. 2022).

However, social capital is not an unqualified good. Not everyone is connected, and exclusions result. In this regard, previous studies have observed how some groups may abuse their social connectedness to hinder other marginalised social groups in the communities from accessing emergency and recovery aid (see Aldrich 2011b; IDSN 2013). Further, dominant social groups can leverage their contacts with authorities to gain further advantages. For

example, in the aftermath of the Kosi floods in Bihar (India) in 2008, high caste households—with the help of their caste and class privilege—influenced the *Panchayat* (local government) administration to secure a pass to the rescue boats (see Jha 2015). In the same manner, the Dalit social groups in the research locations said that the households who had *chineko mānchhe* (acquaintance person) or *āfno mānchhe* (close circles or relatives) received relief and recovery assistance easily, or even additional aid.

Furthermore, Dalit communities continued to experience caste-based discriminatory practices after the earthquake. I found that Dalit people (e.g., Bhola Ramtel, his family, and other Dalit households in the Sindhupalchok District) lived in a separate cluster (in the temporary shelters) immediately after the earthquake and their communal kitchen was located away from the rest of the other *jāt* (caste) people. Similarly, another Dalit community member, Juntara Ramtel, noted their livestock were killed in the earthquake, but he did not receive any help to rescue the animals in the first place and manage their carcasses later. Moreover, Dalit people in the Dhading District told us that they did not receive information about the distribution of relief goods as people from other castes kept this information among themselves. Dalit and non-Dalit households lived separately in the makeshift camps. Here the caste-based partition was created without making any conscious effort. Following Bourdieu's theory, I recognise this longstanding caste-based prejudice as *caste habitus,* something that has been ingrained within individuals over a prolonged period, internalised via longstanding practices and experiences. Thus, Dalit survivors witnessed the reproduction of social hierarchy and domination after the devastating earthquake. Yet they must be overcome if a more just, and resilient, society is to be built.

Moreover, aid workers and state actors seemed to view exchanges as merely economic and directly pragmatic, yet, as Bourdieu points out, economic exchanges are also symbolic,

freighted with such values as notion of duty (Bourdieu 1962). He further notes that economic capital can be converted more readily into cultural capital and social capital than vice-versa (Swartz 1997). One of the reasons for completing post-earthquake housing reconstruction in some neighbourhoods of the Rasuwa District was that the Tamang community had cultural ties and kinship affinities that readily made the required physical labour and other necessary mutual support available (in other words, a favourable habitus). Furthermore, cultural capital (such as learning, knowledge, and new skills) that was accrued from humanitarian projects, such as skilled-masonry training, meant that people could convert them into economic capital, as they used newly acquired skills to supplement or raise incomes. By utilising survivors' existing material capital (such as landownership) and social status or trustworthiness (cultural capital), they could accumulate additional economic capital through their relatives, moneylenders, or financial institutions. These examples also show us that humanitarian assistance was just *one* of the (not the only) sources that the survivors relied on. They had diversified resources that they could draw upon within their field. However, Bourdieu warns that capital is unequally distributed within the field: there are dominant and dominated agents, and these relations of exploitation reproduce social inequality (Lahire 2015; Peillon 1998).

On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that not all capitals or sources of dependency were helpful. Some could be harmful in the long run, which the participants had begun to realise. The majority of them were able to receive credit from local moneylenders (sāhu), banks, and other financial institutions such as saving and credit cooperatives. These sources were certainly seen as helpful in the short term—for the purposes of immediate survival and completing housing reconstruction work (since, as noted, government funding support was insufficient for this task). However, it was found that the dependence on these actors, especially

local moneylenders and micro-finance institutions (MFIs), was not helpful in the long run because of the high-interest rates charged (as much as 36 per cent per annum). This situation may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, development and relief assistance should be seen as "one of a range of options that people may be able to draw upon in their struggle to deal with crisis" (Harvey and Lind 2005, p. 3). Secondly, over-dependence on unreliable sources and predatory dependencies are outright harmful. In this case, the humanitarian relief and recovery assistance helped to reduce exploitative relationships to some extent.

As I discussed earlier (see Chapter VII), the sāhu (money lenders) and MFIs successfully capitalised on the catastrophe. They gained control over capital and occupied the dominant position (economic or social) in the post-disaster field. Bourdieu's theory is helpful here in understanding the nature of the post-disaster field. Using the Bourdieusian field schema (1992), we understand that disaster-stricken locations are not only physical sites for rebuilding and reconstruction but also social arenas where struggles occur. Different actors seek to accumulate specific capital(s) and strengthen a dominant position in the post-disaster field. Bourdieu's concepts help us to understand complex social realities and assess actors' vested interests and the consequences of their potential actions (*who wins* and *who loses*). Further, this Bourdieusian revelation may, I believe, be helpful for policymakers and other relevant authorities to recognise power dynamics and social domination in the post-disaster field. In particular, it could help curb disaster profiteering.

Criticisms of dependency often relate to the passivity it creates. Yet claims to resources and assistance from others within the community only succeed as a result of sustained effort. "That is to say that material dependence upon others is not a passive condition—it is a valued outcome of long, hard social labor" (Ferguson 2015, p. 97). Therefore, the act of receiving

assistance should not be understood as a passive process. People did not just receive aid. Instead, informed by their habitus, they actively deployed these resources to improve their condition. Also, since actors tend to compete to accumulate various forms of capital, humanitarian assistance may be valuable or helpful capital in that particular time and space for maintaining or improving the position in the field. When people realise that the field has changed (e.g., due to the crisis being different in nature or more significant in magnitude than before) and that their primary habitus is no longer useful in the new field, then the habitus is modified to manage the new social environment. Habitus is always oriented to what is feasible and practical and tends to generate common sense or reasonable behaviour within the given or changing context/field (Bourdieu 1990b, pp. 52–56).

It should also be noted that reliance on humanitarian relief and recovery assistance during the post-earthquake crisis was not a permanent disposition, but a new or reformed habitus evolved to tackle the changing field. The field determines the survivors' habitus or actions. Here, field refers to the social arena within which struggle takes place to secure capital. As Bourdieu argues, various agents in the field use different tactics to maintain or improve their position (Thomson 2012, p. 67). So was the case with some local moneylenders who actively sought to profit from the disaster by charging very high interest on loans. Similarly, most landowners significantly and suddenly increased the price of their land when they became aware that the government was financially assisting the landless people to buy a piece of land for post-earthquake housing reconstruction. As the field changes, so do the rules of the game, and people change their actions or habitus. This also suggests that they are less likely to develop lasting dependency syndrome as is commonly supposed in official narratives.

The survivors demonstrated agency, actively contributing to their community's recovery. They utilised official assistance to increase productivity and improve their living conditions. For

example, the survivors (Sarala, Thule, and many others) recommenced their farming practices. They also provided days and weeks of free labour to rebuild community infrastructures such as village water tanks. This shows that disaster survivors were not merely consumers of humanitarian assistance. They were producers of, and contributors to, the relief and recovery efforts. The findings correlate with other studies that show the relief aid was only a small portion of that needed by the local people for relief and recovery/reconstruction (Berke et al. 1993a; Gautam 2019; Omata 2017). In Gautam's (2019) study, food aid contributed only 20 per cent of the total food needs of families in the Humla District of the Karnali region in Nepal. Similar cases can be found elsewhere. Omata (2017) revealed that people in the Bududuram refugee camp in Ghana relied far more on remittances sent by family members than they did on humanitarian aid. In these cases, as in the one under discussion here, the communities themselves were the more significant party in their recovery. Local dependencies were good dependencies; people often found outside aid to be insufficient, inappropriate, or non-existent.

Moreover, people's agency and resilience should not be underestimated. While disaster survivors may lose all of their physical possessions, they do not lose their agency (see Scheper-Hughes 2008; Vigh 2008). Living in harsh conditions may develop a sense of *everyday resilience* (see Scheper-Hughes 2008; Uekusa and Matthewman 2017). In this regard, Uekusa and Matthewman (2017) found that vulnerable immigrants and refugees acquired "earned strength" due to their prior experience of wars, conflicts, displacement, and everyday hardships. This made them more resilient in the 2011 Christchurch (New Zealand) and Tohoku (Japan) disasters than members of the majority populations. Due to their previous lived experience, these vulnerable people were in a better position to cope with the new normal that the disaster produced. We can relate these authors' findings to those concerning the 2015 Nepal Earthquake survivors who had survived a decade-long civil war, political instability and turmoil over the

decades, and concomitant poverty and hardship in everyday life. This gave them a certain degree of resilience to cope with and recover from the disaster. However, Uekusa and Matthewman (2017, p. 358) cautioned against simply generalising this observation. It may not be applicable to all contexts or all socially marginalised groups. Indeed, individuals and groups have their limits. And previous experiences may be counterproductive or traumatic for some people and have compounded effects. What may be more helpful about the resilience concept in the humanitarian space is that first, we should not assume that disaster survivors are vulnerable victims by default. Second, we should not offer every survivor the same humanitarian "package" and "format" for the response and recovery process.

Finally, in contrast to what may commonly be believed, disaster survivors are not passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. They are active agents of disaster response and recovery who act strategically to secure their position and capitals in the changing disaster field. Therefore, they should be recognised and encouraged for their willingness and ability to bring about positive changes for their families and communities. Further, the possibility and ability to rely on different forms of capital (beyond external economic or material capital) are crucial for disaster survivors to cope with and recover from the impacts of crisis. Therefore, congruent with the arguments of Ferguson (2013, p. 237), humanitarian and development policies should not aim to eliminate dependency but to (re-)create reliable and desirable forms of it.

Summary

In this chapter, I argued that disaster survivors are often criticised for being dependent upon humanitarian (and development) assistance. This dependency was perceived pejoratively by government civil servants and other elites, including NGO staff in the research field. Officials offered such narratives in relation to the disaster response and recovery programmes following the earthquake. However, I, on the other hand, showed that survivors' narratives, featuring people's perspectives and lived experiences, contrast with the official narratives of the dependency syndrome. The findings problematise official discourse.

I discussed how people in Nepal have traditionally benefitted from their (mutual) dependence on social institutions and other people in society. In this regard, I provided examples of social institutions, such as guthi, and traditional customs (e.g., parma or paincho) on which people rely to meet their needs and, on this basis, argued that those who do not (or cannot) rely on such systems suffer more in everyday life and during crises.

Contrary to what is claimed in the official narratives—that people are overly reliant on humanitarian assistance—the findings showed that aid was frequently insufficient, poorly targeted, or non-existent. Moreover, the Bourdieusian framing highlighted the agency of disaster survivors, as their habitus predisposed them to help others.

The results broaden the notion of assistance and dependence, suggesting that social and cultural capital (as well as economic capital) are vital resources for recovery. It was demonstrated that dependencies are not necessarily bad. Hence, greater attention to these non-economic capitals and good dependencies could expedite recoveries from future disasters.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary and Conclusion

In this final chapter, I summarise the research and draw conclusions in light of the findings and discussions of this thesis presented in the previous five chapters. I also present the scope for further research.

My personal experience of hearing about and witnessing disasters of various kinds and scales, in different places in Nepal, at different stages of my life, and a particular concern about the impact of the 2015 Earthquake (7.8 M_w) on the poor and marginalised social groups in the country led me to undertake this doctoral research project. This study explored the experiences of marginalised social groups Dalit and Ādibāsi-Janajāti in the four worst-hit districts in Nepal. Specifically, the research examined how these disadvantaged social groups recovered (or did not recover) following the earthquake. In this regard, the study focused on assessing the humanitarian relief, livelihood recovery, and post-disaster housing reconstruction process from the perspective of subaltern disaster survivors.

The research was undertaken during one of the most challenging times in our recent memory due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The original research plan was therefore disrupted due to the international and local travel restrictions and public health protocols. Thus, interviews were undertaken through digital technology, such as Zoom meetings, and interviews in remote

locations or with people who did not have access to internet or phone facilities were undertaken by field interviewers. The research was carried out in Dhading, Gorkha, Rasuwa, and Sindhupalchok districts of Nepal. Embracing the qualitative inquiry process, 46 interviews were conducted with the research participants—disaster survivors, humanitarian and development workers, and government officials. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical lens–specifically *field*, *habitus*, *capital*–was used to understand the humanitarian response, recovery, and reconstruction process in the aftermath of the earthquake. In addition, the research applied anthropologist Tania Murray Li's (2007) concept of *rendering technical* to examine the post-earthquake housing reconstruction.

The earthquake in April 2015 was Nepal's worst disaster in more than eight decades. As reported earlier, the earthquake claimed nearly 9,000 lives and injured more than 20,000 people. The tremor impacted approximately eight million people and destroyed over half a million houses (which accounts for almost one-third of the country's total population). Moreover, the earthquake significantly ruined agriculture and animal husbandry and damaged public infrastructures (such as schools, health-posts, roads and bridges, water-supply systems, and hydro-power plants), requiring billions of dollars to repair or reconstruct. Consequently, the relief and recovery operation was one of the country's largest ones in recent history. On the other hand, Nepal's humanitarian response and recovery process was challenging due to geographical barriers and remoteness, the high incidence of poverty and inequality, casteism, and social exclusion.

The findings suggest that the bikās apparatus was in play in the post-disaster field. Therefore, the bikās/bikāse (development/developmental) tradition informed the recovery process but failed to address the humanitarian needs of the survivors in the post-disaster context.

Hence, intentional or organised interventions are necessary for the relief and recovery processes with an effective transition and linkages between relief, rehabilitation, and recovery. Further, the findings indicate that ethnic and marginalised social groups are likely to continue facing the pre-disaster socio-cultural challenges (e.g., the caste system) that disadvantage them in accessing disaster emergency aid following the crisis. Due to social discrimination, many of these social groups could not get adequate or necessary assistance in the search-and-rescue operations and their ability to receive relief goods was also constrained. Therefore, rather than responding to the impact or needs identified in the aftermath of the disaster, vulnerability-based interventions could have helped navigate relief aid to the most-needy survivors, like Dalits and marginalised ethnic minorities.

Localised humanitarian assistance (e.g., working with local organisations and communities and distributing locally available and/or suitable relief materials) is likely to be more effective and sustainable. My research submits that a prepared and empowered community is inevitable because community members tend to be first responders. Although coordinating localised assistance has been on the agenda for some time in the humanitarian space, little progress has been made. The problem may, to some extent, be addressed if local (district or village) structures (i.e., beyond the national) are recognised and strengthened. Based on my findings, the coordination among local organisations and communities worked well for it was instant and organic following the crisis.

Drawing on Pandolfi's (2003) mobile sovereignty concept, I suggested that humanitarian agencies enjoyed their power, privilege, and freedom in various ways in the post-disaster environments in Nepal. This phenomenon affects the just and meaningful engagement and lasting impact in the affected communities. Therefore, it is crucial to address the mobile

sovereignty issue or call for “mobile justice”, as Linder (2017) puts it. I propose that this problem be addressed in two ways. Firstly, it is essential to keep all the national and local disaster emergency systems and policies updated or formulate new legislation, if required, as soon as possible following the crisis and ensure that these are effectively implemented. Secondly, reducing any red tape and administrative hurdles that make the emergency process complex and slow is vital.

The results highlight that livelihood recovery aid/assistance provided by the state and non-state actors was a crucial, helpful, and appreciated disaster recovery strategy in resource-poor settings; however, there can be problems in their implementation that may wittingly or unwittingly follow established vectors of inequality, in turn amplifying them.

The livelihood assistance in the study area was predominantly related to human capital, physical capital, or financial capital (referring to the asset pentagon of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework). Social capital—for example, sharing of food—was evident during the emergency phase following the earthquake (see Karki et al. 2022b) and during the housing reconstruction process—for example, the mutual exchange of labour (see Karki et al. 2022a; Gautam and Cortés 2021; Panday et al. 2021). However, this critical capital was less recognised and underutilised in the livelihood recovery programming/processes. I reiterate that social and natural capital are also crucial for sustainable livelihood recovery and resilience. I also acknowledge that mobilising these capitals is challenging due to social exclusions (e.g., caste and gender-based discrimination) and the unequal distribution of natural resources between different castes and ethnic groups.

The research revealed that the “replacement” or “restoration” concept (the idea of regaining what was lost or damaged by a disaster) is problematic as it overlooks the pre-disaster

vulnerability of poor and marginalised households who experience disproportionate disaster impacts. I also showed how this phenomenon benefits the elites or relatively better-off people in communities. Therefore, this suggests that without pro-poor recovery policies and programmes, pre-disaster inequalities between the haves and have-nots are likely to continue, if not grow, in post-disaster environments.

Congruent with Daly et al. 2020, I see the need to link livelihood relief, rehabilitation, and recovery/development (bikās). This necessitates adopting a holistic livelihood recovery rather than piecemeal and fragmented livelihood assistance. Further, any new commodity or technology (such as the case of mini-tillers provided herein) should be carefully assessed to ensure its suitability, viability, and effectiveness in the contexts in which they are to be used so that such initiatives do not create unnecessary dependency on either the market or external actors. I argue that local people's position and ability to own or have control over the means of production is crucial for resilient livelihoods.

Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction can be appreciated for its *intention* to help the survivors rebuild their homes and its *ambition* to achieve structural resilience in housing reconstruction. Nevertheless, there were numerous issues from the perspective of the justice or equity principle (*who was supported and how*), the reconstruction process (*what got built and who decided*), and the practicality or usefulness of the post-earthquake housing in the given rural context (*was it fit for purpose*). Thus, rendering reconstruction as technical was counterproductive.

I offer Bourdieu's theoretical contributions (field, habitus, and capital theory) as an applied framework for policymakers and practitioners to understand the social realities that confront them and to effectively undertake housing reconstruction processes without simply

rendering them technical. Bourdieu's concepts are promising as they help us understand complex social realities, assess actors' vested interests, and the consequences of their potential actions (*who wins and who loses*). This may help curb disaster profiteering and help recognise power dynamics and social domination in the reconstruction field.

As I discussed above, there was—and is—too much focus on physical resilience or infrastructural robustness regarding disaster mitigation in Nepal. The emphasis on structural resilience distracts us from questions of social structural resilience. For example, the reconstruction of buildings can distract us from chronic poverty and deep social inequalities that are embedded in society. Colourful images of houses with titles like 'glory returned' in newspapers and magazines serve as a distraction (Urry 2004). On this point, Gieryn (2002, pp. 38-39) reminds us of the social consequences of buildings. Once constructed, they channel action in three ways. First, people are obligated to use them in order to function in the world. Second, they prevent alternatives—the politics of building construction and their subsequent existence are obscure to us. Third, they work against change as the costs of altering or transforming them are often too great. In the case of post-earthquake Nepal, the poor have small and unsuitable houses but big loans to repay. Glory has not returned. Acute poverty, caste discrimination, and gender inequality still prevail.

In the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, many people commented that *"bhukampale dhani garib, jāt-pāt kehi bhandaina"* (earthquakes treat everyone equally; literally, earthquakes do not differentiate rich or poor, "high" or "low" caste). While it was true that the jolts of the quake were the same for everyone, the damage and loss were not the same for everyone. However, the Dalit and marginalised Ādibāsi-Janajāti who were already in a vulnerable state before the earthquake due to the historical and structural marginalisation

process, the calamity exacerbated their situation. Average per capita loss and damage obscures that fact that Dalit Ādibāsi-Janajāti—who have so little—lost most, if not all, they had. So, they tend to lose more than anyone else in absolute terms. Further, Dalits and marginalised Ādibāsi-Janajāti had fewer resources and capital to utilise for their recoveries, and, as I discussed above, the idea of "restoration" excluded them from accessing some types of aid. Therefore, more targeted response and recovery interventions are necessary considering the vulnerability and impact of the crisis. Equitable assistance is justifiable rather than a blanket (equal aid) approach.

The caste habitus seems to be durable, but, as Bourdieu argues, no habitus is eternal (Bourdieu 1992). In fact, some habitus may be *forgotten*, *adapted*, or *replaced* by a new or reformed habitus in response to the changing structure or field (see Bourdieu 1990b). By adopting the Bourdieusian framework, I argue that although caste habitus reproduces inequality and vulnerability, both can be challenged and eliminated in three ways. Firstly, since caste habitus is formed primarily by socialisation, *transformative* family education and community social awareness programmes should be introduced and scaled up. Secondly, if these interventions could not be done effectively, education and training that promote equality should be undertaken. Bourdieu has pointed out that education and training are fundamental in producing habitus and reproducing inequality in society. Lastly, as Bourdieu suggests, habitus will be less influential if the field is highly regulated (France et al. 2013). Therefore, the formation and *effective* enforcement of the anti-caste discrimination policies/law are essential here.

Finally, in contrast to what may commonly be believed, disaster survivors are not passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. They are active agents of disaster response and recovery who act strategically to secure their position and capital(s) in the changing disaster field.

Therefore, they should be recognised and encouraged for their willingness and ability to bring about positive changes for their families and communities. Further, the possibility and ability to rely on different forms of capital (beyond external economic or material capital) are crucial for disaster survivors to cope with and recover from the impacts of the crisis. Therefore, congruent with the arguments of Ferguson (2013, p. 237), humanitarian and development policies should not aim to eliminate dependency but to create reliable and desirable forms of it. Hence, the goal should be to help disaster survivors reduce *harmful dependencies* and recognise and strengthen *good dependencies* in the pre-and-post disaster fields.

Scope for Future Research

One of the objectives of the research was to understand the lifeworld of marginalised and oppressed communities in relation to post-earthquake housing reconstruction in rural locations. Further research is suggested to compare housing recovery experiences with other social groups in the communities.

During the research interviews, I found an aberrant case: one of the participants in the Sindhupalchok District was concerned more about rebuilding *a gumbā* (Buddhist monastery) than his own house. He donated his “muscle” and as much money as he could to the reconstruction of the gumbā in his village. I recognise that further research is required to understand the role of faith, for example, in reconstructing public and private infrastructures following the disaster. Such studies will contribute to the scant but growing body of literature on religious and faith perspective, including cultural lens, in understanding disasters and post-disaster recovery processes (Childs et al. 2021; Feener and Daly 2016).

Nepal has a long history of undertaking bikās (development) projects and establishing various structures and systems in the name of bikās. Further study is necessary to understand how these bikās interventions or outcomes were effective in helping people to withstand and cope with the disaster and recover from the devastating impact. In other words, further research on the development–disaster–(re-)development nexus is suggested.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Development and Disaster Paradigm Compared Since 1950s

Paradigm		1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s onwards
Development paradigm	**Paradigm**	**Modernisation**		**Market liberalisation**		**Sustainable development**	
	Themes	Modernisation, dual economy model, 'backward agriculture', community development, lazy peasants	Transformation approach, technology transfer, mechanisation, agricultural extension, growth role of agriculture, green revolution	Redistribution with growth, dependency theories, basic needs, integrated rural development, state agricultural policies, state-led credit, green revolution continues	Structural adjustment, free market, rise of NGOs, rapid rural appraisal (RRA), food security, famine analysis, Gender in development (GID), decentralisation	Micro-credit, participatory approaches, stakeholder analysis, rural safety nets, gender & development (GAD), environment & sustainability, poverty reduction, vulnerability, good governance, *rights-based approach, empowerment*	Sustainable livelihoods, participation, social protection, poverty eradication, vulnerability reduction, climate change, resilience, *Do No Harm, Mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues/ intersectionality (such as gender, disability, climate change), social inclusion*
Disaster paradigm	**Paradigm**	**Hazard**		**Vulnerability**			**Resilience**
	Themes	Geo-physical natural hazards, nature-society interaction, cost-benefit analysis	Satisfying risk, quantifying risk	Hazard paradigm (natural, technological, social), land degradation, erosion, disaster planning, (social)vulnerability, comprehensive management	Biological hazards, construction of risk, technological hazards, participation, primary health care, entitlement theory, vulnerability, civil defence	Complex emergencies, vulnerability reduction, private market, participation, human ecology of disease, risk assessments, disaster resistance, sustainable hazard mitigation, disaster resilience, invulnerable development	Participation, vulnerability, climate change, resilience, good governance, livelihoods, DRR, psychosocial, comprehensive vulnerability management, new humanitarianism

Source: Manyena 2012, p. 329. Manyena adapted the development paradigm from Ellis and Biggs (2001). My insertions are in italics.

Appendix 2: Caste Hierarchy of Muluki Ain, 1854

Hierarchy	Category	Social groups
A	*Tagadhari* (Wearer of Holy cord)	Parbate upper castes, Newar Brahman, Tarai Brahman, Newar upper caste
B	*Namasinya matwali* (Non-enslavable Alcohol Drinkers)	Magar and Gurung (associated with Gorkhali army), Sunuwar (Hinduised), Newar (non-Hindu)
C	*Masinya matwali* (Enslavable Alcohol Drinkers)	Bhote (Buddhist), Chepang, Kumal and Hayu (ethnic minorities), Tharu (Tarai ethnic), Gharti (progeny of freed slaves)
D	*Pani nachalnya, Chho chhito halnu naparnya* (Impure but Touchable)	Lower caste Newar, Muslim, *Mlech* (European)
D	*Pani nachalnya, Chho chhito halnu parnya* (Impure and Untouchable)	Parbate artisan castes, Newar scavenger castes

Source: Based on Gurung 2006, p. 40

Appendix 3: Research Ethics Approval

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Office of Research Strategy and Integrity (ORSI)

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Level 11, 49 Symonds Street
Telephone: 64 9 373 7599
Extension: 83711
humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

17-Oct-2019

MEMORANDUM TO:

Assoc Prof Steven Matthewman
Sociology

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 023732): Approved

The Committee considered the application for ethics approval for your study entitled **Rising from the rubble: Post-disaster recovery and (re-)development in Nepal**.

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval has been granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 17-Oct-2022.

Completion of the project: In order that up-to-date records are maintained, you must notify the Committee once your project is completed.

Amendments to the project: Should you need to make any changes to the project, please complete an Amendment Request form in InfoEd, giving full details along with revised documentation. If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for approval.

Funded projects: If you received funding for this project, please provide this approval letter to your local Faculty Research Project Coordinator (RPC) or Research Project Manager (RPM) so that the approval can be notified via a Service Request to the Research Operations Centre (ROC) for activation of the grant.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the Ethics Administrators at humanethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Additional information:

1. Do not forget to complete the 'approval wording' on the PISs, CFs and/or advertisements and emails, giving the dates of approval and the reference number. This needs to be completed before you use the documents or send them out to your participants.

Please quote Protocol number **023732** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
Faculty of Arts

Department of Sociology
Human Sciences Building, 10 Symonds Street
Auckland, New Zealand
Email: jkar943@aucklanduni.ac.nz
Website: https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/arts.html

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(For Remote Interviews)

Project Title:	Rising from the rubble: Post-disaster recovery and (re-) development in Nepal
Researchers:	Jeevan Karki (PhD Candidate)
	Steve Matthewman, PhD
	Jesse Hession Grayman, PhD

Researcher Introduction, Invitation, and Right to Withdraw from Participation:

My name is Jeevan Karki. I am a doctoral student at the University of Auckland in the Department of Sociology working with Steve Matthewman, PhD, and Jesse Hession Grayman, PhD, as my supervisors. I am conducting my research study on post-disaster recovery in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal Earthquake and this research has been awarded/ funded by the University of Auckland's Faculty of Arts Doctoral Research Fund (DRF) and the Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Studies Network respectively. I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time during this interview without giving reason. In case you change your mind later, you can withdraw your data without giving reason up to six weeks after the interview. If you decide to do

so within this stipulated timeframe, you can contact me (the researcher) by sending an email or making a digital telecommunication call. There are no penalties for withdrawal.

Research Description:

The Nepal Earthquake of 7.8 magnitudes that took place on 25 April 2015 affected millions in this country. When disasters (like this earthquake) occur, it is the poor, marginalised, and disadvantaged groups in the communities who are often impacted the most and who face the most challenges when trying to recover. However, there is little known about how socially and economically marginalised groups, such as Dalits and ethnic minorities in Nepal, have recovered (or have failed to recover) following the devastation. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap. Similarly, in the aftermath of the earthquake, various kinds of post-disaster recovery initiatives were carried out by different International/ non-government organisations (I/NGOs) and government institutions, but the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of such interventions, especially from people or survivors' perspective, are not sufficiently evaluated or researched. Therefore, it is important to examine such post-disaster recovery interventions to ascertain their effectiveness. A better understanding of the recovery process in this disaster will remain crucial for both present and future societies of Nepal as the country is vulnerable to various kinds of disasters. Research findings would also help with the recoveries of poor and marginalised social groups in Nepal and elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, I hope that the research can help the local, provincial and national government institutions, and other non-government humanitarian and development actors to improve their current and future recovery strategies, policies, and programmes.

Research Procedures:

If you wish to participate in this research project, you will participate in a digital interview led by me. The interview will be done through phone, email, or an internet-based communication such as Zoom or Skype. This interview is expected to last for about an hour, but it may or may not take longer since it will be an informal interview with open-ended questions. If necessary, and providing that you agree to participate, a follow-up interview may be organised. Topics in the interview will be based on your experiences of the Nepal Earthquake 2015, and of the subsequent recovery. You are welcome to ask me (the researcher) any question or concern about the research project and the use of your data. This interview will be audio-recorded with your consent. Even if you agree to be recorded, you may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time without giving reason.

You are entitled to request to review and edit your interview transcript and to review the summary of findings. If you wish to review your interview transcript and/or the summary, please provide your contact information on the study consent form.

I would like to hear your stories, but you do not have to tell me anything that you do not want to. If any of the questions make you feel discomfort and you need socio-psychological support, please let me know about it and I will refer you to a relevant health worker or institution. The institutions that provide psycho-social services have been listed below:

Name of the institutions	Contact address
Bhaktapur Hospital	Bhaktapur, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-6610798
Bir Hospital	Mahaboudha, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-4221119/ 1-4221988
Centre for Mental Health & Counselling - Nepal (CMC-Nepal)	Jitjung Marg, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-4102037/ 1-4226041 Email: cmcnepal@mos.com.np
Civil Hospital	Min Bhawan, New Baneshwor, Kathmandu, Phone: (+977) 1-4107000
Dhulikhel Hospital	Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchok, Nepal Phone: (+977) 11-490497/ 11-490707 Email: dhos@mail.com.np
Koshish Nepal	Bagdol, Lalitpur, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-5190103 Email: info@koshishnepal.org
Mental Hospital	Lagankhel, Lalitpur, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-5521333/ 1-5521612 Email: mentalhospitallagankhel@gmail.com
8. National Trauma Centre	Mahankal, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-4239161, 1-4226634 Email: traumacentrektm@gmail.com
9. Patan Hospital	Lagankhel, Lalitpur, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-5522278/1-5522266 Email: pahs@pahs.edu.np
10. T.U. Teaching Hospital	Maharajgunj, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone No: (+977) 1-4412303/ 1-4412505 Email: ittuth@iom.edu.np
11. TPO Nepal	Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone: (+977) 1-4431717/ 1-4437124 Email: tponepal@tponepal.org.np

Data Storage/ Retention/ Destruction/ Future Use:

The digital files of the recordings will be securely kept in the researcher's computer until destroyed. Electronic data will be stored in the researcher's password-protected computer until interviews are transcribed, and hardcopy transcriptions and consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet for six years. Any hardcopy transcripts will be shredded after they are typed into the computer.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

In this research project, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. In order to protect your identity and confidentiality, no real names will be used in the thesis or in any written papers; instead pseudonyms will be used. While pseudonyms will be used to preserve confidentiality, you still cannot be guaranteed anonymity as there is a chance you could be identified through your comments. In the case that an interpreter is present in the interview, the researcher will make sure that s/he understands that the information collected in the interview is confidential and must not be disclosed to or discussed with anyone other than the researcher, and that the interpreter signs the confidentiality agreement-form before the interview.

Contact Details:

If you require more information about the study, please contact the following person:

Researcher:
Jeevan Karki
Sociology
Email: jkar943@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Principal Investigator/Supervisor:
Associate Professor Steve Matthewman
Sociology
Email: s.matthewman@auckland.ac.nz
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Deputy Head of Research:
Dr. Carisa Showden
School of Social Sciences
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Phone: +64 9 923 2257

UAHPEC Chair contact details:

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, Office of Research Strategy and Integrity, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373 7599 extension 83711. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 17 October 2019 for three years. Reference Number 023732.

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form (English Version)

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Faculty of Arts

Department of Sociology
Human Sciences Building, 58 Symonds Street
Auckland, New Zealand
Email: jkar943@aucklanduni.ac.nz
Website: https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/arts.html

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM

(Participants)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Project title:	Rising from the rubble: Post-disaster recovery and (re-) development in Nepal
Name of the Researchers:	Jeevan Karki (PhD Candidate); Steve Matthewman, PhD (Supervisor); Jesse Hession Grayman, PhD (Supervisor)

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that the interview may last for an hour, but I am also aware that it may or may not take longer as it is an open-ended informal interview.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to six weeks without giving reason.

- I understand that pseudonyms will be used in write-ups to preserve my confidentiality; however, I am also aware that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed as there is a chance I could be identified through my comments.
- I understand that if a translator is used, they will sign a confidentiality agreement.
- I agree / do not agree to be audio recorded. *(please circle one)*
- I allow / do not allow to take images of humanitarian assistance and recovery items or materials. (*please circle one*)
- I wish / do not wish to receive a transcript of my interview for editing. *(please circle one)*
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings. *(please circle one)*

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have opted to receive the transcript of your interview and/or a summary of the research findings, please provide your email/ postal address below:

_____

_____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 17 October 2019 for three years. Reference Number 023732.

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule (with local people/community members)

State of Recovery:

1. Where were you when the earthquake happened? How did it affect you and your family? How did it impact upon your community?
2. How was your/your family's experience of disaster's impact different from or similar to other caste groups in the community?
3. How did you overcome the impact of the 2015 earthquake? What helped you, in particular, to recover from the disaster?
4. If you have not been able to recover from this disaster, what were the challenges or hurdles you had experienced?
5. What kinds of help or support did you receive from neighbours? What types of help or support did you receive from relatives or kinships? How has your caste/ ethnic identity helped or excluded in receiving help and support from neighbours and relatives/ kinships?
6. Were you involved in any kinds of community groups, such as women groups, saving and credit groups, etc.? If so, how were they useful aftermath the earthquake? Were any programmes undertaken through such groups? Please explain with examples.
7. How did the earthquake impact the community infrastructure, such as foot trails/ road, bridges, community irrigation, micro-hydropower, etc.? How have these infrastructures been recovered? And, how was your involvement or participation?

Nature and Relevancy:

1. What kinds of relief and assistance were provided by the government and other non-government organisations? What did you receive? How was the support useful or not useful?
2. Were you or your family unable to access any assistance granted in your village/ community? If so, why? Are there more people, like you, who were deprived of accessing relief and recovery assistance?

3. Which particular type(s) of assistance did you find most useful, and why? Similarly, what did you find less helpful, and why?

Rebuilding Homes:

1. Have you completed rebuilding your home? (If yes, when did you finish it? If not yet, what are the reasons?) [Also ask, if the old house has been repaired or reused in any form)
2. How do you feel about this new home? What key differences do you find between the old home and this new home? Which one do you like? Why?
3. What kinds of assistance did you receive from the government for rebuilding your home? To what extent the support provided by the government was sufficient to rebuild the home? How did you manage to find additional costs? How is your experience/ situation similar to or different from other caste groups?
4. What were the conditions to access the government's housing reconstruction fund? What do you think of these conditions (considering your situation)?
5. How difficult or easy was to receive/ access that fund? How challenging was it to collect and submit the required documents/ documentation? Could you please explain in detail? Did anyone (people or institution) help or facilitate you in this process? Has has your social position and unique circumstance played any role in fulfilling or preventing the required documentation and process and receiving the fund? Please share with specific examples.
6. Did you have to visit the government office(s) multiple times to receive the housing grant? If so, how many times and other obstacles did you face?
7. How did non-government organisations help you for rebuilding home? How was the assistance helpful?
8. What kinds of local materials or resources were used in rebuilding your home? How were the local resources helpful? How has your social position (caste/ ethnic identity) impacted–positively or negatively–in accessing local materials and resources?
9. Did you build any additional rooms or a new home altogether (in addition to the government-assisted house reconstruction) using your own strengths and resources? How do you relate your experience with other caste groups in the community?
10. In your view, what could have been done better in rebuilding homes?

Recovery of Livelihoods/ Economies:

1. What was your primary source of income or livelihoods before the earthquake, and how was it impacted? How do you relate your experience of the impact on livelihoods and economic situation as compared with other caste groups? Please share with specific examples.
2. How did you survive afterwards? How did you overcome this situation?
3. Were any new employment or income-generating opportunities available after the earthquake (for example, the demand for additional workforce in reconstruction, new jobs opening in the government and non-government sector, or new opportunities for businesses and micro-enterprises)? Did you or your family benefit from these opportunities? Please elaborate with examples.
4. How is your landownership, farming, and animal husbandry situation in relation to other caste groups? How did the earthquake impact your farming/agriculture and animal husbandry? How were you able to recover from the impact on farming and livestock?
5. As part of the recovery process, have you done anything new or different in farming and livestock rearing? Consider methods, tools, or improved varieties or breeds. (If yes, ask these questions: how did they learn about these tools and techniques, access, any change on income, other benefits, challenges, etc.)
6. What kinds of assistance did you receive from the government or non-government organisations to help recover your livelihoods? Was it relevant to your specific livelihoods needs? (Indicate if there was any caste occupation needs) Please share with specific examples.
7. In your view, what could have been done better for livelihoods and economic recovery?

Miscellaneous:

1. How was your journey of recovery from the earthquake impacted by the pandemic?
2. What is your plan for the future?
3. Did I miss any pressing questions to ask you?
4. Do you have any questions to ask me?

Appendix 7: Interview Schedule with Development and Humanitarian Workers and Local Government Representatives

Overall post-disaster recovery situation:

1. It has been now more than five years after the earthquake. How do you assess the state of recovery?
2. The slogan "build back better" was famous in the aftermath of the earthquake. Now looking at where we've arrived today, do you think we are on the right trajectory?
3. Have you observed or encountered any positive—intended or unintended—effects of recovery and reconstruction efforts?
4. Similarly, have you observed or encountered any negative or harmful—intended or unintended—effects of the recovery and reconstruction efforts?
5. What type of people in the communities were recovered, and what kinds of people were unable to recover? *(How, Why)*

Nature of relief and recovery interventions:

1. What kinds of post-disaster recovery programmes/ interventions have your organisation carried out in the community, and why?
2. Which geographical areas were chosen (by your organisation) for post-disaster recovery programmes, and why? What kind of demographic population (social groups) reside in your working areas?
3. Could you please let us know the duration of the programme interventions and what were the reasons for specifying such timeframe?

Process of beneficiary selection and decisions:

1. How did you identify the target beneficiaries for post-disaster recovery interventions? *(Criteria, tools, process, and challenges/ limitations)*
2. What kinds of programmes did you implement with marginalised groups (Dalits and Janjātis)?

3. How did you prepare and plan programmes? Could you please explain the planning and programme designing process or steps you had adopted?
4. What were the roles of the community people in this process?

Impact/ results of relief and recovery interventions:

1. What are the key achievements of the relief and recovery interventions you had carried out?
2. What progress has been made in the areas of housing reconstruction? *(focus on Dalit and Janjāti groups)*
3. What progress has been made in the areas of livelihoods? *(focus on Dalit and Janjāti groups)*
4. What were the major challenges you had faced, and how did you overcome them?

Mobilisation of local resource:

1. What kinds of local resources were identified and mobilised in the recovery process/ programmes?
2. How were these resources helpful for the recovery efforts?

Development-recovery relations:

1. What kinds of development programmes were implemented in those communities in the past? What were the key outcomes of such interventions (before the earthquake)?
2. To what extent were these outcomes useful to help people recover from the disaster?
3. Were any social institutions such as groups and cooperative were formed through the development projects before the earthquake? If yes, how were these groups mobilised (in the aftermath of the earthquake), and how were they helpful to the relief and recovery efforts?
4. What kinds of opportunities and challenges have you experienced (or assumed) in the post-disaster context to implement (re-)development programmes?

Others:

1. How did the post-disaster recovery framework and policies help or facilitate the recovery and reconstruction process? What were the key challenges in implementation, and how were they addressed?
2. What key lessons have you or your organisation learnt from the post-disaster response and recovery process?
3. How has the pandemic impacted the efforts of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction interventions?
4. Did I miss any pressing questions to ask you?
5. Do you have any questions to ask me?

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