

**AN UNSEEN REALITY**

**RECOVERY FOLLOWING SMALL DISASTERS IN  
REMOTE AREAS**

*The case of Sannighat, Kalikot, Nepal*

November 2014



#### Date of Publication

November 2014

#### Published by

Mission East Nepal

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Saanighat area after the flood of April 2013

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report examines the recovery experience of small, remote Nepalese communities in the aftermath of disaster. The aim is both to provide academic insight and to contribute to the formulation of better recovery strategies, policies and plans by government and other “external” agencies. To this end the report identifies the actions taken by disaster affected communities to promote their own recovery and to identify those potential areas of support that could be targeted by external aid agencies that would support recovery measures.

The information presented comes from a study of Mumra and Mehalmundi in Sannighat in the Kalikot District carried out by Mission East Nepal in March- April 2014, in the aftermath of a destructive flash flood that occurred in June 2013. This information is extended drawing on further material garnered in on-going research in the remote hill areas of Baitadi and Kailali districts. This work was carried out by the author of this report in the period from November 2013 to February 2014. The study involved in-depth interviews with community members directly affected by the flood, semi-structured interviews with government officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a focus group discussion disaster affected households. The information generated was largely qualitative and both an accepted social science research methodology and the most realistic option given the lack of appropriate statistical data available in the areas concerned.

This study demonstrates and concludes that while the recovery process following small-scale disasters in remote communities follows the three-stage recovery process of existing academic models, the characteristics of each

stage differs markedly. In particular, the research presented here demonstrates that recovery following small- scale disasters is dominated at every stage by self-help at the community level and that external government and agency intervention, while of major importance, is largely limited to the immediate rescue and recovery phase and does not extend to longer-term complete recovery. The communities concerned and the impacted populations are all shown to have considerable self-resilience but this is inadequate to ensure full recovery, leading the impacted communities to increased poverty, social disruption and increased vulnerability to future potential hazards.

These findings are used to generate a number of specific recommendations for NGOs in the following areas:

### 1. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) model, currently promoted in Nepal, while remaining an essential model to increase community resilience, is way too demanding for remote communities considering their poor physical accessibility and harsh socio-economic conditions. Such CBDP model therefore needs to be adjusted and simplified for remote communities. This could possibly be done by prioritizing some core activities, such as linking Local Level Disaster Management Committees (LDMC) and its task force with Police Forces, increasing the provision for community emergency funds, conducting Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) at Ilaka level instead of ward level, and identifying strategies for cross-assistance by neighbouring communities and Village Development Committees (VDCs).

## 2. DISASTER MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation practices could involve bio-engineering or civil engineering techniques, or some sort of combination of the two, to ensure slope stability and reduce erosion.

## 3. LINKING COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT WITH DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

A well-managed community forest not only provides remote communities with adequate forest products required in their daily lives, but it also contributes to income diversification, better soil stabilization, enhanced land management practices, and social and institutional development. In this way, it enhances a community's resilience to disasters. Connecting community forestry, or other related development work, with disaster management could broaden the scope of action for a more effective community level disaster management plan (such as, creation of community fund, and risk-sensitive training and planning)

## 4. FOOD AID

Post-disaster food aid, provided predominantly by external agencies, is useful, but is largely inadequate to meet the need of the affected communities living in food insecure areas of remote Nepal. Many people emigrate from their home communities to cope with food shortages, which later detract from the rebuilding of community capacities and essential infrastructures in social recovery on the longer-term. Food distribution and aid should therefore not only be calculated to cover the short-term rescue phase, but should also be incorporated into the longer rehabilitation phases. This

would help to retain manpower for effective reconstruction of essential infrastructure assets (bridges, roads, mill, etc...).

## 5. EMPLOYMENT RE-GENERATION RECOVERY PROGRAMS

Despite its importance in long-term social recovery and community capacity building, the regeneration of employment opportunities currently lacks priority in Nepal. NGOs should therefore design and facilitate more projects that offer start-up capital for small rural businesses, coupled with the provision of any necessary skills and guidance training. It is also crucial that these projects ensure the creation of equal opportunity across all sectors of society. Most vulnerable groups, such as families headed by single women and those whose sole income is impacted, should be prioritized by these programs.

## 6. EDUCATION AND HEALTH SUPPORT FOR DISASTER AFFECTED CHILDREN

During disasters, children are one of the most vulnerable groups within a community. They require special attention in terms of food, safety, security and education. Additionally, children who have suffered trauma, such as losing a parent(s), need ongoing psychological support, which goes far beyond the provision of standard provisions of health and education. Schools are viewed in remote communities as playing a significant role in disaster recovery, but currently, it is often the physical entity of the school as an emergency shelter that is emphasized, and their role, particularly in long-term social recovery, remains less explored. The myriad of adaptive functions and roles

the school can play in the context of remote communities is something that is not yet fully utilized, despite its unlimited potential in contributing to child-centered community recovery. It is recommended to further explore and incorporate this potential of schools under the School Based Disaster Preparedness (SBDP) model– a model that is currently promoted in Nepal.

## 7. RECONSTRUCTION:

Similarly, NGOs could get more involved to help communities in the repair and reconstruction of vital public buildings and amenities using safer and stronger technologies that would resist better the next disaster.

Many aid and development agencies target the building of resilient communities. This surely requires an extension of support beyond conventional relief that focuses on the immediate aftermath of disasters to a greater emphasis on a longer term integrated recovery support. The aforementioned recommendations, if implemented, could offer useful means to move forward to facilitating successful recovery of disaster affected communities in remote areas of Nepal, and in the longer-term, build secure, safer, and more sustainable communities.

# CHAPTER ONE

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## INTRODUCTION

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Approximately eighty percent of Nepal's population live in rural areas and are dependent on subsistence farming (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2013). Physical isolation, chronic poverty and a lack of economic opportunities characterise much of the country. At least partly in consequence, a significant proportion of the rural population lives on hazardous sites, such as steep slopes, narrow ridges, and flood prone river valleys and plains. For some of these people, living in such areas provides an economic opportunity, but for most, it simply offers the only option to survive.

Shortage of adequate land forces many people to adopt unsustainable practices. Deforestation to create housing sites, farming steep slopes, over-cultivation and excessive grazing are common (Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, 2004; Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal [FECOFUN], 2010; Ministry of Home

Affairs [MoHA] & United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2010). Such practices leave many communities vulnerable to a range of hazards including, and most prominently, floods and landslides. Every year in Nepal, the monsoon rains bring disasters that claim lives and damage houses and property. Thousands of people are affected. Disasters also kill livestock, damage vital food supplies, destroy crops and infrastructure and leave families struggling to meet their daily needs. Some years are particularly critical (2011, 2013 and 2014 to recall recent times) where floods, landslide and flash flood hit hard the country and cause widespread damages but usually monsoon season triggers not one single event, but a combination of multiple and separate disastrous events that hit different communities across the country.

Analysis of the historical evidence highlights two key points: most disasters in Nepal are

small-scale events; and the communities affected are mainly in the country's most remote areas. In comparison to larger disasters, the impact of small-scale disasters is more localised. Individually, they kill or injure a relatively small number of people and the damage caused does not necessarily generate a vast financial loss. However, the total impact and cost of such small-scale disasters, however, is enormous and their social impact severe (Lavell, 1998; Marulanda, Cardona, & Barbat, 2010; Marulanda, Cardona, & Barbat, 2011). Yet small disasters, particularly in remote communities, are rarely the focus of discussion at any major policy forum and despite the increase in disaster management activities in the Nepal (see United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNISDR], 2011), most remote communities in the aftermath of small-scale events are largely unsupported by government, aid-agencies, or development organizations. People living in remote hill and mountain areas must typically recover using only their own resources. Little is known about how these people respond to or recover from disasters. Recovery, even with external aid, is always a struggle. Poverty, isolation, and lack of support from external agencies only compound the challenge for those affected. To date, however, understanding of the recovery process experienced by communities in the wake of small-scale disasters remains under-researched and poorly understood.

The findings presented here are the outcome of research conducted by Mission East Nepal

for the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) in April 2014. The context is remote communities affected by small-scale disasters. The aim is to identify the needs of communities in remote areas of Nepal in post-disaster situations. The findings are also designed to provide academic insight, and to encourage and help local and external actors better prepare recovery strategies, policies and plans. In the longer term, it is hoped that the findings may be used to help build safer, more resilient communities.

This report has two specific aims:

- 1) To identify the actions taken by communities to promote recovery (includes coping practices) in response to disasters.
- 2) To identify potential areas of support that could be targeted by external aid agencies to facilitate community recovery.

The investigation and findings come primarily from a study of Mumra and Mehalmundi communities in Sannighat in the Kalikot District in the aftermath of a destructive, flash flood in June 2013. The findings and recommendations also draw on the wider knowledge and experience garnered by the author, Sushma Shrestha, from her on-going research in Nepal, as part of her PhD at The University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her research involves an ethnographic study of the recovery process in communities in the remote hills of Baitadi and Kailali districts.



# CHAPTER TWO

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## THE CONTEXT

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Research on disasters recognizes ‘the vulnerability of a population’ as a prerequisite to the occurrence of a disaster (O’Keefe, Westgate, & Wisner, 1976; Susman, O’Keefe, & Wisner, 1983; Cannon, 1994). Hazards become disasters only and if there is a vulnerable human population. At the same time these studies also demonstrate that the impact of the disaster is more dependent on the degree of vulnerability of the population concerned than on the severity of a physical event itself. Dangerous locations, unprotected buildings and infrastructure, poor economic conditions and a lack of disaster preparedness are some of the most commonly recognized forms of vulnerability (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, & Wisner, 1994).

Most research on vulnerability suggests community recovery after disasters is determined by the extent to which the vulnerabilities that led to disaster are

themselves addressed or reduced (Susman et al., 1983; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC], 2001; Davis, 2011). Other studies (Folke et al., 2002; Turner et al., 2003; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2012) have identified exposure, sensitivity and resilience as the three major components of vulnerability. This perspective views exposure as an external dimension of vulnerability, typically a product of physical location and the characteristics of the surrounding built and natural environment. Sensitivity refers to the internal components which are in effect the root causes of vulnerability (for example: socio-economic disparities, and land tenure). Resilience, in a broader sense, refers to the coping capacity or recovery potential of those affected. Addressing these three components is recognized as fundamental to reducing vulnerability to future potential hazardous events.

In line with current understanding of disaster (see, for example, Kates & Pijawka, 1977; Bolin & Patricia, 1978; Davis, 1978; Cuny, 1983; Oliver-Smith, 1986) this report explores recovery as a three-stage process. The literature also recognises that recovery occurs differently, depending on the context, and the damage that occurs can involve a range of different coping mechanisms. These includes the reconstruction of housing and infrastructure, the restoration of jobs and businesses, population resettlement, and psychological and physical support (Cuny, 1983; Oliver-Smith,

1986; Ingram, Franco, Rio, & Khazai, 2006; Smith & Wegner, 2007; Lizarralde, Johnson, & Davidson, 2009; Amaratunga & Haigh, 2011; Duynne & Leemann, 2012).

Community recovery is discussed over three sequential periods in this report: the first two weeks, week two till week twelve, and week twelve to week thirty-six. Recovery therefore covers a total period of nine months after the disaster. This phased analysis allows for an examination of the varied activities of the local community and external agencies in each phase.

# CHAPTER THREE

## DATA COLLECTION

The study required gaining an understanding of how disaster impacts those people directly affected, and their experience in the recovery process. Qualitative techniques are commonly accepted as the best means to understand people's behaviour and actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Flick, 2009), and three different qualitative techniques were applied: in-depth interviews; semi-structured interviews; and a focus group.

### **In-depth interviews:**

A total of nine interviews, each lasting around 45 minutes, were conducted with community members directly affected by the flood. All interviews were audio recorded.

### **Semi-structured interviews:**

Concerned agencies, both government and non-government, and the media were all identified by the author (based on experience and the literature) as potentially important in post disaster situations. Eight representatives of these groups were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. The interviewees included representatives from Radio Karnali, and key

personnel from NGOs such as the Kalikot District Chapter of the Nepal Red Cross Society, Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Center, the Human Rights and Environmental Development Center, and local government authorities such as Village Development Committees (VDC), District Development Committees (DDC), and the District Administration Office (DAO), as well as a representative of the Lamabagar Primary School. The key aim was to discuss the issues around disaster response and gain insights into the role of these different groups in the recovery process.

### **A focus group:**

Discussion involved thirteen participants from households impacted by disaster. The aim was to listen to community members' views about their (on-going) experience of the recovery process.

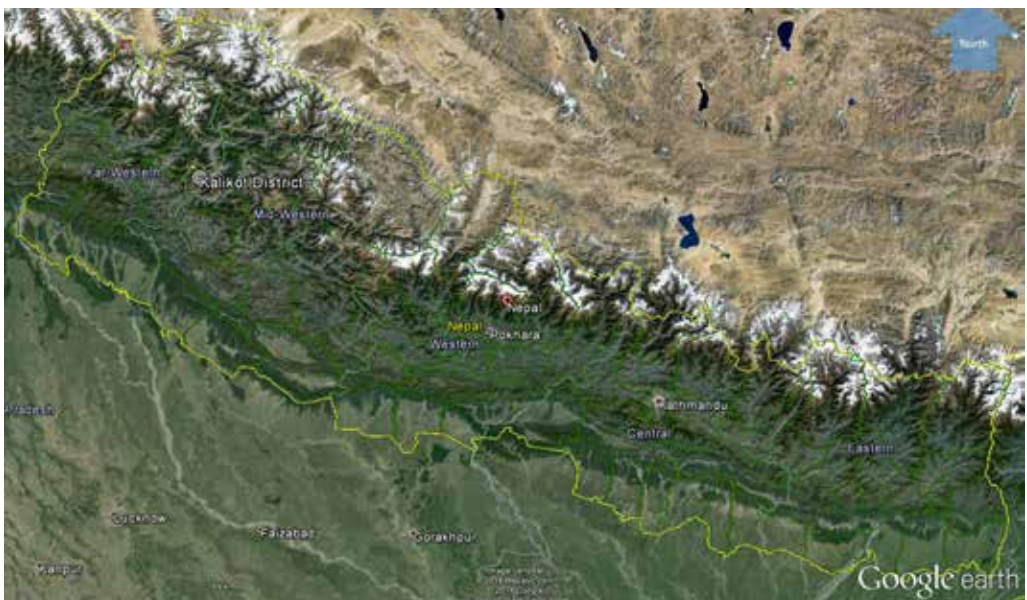
The in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus group used a series of interview themes developed by the author based on her field experience the in Baitadi and Kailali districts (Appendix 1).

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE SANNIGHAT AREA

Sannighat is in the Kalikot District, a remote mountain region in the Karnali zone itself isolated in the Mid-Western Region of the country. In the north is Manma, the administrative capital of Kalikot. The Sannighat River, which flows down from the northern Himalayas meets the Karnali River north of Manma. Running through Kalikot, the river has cut a series of valleys. The Sannighat

is one of those valleys and the site of both study communities Mumra-1 (ward number one of Mumra VDC) and Mehalmundi-4 (ward number four of Mehalmundi VDCs) (see, Map 1, Map 2, and Picture 1). These communities are at an altitude of 1600-2000m, straddle the Sannighat River, and are physically connected by a suspension bridge and a wooden bridge – both of which were swept away in the flood.



**Map1:** Location of Kalikot District in Nepal



**Map2:** location of Sannighat in Kalikot District  
**Source:** google earth (modified by the author)

The Kalikot District has an environment that is harsh, rugged and characterised by steep slopes, so agriculture is limited to scattered pockets (Map 3). The District ranks low in terms of socio-economic development and the population has only limited access to even basic services such as potable water, sanitation, electricity and telephones. There are only limited health services and the road network is poorly developed. There are high levels of illiteracy and most communities face increasing food insecurity. Economic opportunities and paid unemployment are scarce (Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal, 2009; United Nations, 2011a). In terms of development, the communities of Mumra-1 and Mehalmudi-4, are similar. Like many other areas in Kalikot, both communities lack effective road links and for the most part, access is restricted to foot trails making Manma

a two day hike away. From Manma, the Karnali Highway provides a link to other parts of the country. But in the monsoon season, even this highway often gets blocked.

Prior to the disaster, Mumra-1 and Mehalmudi-4, were relatively better off in social and economic terms than many other communities in the District. While only 9.25% of the Kalikot District's total land area is cultivable, the region suitable for cultivation around Sannighat is more extensive. Crops such as millet, corn, paddy rice, and wheat, as well as vegetables (primarily potatoes) are widely grown. Sannighat itself is a rural town with a market that serves the surrounding area. Both Mumra and Mehalmudi have shops that sell a range of basic commodities including food, clothing, and medicine.



**Map 3:** Birds eye view of the study communities- Mumra-1 and Mehalmudi-4  
**Source:** google earth (modified by the author)

Lamabagar Primary School is in Mehalmudi-4, close to the banks of the Sannighat River. Mumra-1 has a 500 Kilowatt hydropower house that generates electricity for eight VDCs in the Kalikot District including Manma. Many local businesses, including local furniture manufacturers, training institutes, and services such as health, local radio stations and printing companies rely on electricity generated by the power station. There are also several water

powered flour mills. A police station serves the surrounding communities.

#### 4.1. THE SANNIGHAT FLOOD

On 18 June 2013, the monsoon rains caused the Sannighat River to flood, killing 11 people and injuring many more. Around 13 houses and 10 shops were completely washed away by the flood. A vast area of productive land and forest was destroyed. An exact figure regarding the



**Picture 1:** The Sannighat community in 1999, before the disaster  
(Mission East, 1999)



**Picture 2:** *The landscape in the Sannighat area post-disaster (Mission East, 2014)*

productive land is not known. Rough calculation from the google map indicates that around 15 hectares of productive land was destroyed by the flood. Substantial infrastructures, such as a primary school, two bridges, and several foot trails were flooded (Pictures 2 and 3). Severe damages occurred in the electricity power house, flour mills, and drinking water and irrigation channels. The rice crop was almost ready for harvest and the flood swept away much of the crop. The flood also took away a lot of personal property including cash, jewellery, utensils, clothes and stored grain, as well as livestock, and other valuable resources properties.

The flood was caused by landslides and mass

erosion in the upper streams of the Sannighat River which subsequently dammed the river in its upper reaches and creating a lake. After three consecutive days of rain, the dam burst, generating further extensive flooding.

The flood resulted in the loss of a large portion of the cultivated land. Some parts of this land were swept away, others were covered by debris. Instead of cultivated, and indeed cultivable, land, what now remains is effectively a large expanse of bare river bank composed of sand, stones and large boulders.

The flood also destroyed Lamabagar Primary School and the hydro power canal, and seriously damaged the power house (Picture 4).



*Picture 3: The landscape in the Sannighat area post-disaster  
(Mission East, 2014)*

## 4.2. THE RECOVERY EXPERIENCE OF THE SANNIGHAT COMMUNITY

### **PERIOD 1: The first two weeks after disaster**

Death and destruction traumatized community members. The loss of lives left many orphaned, and destroyed property, leaving many more homeless and without land.

Initial help came from neighbours and the police. Where necessary, survivors were taken to safe locations on elevated sites, including to the police station and to the power station. Individual community members and the police provided blankets and bedding. They also provided food and water to help for the first couple of days. Such local help is recognized in the literature as typical of the initial phases



*Picture 4: Current conditions at the Sannighat hydro station  
(Mission East, 2014)*





**Picture 5:** Community members with utensils provided by the Red Cross (Mission East, 2014)

after a disaster (see Bankoff, 2007; Gaillard et al., 2008; Chamlee Wright & Storr, 2011)

Importantly, the police in turn informed the Nepalese army and the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) of the disaster and advised them of urgent needs. These agencies responded with more food supplies and clothing. The army and the NRCS also informed other government and non-government agencies of the need for help and support. Neighbouring communities assisted with offers of food, clothes and shelter. The Red Cross also distributed standard non-food relief items including utensils, tarpaulins and blankets. Other humanitarian and development agencies (including KIRDARC<sup>1</sup>, HURENDEC<sup>2</sup>, Sada Nepal, Sewa, Mission East, and Care Nepal) provided food and clothing (Picture 5).

As the monsoon season was just beginning, further heavy rain was anticipated and with it the risk of more flooding. Recognising this, most families living in lower areas, including those directly impacted by the flood and others who had escaped damage but felt at risk, moved to higher areas farther from the river. Other community members helped provide temporary shelter. Private houses and porches, located on the higher ground, provided shelter for some, others moved in to cowsheds and still others used tarpaulins to make tents. Those with close relatives in neighbouring communities moved in and lived with them. Children who had been orphaned were taken in by relatives.

A local resident summed-up the situation:

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1. Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre  
2. Human Rights and Environment Development Center

*There is nowhere to sleep;  
No food to eat, no school to study;  
No trail to walk along, nor any bridge to  
cross the river;  
I see orphans and widows crying;  
There is not even land to cultivate;  
I feel so much pain.*

A meeting of the District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) was held in Manma on 2nd July 2013 (14 days after the disaster) and determined to provide NRs. 40,000 funeral money as cash aid to any family that had lost someone and compensation of up to NRs. 20,000 to those who had lost their home, land or business. Others continued searching for lost family members. Although the missing were commonly assumed to have died, finding the bodies was important, not only for consolation and reassurance to the family, but the body also as formal evidence to claim funeral money. The injured received primary medical treatment from a local resident member of the Red Cross. Those more seriously injured were taken to the closest hospital in Nepalgunj, 3-4 days away, and this involved the combined use of walking tracks and vehicle transport away. Other survivors struggled to obtain food, clothing and shelter to survive. For almost two weeks after the disaster, those affected had to rely totally on food and shelter provided by community members and external agencies.

The residents of Sannighat and surrounding areas as well as those of Manma had to survive without electricity, as the flood had swept away the hydropower canals. Lack of power also seriously affected local flour mills and irrigation systems, as well as many businesses that relied on electricity, including local furniture

companies, training centres, health services, local radio stations and printers.

Houses on both banks of the Sannighat River were flooded. People on one side often had friends and relatives on the other, but as the flood had destroyed all the bridges, contact between people on both banks was not possible. As a result, people were not only traumatized by their own individual losses, but worried about family and friends they could not visit. Some wrote messages, put them in bottles, and threw them across to the other side.

The first two weeks after the flood was characterized in Sannighat by emergency measures to save lives. Coping activities in this period were quite similar to that described in the recovery models (see Kates & Pijawka, 1977; Cuny, 1983; Alexander, 2002). In contrast, however, such emergency actions in this particular instance were dominated by the actions of affected communities themselves and not the external actors as suggested in those models.

#### **PERIOD 2: Week two until week twelve:**

Soon after an announcement by the District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) of relief aid, some locals took the lead to complete the documentation to access that aid. As for the bodies, those that were found were cremated. Most people who received funeral and relief money used some of it to buy basic food such as oil, rice, grains, and salt, and necessary medicines.

Throughout this period, community members, neighbours and relatives continued to provide shelter, and food for those in need. Despite their grief, people tried to move on and began to plan and arrange for their basic longer-term needs.



**Picture 6:** A simple outdoor shelter provides a classroom, Lamabagar Primary School.  
(Mission East, 2014)

Those directly affected by the disaster also established the Flood Survivors Relief Committee to demand aid and other benefits from the State. The Committee requested food, money and reconstruction assistance from neighbouring villages, various aid and development organizations and local and regional governments. Several meetings were held with the VDC and with NGOs. The Committee's voice attracted the attention of several aid agencies. As a result, these agencies continued to provide additional food and clothes for a few more weeks.

The local school teachers got together within the first two weeks of the flood, and called an emergency meeting of the community. All agreed on the need to get the school functioning. Soon after, teaching resumed. Initially, there was a cash supplement of NPR

90,000 provided by the District Education Office (DSO) to help re-establish schooling. Some of this was used to rent a house as a temporary school. To create more space, tented sheltered areas (Picture 6) were established to provide additional class space, and some classes were also held in more exposed open areas (Picture 7).

Over the following weeks and months those people who had been hospitalised started to return home. Around two and half months after the flood, towards the end of the monsoon, water levels subsided and people moved out of their tents and where possible, returned to their previous homes. Some who remained homeless continued to live with relatives and neighbours, while others with the help of community members started to build temporary sheds as homes, using locally available materials.



**Picture 7:** Outdoor classes, Lamabagar Primary School  
(Mission East, 2014)

The period between two to twelve weeks was characterized by community's efforts to move from an emergency situation to relatively normal functioning community. When compared to the established recovery models<sup>3</sup> (see Kates & Pijawka, 1977; Cuny, 1983), the coping activated during this period was not dominated by one single activity like it is described in the models. Rather, multiple activities are dominant. Most importantly, in contrast to those models where external actors plan and intervene to support community recovery, in Sannighat, recovery was, to a large extent, solely driven by the affected communities themselves.

**PERIOD 3: Week twelve till week thirty-six:**

With time, psychological healing occurred. Those who previously grieved for lost family members started to participate in communal meetings and got increasingly involved in community reconstruction. In Sannighat, the local population are Hindus. Hindus regard the River Ganges as sacred and recognises Ganga as a goddess. The Sannighat River ultimately flows into the Ganges, so the people in Sannighat believed that the possessions and resources they had lost were of great value and that the

*3. Models and classifications given by Kates and Pijawka (1977) and (Cuny, 1983) remains the basis of understanding of the recovery process. Typically the recovery process in the aftermath of a disaster is classified into three sequential periods: the emergency phase, the transitional (or rehabilitation) phase and the reconstruction phase. Each phase describes the dominant activity undertaken at that particular period by external agencies. The emergency phase is characterized by those actions necessary to save lives, the transitional phase includes people's return to work and the permanent repair of infrastructure and damaged buildings and any other actions necessary to help people regain their livelihoods as quickly as possible. The final phase, reconstruction, is characterized by building new houses and other accommodation, the repair of roads and other community facilities, and the re-establishment of the economy. A common feature of these models is their inclusion and explanation of relief and recovery support in the context of that provided by external agencies. They pay little attention to the actions of community members in a post-disaster situation.*



**Picture 8:** *The re-construction of Lamabagar Primary School (April 2014)  
(Mission East, 2014)*

flood had allowed them to give their valuables as an offering to the Ganges and so to honour their God. This provided some psychological reassurance and comfort, but did not in itself support recovery, at least in practical terms. Help and support (moral, financial and food) from relatives and community members also provided psychological healing.

The official distribution of aid from development and other agencies stopped a month after the flood. The need, however, remained. Giving and receiving aid as food and shelter became less common over time. While some had to continue to rely on relatives for food and shelter, others progressed in the construction of their new home; others left for India to find work. Many people, however, continued to struggle to meet their daily basic needs.

People started cultivating any of their land that had not been completely destroyed. Some also started to cultivate land they had previously viewed as “less cultivable”. As the amount of productive land had decreased, the need and pressure to access land to farm was huge. Forced to cultivate unsuitable land would in the longer-term result in environmental degradation, but there was little choice. A widow whose husband had drowned in the flood and was left with her four small children, explained that, *‘working this land for the whole day, every month of the year will still be not enough to feed our family of five’*. Cultivating the land also requires irrigation. Most canals had been damaged by the flood, so where possible, people started to build temporary irrigation canals. However, the amount of food that could be grown was generally insufficient.



**Picture 9:** A temporary stone bridge  
(Mission East, 2014)

For many, what they could grow was only enough to feed their household for around three months, so they had to find additional employment. For most, the only option was wage-based labour, but this was not readily available. Some borrowed from money lenders or relatives. Many had to use several different sources as no one source could provide enough to meet even their basic necessities. A few people who now had no land, no house, and no employment were forced to move out of the District to try to survive.

Many people even went to India to find work. A return to self-sufficiency was a priority for all concerned. But most survivors lacked the resources to survive independently. Prior to the flood, subsistence farming and small local businesses, often shops, were the main sources of employment in Sannighat. When people lost their land or business they had few alternative means to earn a living. Farmers who had lost most of their land needed money for

food. Most shopkeepers had invested most of their earnings in their business; some even had loans. After their shops were destroyed, their businesses were lost and those that had loans remained in debt with no means to service them. People started exploring all possible alternatives. Some used funeral and compensation payments from the DDRC to start a new business. For example, one man, who had lost two family members and his property, bought a water-powered flour mill as a source of income. Another who had lost his shop built a small shelter on the village trail and sold tea to passers-by. For some, the relief money proved just enough to clear their debts.

In the period from week twelve to week thirty-six period after the flood the survivors repeatedly sought support from the Government and aid agencies. The Flood Survivor Relief Committee travelled as far as Kathmandu to seek support, and demonstrated in the streets in front of ministerial offices in the Singha Durbar complex



**Picture 10:** A temporary wooden bridge  
(Mission East, 2014)

to increase their visibility. They also met political representatives and government authorities. The District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) and some political parties provided money to cover their accommodation, food, and travel, including their costs of returning home. Ministerial assurances of help to assist recovery have to date remain unfulfilled.

After the efforts of the community, HURENDEC, an NGO agreed to provide financial support to rebuild Lamabagar School (Picture 8). Local community members provided construction materials, including sand, mud and stones. Some other non-governmental organizations provided paper and books for the pupils.

The community, on its own, tried to re-establish the foot trails. They also built a bridge over the river using logs and stones (Pictures 9, 10). Community members started digging canals to access drinking water. This was supported by

the VDC office of Mehalmudi, Mission East and KIRDARC, all of whom contributed financially and technically to rebuild canals and re-establish communal water supplies. Flour mills were also re-established by local communities with some financial help from KIRDARC (Picture 11).

Coping activities between week twelve and week thirty-six were characterized by the community's efforts to access the resources necessary to survive, be self-reliant, repair and reconstruct physical amenities, and to attract external recovery support. These activities match with the expectations described in the final recovery stage(s) of the established models by Kates and Pijawka (1977) and Cuny (1983) (refer to footnote 3), but unlike the models, the coping in Sannighat was again shaped by less external influence and remained to be driven by the efforts of the community.



**Picture 11:** A re-established water powered flour mill  
(Mission East, 2014)

Despite some indications of progress, the community had not recovered to any significant extent nine months after the disaster. Many of the affected population still depended on community assistance for basic food, shelter and clothing needs. All of those who survived the flood and are still currently living in Sannighat continue to live where they did before, despite the continued risk of floods and related disasters and their own awareness of these risks. One local resident reported that even the smallest thunderstorm and onset of rain stops them from falling asleep. As the hydropower canals remain out of action, most residents in Kalikot District still have no electricity. This is

badly affecting local businesses including those in the district headquarter, Manma. According to the eKantipur News for 19 June, 2014, three furniture businesses and five training institutes in Manma remain closed because of lack of power. Local radio stations and printing companies are struggling to survive, while local health facilities are still operating below their full potential (Pandey, 2014). Despite the efforts of the community and NGOs to re-establish the water system, people still lack access to potable water. The new wooden bridge has made it possible to cross the river, but a higher, more secure structure is required.



# CHAPTER FIVE

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## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

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The Sannighat flood of June 2013 was a total shock to the local communities. The affected communities had no direct experience of floods on the scale experienced and no accumulated knowledge or experience to build on.

In the last few years, a few organizations, notably Mission East Nepal and KIRDARC, have been working on disaster preparedness in the Karnali Zone. Projects have been implemented in few selected VDCs in the Zone. Despite being at risk, Mumra and Mehalmundi were not among those selected VDCs, and had no projects in place. At least partly in consequence, neither had they any awareness of flood preparedness, and there had no flood warning system in place. The Country Director of Mission East expresses the challenge they face in selecting target VDCs for project implementation. Based on vulnerability and risk exposure model Mission East used in Humla districts in 2009, it was found that all communities and VDCs in the districts of Karnali Zone are vulnerable and are exposed to a similar degree of disaster risk. This implies that they all require disaster preparedness projects

to help boost community awareness of local disasters, and equip and prepare them to avoid disasters or minimize their impact. He further points out that despite such understanding, it is practically impossible to cover all the VDCs of the District because neither INGOs nor the Government have sufficient resources. As a result, he says Mission East is forced to limit their work to a few VDCs selected on the basis of the Government's Disaster Preparedness Plan or the organization's own risk survey. Many vulnerable areas, such as Mumra and Mehalmundi, subsequently often remain unsupported and continue to be exposed to high levels of risk.





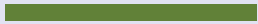
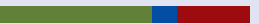
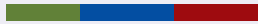
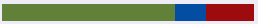
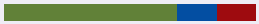







The affected communities had some oral traditions pertaining to past disasters, but none of these highlighted the importance of flood preparedness, and consequently, many did not expect it. This helps explain the deaths that occurred, the loss of personal property including cash, jewellery, utensils, clothes and stored grain, as well as livestock, and other

valuable resources. If they had been aware of the risks and been prepared for them, they would have been better able to save themselves and their possessions.




These circumstances contrast with the evidence from communities in Baitadi and Kailali<sup>4</sup>. As with Sannighat, Baitadi and Kailali had no warning systems but are frequently impacted by small disasters and had accumulated significant

experience as to the probability of disasters and their possible impacts. This allowed these communities to prepare and better manage their physical safety and protect their property and resources. Although such protection does not extend to the capacity to protect their land, homes, forests, crops, and other resources and amenities, in both Baitadi and Kailali disasters rarely results in loss of life or serious injury or the loss of personal property.

**Table 1:** Comparative analysis of the degree of involvement of the local community, government, and external agencies support (financial, technical, coordination) in community recovery in the aftermath of the 2013 Sannighat flood

Period 1 (first two weeks after disaster)	Period 2 (week two till week twelve)	Period 3 (week twelve until week thirty-six)
Meet basic necessities (food, shelter, clothes) 	Meet basic necessities (food, shelter, clothes) 	Meet basic necessities (food, shelter, clothes) 
Primary health care 	Formation of emergency groups for receiving external support and facilitating recovery activities 	Reconstruction of public infrastructure 
Search and rescue 	Efforts to seek external support 	Efforts to seek external support 
Psychological support 	Re-establishment of education services 	Re-establishment of physical and social services 
Temporary shelter (safer locations) 	Return to the previous (disaster affected) location and starting the reconstruction of homes 	Reconstruction of homes 
		Re-establishment of employment 

**Legend**

 Involvement of community     Involvement of government     Involvement of a non-government agencies

Recovery Activities

4. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014

As shown in Table 1, physical survival was the community's focus in the first two weeks. This included meeting such basic needs as food, shelter and clothing. Other main needs included primary health care, search and rescue facilities, psychological support and provision of temporary shelter in safer locations. These were largely met with the help of other community members, neighbouring communities and external government and non-government agencies.

The key priority of the affected communities in the period from two to twelve weeks after the disaster was to collect aid to meet their basic needs, and to seek further external aid to re-establish the basic physical and social amenities necessary to run the community. The aim was to return to a relatively normal functioning community. The need for basic food, shelter and clothes, however, didn't end quickly. Nine months after the disaster, these needs still existed for some families. Community help continues to support needy families with basic necessities. While other community members and neighbouring communities continued to provide basic needs, help from external agencies quickly tailed-off and stopped completely within three months of the disaster. The community considered the school as an important social amenity, and considerable efforts were made to re-establishment its activities. The school resumed teaching quicker than any other service. People were also anxious to leave their temporary shelters to return to their former homes or the site of their former homes especially towards the end of monsoon when the risk of flooding lessened. The coping

actions in this period were dominated by the activities of the affected communities. Compared to the first period, the involvement of external agencies was significantly less.

The dominant activities in the third period (week twelve until week thirty-six) can be summed-up in the community's efforts to provide their basic necessities "on their own", independent of external aid. People started to return to work or look for employment. Repair and reconstruction of major physical infrastructure became a priority to allow new employment opportunities to emerge. The reconstruction of the school and re-housing were other important activities in this period. There was even less external aid available in the third period, despite the perpetuity of the community's own efforts to acquire such external support.

Community members stand out as the key drivers of recovery following the 2014 flood (Table 1). The community demonstrated its capability to organize itself and this was of enormous importance in helping explore recovery options and was crucial in promoting reconstruction of communal physical infrastructure, re-housing victims, re-establishing infrastructure and social services, and voicing the need for external aid and support. In many recovery activities (more than 40%) community members are the sole group involved (see Table 1). Social resources in the form of existing family ties, wider social networks and cultural norms are key driving forces in recovery. Helping relatives, friends and neighbours was the socially expected norm. Community members helped each other obtain basic necessities, including money and physical

assistance. Moral support from the broader community and religious beliefs contributed to psychological healing. The disaster also raised people's awareness. After the flood, locals of Sannighat realized the existing flood risk of their locality, and expressed the need to be relocated to 'safer places', which according to them is 'higher ground, and away from the river bank'. They also generated debate as to the importance of forest in controlling landslides and erosion. To them, the direct cause of the flood was the landslide and mass erosion on the upper reaches of the Sannighat River. They, similarly, highlighted the urgent need for flood mitigation measures in Sannighat.

Both the cases of Sannighat, and Baitadi and Kailali demonstrate that relief from the government and non-government agencies does occur once knowledge of a disaster is communicated to and recognized by the authorities and agencies concerned. In practice, it seems, at least in Nepal, disasters, whether big or small, and wherever they occur commonly generate external aid and support. Such help is however largely inadequate to meet the recovery needs of the affected communities. As seen in Sannighat, most external interventions by government and NGOs in the aftermath of the flood were focused on meeting survival needs, including food, shelter, and clothing (see Table 1). Such support is the relief part of recovery aimed to save lives. Recovery, however, aims just not at saving lives – the goal is to build a functional and safer community, which therefore involves a wide range of other recovery activities (as discussed in section 2). Relief is widely accepted to have massive importance, yet as shown, represent only a small part of total

recovery both in terms of the resources needed and actions taken by an affected communities (see Cuny, 1983). In order to fully recover Sannighat communities equally require repair and re-housing of the population, patching up of utilities (such as trails, the drinking water pipeline, and the irrigation canal), reconstruction of the school and bridges, the ability to return to work, the re-establishment of the economy and psychological healing. These activities, however, were largely neglected by the Government. Non-government organizations, on the other hand, did make an effort to address such needs (Table 1).

In Sannighat, external aid and development agencies' activities mostly focused on meeting the survival needs of the community. This was equally true in Baitadi and Kailali. The role of the Government was also largely minimal to meet recovery needs. Unlike Sannighat, however, the involvement of non-governmental organizations in Baitadi and Kailali was comparatively slight. Two key factors help explain this difference. Firstly, most disasters in Baitadi and Kailali are associated with recurrent landslides. As noted above, over time people develop experience and the knowledge to anticipate hazards. Though in Baitadi and Kailali the loss of property including land, homes and infrastructure was similar to that in Sannighat, there was no loss of life and the loss of household goods was much less. Secondly, unlike Sannighat, those communities did not include markets or services for other communities. As a consequence, Baitadi and Kailali attracted less attention from non-governmental agencies and comparably less support was provided.

In the case of Sannighat, the existence of a police station in the community was of considerable value as it allowed effective and timely communication with concerned agencies (Nepal Red Cross, Nepal Army, and local government) and helped activate services including search and rescue and primary health care in response to the disaster.

In Sannighat as in other remote areas, the research suggests that after a disaster households, in particular those that have to rely entirely and directly on natural resources, suffer, and for them, the process of recovery is particularly difficult. For example, subsistence farmers who lose most or all of their land and crops struggle to survive because they lack any alternative source of income to meet their daily needs. Families who have members employed in the service sector are less affected. While they also have lost their land and property they commonly still had an alternative source of income.

For families with households headed by a woman, recovery is particularly challenging. In remote regions of Nepal, particularly those in the Far and Mid-Western Region, women are discriminated in many different facets of their lives. As a result, the choices available to them, including income generation, are severely limited. For instance, after the flood, many men left and went to India for work. Their wives or closest relatives took responsibility to take care of their children, house and farm. In families with households headed by a woman leaving her children and house behind, even to find work, is not socially acceptable. Similarly, as a woman widowed by the flood explained, men “easily remarry”. For women it’s far more difficult. In fact, remarriage is a social taboo. Secondly, as

she explained, after marriage, women have to leave their existing home and live with their husband in his home. For widowed women with children, taking them with her is not accepted, while leaving them behind is impossible.

In Nepal, social status based on caste and ethnicity significantly determines a population’s level of poverty, power and education. Accordingly, studies have shown that a large proportion of Dalit people, the most socially discriminated caste, are poor, landless, illiterate and have poor health (United Nations, 2011a). They are therefore recognized in development plans and projects, including those on Disaster Risk Management (DRM), as being the most vulnerable. The Sannighat, and similar cases in remote Nepal, however, show no direct linkages between caste, disaster occurrence, impact or recovery. Instead, these examples show that all remote populations (Dalit or non-Dalit) who live on unsafe land, or those who have unsafe employment, are equally subjected to disaster risks, irrespective of their caste and ethnic groups. At the same time, recovery among the population is mostly dependent on its degree of access to food, food production, dependence on natural resources, alternative income and economic opportunities, and existence of social network and relationships. Most Dalits, being in a disadvantaged position, surely have less access to land and other assets, but that does not automatically make them vulnerable to disasters. Dalits in remote areas, in general, are relatively less dependent on natural resources (like land) and they have multiple skills and income sources unlike most other families<sup>5</sup>. This suggests that Dalits are less vulnerable and are relatively more resilient than other caste groups. Dalits are indisputably poor and discriminated in many facets of life, but in the context of disasters, they are equally

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5. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

or even less vulnerable, and they are found to have characteristics showing greater levels of recovery capacities than other caste groups<sup>6</sup>.

In recent years the view has been developed that disasters offer an opportunity to reduce the risk of future disasters and as an opportunity to ‘build back better’ and rectify past mistakes in planning, land use and transportation (Christoplos, 2006; Kelman & Gaillard, 2008; Amaratunga & Haigh, 2011). In effect, it is argued that the goal of recovery should not be limited to re-building or re-establishing what formerly existed, as that was what created the vulnerability and fostered the disaster to happen in the first place. Recovery is now broadly accepted as building resilient communities that are less vulnerable to any future hazards. Notions of ‘building back better’ are, however, not characteristic of recovery, as evident in the examples of Baitadi or Kailali. In all these areas the current residents are now even more exposed to disaster risks than before. This is not due to the residents’ lack of awareness or lack of the knowledge necessary to reduce vulnerability, but because they have no options other than to exist as they do. Loss of productive land and other businesses in all of the study

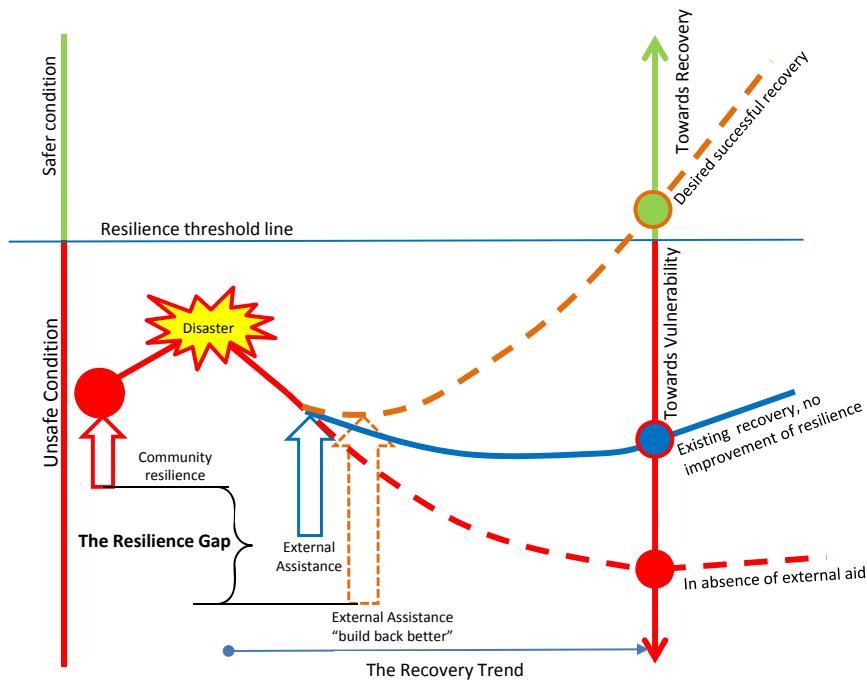
areas is forcing people to over-cultivate their land, and to cultivate those areas unsuitable for such use. Moreover, people have been obliged to deforest some areas to build new homes and bridges. Deforestation increases the risk of accelerating erosion. The affected communities therefore have been pushed into a greater level of vulnerability. However, social cohesion, the capacity to organize themselves, extensive direct involvement in achieving recovery, and increased disaster awareness characterized the Sannighat communities throughout the recovery process. In this sense, the communities of Sannighat area ‘to a certain extent’ does meet the three resilience criteria identified by the Resilience Alliance<sup>7</sup>. This was found equally true of the communities in Baitadi and Kailali<sup>8</sup>. This suggests that these remote communities have a certain degree of resilience to cope with disasters, and this has aided in the recovery process. More importantly, however, despite resilience, Sannighat communities and the other communities of Baitadi and Kailali failed to fully recover in the aftermath of disaster. If such communities have a certain level of resilience, the gap toward full recovery remains important and does not enable them to “build back better”.

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6. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

7. Resilience Alliance has developed a consolidated definition that characterizes resilience in three dimensions: the amount of disturbance a system can absorb and still remain in the same state or domain of attraction; the degree to which a system is capable of self-organisation; and the degree to which that system can build and increase its capacity for learning and adaptation (Folke et al., 2002).

8. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.



**Figure 1:** Recovery of the Sannighat community after the flood of June 2013  
(Source-author)

Figure 1 illustrates the recovery trend of disaster affected communities in Sannighat. As shown, in the aftermath of the flood the disaster affected communities not only failed to recover, but they are now at a greater level of vulnerability than before. If the communities have a certain degree of resilience, helped further by external assistance, it is not sufficient and therefore impacted little on community full recovery. On the contrary what is observed is that vulnerability has increased. In other words, the degree of resilience existing in these remote communities appears inadequate to facilitate successful recovery. As shown in the Figure 1, a successful recovery trend (represented by dotted brown line) could have been made possible if community resilience had been greater. There is a significant gap

in resilience which is preventing communities from successful recovery. As acknowledged earlier, both government and non-government agencies have made efforts to facilitate community recovery. This support, however, was insufficient to fill this “resilience gap”. The need for additional external support is clear and is crucial to achieve full and successful recovery.

The issue, however, is not just about ‘additional external support’ to fill this gap but it is also about providing the support that is adjusted to population needs. People in Sannighat reported great dissatisfaction with the level of support provided by external agencies, particularly by the Government. They acknowledged the value of the support provided as food, temporary shelter and clothing as well as any

cash payments, but felt strongly that what was needed most was help to return to a state of self-sufficiency. The relief provided in no way compensated for what had been lost. Many had lost their agricultural land, often their sole means of subsistence. Others lost their shop or business and all their personal belongings. A shop, for most of those concerned, represented their lifelines and was their primary (or sole) source of family income. After the flood, many faced (and continue to face) difficulties in meeting their basic daily needs. Some lacked food. In these circumstances, aid was helpful, even essential, but it was too limited. Community members had to step in, and even nine months after the flood, had to continue to help the needy out of necessity. As recognised and acknowledged by the recipients, this is not a viable long-term solution. Many community members who are currently supporting those in need face difficulties in meeting their own needs, and supporting others in the community who are in greater need is an additional burden. This 'burden' of community support also resulted in a loss of autonomy for support recipients, bringing added stress. What is thus needed is help to re-establish the victims of the flood as self-reliant community members and enable them to support their families and return to being active community members.

Disappointment expressed by the community at the extent of Government and other external aid providers was compounded by their inaction or lack of involvement in the repair and reconstruction of infrastructure and services. Recovery was viewed by the community as a return to full functioning. Reconstruction and re-establishing of pathways, bridges, school, irrigation canals, and electricity were viewed by the community as a primary need. Safety was also deemed important. Community members, particularly those who had lost their homes and had to relocate are now well aware that

they are living in a hazardous location; they feel extremely unsafe. This was highlighted by one community member when he said that even a small thunderstorm now conjures-up the fear and chaos of the flood. Despite awareness that their current location is unsafe, community members feel powerless to change their circumstances and ensure their safety. The fact that to date no external body – particularly the Government – has done nothing to resolve this situation greatly angers community members.

Community members complained that those affected by the flood in the Darchula District, in the Far-Western Region, had received more relief money, attention and support from the national Government and other agencies than they received. The Darchula flood occurred some days after the flood in Sannighat and swept away an entire community in Khalanga, the administrative capital of the District, impacted hundreds of people, and extensively damaging infrastructures including some important government buildings and a hospital (Paudel, Regmee, & Upadhyay, 2013). According to the residents in Sannighat, the impact of the flood on families in Darchula was no different than in Sannighat. The residents in Sannighat felt disadvantaged and neglected. This neglect, they describe as being treated as 'step-children', has generated further anger. The extent of relief (and benefits) both from the Government and from non-government agencies is undoubtedly unevenly distributed (see for example National News Agency Nepal, 2013; Chunara, 2014). This inequality is equally evident in Baitadi and Kailali. There is no one reason for such discrimination. Physical accessibility, the scale of the disaster, socio-economic conditions and the political importance of the affected communities all appear to play some part in determining the level of attention and support received<sup>9</sup>.

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9. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.



In Sannighat, in Baitadi and in Kailali, the research suggests that existing policies are inadequate to properly facilitate community recovery. Economic and human resources for recovery remain largely inadequate and existing regulations for disaster relief and recovery support are unclear. The roles and responsibilities of concerned departments and government bodies at different levels are not clearly documented nor widely known. The potential economic resources are distributed widely among so many different ministries and departments (and at different levels within those ministries). As a result, the channelling and coordinating of aid to disaster sites is difficult, costly, and time consuming<sup>10</sup>. If not properly channelled, the resources provided as aid may be far too little to make any significant impact on recovery<sup>11</sup>. Better coordination between multiple aid agencies is also required, but is difficult to achieve. Recent years have, however, shown some signs of hope. The Government is increasing its efforts to revise its policies with

respect to disaster management including preparedness, relief and recovery. The focus to date, however, remains on early recovery, specifically relief support, and preparedness activities. These principally involve community awareness, rescue management and related training to the community members.

In the aftermath of disasters in small, isolated communities and with few options and little external aid, religion remains a major source of comfort.

Nevertheless, efforts for full recovery to be deployed by community, government and NGOs, would be significantly reduced if a better level of preparedness had existed in Sannighat community. This study clearly indicated that the people in Sannighat have been moving to further vulnerability. Should investment has been on better preparedness, loss would have been minimum (such as in Baitadi and Kailali) and the scarce resources from government and NGO may have been sufficient to ensure full recovery of Sannighat community.

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10. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

11. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

# CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Remote communities in Nepal are extremely vulnerable to disasters. Most are located, out of necessity, on unsafe lands, and involve unsustainable ways of life. Weather conditions are extreme and small disasters are common. As shown in this report, after such disasters, external support is largely limited in meeting the survival needs of communities concerned. Recovery is therefore largely dependent on the strength and resources of those directly affected and the support of the wider local community. Such conditions persist over the longer term as such external aid and assistance that is provided soon stops. Yet most of those affected, whether individuals or communities as a whole, lack the resources to survive or properly recover without external support. At the same time, however, remote communities have been shown to be resilient in their response to disasters. Social resources in the form of strong socio-cultural relationships, exchange relationships and social networks

are the major strengths that underpin this resilience. Resilience help these communities re-establish basic functions, but is inadequate to ensure long-term recovery. Despite community and household efforts and capacities, many (possibly even most) communities fail to fully recover. External assistance is available and is helpful, but is largely insufficient and contributes little to community recovery. More often, disasters will worsen poverty, increase unsustainable activities, and escalate the risk of future disaster. Communities need a 'greater and comprehensive longer term external support' to fill the existing resilience gap (Figure 1). Government, aid agencies and NGOs, can all contribute to this goal.

Aid agencies and development NGOs are a long-established source of support for disaster management in Nepal. In the case of small-scale disasters, however, their role remains largely limited both in terms of the resources

they provide and activities they perform. The resources offered are relatively scant, and their activities are mostly focused in providing short-term emergency supplies. Such resources and activities are extremely important but fail to meet essential longer-term community recovery needs.

The evidence presented in this report is demonstrably limited, but the circumstances described and the behaviour, attitudes and values illustrated do allow some valid generalisation and the development of several initiatives NGOs could usefully take to address the situation before and after small-scale disasters in Nepal and elsewhere.

## 1. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Disasters increase communities' vulnerability to any future hazards as shown in this survey. Such vulnerability could be reduced by better disaster preparedness. A relatively recent emphasis by many NGOs has been to raise communities' disaster awareness, including the deployment of disaster warning systems, improved communication mechanisms, and help for communities to prepare effective search and rescue activities, including first aid in times of disaster. These activities are important and are found impactful across Nepal (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNISDR], 2011), and should certainly continue. Importantly, however, these activities need to be extended to remote, isolated, small communities that currently remain neglected by such programmes.

In general, disaster preparedness is extremely important for all remote communities, whether or not they have been previously affected by disasters. It is an 'efficient' and 'cost-effective' solution for building resilient communities and

self-reliant communities. A greater effort and investment on disaster preparedness of remote vulnerable communities is recommended to further reduce disaster impact and recovery expenses in the aftermath of a disaster. Without such efforts the prospect is for more, serious disasters and an increasing need for more and more costly short-term recovery "solutions".

Currently, in Nepal a Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) model is promoted by the Local Disaster Risk Management Planning Guideline (LDRMP) to establish disaster preparedness, response preparedness and early recovery planning. The CBDP model involves disaster management process that is self-sufficient and comprehensive in addressing most aspects on disaster preparedness. Successful implementation of this model requires substantial and continuous commitment of the key agencies at both district and local level in terms their involvement, time, and financial and technical assistance. What is required is a series of regular meetings at different levels, reporting, and a relatively complex process of data collection, and coordination with multiple stakeholders. In remote areas, where physical access is difficult and socio-economic conditions are harsh, the requirements of the model are way too demanding to achieve. This CBDP model therefore needs to be adjusted and simplified for remote communities. This could possibly be done by prioritizing some core activities and making some adjustments to the usual procedure to make it more simple and feasible in the context of remote Nepal. For example:

- A local police station is of great value especially in times of emergency. In particular, in the context of remote Nepal, the police force are usually among the first responders

and their role is crucial in facilitating effective response and recovery. Developing the capacities of local police force is vital to improve relief and recovery mechanisms in remote areas. This should include improving the capacities of the police through provision of relevant knowledge and the skill training required to maintain security, and conduct effective relief and rescue operations at times of disaster. Similarly, equipping local police stations with proper communication facilities, first-aid equipment, emergency food and water supplies, and search, rescue and safety equipment is equally important. Local Disaster Management Committee (LDMC) formed as per the CBDP model, and its task forces, could be linked to the Police Forces. For instance, wherever possible, both these groups could jointly participate in training and simulation exercises.

- Allocation of an emergency fund should be prioritized in all communities. The fund could be pulled in from various sources. Firstly, a certain percentage of community resources such as income from community forest products (if any) can be allocated for emergency funds. The community could charge small fees to outsiders in crossing a local bridge. Certain communal events could also be organized and earnings could be made. At times of disaster such emergency funds could be very useful to restore immediate communal facilities.

- It is beneficial to rather conduct an Illaka level assessment (vulnerability and capacity assessment) with the involvement of the representatives of the VDCs within the Illaka

rather than to conduct numerous ward level assessments. Firstly, due to the difficult topography and lack of transportation to and from in remote communities, it is extremely hard for the social mobilizers to conduct a quality assessment in the limited time provided<sup>12</sup>. Secondly, many neighbouring wards and VDCs share common hazard and resources<sup>13</sup>. Finally remote region of Nepal have usually one Police Station per Illaka. Using this strategy could not only save time, effort and other resources, but would also allow an avoidance of data overlapping and would promote the collation of quality information.

- It is cost-effective and probably resourceful to minimize the number of members in both the local disaster management committee and subcommittees / Task Force.

## 2. DISASTER MITIGATION MEASURES

Disasters often leave the impacted communities physically more exposed to future hazards. Landslides leave destabilized slopes, floods may cause accelerated erosion and leave massive depositions of soil and rock in lower areas and streams. Ensuring proper mitigation strategies are implemented is vital if the risk of future hazards is to be addressed. In Nepal, at least, the Government has limited resources to meet such needs. Too often, the result is a lack of effective mitigation measures again, increasing the long-term disaster risk.

Mitigation practices could involve bio-engineering or civil engineering techniques, or some sort of combination of the two. There are many potential mitigation

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12. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

13. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

measures to ensure slope stability and reduce erosion. These include slope modification through excavation and infilling, construction of dams and retaining walls, slope stabilization and erosion control using contour wattling, coir netting, or jute geo-textiles, drainage techniques such as site levelling, ditches and drains, drainpipes, and safe cultivation practices, the list goes on (Wu & Feng, 2006; Highland & Bobrowsky, 2008; Singh, 2010). Timely mitigation is important. Further support by NGOs in this area is urgently needed

### 3. COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT

The importance of community forests has to date been undervalued in projects associated with disaster management in Nepal. A community forest management system now exists in many rural communities including the remote hills and mountains of Nepal. These systems exist when the local community plays a significant role in the land use decision making and where the community is satisfied with its involvement and benefits from the management of the surrounding forest and its resources (Roberts & Gautam, 2003; Ojha, Persha, & Chhatre, 2009). People, particularly in remote communities, entirely depend on these forests for their daily firewood, as a source of cattle fodder, herbal medicine, and wild crops. Well managed community forests provide cash income and material resources for families, and generate income opportunities. Twenty-five percent of the income generated is contributed to community development. Such development activities include improving irrigation canals and water distribution systems,

supplementing teachers' salaries, using forest products for the construction of schools or other public buildings. Importantly, there also exists a pro-poor innovation practiced among various community forest user groups (CFUGs) which allows subsidies to be provided for poor and disadvantaged groups including families affected by disaster. These subsidies take the form of low interest loans for income generating activities, forest land explicitly reserved for these disadvantaged groups, community lands to their landless or near-landless members, so they can earn their living through the cultivation of medicinal herbs or other crops, free distribution of forest products, scholarship for children from these families, and the like (Bhattarai, 2007; Ojha et al., 2009). These families are also prioritized over others in locally created forestry related jobs, such as processing of handmade paper or working as nursery labourers (Subedi 2006). Communities with a well-managed community forest system are more resilient than those without. A well-managed forest minimizes disaster risks, particularly those associated with landslides, erosion and floods. These communities generally have a greater degree of economic resources and institutional capacities to support community recovery in the aftermath of a disaster. At the same time, a community forestry system provides benefits to the neediest families, and so aids recovery for those most affected by disasters. In a nutshell, well managed community forests contribute to disaster management and at the same time enhance the overall well-being (resilience) of communities in need. Most remote communities, however, lack effective

forest management capability and skills and so are unable to properly utilize their potential<sup>14</sup>. District level government forest offices can offer technical training to communities, but for the most part lack the financial and human resources to meet these needs<sup>15</sup>. NGOs could usefully fill this gap.

Global discussions of forest destruction directly associated with disasters rarely occurs. This is a major omission and contrasts with global efforts to achieve environment sustainability. In the particular context of remote communities in Nepal, loss of forests, primarily community forests, reduces access by local residents to daily necessities. This increases hardship and hinders disaster recovery. Loss of community forests also obliges people to adopt unsustainable practices, including deforestation and excessive grazing, as a means to survive. NGOs could play an important role by supporting these communities better manage and restore their forest resources.

More generally, any development projects implemented by NGO are sources of incomes, alternatives options and better knowledge. Connecting development work with disaster preparedness initiative may broaden the scope of action for a more effective preparedness (creation of community fund, risk-sensitive training and planning, etc...)

#### 4. FOOD AID

Another important issue is food. In general, many parts of rural Nepal are food insecure. Moreover, those in the Karnali Zone are generally identified to have high levels of food insecurity. The Kalikot District is no different. For most months of the year people find it hard

to access sufficient food. At times of disaster the situation worsens. The flood in Sannighat destroyed stored grains and crops, and the land to produce food. As a result, access to basic food became even more difficult particularly to those who prior to disaster were already food insecure. Food aid was provided by external agencies, but was largely insufficient. Many men had to migrate to cope with food shortage, leaving less manpower in the community for the reconstruction. Moreover, food aid ended long before people could manage to feed themselves. In food insecure areas like Kalikot, there is a need to increase food aid for as long as required to allow communities to ensure their own self-sufficiency. For example, food distribution and aid should not only be calculated to cover the short-term rescue phase, but should also be incorporated into the longer rehabilitation phases. This would help to retain manpower for effective reconstruction of essential infrastructure assets (bridges, roads, mill, etc...) so that businesses can re-start faster.

#### 5. EMPLOYMENT RE-GENERATION RECOVERY PROGRAMS

Disasters are not separate from livelihoods; in fact disaster cause, impact, and recovery are embedded into people's livelihoods. There is therefore need for a comprehensive approach in disaster management programs that encompasses peoples' livelihoods. To date, recovery interventions in remote Nepal lack any prioritization of efforts to regenerate employment. One of the main reasons that households and communities fail to recover after disasters is their lack of access to those resources necessary to survive and be self-reliant. What is needed is help to return to self-

14. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

15. Information is from the fieldwork conducted by the author in Baitadi and Kailali District in the period from November 2013 to February 2014.

sufficiency. NGOs could design and promote facilities that offer start-up capital for small local businesses, backed by the necessary skills and guidance training. In Nepal, support for cattle farming, fish farming, vegetable gardens, beekeeping, and the growing of medicinal crops are all potential options. The scale of support could vary. At the smallest scale, support for individual households could take the form of cash grants or loans, or material supplies, such as livestock. At larger scale such programs could support the establishment of small local businesses, which would not only provide recovery support for disaster affected communities, but would create employment and income opportunities. These programs could be deliberately designed to provide opportunities and benefits for both women and men. Affected families headed by single women, and those families whose sole income is impacted, should be prioritized by these programs.

## **6. EDUCATION AND HEALTH SUPPORT FOR DISASTER AFFECTED CHILDREN**

In disasters children require special attention in terms of food, safety, security and education. They are among the most vulnerable and their needs are multiple. The loss of school books, stationary, uniforms and the like commonly get little attention in most events, but are important. NGOs could further explore this area and examine any special support needs. Above

all, children who lose their parents in disasters need long term support and commitment for their well-being that goes beyond standard education and health. This is a further area that deserves attention.

In disaster management schools are increasingly used as emergency shelters and centres for awareness creation. Their role, particularly in longer term community recovery, however, remain less explored. In the context of remote communities, people consider schools as an important social entity and their functioning is regarded crucial for community recovery. Schools therefore have a huge potential to function as a recovery centre for disaster affected children and the wider community.

This area deserves further exploration and it is recommend to consider the role of schools, its teachers and children at the preparedness stage, while devising SBDP model, and how school and its children can not only be safer but also contribute to the overall community recovery.

## **7. RECONSTRUCTION**

Similarly, NGOs could get more involved to help communities in the repair and reconstruction of vital public buildings and amenities using safer and stronger technologies that would resist better the next disaster.

Sannighat, as well as Baitadi and Kailali portray the unseen bitter reality of disaster recovery in small, isolated communities in remote parts of Nepal. Despite the evident and existing coping capacity of affected communities, they fail to recover properly. Nepal has thousands of small remote communities scattered over the hills, mountains, and valleys of the country. Other countries share these characteristics. In Nepal too, as elsewhere, many of these communities are frequently exposed to and impacted by small disasters. These communities share similar characteristics to those discussed in this report and there is no reason to believe that the level of attention they have and do receive in the face of small-scale disasters or the level of external support provided greatly differs. There is therefore no reason to believe that their experience of recovery differs either. It is consequently reasonable to conclude that a significant proportion of the populations in these communities that have experienced

disaster are left in circumstances of increased vulnerability and increased misery.

Many aid and development agencies target the building of resilient communities. This surely requires an extension of support beyond conventional relief that focuses on the immediate aftermath of disasters to a greater emphasis on longer term integrated recovery support. It equally requires an extension of support to remote communities that experience frequent small-scale disasters and untold misery and distress, but are too often overlooked.

Focusing on the given recommendations could offer useful means to move forward to facilitating successful recovery of disaster affected communities in remote areas of Nepal, and in the longer-term, building secure, safer, more sustainable communities.



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# APPENDIX ONE

## INTERVIEW THEMES

	Affected Household	Community	External agencies (Government and Non-Government)	What was useful? Why?	What was not useful? Why?
Pre- disaster	<p>Describe the place before the event happened; What does the participant (household member) think about the cause of the disaster?</p> <p>Was the household prepared for the disaster?</p> <p>Were there any predictions about the disaster?</p> <p>Were there any prevention measures from the household?</p>	<p>According to the participant:</p> <p>What does their community think about the cause of the disaster?</p> <p>Were they prepared for the disaster?</p> <p>Were there any predictions about the disaster?</p> <p>Were there any prevention measures from the community?</p>	<p>According to the participant:</p> <p>Were there any prevention measures or related work from any external agencies? If yes what was it and what were they doing?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?</p>
During Disaster	<p>Describe the situation during disaster; what they did during disaster</p>	<p>Describe what the community did during disaster</p>	<p>Describe what the external agencies do during disaster</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?</p>

Post Disaster					
First two weeks after disaster	Describe the immediate post disaster situation; what the affected household did in the first two weeks?	Describe what the community did in the first weeks after disaster	Describe what the external agencies did in the first weeks after disaster	If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?	If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?
First three months after disaster	Describe the situation in the first three months of disaster  (any repetition?); what the affected household did in the first three months after disaster	Describe what the community did in the first three months after disaster	Describe what the external agencies did in the first three months after disaster	If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?	If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?
After 1 year (If Repetition when?)	Describe the situation in the first year after the disaster; if there was repetition then when and what happened; what the affected household did in the first year after disaster; If there was repetition of the disaster in the same place or nearby were there any actions (preparedness/ mitigation work) from the affected household? If yes, what kind of actions?	Describe what the community did in the first year after disaster; what their actions were after the repetition occurred if any. If there was repetition of the disaster in the same place or nearby were there any actions (preparedness/ mitigation work) from the community? If yes, what kind of actions?	Describe what the external agency did in the first year after disaster; what their actions were after the repetition occurred if any. If there was repetition of the disaster in the same place or nearby were there any actions (preparedness/ mitigation) work from the external agency? If yes, what kind of actions?	If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?	If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?

<p>After 2 years (If Repetition, when, impact then?)</p>	<p>Describe the situation in the second year after the disaster; if there was repetition then when and what happened; what the affected household did in the second year after disaster; If there was repetition of the disaster in the same place or nearby were there any actions (preparedness/ mitigation work) from the affected household? If yes, what kind of actions?</p>	<p>Describe what the community did in the second year after disaster; what their actions were after the repetition occurred if any. If there was repetition of the disaster in the same place or nearby were there any actions (preparedness/ mitigation work) from the community? If yes, what kind of actions?</p>	<p>Describe what the external agency did in the second year after disaster; what their actions were after the repetition occurred if any. If there was repetition of the disaster in the same place or nearby were there any actions (preparedness/ mitigation) work from the external agency? If yes, what kind of actions?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?</p>
<p>Now (Situation)</p>	<p>How is the present situation of the affected household? Have they moved? How are they living? What have been the changes in their lives? How are they responding (coping) to the disaster impact, or getting prepared to the coming one (if there has been repetition? How does the future look like for them (particularly after the disaster affect)</p>	<p>How is the present situation of the affected community? What are the changes in the community? How is the community responding (coping) to the impact of disaster, or getting prepared to the coming one (if there has been repetition)?</p>	<p>Are there any external agencies working in the response/ recovery/ preparedness part? If yes, which agencies and what are they doing?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is useful and why?</p>	<p>If there were any actions/ interventions from either community, or affected household (themselves) or external agencies, what does the participant think is not useful and why?</p>



Humanitarian Aid  
and Civil Protection

The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO), the largest single donor in the world, aims to save and preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering and safeguard the integrity and dignity of populations affected by natural disasters and man-made crises. A significant part of the European Commission's humanitarian assistance to Nepal goes towards helping communities resist, withstand and cope against natural disasters like floods and landslides through the creation of community based rescue mechanisms, disaster-resilient infrastructure, early warning systems and flood management.

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Mission East (ME) is a Danish non-profit international relief and development organization that works with the most vulnerable communities in Eastern Europe and Asia, making no political, racial, or religious distinction among those in need. ME's mission is to help the vulnerable people through humanitarian relief aid, development assistance, the linking of relief, rehabilitation and development, and supporting communities' capacities to organize and assist themselves. ME's 'Values in Action' are honesty, integrity, compassion, respect for all people and valuing the individual. In Nepal, Mission East started working since 2007.

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