

## **What Works in the Community in the Aftermath of a Crisis**

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A Case Study on the Coping Mechanisms of Communities in the Face of  
the Earthquake

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***for***

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, before the arrival of any external support, a community is left to its own devices to come up with coping mechanisms that can help it deal with the immediate problems at hand. Such was the case with many communities that were devastated by the massive earthquake that struck Nepal on 25 April 2015. Several actors from within the community came together to respond to the urgency of the situation. However, given the social structure and the socio-political context of the country at the time of the earthquake, coupled with the inability of the government to respond to the needs of the people in a timely manner, their actions were not sufficient to completely mitigate the adverse effects of the earthquake. However, coping mechanisms of a community, when bolstered properly can increase the efficiency and impact of community-led actions aimed at dealing with any crisis. Moreover, in the post-earthquake scenario, communities can also be mobilized to participate in the rebuilding process to ensure local ownership and sustainability of the tasks undertaken. This paper presents the various coping mechanisms communities demonstrated in the aftermath of the earthquake. In doing so, the paper also identifies areas where the government can reform its policies to better support coping strategies of local communities in the long term.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 General Background

Nepal, the 11th most earthquake prone country in the world, has been struck by several devastating earthquakes since the first recorded one in 1255 AD. In 1934, a major earthquake of 8.4 magnitude killed around ten thousand people in Kathmandu Valley alone, destroying most of the heritage sites and infrastructure. This was followed by series of major earthquakes in 1980, 1988, 2011 and the most recent one in 2015, killing and displacing thousands of people and causing massive destruction to private housing and public infrastructure.

Nepal was struck by a 7.6 magnitude earthquake on 25 April 2015 at 11:56 AM, with its epicentre in Barpak, Gorkha. The earthquake has been followed by 396 aftershocks greater than a magnitude 4 Richter scale as of 24 September 2015. The devastation has been extensive. Cultural and heritage sites, over half a million houses, government buildings, schools and health posts, roads, bridges, water supply systems, trekking trails and other basic infrastructure have been reduced to rubble. Millions of people were forced to live out in the open, which disrupted their daily lives and had a severe impact on their physical and psychological wellbeing.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, aid and assistance started to flood in from both inside and outside of the country. The government started immediate search and rescue operations, and announced a state of emergency. However, the rescue and relief operations were more urban-centric, sidelining the most affected communities in rural parts of the country. One of the major reasons behind this was the destruction of transport routes to rural communities and the limited means and resources to carry out air rescue and support. The lack of responsiveness displayed by the central government and local systems of governance highlighted the lack of preparedness at an official level, which further exacerbated the vulnerability of rural communities. As a result, the communities were compelled to mobilize themselves in order to cope with the devastating impact of the earthquake. Various elements played a key role in motivating communities and helping them move forward in the face of such a crisis. Their compulsion to cope with the situation ignited their will to act for themselves.

A newspaper article published in the British newspaper, the Guardian, claimed that during the Gorkha Earthquake of April 25 2015, many earthquake hit districts that were only a few miles away from the capital received little attention, which led to the locals undertaking tasks that are usually performed by trained rescue and relief professionals. They began pulling out the dead from the rubble and performed their cremations. In the absence of relief packages that took several days and in some instances even weeks to arrive, the locals had to rely on whatever food they could retrieve from the rubble. Undoubtedly, they suffered from deprivation due to a lack of resources and many suffered from emotional trauma, but they had no choice but to move forward in order to

survive.<sup>1</sup> Ordinary youth became community leaders, shopkeepers became philanthropists, and the elderly offered faith and optimism to keep the morale high. Even though different communities responded differently to the situation, what remained common was their determination to rebuild their lives and their homes. However, the lack of timely external intervention meant that communities had to deal with diminishing resources and supplies. Materials used to build temporary shelters were limited and the temporary shelters that were built using tarpaulin and plastic could not protect the locals from wind or rain and were not sustainable. To this day, the lack of prompt response from the government at both national and local level has left local people still waiting for proper shelters. While the communities worked well to cope with the immediate demands of the natural disaster, in the absence of external support, their efforts have waned and their situation has deteriorated.

This paper tries to evaluate the coping mechanisms of a community based on the actors who play an important role in helping the community deal with the crisis. It also tries to explore ways in which the government can further empower these communities through reformed policies related to reconstruction and recovery so communities are better equipped to deal with any future disasters of similar scale.

### **1.1.1. Research Problem**

Past as well as recent experiences in Nepal highlight the nature and importance of coping mechanisms that communities employ in the absence of any external support or intervention. Despite the multiple challenges faced by communities, they are compelled to find ways to survive and move forward. In the context of the earthquake, while relief, aid, and external support cannot be fully negated from the picture, their arrival took several days to weeks during which time the communities had to fend for themselves. They mobilised themselves to carry out relief and rescue work even though they were not prepared or trained for it. They managed the retrieval and distribution of essential goods such as food and helped each other construct temporary shelters. Usually, the government is supposed to execute these tasks in the aftermath of a disaster. However, at the local level, the government mechanism that should have been answerable to local people was dormant in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. Firstly, it was because they were not prepared to deal with a crisis of such magnitude and secondly, they had minimal autonomy and had to depend mostly on the central government for decision-making, which delayed the entire relief and rescue process affecting communities significantly. In such a scenario, the coping mechanisms that kept the locals moving filled the vacuum. However, if the various elements that worked to help communities cope with the disaster were to be strengthened, the communities would be stronger and better equipped at dealing with such adversities in the future. Furthermore, in order to deal with any crisis, it is of utmost importance that local coping mechanisms be taken into consideration. In fact, rather than introducing an entirely sophisticated idea or practice, which is alien to the community, it would be better to strengthen the existing coping mechanisms to achieve

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<sup>1</sup>Burke 2015

desired results. Therefore, the policy dealing with reconstruction and rebuilding must take note of community's own coping mechanisms and work towards strengthening them further.

### **1.1.2. Research Question**

1. What were the coping mechanisms that communities relied on immediately after the earthquake?
2. How does the reconstruction and rebuilding policy address the long-terms concerns of rebuilding and rehabilitating these communities?

## **1.2. Research Methodology**

### **Primary Data:**

This research mostly uses field data collected from Charikot and Namdu in Dolakha district of Nepal. The data comes from in-depth interviews, focused group discussion and key informant interviews.

### **In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews were carried out with locals from both Charikot and Namdu.

### **Focused Group Discussion**

A Focused group discussion was carried out in Namdu with 15 participants.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

Key informants were interviewed in both Charikot and Namdu. In Charikot, the key informants were media personnel, local businessperson (1), lecturer at local campus (1), members of the Ward Citizens Forum (2), health professionals (2), and member of Ama Samuha (1). Likewise, in Namdu the key informants were local social workers (3), local school and college teachers (4), and local health professional (1).

### **Content Analysis**

For the purpose of analyzing the content and generating several themes, the data went through a process of coding. Cluster Analysis was carried out to group similar data together.

### **1.2.1. Study Objectives**

The aims of this study are:

- To identify what worked effectively in the community in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake
- To identify the roles played by these effective elements and their importance in the rebuilding process with regards to the existing policy relating to reconstruction and rebuilding

### **1.2.2. Selection of Target Areas**

In order to document the differences in coping strategies, two VDCs of one district were selected from the fourteen districts that were most affected by the earthquake of 2015. The two VDCs, Namdu and Charikot are located in Dolakha district. Namdu is in a rural setting with residents belonging to three major caste groups, Brahmin, Tamang and Dalits (Sarki), while Charikot is the district headquarter of Dolakha and is a semi-urban, heterogeneous community.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1. Community: Meaning and Concept**

In the simplest sense of the term, a community refers to a social unit of any size that shares common values, interests, experiences or cause. James Paul defines it as a group or network of persons who are connected to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties and mutually define that relationship as important to their social identity and social practice. It comprises of all of their social relationships and generates a sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup> It could be Urban, semi-urban and rural in nature.

In the rural context, the population has much more in common due to the characteristics they share which identify them from the rest.<sup>3</sup> As the community is in a rural setting, its relative isolation makes it more close-knit and people are more interdependent. This results in strong social and emotional bonds.

For the purpose of this study, the communities that are being studied can be defined as heterogeneous, semi-urban or rural as they try to cope with impact of the earthquake by relying on existing societal structures and relationships.

### **2.2. Definition of Coping Mechanism**

"Coping" is the manner in which people act within existing resources and the range of expectations of a situation to achieve various ends. Generally, it means "resource management" in unusual, adverse and abnormal situation.<sup>4</sup>

According to Blaikie<sup>5</sup>, coping in the face of adverse circumstances may be seen as a series of adaptive strategies to preserve physical or emotional things such as respect, love, family, and household and community cohesion as far as possible in the face of a threat. He further stresses that these coping strategies are passed on from generation to generation within communities and

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<sup>2</sup> Paul et. al., 2012. 14.

<sup>3</sup> DFID 2011

<sup>4</sup> Murphy and Moriarty 1976

<sup>5</sup>Blaikie et al., 2004



households with a belief that earlier actions would be a reasonable guide for similar events occurring in future. However, as the society changes and so does their needs, coping strategies start changing and taking new forms. This however does not exclude the possibility that communities are unfamiliar to newer types of hazards. In the face of adverse and uncertain events, communities start coping with the situation through several adaptation and mitigation measures at a local level, which often proves to be inadequate given the enormity of the hazard faced and the community's lack of preparedness. Often than not, such coping mechanisms are short lived and are aimed at responding to immediate effects of disaster to a set of targeted beneficiaries which overlooks the long-term sustainability of the community.

Coping strategy has also been defined as the ability of social actors to cope with and overcome all kinds of adversities.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it also addresses reactive<sup>7</sup> and absorptive<sup>8</sup> measures of how people cope with and overcome immediate threats by relying on resources that are directly available to them.

Likewise, in Campbell's general conceptual model, community includes the elements of space, sentiment, and social structure.<sup>9</sup> Space, refers to the geographic location and the surrounding environment, while sentiment refers to psychological, symbolic, and cultural dimensions of the community depicting the psychological attachment and emotional bond of members with their community. It is the sense of togetherness and norms of trust and reciprocity that they share with each other. Similarly, social structure refers to the social networks encompassing communal groups. Therefore, coping mechanism or coping strategy can be defined as the response of a community to adversity and the ways in which they cope with unusual and stressful situations. Depending on the geographic location of the community and the existing bonds as well as networks within the community, the coping mechanism can vary. Likewise, the type of relationships that exist within the community can dramatically change during times of adversity.<sup>10</sup> The relationships during normal times help facilitate communal life in general, while the relationships during adverse times, largely, shape the coping mechanism of the community.

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<sup>6</sup>Markus Keck and Patrick Sakdapolrak 2013, 10

<sup>7</sup>Obrist 2010, 285

<sup>8</sup>Béné 2012

<sup>9</sup>Campbell 2000

<sup>10</sup> James 2011

### 3. Field Research Findings

#### 3.1. Coping Mechanisms Existing in the Community

##### 3.1.1. Familial Bond and Kinship

In the aftermath of the Gorkha earthquake, most of the communities were on their own before any external help or support arrived. Moreover, in the case of a country like Nepal, where the topography makes many places hard to access, people were excluded from the rescue and relief process. Major roads were blocked and given the lack of alternatives, the government could not intervene on time. Thereby, the communities that lived outside of the capital and were hard to reach due to the inaccessible geographical locations were compelled to cope with the situation on their own. In this regard, familial bond and kinship played a key role in helping communities cope with the crisis. Familial bond and kinship extended at various levels, ranging from the immediate family to relatives and neighbours. The role that family bond and kinship played in the coping mechanism of the community has been further explored below:

##### 3.1.1.1. *Immediate Family and Relatives*

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, family members living together supported each other. Those who were strong enough rescued their family members along with other essentials they could retrieve from under the rubble. One local from Dolakha, Manju Shrestha, spoke of the help she received from her family. “My son and I retrieved food from our house as well as from the field and my son bought some food items from a shop, which we ate. Later on, my son and my son-in-law built a small cottage.” Likewise, Ram Kumari Basnet from Makai Bari said, “My husband is not alive, so I called my brothers from my maternal side of the family who live a few houses away from mine. They helped me build a shelter for my family and myself. They were the ones who first came and helped me. During the emergency, we made a temporary shelter in the form of a shed using our tarpaulin. All of us stayed there for three days. We shared our food. Later we started receiving relief.” Similarly, Harimaya Shrestha from Dolakha stated, “My husband and father-in-law built a temporary shelter. We used the tarpaulin that we normally use in our fields to dry our crops, and shreds of *bhakari* (container used for storage).” Likewise, another respondent Gopini Khadka from Charikot stated, “On the day of the earthquake everyone stayed out in the field in our village. Later we sent tents from Charikot to our village and helped build a temporary shelter using corrugated sheets. My family in village is living there right now.”

Given the fact that external support was delayed and local governmental mechanisms lacked the power to act on their own, it can be deduced from the statements above that

in the aftermath of the earthquake, the immediate support came from family members that lived together or lived in close proximity.

### **3.1.1.2. *Families Living Outside or Abroad***

Most of the respondents unequivocally stated that in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, their immediate family members were their main source of support. However, this bond extended to family who lived outside of their original place of abode. For instance one of the respondents, Tulsi Thapa of Dolakha said, “My children live in Kathmandu; they brought us food items, clothes and money. Also, our relatives who lived elsewhere sent us food items, clothes, and money.” On a similar note, another respondent Bishnu Acharya of Dolakha stated, “Our children brought us food items, clothes and using their connections they brought relief material to our village.” Furthermore, Manju Shrestha of Dolakha asserted, “Those people who have gone abroad or are in Kathmandu and are in a better position did send relief items like food and corrugated sheets to our village after a month or two.” The act of assisting one’s family members and even the village was evident in the community both immediately after the earthquake as well as in the latter phase.

### **3.1.1.3. *Locals and Neighbours***

After immediate family, neighbours and other members of the community were the ones who came forward to help. Devi Jirel of Charikot asserted, “Everyone from the neighborhood lived together, for almost a month. They didn’t have the heart to live separately and were scared, so they relied on each other for support and comfort.” Likewise, Ramila Tamang of Namdu said, “Most of the things in the aftermath of the earthquake were done by us villagers. We did it together. We arranged for food, shelter and sought for external help while building pressure on the local government bodies to act. Any other support arrived later on. Until the support arrived, we depended on the food crops from our fields and continued to sleep in the open. My family slept in the outside area of the local school. We shared our food with our neighbours.”

On a similar note, Pradeep Kumar Yadav of Dolakha said, “We bought food materials from a nearby shop. There was not much problem regarding food. Until relief arrived, we depended on whatever we could retrieve from the rubble and whatever we could get from the shop. Five to seven family members built a kind of temporary cottage; it was topped by tarpaulin, but was not walled. Seven families shared the place, and the food retrieved from each other’s houses was shared. It went on like this for around a month. The community members worked together. Locals shared their resources. Likewise, in Charikot people stayed in banquet halls and on the roads, while many took shelter in the nearby premises of the PHC (Public Health Centre) that was open and spacious.” The role played by neighbours and community members was further

stressed by other respondents as well. One of the respondents, Niruta Basnet from Dolakha stated, “Everyone from our community stayed in a field. We ran into the house, brought out our utensils and cooked our food out in the field. We did everything on our own. Our community and the locals did everything. We stayed in the open after the first earthquake; the second earthquake fully destroyed our house. Thereafter, in order to build us a temporary shelter, we used the tarpaulin that was used in our fields. We also used pieces of *bhakari*, and we gave it a wooden support and lived under it. We bought food from a shop nearby and also retrieved whatever we could from the rubble and that is how we managed. Everyone kept saying that another earthquake would strike again so we lived together.” Likewise, Kusum Shrestha from Dolakha stated, “We depended on the crops that we grew in our own field. Regarding shelter, we did not even have corrugated sheets so we used shreds of *bhakari*. We used it to make a temporary shelter, more like a cattle shed. We are still living under it. Brothers from our village built it. They helped each other build a temporary shelter. They said - let’s build yours first then we can build ours.” Manju Shrestha from Dolakha had a similar experience and stated the kind of support she had received from her neighbours. On a similar note, Sajan Thakuri of Charikot stated, “All of us stayed together and supported each other. Those who had money, food and other goods helped those who had lost their possessions.” Similarly, Rajendra Manandhar, a resident of Charikot expressed, “Immediately after the earthquake struck, people came out of their houses. Those who survived consoled families who had lost their loved ones, while some rescued people from under the rubble. Even my house where Surya Development Bank was located was reduced to rubble. People helped others out of their own free will and under no compulsion. Everyone gathered and even though it was not perfectly organized people did what they could to help each other. This was a clear depiction of humanity at its simplest form.”

Similarly, Pratap Acharya a respondent from Namdu said, “We slept under the sky on that day. Later we made a small cottage from the plastic and tarpaulin that we had. We built the cottage together locally. On that day, we did not eat anything. Later we ate what we had in our fields and whatever we received from others.”

On a slightly different note Laxmi Lama from Chotang, Charikot stated that it was the local men and women who worked together in the aftermath of the earthquake to overcome the situation before any external intervention arrived. However, she mentioned that she and her husband who were too old to build a temporary shelter for themselves had to hire a daily wage earner from their own neighborhood as her children did not live with them, and they had no one else they could turn to for help. Likewise, Bishnu Acharya of Dolakha also expressed a similar opinion. “Since I am very old and my wife is also old and our children don’t live here, we had to hire local people from

the Sarki community to help us build a cottage. We paid them NRS 500 in order to build the cottage using the corrugated sheets from our collapsed house.”

Overall, from the statements of respondents it can be inferred that family, community members and neighbours did most of the work in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. They helped each other build temporary shelters and shared their food among each other. From their activities and the statements of locals, it can be deduced that there was a kind of reciprocation of labour that took place. Neighbours took turns to help each other build temporary shelters. However, for those who could not contribute through physical labour due to old age, had to offer some economic incentive to others in order to get their shelters built. It was mostly true in the case of families of the elderly who lacked young people capable of assisting those building shelters.

The support extended by neighbours to each other was more long lasting in Namdu, a rural part, than in Charikot, a semi-urban area. One of the possible reasons could be the situation prevalent in these two areas. In the case of Charikot, the scale of damage caused to housing was less compared to that in Namdu. Most of the people still had their houses to go back to and as the fear of another possible earthquake subsided after a week or two, they started moving back to their houses. This was not the case in Namdu. Since, most of the villagers had lost their houses; they had to stay outdoors, had to build temporary shelters and had to rely on each other much more.

Therefore, the role of neighbours within the community in coping with the disaster was prominent, as most of them had suffered a similar fate. In addition, in rural parts like Namdu which is a relatively closed community, they had more similarities in regards to their way of life and were interdependent both in normal times and in the time of disasters

### **3.1.2. Social Ties and Businessmen with Links to the Community**

Apart from immediate family and neighbours, there were other actors from within the community who played a positive role in assisting the community to cope with the consequences of the earthquake. In this regard, businessmen who had resources and were willing to help their community were a major support in the aftermath of the earthquake. Local owners of banquet halls opened up their space for people to stay, while local shopkeepers gave away food items.. Businessmen who had strong social ties with the communities were the most helpful. Furthermore, the links and connections that these businessmen from within the community had with people and groups outside of the community was of significant help too as these links were used to direct resources to Namdu and Charikot and bring in external support and assistance to the communities.

### **3.1.2.1. *Philanthropic Deeds of Local Businessmen***

Manita Shrestha, a local from Charikot stated, “In Charikot, most of the assistance was extended by local business groups and individual social workers. The group, which comprised of both local businessmen and businessmen hailing from Dolakha, were extremely helpful to both Charikot and Namdu in the aftermath of earthquake. They were moreover efficient in Namdu as it was more severely hit compared to Charikot and the need was much more pressing there. As far as I know, they supported the locals with food, clothes and tents.” Likewise, Sita Kayastha a local of Charikot expressed, “In Charikot, most of the assistance was extended by the local business community. I myself own a shop in Charikot; I too donated some food and money, in order to support the victims of earthquake.”

Rajendra Manandhar, a local businessman said, “In Charikot itself, I collected relief materials like food, corrugated sheets and distributed it to media personnel, other households, and the Dalit Community in villages around the Charikot area. In fact, along with other social workers, I acted as a bridge between people who donated relief materials and the people who were in need.” Likewise, Devi Jirel a resident of Charikot stated, “In the aftermath of the earthquake, the local business community was a huge support. Rich businessmen who were originally from Dolakha but lived outside of Dolakha came and helped the people in need. They distributed food, clothes, and tents in various villages in Dolakha.” Ram Tamang, a respondent from Namdu also stated that businessmen brought food items and clothes to their village. Likewise, Niruta Basnet from Dolakha expressed, “We have a shop nearby our house. The shopkeeper lent us food items and was really helpful.” Similarly, Pradeep Kumar Yadav of Dolakha expressed, “Local shopkeepers were of immense help to us as they remained open even though they had also suffered through the earthquake. They also distributed food items such as rice and pulses for free.”

The degree of support and assistance that flowed in from local businessmen was very high. Support also flowed in from businessmen who owned small-scale businesses. For instance, local shopkeepers offered food on credit and distributed food to those who were in need. Such deeds of kindness assisted the locals to a large extent. However, they were not sustainable. For example, the shopkeepers who distributed food items for free ran out of supply at one point and were unable to extend any further help. Similarly, the business community that showered victims with overwhelming support and assistance in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake had to go back to their own work and were unable to support the victims for a longer duration. Almost nine months after the earthquake, at the time of writing this paper, the victims are still in need of clothes and other assistance but the business community has not been able to extend

the same type of support they offered in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. This largely explains how such support extended by any groups or individuals is ephemeral, when they are not properly planned and structured. Thus, it increases the vulnerability of victimized communities once such support ceases to exist.

### **3.1.2.2. *Motivating Others to Donate and Help***

Apart from helping those in need out of their own pockets, many local businessmen motivated others to do the same. A local of Charikot, Arun Shrestha said, “Renowned social workers and women from our community also distributed relief materials. For instance, Bishnu Laxmi Shrestha who lives in Kathmandu, but hails from Dolakha came to Dolakha immediately after the earthquake and donated NRS 1 lakh to the DDRC. She also requested others to donate whatever they could. Many of the local businessmen followed in her footsteps and donated money, food items and other materials in whatever way they could.” Rajendra Manandhar a local of Charikot said, “Socially renowned people like local activists, media personnel and social workers also helped in whatever ways they could. In fact, the support that came from these people helped us for almost fifteen to twenty days. Most of the businessmen from Charikot helped a lot; they acted as community leaders in the time of crisis. The amount of monetary support and motivation they were able to provide was commendable.” Few of the prominent faces in business community of Dolakha took the lead in contributing money and goods to support the earthquake victims. Due to the influence, they held within the community, they were able to motivate others to make similar contributions. The local businessmen started assisting the victims of earthquake, which actually helped the community sustain for a bit longer in the absence of much external support.

### **3.1.2.3. *Use of Personal Networks***

Businessmen who had links and connections outside of their own community were of immense help in the aftermath of the earthquake. They used these links in order to receive assistance and support from external sources and then diverted it to the local community.

Sajan Thakuri a local of Charikot said, “I liked the way businessmen functioned here. They helped those who were in need through personal contributions and even using their personal links. Mostly they provided assistance out of their own pockets.” Since, they were well known in the business community both inside and outside of Dolakha, it was easier for them to seek and receive such assistance. Their level of influence also attracted donations and contributions from other members of the business community even if they did not have any social ties with the people of Dolakha. According to Dharmaraj Gole, a local social worker from Namdu, “Many people here have links with other places; they used these links to direct resources to our area. We distributed the

relief items we received in a fair manner.” A Focus Group Discussion reiterated the same thing as a participant said, “Individuals through their links and connections brought relief items and distributed it on the basis of population size in different wards of Namdu.” The links and connections as stated by the respondents were both personal and professional. Moreover, as stated by the respondents they were highly effective in directing relief and support to the communities during the emergency phase.

### **3.1.3. Community-Based Organizations (CBO) and Other Bodies and Their Role in Assisting the Communities Cope in the Aftermath of the Earthquake**

Apart from familial bond and social ties, there were other organizations and CBOs existent in the communities that assisted communities to cope in the aftermath of the earthquake. Most of the existent CBOs were relatively passive in the aftermath of the earthquake. While Ward Citizen’s Forums (WCF) carried out several works ranging from recommending the villages and wards for relief based on the degree of devastation and their needs to mobilizing relief and other assistance. Likewise, money collected through women co-operatives at local level in Namdu was used to buy oil and foodstuff, which was later distributed in Namdu itself. Youth clubs were active in areas around Charikot, but not so much in Namdu or Charikot itself.

Likewise, political parties were active in both Namdu and Charikot in the aftermath of earthquake. They were involved in distributing relief materials like food items, tents in the aftermath of the earthquake. However, they were not fully able to represent the locals from both Namdu and Charikot in the aftermath of the earthquake. They failed at making local officials accountable in distribution of relief to the earthquake victims. In addition, instead of forwarding the interest of victims, they were actively involved in halting external assistance in order to forward their own interests. For instance, in Namdu they halted the distribution of corrugated sheets by the organization Save the Children as the former demanded that such distribution be made on the basis of victim cards (as they were allegedly involved in issuing fake victim cards) while the latter favoured distribution based on technical assessment reports.

Similarly, local health posts were actively involved in treating the victims of earthquake. They attended to the victims on time and helped them with medical assistance and support. In addition, the primary health centre was used to store relief items and food materials. Likewise, army personnel were actively involved in rescue and relief distribution in the aftermath of the earthquake. In addition, government personnel from the Chief District Office (CDO) pressurized the central government to send assistance promptly. They also distributed identity cards to the victims of the earthquake, and distributed food items and money to them. The DAO and the DDRC worked in collaboration in collecting relief materials and funds and worked alongside other agencies.

In this way, the existent mechanisms were assistive to the locals to a certain extent. However, they largely they failed in acting promptly and ensuring transparency and fairness.



#### **3.1.4. Local Leadership**

Local leadership played a key role in the community's coping mechanism in the aftermath of the earthquake. Most of the communities had limited or almost no access to any external support. Furthermore, in the absence of locally elected representatives, the lack of a mechanism to undertake various roles to cope with the crisis was highlighted. There was no prompt response mechanism to deal with the problems associated with such a crisis. In this regard, local community leaders came forward and assisted their communities in every possible way. They took on the leadership role in the community and assisted their fellow community members. Various individuals in different communities, depending on the type of community and its societal structure, undertook such roles.

##### **3.1.4.1. *Businessmen***

In a semi-urban community like Charikot, which has more small to large scale businesses, the locals benefited more from the scale of assistance and support they received from business owners who came forward at a time of crisis. They took on the role of community leaders in the aftermath of the earthquake. Even though, they assisted people in various rural parts of Dolakha, their leadership was more evident in Charikot. They began activities aimed at raising and collecting donations using their personal and business links. They also collaborated with the DDRC to channel the collected funds to the victims in need. Rajendra Manandhar, a local from Charikot said, "In Charikot, in the aftermath of earthquake, the leadership role was taken up by the local businessmen." This was further reaffirmed by Santa K.C. as he stated, "In Charikot, individuals from the business community organized themselves and started collections for money and relief materials. They led the assistance that first came to Charikot but soon extended it to other parts of Dolakha."

##### **3.1.4.2. *School teachers and Headmasters***

In Namdu, the role of schoolteachers and headmasters was different from what it was in normal times. They took charge, assisted the locals both emotionally and psychologically, and represented them in various government bodies by forwarding their grievances and asking for assistance. They acted as a pressure group in dealing with local government bodies like the VDC and the CDO by asking them to address the needs of the locals on time.

Devi Jirel, who belongs to a rural village in Dolakha said, "Teachers from the schools organized for the people to stay in the school premises. They motivated locals, kept them calm and asked them to have faith and be cautious." Deepak Tamang, a teacher from Namdu stated, "Teachers from the local school and campus were active after the earthquake. I have personally visited the administration several times to talk about resources and the amount pledged by the government as well as communicating the

needs of the local people.” Another respondent, Ramila Tamang from Namdu said, “The headmaster and teachers from our local school helped us. They asked us to maintain our calm and motivated us. We were really scared but they played an effective role as they took ownership and fully empathized with the needs and problems faced by people in our area. Since they belong to our area, they have a better knowledge of our needs and wants.” Nima Maharjan, a resident of Namdu said, “I have witnessed local people, local teachers, and headmasters running around the VDC office to get relief items for the village. They have been leading delegations to the concerned government bodies.” On a similar note Pratap Acharya from Namdu said, “Local teachers and local social workers took the lead in bringing relief items and other materials needed by the locals.”

Dharmaraj Gole, a retired teacher from Namdu added, “Teachers from both the schools and the campus were active in the aftermath of the earthquake. I along with other teachers visited the administration several times to talk about resources and the amount pledged by the government and the needs of locals.” During the FGD in Namdu an individual said, “Delegations of teachers, locals, and members from political parties and women's organizations went to the VDC and the CDO office to pressurize them to act. It is still ongoing.” On a slightly different note, Santa K.C. a lecturer in Charikot expressed, “In the case of Charikot which is more of a semi-urban community, the role of teachers was not very pertinent, though it was more obvious in rural parts of Dolakha. However, even in Charikot they played an active role in motivating and encouraging people. They also provided school space for storage and helped to manage and distribute relief materials. They made the school compound available for the public to stay during the emergency period.”

Thus, from the statements made by the respondents it can be deduced that in a rural community like Namdu, the role of teachers and headmasters has been held in high regard and they were actively sought after for advice and help. In the aftermath of the disaster, they helped the community by making the resources that they had access to available to those in need. Likewise, due to their position and their level of credibility, they were also more likely to be taken seriously by the administration. Thus, they used their position in the community and their social stature to influence the decisions of the government to make a large impact in the communities.

## 3.2. Policy Linkages with Specific Reference to Findings

### 3.2.1. Policy

The Post Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Policy was introduced in August 2015, four months after the devastating Gorkha Earthquake. The concept of *Build Back Better* lies at the heart of this policy, which emphasizes the use of local skills, manpower and resources in the reconstruction and rebuilding phase. Moreover, it emphasizes the use of the unique crisis management skills that was seen in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake to move forward in the rebuilding process. To this end, it proposes several strategies and action plans to achieve its objective of building back better.

#### 3.2.1.1. *Post-Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Policy*

- Guiding Principle 2.2 asserts that the use of local materials, labour, local knowledge and skills is imperative to adhere to the concept of Building **Back Better**. Self-rebuilding implies that locals build their own houses while public infrastructure is built through government and donor support. Likewise, Principle 2.3 stresses on the use of locally produced materials in the rebuilding process. Furthermore, Principle 2.9 stresses on strengthening national unity, harmony and goodwill that was witnessed during the rescue, relief and search efforts in the aftermath of the earthquake. It highlights the importance of bolstering these values during the rebuilding and rehabilitation phase as well. It highlights that the unique crisis management capacity and skills of the Nepalese people must be mobilized in a planned and timely manner.
- Strategies enlisted to secure the objectives of rehabilitation and rebuilding<sup>11</sup> stresses on promoting the self-rebuilding process<sup>12</sup> and the optimum use of local materials and skills.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, it states that equality shall be ensured in providing financial support to the families of earthquake victims.<sup>14</sup>
- The action plan<sup>15</sup> framed by this policy elaborates on the proposed strategies as followed:
  - ❖ Strategy concerning promotion of self-rebuilding: It stresses on the rebuilding of devastated houses by homeowners both in urban and rural parts of Nepal. For this, the government pledges to provide financial and technical support. However, it restricts the involvement of foreign citizens or organizations in rebuilding private houses.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, it further stresses that the local community shall assist families comprising of single women, people living with disability, and elderly people in

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<sup>11</sup> Policy, Objective 3.1

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Strategy 4.1.1

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Strategy 4.1.2

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Strategy 4.1.4

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Chapter-5

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.1 (a)

rebuilding their houses.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, it highlights that in rural and semi-urban areas a group of locals shall be formed with an aim to rebuild houses in succession.<sup>18</sup>

- ❖ Strategy relating to optimum utilization of local resources and skills: It states that earthquake-resilient houses will be built by utilizing locally available resources like stones, sand, bricks, bamboo, and wood as per the national building code.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it seeks to promote locally manufactured products like corrugated sheets, cement, iron rod, etc., while discouraging the import of fabricated houses or its parts.<sup>20</sup> It further stresses on fostering industries, which mobilize locally available resources in order to produce refined products like concrete blocks, sand blocks, pre-cast beams, slabs, etc.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, it stresses the optimum utilization of building materials retrieved from houses destroyed by the earthquake.<sup>22</sup>
- ❖ Strategy relating to construction of emergency community buildings in urban areas: In all the municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley and in the district headquarters of earthquake hit regions at least one ‘emergency community building’ shall be built, which can be used as a temporary shelter during crisis and can also be used for other social events during normal times.<sup>23</sup>
- ❖ Strategy relating to immediate means of livelihood: It seeks to remunerate locals who get involved in removing debris of destroyed public buildings or those who assist in the rebuilding process using their physical labour. Such remunerations shall be made either in kind like food or in cash.<sup>24</sup> It seeks to provide skills generating training to locals so that they can actively engage themselves in income generating activities at a local level or run cottage industries.<sup>25</sup>

- Inter-related issues stated in Chapter 6 of the policy deals with ‘crisis risk minimization’ and its preparation. With an aim to build safer buildings, it seeks to provide large-scale training to locally available engineers, construction workers, wood workers and contractors at a local level.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, it further stresses the need of awareness at the local level regarding earthquake and other forms of natural disasters.<sup>27</sup> In addition, with an aim to encouraging pre-crisis preparation, it aims to form community-based associations at the local level.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in the training programmes organized by the government it proposes at least one third female

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.1 (b)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.1 (c)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.2. (a)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.2 (b)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.2 (c)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.2 (d)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.1.9 (a)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.5.1 (a)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 5.5.1. (b)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 6.1.1 (c)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 6.1.2 (a)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 6.1.2 (c)

participation.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in order to advertise the use of safe construction process, it plans to offer training on construction practices extensively. In such training sessions locally, available engineers, builders, construction workers, supervisors, plumbers, electricians and bar-benders will be included. Furthermore, local youth, women and marginalized groups will be prioritised for such trainings.<sup>30</sup> In addition, a grievance redressing mechanism will be maintained at the local level to respond promptly to any complaints.<sup>31</sup>

- Furthermore, for the implementation of the policy the government intends to deploy the army, the police, the armed police force, civil servants and teachers if they are needed in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, based on their experience and qualifications. Likewise, taking note of the spontaneous involvement of individuals during the search, rescue and relief process in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, various provisions have been made to make the best possible use of such human resources.<sup>32</sup> Firstly, students above 18 years of age, studying in colleges or universities will be deployed to the nearest areas and shall be mobilized to clear the debris, demolish critically damaged structures and build temporary shelters. To ensure this, concerned educational institutions are asked to accommodate their academic calendar in consultation with the concerned government agency.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, various volunteers deployed by various political parties, their sister organizations, social organizations, professional organizations and the civil society shall have to coordinate with concerned government body in the district and shall work in the assigned area for the allocated period of time.<sup>34</sup> For any international organization, professional network or independent person willing to do voluntary work, are required to coordinate with the Social Welfare Council and concerned government body at the district level, and work in a specified area for a specific period of time.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, with an aim to engage local youth in the rebuilding process, necessary training and information will be disseminated in coordination with stakeholders.<sup>36</sup>

### **3.3. An Analysis of Policy Areas and Findings from the Field**

The Recovery and Reconstruction policy that aims at building back better through mobilization of local resources and manpower can be linked to the findings of this study to assess whether or not the policy is feasible. The findings enumerate the role played by local manpower and their use of local resources in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. The communities coped in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake by relying on kinship, local networks, etc. Their actions were largely reactive to the immediacy of the situation. In regards to long term rebuilding and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 6.3.4

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 6.5.1

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 6.7.1

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 7.4

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 7.4.1

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 7.4.2

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 7.4.3

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Action Plan 7.4.4

rehabilitation, the characteristics exhibited by the communities can be used to inform the national policy. These findings could be viewed in the light of the proposed policy that largely focuses on mobilizing local people and resources for the task of rebuilding and reconstruction. Much of the findings from the field clearly illustrate that in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake locals dealt with the catastrophe by depending on each other, their local leaders, local mechanisms and locally available resources. Hence, we can draw that in the face of adversity locals in rural parts of Nepal belonging to closed communities dealt with the crisis locally, whether it was out of compulsion or free will.

This may be a sustainable way of dealing with crises in the future for several reasons. Firstly, the locals have a better understanding of their area and the resources available and secondly, when they act on their own, locals have a feeling of ownership. These two factors themselves could make the rebuilding process much more sustainable and hone the ability of communities to deal with crisis more effectively by empowering them with the necessary skills.

Similarly, the policy on Recovery and Reconstruction mainly stresses on the reconstruction of physical structures that have been devastated by the Gorkha earthquake by mobilizing the support and assistance from various international, national and local agencies. Moreover, it is a framework that guides the roles and functions of several actors who would be actively involved in the reconstruction process. The policy guideline is based on the suggestions and necessities stated by the Post Disaster Necessity Determination report. This report states that the policy should be determined by the centre however programmes and plans must be determined at the local level. Furthermore, it stresses on the need of mobilizing local resources, knowledge, skills and handicraft in the reconstruction of devastated structures. It also highlights the importance of the idea of self-rebuilding and the effective deployment of political parties, local organizations, NGOs and professional networks in the reconstruction process. Likewise, it reiterates the spontaneous involvement of locals in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake in the rescue, relief, and search efforts while stressing on the need of national unity, solidarity and tolerance in the rebuilding and reconstruction work. It suggests various action plans with an aim at fostering these principles. However, not all the action plans are as feasible, as deliberated below:

- **Building by Self**

- ❖ ***Concerns of Families Comprised of Elderly, Single Women, and People Living with Disabilities***

The policy's central focus is on the idea of Building Back Better, by focusing on the use of local resources and manpower. In this regard, the action plan that seeks to foster self-rebuilding stresses on the need of homeowners to rebuild on their own. Likewise, it states that families comprising of elderly people, single women and people living with disabilities shall be assisted by the community in rebuilding their houses. It does not refer to any form

of financial incentive for such assistance. While this action plan might have its own merits, if we were to think about it in a more detailed manner, this strategy may not be feasible in the current scenario. The findings suggest that in cases where the family members were elderly such spontaneous assistance was not available. Instead, they had to pay for the labour hired from within the community. This renders the effectiveness of the policy in this regard questionable. Proper and effective redress for such issue is pressing, as in its absence the policy is bound to be ineffective. It could be modified so that the government remunerates the locals for assisting families comprised of single woman, elderly and people living with disabilities. This would ensure support from the community to these families, which otherwise could be unreliable.

- **Collective Rebuilding by Locals: Pros and Cons**

The proposal on building houses collectively was supported by the findings. However, it requires a more thorough study of the communities in consideration. At the local level, people went on building temporary shelters one after another by mobilizing their collective strength and using locally available resources. In this regard, they assisted each other and built their shelters consecutively. However, this was limited to a particular group of caste, i.e. in a rural location like Namdu such efforts actually sidelined the *Dalits*, leaving them to rely on their own community for assistance. However, in areas around Charikot, people from various caste and creed assisted each other in building temporary shelters.

This shows that the same policy might not work in all areas or every kind of setting. In fact, the policy should be area specific rather than general. For this end, a group of local representatives could be formed who could suggest a proper model for an area, based on its societal structure and functioning.

Furthermore, the idea of mobilizing locals for rebuilding their houses is in itself flawed. Firstly, the idea of collective rebuilding stresses on the use of locals in building their houses however ignores the fact that not all locals are skilled. This makes the policy untenable, as the unskilled manpower might actually be unable to build earthquake-resistant houses as purported by the policy. In addition, this would require for the skilled manpower to receive specialized training in building earthquake-resilient homes while calling for a need to increase the number of skilled individuals through training. The policy speaks of training locally skilled manpower and prioritizing youth, women, and backward classes. However, it is silent about increasing the number of skilled manpower, which is vital to accomplish the rebuilding process on time. The proposal to have at least one-third women participation in such training is a way forward for women empowerment. However, it significantly contradicts with the findings, which suggests that most of the women in Charikot as well as Namdu were restricted to their household chores and had almost no role in building temporary shelters. This again raises the question of whether such reservation alone can

help empower women and whether the given one-third seats could be filled. This requires for the policy to deal with specific ways to increase female participation in rebuilding and expand their roles from household chores to reconstruction. In order to resolve this problem, economic incentives could be used as a possible measure, where women would be paid for the training as well as for the work in order to encourage their participation.

- ***Use of Locally Available Earthquake-Resistant Materials***

- ❖ ***Feasibility***

The policy proposes the use of locally available resources to build houses that are earthquake-resistant. The findings also show that locally available resources had been used to a larger extent. Likewise, the Design Catalogue for Reconstruction of Earthquake-Resistant Houses<sup>37</sup> recommends the use of several materials like stone, sand, cement, wood, and corrugated sheets. However, the pivotal question is whether the proposed materials could actually be earthquake-resistant as well as feasible for an import dependent economy like Nepal. According to a leading research on earthquake, from an earthquake safety point of view steel, wood and reinforced concrete are the most suitable construction materials, while brick, block are moderately suitable.<sup>38</sup> However, the policy, which suggests the use of bricks, blocks, woods, and bamboo, is not clear on how the suggested local materials shall be used in the reconstruction and rebuilding process, for example whether bricks should be reinforced. The policy details the materials that could be locally obtainable, but fails to speak of how it could be used to ensure safety. Likewise, it is highly unlikely that all the suggested materials are available and obtainable in all the earthquake-hit areas. Furthermore, in practice, in the aftermath of the earthquake, locals used *bhakari* and its remnants to rebuild their houses, while some opted for using plywood and corrugated sheets. The use of the suggested materials was not persistent in the two communities (i.e. Charikot and Namdu), which largely was due to the unavailability of such materials at the local level. Thus, these materials would have to be brought from other parts of the country where they are available. Unexpected problems such as the recent fuel crisis adds to the complexity of sourcing and transporting the recommended materials. The fuel crisis caused the closure of several industries, thereby hampering the availability of materials like cement and corrugated sheets but also halt the transportation of materials from one part of the country to the other. Thus, the scarcity of the recommended materials is bound to slow down the already sluggish rebuilding process and therefore raises doubts on the feasibility of this approach to rebuilding.

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<sup>37</sup>The Design Catalogue for Reconstruction of Earthquake Resistant Houses Volume-I, October, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.nset.org.np/nset2012/images/publicationfile/20110816230617.pdf>



### ❖ ***Clear and Timely Support***

It is crucial that earthquake-resistant houses are built on time. As findings show, the locals have started building small cottages for themselves and they might eventually move towards building permanent shelters on their own as well. The deferred action of the state machinery in assisting locals to build their houses has left the locals without a proper shelter to protect themselves from adverse weather conditions. A delay in building earthquake-resistant houses can lead individuals to build their own permanent homes that do not adhere to the building code. Considering their lack of expertise and the limited resources available, they might ultimately end up building the same kind of houses that existed before the earthquake. This will severely hamper the concept of Building Back Better and will increase the vulnerability of the victims of earthquake. Therefore, it is important that as proposed in the policy, the government extend the technical support to the locals as soon as possible.

### ○ **Need of a Local Mechanism for Increasing Local Awareness and Preparedness**

Likewise, the policy aims at increasing public awareness regarding any kind of natural calamities in order to minimize the future risks associated with such calamities. Furthermore, with an aim to strengthen the level of preparation at the local level, it suggests the formation of a social group. This is commendable, as the findings show that in the absence of external support the communities did for informal structures that helped communities cope with the disaster. Therefore strengthening these informal structures to foster the existing community coping mechanisms through a proper community-based structure could work really well. Likewise, awareness and preparedness within communities could be furthered through the mobilization of local leadership that emerged in the aftermath of the earthquake and gained the trust of the locals in the absence of locally elected representatives. The local leaders in the form of teachers, businessmen, social workers, etc., acted on behalf of the locals and were the ones whom the locals listened to and trusted. Therefore, it is imperative that the policy take these factors into consideration and proposes a system where such leadership is encouraged and their greater participation is ensured, to help locals deal with such calamities and be better prepared for the future.

### ○ **Deployment of Several Actors and their Roles**

The policy further states that government employees, the army and police personnel, civil servants and teachers shall be deployed to earthquake hit areas to extend their expertise and help the communities in the rebuilding process. This could be a great way of strengthening the coping mechanisms of a community as suggested by the findings. As in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, army personnel were actively involved in the search and rescue effort, which helped save many lives. Likewise, at the local level

especially in Namdu, schoolteachers helped the locals in coping with the situation by providing emotional and psychological support. Furthermore, they provided the school premises for the locals to live in and pressurized the local authorities like the VDC and the CDO to act promptly and address the needs of locals. Similarly, they were also involved in coordinating with international agencies for fair distribution of relief materials. Likewise, government employees like health professionals attended to the sick, wounded, and provided them with the best possible medical assistance. This helped save the lives of many earthquake victims. In this light, the idea of deploying individuals with specific expertise to earthquake hit regions for recovery and reconstruction is a valuable approach. However, the policy needs to be more specific about how it intends to mobilize the manpower in the earthquake-hit regions. For instance, army personnel could be mobilized to help rebuild local structures after receiving the necessary training. In addition, teachers could be offered proper training to bolster their role as counselors within the local communities. Given the role played by teachers at local level in the aftermath of the earthquake in helping the locals deal with their trauma and also in bringing in external support, it is crucial that the policy takes the role of such actors into consideration. Overall, their role as counselors and facilitators needs to be emphasized by the policy to bring about efficient results. There is also a pressing need for civil servants who can address the grievances of locals and speed up the rebuilding process. For all these reasons, there is a need for a clear plan that assigns specific roles to the professionals so they can make a valuable difference to the communities they work in.

- **Mobilization of Volunteers**

The policy aims at maintaining and enhancing the roles of volunteers as witnessed in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. It intends to do so by involving students, members from political parties, their sister organizations, social organizations, professional organizations, and the civil society. Findings of the study suggest participation of such volunteers was remarkably high in the aftermath of the earthquake. Likewise, local youth actively assisted the communities in Namdu and Charikot in the aftermath of the earthquake. This calls for the policy to take a more pragmatic approach. The policy at present suggests the mobilization of volunteers from universities and colleges by deploying them to nearby areas. However as witnessed in the aftermath of the Gorkha earthquake, such volunteerism was in fact short lived as the external members of the community had to leave at some point to continue with their own lives. In this regard, in order to ensure a sustainable volunteerism and to curb out any difficulties associated with mobilizing the volunteers pouring in from outside, it is much more realistic to mobilize local youth. The local youth who were actively involved in areas in the aftermath of the earthquake are part of the communities and are best positioned to communicate with other members of their community. Moreover, their commitment to the rebuilding approach will be permanent as they themselves belong to the affected community. In addition, a feeling of ownership

among the locals is higher as compared to outsiders. However, it is vital that such mobilization is governed and scrutinized properly in order to avoid any vacuum or mismanagement of resources. For instance, spontaneous uprising of volunteers was high in the beginning however eventually it started fading away. The initial support that the locals received was overwhelming which increased their dependency and weakened their own coping mechanism. Therefore, when the support withered away the locals found themselves more vulnerable. Likewise, apart from the positive roles played by political parties and their sister organizations, there were instances where their intervention left locals without any assistance. For example, the issuance of fake victim cards for made international agencies doubt the credibility of the process that identified the victims. This halted the relief for actual victims. This shows the need of a mechanism to look into the actions of political parties and their sister organizations during the ongoing relief activities. In addition, it is imperative that the local perspective is taken into account while mobilizing volunteers to ensure that the needs of the earthquake victims are prioritized.

## **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **4.1. Conclusion**

This paper tries to evaluate the coping mechanisms of communities based on roles played by several actors existing in the community and the bond existing between community members and the actors.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, community members came together and started working towards overcoming the immediate crisis. They started acting at an individual level, then in a more organized manner at a local level. Immediate family members assisted each other as far as they could, and they received further support from their neighbours and other community members. Family and community members who were living elsewhere or abroad sent in support and assistance in the form of food and relief material to their families and community as well. Furthermore, even the kind of relationship that existed within the community varied from one location (Charikot) to another (Namdu), given their different characteristics as a community.

Social ties played a significant role in helping the community cope with the crisis. In case of a semi-urban community like Charikot, the role of the business community was prominent as most of them belonged to that particular area and to Dolakha Bazar. Apart from assisting the earthquake victims through their own donations, they also encouraged others to be part of the effort. They further mobilized their links and connections to direct assistance and relief to the region.

Similarly, the role of youth and women co-operatives was also visible in certain areas. The role of youth at an individual level was existent in both Charikot and Namdu; however, the role played by youth clubs was limited to a few areas around Charikot. Likewise, the role played by the Ward

Citizen's Forum was quite significant in Namdu where it distributed relief items and acted as a pressure group. In fact, it was more concentrated in areas around Charikot rather than in Charikot itself.

Similarly, political parties were seen to be active more in Namdu than in Charikot. In Namdu, they were mostly involved in relief distribution and advocacy. However, they were unable to hold the local authorities accountable for responding to the needs of local earthquake victims on time. This in fact overshadowed their good work.

Likewise, in Charikot the local business community and some local social workers took a leadership role in assisting the community in the aftermath of the earthquake. In Namdu, the local schoolteachers, headmasters and local social workers emerged as leaders within the community. This was because they were already active members of the community and were held in high esteem by the community members. Since most of them belonged to the same community, it made it easier for the locals to trust them and depend on them for extensive support. Furthermore, other groups that were actively engaged in assisting local communities cope with the situation were the pre-existing formal structures within the community. The health posts and the PHC assisted the locals by providing their service and attended to the wounded and sick on time. Likewise, the army personnel helped locals retrieve bodies and other items from under the rubble. Similarly, the government built mechanism like the DDRC distributed relief items to the locals, channelled funds and other items while the VDC distributed relief funds to the locals. Overall, in the immediate aftermath of earthquake the coping mechanism of communities helped them endure and survive the disaster before any external help arrived. The government with an aim to help the communities rebuild formulated the post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction policy, which aims to assist the communities to build back better.

#### **4.2. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the research, which explains the coping mechanism employed by communities in the aftermath of the earthquake, the following recommendations are made with the view to better inform the government's post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction policy:

1. Proper provision regarding remuneration and incentive needs to be proposed in regards to assisting families comprised of single women, elderly, and people living with disability while rebuilding houses with the assistance from community members.
2. In the process of homeowners rebuilding their own houses, the existing societal caste-based distinctions must be taken into consideration and a special mechanism needs to be put in place to address any possible discrimination.
3. The use of locally available building materials must be assessed in order to ensure resilience and availability.
4. In order to minimize the impact of the earthquake, the service mechanisms assisting the locals in rebuilding their houses must be established right away.

5. Training for local schoolteachers, army personnel, and other government employees to be deployed in earthquake-hit regions must be prioritised.
6. Volunteers from within the community should be included in the rebuilding process and external volunteers local should be made well aware of the characteristics that define the community they are deployed to.

## Appendix

What worked in the community	support psychologically and counselling	Retrieve materials	Build temporary shelters by mobilizing local	Requested for external support	Cooked food together	Provided money, relief items like food, clothes etc.	Mobilized Local Business Community and their support	Awareness Raising	Co-ordination between different	Prepared necessary documents	Inability to ensure accountability	Provided space	Pressure group, Delegation, Lobbying	Fake victims creation	Attended the sick and wounded
Familial Bond and Kinship															
❖ Immediate family and relatives															
❖ Family members living outside or abroad															
❖ Local Communities and Neighbours															
Gender															
• Male															
• Female															
Caste															
• Sarki															
Social Ties and Businessmen who have link with the community															
Philanthropic deed of local businessmen															
Motivating others to donate and help															
Use of their links to receive help															
Ama Samuha															
Youth Club															
Women Saving Co-operatives															
Ward Citizen's Forum															
Political parties															
Constructive Activities															
Inability of Political Parties to fully represent and assist the locals															
Local Leadership															
Businessmen															
School teachers and Headmasters															
Others															
Health Services															
Army															
Government Bodies															

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