

Concerns of Women in the Rebuilding Process after the April 2015 Earthquake In Nepal

Rina Chaudhary

for

Alliance for Social Dialogue
Kathmandu, Nepal

Alliance for Social Dialogue
Policy Research Fellowship Program 2015
December 2015
www.asd.org.np



Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
1. Introduction.....	4
1.1. Background	4
1.2. Statement of Problem	4
1.3. Research Questions	5
1.4. Research Methods	5
2. Literature Review.....	6
2.1. The Impacts of Disaster and Inequality.....	6
2.2. Disaster and Marginalized Groups.....	6
3. Concerns of Women and Women with Disabilities in the Aftermath of the Earthquake.....	8
3.1. Concerns of Pregnant Women and New Mothers.....	8
3.2. Concerns of Women as Caregivers	9
3.3. Work Burden in Makeshift Shelters.....	9
3.4. Property Ownership and Rebuilding	9
3.5. Concerns of Women in Rebuilding and Reconstruction of Homes	11
3.6. Personal Safety and Sanitation.....	11
4. Concerns of Women with Disabilities	13
4.1. Living Conditions in the Tents for Women with Disabilities	13
4.2. Mental Well-being of Women with Disabilities	14
4.3. Inadequate Support for Women with Disabilities	14
5. The Reconstruction and Restoration Policy.....	15
5.1. Health and Sanitation	15
5.2. Property Ownership and Rebuilding	16
5.3. Implementation Process and Institutional Structure	16
5.4. Alternative Forms of Livelihood.....	17
5.5. Women in the Reconstruction Process.....	17
6. Conclusion	17
7. Recommendations.....	18
Bibliography	20

Policy Discussion Paper – 4 /2015

Concerns of Women in the Rebuilding Process after the April 2015 Earthquake In Nepal

ABSTRACT

The earthquake that struck Nepal in April 2015 had a tragic impact on life, livestock and property. According to the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment report (PDNA), prepared by the National Planning Commission, more than 9,000 people were killed and 22,300 people were injured whereas according to the Nepal Earthquake Humanitarian Report, more than 600,000 houses were destroyed and another 290,000 were damaged.

However, this paper goes beyond impact of the earthquake in the immediate aftermath in order to evaluate how it affected existing marginalized groups and to what extent were their existing vulnerabilities further exacerbated. This paper discusses and analyses the impact of the April earthquake on women and young girls and women with disabilities. The paper demonstrates the cross-sectional impact of the earthquake on women by assessing their position in the society determined by their gender, class, caste, age, political patronage, and physical disability. With data collected from the field, the paper aims to highlight the additional burden of a natural disaster on women in relation to their role as mothers and primary caregivers within the family unit.

The paper also offers critical insight on disaster preparedness in Nepal and how women suffer due to the lack of basic necessities such as water, access to healthcare services and suitable living conditions that guarantee privacy or a right to personal space and dignity. By focusing on the problems that directly affected women in the aftermath of the earthquake, the paper also highlights the shortcomings in the national policy of Reconstruction and Rebuilding by looking at how gender sensitive the provisions are, especially in relation to discriminatory provisions around receiving government aid and support for reconstruction and rebuilding.

The paper goes on to offer recommendations informed by the research, that can contribute to future disaster preparedness plans to ensure the specific concerns of women and women with disabilities do not get side-lined.

This paper is a product of the Alliance for Social Dialogue Policy Research Fellowship Program 2015. Policy Research Discussion Papers are also posted on www.asd.org.np. The author can be contacted at rinachaudhary1@gmail.com. Findings and Conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ASD.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

On April 25, 2015, Nepal was struck by a powerful (7.6 magnitude) earthquake with its epicentre in Barpak, Gorkha. The earthquake was followed by more than 300 aftershocks above 4 Richter scale. According to the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment report (PDNA) prepared by the National Planning Commission, more than 9,000 people were killed and 22,300 people were injured. The Nepal Earthquake Humanitarian report states that more than 600,000 houses were destroyed and another 290,000 were damaged.¹ Furthermore, fourteen districts which were most affected were declared as ‘crisis-hit’ for the purpose of the rescue and relief operations.² The large-scale damage caused by the earthquake affected over one-third of the population of the country.

The impact of any disaster on marginalized groups can exacerbate their existing vulnerabilities. This paper aims to look at the status of women and their specific concerns in the aftermath of the earthquake. Women have been historically marginalized in Nepal as attested by their social, political and economic status in the society. The paper goes further by focusing on women with disabilities who are further sidelined. The PDNA report identified women as most affected by the earthquake. In the light of this, the research also looks at how the government has addressed the concerns of women through its Rebuilding and Reconstruction Policy and how it intends to include women in the reconstruction process itself.

1.2. Statement of Problem

While natural disasters are indiscriminate in terms of their impact, the level of damage may vary depending on demographics such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, and caste. As a result of the earthquake, large sections of the population from different social and economic backgrounds cohabited in makeshift shelters in open areas. Despite the impact of the earthquake on women, they were still compelled to carry out their duties as primary caregivers irrespective of their circumstances. Despite the radical change in their living conditions and the lack of basic facilities, women tried their best to carry out their domestic duties. The pressing demands of their families, coupled with the need to rebuild their homes and their livelihoods posed many challenges for women. Moreover, while women with disabilities faced similar challenges they also had to cope with living in unfamiliar surroundings.

Furthermore, one of the greatest challenges that have emerged for women in the aftermath of the earthquake is related to property ownership and how it is linked with accessing support and aid from the government. In the case of Nepal, only 19.71% of women possess proof of property ownership whereas only 25.73% of household heads are women.³ In the rebuilding process,

¹ UNFPA 2015

² PDNA Report 2015

³ National Population and Housing Census 2011

proof of property ownership is essential for receiving an Earthquake Victim Identity Card, which is a pre-requisite for claiming any type of support from the state for reconstruction. However, the Earthquake Victim Identity Cards are only issued to the head of the household making it difficult for many women to claim relief grants and aid offered by the government.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What were the pressing concerns of women and women with disabilities in the aftermath of the earthquake?
2. How could the government acknowledge and address the concerns of women and women with disabilities in the rebuilding process?

1.4. Research Methods

The research is based on Key Informant Interviews conducted with earthquake victims who are women and women with disabilities. The interviews were also extended to individuals working at NGOs and other organizations present on the ground. The list of NGOs and INGOs consulted for the purposes of the research are listed below:

- WOREC (Women's Rehabilitation Centre)
- NFDN (Nepal Federation of the Disabled)
- NDWA (Nepal Disabled Women's Association)

Field visits:

Bidur Municipality and Tupche VDC of Nuwakot district were selected as sites for the field-based research. The district has been identified by the government of Nepal as one of the fourteen most earthquake-affected districts. The two sites were selected for their mixed population.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

A total of five focus-group discussions (FGD) were conducted in order to better understand the concerns of women in the aftermath of the earthquake. Two FGDs comprising of women from Bidur and Tupche were conducted. In the same sites two more FGDs were conducted comprising of women belonging to the Dalit community. One FGD comprising of women with disabilities was organized at the district office of NFDN. The main purpose of the FGDs was to understand the major concerns and problems of women and to try and understand how the government could address their concerns in the rebuilding process.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Impacts of Disaster and Inequality

The Post Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA) report shows the level of inequalities prevalent in Nepal, based on geography, income and gender. Poorer rural areas were more adversely affected by the earthquake than urban areas. Each natural disaster affects human life and livelihood, but the impact may vary across different social groups. The earthquake impact was felt the most by the rural poor due to the damage it did to their homes, livestock and livelihood. Women who relied on agriculture as their only source of livelihood found themselves in an extremely vulnerable economic state as they did not have any alternative livelihood options.

2.2. Disaster and Marginalized Groups

In response to the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in 2011, Elizabeth Maly in her essay, 'Towards a People-Centered Housing Recovery After the Triple Disaster', argued that housing and livelihood are interrelated, which brings to light the struggle faced by the earthquake victims in rebuilding their homes along with their livelihoods.⁴ The cost of housing recovery has a direct impact on the livelihood options available to an earthquake victim based on their household budgets. Maly further goes on to describe how disaster and vulnerability are also interrelated. The level of risk associated to factors which contribute to vulnerability increases in the aftermath of a natural hazard. The factors linked to the vulnerable disposition of people can be age, income, gender, caste, ethnicity or housing situation. Vulnerable people suffer more during and after a disaster. Survivors with low-income face the additional economic burden associated with reconstruction or recovery in the aftermath of a natural calamity. Furthermore, single women, single mothers, people with disabilities, who face multiple forms of discrimination during normal times, find themselves more vulnerable in times of crisis as they have to cope with the unpredictable shocks and stresses that have an impact on their economic and social well-being.⁵

Marginalization is the process where individuals and entire communities of people are systematically denied full access to various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available as a citizen of a state. In other words, a group of people or community who are deprived from the basic benefits such as access to education, health, administration, power and politics of the state can be referred to as the marginalized.

The constitution of Nepal defines marginalized as "...those who have been forced to fall backward politically, economically, and socially. Those who have been unable to avail services because of discrimination and harassment, and because of geographical disconnection, and those communities whose standard of living has been below the legal standard as specified in the

⁴ Bacon and Hobson 2014

⁵ ibid

human development indicators. It also signifies the ultra-marginalized and communities on the verge of extinction."⁶

The marginalized groups suffer disproportionately during disasters. According to a report published by Amnesty International in June 2015, in the aftermath of the earthquake in Nepal, unequal or unfair distribution of relief and aid was evident and was partly related to remoteness of affected areas and inaccessibility to some communities. For the collection of relief, people had to walk long distances making it tougher for women, the elderly and people with disabilities.⁷ Moreover, there were news reports that stated that relief and aid distribution was politically manipulated in some communities.⁸ The Amnesty report further corroborated this claim in the report when it stated that, "The political actors competed for status through the provision of relief."⁹

In Record Nepal's article, 'Unequal power relations and extractive development are condemning Tamang communities to poverty', the author, Shradha Ghale has pointed out that the vulnerable situation of marginalized communities in the aftermath of the earthquake is closely linked to dynamics of race, caste and ethnicity. More than 60% of the quake victims were from marginalized ethnic groups. Dalits were the worst-hit in areas with mixed population and majority of the victims belonged to the Tamang community. Of the 3500 people that lost their lives in Sindhupalchowk, nearly half of them belonged to the Tamang community.¹⁰

A 2010 UNDP report states that women and men belonging to different age groups and socio-economic status exhibit distinct vulnerabilities.¹¹ Gender, age and socio-economic status shape their experiences during a disaster and their coping capacity. Disasters increase the pre-existing vulnerabilities of women. In the case of Nepal, the earthquake made women even more vulnerable and weaker; economically, socially and physically. While they were already victims of the gender bias, their status further deteriorated after the earthquake. In Nepal like in many other countries, women and girls are responsible for unpaid labour, such as providing care and looking after their household and a natural disaster adds to their existing burden of labour. Furthermore, "...women are likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence leading many to even avoid using shelters for the fear of being sexually assaulted."¹²

Besides difficulties in accessing aid, women also struggled with the reconstruction of their destroyed homes due to limited access to resources as well as lack of manpower. At the same

⁶ Constitution of Nepal 2015

⁷ Amnesty International 2015

⁸ The Himalayan Times 2015

⁹ Amnesty International 2015.

¹⁰ Ghale 2015

¹¹ UNDP 2010

¹² Amnesty International 2015

time families with disabled members had to provide the necessary care and medical attention at a time of crisis increasing the economic and work burden in the absence of special support extended by the government towards people with disabilities in the aftermath of the earthquake.

3. Concerns of Women and Women with Disabilities in the Aftermath of the Earthquake

Considering the plight of marginalized groups and how they might be further sidelined in the event of a disaster, the purpose of the research was to capture the specific concerns of women and women with disabilities. Below are the pertinent concerns that emerged during the course of the research:

3.1. Concerns of Pregnant Women and New Mothers

The earthquake destroyed public service infrastructures that offered basic social services including healthcare.¹³ This had an adverse impact on pregnant women, lactating mothers and infants. The destruction of homes, food stock and healthcare posts affected health, hygiene, security and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women. As per the FGDs conducted in Bidur-1, Bandre and Tupche-2, Ankara; pregnant women and new mothers experienced multiple problems while living in temporary shelters made of tarpaulin and plastic. They struggled to shield themselves and their new-born babies from adverse weather conditions. As they lived out in the open, they feared wild animals and failed to protect their children from mosquito bites. According to one of the participants of the FGD, *“Living under the tarpaulin was scary. We were afraid of snakebites as there were a few instances of snakes entering the makeshift shelters. The shelters were also infested with mosquitoes and flies and we were scared of diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea.”* Pregnant women, lactating mothers and their babies did not have access to a balanced diet as the food supplies were scarce. The diet available was lacking in the required nutrients necessary during the postnatal stage. There were many instances of women and young babies suffering from fever and diarrhoea due to poor living conditions and poor levels of nutrition.

As temporary shelters were covered with zinc, they were poorly insulated and the temperature inside fluctuated from extreme cold to extreme heat depending on weather conditions. Such extreme changes in temperatures contributed to the poor health of pregnant women, lactating mothers and infants. Moreover, those in poor health conditions struggled to receive medical attention as the hospitals were too crowded due to the large number of victims who had suffered physical injuries. Some did not have enough money to pay for hospital visits. Moreover, the hospitals were also running out of medical supplies.

¹³ PDNA 2015

3.2. Concerns of Women as Caregivers

The loss of home and the economic strain caused by the earthquake made life extremely challenging for women. As primary caregivers within the family, they struggled to provide adequate food and other basic necessities to their children and other members of the family.

The situation of women in Bidur, Maare Ghaat and Tupche was extremely vulnerable. Ritumaya Rai and Monika Lama (Pseudonyms) shared how they were unable to provide enough food for their children. They were also concerned that due to the added economic burdens, they would be unable to send their children to good schools. They also said how the productivity of their land had already reduced due to landslides and the earthquake added to their existing woes by killing their livestock and making them even more economically vulnerable than before.

3.3. Work Burden in Makeshift Shelters

The earthquake significantly increased the burden of household chores on women. The scarcity of basic supplies such as food and water created multiple challenges for women living in tents. Since the earthquake destroyed most of the water sources, women had to walk long distances to get water for daily use. Victims who were displaced from villages such as Shalma and Bhalche set up temporary shelters on the bank of the Trishuli River, in a place called *Maare Ghaat*. These victims are still suffering from water scarcity which is affecting levels of health and sanitation. Twenty-five to thirty households have had to rely on one source of running water. According to interviews conducted with two women in *Maare Ghaat*, their work burden increased due to scarcity of water, firewood, cooking gas and other essentials. Though they did receive various forms of aid on a regular basis, the scarcity of LPG cooking gas and fuel made life very difficult for them. Moreover, the people were forbidden from collecting firewood from the jungle without the permission of the government, which made them even more reliant on external support.

But, the situation in Bidur and Tupche seemed less dire than *Maare Ghaat*. Since their water sources were not affected by the earthquake, the victims in this area did not struggle with water shortages as much. The households living under each tent were quite organized with older women preparing food for the entire group and taking charge of how the work got divided between women. Women who took part in the FGD said that those with small babies were excused from household chores so they could focus on taking care of their children. But, at the same time women did face difficulties in retrieving usable supplies from their collapsed homes. They also could not help much in building temporary shelters.

3.4. Property Ownership and Rebuilding

Distribution of Identity Cards for Earthquake Victims:

To help the victims of the earthquake, the government, through a cabinet-level decision announced the immediate dispatch of relief in the form of cash and relief packages. However, the government also introduced the identity cards for earthquake victims and mobilized local government employees and other members of the community such as teachers and lecturers to distribute these cards. The identity card system was meant to ensure transparency during the

relief process and to ensure that the rightful victims received the assistance. But, the implementation of the identity card system soon met with many irregularities as the number of victims soared beyond what the government had calculated based on the assessment reports of the impact of the earthquake.¹⁴

The procedure was also particularly discriminatory towards women. In order to receive a victim's identity card, the individual was required to present property ownership documents that attested his or her status as the head of the household. In most of the families, males are recognized as the head of family and are the legal owners of the property. While women with proof of property ownership and women who were the heads of the household in the absence of their husbands easily received the earthquake victim family identity card, single women without proof of property ownership or women unable to prove that their husbands were away struggled to receive the identity cards.

According to some staff members of WOREC, people had complained of irregularities during card distribution. Households with completely damaged homes ended up getting a card that identified them as owning partially damaged homes and vice versa. Similarly, multiple households living in one house as a joint family were only recognized as a single family whereas a single family ended up receiving cards that identified them as joint families, giving them access to more aid and support. These irregularities were linked to corruption and possible fraud in the distribution of relief materials and funds.

In the context of this paper, the case study below highlights the challenges faced by a single woman with disability in receiving the Earthquake Victim Identity Card.

Case Study

Sarita (Pseudonym) had an eye problem. She got married and moved to Buddha Sing VDC. After two years she completely lost her eyesight. After she turned blind, her husband left her and remarried. Since then, she has been living with her parents. Though she had separated from her husband, they were not divorced. As she had no proof of legal separation from her husband she had difficulty getting an earthquake-affected identity card as she was not recognized as head of the household.

The April earthquake destroyed most of the houses in her community including her parent's house. Her parents received the Earthquake Victim Family Identity Card easily but it wasn't the same for her. She first went to Gerku VDC to claim her identity card but she was asked to go to Buddha Sing VDC instead as that was where she got her citizenship card from, under her husband's name. When she went to Buddha Sing VDC for the card, the VDC secretary told her that her husband had already claimed the identity card. Since she had no way of proving that she was separated from her husband, she was unable to get the identity card, which meant that she

was deprived from receiving any compensation from the government. Sarita did receive some relief supplies such as zinc sheets from NFDN and sanitary kits from WOREC Nepal, but has not received any support from the government yet.

Not all women struggled like Sarita, during interviews two women from Bidur- 1 said that their husbands were abroad however, they got the cards earlier than others households and didn't face any difficulties because their community gave priority to women-headed families with young children.

Similarly a single woman from Tupche-2, Akare said that even though she was unmarried and lived alone, she did not face any problems in getting the identity card.

3.5. Concerns of Women in Rebuilding and Reconstruction of Homes

Families with women as the head of the household and families made up of the elderly struggled the most in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. They were faced with the task of building temporary shelters which is physically demanding. They had difficulty accessing materials such as zinc sheets required to construct the shelters. Moreover, they had to rely on paid labour to build shelters in the absence of male members in the family. The cost of the labour was high especially considering the destruction of their homes and their livelihoods. Moreover, the economic blockade which lasted for over four months created a shortage of supply of building materials. This caused a sudden hike in the prices of raw materials and daily essentials, adding to the already existing economic burden.

In some cases, women with male members in the family working abroad, fared better as they received money on a regular basis which helped them in rebuilding. The money offered by the government as immediate relief was not sufficient to cover the costs of rebuilding and the rising prices of building materials made things even more challenging. As gathered from the FGD and interviews, it is evident that the economically poor suffered much more because of the earthquake.

3.6. Personal Safety and Sanitation

Hygiene and Sanitation

Gender-based discrimination or discrimination against women is the most common problem prevalent in the Nepalese society. This pre-existing gender bias was reflected in the post-disaster relief prioritization, where little or no attention was given to women's specific needs for their personal safety and health.¹⁵ The earthquake further affected women and adolescent girls as they struggled with maintaining their personal hygiene in the temporary shelters. With most of the toilet facilities and water sources destroyed by the quake, women and young girls suffered from a lack of proper facilities necessary for their social and physical well-being. Since the female

¹⁵ Baruah 2015

members of the families were responsible for most of the household chores, they were forced to tackle problems such as lack of water and food supplies.¹⁶ Women and girls during their menstruation had to suffer from the lack of toilet facilities, water and lack of sanitary supplies. In the FGDs conducted at Bidur and Tupche, the participating women shared that in the aftermath of the earthquake they lacked basic facilities such as water and toilets and did not have access to essential female sanitary products. The government did little to address these problems and it was only after over a month that NGOs and INGOs such as WOREC, UNICEF and NDWA distributed sanitary kits to the women living in temporary shelters.

Living in an open area with a large group offered women little privacy, making it difficult for them to even change their clothes. Moreover, the lack of toilet facilities meant women had to use open areas in the outdoors which added to their discomfort. The lack of privacy, lack of toilet facilities, lack of water and sanitation had an adverse impact on the physical and mental well-being of women and adolescent girls.

Psychological Impact on Women and Young Girls

According to several NGOs that work with women, the psychological impact of the earthquake on young girls and women was noticeable. There were many cases of young girls and women suffering from frequent fainting spells. The women and girls also exhibited symptoms of anxiety as many complained of insomnia.

Women and Violence

Incidents of violence against women were noted in the open makeshift shelters after the earthquake. Women were verbally abused and physically threatened not only in public places but also in their own homes. Moreover, women became easy targets of sexual violence in temporary shelters.¹⁷ The 2014 Report of the UN Secretary-General on gender equality, underlines 'the likelihood of rape and sexual violence rising during natural disasters.'¹⁸ As per the interview with staff members of WOREC, women were threatened on a regular basis in the tents. WOREC has documented 173 cases of violence against women from mid-June to mid-July from all development regions and more than half of these cases were related to domestic violence.¹⁹ However, the FGDs did not reveal any specific instances of violence against women in Bidur and Tupche.

¹⁶ PDNA 2015

¹⁷ UN Women 2015

¹⁸ UN 2014

¹⁹ The Himalayan Times 2015

4. Concerns of Women with Disabilities

While women with disabilities had to face the exact same challenges as other women, they were further affected because of the lack of disabled-friendly facilities. Most of the infrastructure such as social service centres, health centres and houses were demolished by the earthquake. Thousands of people were rendered homeless and had to live out in the open in tents. But, women with disabilities were more vulnerable while living in open areas that offered little or no protection. Women with disabilities struggled with basic facilities such as toilets. Firstly, the facilities were lacking and moreover they were not disabled-friendly. Moreover, a recent report of NDWA shows that 80% of women with disabilities face physical violence and 50% experience sexual violence in their life time.²⁰ Similarly, women with physical disabilities were also more vulnerable to violence, both physical and sexual while living in open temporary shelters.²¹

4.1. Living Conditions in the Tents for Women with Disabilities

People with disabilities depend on familiar living environments. They are used to their homes and carry out their daily activities like cooking and cleaning in their habitual spaces. However, the earthquake destroyed the homes of many people with disabilities and forced them to move to temporary shelters. They found it difficult to do their daily household work inside communal spaces that were unfamiliar and lacked the facilities they were used to. During the FDG, a woman with disability said, *“We are used to our old house but the tent is completely new to us and we cannot do anything without someone's help.”*

Those who required regular medical assistance were left without any access to healthcare. The Administrative Manager of NFDN, Manish Prasai, said during an interview, “People with disabilities who needed a special bed or needed support to get out of bed were neglected in temporary shelters. There was nobody there to help them with their daily activities in the communal tents.”²²

Gitu (Pseudonyms) and Sarita (Pseudonyms), both women without eyesight, shared their struggles during an interview with maintaining personal hygiene during menstruation. The lack of disabled-friendly toilet facilities meant that people with disabilities had to ask for help and support every time they had to go to the toilet. They also had to use the outdoors in the absence of toilets which made them feel uncomfortable. Water Aid built disabled-friendly toilet facilities in some places but they were not enough to cater to the needs of all people with disabilities. Moreover, the women were constantly concerned about their safety and security as they felt vulnerable in unfamiliar surroundings.

²⁰ NDWA 2007

²¹ Nepal Earthquake Response 2015

4.2. Mental Well-being of Women with Disabilities

The earthquake had a considerable impact on the mental well-being of women with disabilities. The interviews reflected the concerns of women regarding their safety and security during the frequent aftershocks that followed the massive earthquake. They were worried about not being able to come out of their shelters in time. Those with no eyesight were worried about finding their way to safety in the event of another earthquake or aftershock. Two respondents said, "We were scared of the aftershocks and worried about who would save us if our homes or houses collapsed."

4.3. Inadequate Support for Women with Disabilities

While there was no proof of wilful discrimination against women with disabilities during the relief and rescue efforts, there were instances where discrimination happened due to lack of foresight and sensitivity towards their needs. Essential relief supplies such as food and material for temporary shelters were distributed to all, however neither the government nor the NGOs or INGOs were mindful of the specific needs of women with disabilities, such as wheelchairs that may have been destroyed by the earthquake. While the relief packages were being distributed, most of the women with disabilities in areas close to the relief distribution site had access to it. However, disabled women who lived far from the distribution site were either not notified in time or struggled to get to the site. Access to the distribution site by road was a major factor that determined whether or not someone with disability received the relief supplies. According to interviews with NFDN and NDWA, many did not receive information about the distribution of relief materials and those who did, could not easily get to the site to receive it. People who managed to get to the site struggled with receiving the supplies as the distribution was not managed very well. The queues were not organized and they often found themselves waiting in line. Even after they received the relief supplies some of them had to pay a porter to carry it for them.

Similarly, women with speaking or hearing difficulties who had to rely on sign language to communicate struggled to communicate due to lack of mediators in relief distribution sites. However, during the FGD there were women with disabilities who were helped by their families and did not have much difficulty in receiving the relief materials. The aid was received by their parents or other members from their families on their behalf. There were also instances where some NGOs reached out to people with disabilities and took the relief materials to them. The most obvious shortcoming of the government during the assessment of the earthquake damage was that their data collection did not capture specific information related to people with disabilities. This means that the government failed to collect crucial information that could have helped in devising a reconstruction plan friendly to people with disabilities.

5. The Reconstruction and Restoration Policy

After the immediate relief and humanitarian work, the challenges of reconstruction and resettlement still remain. The government has introduced the National Reconstruction and Restoration Policy and has also established the National Reconstruction Authority, a national body with extraordinary judiciary. The authority has been given five years to complete the job at hand with the option of extending its term by one year if necessary.

One component of the National Reconstruction and Restoration Policy is the **Earthquake-Induced Fully Damaged Settlement Rebuilding Grant Delivery Procedure** which includes guidelines around financial assistance, technical guidance, social mobilization and skills upgrade and identification of the beneficiaries. The policy also sets out objectives to protect the people and their communities in earthquake-affected regions and restore and rejuvenate productive economic sectors in order to generate alternative options for livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, the policy sets out future plans for disaster risk management and development of integrated and planned settlement.²³

While the policy is ambitious, it fails to address some of the specific issues and concerns affecting women and women with disabilities as highlighted by the research findings. Some of the major shortcomings of the policy are discussed below:

5.1. Health and Sanitation

The policy states that it will focus on the protection of people in earthquake-affected regions while prioritizing social security, basic health services, reproductive health, child health, adolescent health and nutrition. Furthermore, the policy gives priority to women, children and people from poor and marginalized communities. To help these specific sections of the population the policy aims to create awareness regarding health and education and provide special training to offer skills that can help these people to rehabilitate their lives and their livelihoods. It also highlights the need to rehabilitate and restore the lives of earthquake-affected women, people with disabilities, orphans and the elderly.²⁴ Moreover, the government pledges special help to different groups at risk such as pregnant women, single women and widows. However, the policy does not address any future plans for providing basic healthcare services in the event of another natural disaster. Pregnant women had to face multiple challenges in the aftermath of the earthquake due to scarcity of food, healthcare facilities and medication. Moreover, they had to endure terrible living conditions in temporary shelters where they struggled to protect themselves and their children from harsh weather conditions and possible diseases. The reconstruction policy fails to address solutions to these problems especially if such

²³ National Reconstruction Policy 2015I

²⁴ *ibid.*

a disaster were to recur in the future. While the policy might be focused on raising awareness, it falls short on offering solutions to problems affecting service delivery during a crisis.

5.2. Property Ownership and Rebuilding

Proof of land ownership plays a critical role in the rebuilding phase of housing and settlement. As the policy requires proof of ownership of land or housing as a prerequisite for being identified as beneficiaries, it leaves women in a precarious situation. A very small section of women own property deeds as it is usually under the name of a male member in the family. While the policy includes a provision for the earthquake grant to be deposited into a joint account held by both the husband and the wife, it is silent on the cases of single women or female-headed households. Moreover, women who reside in squatter communities or live in co-operative land registered under the name of an organization have no way of claiming rebuilding grants. The policy fails to address the probable concerns of women who do not have proof of ownership of land and housing.

The policy also fails to address the concerns of women who belong to marginalized communities such as the Dalits. Their social status has deprived them of buying land or claiming ownership of a land where they may have settled for a long time. The policy does not allow for any alternative ways of identifying beneficiaries who can receive rebuilding support in the absence of legal proof of ownership.

5.3. Implementation Process and Institutional Structure

The current reconstruction and restoration policy developed by the government offers earthquake victims a grant of NPR. 200,000 per family for reconstruction purposes. Any excess expenses have to be borne by the homeowner. Whether the grant amount in itself is sufficient or not is questionable. Furthermore, the process of receiving the grant is not victim-centric as it is lengthy and complicated.

The grant is offered in three instalments and each instalment depends on the completion of a certain procedure. For example, the first tranche is only released once the map of the new house is verified by the VDC office of the municipality. Furthermore, the grant is deposited into a bank account, requiring victims without banks accounts to open one.²⁵ These requirements are challenging for the rural poor and especially women. In Nepal the average literacy rate of women is 49% and it is even lower in remote earthquake-affected areas. During the FGD, many women and women with disabilities said that they did not understand the banking process, and were worried about not being able to navigate through the complex procedures in order to claim government support. In this regard, the policy fails to offer any type of support to women who might need help with the procedural formalities required to receive government support.

²⁵ *ibid.*

5.4. Alternative Forms of Livelihood

The policy sets out skill development programmes for earthquake-affected women to offer them alternative forms of livelihood. With the destruction of farming land and livestock, women who have always depended on agriculture as a source of income, have been left in the lurch. The policy means to address the concerns of these women by touching upon alternative economic and livelihood opportunities. Unlike men, women have fewer options available to them in regards to alternative livelihood as they also have to look after their family and their household. However, the policy fails to address the existing work burden on women. In order to improve women's economic livelihoods the government has to come up with flexible options that cater to the needs of women whose main source of livelihood has been taken away by the earthquake. Moreover, the government also has to lessen the burden on women by restoring basic facilities such as water supply so that women do not have to walk for hours just to collect drinking water for their families. The policy is also silent on the type of skills or employment opportunities for women with disabilities.

5.5. Women in the Reconstruction Process

The reconstruction policy is anchored on the central idea of self-rebuilding²⁶: an idea empowering the victims and allowing them to be in control of the reconstruction of their homes and lives is a positive approach. However, such an approach does not take into consideration concerns of women. Women are responsible for looking after their households and their families. The responsibility of reconstruction could just be another added burden for many. Due to lack of male members in the family, women might have to hire paid labour for physically challenging tasks in the reconstruction phase, adding to their economic burden.

6. Conclusion

While the earthquake affected people irrespective of their social class, caste, gender or physical conditions, this paper aims to highlight the specific concerns of women. Through interviews and FGDs the paper has gathered general issues that affected women. The reconstruction policy offers guidelines that aim to help earthquake-affected victims rebuild their lives and their livelihoods in the aftermath of the earthquake. But in doing so, it has failed to address some of the existing vulnerabilities associated to the victims, which is the focus of this research.

The women in question had to suffer consequences that resulted from their position in the society. The living conditions adversely affected young girls, women with children, and women with disabilities as they were compelled to tackle the burden of their housework in unfamiliar surroundings. The lack of healthcare facilities meant that women were unable to provide proper care to their infants. Moreover, the lack of toilet facilities meant that women had pressing concerns about their health, safety and their dignity. Threats of sexual assault and harassment plagued women living in communal tents. The low levels of hygiene and sanitation due to

²⁶ *ibid.*

scarcity of water and toilet facilities affected women more than men. The temporary living shelters were not designed to be sensitive towards the needs of women with disabilities, leaving them extremely vulnerable.

Moreover, the blanket approach to proof of property ownership has curbed the stake of women in receiving relief grants as most of them do not have legal claim to the properties in question. In the light of these issues, the government should review the reconstruction policy to include and address the genuine concerns that have been raised and the following recommendations could be a starting point:

7. Recommendations

- The reconstruction policy is discriminatory towards women as it only accepts land ownership documents as a viable proof towards being identified as an earthquake victim. Such a provision makes it challenging for women who are single, or are heads of their households but do not have the property deeds in their names. The government should devise alternative ways of identifying and verifying the rightful victims so they are eligible to receive financial support without having to rely on male members of the family.
- Since most of the women in rural areas depend on agriculture as their source of livelihood, the government should introduce specific programmes that can benefit them and help them to cope with the loss of agricultural land and livestock. The government can offer training and aid to women so they can open small scale agro-businesses in their local communities. The government should also facilitate the supply of materials for these businesses by creating transport links to these rural areas.
- The government should rehabilitate and reconstruct healthcare facilities as soon as possible so that women can receive the care they need and also provide essential care to their families.
- The role of women as income earners and entrepreneurs should be recognized in livelihood recovery interventions with an emphasis on training, cash support, and financial inclusion. Such inclusive practices should be applied to people with disabilities and the elderly too.
- The government should also come up with a plan to address the needs of women who are landless or belong to squatter communities. It should provide shelter and create basic livelihood opportunities for them.
- The government should focus on building earthquake-resistant housing that also caters to the needs of women with disabilities. Moreover, the policy is silent on ensuring the safety and security of women during a natural disaster. It should plan for shelters that have toilets and water facilities in the case of similar situation in the future.

- The government should offer counselling services to women who are suffering from anxiety and mental trauma because of the earthquake.

Women with Disabilities

- The policy should ensure that the new building code and the reconstruction process are sensitive to the needs of individuals with disabilities. Public infrastructures should be built considering the needs of people with disabilities.
- The government should ensure that people with physical disabilities are not sidelined during distribution of relief funds, relief materials, and financial assistance. It can do so by collecting actual data on the number of people with disabilities who are earthquake victims. The government must think of ways in which people with disabilities can contribute to the reconstruction and restoration efforts so they can also participate and support their livelihoods. The National Reconstruction Policy does not include a disability-friendly disaster preparedness plan. Thus, for the safety of people with disabilities, the government should devise a disabled-friendly disaster preparedness plan for the future.

Bibliography

Amnesty International. 2015. *Nepal Earthquake Recovery Must Safeguard Human Right*. London: Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en>

Maly, Elizabeth. 2010. "Towards a people-centered housing recovery after the triple disaster." In *Human Security Comes Home: Responding to Japan's Triple Disaster*, edited by Paul Bacon and Christopher Hobson, 108-127. London and New York: Routledge.

Baruah, Nandita. 2015. "Nepal's Missing Gender Lens" *New America*, May 14. Accessed May 14, 2015. <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/81/nepals-missing-gender-lens/>

Bhattachan Kriahna, Tej B. Sunar, and Yasso Kanti Bhattachan (Gauchan). 2009. "Caste-Based Discrimination in Nepal." *Working Paper Series*. Vol. III: Number 8. New Delhi: Indian Institution of Dalit Studies.

Baruah, Nandita. 2015. "Nepal's Missing Gender Lens." *New America*, May 14. Accessed May 14, 2015.

Ghale, Sharaddha. 2015. "Unequal power relations and extractive development are condemning Tamang communities to poverty." *The Record*, September 29. <http://www.recordnepal.com/perspective/heart-matter-part-3#sthash.FAXG1Wmj.dpuf>

McDonald's Corporation. 2008. "McDonald's Happy Meal Toy Safety Facts." Accessed July 19. <http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/about/factsheets.html>.

The Himalayan Times. 2015. "Village politics plays spoilsport, Obstructs assistance to the needy." [Accessed May 3. www.thehimalayantimes.com](http://www.thehimalayantimes.com)

The Himalayan Times. 2015. "Violence Against Women up in Private Space: WOREC." Accessed July 27. <http://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/vaw-cases-up-in-private-spaces-worec/>

Central Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *National Population and Housing Census*. Kathmandu: The National Planning Commission.

The National Planning Commission. 2015. *Post Disaster Needs Assessment*. Kathmandu: The Government of Nepal.

The Government of Nepal. 2015. *National Reconstruction and Restoration Policy*. Kathmandu: The Government of Nepal.

Pariyar, Raj. 2015. "Double Trouble." *The Kathmandu Post*, December 12. <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2015-12-30/double-trouble-20151230092646.html>

NDWA. 2007. *Current situation of Women with Disabilities in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Disabled Women's Association. <http://www.ndwa.org.np/index.php/about-us>

United Nations. 2014. *Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Natural Disasters*. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2014/13

UN Women. 2015. *Reaching out to survivors of violence in post-earthquake Nepal*. <http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/reaching-out-survivors-violence-post-earthquake-nepal>

Waiting for Justice: Report of Initial Findings from Immediate Needs Assessment and Monitoring Responses towards Affected Dalit Communities in Nepal Earthquake 2015 Report (The Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee, https://www.google.com.np/?gws_rd=cr&ei=UhK4V7OUO4HOvgT21LOIBA#q=waiting+for+justice+after+the+quake