Beyond 'Build Back Better'

Strengthening Social Inclusion and Accountability through Community-Led Reconstruction in Post-Earthquake Nepal

Gordon Crawford and Chas Morrison

Centre for Trust, Peace & Social Relations
Coventry University

DISASTERS EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

Research Centre Trust, Peace and Social Relations | Coventry University

HelpAge International

actionaid NEPAL

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements:

1. Acronyms and Terminology

AAN	ActionAid Nepal
CGI	Corrugated galvanised iron
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability
CLR	Community-Led Reconstruction
CLRP	Community-Led Reconstruction Programme
CRC	Community Reconstruction Committee
CSRC	Community Self-Reliance Centre
CTPSR	Centre for Trust, Peace & Social Relations, Coventry University
Dalits	Lowest caste in the caste system, historically disadvantaged
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAUC	The Global Alliance for Urban Crises
Gaunpalika	Rural Municipality
Gompa	Buddhist temple
GoN	Government of Nepal
Guthi	A traditional form of land ownership, particularly for religious and cultural sites
HAN	HelpAge Nepal
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
IAT	Inclusion, Accountability and Transparency
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
Janjatis	Various indigenous ethnic minorities, often disadvantaged
Lakh	One hundred thousand
LRF	Land Rights Forum
Magar	One of the Janjati groups, often poor and marginalised
Nagarpalika	Municipality
NRA	National Reconstruction Authority of the Government of Nepal
PwD	People/Persons with disabilities
Rs	Rupees
SWC	Social Welfare Council (under Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare)
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
VDC	Village Development Committee – second lowest administrative unit in the previous political structure
Ward	Smallest unit of government under the new political system
WCF	Ward Citizens Forum
Yolmo	One of the Janjati groups, often poor and marginalised

2. Executive Summary

It is widely recognised that working with, and on behalf of, a range of stakeholders and beneficiaries is essential for disaster recovery to be representative and equitable. Within the humanitarian sector, there has been an emphasis recently on greater inclusion and accountability to affected populations, but the implementation of this is complex and open to a variety of approaches and interpretations. Agencies within the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) are at the forefront of developing inclusion, accountability and transparency (IAT), both in operational terms and in humanitarian policy.

This research has coalesced around an ambitious model for post-disaster recovery: the community-led reconstruction programme (CLRP), implemented by ActionAid Nepal and its partners following the earthquakes in Nepal. The CLRP positions affected populations at the forefront of decision-making about social transformation, human rights and interactions with government, to produce a reconstruction that goes beyond 'build back better' for individuals and society as a whole. The implementation of the CLRP provides a lens through which IAT issues can be investigated, and the contributions of humanitarian actors in the research.

This report employs data gathered through a mixed-methods research design, comprising interviews with elected officials and local committees, focus group discussions with affected communities, a perception survey, street drama and video case studies of elderly people. A previous but related piece of work examined the planning and implementation of DEC agencies active in Nepal, using data collected from their own recovery plans and interviews with senior staff in Kathmandu. Data was collected by mixed teams of Nepali and British researchers.

What emerges from these investigations is a complex picture of social change: social conventions of status and identity being re-examined and challenged; a greater influence, and at times leadership, of women; an understanding that communities who work together produce better reconstruction; and an agreement that previously marginalised social groups deserve to be included as integral members of society.

Three main indicators of successful community-led reconstruction become clear:

1. The importance of community-based committees that facilitate the self-organisation of marginalised groups whose voices have historically been excluded;

2. Constructive engagement with government, and with (I)NGOs, to advocate for their needs;

3. The presence of democratic government, especially at local level, that is responsive and downwardly accountable to local citizens, inclusive of relatively poor and marginalised groups.

Effective and sustainable community-led reconstruction is much more than self-help. The precarious and unstable social conditions in a post-disaster environment create a space for people to confront existing inequalities and unjust power dynamics. Addressing these in a constructive yet robust way, with the sincere engagement of representative government, provides the best circumstances for a reconstruction process that genuinely goes beyond 'build back better'. More than resilience or 'coping mechanisms', this self-reflective process of social change examines the vulnerabilities and exclusionary practices that increased disaster risk in the first place.

However, some of the CLRP's intended aims have not materialised. The establishment of Community Reconstruction Committees (CRCs) has not led to sustainable social change in all areas of intervention. Positive social changes are more visible in areas benefitting from long-term engagement of local development partners, and the improvements in the status of women are more tangible than those for other vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities or elderly people. The promotion of IAT is outwards facing – it seeks to lead to improved relief and recovery and to strengthen the relationships between humanitarian agencies, government authorities and affected people. While the mapping report suggests that 12 DEC agencies[1] operating in Nepal are leading the mainstreaming of IAT, a more outward-facing approach would allow IAT programming to meet the actual needs of local people more effectively.

1. The DEC agencies that took part in this research project.

3. Introduction

Two years after the devastating earthquakes in Nepal in April and May 2015, a partnership comprising Coventry University, ActionAid Nepal (AAN) and HelpAge Nepal (HAN) has undertaken an action research project to investigate the initial implementation of Community-Led Reconstruction (CLR). This approach seeks to increase inclusion and accountability to disaster-affected communities to ensure marginalised groups are included. The overall aim of this research is to provide learning and evidence on implementing CLR and thereby improve performance and enhance accountability to disaster-affected people. The primary research question was as follows:

To what extent and in what ways can CLR in post-earthquake Nepal lead to greater inclusion of marginalised groups and improved accountability to beneficiaries?

The research objectives were six-fold:

1. Map key DEC agencies' indicators, approaches and lessons learned on inclusion of marginalised groups in CLR in Nepal;

2. Track, analyse and assess the inclusion of marginalised groups especially women and elderly, and accountability outcomes of CLR;

3. Enhance the effectiveness of CLR through the insights gained from action research being immediately fed back into programme implementation and provide a feedback loop to DEC members, their partners and community members;

4. Provide learning and evidence of 'what works' regarding inclusion of marginalised groups and how to ensure transparency and accountability to disaster affected communities and UK donors for future DEC appeals and member agencies humanitarian responses;

5. Develop insights into the practices of CLR and disseminate learning nationally and globally amongst DEC members, policy makers, NGOs, international organisations and academic circles;

6. Demonstrate impact with regard to membership criteria especially the Core Humanitarian Standard, Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct, and Sphere standards.

The research had two distinctive elements. First, a mapping exercise was conducted on how inclusion, accountability and transparency (IAT) measures are undertaken in planning and in practice across the 12 of the DEC member agencies active in Nepal. As a data collection method, interviews were undertaken with 12 DEC agencies in Kathmandu in early June 2017. The full findings of the mapping exercise are provided in a separate report and are support for the full Action research project. The DEC is an umbrella group of UK humanitarian organisations that collectively launches appeals for emergency funds to assist people affected by humanitarian crises. The DEC member agencies operating in Nepal that took part in this research are:

Oxfam

Save the Children

Islamic Relief

Concern Worldwide

World Vision International

Tearfund

Christian Aid

ActionAid Nepal

British Red Cross

CAFOD

CARE Nepal

HelpAge Nepal

This report concludes with an overview of 'what works' in CLR based on the Nepal experience, but applicable for other post-disaster contexts. These include: adapting CLR to local conditions and norms: co-design of the reconstruction process that puts affected communities at the centre of decision making; sustained support and facilitation that promotes women's leadership and builds people's understanding of their political rights. Finally, the report contains recommendations for post-disaster work in general and recommendations for the humanitarian community, such as the need to capitalise on existing civil society structures and the need to strengthen citizen-government relations. DEC agencies and other INGOs should develop more sensitivity regarding the challenges facing local government for reconstruction, particularly within a newly evolved political structure, as that encountered in Nepal. IAT compliance is strengthened if different actors have a more nuanced understanding of each other, leading to improved collaborative working relations.

4. Context

Second, and more substantially, the action research component has entailed two periods of fieldwork and a variety of data collection methods in order to examine the implementation of CLR in post-earthquake Nepal and to address the above primary research question. This report provides the findings of this action research, inclusive of analysis of what works in order to adapt and enhance ongoing programme implementation.

This report is structured as follows. Following the executive summary and this brief introduction, the Context section provides information on the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal in the global context of accountability to disaster-affected communities. Section 5 then examines the concept of community-led reconstruction (CLR), and its interpretation in practice by ActionAid Nepal's Community-Led Reconstruction Programme (CLRP). The sixth section then provides a summary of the research framework and data collection methods for the action research component. The following three sections (7 to 9) constitute the core of this report in which the findings are presented from the various data collection methods. These are arranged around community perceptions (section 7), focus group discussions and survey (section 8), and citizen-government engagement (section 9). A penultimate section then builds on these findings by analysing what works in CLR (section 10), with the conclusion (section 11) providing an overall answer to the research question, along with considerations for policy both for general CLR and post-disaster work and for INGOs and government on improving IAT issues. The annexes are contained in section 12.

Research was undertaken following the disastrous earthquakes of 2015 in Nepal and in the global context of accountability to disaster-affected populations being high on the humanitarian agenda.

The 2015 Nepal Earthquakes

Nepal was hit by two devastating earthquakes of 7.8 and 6.8 on the Richter scale in April and May 2015. Thirty districts out of 75 in the country were affected by the earthquake, with 14 worst-hit districts. The disasters killed over 8,700 people, injured over 22,000 and destroyed over 500,000 houses, and a further 275,000 houses sustained partial damage. Over 8 million people were affected and 2.8 million displaced. The immediate disaster aftermath involved a large-scale and challenging humanitarian response in complex geo-political terrain with massive logistical complexities, including a wide physical area, mostly very rural locations, and mountainous terrain with remote communities. Bureaucratic oversight by the Government of Nepal (GoN) was intended to improve coordination and monitoring of INGO activities, but also increased the workload and caused delays, particularly in transitioning to the reconstruction phase. All INGOs in Nepal have to register with, and be approved by, the Social Welfare Council (SWC) and cooperate with their procedures which can be bureaucratic. The 2015-6 border blockade by India also caused logistical delays and disrupted relief distribution.

Sindhupalchowk was the most earthquake-affected district in the whole of the country. Over one-third of the total fatalities were in this district with 3,570 people dead and 1,567 seriously injured. 95% of homes in Sindhupalchowk were destroyed or severely damaged. 196 kilometres of road were obstructed and 13 trail bridges and 691 water supply systems were destroyed.[2] In Sindhupalchowk, both AAN and HAN work in partnership with a well-established NGO, the Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), which acts as both organisations' local implementing agency. Within Sindhupalchowk, we undertook research in communities in Melamchi Municipality and Helambu Rural Municipality in the western part of Sindhupalchowk, two of the 13 newly-established municipalities that constitute the new local government structure outlined in the federal Constitution of 2015.

Nepal – District Map
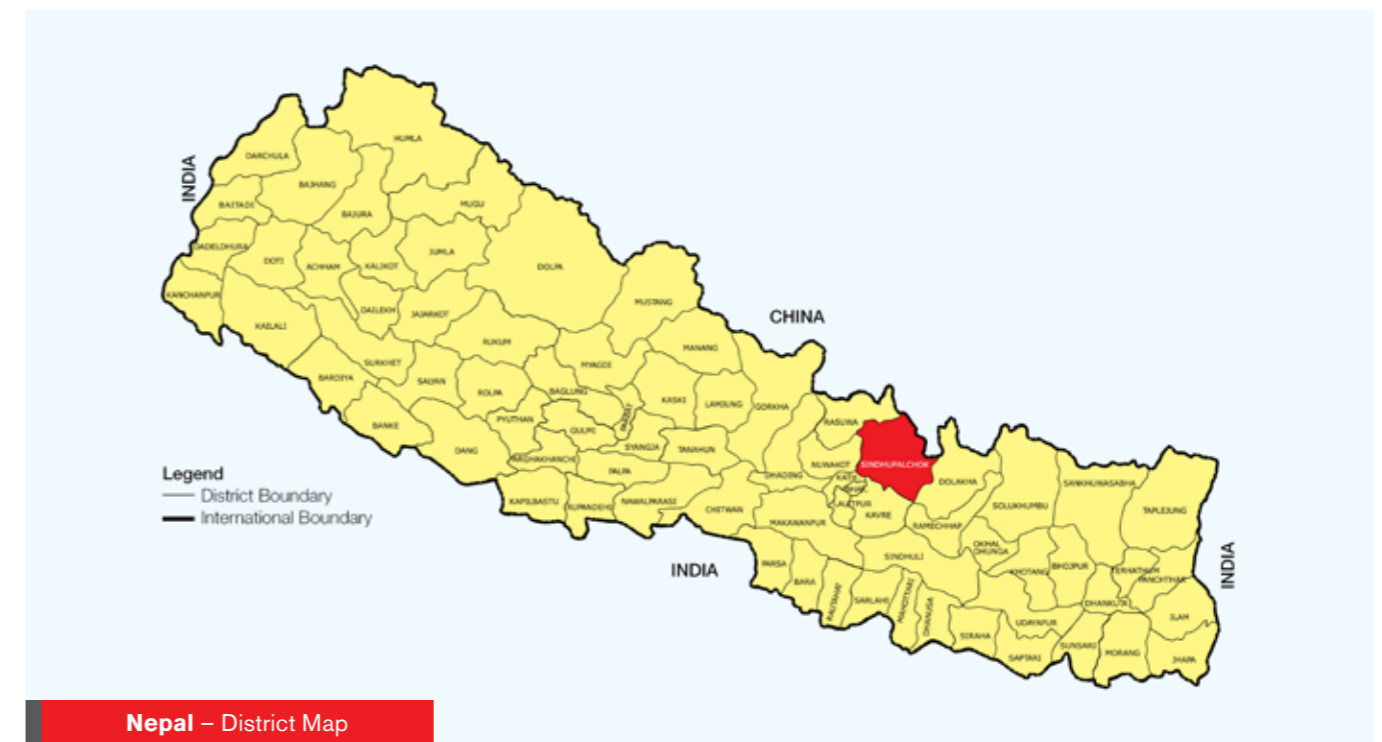
2. Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report by National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal, 2015

5. Community-Led Reconstruction in Concept and Practice

The Concept of Community-Led Reconstruction in Post-Disaster Contexts

Community-led and participatory approaches in post-disaster reconstruction have been widely and repeatedly recommended[3], but significant gaps remain between theory and practice. Genuine community participation is often insufficiently implemented, and people's capabilities are often squandered[4] leading to poor reconstruction and perpetuation of social inequalities.

What exactly constitutes community-led reconstruction is open to a variety of perceptions and implementation models. It may be referred to as community-driven, community-based, locally owned, or owner-driven reconstruction. Whatever the terminology, CLR constitutes much more than local participation. Broadly speaking, CLR emphasises the need to rebuild communities, not only houses; prioritising community planning and involvement in leading the reconstruction process; inclusive engagement of women and various social groups; critical and constructive engagement with government; using locally available and appropriate materials and technologies; improved transparency and accountability to affected communities; and a stated intention to improve on the previous *status quo* through 'building back better'.

ActionAid Nepal's conception of CLR builds on this and also emphasises the dignity and agency of affected people; the empowerment of excluded social groups to claim and enjoy greater rights; women's leadership; advocating for the rights of landless people; and an overall social transformation that leads to a more equitable and just society.

Many major international organisations promote CLR approaches, albeit under a variety of labels: UNOCHA, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction & Recovery (GFDRR), the World Bank and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), as well as the major INGOs. Collaboration, multi-stakeholder dialogue and resilience-building were central to the Hyogo Framework, superseded post-2015 by Sendai Framework, which also promotes the people-centred approach of 'Build Back Better' in recovery and reconstruction.

CLR aims to integrate local expertise and social capital, with an emphasis on the causes of vulnerability over the symptoms and impacts of disasters[5]. Perceived advantages are as follows. Financially, CLR that employs locally available resources (knowledge, tools, materials, systems) is likely to be more efficient than top-down programmes. Marginalised and vulnerable groups require particular attention when prioritising local and national stakeholders and systems[6]. The best reconstruction outcomes emerge when end-users are engaged from the beginning in designing, planning and decision-making[7]. There are higher levels of satisfaction in reconstruction programmes when compared to contracted work[8] and the highest levels of satisfaction resulted from owner-driven reconstruction[9].

Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations

Accountability to affected communities is high on the global humanitarian agenda and DEC members have placed significant emphasis on inclusion, accountability and transparency (IAT). Numerous organisations have likewise issued guidelines, strategy papers and policy recommendations on IAT, including Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Committee of the Red Cross / Crescent Code of Conduct, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter, and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). The latest iteration is the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), adherence to which is a key component of the Disaster Emergency Committee's (DEC) member agencies' approach.

In 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) called for local and national actors to be at the forefront of humanitarian responses and the need for greater localisation of aid. Existing local capacities need to be utilised, not replaced. The Grand Bargain on transparency is a set of proposals and commitments seeking to improve the transparency of humanitarian funding. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC) emerged in 2016 from the WHS. It is committed to local leadership, appropriate localisation of aid and increased participation of affected people. The GAUC promotes local knowledge that leads to improved bottom-up approaches that mobilise available partnerships and resources.

Common themes in all these policies and standards are the localisation of aid, decentralisation of decision making and local leadership, and moves towards a delegation of authority. Stakeholders are asked to recognise domestic expertise, local knowledge and a broader understanding of implementation, to move away from project-bound activities and undertake new thinking on what constitutes collaboration.

3. For examples, see Lawther P. M. (2009), "Community involvement in post disaster re-construction – case study of the British red cross Maldives recovery program, *International Journal of Strategic Property Management*, 13:2, 153-169.
4. Davidson, C.H. et al. (2007), "Truths and myths about community participation in post-disaster housing projects", *Habitat International*, 31:1, 100-115.
5. Schilderman T. (2004), "Adapting traditional shelter for disaster mitigation and reconstruction: experiences with community-based approaches", *Building Research & Information*, 32:5, 414-426.
6. Sanderson D. & Ramalingam B. (2015), "Nepal Earthquake Response: Lessons for Operational Agencies". ALNAP Lessons Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI.
7. Davidson et al. (2007)
8. Ophiyandri, T., Amaratunga, D. & Pathirage, C. (2010), "Community based post disaster housing reconstruction: Indonesian perspective". CIB 2010, 10th - 13th May 2010, University of Salford; Dhouha Bouraoui & Gonzalo Lizarralde, (2013), "Centralized decision making, users' participation and satisfaction in post disaster reconstruction: The case of Tunisia", *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment,* 4:2, 145 – 167.
9. Barenstein, J.D. (2008), "From Gujarat to Tamil Nadu: owner driven vs contractor driven housing reconstruction in India", paper presented at 4th International i Rec Conference 2008 Building Resilience: Achieving Effective Post disaster Reconstruction.

The costs of private housing reconstruction need to be more systematically measured against community infrastructure[10], and housing reconstruction needs to be linked with income-generation[11]. Huge political commitment is required to address the complexities of land ownership, water access and social vulnerabilities.[12] Careful consideration is likewise required to include and promote cultural sensitivities, local materials and environmental concerns[13].

Multiple challenges exist to CLR implementation[14], such as a lack of capacity and technical expertise[15]. Weak relocation planning and weak community participation can lead to failures in post-disaster reconstruction[16]. As disasters destroy and disrupt community structures and mechanisms for local governance[17], repeated facilitation with communities is required[18]. Emphasis on participation often produces unrepresentative sectors of any given population[19] (local elite capture) which can exacerbate social divisions. One key success factor is the presence of representative governance, combined with sufficient coordination, accountability and legitimacy[20].
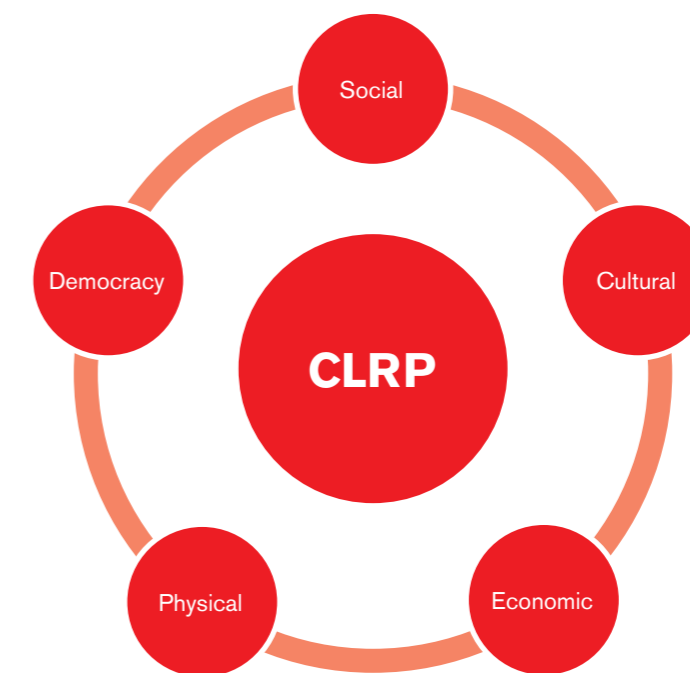
Women are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises, while simultaneously being the "lynchpin for addressing disaster risks and building resilience".[21]

A stated intent to promote women's leadership is part of the Sendai Framework for Action.[22] The UN Commission on Status of Women adopted a resolution in 2012 on "gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters"[23], with acknowledgements of the vital role of women in disaster risk reduction, response and recovery, and that a gender-responsive approach can address the underlying social issues that create vulnerability.

ActionAid Nepal's Community-Led Reconstruction Programme

In April 2016, in-line with government priorities, AAN shifted from relief to reconstruction with the commencement of its CLRP. Informed by the Government's 'Post Disaster Needs Assessment' (PDNA) and AAN's own real-time evaluation and strategic plan, the CLRP is funded primarily by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), and other development partners. The CLRP is implemented in six of the most earthquake affected districts. The English 'community-led reconstruction' can be translated word-for-word into Nepali, with no change in meaning or semantic range.

Figure 1: Five thematic priorities of ActionAid Nepal's CLRP

Women's rights and empowerment cut across all the outcome areas. Women are traditionally more marginalised and excluded from the public sphere than men and play a smaller role in public decision-making.

The CLRP entails an ambitious attempt to enable local communities to engage in reconstruction efforts from the grassroots-level upwards, inclusive of the participation of women and marginalised groups. It is based on the creation of Community Reconstruction Committees (CRCs) at village or settlement level. The principle of having at least 40% women in each CRC is a structured attempt to enable women's involvement in community decisions and in aspects of communal life that have often been the preserve of men. The inclusion of indigenous and marginalised groups within CRCs is another attempt to encourage the expression of hitherto excluded voices at community level and in engagement with government. The inclusion of local youth alliances enables the expression of other less frequently heard voices, ones often given little attention by the authorities. The simultaneous

strengthening of women's rights forums (WRFs) provides an additional space for women to develop their leadership qualities and self-confidence. However, the encouragement of such social change towards greater gender and social equality is not without its difficulties and constraints.

Land and landlessness are major issues that have been exacerbated by the earthquake. Landless people are frequently excluded from the government's financial support for earthquake victims due to lack of the necessary land ownership certificates, although latterly, the GoN is addressing this by the introduction of a process by which a stated number of local people can certify landless people as genuine disaster victims, thus enabling them to access GoN reconstruction grants.

At the time of writing, the GoN and National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) are formally working to a completion deadline of July 2018 regarding individual housing reconstruction. However, an enormous amount of physical work remains to be done, and this deadline may need to be altered.

10. Freeman, P. K. (2004), "Allocation of post-disaster reconstruction financing to housing", *Building Research & Information*, 32:5, 427-437, DOI: 10.1080/0961321042000221016
11. Barakat S. (2003), "Housing reconstruction after conflict and disaster", Humanitarian Practice Network at Overseas Development Institute, Paper no. 43, Dec 2003.
12. Maskrey A. (2011), "Revisiting community-based disaster risk management", *Environmental Hazards*, 10:1, 42-52.
13. Barenstein (2008).
14. Sadiqi Z,. Bambang T. & Coffey V. (2015), "Community participation in post-disaster reconstruction". *ICE Proceedings Municipal Engineer*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1680/muen.15.00016
15. Ophiyandri, T., Amaratunga, D. & Pathirage, C. (2015), "Advantages and Limitations of Community-based Post-disaster Housing Reconstruction Project". The "State of DRR at the Local Level"- A 2015 Report on the Patterns of Disaster Risk Reduction Actions at Local Level, UNISDR.
16. Sadiqi et al (2015).
17. Duxbury J. & Dickinson S. (2007), "Principles for sustainable governance of the coastal zone: in the context of coastal disasters", *Ecological Economics* Vol. 63 (2–3), pp. 319–330.
18. Steinberg F. (2007). "Housing reconstruction and rehabilitation in Aceh and Nias, Indonesia- Rebuilding lives". *Habitat International*, Vol. 31, pp. 150-166. (p.164).
19. Ganapati N. E. & Ganapati S. (2009), "Enabling Participatory Planning After Disasters", *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 75, No. 1.
20. Guarnacci U. (2012), "Governance for sustainable reconstruction after disasters: Lessons from Nias, Indonesia", *Environmental Development*, Vol. 2, pp. 73-85.
21. The 'Gender & Disaster Risk Reduction' conference, Ha Noi, Vietnam, May 2016 http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2016/05/women-hold-key-to-addressing-disaster-risks
22. UNWOMEN 2016, "Women hold key to addressing disaster risks", http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2016/05/women-hold-key-to-addressing-disaster-risks
23. UNWOMEN 2012 "Commission on the Status of Women: Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters" http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/policies/v.php?id=26388

6. Research Methodology

This Action research was undertaken in ActionAid Nepal and HelpAge Nepal operational areas, and henceforth both will be referred to as the 'partners'. The methodology features six sets of mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. These are outlined below followed by a more detailed description and discussion of the perception survey. It has not been possible to triangulate specific claims by respondents, and any reference to an individual (I)NGO has been anonymised in this report. In any case, local community members or government officials occasionally confuse the names of humanitarian agencies.

A. A desk based **mapping exercise** was undertaken to provide a background on accountability and inclusion as part of the proposed and actual responses of the 12 DEC agencies listed above. This is available in a separate document.

B. **Nine focus group discussions** (FGDs) were held with earthquake-affected communities in rural areas of Sindhupalchowk District, during May to June 2017. These communities are within Melamchi Municipality and Helambu Rural Municipality in the western part of Sindhupalchowk. The FGDs were facilitated and translated by CSRC and AAN staff, while Coventry University staff posed questions and took notes. The locations of the FGDs are in Annex 3.

C. A **perception survey** of 26 questions was undertaken with a sample of over 360 earthquake victims from randomly selected households to collate their opinions and experiences of reconstruction to date. After quality checking, 322 complete sets of survey responses were collected in total. The survey was undertaken in late May 2017 by staff from CSRC in Sindhupalchowk, following training from Coventry University staff on the survey software and the use of handheld tablets. See Annex 1 for the full set of 26 questions.

D. **13 Interviews** were undertaken in October 2017 with key government officials at the recently established Municipality and Ward levels in Melamchi Municipality and Helambu Rural Municipality in Sindhupalchowk District, and with the District Development Committee and NRA staff in Chautara, the district capital. These were conducted by Coventry University staff, and facilitated by AAN and CSRC. Half the interviews were undertaken in English and half in Nepali and simultaneously translated and each interview was also audio recorded. These interviews were carried out after the May 2017 elections at Municipality and Ward levels, under Nepal's new devolved political structure. Interviewees comprise both newly elected political party members and government officials, some of whom had previously been employed in the old Village Development Committee (VDC) offices, now abolished. The list of interviewees is in Annex 4.

E. **2 group interviews** were undertaken with local social movements, with a Women's Rights Forum (WRF) and an Older People's Association together, and with a Land Rights Forum (LRF) and a Dalit association together, in October 2017, to follow-up on their experiences of the new local government system. See Annex 5.

F. **Audio-visual:** local perspectives on reconstruction processes and social change were gathered audio-visually through community drama and narrative case stories of four elderly people: three men and one woman. These were designed and facilitated by CSRC and supported by professional production companies. Audiences at the community drama performances then completed a feedback questionnaire, and key parts of the elder people's video footage was translated into English. A short film was produced of the four senior citizens' interviews. Annex 2 gives the post-drama feedback form.

HelpAge International in Nepal

Background
HelpAge International is a global network of organisations that helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives. In Nepal, since 2011, HelpAge has been working with local and community-based organisations in 18 districts. HelpAge and its partners also support the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare under the Government of Nepal in matters and issues related to the development and capacity-growth of Older People.

2015 Nepal Earthquake Humanitarian Response Programme

As an age-specialist global humanitarian organisation, in addition to partnering with Action Aid in the earthquake-affected district of Sindhupalchowk in 2015, HelpAge has delivered immediate and long-term aid to over nearly 27,000 Older People and over 50,000 indirect community beneficiaries in 11 earthquake-affected districts, in which nearly 40% women and 56% disadvantaged group members constituted community self-help groups of Older People, PwDs, and youths in each Older Person's Associations (OPAs). In the district of Sindhupalchowk, the Action Aid-HelpAge partnership helped over 2,000 Older People-led households receive transitional shelter kit materials and cash for labour.

Perception Survey

The perception survey (C) provided quantifiable data on the experiences and viewpoints of earthquake-affected people, to complement the qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions (B), interviews with government officials (D), and group interviews with local social movements (E). These main data sources were augmented by video interviews with four elderly people and locally produced street drama (F). This range of complementary research tools allowed the team to incorporate contributions from multiple stakeholders and at different social levels.

CSRC carried out the anonymous perception survey in May 2017, comprising 26 questions designed collectively by Coventry University, AAN and CSRC staff. The survey sought to reveal local people's views of the reconstruction progress, levels of satisfaction with government and NGOs, and opinions on the post-disaster status of women and marginalised groups. This was done using a survey software loaded onto handheld tablets and undertaken in villages where AAN, HAN and CSRC have been working. The survey was administered by CSRC social mobilisers in randomly selected households.

Quantitative survey total N=322.
Female: 199 (62%). Male: 123 (38%)

Not all the questions relate directly to this research project, some were to ensure geographical coverage. Data drawn from the survey has not been triangulated. For several of the questions, multiple responses are possible and therefore the totals are often not 100%.

Some limitations to this survey should be mentioned. Data was collected by various different teams, often simultaneously, which can reduce standardisation. People in this region are unfamiliar with surveys and it was the first time for both respondents and the CSRC researchers to employ this method of data gathering. Respondents were selected randomly (based on whoever was at home during the day), and only in areas where AAN and HAN

have been operating, meaning that many of the respondents are known to the social mobilisers who carried out the survey. The survey data was collected by staff from CSRC (the main implementing partner for AAN and HAN), but some questions relate to perceptions of NGO activity and impact, so some respondents might not feel able to openly express criticism. Where answers are disaggregated based on marginalisation, this is based on the small (N=31) number of respondents who self-identify as non-marginalised. A general disadvantage of surveys is that responses tend to be skewed to the average number (2.5 for responses ranging from 0 to 5). The social mobilisers attempted to ensure some degree of privacy so that respondents could answer honestly without anybody listening, but the social environment in a country like Nepal makes this difficult.

As mitigating factors for these issues, the research team felt that training staff on quantitative methods and the use of survey software was an important element of the participatory action research, and the training was carefully rolled out and supported with follow-up feedback and discussions. The selection of the survey questions was prepared by a group comprising staff from Coventry, AAN and CSRC and with relevance to other sections of the action research. Challenges in the survey data collection were highlighted at the end of every day and solutions were discussed, such as the need for more male respondents or representation from marginalised social groups. Of the total surveys (nearly 400), around 70 were rejected for not being fully answered or unclear, and we were left with 322 complete sets of answers. As for the issue of transparency of responses and being able to criticise NGOs, it has long been a working practice of AAN and its partners to foster a culture of honest feedback from communities and for people to express themselves openly.

Overall, the survey responses are indicative only. The number of responses is not large enough, and the data collection methods not robust enough, for the sets of answers to be considered fully reliable. The survey is instead a secondary research tool that seeks to supplement the other more comprehensive methods such as the FGDs and interviews. To reflect this, insights from the survey from the perception questions are presented alongside the FGD material below.

7. Community Perceptions

An integral part of this action research is the incorporation of affected people's attitudes and experiences. This serves as an additional source of data to complement the focus group discussions and interviews with officials. Perceptions from the communities were gathered using a quantitative survey (mostly of closed questions), a series of video interviews with elderly people, and feedback provided in response to performances of locally made street drama. CSRC undertook the data collection for all these, with oversight from AAN and Coventry staff.

Perception survey

The survey was divided into two sections. The first set of questions relate to demographics, and then 16 principal questions elicit people's opinions and perceptions of reconstruction related issues. 322 complete sets of responses were collected. The average age of the survey respondents is 43 and nearly two thirds of the respondents are women. One interesting observation from the start is how little variation exists between responses from women and from men, which implies that different perceptions of the reconstruction process and the actors in it, are not significantly gendered.

In general, the perception survey indicates some widespread (but mild) feelings of pessimism, which contradicts the self-reporting of NGOs, and the claims made by elected officials. It might be that the anonymity of the survey allows for people to express their frustrations more candidly than in a group. For some of the survey questions, the average answers are under a threshold of 2.5 (the mean score for answers ranging from 0 to 5). The highest level of satisfaction is regarding (I)NGOs' activities and overall the survey indicates generally higher levels of satisfaction with (I)NGOs than with government. The question on perceived change in the social position of women after the earthquake gives an average score slightly higher than 3, suggesting that over the respondents think there has been a slight improvement, with no significant difference between men and women's perceptions.

The demographic data from the survey is presented here:

| Education Level:	Women	%	Men	%
Master's Degree	0	0%	1	0.8%
Bachelor's Degree	1	0.5%	5	4.1%
High School	7	3.5%	13	10.5%
School Leaving Certificate	6	3.1%	8	6.5%
Less than School Leaving Certificate	7	3.5%	7	5.7%
Below Standard 8	47	23.6%	41	33.3%
No education	128	64.3%	45	36.6%
No answer	3	1.5%	3	2.4%
Totals	**199**	**100%**	**123**	**100%**

Education levels in this part of Sindhupalchowk are extremely low and show the most highly gendered division of any survey question. Two thirds of women have no education at all, compared to one third of the men. 5% of the men have a university degree, compared to 0.5% of the women. Men are three times more likely to have completed high school and twice as likely to have a School Leaving Certificate. However, these significant differences in educational attainment are not reflected in significant differences in the perception questions of the survey among men and women.

Survey: Earthquake damage to home
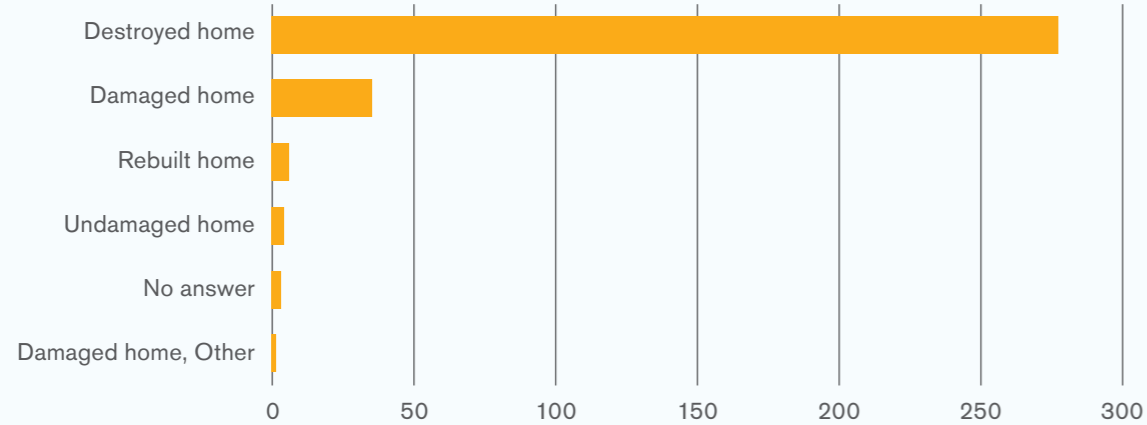
277 people, or 86%, have had their homes totally destroyed. Only 6 people have been able to rebuild their homes. 4 people suffered no damage to their dwelling.

Survey: Current accommodation
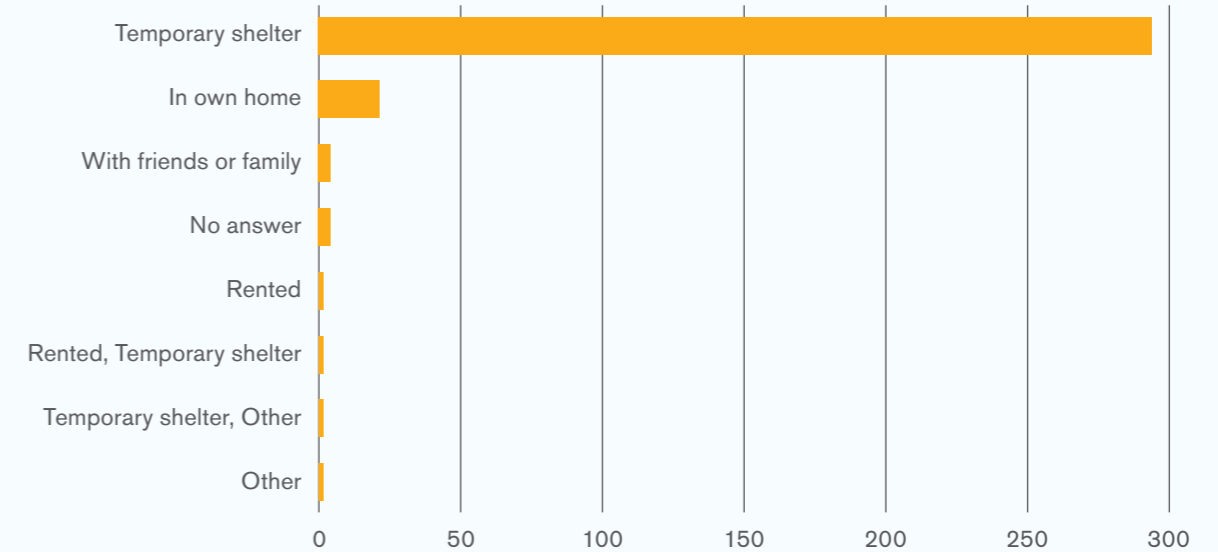
An overwhelming majority (291 people, 90%) were residing in temporary shelters at the time of the survey (May 2017).

Employment Status	Women	%	Men	%
Daily wage earner	25	12.6%	11	8.9%
Retired or elderly	5	2.5%	0	0%
Salaried Job	6	3.0%	6	4.8%
Self-employed	31	15.6%	32	26.0%
Sick or disabled	6	3.0%	1	0.8%
Student	1	0.5%	4	3.2%
Unemployed	32	16.1%	10	8.1%
Unpaid care work	77	38.7%	53	43.1%
Other	10	5.0%	3	2.4%
No answer	6	3.0%	3	2.4%
Totals	**199**	**100%**	**123**	**100%**

(The data on employment status needs to be understood in the context of people who are at home during the day, and thus less likely to be out working, or to have work that is home-based). The responses illustrate that women appear to be twice as likely to be unemployed as men. 5.5% of the women report being disabled and/or retired, compared to less than 1% of the men. Despite the smaller sample size of men, 4 of them are studying and only 1 woman. However, a higher percentage of men are engaged in unpaid care work than women, which likely reflects the type of people who are at home during the day. Overall, the employment status of respondents shows less gender variance than levels of education. For work type, 242 respondents state that they work in farming in some capacity (75%).

The picture that emerges from the demographic section of the survey illustrates some realities of rural life in Nepal as well as the overwhelming devastation inflicted by the earthquake. Men are more likely to be away from the home, and of those at home in the day, the average age is 43 which is middle-aged in this context but also illustrates the high numbers of young Nepalis (of both sexes) who go abroad from this region to work in the Gulf or India. General levels of educational attainment of this region are very low.

Earthquake damage is severe. 86% of people's houses are completely destroyed. Even more than two years after the disaster, only 6 people have managed to reconstruct a house. A very high number (90%) of respondents report to be still residing in temporary shelters and very low numbers of people are staying with relatives or in rented accommodation.

Interviews with elderly people

One aspect of the participatory data collection was the video interviews of four elderly people in Helambu speaking openly about their experiences and thoughts during and following the earthquake. The team interviewed three men and one woman. The full edited video is here[24], with English subtitles. Despite the devastation (*"I saw destruction, nothing was left, everything was flattened"*), they were very positive about the inputs from HelpAge and ActionAid in particular. One man stated that, *"If it had not been for these organisations and if we had totally relied only on the government, then we would have starved to death"*.

The local Community Reconstruction Committee (CRC) was effective in distributing relief, and transitioning to reconstruction: *"This Committee worked diligently and with full transparency"*. Another man states that *"The Committee that has been formed should continue working transparently"*. While they welcomed the work done by humanitarian agencies, they keenly felt the absence of family members: *"Not all senior citizens can go to receive their old age pension, no one will come to individual houses to provide it"* and *"We cannot travel long distances every day to fetch water"*. There are suggestions that the CRC and other local organisations could be more effective in supporting elderly people and tailoring that support to their specific needs.

They referred to the knowledge of older people that is not sufficiently integrated or acknowledged: *"We can just provide the young generation with what we have learnt… [we] have all kinds of traditional skills. These must not be forgotten and transferred to young generation farmers. [But] senior citizens do not get respect in the community"*. However, another man claims that, *"Senior citizens have begun getting respect and are being considered as a group needing support"*. With regard to land ownership, *"We need support in getting our right to land… and land to those who do not have any"*.

These elderly respondents appear cynical about the NRA procedures: *"The people are not confident of the government about this [grant] declaration... it should take a proper initiative to effectively disburse the fund"*. None of the relief materials they received were provided by the government, only NGOs.

In terms of the disaster's social impacts, the elderly woman says positively: *"I see a lot of changes… People were not very supportive to each other, but this earthquake and the processes taken thereafter to provide relief to the communities have increased cohesion in the village"*. With the livelihoods support such as poultry farming, elderly people *"can now eat better food… they are happy."*

Street drama

The use of street drama has a history in Nepal as an effective tool for raising community awareness. For this current action research project, it was employed to strengthen accountability and social inclusion while supporting a community-led reconstruction approach. The concept for the theatre production was developed by members of the Helambu Youth Alliance regarding the issues the community faces during the lengthy reconstruction process. The theatre show was performed by selected members of the Youth Alliance who had previous drama experience, with professional support from a local drama production company who assisted in finalising the script and training Youth Alliance members on improvisation and execution.

The theatre show was advertised through the CRCs and Women's Rights Forums and other local committees. Approximately 250 people attended showings in different locations in Chanaute, Ichok and Melamchi in mid-November 2017. The whole process was supervised and supported by CSRC, as they have worked previously on facilitating local drama productions. The video of the street drama is here[25].

The street drama was designed to:

• Enhance capacity and knowledge of the Youth Alliance and other participants on inclusion and reconstruction;

• Raise awareness of participatory reconstruction processes, CRC responsibilities in supporting housing reconstruction and NRA procedures;

• Showcase current problems and issues collectively faced by the community in reconstruction;

• Motivate the community to collectively engage in finding solutions and work together.

30 questionnaires were filled in by various audience members, with a 50/50 split between male and female. Respondents' average age was 33.5 years. Some of the more pertinent findings are overleaf:

> **"If it had not been for these organisations and if we had totally relied only on the government, then we would have starved to death."**

24. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX3GDAN8dxY

25. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-jEt8mfxm4&t=2s

Questions on the street drama:	1 = minimum 5 = maximum					
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
How would you rate this drama as a whole?	3%	17%	20%	20%	40%	3.8
How effective is this drama as a tool for communication in post disaster context?	7%	0%	17%	20%	57%	4.2
How much do the messages in this drama relate to your own experiences?	0%	3%	10%	17%	70%	4.5
Did this drama encourage you to reconsider your own opinions?	0%	3%	10%	30%	57%	4.4
Would you behave or act in a different way after seeing this drama?	0%	7%	20%	30%	43%	4.1
How likely would you be to discuss the themes of this drama with other people?	0%	13%	10%	23%	53%	4.2

This is overwhelmingly positive feedback from the audiences, with the highest rating referring to the messages in the drama relating to people's own experiences. Other suggestions from the audience were for further drama to instruct communities about the importance of working together and awareness raising of the complexities of the NRA grant process. The issue of social discrimination was also raised, with the suggestion that this needs to be reduced, and that the CRCs should play a more prominent role in housing reconstruction.

Information Education Communication materials developed under this action research project

8. Focus Group Discussions and Survey Feedback

Nine focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Melamchi Municipality and Helambu Rural Municipality from 18th to 25th May 2017 with a variety of marginalised groups (see Appendix 3). One FGD was held with a Community Reconstruction Committee in one settlement, and other FGDs were held in a Dalit community, with a Yolmo[26] Janjati group, with a displaced Magar group, with an Older People's Association, a Youth Alliance group, a local Land Rights Forum, and two women's rights groups in two communities, one that was mainly composed of Dalit and Janjati women.

Questions explored the participants' understanding of community-led reconstruction, then addressed the extent to which the needs of marginalised groups had been included in the reconstruction process, and the degree of accountability and transparency to local communities of both of (I)NGOs and government. These three questions are explored in turn, with material from the perception survey also integrated into the overall findings. Text in *italics* below comprise direct quotations from FGD participants, as translated by AAN and CSRC staff.

One survey question asked respondents:
"Do you consider yourself to be from a marginalised group?"

Marginalised groups	N	%
Janjati	94	29.1%
Youth	62	19.2%
Other	57	17.6%
Low caste	55	17.0%
Widow or female headed household	38	11.7%
Elderly	30	9.3%
Disabled	16	4.9%
Long term sick	14	4.3%
I do not consider myself to be from a marginalised group	31	9.9%

▲
Out of the 322 respondents, 291 (90%) consider themselves to be from a marginalised group. Of the remaining 31 people who do not consider themselves marginalised, 17 are men (54.8%) and 14 are women (45.2%), even though women are 62% of the overall respondents. This indicates a significant gender bias in whether somebody identifies as belonging to a marginalised group. Interestingly, none of the respondents have listed 'landless' as a marginalised category. Hereafter, the terms 'marginalised' and 'non-marginalised groups' are used based on the self-identification of survey respondents.

26. They are among the 59 indigenous groups officially recognized by the Government of Nepal as having a distinct cultural identity and are also listed as one of the 645 Scheduled Tribes.

Understanding of Community-Led Reconstruction?

CLR was understood in a variety of diverse ways. Understandings of CLR differed from a very practical orientation, mainly around housing reconstruction, to a value-based understanding around collective solidarity. CLR was perceived more as self-organisation at the community level, and as a means to mediate and organise with NGOs. But CLR as a means of strengthening engagement with government did not feature significantly. Some focus groups, representing either communities or particular marginalised groups, showed a sophisticated understanding of CLR, while others were relatively unaware of the concept.

A common answer to the question of 'what does CLR mean to you' focused on a more collective approach to physical reconstruction, especially of houses: *"CLR means getting the tools to reconstruct"* (FGD 2); *"The community help me make my house"* (FGD 2); *"Reconstruction of collapsed houses is a community effort"* (FGD 4); *"We have worked together on public toilets and community buildings"* (FGD 7)*"*. This very practical orientation was expressed most clearly by the Yolmo group: *"We work together, with the community in a position of responsibility"* (FGD 8). Their self-help approach was demonstrated by their collective efforts to clear the road to their community, blocked by post-earthquake landslides. As they noted, *"For example – this road is CLR"* (FGD 8). This Janjati or indigenous group was probably the most marginalised group that we met, living relatively isolated in the high hills and with vehicular access made impossible by landslides. Community members, both women and men, were manually clearing huge stones from the road, and took a break to talk with us. They noted the lack of support from both government and non-government agencies: *"Many people and agencies came to look at the damaged road, took photos from below, then left. Nobody came up as far as where we are having this meeting now"*. Therefore, they engaged in collective self-help, inclusive of help from fellow Yolmo people

from lower communities: *"Our community didn't lose hope and we carried on working. 300 to 400 households plan to work on this road on a rotation basis, from both upper and lower villages. We are doing the impossible, according to the government point of view"*. (FGD 8).

"As a group, we have more power and influence than as individuals. It is empowering."

This notion of collective support was expressed frequently as the key value that permeated through CLR: *"CLR means doing things collectively, with the welfare of the whole community in mind"* (FGD 1); *"CLR is identifying community needs and working together to solve it"* (FGD 6); *"We identify problems and then discuss collectively to collect ideas and design solutions together"* (FGD 3); *"We are all community, so we discuss among ourselves – that's CLR"* (FGD 7). This sense of mutual support and assistance had increased post-earthquake, partly due to the immediate emergency response where community members came together to help one another: *"Neighbours working together now for the betterment of the community"* (FGD 3); *"Community comes together. We have monthly meetings, which never happened before"* (FGD 9). And this was experienced as empowering compared with the individualism (or more inward household orientation) that had prevailed previously: *"As a group, we have more power and influence than as individuals. It is empowering"* (FGD 1).
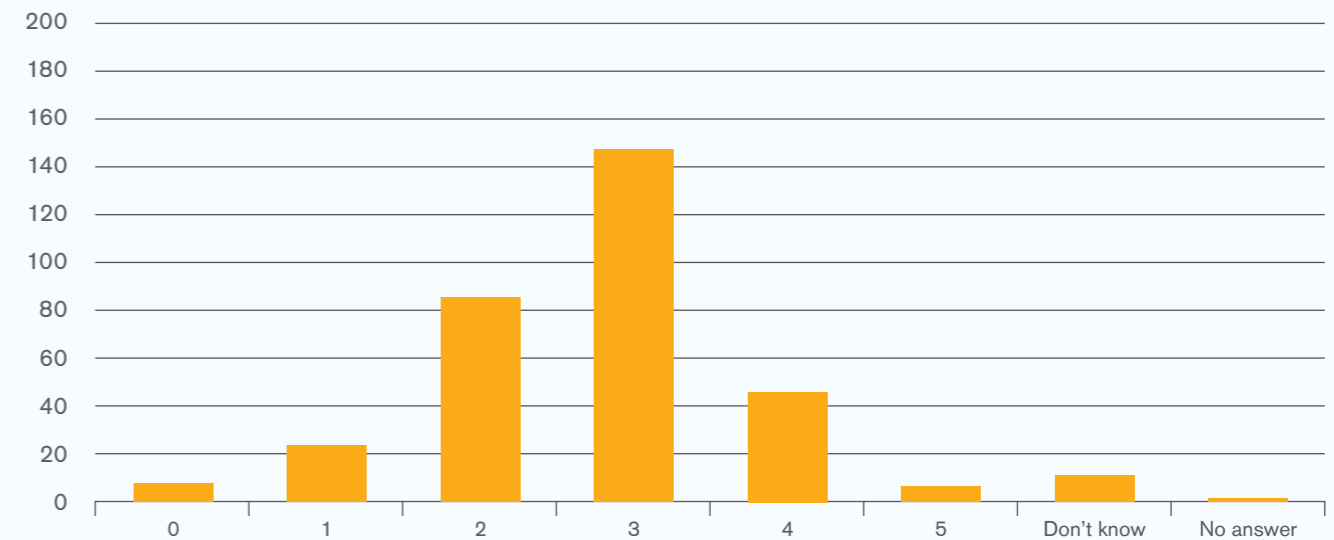
Marginalised groups have an average of 2.73 for this, and non-marginalised groups' average is 2.30, both below the halfway threshold of 2.5. These answers again contradict information from other sources, which tends to suggest that the various committees and forums are able to collectively discuss post-disaster issues.

From the survey: "If you could prioritise one issue for reconstruction in your community [not individual houses] what would it be?"
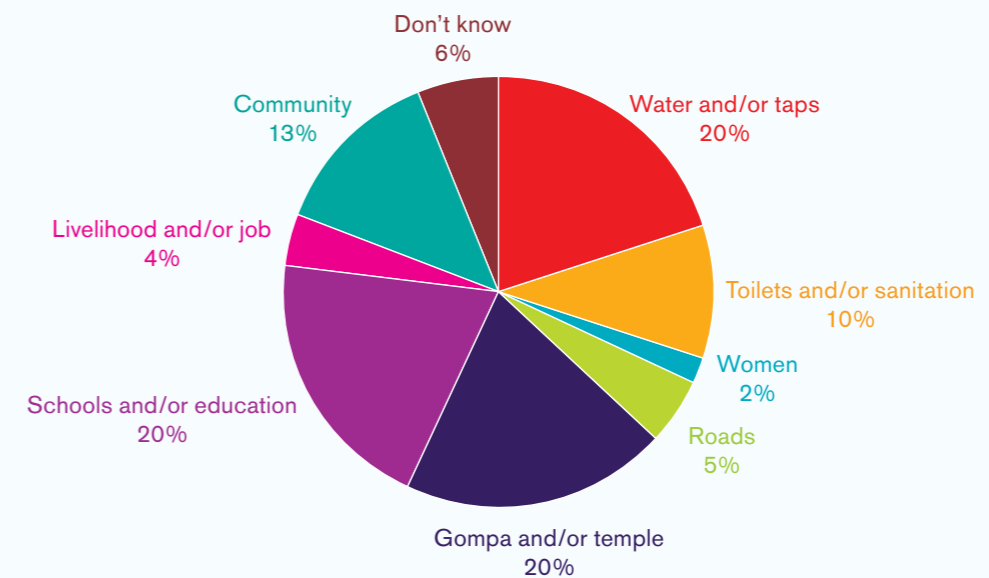
This set of survey answers shows the issues that people think should be prioritised most are water supply, schools and religious buildings. 'Roads' appears to be much less of a priority, but in group discussions the need for wider roads is mentioned multiple times. The concept of 'community' is mentioned by only 13% of respondents.

CLR was also understood as a means by which to engage and liaise with external organisations, though notably this was more with NGOs than with government. Community self-organisation has facilitated discussions and activities with different agencies: "*Forming a group and discussing how to work as a group. The community leads, and takes forward the voices of the community*" (FGD 2); "*[External] organisations need to work on the needs of the people, they need to listen to community needs*" (FGD 7); "*A committee was formed with a local leader chosen, then the* [INGO water] *project was implemented with community participation*" (FGD 4); "*The external organisations think of projects like water, and the community selects workers and beneficiaries*" (FGD 7). However, CLR as facilitating engagement with government was only mentioned once, by the women's group of Dalits and Janjati women: "*The community identified marginalised people, who then got government support*" (FGD 7).

"The community leads, and takes forward the voices of the community."

Specific topics mentioned when answering the survey question "What do you understand by reconstruction?"

Topics Mentioned	N responses (men and women)
'Rebuilding homes'	279
'Livelihoods'	84
'Social inequalities'	72
'Education'	66
'Disaster risk'	54
'Health'	50
'Change'	31
'Rebuilding infrastructure'	15
Don't know	21

▲
There were no response prompts for this survey question and multiple answers were possible, so the answers were collated into categories. 279 respondents state that reconstruction entails rebuilding homes, and 15 state that it is rebuilding infrastructure. There were a range of other answers, including livelihoods, 'change', inequalities, education, risk and health, all of which rate more highly than 'rebuilding infrastructure'. This indicates low perceptions of the importance of community infrastructure, and a focus on individual houses as the main aspect of reconstruction. There was little variation in responses between men and women for this question. What is unusual here is that the top three answers for the previous question **"If you could prioritise one issue for reconstruction in your community what would it be?"** are not mentioned in the answers to the present question, which likely indicates some lack of clarity about what constitutes reconstruction.

Inclusion of Marginalised People?

Focus groups were asked their views on the extent to which CLR has led to greater inclusion of marginalised people and more attention to their particular needs. Several focus groups reported greater inclusion of various marginalised peoples in both the emergency relief and reconstruction phases, though they were referring almost exclusively to NGO-related activities, and also mentioned significant caveats.

One Dalit woman reported that: "*Marginalised people are being heard. Before the earthquake, there was a lot of discrimination against Dalits*" (FGD 3), with the implication that such discrimination has declined somewhat. The older people's focus group confirmed that: "*Poor Dalits and women were prioritised*" (FGD 5). The focus group discussion with the Community Reconstruction Committee (CRC) claimed that, "*The CRC selects marginalised people as beneficiaries and for training*", with the example given that, "*Women mostly received goats, more than men*" (FGD 1). And indeed, the whole CRC group were of the view that: "*We include marginalised groups more than before, we listen to their voices and provide trainings*" (FGD 1). The Yolmo indigenous group noted that, "*We were prioritised for masonry and carpentry training by AAN and INGO X*", and they thought that this was "*due to being Janjati*" (FGD 8). However, this last example suggests that inclusion of marginalised groups has often been initiated by (I)NGOs, rather than as a move to contest inequalities within village communities. The youth group noted that: "*NGOs gave quotas for groups of all marginalised people*" (FGD 4); and this was confirmed by the Dalit group where one man stated that: "*Disabled, single women, Dalits, were selected for CGI sheet distribution by X INGO*" (FGD 3). However, the same participant also claimed that, "*In fact other people received them [the CGI sheets], not those intended,* and *this was done by local people*", with implied criticism of the CRC.

"We include marginalised groups more than before, we listen to their voices and provide trainings."

Indeed, there were a number of such caveats regarding greater inclusion of marginalised groups in reconstruction efforts. At times the practice of inclusion was challenged. A participant in the older people's group acknowledged that, "*Dalits have been prioritised*", but qualified this by stating that such prioritisation was "*more by talking than in real practical terms*" (FGD 5), implying that the reality of inclusion did not always match the rhetoric. CRCs often acted as intermediaries between external organisations and the community, but were subject to considerable criticism. A participant in the women's group stated that: "*The CRC exists to select beneficiaries, based on marginalisation, but some people get overlooked and are not prioritised, so the CRC is not very popular*" (FGD 2). A voice from the older people's group was blunter, stating, "*Some people eligible for relief didn't receive it, due to CRC bias*". She was supported by another voice who claimed that the "*CRC involves nepotism and favouritism, we are critical of the CRC*" (FGD 5). A participant from the Dalit group extended criticism to NGOs claiming that, while discrimination against Dalits has declined post-earthquake, "*Discrimination is still prevalent in organisations lacking a community focus*" (FGD 3).

Survey: On a scale of 0-5, how well do you think women's needs and priorities are addressed in your community reconstruction?
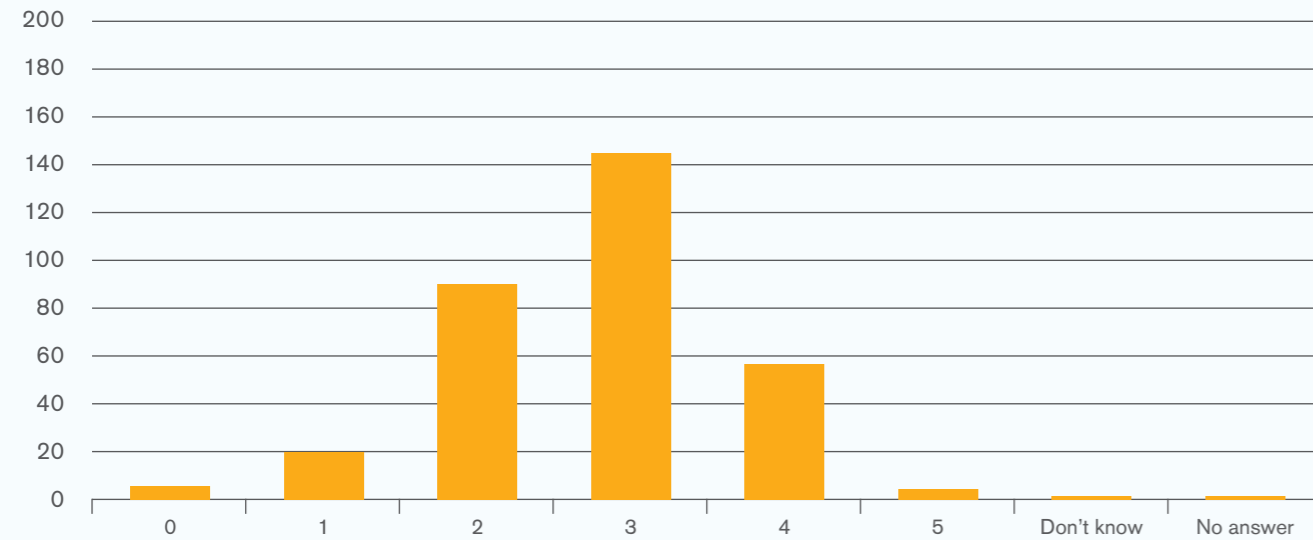
Women answer an average of 2.77 for this, and for men it is 2.69, both above the 2.5 halfway threshold. Again, no real discrepancy in terms of gender. The responses to this question also contradict findings from the FGDs and interviews and the claims of NGOs, who report that women's needs are a core aspect of post-disaster reconstruction. The research team has first-hand experience of witnessing, in several different villages, women stating that conditions for them have improved, and men claiming to be happy when women take a greater role in public decision-making.

However, see the survey question opposite:

Survey: On a scale of 0-5, has the social position of women since the earthquake in your community worsened (0), stayed the same (3) or improved (5)?
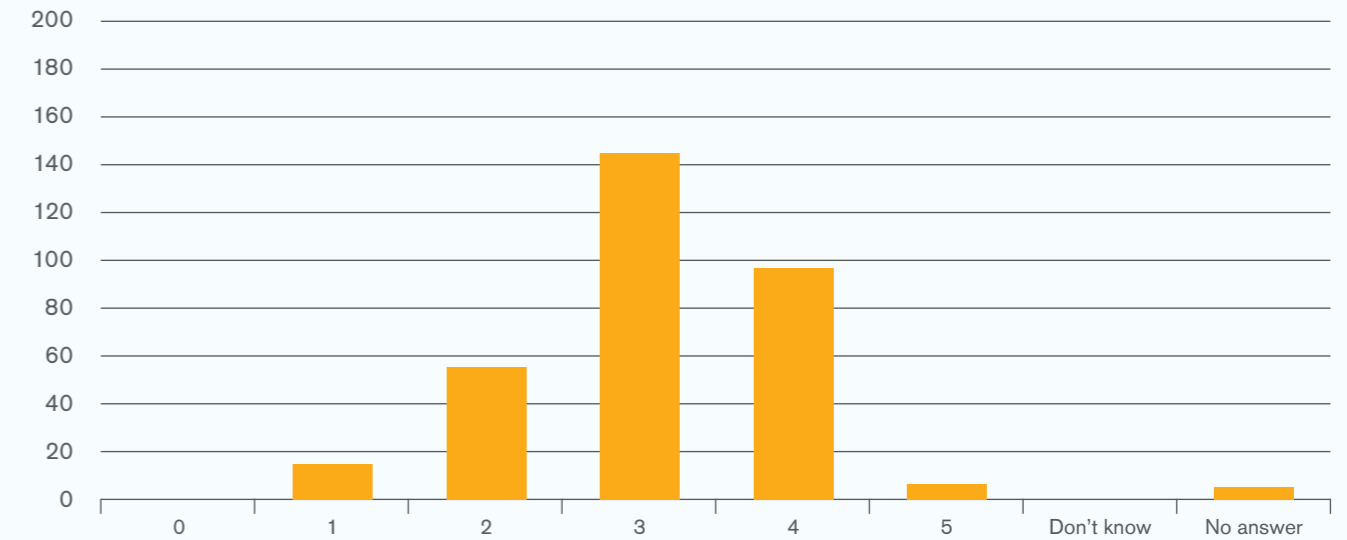
Nobody answered 0. The average response score for marginalised groups is 3.08, and for non-marginalised it is 3.10. When these responses are disaggregated based on gender, there is likewise no significant differences in perceptions between men (3.05 average) and women (3.09 average). Therefore, however the responses are disaggregated, the average answers are all over the threshold of 2.5. There is thus very little difference between men and women's average responses for the survey questions dealing with gender issues in the reconstruction. This is a positive finding, that the survey demonstrates minimal gender-based divisions in terms of respondents' perceptions of the reconstruction processes.

The older people's focus group (FGD 5) provided a rich discussion about the marginalisation and exclusion/inclusion of elderly people. There was criticism of the lack of attention to the needs of elderly people by both the community itself and external organisations: *"Our own people have not listened to elders' voices, and most NGOs didn't either"*. However, there was acknowledgement of the work of HelpAge Nepal and AAN, as well as CSRC: *"Most organisations overlooked elders, except CSRC, HelpAge & AAN"*. There was particular praise for HelpAge: *"Apart from HelpAge, no other organisation asked about the views of elders; For elders' rights, HelpAge identified our needs"*.[27] The source of older people's problems and isolation was seen as migration: *"Our sons & daughters have gone abroad, or to Kathmandu; we feel abandoned if the children emigrate; many lands are*

left barren as people left, and we elders can't farm it". The government was not perceived as paying attention to elderly people's particular needs post-earthquake: *"NGOs did many good things for elders, while the government did nothing"*. And while older people shared in the general enthusiasm for the newly elected local government, expectations were tempered by the fact that: *"No candidates in the recent election were elderly"*. There was also self-criticism and an acknowledgement that inclusion was also dependent on their own self-mobilisation: *"We made mistakes as well. This current Elders' Committee was set up by HelpAge and CSRC, but we failed to keep up monthly meetings. Our Committee was active during the distribution period, but not so much anymore, and it should be. We need to focus on making it active"*. (All quotes from FGD 5).

---

27. Indeed, the concern was that HelpAge was leaving Nepal and it was requested that: *"In your report, you should request HelpAge to return"* (FGD 5).

In sum, a degree of greater inclusion of various marginalised groups, including women, Dalits, Janjati groups and elderly people, has occurred as a result of CLR. However, this would appear to be mainly due to the policies and practices of the (I)NGOs advocating for CLR, rather than a spontaneous response from village communities to the problems faced most severely by marginalised groups in the post-earthquake context. Additionally, there were significant caveats to any progress in inclusivity, with critiques of the practices of community-based bodies, of (I)NGOs and of government. As a final point, due to the alien nature of the concepts, we noted the difficulties in instigating a discussion about marginalisation and inclusion issues in the focus group with displaced Magar people, despite relevant questions being posed in Nepali language. This suggests that the exclusion of severely marginalised groups can be so acute, and their internal focus on coping strategies so intense, that there is limited awareness and understanding of what greater inclusion could entail.

With regard to whether the needs of marginalised people had been addressed, discussions focused on the extent to which (I)NGOs had responded to the particular needs of various groups. The picture was again mixed, with evidence of positive responses along with some dissatisfaction and critiques.

The work of HelpAge with the elderly was generally appreciated, and not just by the older people's group. Discussions with the CRC group and a women's group both highlighted the work of HelpAge. The CRC group stated that: *"HelpAge did good work; they gave 7,500 Rupees for each elderly person"* (FGD 1). Significantly, this was stated in the context where INGOs were being criticised for talking but not doing: *"Mostly the INGOs came to talk, but haven't really done any reconstruction work*; *INGOs listened to local voices, but then didn't do enough concrete work for reconstruction"* (FGD 1). Another voice confirmed such views, while highlighting the work of HelpAge: *"People are disappointed, but HelpAge had some positive inputs"* (FGD 1). Likewise, the women's group gave the example of HelpAge to illustrate assistance to marginalised groups: *"Yes, NGOs prioritise the marginalised, for example, HelpAge gave 1 lakh rupees 'to elderly people"* (FGD 2). This group reported positively that, *"Some NGOs prioritise the marginalised, especially the elderly, Janjatis, single women and Dalits*," but with the caveat that, *"not all of them do"* (FGD 2).

"We told every NGO about our land issues, but no concrete progress has been made."

Similarly, the small and highly marginalised group of displaced Magar people, highly dependent on NGO support, reported mixed experiences. Positively, *"NGOs come and discuss with us, and provide solutions; NGOs give training to people chosen by the community. All of us are marginalised, so NGOs support all our 18 households".* But more negatively, no NGO had addressed their key need of land for rebuilding houses: *"We can't move ahead with reconstruction without land certificates. This is our main problem. We told every NGO about our land issues, but no concrete progress has been made".* [All quotes from FGD 9].
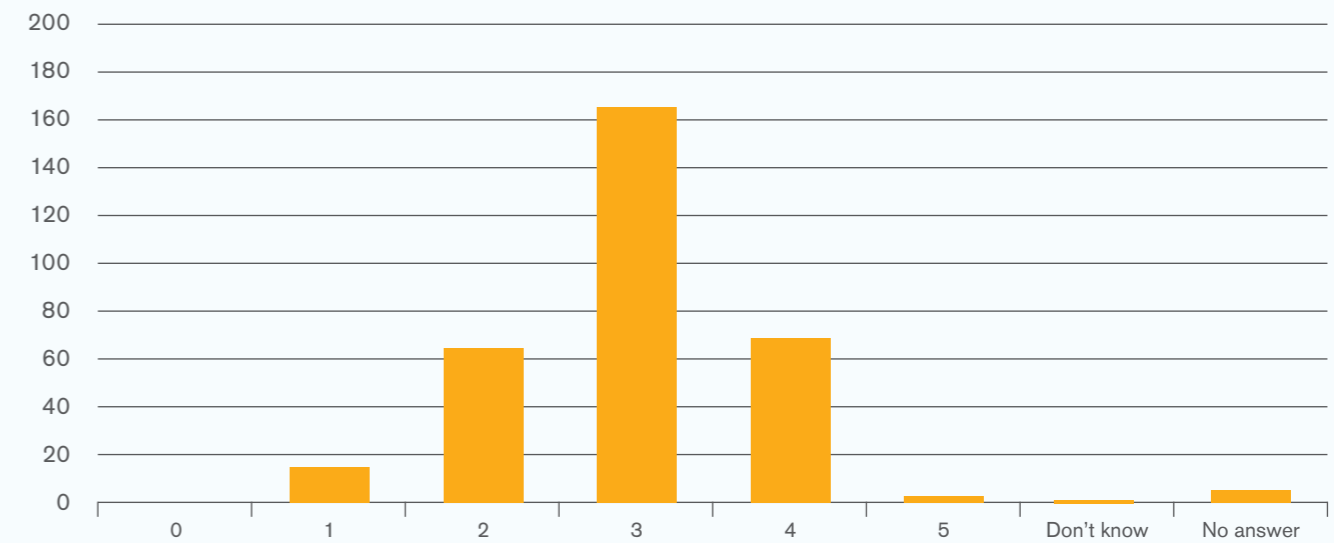
The average answer here from marginalised groups is 2.94 and from non-marginalised groups it is similarly 2.83. Nobody has answered 0. This suggests our respondents feel that the social position of marginalised groups has only very slightly improved since the earthquake. This is slightly more pessimistic than the assertions of elected officials and local development actors like (I)NGOs. It must be remembered that this survey was undertaken in an area which has received significant humanitarian programmes designed explicitly to improve the conditions of socially marginalised groups.

It was also noted that people with disabilities were consistently absent from the list of beneficiaries. This issue was specifically raised in one focus group, with the response that: *"Post-earthquake, the Government gave 300 rupees [US $3] each to them. An NGO gave them cooking utensils, clothes, mats, basic household items, but we don't know the NGO name"* (FGD 2). This suggests limited attention to the issues faced by people with disabilities in the post-disaster context by both government and the NGO sector. In general, the issue of disability was not raised much by our respondents unless mentioned specifically by the research team.

As non-beneficiaries, the youth alliance group provided a good perspective on (I)NGOs's focus on marginalised groups. However, as HelpAge reports, disability-related data was hard to collect, for various reasons. Less than 1%

of HelpAge's existing OPAs have Persons with Disabilities; out of 13,615 older people directly impacted/benefitted by HelpAge's emergency-recovery work in 2016-17, only 19 persons (about 0.14%) were found to be PwDs registered with local village development committee offices under the three disability categories[28] of fully-disabled (Red), highly-disabled (Blue), and partially-disabled (Yellow).

The youth alliance noted that some NGOs arrived before the government in the immediate post-earthquake emergency phase and stated that: *"They did good work"*. The youth group also highlighted the work of 2 (I)NGOs in working with marginalised groups. One non-DEC (I)NGO was said to prioritise single women, elderly people and the economically marginalised for house reconstruction, while another (I)NGO was commended for *"form[ing] committees with*

28. http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2015-09-29/fault-in-the-system.html – disability categories in Nepal

elderly and disabled people as leaders", regarded as an example of "*good accountability"*. However, the youth group also noted that, "*not all NGOs addressed the needs of the marginalised"*, *with some complaints raised against them.* The example was given of one NGO (the name could not be recalled) which *"asked people to dig pits for toilets, but then no toilets were built"*. A positive suggestion was that: "*Youth mobilisers could assess and monitor NGO activities, like a watchdog role. Youth have been left out. They should be mobilised to do monitoring".* (All quotes from FGD 4).

"Youth have been left out. They should be mobilised to do monitoring".
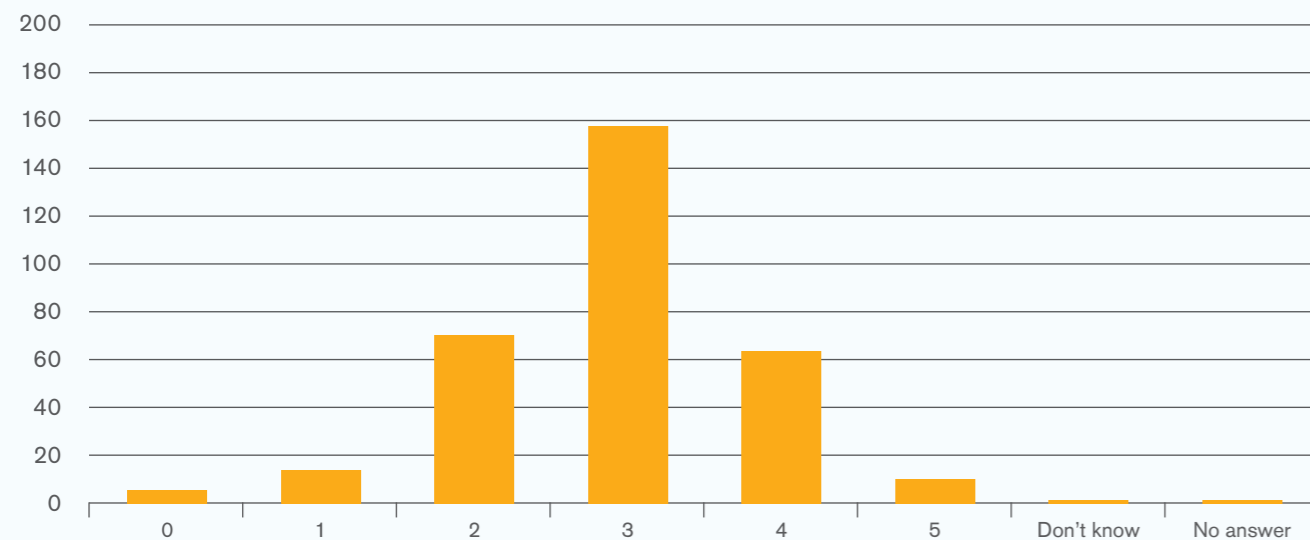
For non-marginalised groups, the average answer here is 2.84, and for marginalised groups it is 2.90. While there is little difference between them, both averages are over 2.5, which slightly supports the claims made by various INGOs that the needs of marginalised groups are now being prioritised.
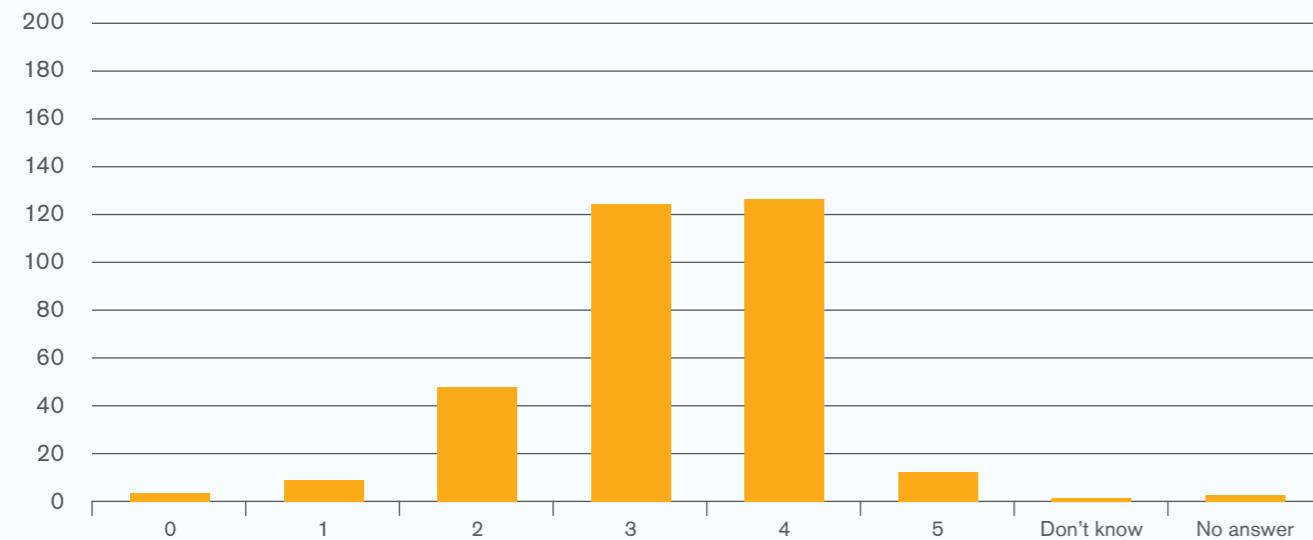
Transparency and accountability of (I)NGOs?

In terms of NGO transparency and accountability to communities, as well as the extent to which communities had opportunities to discuss concerns with NGOs, the picture was again mixed with considerable criticism of NGO practice. One consistent point was that NGOs varied: *"Some NGOs are transparent, and others are not"* (FGD 2).

Those key NGOs that had a longer-term presence were generally perceived as more responsive and transparent than those that were only active in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. In the Dalit community, there was agreement that AAN and CSRC are accountable and transparent. Although this response could be viewed as due to the presence of both organisations in the FGD, good practice did seem to be evident. When asked, 'How did AAN & CSRC take into account your opinions?', the reply was that: *"We had many discussions, came to an agreement to design solutions together and identify beneficiaries together"* (FGD 3). The same community expressed satisfaction with one non-DEC INGO with whom they have an MoU: *"We have an agreement with [them]. After long discussions, we signed an MoU"* (FGD 3). The women's group composed mainly of Dalit and Janjati women also expressed favourable experiences with this INGO, commended not only for its delivery of a water project, but also for the transparent way in which this was undertaken: *"They listened to us about the water project, we like that. The community should be able to feedback to the NGO on the plan. We need regular community meetings to keep us informed. Some NGOs are good at this, other NGOs not so much"* (FGD 7).

Negative views were expressed in the CRC group that: *"INGOs are not transparent. People don't know how they work; Financial transparency is lacking"* (FGD 1). The Dalit community also expressed criticism of NGOs who came and went: *"Most NGOs didn't consult us. Many NGOs do a little work then leave. We feel this is not accountable"* (FGD 3). Criticism tended to focus on the creation of expectations by NGOs, but then failure to deliver. One women's group criticised a well-known INGO, stating that: *"One mobiliser from [an NGO] came daily making promises, but in the end did nothing"* (FGD 7). The other women's focus group gave similar examples of non-delivery: *"At least 3 women got promises from NGOs that they would receive handouts, but the NGOs never reappeared; Some NGOs did needs assessments, but then failed to distribute anything"* (FGD 3). The youth group was also critical of NGOs' lack of consultation and duplication of work: *"A visit by one INGO occurred – but people didn't know about it; NGOs should do different work instead of trying to cover many different sectors… and duplicating work"* (FGD 4). The Yolmo community reported that their relative isolation meant that NGOs had not engaged in consultation with them: *"We have had no opportunity for interaction about NGO progress. We have not been included in any discussions"* (FGD 8). The failure of any NGO to address the displaced Magar community's key problem concerning the need for land for reconstruction also indicated a lack of accountability towards that community: *"Every NGO comes to discuss – we present our problems, but this main problem [of land] remains unresolved"* (FGD 9). The youth group also experienced exclusion and thus a lack of accountability towards them by NGOs: *"Youth have been overlooked. There are no specific youth programmes. The NGOs should have designed youth-oriented activities"* (FGD 4).

Chart: Bar chart with y-axis from 0 to 200 in increments of 20. X-axis categories: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Don't know, No answer. Approximate values: 0 ≈ 3, 1 ≈ 8, 2 ≈ 48, 3 ≈ 124, 4 ≈ 126, 5 ≈ 12, Don't know ≈ 1, No answer ≈ 2.
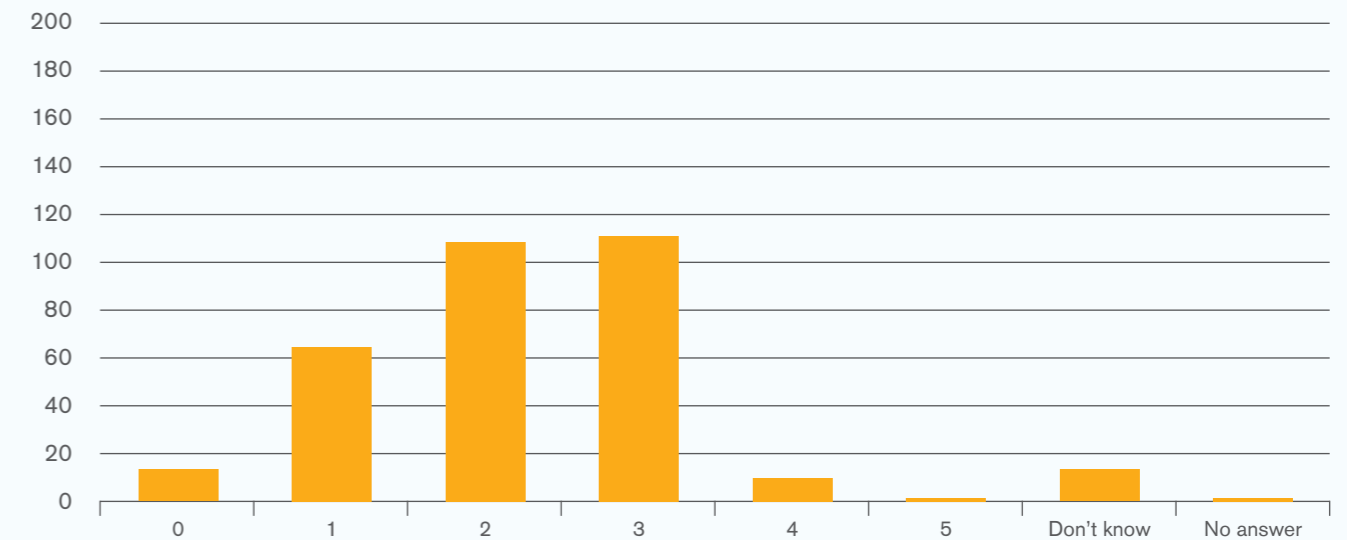
This is the highest average set of survey responses. Non-marginalised groups have an average of 3.42 and similarly the marginalised groups' average is 3.24. This suggests both groups express some level of satisfaction with the INGOs' reconstruction programming, considerably more than with local government. There is however also a strong possibility that respondents are unwilling to express dissatisfaction with NGO activities, when the field researchers are themselves from NGOs.

Accountability of government?

The FGDs were held immediately after the first round of local government elections held in May 2017, and thus before the new local government system had been established. Therefore, participants' experiences and perceptions of government accountability and transparency pertained to the old system of unelected officials at VDC and district level. Although our FGDs were now located in one new rural municipality and one new municipality, they were located in several old VDCs. Two questions were asked concerning relations with government: the accountability of government to the community along with the transparency of its operations; and the mechanisms for communities to communicate with government. The views of focus group participants were predominantly negative regarding government accountability and transparency, with means of communication said to be limited and difficult.

Only in one focus group, that of Dalit and Janjati women, was a more positive view of government expressed, and this seemed mainly due to a particular VDC Secretary and the good relations he maintained with the community. One participant stated: *"We had good relations with local VDC representatives, especially the Secretary. He listened to us…. But that was before this recent local election"*. This view was endorsed by another participant who stated: *"the VDC Secretary used to call us for meetings to keep us informed. We couldn't always attend. But when we did, it was good"*. Additionally, this focus group provided a rare positive comment about the NRA and their team of engineers: *"Government engineers are in the field now, advising us"*. [All quotes FGD 7].

Chart: Bar chart with y-axis from 0 to 200 in increments of 20. X-axis categories: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Don't know, No answer. Approximate values: 0 ≈ 14, 1 ≈ 64, 2 ≈ 108, 3 ≈ 110, 4 ≈ 9, 5 ≈ 1, Don't know ≈ 13, No answer ≈ 1.
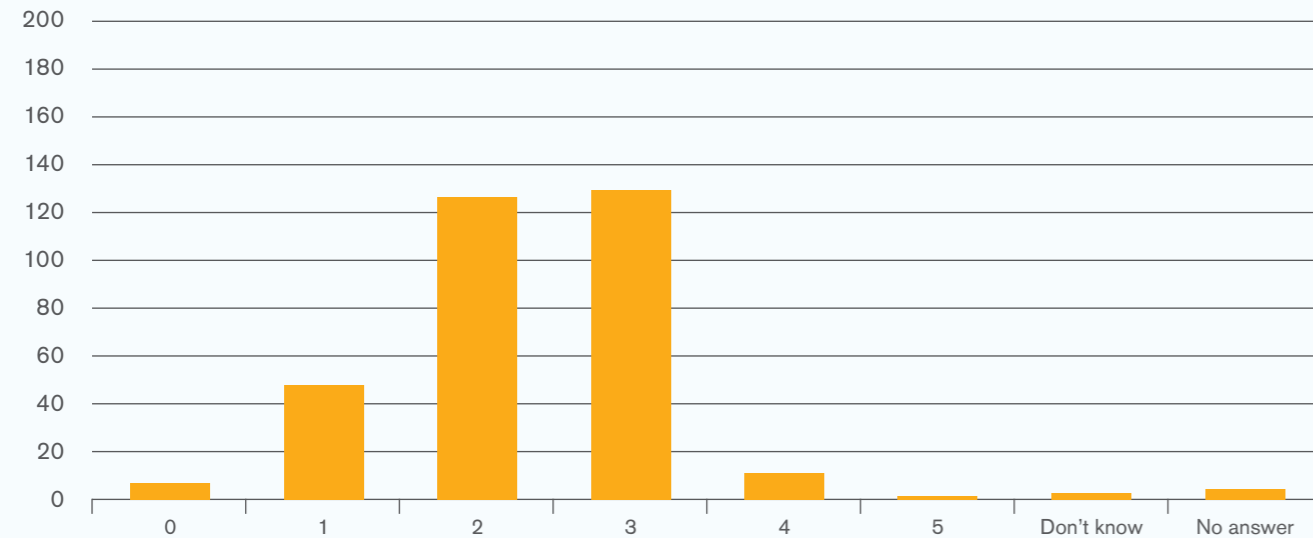
The overall average here is 2.15, suggesting low levels of satisfaction with the VDCs' activities. However, for marginalised groups the average is 2.19, and for non-marginalised it is 1.77. Both these figures are very low, but seem to indicate that marginalised people consider the local government to consult and coordinate *more* than non-marginalised people do.

Four survey questions relate to people's perception of local government. In general, we find average responses in this category to be below the mean of 2.5, suggesting that the respondents are in general dissatisfied with government actions.

Overall, however, the view of government accountability was negative, at times quite bluntly so. In response to the question of how much the government has been accountable, one youth group participant answered *"Zero"* while another stated *"Not at all"* [FGD 4]. Most comments pertained to the VDC, as the main unit in the previous local government system. The CRC group stated that: *"The VDC is not very accountable"* and that there was a *"problem of access to the VDC funds"* [FGD 1]. A number of FGDs questioned VDCs' commitment to inclusiveness and their accountability to marginalised groups. For example, one women's group questioned the VDC's use of funds meant to be earmarked for women and children: *"The VDC had a separate budget for women and children, but they used it to construct a road. When challenged they said that women and children would use the road too. But this is not a good rationale"* [FGD 2]. The Dalit group also highlighted issues of exclusion: *"Dalit representatives were not included in the VDC Council despite government grant provisions"* [FGD 3]. This was echoed by a female member of the Land Rights Forum, who stated that: *"Marginalised people's voices were not heard by the local government. VDC decisions were not passed onto village people"* [FGD 6].

Lack of information and transparency were also highlighted by various focus groups. The older people's group stated that: *"We don't get information from the VDC about elder programmes, funds and opportunities; we don't know enough about funds and projects from VDC"* [FGD 5]. Interestingly the youth group confirmed such problems for elderly people when making a wider point: *"There is a lack of information from the VDC and coordination is weak. For instance, many elderly people know nothing about what they are entitled to, about what they can receive"* [FGD 7]. The Yolmo group also indicated limitations with financial information: *"There is an annual meeting – a public hearing on income and expenditure. But otherwise we get no information from government on the budget or how it is spent"* [FGD 8]. In terms of challenging the lack of accountability at VDC level, it was noted by the women's group that there was a complaints procedure, however: *"You have to go to the VDC in person and fill in a form to make a complaint. So the illiterate cannot do this"* [FGD 2].

Bar chart with y-axis from 0 to 200 (increments of 20). X-axis categories: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Don't know, No answer.
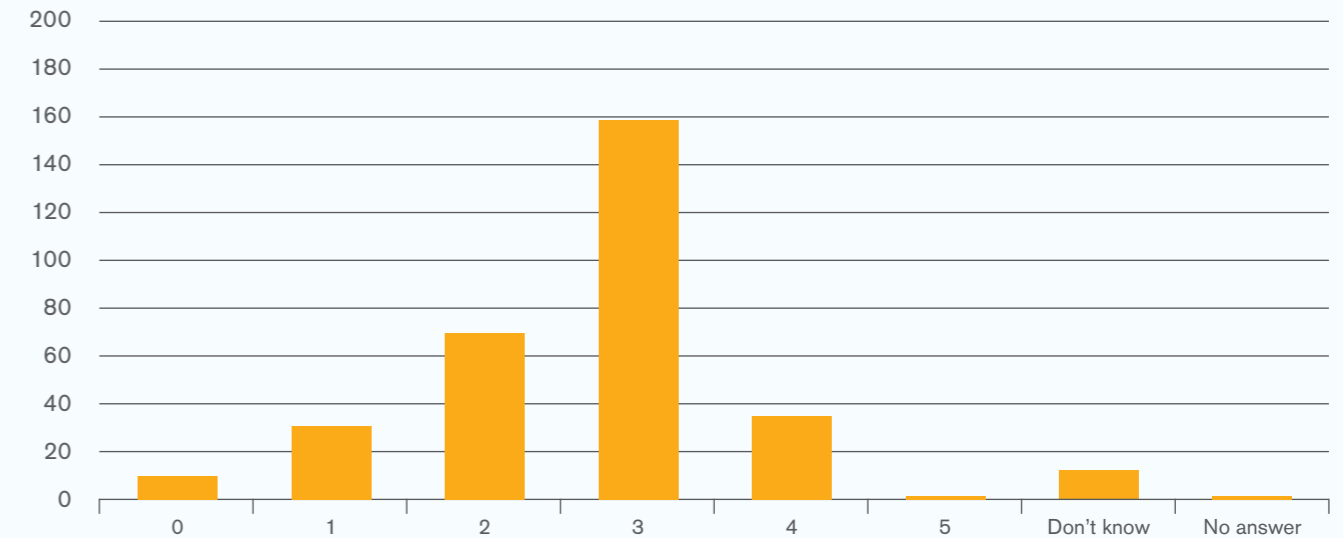
The average response here is 2.34, with no significant difference between the average responses of marginalised or non-marginalised groups in terms of how well they consider that the government understands the community's reconstruction needs. There is likewise insignificant gender variation.

Channels of communication with the VDC were also limited. The older people's group stated that: *"There is no real mechanism to communicate with the VDC"* [FGD 5]. The women's group noted that to express your needs and request assistance, you had *"to ask VDC officials"* [FGD 2], presumably by face-to-face interaction at the office. CRC group participants stated that: *"Local people lack a mechanism to contact the local government, they don't have access";* and *"it's hard to get heard"* [FGD 1]. Similarly, the Yolmo group highlighted that: *"We have no regular meetings with the VDC and the multi-party representatives. So, it's hard for us to communicate"* [FGD 8]. This lack of access by local people to local government structures was not seen simply as a technical problem pertaining to institutional mechanisms, but one that concerned issues of access, power and influence, with access mainly restricted to political parties and elite groups. As a participant in the women's group stated: *"Access and power to meet the VDC is the issue here"* [FGD 2]. Another female voice from the Land Rights Forum similarly noted that: *"The VDC involved politicians and well-connected people"* [FGD 6], again

indicating the lack of access for local, marginalised groups, and domination of the old VDC structures by the political parties, despite the lack of elections in the old system.

The dominant influence of local politicians and the relative exclusion of local people's voices was also confirmed by the older people's group, stating: *"We need elder representation at the VDC, not just politicians"* [FGD 5]. The extent to which this situation will change in the new local government system, following the local elections, can only be assessed at a later time. However, two points of concern arose. First, in the older people's group, it was noted that: *"No candidates in the recent election were elderly"* [FGD 5]. Second, one voice from the local Land Rights Forum was already raising questions of accountability and transparency at the newly created Ward level, giving the example of the newly elected official (the Ward Chair) having distributed materials meant for the whole Ward *"to nearby his own home"*. In his view this indicated that: *"The new local government is still not transparent, and our voices are still not being listened to"* [FGD 6].

Bar chart with y-axis from 0 to 200 (increments of 20). X-axis categories: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Don't know, No answer.
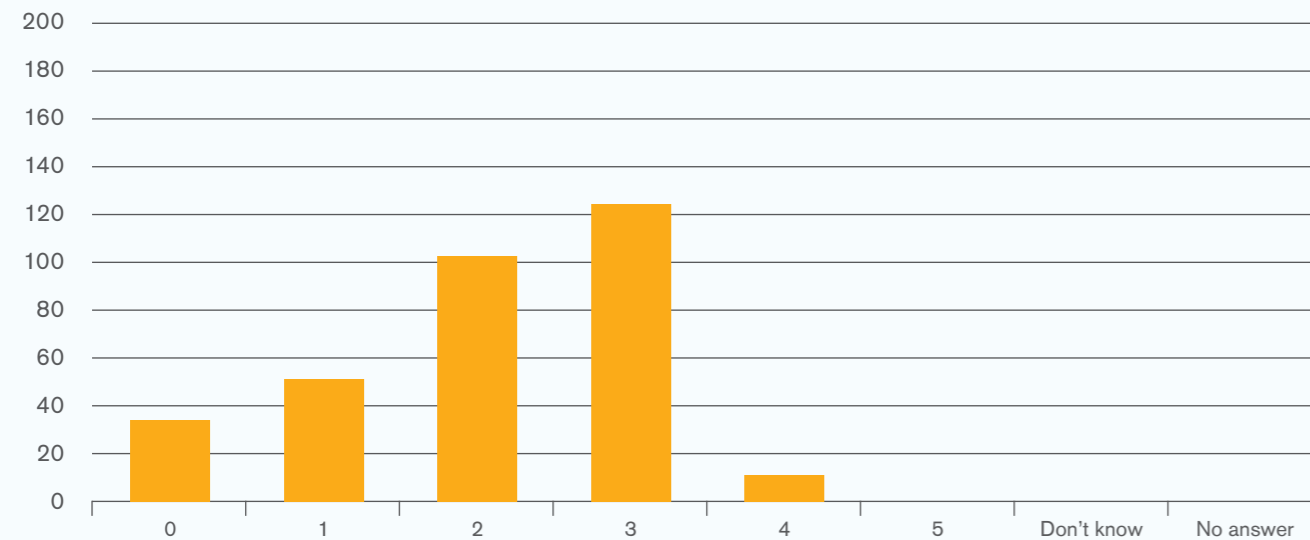
For non-marginalised groups, the average answer here is 3.03. For all marginalised groups, the average is 2.57. Non-marginalised groups thus report experiencing slightly less difficulty in communicating with local government, which may indicate higher levels of education or access.

Experiences with central government were not positive, with complaints focusing on the role of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and their engineers in the field. A youth group participant noted that: *"A government official came to record the destruction, and promised compensation. But so far, no compensation has come"* [FGD 4]. The women's group criticised the disbursal of a 4000 rupees' grant to children under-5 from the government's Children's Welfare funds, complaining that: *"Many children's names were lost, and so the government refused to distribute. Some received the assistance, but not all"* [FGD 2]. As a marginalised group in an inaccessible mountainous area, the Yolmo group had faced particular problems in communicating with central government agencies and accessing compensation through official processes: *"Sometimes we face unreasonable problems from government, for example concerning the grant money. The government requests lots of documentation, the process is very bureaucratic. We have to go to the bank multiple times, a difficult process* (given their remote location). *We are not sure that we will obtain the grant. The government demands on us are unrealistic, we can't do it".* [FGD 8].

"Local people lack a mechanism to contact the local government, they don't have access."

9. Citizen-Government Engagement

Note that nobody has responded 5 for this question and the average response disaggregates to 1.58 for non-marginalised, and 2.14 for marginalised groups, which again seems to indicate that marginalised people tend to have a less unfavourable opinion of what reconstruction the government has achieved. However, both sets of answers are low overall.

The main critique of central government policy and practice concerned the rebuilding of houses and the difficulties faced in meeting the post-earthquake building regulations. The CRC group stated that: *"Government criteria are unclear; We receive messages about building regulations, for example, sometimes materials are approved, and then not approved; NRA Building codes are hard to follow, and more expensive to comply with"* (FGD 1). The appropriateness of the specified NRA house designs was also questioned, both from a safety viewpoint and a cultural perspective: *"We know our government wants safe houses, but our houses are safe enough. Houses should be assessed individually, not just on a checklist. This is also destroying our culture"* [FGD 6]. Another participant from the Land Rights Forum was critical of the capacity of the NRA technicians: *"The NRA Engineers check the walls only and lack practical experience. They aren't real engineers – they only have a checklist, no real technical analysis is done. They only tick boxes on a form"* [FGD 6]. The Yolmo group had not been visited by NRA engineers or received any advice on earthquake resilient rebuilding: *"Government technicians have not visited to talk about safe reconstruction, or to support us on how to reconstruct"* [FGD 8].

On occasions, comparison was made between government and NGO practice in terms of accountability and transparency, with a more favourable assessment of NGOs. The youth group stated that: *"If we complain, the government stays mute, not answerable. But if we complain to NGOs, they give a response"* [FGD 4]. The women's group also noted, in circumstances where grants to under-5 children had been refused due to missing paperwork, that: *"NGOs would not have done this"* [FGD 2].

To be effective, community-led reconstruction requires engagement with government, who are ultimately responsible for reconstruction, and we noted above that 'critical and constructive engagement with government' was a stated aim of AAN's CLR programme. In addressing our research question, we also highlighted at the outset that a key factor for the success of CLR is democratic government, especially at local level, one that is responsive and downwardly accountable to local citizens, inclusive of relatively poor and marginalised groups. In the previous section, we examined the experiences and abilities of local people and community groups in engaging with government, and emphasised the difficulties and limitations in doing so.

In this section, our focus turns to examining how local government interacted with local citizens in the reconstruction effort, and ways in which citizen-government engagement can be made more effective. In particular we focus on the extent to which such engagement has entailed the inclusion of women's voices and those of marginalised groups, and the degree of local government transparency and accountability to all citizens. Intriguingly, investigation of these questions has taken place in the context of a major restructuring of local government in Nepal, along with a radical devolution of powers, changes that occurred exactly at the time of this research. Therefore, we commence by outlining the new local government system under Nepal's new federal constitution and the role of local government in reconstruction. We then consider the key issues of: the inclusion of marginalised groups; women's leadership; government transparency and accountability to citizens. Finally, we look at the interaction of local government with (I)NGOs, and examine questions of (I)NGO accountability to government. Discussions here are all based on interviews undertaken with local government elected politicians and officials in late October 2017.

New Local Government System under Federal Constitution

The first local government elections for 20 years were held in Nepal in May 2017 and represented the first stage of implementation of the new Constitution of Nepal, enacted in September 2015. This involves a major shift from a unitary state to a federal state with three levels of government – federal (or national), provincial and local. The new federal constitution also involves radical decentralisation, with a restructuring of local government and the devolution of significant new powers and functions. The old structure of Village Development Committees (VDCs) has been abolished and replaced with municipalities (Nagarpalika) and rural municipalities (Gaunpalika), now the core local government unit in peri-urban and rural areas. The (rural) municipalities cover a larger geographical area and the Constitution provides them with 22 exclusive powers and functions, known as the 22 exclusive rights, including education, basic health, water and sanitation, agriculture, local roads and disaster management. The (rural) municipalities are sub-divided into a number of wards, similar in size to the old VDC. The political structure in municipalities (Nagarpalika) and rural municipalities (Gaunpalika) is identical. They are composed of an elected mayor and deputy mayor (municipality) or an elected chair and vice chair (rural municipality), both full-time positions, with one having to be a woman. Each ward has a directly elected Chair, also a full-time position, and 4 Ward members, who form the Ward Committee. Elected ward members include two reserved seats for a women's representative and a Dalit women's representative. At the administrative level, each (rural) municipality has a Municipal Secretary, while each Ward has a Ward Secretary, many of whom had previously been VDC Secretaries under the old system.

The citizen-government element of CLR in post-earthquake Nepal has been complicated by the substantial changes in local government structures, yet the re-establishment of democratic local government with very significant devolved powers also entails new opportunities for constructive engagement. In order to examine this potential, we undertook interviews with elected politicians and government officials in Melamchi municipality and Helambu rural municipality and in all the wards in which CSRC is engaged in CLRP activities with AAN and HAN, that is one ward in Melamchi municipality and 5 wards in Helambu rural municipality.

Local Government Role in Reconstruction

Interviews with the newly elected politicians at municipal level (Deputy Mayor of Melamchi municipality and the Chair of Helambu rural municipality) indicated, unsurprisingly, that housing reconstruction was the number one priority. The Deputy Mayor noted that the number of re-built houses was very low and that the key role of the municipality was to facilitate house reconstruction, as well as the re-building of schools and health facilities. The Chair of Helambu rural municipality stated that housing reconstruction had been his key manifesto issue in the election campaign and had been his major priority since coming to office. Both also indicated a wider understanding of reconstruction, beyond physical reconstruction to social and cultural issues. The Melamchi Deputy Mayor noted that reconstructing social values was also necessary by *"removing the bad and replacing with a new mentality"*,[29] although the specifics of this remained undefined.

The Helambu Chairperson was concerned that reconstruction should preserve the local Yolmo culture, including through housing design. He noted that: *"Our culture in Helambu is different and the [NRA's] 17 designs are not suitable for Yolmo culture as they have not been culturally adapted"*.[30] He claimed to have discussed this with local communities and the NRA, leading to approval from the NRA of a new Yolmo community design. The Helambu Chairperson also other ways in which he had

successfully advocated for his constituents, including marginalised people, with central government in relation to housing reconstruction since coming to power. First, he had tackled the omission of some local people, often the most marginalised, from central government's beneficiary list of those eligible for the cash grant for home reconstruction. Second, a geological survey had been completed in vulnerable areas of Helambu, with 2 settlements identified as high risk and in need of relocation.

The discussions at Ward level, with five Ward Chairs, several elected members and four Ward Secretaries, emphasised similar themes and issues. Their role in reconstruction mainly focused on housing and other elements of physical reconstruction – schools, health posts, water supplies and government buildings. Ward Committees have also been involved in assisting those earthquake victims omitted from beneficiary lists for the reconstruction cash grant, a problem that has affected marginalised and vulnerable groups in particular. Problems arose, for instance, for landless groups, lacking a land certificate, and for women where land was in the name of absent or deceased men, with inclusion on beneficiary lists requiring liaison with district-level bodies.[31] One Ward Chair stated that: *"Marginalised groups, such as single women and elderly, are left off beneficiary lists. We need to identify these individuals, then give their names to District Coordinating Committee for inclusion"*.[32]

Inclusion of Marginalised Groups

While a focus of newly elected representatives has been identification of earthquake victims who had been omitted from central government's beneficiary list for the cash grant, often the most marginalised in society, to what extent has the stated intent to address the general needs of marginalised groups been realised in practice in the first 6 months of the new structures being established?

The deputy mayor of Melamchi municipality was honest in acknowledging that addressing the needs of marginalised groups had *"not yet happened"*.[33] In contrast, at Ward level in Melamchi, strong awareness of marginalised groups was shown, noting that their needs went beyond reconstruction to include: sustainable incomes; safe land for those in vulnerable locations; education and access to livelihood opportunities. The Ward Chair also indicated that there are provisions for marginalised groups in the ward and municipal budgets – 10% each to children, women and Dalits – though disbursements had not yet commenced.[34] A focus on marginalised groups in reconstruction appeared to be confirmed by the Ward Secretary, stating that: *"We prioritise single women, landless people and Dalits for household reconstruction, and we recommend them to Line Agencies too",* although it was less apparent what this actually meant in practice.[35]

Findings were similar in Helambu Rural Municipality. Some awareness of the general needs and associated problems of marginalised groups was indicated, but with little practical action to date to address such needs, except for greater inclusion on beneficiary lists. One disappointing aspect was that the elected representatives of marginalised groups, notably Dalit women's representatives, were often passive in interviews and at times unable to answer questions. One exception was a vocal and articulate woman in the Ward 4 interview, although interestingly she was a representative from the Dalit community on the Assembly of Helambu Rural Municipality, and therefore not a political party elected representative.

Women's Leadership

To what extent has local government encouraged women's leadership both in reconstruction and other activities, and responded to the key demands that have come from women's involvement in CLR activities? We address this by considering the composition of local government, as well as local government's promotion of women's leadership in the community.

The Constitution has promoted women's political participation in local government through two reserved seats for women at Ward level, including a Dalit women's representative, and at (rural) municipality level where either the mayor or deputy mayor or chair or vice-chair must be a woman. Nonetheless, male dominance in local government institutions remains prevalent. The Mayor of Melamchi Municipality and the Chair of Helambu Rural Municipality are both men, with women as their deputies. All six Ward Chairs were men, and all but one Ward Secretaries were men. The one female Ward Secretary was the only one in the 7 wards of Helambu Rural Municipality. While elected female representatives attended some of the Ward-level interviews, they were generally less forthcoming than the men in answering questions. This issue of women's capacity in local government was raised in one interview with a Ward Secretary, with the lack of education for many rural women perceived as a crucial problem:

"Our Constitution grants positions for women but there have been no real results from this provision yet. Most rural women are elected to positions they can't fulfil. They don't have enough education. Despite the Constitution, there is a lack of capacity, even when elected. The Mayor leads, and women sign papers, but that's not leadership".[36]

29. Interview Deputy Mayor, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
30. Interview Chair, Helambu Rural Municipality, 27.10.17
31. Another category of people adversely affected were those whose land remains in their forefather's name and has not been transferred legally to the current generation. As the possession of a land certificate was made compulsory by the NRA to be a beneficiary of a cash grant, then many people have found themselves excluded from the beneficiary list.
32. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 6 HRM, 26.10.17

33. Interview Deputy Mayor, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
34. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no 6, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
35. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no 6, Melamchi municipality, 25.10.17
36. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17

In terms of local government's own promotion of women's leadership, some good intentions were expressed but few concrete activities to date. A more positive outlook was expressed in Ward 4 by the Chair and by two female elected representatives: *"After the main election, most women are interested in leadership"*;[37] *"Community women are excited to be elected, to lead development works".*[38] The other female representative noted the challenges – *"Even now, women are confined in household activities. They don't participate much"* – but was positive about ongoing processes: *"By going to forums and committees, women become self-aware and take the lead. We learn a lot".*[39]

It appears that there is some cross-over and synergy in the processes of women's leadership through CLR activities and women's new role as elected representatives. However, significant obstacles to effective participation remain.

"Community women are excited to be elected, to lead development works."

Local Government Transparency

The focus group interviews and the perception survey data indicate a lack of transparency and information provision in the old VDC-based local government system. Has the new system of elected representation led to greater transparency?

When asked about means of communication with local citizens about reconstruction activities, local politicians and government officials highlighted several common mechanisms through which information was transmitted to citizens:

- Ward members

- Posters in public places

- Local FM radio

- Mobile phone communication, especially between elected members and community leaders

- Public meetings

- Social mobilisers and (I)NGO staff

- Complaint boxes in various public places

- Facebook page, then young people share information with older people

It would appear that good intent is there within the new democratic structures to disseminate relevant information. However, given the newness of the new local government system, it is not possible to state whether such good intentions have been realised in practice or not.

The politicians and officials were less clear, however, when it came to answering the question about processes for local people to communicate their needs to local government, essential if community-led reconstruction is to influence government reconstruction efforts. In ten interviews, almost all said that this was through 'ward members, either by phone or by visiting the Ward office'. One stated that: *"We have no official mechanisms or procedures, but we collect information through ward members and the public coming to our office".*[40] For those geographically remote communities, there is reliance on access to a mobile phone: *"People near roads, they come directly to the Ward office. For remote people, they use phones, or the neighbour's phone"*,[41] with ward members said to put their phone numbers in public places.[42] At municipal level, the intention was stated *"to organize a major public interaction programme where the public will share their problems directly with the mayor and vice versa"*,[43] but this had not yet happened. One Ward Chair noted the importance of collective mobilisation for policy influence, and the historical success of such movements in Nepal: *"Local people can influence local reconstruction efforts if they come in groups rather than individually and complain, because a group can have an impact on decision-making as movements and campaigns have done in our political history".*[44]

In terms of engagement with local organised groups, notably CRCs, local women's rights forums, land rights forums, Dalit groups and older people's associations, responses from local politicians and officials were mixed. At the municipal level, some limited interaction at mayoral level was reported, notably with the Land Rights Forum concerning Guthi[45]

issues: *"We have had meetings with the land rights forum mostly for Guthi related problems and as a result these victims can reconstruct their homes on Guthi land with the cash grant being provided by government".*[46] But no formal meetings had been held with other groups. At Ward level in Melamchi municipality, there seemed to be considerable interaction and engagement, with the Ward Chair stating:

"I am aware of these reconstruction committees, women forums, Dalit groups in my ward and I also attend their meetings. Similarly, I have meetings with them in my office as well as focusing on identifying their problems and the ward office's role in solving them".[47] However, the Ward Secretary reported rather differently that he only had coordination with CRCs and that: *"The Land Rights Forum and Women Rights Forum don't coordinate with me, nor do the Old People's Association".*[48]

The engagement in this one Ward in Melamchi municipality was more positive than found in any Ward in Helambu rural municipality. Here there was little interaction with local social movements involved in CLR activities, nor with CRCs who were generally regarded as inactive. In Ward 5, some meetings had been held with local rights groups and CRCs, but without positive outcomes. The Ward Secretary stated that: *"LRF and women's alliance have meetings with us, but despite this no major achievement has yielded to date".*[49] Similarly, the Ward Chair noted negatively that: *"We have had interaction meetings with CRCs, but they are not working. Mobilisation is weak… They don't fulfil roles and responsibilities".*[50] In Ward 2, the Chair was aware of CRCs, WRF, and LRF, but feels that: *"They exist in name only – no real results have been produced".*[51] In Ward 6, the Chair stated that he had never met local rights groups as *"They have not asked to meet me".*[52] He was also unaware of what CRCs in the Ward were doing, as were the three other elected members present. In Ward 1, the Ward Secretary

37. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no.4 HRM, 25.10.17
38. Interview Dalit woman elected member, Ward no.4 HRM, 25.10.17
39. Interview female elected member, Ward no.4 HRM, 25.10.17

40. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17
41. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17
42. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 6, Melamchi Municipality, 24.10.17
43. Interview Deputy Mayor, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
44. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 6, Melamchi Municipality, 24.10.17
45. A traditional form of land ownership, particularly for religious and cultural sites
46. Interview Deputy Mayor, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
47. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no 6, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
48. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no 6, Melamchi municipality, 25.10.17
49. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17
50. Interview Ward Chair and members, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17
51. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no.2 HRM, 27.10.17
52. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 6 HRM, 26.10.17

states that: *"CRCs are not active; but LRF and women's rights groups are more active"*.[53] He had interacted with CRCs before elections (as the VDC Secretary), but not post-elections. The lack of engagement was confirmed in the interview with elected Ward members, who stated that they had: *"heard of the CRC, WRF, LRF, but have had no contact with any of them, and don't even know any members of these organisations"*.[54]

A more positive outcome was reported in a meeting with the local Dalit community from having a reserved seat in all Wards for a Dalit woman representative, which appeared successful in improving two-way communication between Dalits and local government, at least in this instance. One Dalit woman stated that: *"Previously, community members did not know about VDC plans, budgets and programmes, but now they have their elected representatives who inform communities about the Ward plans and so on. The Dalit community now knows more about what is happening"*, and their elected representative can also take their views to the Ward office.[55]

Notwithstanding this example, post-elections, there has been limited engagement by newly elected local government members with local social movements and community groups, especially in Helambu rural municipality, with local politicians at times displaying a rather negative disposition towards such groups. In addition, there had been little interaction with CRCs, with almost a consensus that CRCs were not active and mainly existed in name only. Clearly, this lack of engagement by local government with community groups impacts negatively on the effectiveness of CLR, with government needing to open up channels by which local groups can communicate with them, and in turn local groups making greater efforts to engage with elected representatives and local officials.

"The Dalit community now knows more about what is happening."

Local Government Accountability

It is recalled that, in the community-level focus group discussions held immediately before the new local government system was established, the views of participants were predominantly negative regarding the accountability of local government, notably concerning the old VDC and district level structures. To what extent has the new democratic local government system, inclusive of the decentralisation of powers, introduced greater accountability? Here we review the perspectives of local government politicians and officials themselves, and then the views of local social movements.

In answer to the question, "are you mainly accountable to higher government bodies or downwardly accountable to local citizens", there was a consensus among local politicians and officials, perhaps unsurprisingly, that they were accountable to local people. Such views were supported by enthusiasm about local government having been brought closer to the people, and that local government now had responsibility for overall local development, including reconstruction. The Melamchi municipality Deputy Mayor expressed it simply: *"We are accountable to the community and the community will make us accountable to them"*.[56] A Ward Chair was similarly optimistic about the new closeness between locally elected representatives and citizens, and the positive impact on accountability of holding regular elections: *"We work and live with our citizens, we are accountable to them. If I do good work for them, they will vote for me"*.[57]

Yet, there was also clear awareness of the problems associated with such a radical re-structuring and decentralisation of powers and responsibilities to local elected representatives, at least in the short-term transition period. Several interviewees highlighted the two-fold problem of a lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities by newly elected representatives and a lack of guidance from central government. One Ward Chair stated that:

"Many rights have been provided [to local government] but new elected members are unaware of these. They need capacity-building and more information".[58] A Ward Secretary was of the view that: *"We have been given 22 exclusive rights but no guidelines, therefore decentralisation is in name only"*.[59] But notwithstanding these initial problems, the feeling among local politicians and officials was positive, with an expectation that local government would work more closely with, and be more accountable to, local people, including in reconstruction efforts: *"We are excited and happy to see change"*.[60]

Given the criticisms of government, especially of the old VDCs, that emerged from the focus group discussions undertaken in the first phase of fieldwork, we sought the views of local social movements on the new local government system and the changes it has introduced.[61] Views were mixed, but some comments indicated that the new Municipal and Ward level authorities have not (yet) fulfilled many of their stated intentions. The WRF group reported that the Ward Chair doesn't meet them anymore, he only did so before the elections.[62] Another WRF member said: *"We are happy with NGOs. But we can't say the same about the Rural Municipality"*. It was stated that election promises had included addressing women's problems, and building good schools, but *"neither of these has happened"*.[63] The elected Dalit woman member herself acknowledged that, *"The problem with the Ward Committee is that there is no clear plan, and nothing has happened yet"*, though she remained hopeful that *"the local government will respond to Dalit needs"*. However, other Dalit community members at the meeting did not share this optimism: *"From experience, we know that the government system does not deliver"*.[64] It is clear that new local governments have considerable work to do to gain the confidence of local citizens in terms of their accountability.

---

53. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no. 1 HRM, 27.10.17
54. Interview elected Ward members, Ward no. 1 HRM, 27.10.17
55. Group discussion with Dalit Association and LRF, Chitre Dalit Tol, Ward no.2, HRM, 27.10.17

56. Interview Deputy Mayor, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
57. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no.2 HRM, 27.10.17 58.   Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17
59. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no 6, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
60. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no.4 HRM, 25.10.17
61. Two group discussions were held in Helambu Rural Municipality in late October 2017 with representatives from the local Women's Rights Forum and the Older Peoples Association in one meeting and with the Dalit community and Land Rights Forum in the other.
62. Group discussion with WRF and OPA, Ichok, Ward no.1, HRM, 28.10.17
63. Group discussion with WRF and OPA, Ichok, Ward no.1, HRM, 28.10.17
64. Group discussion with Dalit Association and LRF, Chitre Dalit Tol, Ward no.2, HRM, 27.10.17

Accountability of (I)NGOs

In terms of our research question concerning 'improved accountability to beneficiaries', there are different lines of accountability. In the previous section, we addressed the accountability of local government to local citizens, elsewhere we have considered the accountability of (I)NGOs to local disaster-affected communities. A third line of accountability is that of (I)NGOs to government, given that the state represents the legal authority with ultimate responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens. What was the government view of (I)NGO accountability both to the beneficiaries that they worked with as well as to itself as public authority?

Across different levels of government and among different stakeholders, the consensus is that INGOs and NGOs (the terms are used interchangeably) have had a positive impact and their presence was welcomed. The main complaints are around coordination, duplication and not fulfilling promises to communities or local authorities. Several government respondents referred to the wide and ambitious mandates of many humanitarian actors, with recommendations that these should be made more modest and achievable, with more of a focus on physical reconstruction, especially of houses. One Dalit woman Ward member stated that: *"NGOs should support physical housing reconstruction rather than other work… focus on one settlement at a time and improve water, houses, livelihoods etc, instead of disbursing the budget in small projects"*.[65] Similarly, the Chair of Helambu Rural Municipality states: *"NGOs should have moved onto reconstruction instead of disbursing resources... then they could have moved onto livelihoods. But they were spread too thin"*.[66] Likewise, the Ward 2 Chair suggests: *"NGOs should stay within their capacity and focus on physical reconstruction"*.[67] The Deputy Mayor of Melamchi Municipality felt that more co-ordination by NGOs with the municipal authorities was needed: *"If the NGOs identified marginalised people and communicated to the Municipality, then we could achieve 100%"*.[68]

One clear demand was that NGOs should be more transparent and accountable to municipal authorities. This view was expressed forthrightly by Ward Secretaries. One stated that: *"INGOs should do bilateral agreements at Ward level, stating their activities, budgets, duration"*, not only at central or district level.[69] Another complained that: *"Some NGOs come to work in the Ward without prior authorisation and are not accountable to the community they are working with"*.[70] The officials in this Ward (no.4) became stricter after one NGO distributed materials without getting approval. Commitments by humanitarian agencies need to be adhered to, to avoid examples like one Nepali NGO that promised CGI sheets for marginalised communities if they received a request letter and then failed to distribute any CGI sheets.

Other examples of unsatisfactory practice are given. The Chair of Helambu Rural Municipality refers to NGOs who make agreements, but then don't return. The Ward 6 Chair claims that: *"NGOs may come into the Municipality without providing prior information or getting approval. This can lead to duplication of NGO efforts"*.[71] The Ward 4 Chair says: *"INGOs work short term, but we need long term programmes. INGOs work on small issues, things that most people already know, not important"*.[72] A Ward 4 elected member claims that: *"For INGOs and NGOs and the Ward office, there is weak coordination between them all"*.[73] Other elected officials are more positive however. In Melamchi Ward 6, the Secretary says: *"For the INGOs, I am happy"*.[74] Although there is also a view that before the local elections, NGOs fulfilled a role that is perhaps not so relevant anymore: *"Now elected officials are in place, maybe reliance on NGOs will go down"*.[75]

10. Community-Led Reconstruction – What Works

A crisis such as the 2015 earthquakes presents opportunities for social transformation. Reconstruction not only refers to physical infrastructure, but also social, economic and psycho-social reconstruction. This includes the modification and rebuilding of society in the aftermath of emergency, and this foundation and these processes allow for a democratic transformation driven by the agency of affected people and movements. If this is well facilitated, this constitutes the real meaning of 'build back better'. CLR programmes need to be contextual. Each CLR will be distinct, and developed in response to local conditions and socio-cultural norms. Regarding the inclusion of socially marginalised groups and ensuring transparency and accountability in future humanitarian responses, the 'what works' elements of CLR following the Nepal earthquakes can be summarised as follows:

Working with communities to co-design their own reconstruction vision helps overcome the challenges inherent in promoting inclusion of marginalised groups (such as weak capacity, prejudice or illiteracy). Close collaboration and joint decision-making that puts local communities at the centre of the post-disaster activities and factors in governance issues, helps to build representative and inclusive reconstruction. If affected people perceive themselves to be the architects of their own reconstruction, then this process of social outreach is proven to empower them (inclusive of vulnerable groups), embed the concept of solidarity and lead to fundamental changes in power dynamics and social inequalities.

Livelihoods is a major challenge in the post-disaster context. Immediate (but temporary) opportunities need to be implemented that rely on donations, while building local capacities to think in economic terms more broadly and more sustainably. For example, the potential to develop some sites as holiday destinations for foreign trekkers is popular among communities and local officials. Manufacturing and forestry initiatives are also possible but suffer from a lack of infrastructure, which can be addressed through a long term implementation plan.

Promoting women's leadership has been a major aspect of CLR in Nepal. With the right guidance, tangible improvements in the status and autonomy of women is evident even within a short timeframe. This shows greater progress than the status of elderly, disabled people or ethnic minorities, where social improvements take longer and perhaps have to combat more prejudice. It is vital to develop indicators and benchmarks for monitoring and assessing inclusion of vulnerable groups, and in what ways they are included. Being transparent with communities about the expected delays and challenges ahead eases frustrations and helps engender a more realistic view of the lengthy reconstruction process. When promoting women's leadership and greater inclusion of the marginalised, sustained training is needed, for example on negotiating, advocacy and social development, to prevent traditional hierarchies and associated power inequalities being re-affirmed at local level.

Longer term partnerships to build strong working relationships are not always feasible due to economic and staff limitations, but sustained working through local agencies has demonstrated its tangible benefits in Nepal's post-disaster environment. AAN, HAN and CSRC maintain good relations with communities based on mutual trust built over years, which has assisted significantly in collaborative post-disaster work (as repeatedly mentioned by communities and local government). A consistent presence in the disaster affected areas and operational visibility have a demonstrable impact and CLR that makes use of existing civil society structures has an immediate 'entry point' to communities. Existing associations have already proven their durability, have members used to working together and are often trusted by local communities. These associations can be adapted and supported for post-disaster work, leading from relief to reconstruction, instead of setting up new structures that may become defunct or whose aims are not well understood. The challenges facing the continued work of the CRCs illustrates the need for prolonged support and augmentation of local capacities to fulfil their mandate.

65. Interview elected Dalit woman member, Ward no. 1 HRM, 27.10.17
66. Interview Chair, Helambu Rural Municipality, 27.10.17
67. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no.2 HRM, 27.10.17
68. Interview Deputy Mayor, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
69. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17
70. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no. 4 HRM, 25.10.17
71. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 6 HRM, 26.10.17
72. Interview Ward Chair, Ward no. 4 HRM, 25.10.17
73. Interview elected Ward member, Ward no. 4 HRM, 25.10.17
74. Interview Ward Secretary, Ward no 6, Melamchi Municipality, 25.10.17
75. Interview elected Ward member, Ward no. 5 HRM, 26.10.17

11. Conclusion

Community-led reconstruction (CLR), as facilitated by ActionAid Nepal, is a very ambitious programme that aims not only to re-build in ways that improve disaster resilience ('build back better') but to go beyond that to challenge existing social inequalities and unjust power relations and to achieve a degree of democratic social transformation at local level and in the society at large. The CLR approach enables reconstruction plans to be developed from the perspectives of those most affected by disasters, especially women and other marginalised groups, notably Dalits, indigenous ethnic groups, landless people and older people and youth. It aims to facilitate the upward expression of community concerns to government and highlight perceived gaps between such concerns and the Government of Nepal's national reconstruction programme. CLR views reconstruction in a holistic way, integrating economic, social and cultural aspects, as well as housing and infrastructure rebuilding. This action research project aims to assess the implementation of a CLR approach as it has unfolded and to contribute to the ongoing learning.

Our overall research question asked: to what extent and in what ways can CLR in post-earthquake Nepal lead to greater inclusion of marginalised groups and improved accountability to beneficiaries? Our findings highlight three interacting factors as key to achieving greater inclusion of marginalised groups and enhanced accountability to local beneficiary groups in post-disaster contexts. One is the strength of local community-based organisations, inclusive of the self-organisation of marginalised groups and the expression of marginalised voices within broader-based community organisations. A second is the ability of community-based organisations to engage with government and with (I)NGOs in advocating for their needs and demands, inclusive of those of marginalised groups. The third factor is democratic government, especially at local level, that is responsive and downwardly accountable to local citizens, inclusive of relatively poor and marginalised groups. In concluding, we look at the role of CLR in facilitating these three factors and the lessons learned in the Nepal context.

An initial qualification is needed, however. This research was started barely one year after the start of the reconstruction phase in Nepal in April 2016. This was ideal for an action research project, but inevitably means that the impact of CLR was limited within that timeframe. The data collection was also undertaken within the context of a radical change in local government, not only the first democratic elections to local government bodies in 20 years, but also a significant restructuring of local government institutions

and a substantial devolution of powers and functions to the new (rural) municipal authorities. Interestingly, this enabled questions of government accountability to marginalised groups to be considered in a whole new context, but again findings are inevitably provisional due to the very short time-period in which the new local government system has been in operation. It also meant some disruption to the engagement of community organisations and local social movements with local government, given the major reforms being implemented.

In relation to our first factor, the strengthening of community-based organisations and local social movements has been a crucial part of this CLR approach. The initial focus on the creation of Community Reconstruction Committees (CRCs) at village level was important. The inclusion of traditionally excluded voices in reconstruction efforts was encouraged by the principle of equal representation of women and men on the CRCs, with the aim of of at least 40% female membership, as well as by encouraging representation from other marginalised groups, such as Dalits and indigenous peoples. The concurrent strengthening of local land rights forums, women's forums, old people's associations and youth alliance groups provided further opportunities for marginalised groups to express their concerns and needs, including through interaction with CRCs, and to develop their advocacy skills. Therefore, the degree of self-organisation at community level was impressive, and it was evident that INGOs had contributed to this, notably HelpAge with support to Older People's Associations, and ActionAid through their work in the establishment of CRCs and support to local landless people's and women's forums. The role of CSRC as the local partner organisation for both INGOs was also highly significant, given its long-established presence in the area and its engagement of local social mobilisers. It was also evident that communities in the two (rural) municipalities in Sindhupalchowk were enthusiastic about a CLR approach and felt positive towards it as a mechanism to improve post-disaster reconstruction.

However, one disappointing finding was that several CRCs have ceased to operate as intended. Some of them were no longer functioning and newly-established Ward Committees have had little or no contact with them, which seemed an opportunity lost. In other communities we found that there was either a lack of consensus on the role of CRCs or grievances about CRC decision-making and membership. It would appear that the initial focus on the formation and establishment of CRCs as an integral part of a CLR approach, often from the emergency phase onwards, has

---

Developing affected people's understanding of their political rights, and their responsibilities, is a core aspect of CLR. Meaningful reconstruction is likely to benefit from reforms in citizen-government relations. CLR actors then have a responsibility to maintain communications with government and inform reconstruction policy. A reconstruction process will expose existing systemic issues, such as the precariousness of landless people or single mothers. CLR entails sustained advocacy for their rights, linked to 'conscientisation'- the building of public opinion in favour of these groups and how they are an integral part of society with much to contribute. A cohesive society showing trust-building impacts then becomes more resilient to future disaster risk. Greater transparency on the part of CLR actors will influence local government transparency initiatives. For example, multiple examples exist of how AAN has influenced local officials to prioritise accountability and transparency, which before the earthquake were generally not government priorities.

CLR entails a combination of soft and hard development initiatives. Collective action, such as communal construction of roads or irrigation channels, brings together social groups who may have no experience of collective working. After the physical work, it is evident that cooking and eating communally has a particular cultural resonance and helps overcome inter-group prejudice.

Locally produced cultural activities such as street theatre are highly popular as a method to disseminate CLR messages and strengthen community cohesion. Drama productions can be developed by civil society associations such as youth groups. Radio broadcasts are likewise effective as a means to reach large numbers of people, whereby successes and insights from specific areas can be disseminated, as well as difficulties and obstacles.

not been sufficiently sustained and many have quickly lapsed into relative inactivity. This is despite the reconstruction effort remaining at an early stage with few community members having re-built homes, and with various marginalised and poor groups, such as single women, elderly and landless people, continuing to face severe problems concerning housing and livelihoods. There are certainly lessons here for INGOs, their local partners and social mobilisers alike, indicating the fragility of newly created committees and organisational structures at village level and the need for continued support. Fortunately, other local social movements that existed before the earthquake and often linked to national-level movements, such as women's rights forums, land rights forums and Dalit organisations, remain relatively strong, active and visible in the reconstruction process.

In relation to the second factor, CLR is not simply self-help, and greater inclusion of marginalised groups and improved accountability to beneficiaries in reconstruction efforts depends crucially on the ability of local organisations to engage with government, especially local government. Focus group discussions with local groups included their experiences of government, prior to the recent elections and local government reforms, and these indicated that engagement had been difficult and relatively unsuccessful. In theory, this could be attributed to a lack of advocacy skills on the part of local organisations, and/or a lack of government accountability to local citizens. While there are elements of both here, the latter factor seems the most significant. In the focus group discussions, with one exception only, all groups complained about the lack of accountability of local

government, that is the old VDC-based system. Grievances focused on the lack of access for engagement, with one CRC and an older people's association both noting that there was no formal mechanism by which to communicate or contact the VDC, and that it was hard to be heard. Similarly, a more remote Janjati group stated that communications were difficult, and that they had no regular meetings with the VDC. Others complained about a lack of transparency in information provision, including financial information about budgets supposedly ring-fenced for marginalised groups, such as the elderly and women and children. Other marginalised groups, notably Dalits and landless, felt excluded from decision-making processes, and again stated that their voices were not heard. In contrast, it was noted that access was available to political parties and to elites and 'well-connected' people, with a WRF representative stating that the key issue was one of access, power and influence, leading to the continued exclusion of marginalised groups and their needs.

Major dissatisfaction was also expressed about central government, especially the NRA, whose response was often perceived as slow, bureaucratic and lacking in empathy. Poor and marginalised people experienced problems with ongoing exclusion from assistance with rebuilding homes, notably access to the government grant due to problems in meeting the eligibility criteria, such as citizenship certificates and land ownership certificates, as well as meeting housing design and building code requirements. Complaints focused on government inflexibility and a lack of advice and assistance on the part of government.

Some successes were evident, notably in relation to home reconstruction. For instance, a landless Dalit community was optimistic that a 'land management scheme', funded by a two-lakh rupee grant from government, would allow land to be purchased from private landowners for house rebuilding. Yet this scheme was through the NRA and not local government, and was facilitated by the LRF nationally, with a vertical chain of communication from local LRF to district LRF and national LRF, rather than horizontal engagement with local government. In other words, success has been through pre-existing social movements and their own linkages from local to national levels.

An inhospitable government context clearly requires a 'demand side' of strong grassroots organisation and advocacy for the interests of poor and marginalised groups. Yet our findings indicate that more could be done within CLR to strengthen the ability of community-based organisations and local social movements to advocate their demands to local government. Training programmes and capacity building on advocacy work were not very evident, and therefore local government has been able to remain largely unaccountable to local citizens. The relative weakness of an NGO-inspired CLR programme to enhance local organisations' ability to engage with government is a key lesson to be learnt.

Thirdly, such a lesson is particularly important in the context where local government has fundamentally changed, and the new local government system entails significant potential for more democratic, accountable and responsive governance. Initial signs have been mixed, however, regarding realisation of that potential. Positively, new bodies at municipal and ward levels are focused on house reconstruction, especially with the central government deadline of July 2018, and have provided assistance to those excluded from beneficiary lists as well as information and advice on earthquake resilient design and building codes. Access to elected members, especially at Ward level, is better, particularly when compared to previous problems of access to non-elected VDC officials. Good intentions to be accountable to local citizens has been expressed, and there is a degree of physical and social closeness between elected representatives at Ward level and local people, working and living together. Some prioritisation of vulnerable people and marginalised groups is evident, such as single women, landless and Dalits. Importantly, the radical decentralisation of the 22 'exclusive rights' entails potential for local groups to have influence over local policy-making processes. A number

of negative points were also noted, however, which impact adversely on the responsiveness to marginalised groups and on downward accountability to all earthquake-affected citizens. Formal mechanisms for democratic participation have not been created, with five-year plans being formulated in an *ad hoc* manner. Interaction with local organised groups remains limited, with some negative or disparaging attitudes noted towards social movements, particularly LRF and WRF. While radical decentralisation holds great potential, human and financial capacity are required for effective implementation, with both relatively absent at present. Women's representation is guaranteed by the Constitution, yet male dominance in local governance remains, and political party control means that female representatives are selected by the party and are not necessarily strong and capable female leaders, as indicated by our own observations as well as those of the local women's group. Given the dominance of one particular political party in most (rural) municipalities, holding most key elected positions, there is a fear that policy-making will be kept within the confines of the party in power, often determined at national level, with the privileging of local party supporters, especially elite party financiers, for benefits.

The new decentralised local government system opens up significant prospects for successful CLR through the engagement of local community groups and social movements with the new political structures. Yet evidence here from our interviews with key actors in the new political structures suggests that their stated intentions to be more inclusive of the needs of marginalised people and accountable to all constituents are far from guaranteed, with shortcomings immediately evident. The opportunities that the new system of democratic decentralisation opens up will only be realised through grassroots mobilisation and pressure on government from local organisations to act more downwardly accountable towards local citizens. Community organisations and local social movements that represent marginalised groups will need to advocate their demands to local government and input into policy-making processes more generally. In this context, the importance of CLR activities that focus on strengthening the advocacy skills of local organisations, as noted above, becomes even more imperative. INGOs, as relatively well-resourced organisations, can also look at ways in which they can support the new local government personnel to strengthen their ability to meet the heightened expectations, including the capacity of newly elected members.

In sum, the CLRP has led to greater inclusion of marginalised groups in reconstruction processes to a limited degree. This has been achieved mainly through working with existing social movements of marginalised groups at the local level, and supporting their mobilisation and advocacy capacities. While the CRCs, established precisely for this purpose, also contributed to greater inclusion for an initial period, not all of them have endured, and their apparent collapse indicates a lack of sustained support and guidance from (I)NGOs and their local partners. Engagement with local government in attempts to ensure greater government accountability to poor and marginalised groups, has had limited success, especially in the context of the previous VDC-based system. Under the old VDC system, such limitations were largely due to the inflexibility of unelected officials and their unresponsiveness to local citizens, but also reflect a lack of focus from (I)NGOs on enhancing local organisational capacity and advocacy skills. The new decentralised system of local governance entails far greater potential for accountable government that responds more positively to demands from below. Yet, this is far from guaranteed, and will depend largely on the activities of (I)NGOs and social movements in processes of community-led reconstruction, and indeed community-led development, in (self-) organisation, mobilisation, and advocacy for the rights of poor and marginalised people. The following considerations arise out of experiences to date.

Considerations for general Community-Led Reconstruction and post-disaster work

- Disasters can provide opportunities for positive change, such as increased agency of women or excluded social groups, raised environmental awareness, or increased engagement with local government. CLR can seek to stimulate such positive change through giving voice to hitherto excluded groups and making explicit reference to progress in these areas.

- CLR efforts should focus on the *processes* of social change in reconstruction, as well as the *results*. Communities will focus on rebuilding of houses but the collaborative steps involved can also be emphasised. Given the ambitious nature of CLR, communities require substantive and systematic support to connect the lofty CLR aims with the daily realities and hardships they face.

- A large number of separate and overlapping committees and organisations can be counter-productive. It is perforable to work with existing organisations that represent marginalised groups, where these exist. If new community organisations are required, such as Community Reconstruction Committees, then inclusion of representatives of all marginalised groups is vital, as well as ensuring that the voices of such groups remain heard within the committees. It is important that women are not just members of CRCs but in positions of leadership.

- Sustained support to local organisations and committees is crucial to establish meaningful levels of trust and develop a shared vision of reconstruction. There is little value in establishing committees that rapidly become defunct.

- Careful planning is required at the start of such programmes on how to effectively link the rebuilding of private housing (which is the priority of households) with community infrastructure such as roads, schools or health posts. Physical works need to be linked to progress indicators, combined with a road map co-designed with communities that allows success, challenges and weaknesses to be monitored and addressed.

Considerations for agencies on improving IAT issues

- Increased agency and decision making of women demonstrates greater potential for social change in post-disaster context than other marginalised groups such as minorities or low castes. The promotion of women's social status is a goal in itself, but also an entry-point to encourage public reflection on social transformation more generally.

- Continued exclusion of the most marginalised remains a problem, notably of some Janjati groups in the Nepal context. This can be exacerbated in Nepal where mountainous terrain makes access difficult. Greater awareness by NGOs is required and a determination to include such 'hard to reach' groups.

- In CLR, the crucial relationship is between disaster-affected citizens and government. The task of (I)NGOs is to facilitate citizen – government engagement along constructive and democratic lines. A two-pronged strategy is required. One is to strengthen the advocacy skills of community organisations and local social movements. The other is to strengthen the capacity of local government, especially for elected members, to respond to demands from below.

- (I)NGOs are often better resourced than local governments and should consider making their human resources available to government, especially in reconstruction contexts. The seconding of engineers and technicians to new local governments was a case in point here.

- (I)NGOs must always gain the consent of local government officials prior to commencing reconstruction activities, given that they are accountable not only to their beneficiaries but also to the relevant public authorities. Government informants made complaints against (unspecified) (I)NGOs that this had not occurred on occasions.

- Humanitarian agencies with a long presence in country experience more trust and a closer working relationship with both communities and government. Collaborations with local implementing partners are stronger post-disaster if they also worked together pre-disaster.

- Humanitarian actors need to work together and reduce the 'silo' mentality. (I)NGOs should foster a more nuanced understanding of the difficulties and challenges facing local government, and those experienced by existing civil society groups.

12. Annexes

Annex 1: Perception Survey Questions

Part A – Demographic questions

1. Location

2. Earthquake damage to home

3. Current accommodation

4. Employment Status

5. Occupation Type

6. Age

7. Male or female

8. Education completed

9. How many dependents do you have?

10. Are you dependent on somebody else?

Part B – Perceptions and opinions

11. What do you understand by the term 'reconstruction'?

12. On a scale of 0-5, how well do you think the government understands the reconstruction needs of your community?

13. On a scale of 0-5, how well does the local government (VDC Secretariat) consult and coordinate with your community to address reconstruction challenges?

14. On a scale of 0-5, how happy are you with the overall reconstruction of your community by the government so far?

15. On a scale of 0-5, how well does your community address the needs of marginalised people like disabled, elderly, landless, low caste, Adivasis, Janjatis, or single women since the earthquake?

16. On a scale of 0-5, how well do you think women's needs and priorities are addressed in your community reconstruction?

17. On a scale of 0-5, how sensitive are the men in the community to women's needs and priorities in the reconstruction?

18. On a scale from 0-5, has the social position of women since the earthquake in your community worsened (0), stayed the same (3) or improved (5)?

19. On a scale from 0-5, has the social position since the earthquake of other marginalised groups in your community worsened (0), stayed the same (3) or improved (5)?

20. On a scale of 0-5, how well does your community collectively discuss post-earthquake issues and challenges?

21. How satisfied are you with International NGOs in terms of the reconstruction efforts (not relief work) from 0-5?

22. How easy or difficult is it for you to communicate with local government? Rate your experience 0 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy).

23. If you could prioritise one issue for reconstruction in your community [not individual houses] what would it be?

24. What changes would you like to see in your community 5 years after the earthquake?

25. Do you consider yourself to be from a marginalised group?

26. Has this research been satisfactorily explained to you, and do you consent for this data to be included in our project?

Annex 2: Street Drama Feedback Form

Community Led Reconstruction Programme
Post Drama Feedback Form

Date:	Age:	Sex:	Drama location:

PART A	
PLEASE ANSWER WITH A NUMBER (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). *1 = MINIMUM* *5 = MAXIMUM*	**NUMBER** **1 to 5**
How would you rate this drama as a whole?	
How effective is this drama as a tool for communication in post disaster context?	
How much do the messages in this drama relate to your own experiences?	
Do you feel this drama portrayed reconstruction issues in an accurate way?	
Did this drama encourage you to reconsider your own opinions?	
Would you behave or act in a different way after seeing this drama?	
How likely would you be to discuss the themes of this drama with other people?	

PART B
PLEASE ANSWER WITH FULL WORDS
What did you learn from watching this drama?
Have you had similar experiences to the ones shown in this drama? If so, what?
In your community, are there similar problems to those shown in the drama? If so, which problems at present?
Would you like to see similar drama on other reconstruction issues? If so, what?
If you take away one key idea from this drama, what would it be?

Annex 3: Focus Group Discussion Locations, May 2017

1. Chetri village, Dhungana Besi. CRC group

2. Panchakanya, Women's Rights Forum

3. Chitre Gaun. Dalit village

4. Kiul Bagar, Youth Alliance Group

5. Ichok village, Older People's Association

6. Ichok village, Land Rights Forum

7. Thimbu village, Women's Rights Forum (Dalits and Janjatis)

8. Yolmo village (Yolmo Janjatis)

9. Chirikakla village, camp of displaced Magar people (Janjatis)

Annex 4: List of Government Interviewees October 2017

1. Melamchi Municipality Ward No. 6, Ward Secretary, Kaladhar Dhakal, 25 October 2017

2. Melamchi Municipality Ward No. 6, Chairperson Jeet Raj Thapa and 1 male elected member, 25 October 2017

3. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 4, Ward Chairperson, Rajkumar Lamichhane, 25 October 2017

4. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 4, Ward Secretary, Kalyani Ghimere, 25 October 2017

5. Melamchi Municipality, Deputy Mayor, Bhagwati Nepal, 25 October 2017

6. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 5, Ward Secretary, Kumar Koirala, 26 October 2017

7. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 5, Ward Chairperson, Harka Bahadur Tamang, and 2 female, 1 male, elected members, 26 October 2017

8. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 6, Ward Chairperson Suku Ram Tamang, and 1 female, 1 male, elected members, 26 October 2017

9. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 2, Ward Chairperson, Tsering Gyalbo Lama, and 1 male elected member, 27 October 2017

10. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 1, Female Dalit Representative and 1 male elected member, 27 October 2017

11. Helambu Rural Municipality, Municipal Chairperson, Nima Gyalzen Lama, 27 October 2017

12. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 1, Ward Chairperson, Nyima Gyaltsen Sherpa, 28 October 2017

13. Helambu Rural Municipality Ward 1, Ward Secretary Narayan Prased Poubel, 28 October 2017

Annex 5: List of Meetings with Local Social Movements, October 2017

1. Land Rights Forum and Dalits Association, Chitre Tole, Helambu Rural Municipality, Ward No. 2, 27 October 2017

2. Women's Rights Forum and Older People's Association, Ichok Health Post, Helambu Rural Municipality, Ward No. 1, 28 October 2017

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University

CTPSR's research is grounded in the needs of the individuals, communities and organisations it serves, and focuses on bringing people together and providing new evidence, ideas and ways of thinking to assist in responding to the issues they face. We have many active partnerships beyond academia with community groups, faith groups, governments and the humanitarian sector. We employ a range of innovative and participatory research methods with the objective of transferring power from researcher to research participants, enabling them to influence practice and policy development through evidence-based approaches.

www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/trust-peace-social-relations/

www.facebook.com/CTPSR/   www.twitter.com/CTPSR_Coventry

ActionAid Nepal

ActionAid started working in Nepal in 1982, just after ten years of its establishment as a charity organisation in the United Kingdom. Today, ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to further human rights and defeat poverty for all. With an aim to become more 'locally rooted and globally connected', ActionAid Nepal has registered its entity in the concerned Nepal Government authority. ActionAid is a global federation and ActionAid Nepal is one of the members of that federation.

Based on the learning from its engagement in various sectors at various levels from grassroots to international, AAN has evolved through various changes on approaches and working modalities in its 36 years journey of the fight against poverty and injustice. Starting from charity-based work in the 1980s to improve the basic living conditions of the poorest people, AAN has now adopted a human rights-based approach with an aim to enhance the capacity of the poor and excluded people to claim and exercise their rights to live a dignified life. Our approach reaffirms the role of popular struggles, social justice movements, popular actions, community-based organisations and people's organisations for rights conscientisation and transformation of unequal power relations.

COUNTRY OFFICE
Apsara Marg, Lazimpat
Ward No. 3, Kathmandu, Nepal
P.O. Box: 6257
Tel.: 977-1-4002177
Fax: 977-1-4002118
Email: mail.nepal@actionaid.org

EASTERN RESOURCE CENTRE
Panchali, Ward No. 16
Biratnagar, Morang, Nepal
Tel.: 021-470575, 471637
Fax: 021-472635
Email: infoerc.nepal@actionaid.org

WESTERN RESOURCE CENTRE
Karkando, Ward No. 1
Nepalgunj, Banke, Nepal
P.O. Box: 75
Tel.: 081-551366, 551198
Email: infowrc.nepal@actionaid.org

www.actionaid.org/nepal   www.facebook.com/actionaid.nep   www.twitter.com/actionaidnep