

BUILDING BACK BETTER OR RESTORING INEQUALITIES?

Gender and conflict sensitivity in the response to Nepal's 2015 earthquakes



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Abbreviations

BDS	Blue Diamond Society
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSO	Civil society organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
GESI	Gender and social inclusion
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRA	National Reconstruction Authority
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SGM	Sexual and gender minorities
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	Village development committee
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

Executive summary

When natural disasters strike, the global response often looks similar, yet the contexts – with their own particular gender norms, expectations and socio-economic conditions – are often very different. For example, marginalisation and geographic exclusion can shape the impact of a disaster on specific communities and influence their resilience to the crisis. Places affected by conflicts have additional complications as conflicts damage institutions and the social fabric, and lead to psycho-social trauma. Often, humanitarian programming does not take this into account, which leads to negative outcomes. For instance, providing support to survivors of sexual violence, or economic support initiatives that are not conflict-sensitive and fail to consider prevalent gender norms, have resulted in increased violence and domestic violence.

This paper is based on research into the gender dimensions of humanitarian interventions in post-conflict settings from a peacebuilding perspective, using the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal as a case study from which lessons can be drawn for other contexts. It identifies the risks posed by gender-blind humanitarian programming, the need to understand the multiple intersecting dimensions of vulnerability, as well as the key challenges in operationalising national and local gender and conflict-sensitive programming. The purpose of this investigation was to strengthen humanitarian programming that supports both gender equality and peace in complex post-conflict, post-disaster settings.

Following a brief background to Nepal and the earthquakes, the report explores the complex layers of geographic, gender and social exclusion that shaped individual and community experiences of the earthquakes.

Building on this comprehensive understanding of different types of vulnerabilities, it highlights four key findings about the humanitarian response in post-disaster, post-conflict Nepal:

- 1. Embrace complexity: Interventions need to recognise and address the multiple and complex layers of vulnerability and exclusion, taking into account gender hierarchies and the socio-economic exclusion of ethnic minorities, casual labour, widows or gender minorities.** For instance, a young man who migrated to Kathmandu to work as a casual labourer whose place of work and rented accommodation was destroyed faces different challenges and has different support needs to an elderly Tamang widow owning a shop in rural Sindhupalchowk. One way of addressing this is to integrate gender and conflict sensitivity into rapid needs assessments, working with local actors with nuanced contextual knowledge.
- 2. Address the influence of ‘invisible’ gender norms: Interventions need to understand the specific local gendered norms, how these intersect with conflict dynamics and what this means for relief and recovery.** For example, this means recognising the consequences of relief programming based on male lists of households, which can exclude widows or female-headed households, or the results of the social expectations placed on men as protectors and providers to return from employment abroad to look after their family in times of crises.
- 3. Bridge the gap: While gender and social inclusion strategies are central to policy and capital planning, they need to be translated into meaningful impact on the ground, for example, by integrating them into implementing agencies’ plans and operations at the district level, and verifying this through monitoring and participatory feedback loops that involve potentially marginalised groups, such as social audits.**

4. **Pay attention to the risks of instability and conflict at the national level: Interventions should address both local and national conflict risks, for example, by building stronger trust and accountability between all citizens (men, women and third genders) and the state.** For example, the national-level deterioration in stability prompted by the constitutional and fuel crises in Nepal between September 2015 and February 2016 severely hampered recovery programming and adversely affected much of the population and the economy.

Based on the above, the final section of the report makes concrete recommendations for those working on earthquake response, recovery and reconstruction in Nepal, which may also be highly relevant for disaster response in other conflict-affected contexts:

1. **Ensure meaningful participation of marginalised gender and ethnic groups in planning and monitoring** by undertaking an upfront comprehensive gender and conflict analysis and by reaching out to marginalised groups to address the identified barriers to their participation such as remoteness, travel costs, language issues or social norms preventing mixed gender discussions.
2. **Recognise and address pre-existing gendered vulnerabilities** by ensuring that support provided reaches those in need of it regardless of their gender, social identity or location.
3. **Work towards peace and gender equality when designing and implementing programmes** to ‘build back better’ by actively seeking and realising opportunities to overcome pre-existing social and gender inequalities and exclusion through how the reconstruction effort is planned and implemented – for example, not resettling marginalised groups into similarly segregated ethnic enclaves lacking in facilities and basic services.
4. **Ensure gender and conflict sensitivity in recovery programming by following the “Principles of conduct for effective, inclusive and conflict-sensitive earthquake response in Nepal”** and its checklist for project cycle management.
5. **Go beyond small-scale conflict sensitivity by taking into account the broader political conflict dynamics** in the country, for example, by working with the newly created National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) to ensure that it operates transparently, efficiently and addresses entrenched inequalities while avoiding potential elite capture.
6. **Create jobs for peace** by using the reconstruction effort to provide decent jobs and training opportunities for citizens in the country.

1. Introduction

In the humid monsoon heat of Sindhupalchowk, one of the areas most affected by Nepal's earthquakes, about 15 Dalit community members squeeze into a newly reconstructed single-room house: older men, younger men, older women and young women, a few kids playing in the corner. “*Ke garne?* What can be done? We needed to be safe from wild animals,” the village leader explains.¹ In the absence of financial or material support from the government or civil society,² they saw no alternatives but to take a loan from a moneylender to buy the corrugated iron roof to rebuild some housing – at an interest rate of 24%. He points at a young man: “He came back from working in Qatar as a labourer to help his family in this disaster.” People nod – the social expectation of what it means to be a good man, husband and father is evidently shared. The earthquakes had struck only a few months into his contract and the initial loan required for migration was not yet paid off, necessitating an additional loan to bring the young man home to his family and thus doubling the debt without alleviating any of the urgent needs for shelter and food. When asked how they will cope with these additional loans, people shake their heads. There are no jobs there, which is why economic migration is high. But the immediate survival concerns are too demanding to worry about the long-term future and risk of debt slavery, despite economic exclusion having been one of the root causes of Nepal's decade of conflict.

This Dalit family's situation highlights the delicate conjuncture of gender norms and expectations, pre-existing socio-economic marginalisation and geographic exclusion, which shape the impact of natural disasters on communities and influence their resilience to such crises, particularly in conflict-affected contexts that are far from being states of positive peace. In these contexts, conflict and violence have weakened the social fabric, as well as economic and governance institutions, and infrastructure and trust in the government is limited. In the past, humanitarian programming has not always taken this into account, which leads to negative outcomes. This can include the insensitive provision of support to survivors of sexual violence, such as singling them out, which can result in subsequent community rejection or harassment, or economic support initiatives counter to gender norms that contribute to women's economic empowerment but are accompanied by increases in domestic violence.³

This report is based on research into the key gender dimensions in humanitarian interventions in post-conflict settings from a peacebuilding perspective using the case study of the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal. It identifies the potential conflict risks posed by gender-blind humanitarian programming (including the risk of increased sexual violence), the need to understand the multiple intersecting dimensions of vulnerability, as well as the key challenges in effectively operationalising gender and conflict-sensitive programming at both the national and local levels. The purpose of this investigation was to strengthen humanitarian programming that supports both gender equality and peace in complex post-conflict, post-disaster settings using the Nepal case study as a resource from which lessons can be drawn for other contexts.

1 Direct quote by village leader, Dalit community in rural Sindhupalchowk, July 2015

2 By July 2015, they had received only food relief and small non-food items, but no assistance towards rebuilding housing or shelter.

3 A tent set up in an Albanian camp exclusively for the counselling of sexual violence survivors actually increased the risk of violence towards these women due to local cultural norms that see rape survivors as dishonouring the family, which has to be rectified by killing them. M. Wessells, Do no harm: Toward contextually appropriate psychosocial support in international emergencies, *American Psychologist*, 64(8), 2009, pp.842–854; see also International Alert and East African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), *Changing fortunes: Women's economic opportunities in post-war Northern Uganda*, Investing in Peace Issue No. 3, London: International Alert, 2010, <http://www.internationalalert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201009ChangingFortunesWomensEconomicOpp.pdf>

2. Structure and methodology

The research consisted of an extensive desk review as well as six weeks of fieldwork in Nepal from mid-June to the end of July 2015. This consisted of key informant interviews (KIIs) with civil society organisations (CSOs), humanitarian agencies and local government, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with affected communities, in multiple locations in Kathmandu and Sindhupalchowk (Chautara, Bhotechaur, Bahrabise and Khadichaur).⁴ During the conflict, Sindhupalchowk suffered high casualty rates compared to other districts, and it was severely affected by the earthquakes, suffering the most casualties and destruction of or damage to about 88% of housing.⁵

This research was undertaken in order to inform local and international actors engaged in humanitarian programming responding to natural disasters in conflict-affected contexts on the global level by drawing recommendations from Nepal. Some of the recommendations address the longer-term reconstruction effort in Nepal and some will be relevant for disaster preparedness efforts for future disasters. This report may also be of interest to academia and national governments in disaster and conflict-affected contexts.

The report gives a brief background to Nepal and the earthquakes before exploring the layers of exclusion that shaped individual and community experiences of the earthquakes. Building on this comprehensive understanding of the different types of vulnerabilities, it highlights four key findings about the humanitarian response in post-disaster, post-conflict Nepal to provide recommendations for future post-disaster response in other conflict-affected contexts:

- embrace complexity;
- address the influence of ‘invisible’ gender norms;
- bridge the gap; and
- pay attention to the risks of instability and conflict at the national level.

The concluding section summarises the evidence reviewed and highlights the implications for other disaster response interventions in fragile contexts, as well as the implications for long-term reconstruction and future disaster preparedness in Nepal.

4 A total of 47 KIIs and five FGDs were carried out for this research. KIIs were conducted in Kathmandu with national and international CSOs, humanitarian agencies, peacebuilding organisations, youth organisations, women’s networks, donor agencies and residents. Protection cluster meetings and the Inter-Cluster Gender Working Group multi-stakeholder forum were also attended to inform the research through participant observation. In addition, one FGD was conducted with Kathmandu-based civil society and one FGD was conducted with widows/single women in Dharmasthali (rural Kathmandu valley). A further three FGDs were conducted in rural Sindhupalchowk, two with local women’s groups and one with a rural Dalit community. The names of the individuals interviewed have not been disclosed, for confidentiality reasons.

5 There were 3,438 casualties reported in Sindhupalchowk. See Nepal: Casualties and damaged, https://ditaanggraeni.cartodb.com/viz/041aa150-f02d-11e4-b4d8-0e018d66dc29/public_map, accessed 1 February 2016. See also Nepal Earthquake Assessment Unit, Key findings – District assessment Sindhupalchowk, 9 June 2015, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/sindhupalchok_district_assessment_-_key_findings_june_2015_0.pdf

Box 1: Gender-relational approach

Alert adopts a relational approach to gender in peacebuilding, which means understanding gender roles and identities as being constructed through the power relations between men, women, and sexual and gender minorities (SGM) – as well as through the power relations within these groups. This means taking a *broader* understanding of gender by expanding it to incorporate women, men and SGM, and also a *deeper* one by looking at how gender relates to other factors, such as age, social class, disability, ethnic or religious background, political affiliation, marital status or geographical location. Gender identities, roles and expectations never exist in isolation from these other essential identity markers but closely interrelate with them. In the context of Nepal, this is often referred to as gender and social inclusion (GESI).

Why is this important? Men, women, girls, boys and members of SGM experience war, conflict and disasters differently, have different needs and vulnerabilities, and face different challenges during a violent conflict and emergencies, as well as immediately afterwards. In order to help rebuild more peaceful, cohesive and resilient societies following an emergency, taking gendered needs, vulnerabilities and opportunities into account becomes vital. Understanding how gendered identities are constructed through societal power relations can increase the effectiveness of peacebuilding and humanitarian interventions by addressing specific and more targeted issues and concerns, thus bringing about positive change.

Positive peace: Where peace is mentioned, this refers to a positive peace in which all members of society (men, women, boys and girls, transgender and intersex people) are able to exercise their human rights and live without fear of violence. This entails access to decent jobs and livelihoods for adults, education for children, access to justice, as well as the absence of any structural violence and inequalities such as racism, caste-based discrimination or gender inequalities. Issues of economic and social exclusion of certain groups matter to peacebuilders as they are contrary to a positive peace in which conflicts would be resolved non-violently.

3. Background

Between 1996 and 2006, the ethnically and geographically diverse country of Nepal experienced a decade-long People's War, in which 13,246 people were killed and thousands more injured or displaced.⁶ The armed conflict was the product of a long history of exclusionary governance compounded by widespread political suppression, including the killing, torture and imprisonment of political opponents, and a context of high poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Culturally repressive and exclusionary governance created widespread grievances among the system's 'losers', which found increasingly violent opposition after the multiparty democracy achieved by the non-violent People's Movement uprising in 1990 failed to significantly alter socio-economic conditions. Poverty, growing inequality, lack of equitable development and lack of access to quality services, among others, shaped the experience of exclusion that drove many to rise up against the state, both violently in the 'People's Liberation Army' and later non-violently, culminating in a second People's Movement in April 2006. This led to the end of the conflict and a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) being signed, establishing a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution, ensure equality and end marginalisation.

Since 2006, a slow post-conflict transition process saw the achievement of key milestones, such as completion of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former Maoist combatants, the beginning of a long-anticipated Truth and Reconciliation Process, and significant reductions in poverty rates.⁷ Nonetheless the economy remains subdued, underemployment in the informal sector⁸ and unemployment remain high,⁹ and certain key processes such as the promulgation of a new constitution have encountered years of delays and political infighting. Alert's 2015 *Peace Audit: Nepal* lays out the achievements and hurdles in the peacebuilding process in more depth, and identifies accountability in governance as well as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as the two key challenges for Nepal.¹⁰ Both of these are closely linked to endemic poverty and social exclusion issues, as Nepal remains one of the poorer countries in the world – ranking 145 out of 187 on the United Nations (UN) Human Development Index in 2014.¹¹

Due to the enduring poverty and limited labour market, Nepal is experiencing high levels of migration. An estimated one in four households has a member abroad and over half a million young men have migrated to Asia or the Middle East for work.¹² In addition, 1.5 million out of Nepal's

6 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), Nepal conflict report, Geneva, 2012, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/NepalConflictReport.aspx>

7 J. Naujoks and H. Myrntinen, Re-assessing gender norms after conflict: Gender and peacebuilding in Nepal, London: International Alert, 2014, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Gender_RethinkingGenderPeacebuildingNepal_EN_2014.pdf

8 International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Office for Nepal, Nepal labour market update, Kathmandu: ILO, 2014, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-kathmandu/documents/publication/wcms_322446.pdf

9 The CIA estimates Nepal's unemployment rate to be around 50%. B. Snyder, 5 things you need to know about Nepal's economy, Fortune, 27 April 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/04/27/nepal-gdp-economy/>, accessed 15 April 2016. However, exact figures are difficult to confirm due to high migration and high hidden unemployment and underemployment.

10 For more background on Nepal, see E. Drew and R. Gurung, Peace audit: Nepal, London: International Alert, 2015, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/PeaceAudit_Nepal_EN_2015.pdf, which assesses the risks and drivers of conflict, as well as the possibilities for peace.

11 United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2014 – Sustaining human progress: Reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience, New York: United Nations, p.159

12 Government of Nepal, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Department of Foreign Employment, Labour migration for employment: A status report for Nepal, Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, 2014, <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/MigrationReportbyGovernmentofNepal.pdf>; P. Clewett, Redefining Nepal: Internal migration in a post-conflict, post-disaster society, Migration Policy Institute, 18 June 2015, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/redefining-nepal-internal-migration-post-conflict-post-disaster-society>

28 million people regularly cross between Nepal and India's open border.¹³ Internal migration within Nepal is also high, with lower-skilled socio-economic migrants moving for employment despite it often being precarious and low paid. This includes rural-to-rural migration and circular patterns of migration, with families maintaining bases in both rural and urban settings. Despite increasing percentages of women migrating, the majority of migrants are male, resulting in a feminised workforce particularly in rural areas. It is this post-conflict, high-migration context that was struck by disaster.

13 P. Clewett, 2015, *Op. cit.*

4. The earthquakes and response

In April and May 2015, two major earthquakes and countless aftershocks hit Nepal, killing over 8,700 people, injuring over 22,000 and causing widespread destruction of over 800,000 buildings including homes, schools and hospitals.¹⁴ The initial damage and long-term impact were assessed by the government of Nepal in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA)¹⁵ to amount to US\$7 billion, about a quarter of which reflects losses to the public sector and three-quarters represents the value of losses for individuals and the private sector. The impact on the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people has been immensely detrimental in a country already facing issues of persistent poverty and exclusion.

The initial relief operation struggled to reach all the affected communities due to the mountainous terrain, damaged transport infrastructure and bureaucratic delays.¹⁶ CSOs, community members and media reports emphasised the best efforts by a wide variety of actors, most significantly by local first responders. Affected individuals activated their social networks to communicate needs, and individuals and communities mobilised resources to meet those needs, financially supported by the strong diaspora created by Nepal's high migration rates. The international community and agencies, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as the government and army all worked to meet the emergency needs, although the majority of respondents acknowledged that delivery of this support was patchy and that more was needed to reach all of those affected, particularly remote communities.¹⁷ However, the government's earthquake response was hampered not only by weak bureaucratic capacity but also by political complications relating to the promulgation of the controversial new constitution (which reneged on previous commitments on the rights of women and minority groups) and the ensuing protests and the fuel crisis.¹⁸ These not only severely delayed the launch of the NRA but also stymied the transportation of much-needed relief and reconstruction items.

This report focuses on the intersection of gender, social inclusion and conflict issues in the post-earthquake response.¹⁹ The interviews with civil society, communities and individuals in addition to the extensive literature review brought out a number of key dimensions of geographic, gender and social exclusion, which are described in detail below.

14 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nepal, Supporting Nepal to build back better: Key achievements in UNDP's earthquake response, Kathmandu: UNDP, 2015, http://www.np.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/reports/UNDP_NP_supporting-nepal-to-build-back-better-key-achievements-in-undps-earthquake-response.pdf

15 Government of Nepal National Planning Commission, Post Disaster Needs Assessment, Executive summary, Volume A: Key findings, Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, 2015, http://icnr2015.mof.gov.np/page/post_disaster_needs_assessment

16 The civil society and communities interviewed largely concurred on this, interviews by author, June–July 2015

17 Civil society and communities, interviews by author, June–July 2015; see also Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, Inter agency common feedback report: December 2015 feedback report, Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CFP%20December%20Report.pdf>. These feedback reports are based on 1,400 perception surveys undertaken each month.

18 Identity-based protests over the new constitution, particularly in the Terai, have prevented normal fuel import from India into landlocked Nepal. This is addressed in more detail in section 5 of this report. See also S. Lewis, No respite for shortage-hit Nepal as political efforts fall short, *Time*, 25 January 2016, <http://time.com/4192129/shortage-nepal-madhese-blockade/>

19 For more in-depth reviews of the multifaceted relief and recovery interventions, see: Government of Nepal National Planning Commission, 2015, Op. cit.; D. Sanderson, A. Rodericks, N. Shrestha and B. Ramalingam, Nepal earthquake appeal response review, London: Disasters Emergency Committee [DEC], 2015, https://issuu.com/decuk/docs/dec_hc_nepal_response_review; Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, December 2015, Op. cit.; and UNDP, 2015, Op. cit.

4.1 Dimensions of geographic, gender and social exclusion

Caste-based exclusion

Although historical caste-based exclusion has been outlawed, it continues to affect both urban and rural communities. The poverty rate of Dalits is almost twice the national average (42% compared to 24%), and 15% of Hill Dalits are landless and therefore likely to have been in rented housing or living in unsafe lands prone to natural disasters.²⁰ Of the total damaged houses, 41% belongs to Dalits and indigenous communities.²¹ Specific incidents of discrimination, neglect of Dalit households or giving relief in the name of Dalits to others have been documented.²² Where displaced by the earthquakes or associated landslides, Dalit communities further face a higher risk of not being able to reclaim their land after the emergency phase, 'causing challenges to their sustainable recovery' since land is a source of shelter, livelihood and social status.²³ While local response networks responded generously to the disaster, these ran largely on kinship lines so those with the best networks tended to receive the most support, thereby reinforcing pre-existing resource asymmetries through informal support. A report of the Inter Agency Common Feedback Project found that discrimination based on caste or political affiliation was perceived as one of the main reasons for aid unfairness, according to the 34% of respondents who felt that relief was not distributed fairly.²⁴ If these trends continue, sustained perceptions of exclusion could present a risk to post-conflict stability and social cohesion, or exacerbate economic migration trends with attendant social consequences.²⁵

Box 2: Citizenship – the key to legal identity in Nepal²⁶

The citizenship certificate is the most important legal document for Nepali citizens. This certificate mediates access to key social, economic and political rights such as "registering marriages, births, or on voter lists, buying or selling land, sitting for professional exams, opening bank accounts, and accessing credit,"²⁷ as well as drawing state pensions or single women²⁸ support. A 2014 survey documented that about one in five eligible adults did not have the certificate due to "gender and caste at the individual level, as well as with intra-family dynamics at the household level".²⁹ Some women and girls are prevented from accessing this documentation by uncooperative families who want to avoid property inheritance claims, with conflict survivors, widows and sex workers particularly affected due to the absence of husbands. Literacy, lack of awareness or geographic exclusion present further obstacles. Dalit and landless people also face specific barriers in accessing the certificate due to historical exclusion and lack of other documentation, e.g. land titles.

20 Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee, Asia Dalit Rights Forum and National Dalit Watch – National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Waiting for "justice in response": Report of initial findings from immediate needs assessment and monitoring responses towards affected Dalit communities in Nepal earthquake, Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee, 2015, <http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/REPORT-OF-IMMEDIATE-ASSESSMENT-Relief-for-Dalits-in-NEPAL-2015.pdf>

21 Earthquake recovery response, UNDP Nepal, <http://www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/others/earthquake-recovery-response.html>, accessed 16 February 2016

22 Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee, 2015, Op. cit.

23 UNDP, Gender and social inclusion issues: Post-EQ land and natural resources in communities, Presentation at the World Wildlife Fund and Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists hosted workshop on Media sensitisation on post-earthquake green recovery and reconstruction, Kathmandu, 3–4 February 2016

24 The other cause for perceptions of aid unfairness was first-come, first-served. Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, Community feedback to Nepal earthquake response: October 2015, Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, 2015, https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c1eeec175c8c3b0a3e19eca4b/files/CFP_October_Report.pdf

25 For more on the gender dimensions of high migration levels, see J. Naujoks and H. Myrntinen, 2014, Op. cit.

26 Information in this text box is from Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), Acquisition of citizenship certificate in Nepal: Understanding trends, barriers & impacts, Kathmandu: FWLD, 2014

27 Ibid.

28 For socio-cultural reasons, the leading NGO working with widows, Women for Human Rights (WHR), single women group, encourages the use of the term 'single women' instead of 'widow', as the word 'widow' is linked to such stigma and discrimination it is likened to a social death. Using this terminology is a conscious choice to acknowledge these women's continued personhood and agency rather than referring to them by what they have lost.

29 FWLD, 2014, Op. cit.

Bureaucratic exclusion

Destroyed houses also meant the loss of legal documentation of citizenships, marriages and land ownership. Replacing such documents is particularly challenging for poorer or illiterate families including Dalits, the landless and those living far from administrative centres, especially groups with limited mobility, for instance, women caring for small children, the elderly or those with disabilities. It is also an issue for internal migrants living in a different district from where they were born and registered, or for the wives of external migrants who cannot have the documents reissued while their husbands are abroad. It is also particularly challenging for survivors of trafficking or sex workers who do not comply with gendered expectations of femininity, which is linked to chastity and family honour. The subsequent provision of relief and support was frequently contingent on such documentation. Earthquake victim identity cards were issued but required proof of citizenship, so those whose papers were destroyed faced compounded disadvantages.

The blanket distribution of relief, often used in emergency response and to a lesser degree in recovery, was largely channelled through the local government, which – since local elections have not been held for over a decade – meant local political leaders. The extent of clientelism in Nepal means that, in places, these resources were funnelled to political supporters or kinship groups first, compounding the vulnerabilities and exclusion of those without political links or social status.³⁰

Disabilities

People with disabilities, whether or not these were a result of the conflict, faced particular vulnerabilities and support gaps in Nepal even prior to the earthquakes. Of the estimated 7–10% of the population with some form of disability, the majority are supported by their families in the absence of efficient state support mechanisms, and a lack of schooling and employment.³¹ Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, with over half of those interviewed in a 2011 survey having experienced violence.³² After the earthquakes, people with disabilities were disproportionately affected by damage to shelter and the transport system because of their greater reduced mobility, which made seeking relief or coping in displacement camps especially challenging. Women with disabilities were previously targets of violence and became even more vulnerable to SGBV after the earthquakes.

4.2 Gender-based exclusion

Single women

Single women encountered particular socially created vulnerabilities exacerbated by the disaster, whether they were widowed by the conflict, the earthquakes or for other reasons. Single women faced additional challenges in recovering assets from the rubble and constructing shelter without the physical support of male family members, becoming dependent on support from neighbours or volunteers. Caring for children posed barriers to accessing relief materials or support if it meant walking to main roads, or engaging in lengthy bureaucracies or waiting periods. Further challenges include not previously having the right land or citizenship documentation, or now facing barriers in replacing such documentation due to their geographical distance from local administrative centres, lack of funds or literacy, or discrimination within families or institutions. Social traditions had previously exposed them to discrimination, economic hardships and risk of losing their husband's house or land,³³ and there were reports of some single women being left behind in this crisis when the husbands' families relocated out of damaged or destroyed locations

30 Kathmandu-based civil society, interviews by author, Kathmandu, June–July 2015

31 M.R. Panthi, The disability situation in Nepal, *Disability World*, 2004, http://www.disabilityworld.org/06-08_04/gov/nepal.shtml

32 Center for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities (CREHPA), *Violence against marginalised women in Nepal, Reproductive Health Research Policy Brief Number 17*, Kathmandu: CREHPA, 2011, http://www.creha.org.np/download/policy_brief_17.pdf

33 J. Naujoks and H. Myrntinen, 2014, *Op. cit.*

without them.³⁴ For instance, a woman in Maharajgunj was “kicked out” when her husband went missing after the first earthquake, as she was perceived as no longer being under his protection: a vulnerable position exacerbated by the disaster.³⁵

Sexual and gender minorities

SGM experienced gender-based discrimination and social marginalisation even before the earthquakes, which varied depending on their socio-economic backgrounds and locations, and differed between the different SGM.³⁶ They encountered further challenges after the earthquakes, also depending on their particular intersectional identities. A gay landless labourer in the hills would experience different challenges and opportunities to a transwoman in urban Kathmandu. Support workers raised concerns about their members (re)lapsing into mental health issues or being forced into sex work due to the interruption of normal income patterns, especially for the trans community. The stigmatisation of SGM affected the social support available to Blue Diamond Society (BDS, a Nepali SGM support organisation) members, who preferred to shelter in joint groups due to feeling ostracised in the general camps where people without families were segregated into male and female sections, excluding third genders.³⁷ For example, transgender users of segregated sanitary facilities in Kathmandu camps encountered ridicule and verbal abuse, leading them to fear physical abuse or sexual harassment.³⁸ The stigmatisation further manifested in discrimination by transportation providers who refused to transport SGM earthquake casualties to funeral locations.³⁹

Bearing in mind these dimensions of geographic, gender-based and social exclusion, the next section of the report draws out the key findings of the research interviews and FGDs.

34 WHR, interview by author, Kathmandu, 25 June 2015

35 Conflict Victims Common Platform, interview by author, Kathmandu, June 2015

36 For more background on this, see J. Naujoks and H. Myrtilinen 2014, Op. cit.

37 M. Dhakal and J. Wong, Op-ed: In quake hit Nepal transgender people turn adversity into opportunity, Asia-Pacific Transgender Network, 5 June 2015, <http://www.weareaptn.org/news/5/6/2015/op-ed-in-quake-hit-nepal-transgender-people-turn-adversity-into-opportunity>

38 BDS, interview by author, Kathmandu, 26 June 2015

39 Ibid.

5. Key findings

5.1 Embrace complexity

Interventions need to recognise and address the multiple and complex layers of vulnerability and exclusion, taking into account gender hierarchies and the socio-economic exclusion of ethnic minorities, casual labour, widows or gender minorities.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes do not affect people equally. The severity of the impact depends on a range of identity factors such as their socio-economic status and background, location, caste or class, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, political affiliation, ethnic identity or religion, and absence or presence of disability. These in turn define positions of relative vulnerability, resilience and agency, be it in terms of the areas one was able to reside in prior to the disaster and their susceptibility to its impacts, the opportunity to access networks of information and support, or essential skills such as literacy. It is the intersection of these multiple identity factors (intersectionality) that shapes people's experience of the earthquakes and their impacts, as well as their ability to deal with them in the recovery and reconstruction process.

The 2015 Nepal earthquakes occurred in a setting marked by strong stratifications along caste, geographic and gender lines. Those who have less and experience marginalisation prior to the disaster tend to live in more fragile shelters in more vulnerable locations – and are consequently disproportionately affected by the disaster. In Nepal, these intersecting vulnerabilities affect all stakeholders, influencing their relative positions of agency and power. Dalits and marginalised groups, single women and SGM as examined above, but also specific subgroups such as low-skilled internal migrants in Kathmandu, remote communities and people living with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV/AIDS are among the most vulnerable. The next sections explore examples of urban and rural exclusion of these groups and the challenges they face.

Urban social exclusion

Urban communities were significantly more dissatisfied than rural communities on issues relating to their needs being addressed, government or overall response, fairness of aid distribution and feeling heard.⁴⁰ In Kathmandu, one urban group that has intersecting, multiple vulnerabilities are casual labourers. Many are internal migrants living in rented shelter of poor quality on grounds more vulnerable to earthquake tremors or fragile hillsides. These locations experienced stronger seismic disturbances during the earthquakes and subsequent tremors, and the housing was of poorer quality and structural integrity, meaning that residents were more likely to be injured, or lose their shelter or scant belongings. This affected predominantly young men (and to a lesser degree young women) who had migrated from rural areas in search of employment, as well as other citizens unable to afford better lodgings in safer locations, such as senior citizens without family supporting them. Low-skilled day labourers and housemaids were unable to work after the earthquakes when the families who had employed them were displaced and normal life was interrupted,⁴¹ depriving them of previous income.

40 Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, Issue in focus: Community perceptions in rural and urban settings, Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, October 2015, http://cfp.org.np/uploads/documents/Issue_in_Focus_-_Urban_vs_Rural.pdf

41 B. Sijapati et al., Migration and resilience: Experiences from Nepal's 2015 earthquake, Research Paper VII, Kathmandu: Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility, 2015, p.32, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-kathmandu/documents/publication/wcms_379082.pdf

Those in partially damaged housing remain there despite the risk of further collapse in aftershock due to the lack of alternatives. For example, migrants working in artisanal carving in Bhaktapur who live in damaged rental housing “cannot stay there and they cannot go home. They are not helped by the relief in the district [of origin] because they are not there, and they are not helped here [in Bhaktapur] as they are not from Bhaktapur”.⁴² Since the first earthquake occurred at midday, women – due to their domestic and childcare roles – were more likely to be inside houses and consequently more likely to be injured or killed in collapsing buildings. Women from lower socio-economic groups were therefore disproportionately vulnerable to the initial earthquake and ongoing impacts – many continued to cook in their kitchens in damaged housing for lack of alternatives, despite sleeping in makeshift shelters at night for safety. This physical insecurity exacerbates pre-existing economic insecurities, worsening the exclusion of vulnerable groups that present a potential conflict risk considering the roots of previous conflict.

Box 3: Urban vulnerability case study⁴³

A couple from Tundikhel camp used to run a fast-food café that they rented and slept in. They found shelter in a tent in the camp, but are now unable to earn a living as the café was destroyed. The government will provide support for the reconstruction of the building through the NRA; however, this will go to the owner of the building and not to them as tenants. There will be no government or civil society support to the couple compensating their lost earnings, and no guarantee that they can move back into the house and café once it is rebuilt (if they could wait that long). Without a source of income and having lost their belongings, they are unable to procure alternative housing.

Rural social exclusion

Rural communities living in more remote areas or higher up in the mountains have been historically marginalised and were affected disproportionately by the earthquakes and the aftermath. Some of these communities were difficult to reach, especially where transport routes were damaged, disadvantaging them with regard to relief, medical support or provision of reconstruction materials. While stronger individuals have been able to access relief by walking to roads and distribution centres, this was not possible for those with more restricted mobility, such as the elderly, those with disabilities or those caring for small children (usually their mothers).⁴⁴ The loss of housing was compounded by the loss of belongings such as clothes, food stocks, kitchen and cooking equipment (and the ability to cook food), as well as tools, seed stores or harvest storage facilities – and with them the ability to earn their livelihoods as farmers or artisans and their resilience to minor setbacks such as illnesses. They will need targeted support alongside the rebuilding of more durable housing and reviving livelihoods in their remote locations.

Particular medical vulnerabilities

Natural disasters can destroy social and medical support facilities, which affects everyone but especially the poor and the marginalised who have fewer resources to procure alternatives. When community care centres were damaged in the earthquakes, minority groups living with HIV and intravenous drug users were not the only ones affected. They were nevertheless more vulnerable since they have specific medical support needs that were not met, causing secondary risks for them. Two distinct groups, people living with HIV and transgender people,⁴⁵ both faced an interruption to the supply of medical treatments when BDS had to interrupt its STI clinic and retroviral infection clinic following the earthquakes, forcing some members to move to Terai districts closer to India.⁴⁶ BDS field staff was unable to distribute medications and condoms to

⁴² Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) Nepal, interview by author, Kathmandu, 10 July 2015

⁴³ This case study is based on a couple interviewed by the author, Kathmandu, 8 July 2015

⁴⁴ Communities and CSOs, interviews by author, Sindhupalchowk and Kathmandu, June–July 2015

⁴⁵ Transgender people have a higher risk of contracting HIV; transgender women are 49 times more likely to contract HIV than other adults of reproductive age. M. Dhakal and J. Wong, 2015, Op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid.; BDS, interview by author, Kathmandu, 26 June 2015

the districts, which raised the HIV risks of service users. Such exclusion of vulnerable groups is not compatible with positive peace in Nepal. BDS worked with Save the Children, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women to ensure such needs were fed into the recovery planning processes, which is quite a new and positive development.⁴⁷

Vulnerability to SGBV

Most civil society respondents consistently highlighted the danger to women and girls' safety due to the destruction of their safe homes. Neither makeshift shelters nor tents provide sufficient protection in a context of entrenched SGBV.⁴⁸ There were frequent media and civil society reports of SGBV and harassment among the displaced camps and in the basic shelters constructed, and of increased trafficking as people found few economic alternatives to labour migration.⁴⁹ Capturing exact data on this is difficult, in part due to the social stigmatisation of survivors and victim blaming, in part due to survivors being unaware of their rights and reporting procedures. The destruction of police stations, vehicles, access roads and the judicial system also hampered law and order responses and access to justice. Women and girls in rural areas can be more vulnerable to trafficking as there are fewer alternative livelihood opportunities and they are less aware of the issues due to lower access to information and education.⁵⁰ This is not a new problem but an escalating one: some of the areas worst affected by the earthquakes had historically high levels of trafficking, for instance, Sindhupalchowk, Dhading and Nagarkot.⁵¹ However, the frequent media reports about trafficking are credited with raising awareness of this risk, and road checkpoints in earthquake and border districts worked to reduce the trafficking.

These groups all faced particular challenges in accessing support networks at the local and international levels that those with better political and social connections were able to tap into to mobilise economic, material or moral support. Government support through official channels is generally more accessible to those that are better off and registered homeowners linked to patronage networks, with information about aid distribution mechanisms flowing through informal and media channels. In comparison, renters and day labourers living in more fragile conditions may lack such access to communication structures or assets (such as radios or mobile phones), face literacy barriers, or lack access to or leverage with those controlling resource flows. "Disaster affected individuals navigate through reconstruction interventions with varying degrees of experiences of social inequalities and grievances" as a result of unequal development processes.⁵² This worsening exclusion runs counter to peacebuilding needs of building cohesive, stable social relations and citizen–state relations. Gender and social exclusion dimensions of multiple layers of vulnerability should therefore inform programme design and monitoring to ensure support is provided equitably rather than equally.

5.2 Address the influence of 'invisible' gender norms

Interventions need to understand the specific local gendered norms, how these intersect with conflict dynamics and what this means for relief and recovery.

Societies are structured by norms of what is considered right and appropriate behaviour, which differs depending on a person's gender, age, socio-economic or ethnic background, location, marital status and other identity factors. These deeply embedded social norms also shape reactions in the post-disaster relief and recovery phases, be it consciously or unconsciously. Predominant

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See also E. Drew and R. Gurung, 2015, Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Meetings of the Kathmandu SGBV sub-cluster during June–July 2015

⁵⁰ Maiti and Shakti Samuha, interviews by author, Kathmandu, 7 and 27 July 2015

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² M. Jauhola, *Scraps of home: Banda Acehese life narratives contesting the reconstruction discourse of a post-tsunami city that is "built back better"*, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 43, 2015, p.739

gender norms often tend to ascribe a secondary role to women and girls, valuing the male over the female. This is, for example, illustrated by the widespread tradition of feeding men and boys in the family first, which results in less food being available for women and girls, thus disadvantaging them further in a context of heightened resource scarcity. Feminine norms tend to emphasise nurturing, caring, self-sacrifice and obedience to male heads of the household, while men tend to be conceptualised as providers for and protectors of the family.

This contributes to the gendered norm of the man as the head of the household. In most affected areas in Nepal, distribution of relief and the tranches of financial support to 'recognised victims'⁵³ was organised through the local governance structure of District Disaster Relief Committees using a list of male household heads. This was the case even for widows whose husbands had passed away during the conflict or decades previously, or wives whose husbands had never returned from migrating abroad. Overall, female members head 26% of the total damaged houses.⁵⁴ The targeting of relief to male family heads led to female relief seekers facing discrimination, harassment in male-dominated environments or being turned away, increasing their exclusion from state services. Only certain allocations of relief and support targeted women and girls specifically, for instance those given by UN Women or women's organisations. In addition to the barriers of all-male lists for relief allocation, women seeking relief also faced barriers due to gendered expectations of women as primary child carers, which affected particularly those living in remote areas and those unable to leave the house with small children in order to access the supplies frequently left by the side of the main roads.

At the same time, men from marginalised ethnic groups (particularly elderly men) may also face discrimination or challenges in accessing relief, whether due to remote locations or lack of access to information, finding themselves to be possibly more marginalised than well-connected women from local elite groups. Western-shaped assumptions about nuclear family size also led to some joint families⁵⁵ receiving inadequate supplies per male household head for the size of the family. In order to ensure equitable relief, a careful analysis of local gendered power structures and norms – and careful monitoring at the community level – is essential so that those most in need are reached, and to avoid preventable barriers to their access.

Gendered expectations in the aftermath of disaster can increase vulnerability, as exemplified by the young Dalit man, discussed in the opening section, who returned from Qatar to support his family in rural Sindhupalchowk in the post-earthquake recovery period. By incurring additional costs for his return journey while losing the opportunity to earn sufficient funds to pay off the initial migration loan, his family faces spiralling debts and risks future debt slavery, which remains an issue in Nepal. Male migrants therefore faced contradictory gendered expectations: in part they were expected to return home to rebuild destroyed housing and look after the family in the emergency in order to comply with the protector norm; in part they were expected to stay working abroad and keep financial support flowing as provider, which became more important even than before in the damaged economy.⁵⁶ While currently much of Nepal's male youth is migrating for work, voting with their feet rather than engaging in political or revolutionary activism as the preceding generation, a reversal of migratory trends could increase the numbers of young men without decent jobs, increase frustrations with the slow pace of recovery and risk forming a group vulnerable to being manipulated into protest and violence.

The protector component of masculine norms and the pressure to show strength also affects men's psycho-social recovery. The earthquakes had a deeply traumatising effect on many citizens,

⁵³ This is the term used on the government-issued earthquake victim ID cards.

⁵⁴ Earthquake recovery response, Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Joint family refers to the common extended family arrangement prevalent throughout Nepal. This type of family encompasses several generations – usually the parents and their sons with their families – living in the same household as one unit.

⁵⁶ This was consistently echoed across the range of civil society organisations and communities interviewed in Kathmandu and Sindhupalchowk, interviews by author, June–July 2015; B. Sijapati et al., 2015, Op. cit.

re-traumatising some that had been traumatised during the conflict years.⁵⁷ Anecdotes vary from primary to secondary impacts, such as children crying when passing a collapsed school building, or people losing interest in work or family, suffering insomnia or sleeping in their day clothes in order to rush outside for safety should aftershocks occur. Despite civil society efforts in training people to offer psycho-social first aid, there are insufficient numbers of trained psychologists in Nepal to meet the needs.⁵⁸ Coping mechanisms for dealing with traumatic effects seem to be gendered, with talking about trauma and fears being more socially acceptable for women and girls than for men and boys, who face expectations of being strong and not admitting fears.⁵⁹ This can form barriers to seeking the mutual moral support that could alleviate the forms of trauma and manifest in behaviour harmful to themselves, others and social stability.

Dominant norms of masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality also manifested to contribute to increased vulnerability in renting accommodation for several groups that transgress these dominant norms. SGM, particularly transgender people, faced losing their rental accommodation when landlords saw rental market increases as an opportunity to bring in tenants considered to be less 'socially divergent' or possibly paying higher prices in the post-disaster housing market.⁶⁰ This also affected trafficking survivors and sex workers, which are distinct groups but somewhat conflated in common perceptions, and both experienced this secondary impact that increases their exclusion and exposure to both physical violence and sexual harassment.⁶¹

In line with gendered norms expecting women and children to be protected, CSOs have been working with local and national governments and international agencies to offer female-friendly safe spaces or child-friendly safe spaces. These are conceptualised as spaces where women and children are safe from harm, particularly gender-based harassment, and where they can access specific support services such as those related to sexual and reproductive health, psycho-social support, or information on services, rights and referrals. Where these function well, such as in Chautara, they can be pivotal in facilitating access to multiple services for users in one place, access to information and a social support network that helps to cope with psychological trauma (including services to SGBV survivors without being singled out to the broader community). In other places, for example, in rural Sindhupalchowk, they have been insufficient in addressing needs, offering intermittent services, being underequipped or lacking supplies, for example, having only space in a bare tent with no facilities or food – meaning that women and girls returned to non-safe places to sleep and eat.⁶² The current humanitarian response system through the cluster system seems to operate the gendered assumption that safety can be offered in a discrete location, but disconnected from the wider social setting of the post-conflict context.

Lastly but importantly, there are gendered norms around water, sanitation and hygiene, which are linked to menstrual and maternal health, as well as to women and girl's vulnerability to SGBV. These issues emerged as highly problematic after the earthquakes, which destroyed over a thousand health centres, as well as water and sanitation infrastructure such as pipes and wells. The temporary and makeshift shelters in particular left people more vulnerable to malaria-carrying mosquitos, chest infections, rains and floods, all of which potentially increased the caring duties of mothers or female family members who would be expected to fulfil this role by wider society. A survey found that 80% of Dalits in 10 earthquake-affected districts had inadequate access to

57 Interviewees mentioned conflict survivors having difficulties accepting help from the army, as it was implicated in conflict-era human rights abuses, while others saw the support by the army resulting in improving its standing in people's perceptions. Conflict Victims Common Platform, interview by author, Kathmandu, 26 June 2015

58 This has not been helped by instances of better-funded international service providers recruiting skilled psycho-social staff of local CSOs. SAATHI, interview by author, Kathmandu, 19 June 2015

59 SAATHI interview by author, Kathmandu, 19 June 2015, and communities, interview by author, Sindhupalchowk, 21–23 July 2015

60 BDS, interview by author, Kathmandu, June 2015

61 Maiti and Shakti Samuha, interviews by author, Kathmandu, 7 and 27 July 2015

62 Field research in Sindhupalchowk, July 2015

water after the earthquakes.⁶³ Lack of water affects certain groups more than others, for instance, women and girls responsible for domestic water provision or menstruating women. Insufficient sanitary provisions were particularly challenging and problematic from a health perspective with regard to maternal health and postnatal care. UN Women estimated that over 100,000 pregnant women were affected by the earthquakes and reported diseases due to the lack of washing facilities.⁶⁴ Specialist support for maternal health is required, and to ensure reconstruction or 'building back better' of the water and sanitation infrastructure.

The absence of safe, segregated toilets was highlighted repeatedly in interviews for their link to both the dignity and safety of women and girls, since the alternative of open defecation leads them to go into insecure areas at night seeking privacy, where they are vulnerable to physical attacks and sexual harassment. Camps set up by international NGOs (INGOs) were more likely to include sex-segregated washing and sanitary facilities, while this was more challenging in makeshift shelters set up by the affected communities themselves. Damage to or destruction of latrines also affects the return of girls to school. Boys return to schools before girls do as they are less reliant on secure toilet facilities – girls will not return if they are menstruating and schools lack the necessary sanitary facilities. However, out of school, the girls are more vulnerable to direct attacks or to being trafficked.⁶⁵ Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and culturally appropriate sanitary items are vital for the dignity of women and girls and need to be considered in response programming from first response to long-term planning. In the case of Nepal, in addition to rebuilding infrastructure, this also requires overcoming socially constructed but deeply entrenched taboos around menstruation, for instance, in the form of segregation (*chhaupadi*). Due to such gendered taboos, male-dominated bureaucracies can struggle to effectively address these issues. The WASH cluster sees GESI as central, and is working with the government and cluster members to ensure sensitive reconstruction, or is using the opportunity to change practices from open defecation to safer and more hygienic provisions.⁶⁶

5.3 Bridge the gap

While gender and social inclusion strategies are central to policy and capital planning, they need to be translated into meaningful impact on the ground.

Despite consistent inclusion of references to gender in all key documents and policies starting with the PDNA, and despite the attention to gender anchored in standard international response mechanisms, the response on the ground struggled to reach all those in need, particularly those most marginalised by geographic, gender and caste-based exclusion. This section explores the challenges in ensuring that policy-level commitments to GESI translate into effective action on the ground, as well as the implications for the recovery and reconstruction processes.

While Nepal has a well-developed policy and legal framework for gender issues including provisions for the participation of women and girls in local development activities and resource management committees,⁶⁷ the challenge has been translating these into meaningful impact on the ground. Similar challenges have arisen with the implementation of gender sensitivity and social inclusion in the earthquake response. Gender issues were identified and prioritised at the Kathmandu level very early on including through the Common Charter of Demands by Women's

63 Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee, 2015, Op. cit. The research team visited 34 villages and wards in 18 village development committees (VDC) and municipalities of 10 earthquake-affected districts (Dhading, Gorkha, Nuwakot, Kavrepalanchowk, Sindhupalchowk, Rasuwa, Ramechhap, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu).

64 United Nations (UN) Women and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Nepal gender profile, Kathmandu: UN Women, May 2015, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal/document/nepal-gender-profile>

65 Dinesh Prasai, UNDP consultant, interview by author, 7 July 2015; Childreach International, interview by author, 14 July 2015, both in Kathmandu

66 UNICEF WASH cluster coordinator, interview by author by skype, 31 March 2016

67 See also J. Naujoks and H. Myrntinen, 2014, Op. cit.; UN Women and UN OCHA, 2015, Op. cit. p.2

Groups in Nepal for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Post-Disaster Humanitarian Response.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the policy level, PDNA and cluster level are marked by a highly nuanced discourse around multiple layers of vulnerability, and the need to build on agency and work through participative approaches. The work of ensuring a particular focus on marginalised women and ethnic groups was led at the Kathmandu level by the Inter-Cluster Gender Working Group,⁶⁹ and its forthcoming *Gender Pack for the Nepal Emergency Response Preparedness Plan* is a welcome initiative and a global first.⁷⁰

At the same time, however, in practical operations, humanitarian newcomers to Nepal argued against the inclusion of ‘soft’ GESI considerations in the emergency response phase because “that’s development” (as opposed to humanitarian aid), with neither gender nor other discrimination discussed at the International Development Partner Group meetings.⁷¹ In addition, the layers of nuance and awareness did not seem to translate into effective and equitable support provision on the ground or in the mountains despite the village development committee (VDC) secretary, NGO district managers and district cluster leads being fully conversant in the nuances of vulnerability. On the ground, community interviews swiftly brought to light the gaps in reach and relief provision to more remote areas and marginalised communities, despite the best intentions being visible. Practical challenges and operational decision-making prioritisation can result in higher-caste, better-connected, more centrally located and more influential families receiving support first.⁷²

Furthermore, despite continued advocacy, the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data “remained problematic”,⁷³ which means it cannot be tracked effectively, possibly due to institutional reluctance to change data collection methods in such a time of emergency when some ministries were themselves in relocated temporary shelters as their buildings were damaged by the earthquakes. A review by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Informal ad hoc Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action in the Asia-Pacific Region observed that, while the Gender Working Group facilitated better coordination at the Kathmandu level, it could be improved by replicating it at the district level and by ensuring the engagement of both government and women’s groups at the capital level (“an unfortunate oversight”).⁷⁴ Such a strategic oversight could be seen as emblematic of poor priority-setting procedures and was indeed unfortunate, since engagement of the government and women’s groups would have been vital both for the inclusion of women’s perspectives and government take-up.

To illustrate the degree to which these gender and social inclusion strategies remain a challenge, community meetings and feedback in December 2015, around eight months after the earthquakes, showed clear community concerns about “the timeliness and fairness of distribution efforts and reconstruction plans”, with a slight increase in positive perceptions on winter preparedness due to increased distribution of related goods (such as blankets, warm clothes and government cash),

68 This took the shape of deploying three gender capacity advisers, the setting up of the Inter-Cluster Gender Working Group (initially the Inter-Cluster Gender Task Force), and endorsement by the Humanitarian Country Team of the Key Advocacy Messages on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Humanitarian Action within the first week following the first earthquake. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Informal ad hoc Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action in the Asia-Pacific Region, Summary note of meeting 11 January 2016, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/asia/document/iasc-informal-ad-hoc-working-group-gender-humanitarian-action-asia-pacifi-0>

69 The Gender Working Group is an inter-cluster coordination mechanism established to raise gender equality issues and support the realisation of gender-responsive programming in the work of clusters/sectors throughout the humanitarian action phase, co-chaired by UN Women and UN OCHA. It also facilitates a separate multi-stakeholder forum gathering over 60 humanitarian actors to share information, coordinate efforts and bring attention to key gender issues.

70 Communication by the Gender Working Group coordinator to the Gender Working Group via email, 8 February 2016

71 Member of the International Development Partner Group (IDPG), a coordination forum of international development partners (donors) active in Nepal, interview by author, Kathmandu, 10 July 2015

72 Kathmandu-based CSOs and communities as well as communities in Sindhupalchowk, interviews by author, Kathmandu and Sindhupalchowk, June–July 2015; see also Open Mic Nepal, Internews, <http://www.internews.org/our-stories/project-updates/open-mic-nepal>, accessed 29 February 2016. Number 30 of this bulletin series published in February 2016, for instance, details that the government’s support for the winter was insufficient to fully cover all wards.

73 IASC Informal ad hoc Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action in the Asia-Pacific Region, 2016, Op. cit.

74 Ibid.

matched by a decrease in positive perceptions of fairness of aid distribution.⁷⁵ In December 2015, the top priorities remained long-term shelter and financial support, with a slight increase in respondents feeling their problems were being addressed but 69% feeling their problems were not being addressed.⁷⁶ It is worth noting that only 37% of those surveyed by this household perception survey were women, illustrating the continued challenge of including women's voices.

For instance, the Dalit and Tamang communities interviewed in rural Sindhupalchowk in July 2015 had received only sporadic non-food relief, for example, a single tarp for a whole extended family, well into the monsoon season.⁷⁷ This led to better-connected families buying or borrowing corrugated iron sheets, while the less well-connected Dalit family previously mentioned had to borrow money for this at a high rate (24% interest) that,⁷⁸ in the absence of income-generating opportunities, was likely to bring the family perilously close to debt slavery. Unmanageable debt in turn puts the young men and women at risk of trafficking or unsafe migration, whether internal or external, into exploitative conditions. Young men previously faced gendered expectations to migrate to support their family financially,⁷⁹ and earthquake-related debt is likely to increase this pressure (and risk) in the future, especially in areas where livelihoods have been destroyed.

“In the village, livelihoods are most important – just rebuilding houses is not rebuilding lives.”⁸⁰

Beyond shelter, affected communities need to be able to earn their livelihoods. Tourism was an important factor in the Nepali economy, with many tourists attracted to the trekking and outdoor opportunities until the earthquakes destroyed trekking trails and guest houses,⁸¹ the fuel crisis disrupted transport and fear of further earthquakes discouraged potential tourists. Young men who previously worked in the trekking industry as guides and porters need to find alternatives, as do the women who operated guest houses. The challenge of securing alternative legitimate livelihoods has not been helped by the economic impact of the constitution-related fuel crisis, which saw the closure of more than 2,000 factories and loss of over 200,000 jobs.⁸² The reconstruction will require thousands of jobs so ensuring that these go to local men and women – as much as it is feasible – is essential and should be supported with relevant capacity-building, on-the-job support and family-friendly policies to enable access. Further steps beyond this will be to ensure GESI in land policy and human-rights-friendly land legislation to address persistent land exclusion issues, which are a root cause of poverty, as well as effective implementation and enforcement of existing laws.⁸³

A further manifestation of gendered expectations relates to the idea of volunteering, which in itself is a positive concept but should be considered alongside long-term trends of under- and unemployment. The earthquakes were followed by a tremendous popular mobilisation of volunteers coming to the aid of those affected, from neighbours as first responders digging out people buried under collapsed buildings, to volunteer networks forming to coordinate those in need with available resources and transport, using innovative social media and technologies. The

75 Inter Agency Common Feedback Project, December 2015, Op. cit.

76 Ibid.

77 Dalit and Tamang communities, interview by author, rural Sindhupalchowk, 21–23 July 2015

78 Ibid.

79 J. Naujoks and H. Myrntinen, 2014, Op. cit.

80 Dinesh Prasai, UN consultant, interview by author, Kathmandu, 7 July 2015

81 The damage to trekking trails varies greatly, with Annapurna unaffected and Everest somewhat affected and open to business, while the Langtang region will take longer to recover. Which trekking regions are affected by Nepal's earthquake, Trek Route, 27 May 2015, <https://trekroute.com/which-trekking-regions-are-affected-by-nepals-earthquake/>. Trekking companies raised concerns about a government report clearing trekking routes for tourism being published too quickly. R. Iyengar, Is it really safe to go trekking in Nepal again?, Time, 24 July 2015, <http://time.com/3970600/nepal-earthquake-safety-vacation-tourism-trekking-holiday/>

82 O.A. Rai, Full-blown economic crisis, Nepali Times, 27 November 2015, <http://nepalitimes.com/regular-columns/As-It-Happens/economic-crisis-in-Nepal,610>

83 UNDP, Gender and social inclusion issues, 2016, Op. cit.

response from large numbers of the nation's youth⁸⁴ and other volunteers was widely lauded by media and civil society, acknowledging the volunteers' vital contribution to coordinating and distributing relief, clearing rubble and replacing services, such as mobile clinics that utilised medics visiting remote communities on motorbikes when roads were blocked to cars. There are social norms at play that normalise male and female youth working for free, while mature adults are seen as more entitled to paid jobs in order to sustain families. This echoes civil society criticism of the system of working through female unpaid community health volunteers at the local level, which is linked to gendered assumptions about women's care roles not needing remuneration; these health volunteers are provided with limited equipment ("a little bag and a t-shirt").⁸⁵ Although unremunerated, they do actually play a vital role in ensuring community health, including supporting efforts to re-establish WASH services by working on the 'soft' side of behaviour change of communities. These trained individuals performing vital services to their community should be remunerated.

The immense volunteer effort in the earthquake response was facilitated by the high level of unemployed youth in Nepal. Of the estimated 400,000 youth entering the labour market annually, the Nepal Labour Force Survey 2009 found that "youth unemployment is quite high at around 54 per cent", which fuels the migration pattern.⁸⁶ Looking ahead, a major reconstruction effort that should include employment opportunities for high-, medium- and low-skilled workers is needed. This could potentially transform the high levels of youth unemployment and provide a diversification from the current economy where three out of four workers earn their living from agriculture. Amidst the influx of foreign humanitarian workers, staff from local NGOs questioned how many well-paid jobs went to foreign staff with specific technical skills but limited prior knowledge of the Nepali context, compared to the number of Nepalis volunteering and working for free.⁸⁷ Given the importance of first responders to disasters, more should be done to ensure that the specific skills that foreign staff brought to Nepal are used to train and equip Nepali citizens more effectively to future crises – both as volunteers as well as through the building up of a smaller professional corps of disaster responders on par with the foreign professionals who arrived in Nepal en masse.

In sum, the research painted a complicated picture of the humanitarian response in Nepal, which in some ways was exemplary in the inclusion of gender considerations from the beginning, at Kathmandu and policy levels. However, more must be done to ensure it reaches the most marginalised individuals and communities. It must also go beyond simply paying lip service attention to SGBV risk and entail substantial consideration of gendered norms and their impacts on relief and recovery processes, and ensure active and meaningful participation of women and socially excluded groups. The creation of reconstruction-related jobs could prove to be a key peacebuilding opportunity by providing credible alternatives for the exodus of migrating youth, giving them a stake in Nepali society and engaging them in a constructive way in the national recovery project. This would also counteract the trend of hollowing out of society due to the migration of young Nepalis, which is changing the social fabric and gender role models of children in new and unknown ways. In some communities, young boys are growing up without any positive role models of young men demonstrating how to be a good non-violent man or father.

84 This report follows the UN Secretariat by using the terms 'youth' and 'young people' interchangeably to mean those aged 15–24, with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions. In Nepal, for instance, youth was officially defined as those aged 16–40 despite civil society advocating for a lower upper bracket of 29. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Factsheet: Definition of youth, New York: UN, 2013, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>; Government of Nepal, National youth policy, Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, 2010, http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Nepal_2010_National_Youth_Policy.pdf; P. Gupta, R. Kumar and S. Katwal, National youth policy, 2010: Evolution, definition and implementation, Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, 2011, http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Nepal_2011_Youth_Policy_Paper.pdf

85 Civil society professional with health background, interview by author, Kathmandu, 14 July 2015

86 J. Gupte and S. Bogati, Key challenges of security provision in rapidly urbanising contexts: Evidence from Kathmandu valley and Terai regions of Nepal, Evidence Report No 69, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2014, <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/3881/ER69%20Key%20Challenges%20of%20Security%20Provision%20in%20Rapidly%20Urbanising%20Context%20Evidence%20from%20Kathmandu%20Valley%20and%20Terai%20Regions%20of%20Nepal.pdf?sequence=1>

87 Civil society staff from several organisations, interviews by author, Kathmandu, June–July 2015

5.4 Pay attention to the risks of instability and conflict at the national level

Interventions should address both local and national conflict risks, for example, by building stronger trust and accountability between all citizens (men, women and third genders) and the state.

“As we pursue the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction, rule of law, citizens’ well being, good governance, respect for human rights and socio-economic development will remain an important part of [the] rebuilding process.” – Sushil Koirala, former prime minister of Nepal⁸⁸

Although they are not spelled out in this quote, important gender dimensions to peace, democracy, respect for human rights and socio-economic wellbeing do exist. Similar to peacebuilding and development interventions, disaster reconstruction efforts are intrinsically political in nature despite tendencies to portray them as purely technical exercises. It is important to seize this political moment in a gender-relational and conflict-sensitive way both at the national and local levels. In addition to significant frustrations around the delays in government response, national civil society staff and individuals frequently raised concerns over perceptions of INGOs squandering resources, lack of transparency with regards to overheads and counting of beneficiaries, with perceptions of fundraising for headquarters staff and funds in the name of Nepal’s plight.⁸⁹

Where conflict(-sensitivity) was considered in the earthquake response, it was at a low level, with reports of fighting over relief and resources only at a very localised level. Interviewees expressed frustrations around resources being stockpiled and wasted, or external agencies and INGOs entering areas without local counterparts or demonstrating a lack of respect for VDC officers responsible for relief distribution in their area.⁹⁰ A rural Dalit community interviewed expressed frustration with faith-based groups distributing relief only to those sharing their faith,⁹¹ which risks creating gaps between communities with long-term negative consequences for social harmony. So far, grudges over allocations were minor, with the bias mainly perceived as being based on personal or political connections rather than systemic bias. The exceptions were the socially ingrained discrimination against women, particularly widows, and minority groups such as the Dalits, as outlined above. Perceptions of politicised funding support could sow seeds of discontent and amplify concerns about exclusion, which was a root cause of previous conflict and could potentially lead to protests and violence. However, most interviewees were not concerned about a relapse into conflict over the earthquake response, as might be feared considering the increases in violence after natural disasters in Sri Lanka and Haiti.⁹² Interviewees called for detailed, fair needs assessments at the local level, which should be participatory and transformative for the stakeholders, rather than top-down solutions imposed by outsiders.

88 Message from the prime minister, International Conference on Nepal’s Reconstruction 2015, http://icnr2015.mof.gov.np/category/message/message_from_prime_minister, accessed 14 December 2015

89 Civil society staff of several organisations, interviews by author, Kathmandu, June–July 2015

90 Conflict Victims Common Platform, interview by author, Kathmandu, 26 June 2015

91 Buddhist groups to Buddhists and Christian groups to Christians.

92 An empirical study of 187 countries and entities between 1950 and 2000 found that rapid-onset natural disasters “significantly increase the risk of violent civil conflict both in the short- and medium-term, specifically in low- and middle-income countries with high inequality, mixed political regimes [neither fully autocratic nor democratic] and slow economic growth”. P. Nel and M. Righarts, National disasters and the risk of violent civil conflict, *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(1), 2008, pp.159–185; see also P. Bauman, G. Paul and M. Ayalew, Comparative analysis of the impact of tsunami and tsunami interventions on conflicts in Sri Lanka and Aceh/Indonesia, The Mellon-MIT Inter-University Program, 2006, http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/migration/pubs/rrwp/34_tsunami.pdf; J.S. Enia, Peace in its wake? The 2004 tsunami and internal conflict in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, 19, 2008, <https://www.princeton.edu/jpia/past-issues-1/2008/1.pdf>; and L.-A. Berg, Crime, politics and violence in post-earthquake Haiti, Peace Brief 58, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB%2058%20-%20Crime%20Politics%20and%20Violence%20in%20Post-Earthquake%20Haiti.pdf>

On the contrary, most of those interviewed in June and July 2015 identified the new constitution as the most serious threat to peace in Nepal. This was borne out by subsequent developments. The disaster prompted Nepal's political elite to overcome a long-enduring impasse over the new constitution that had been in progress since the CPA of 2006. Promulgated on 20 September 2015 initially to popular celebrations, the constitution embodied the completion of an important step of the peace process. However, consultations on the draft constitution were undertaken perfunctorily and the final version was rushed through without addressing the major criticisms raised.⁹³ Despite a progressive stance on third gender rights, the new constitution is notably regressive in denying women the ability to bestow Nepali citizenship to their children, prompting considerable criticisms from women's rights groups and broader civil society.⁹⁴ It further removed previously agreed percentages of Dalit representation at the federal, province and district levels, which was intended to reverse historical exclusion and marginalisation.⁹⁵ This has rolled back the progressive changes brought in by the post-CPA government.

The new constitution's most divisive features were new geographic and electoral federal divisions that were met with sustained protests by Madhesi and Tharu groups. A heavy-handed government response to these protests resulted in continued unrests and nearly 60 casualties by January 2016.⁹⁶ These unrests together with geopolitical politics resulted in a de facto blockade of imports from India and a major fuel shortage in Nepal, causing immense disruption to life,⁹⁷ "the worst economic crisis Nepal has ever suffered",⁹⁸ and hindering delivery of relief and reconstruction provisions to remote areas, particularly crucial during the harsh winter.⁹⁹

Similar to the post-conflict 'moment', the post-disaster space seems to offer a window of opportunity to change political dynamics. The disaster prompted a shift in political dynamics and subsequent change in the political settlement: a new state-citizen contract was signed on paper in the form of the new constitution. This guise of progress, however, did not resolve long-standing grievances and exclusion, or change much for earthquake survivors: Nepal has not yet succeeded in building inclusive peace. Personal connections still mediate access to services, and to justice, and to post-disaster relief. The government's failure to take adequate care of such large parts of the population rendered vulnerable only further weakened confidence in the state and illustrates the continued deficiencies in the state-citizen contract. Meanwhile, national civil society and international actors have sought to address the gaps, but they cannot replace the services due from the state – trust in the state will need to be rebuilt (or newly built) along with the physical infrastructure. Social accountability mechanisms to enable citizens to hold the government accountable would be a good way forward, and should be designed bearing in mind the gender and social inclusion issues discussed.

There is still potential scope to harness something positive from this crisis. For example, the significant level of civic engagement by Nepali volunteers could be built and extended on by building up the skills and experiences of local residents to address this and future crises in a

93 Observations during field research at a consultation meeting in Bahrabise, July 2015. Issues raised included citizenship, and economic and press freedom issues that remained unchanged in the final constitution. Just two weeks of public consultations led to nearly 39,000 submissions, for which the scheduled one-week period for addressing them was not sufficient, yet the constitution was still promulgated.

94 N. Lama (ed.), *Citizenship in the name of the mother: Gender equality in citizenship*, Informal, 35 (1–2), Kathmandu: Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), 2015, <http://www.insec.org.np/pics/publication/1446614092.pdf>

95 The "provision of 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent representation of [Dalits] ... in the federal, province and local level, respectively, which had already been agreed upon by the parties and the different committees of the first [Constituent Assembly]" was removed. D. Sanyal, *Draft constitution leaves Dalits disgruntled*, Info Nepal, 15 August 2015, <http://www.infonepal.net/english/19680/>

96 These groups feel the constitution renege on previous assurances of electoral provisions, affirmative action and provincial boundaries. International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Alert Nepal – 1 Oct and 1 Dec 2015*, via email to subscribers. See also IANS, *Nepal unrest: No solution in sight, Terai death toll 59*, The Times of India, 22 January 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Nepal-unrest-No-solution-in-sight-Terai-death-toll-59/articleshow/50689329.cms>

97 The fuel crisis entailed shortages of cooking gas, power outages and skyrocketing fuel prices in the shadow economy.

98 The crisis resulted in the closure of more than 2,000 factories, over 200,000 job losses and the tourist inflow halved, after already being affected by the earthquakes. O.A. Rai, 2015, Op. cit.

99 K. Dixit, *Winter emergency for quake survivors*, Nepali Times, 27 November 2015, <http://nepalitimes.com/article/nation/winter-emergency-for-quake-survivors,2715>

sustainable, locally driven way through paid roles, in addition to voluntary first responders. This could give the young generation a sense of having a positive and constructive stake in society, contributing to rebuilding it, thus increasing the value they perceive the state to have if it is seen to be providing reconstruction support and employment opportunities equitably and fairly (in addition to resuming or extending full social services to all districts including remote areas, including to SGBV survivors). Another opportunity arises where resettlement is needed due to irretrievable destruction of lands or ongoing landslide risk. This brings risks of conflict, such as if heterogeneous groups are jointly resettled, conflict with host communities or SGBV risks to female-headed households who are resettled with male strangers.¹⁰⁰ However, such a resettlement also presents a peacebuilding opportunity if communities are resettled in a mixed manner that could overcome previous historical exclusion.¹⁰¹ Most of the response to date has been relief and intermediate recovery support – the major reconstruction and rebuilding effort still lies ahead. It is here that the government needs to ensure that this is delivered in an inclusive manner, mindful of gendered norms and the multiple layers of vulnerability that this report has highlighted.

100 UNDP, *Gender and Social Inclusion Issues*, 2016, Op. cit.

101 FEDO, interview by author, Kathmandu, 10 July 2015

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This research has flagged up the delicate conjuncture of gender norms and expectations, pre-existing socio-economic marginalisation and geographic exclusion, which shape the impact of natural disasters in communities and influence their resilience to such crises, particularly in conflict-affected contexts. It sought to investigate the complex situation of gendered norms and multiple layers of vulnerability from a gender-relational peacebuilding perspective that recognises exclusion as a key driver of conflict.

It explored the links between socially created gendered norms and expectations, and how these shape the response to the earthquakes. Norms pertaining to male heads of households can lead to challenges for women in accessing relief, gendered expectations of masculinity can affect how men cope with the trauma of the earthquakes or drive migration and exacerbate indebtedness, concepts of youth and women's roles can lead to their work not being recognised as paid work, and gendered taboos around WASH can hamper effective response and contribute to women and girls' insecurity.

In the emergency phase of Nepal's earthquake response, there was limited time and capacity to apply a comprehensive GESI-sensitive approach because of the nature of immediate response, although SGBV risks were highlighted from the beginning by key stakeholders from the cluster system, civil society and the media. For medium- and long-term responses, however, GESI needs to be effectively integrated, requiring the vision and analysis to see the impact of gender norms – for example, the debt ramifications of masculinity norms in relation to male participation and/or leadership in household recovery, avoiding the risk of increased SGBV. This needs to be based on nuanced localised gender analysis and humanitarian responders need to commit research funds and time to get this right from the beginning, not as an add-on later. While difficult in the emergency phase, this is absolutely essential the longer a crisis lasts, such as displacement that lasts for years or decades. For the emergency phase, a 'good enough' gender-sensitive 'do no harm' toolkit would be a minimal requirement. Gender aspects are elaborated in detail in the gender section of the PDNA and in the Protection Cluster, however, it is essential that gender is considered across all sectors when it comes to relief and reconstruction, and in providing support to rebuilding livelihoods. Gender mainstreaming across all of the NRA's work streams, decision-making and administrative procedures will be key to ensuring equitable recovery.

1. Meaningful participation is essential: ensuring that marginalised women, men and third genders participate meaningfully in the bureaucratic, administrative and civic engagement mechanisms that are set up to make decisions related to recovery and reconstruction. "Affected people ... need to be kept informed ... to make (the) choices necessary to develop their own strategies to recover and rebuild".¹⁰² To ensure this goes beyond silent token participation, it may be more appropriate to have separate women's groups where women can speak freely or to ensure translation/interpretation into local languages, allowing sufficient time (and travel support or subsistence) to enable participants to travel from more remote areas. The participants may need capacity-building to ensure that women and marginalised groups can participate equally, and that more dominant groups can work with them and respect their participation.

Concretely, this could involve different forms of meaningful participation such as more effective information dissemination on recovery issues in a way that reaches marginalised and illiterate groups, beneficiary accountability mechanisms such as feedback loops, or grievance

mechanisms that are accessible to all members of society and responsive to the needs and grievances raised.¹⁰³ The methods and scope for working towards achieving meaningful participation will depend on a comprehensive gender and conflict analysis of the context, which requires an upfront dedicated effort (with a dedicated budget) to ensure the right start to the response. One of the factors contributing to the slow pace of reform in this is sometimes the lack of diversity embedded in the values and workplaces of the headquarters, which can limit the systems for aggregating distribution data that field staff can use. Integration of gender and conflict sensitivity needs to be embraced and enacted at all organisational levels, policies and practice in order to achieve meaningful change on the ground. This needs to go beyond having an isolated GESI focal point and must involve all implementers taking on GESI considerations in community implementation and oversight.

2. **Addressing vulnerabilities:** ensuring that the support provided reaches those in need of support regardless of their gender or social identity or location, whether this is ensuring the safety of women and girls from trafficking and SGBV, supporting widows in securing their citizenship certificates and land ownership documentation, or supporting young men with accessing decent job opportunities either in Nepal or safe migration for external opportunities. For example, the NRA will distribute reconstruction grants to eligible households, for which they are required to open bank accounts and submit applications.¹⁰⁴ Lower-class women, in particular single women and marginalised and remote groups, including people without citizenship, tend to have lower literacy rates and are likely to be less familiar with bureaucratic procedures and may need targeted support to help them access this grant. “Addressing social injustice and other structural causes of political violence is a powerful means of preventing emergencies and an essential component of humanitarian work.”¹⁰⁵ For future disaster preparedness planning, it is also essential that these gendered vulnerabilities are already recognised and addressed in response plans.
3. **‘Build back better’ – towards peace and gender equality:** working in a way that supports the overcoming of entrenched gender and social exclusion inequalities to ensure a ‘build back better’ approach from a social perspective. While such efforts may not be feasible in the immediate aftermath, all medium- and long-term response must be designed cognisant of GESI stratifications and mindful of how it can avoid exacerbating inequalities and build back resilient, gender-equitable and socially inclusive communities. “Policymakers must understand and respond to an emergency situation on the ground without losing sight of the longer-term factors driving change in Nepal – [a nation] in the midst of ... rebuilding itself”¹⁰⁶ – a process in which gender dimensions will remain essential. This could include using resettlement of marginalised communities, where this is necessary for geological reasons, into more ethnically mixed locations with better access to services and amenities to overcome historical exclusions.
4. **Guiding principles on conflict- and gender-sensitive programming:** To guide conflict- and gender-sensitive programming, the ‘Principles of conduct for effective, inclusive and conflict-sensitive earthquake response in Nepal’ were drawn up by a group of international agencies working in Nepal consisting of Alert, the UNDP, the Swiss embassy in Nepal and GIZ Nepal staff. This is a call for organisations to reflect the context and needs; promote inclusion and equity; be conflict-sensitive; comply with human rights standards; communicate, respect and promote local ownership; and be transparent, coordinated and accountable. These principles include a conflict-sensitivity checklist for project cycle management, detailing questions from

103 For an example of social accountability mechanisms in development processes to enhance citizen-state relations, see J. Robinson, *Making social accountability work: Promoting peaceful development in Uganda*, London: International Alert, 2016, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Institutions_UgandaSocialAccountability_EN_2016.pdf

104 Open Mic Nepal, *Internews*, Issue 30, 8 February 2016, http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/nepal-open-mic/OpenMic_Nepal_Issue30_English.pdf

105 M. Wessells, 2009, *Op. cit.*, p.850

106 P. Clewett, 2015, *Op. cit.*

the needs and capacity assessment and conflict-analysis phase, through the design to the implementation to the monitoring and evaluation phases. By following these principles and applying the checklists, organisations can avoid inadvertently exacerbating inequalities and conflict through their humanitarian response or reconstruction activities.¹⁰⁷

- 5. Consistent and strategic donor support:** For the NRA, which finally took up operations on 16 January 2016 after lengthy political infighting, to be effective and equitable in its operation will require consistent and strategic support from the donor community at a macro level. In March 2016, the NRA started a detailed work-planning process, as well as signing the first housing reconstruction grants to displaced families in Dolakha (almost 11 months after the earthquakes).¹⁰⁸ Political capture and patrimony networks are endemic afflictions of current government institutions and initiatives,¹⁰⁹ which saw Nepal slide from 126 to 130 out of 167 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2015,¹¹⁰ and the newly created agency must avoid this trap. For this, effective donor support to the NRA needs to go beyond the checklist-driven technical support in a more strategic approach. Donors should work with the NRA as an institution with a higher-level vision of transparency, efficiency and independence from political trends and entrenched gender and social inequalities. The recent German parliamentary delegation questioning the reconstruction effort to date was an example of applying pressure to increase accountability.¹¹¹ This cuts both ways, and INGOs and international agencies also need to be transparent about resource allocation, overhead costs and how beneficiaries are counted to ensure the maximum available resources can aid survivors in a gender- and conflict-sensitive way. Accountability should also not only be to the donors, but to the intended beneficiaries to ensure that the support given is tailored to their priorities through social accountability measures that are GESI sensitive.
- 6. Jobs for peace: A major reconstruction effort will be needed in Nepal, which should include employment opportunities for high-, medium- and low-skilled workers.** The significant level of civic engagement by Nepali volunteers could be built and extended on by building up the skills and experiences of local residents to address the reconstruction challenge and future crises in a sustainable, locally driven way through paid roles, in addition to voluntary first responders. This could potentially transform the high levels of youth unemployment and diversify the sluggish, agriculture-dominated economy. Given the importance of first responders to disasters, the specific skills that foreign staff brought to Nepal should be used to train and equip Nepali citizens more effectively to respond to future crises, both as volunteers as well as through the building up of a smaller professional corps of disaster responders on par with the foreign professionals who arrived in Nepal en masse. This could give the young men, women and third genders a sense of having a positive and constructive stake in society, contributing to rebuilding it, thus increasing the value they perceive the state to have if it is seen to be providing reconstruction support and employment opportunities equitably and fairly (in addition to resuming or extending the full social services to all districts including remote areas). Such efforts should be open to both women and men, with special measures to remove the gender and socially created barriers that marginalised groups may face in participating.

107 For more information, visit <http://www.international-alert.org/earthquake-response-principles-nepal>

108 B. Sharma, First grants to be issued from Singati centre, Kathmandu Post, 13 March 2016, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-03-13/first-grants-to-be-issued-from-singati-centre.html>; Reconstruction body preparing framework, Kathmandu Post, 9 March 2016, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-03-09/reconstruction-body-preparing-framework.html>

109 Alert research exploring the mechanics and dynamics of political interference in the public security and justice sectors was carried out in the country in 2011–12. It explored how and why political interference in public security and justice provision impacts state–citizen relations and, consequently, the conditions of peace in Nepal. The research was commissioned by the Department of International Development (DFID) and shared with other NGOs, but was not published. For a more historical account, see S. Dix, *Corruption and anti-corruption in Nepal: Lessons learned and possible future initiatives*, Oslo: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, 2011, <https://www.norad.no/globalassets/import-2162015-80434-am/www.norad.no-ny/filarkiv/vedlegg-til-publikasjoner/corruption-and-anti-corruption-in-nepal-lessons.pdf>

110 Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2015, 2016*, https://www.iaca.int/images/news/2016/Corruption_Perceptions_Index_2015_report.pdf

111 Pace of post-quake reconstruction too slow, say German MPs, *The Himalayan Times*, 27 March 2016, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/pace-post-quake-reconstruction-slow-say-german-mps/>

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