

**Role of Socio-Technical Assistance (STA) in Private Housing
Reconstruction for Vulnerable Community
(A case study of Okhaldhunga District, Nepal)**

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Abstract

Vulnerability is such stage when such people and group can be easily harmed physically or emotionally. They are always in risk in natural or man-made disaster so such people and groups should be cared and supported by all concerns. Great earthquake of August 2015, many old age people, poor, single women, child-headed family and disable family become vulnerable in earthquake affected districts of Nepal. So, Nepal Government had deployed the Socio-Technical Assistance (STA) team to support the vulnerable households. The main objective of this study was to identify the role of STA in private housing reconstruction of vulnerable household. The study was conducted in Okhaldhunga district among the 35 vulnerable households. The study was based on the mixed method so both quantitative and qualitative method was used to collect the data. The findings show that majority of ethnic group who were more than 70 years old were in urgent need of support who were fully supported by STA. almost

all beneficiaries were happy with the support and behaviour of STA. economically, 44.1% household had spent more than 3 Lakh to build the house so they had to manage the additional amount. They had taken loan from relative and neighbor so Nepal Government should provide livelihood support to such household to improve their socio-economic status.

Keywords: Private housing reconstruction, Socio-technical assistance (STA), Vulnerable

Introduction

Social structure is connected by the various social systems, values and norms. The people living within the same community have different social and economic status. People become vulnerable due to various social and natural reasons. It is stated that vulnerability results from developmental problems, personal incapacities, disadvantaged social status, inadequacy of interpersonal networks and supports, degraded neighborhoods and environments, and the complex interactions of these factors over the life course (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007). Nepal's geographical location exposes it to extreme precipitation, seismic activities and landslides. Loss of lives and damage to property and infrastructural assets as a result of natural disasters are a regular phenomenon in the Nepalese economic and social landscape (United Nations, 12-16 March 2018).

Nepal suffered a significant loss of lives and properties due the devastation caused by the magnitude of 7.6 earthquake on 25th April 2015 and thereafter subsequent aftershocks, also known as “Gorkha Earthquake 2015”. Having severe consequences of such an unexpected and merciless disaster, Government of Nepal (GoN) came up with various policies and programs (National Reconstruction Authority, 2016). According to the Post-Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA, 2015) the “Gorkha Earthquake 2015” disaster caused the fatalities of 8,790 people and more than 22,300 injured. Apart from the colossal loss of lives and destruction of 498,852 private houses 2,656 government buildings, furthermore 256,697 private houses and 3,622 government buildings were partially damaged, 19000 classrooms of schools were destroyed and 11,000 damaged. The total economic value of the disaster effects (damages and losses) caused by the earthquake was NPR 706 billion (US\$7billion), which was almost one-third of Nepal's annual GDP (National Planning Commission, 2015). As a result of great earthquake, many people become the helpless and vulnerable who were in urgent need of support to mitigate the risk of vulnerability. Considering this severe situation of poor, disadvantage people, Nepal Government mobilized the Socio-Technical Assistance (STA) team (246 Social Mobilizer and 755 Mobile Masons) through National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) in 14 most severely earthquake affected districts (Dhading, Dolakha, Nuwakot, Okhaldhunga, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Rasuwa, Makwanpur, Gorkha, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur) (Lamsal, Karki, & Poudel, 2020). The main objective of STA is to identify and support the vulnerable community in their private housing reconstruction work. The importance of STA in post-earthquake reconstruction was highlighted the by one previous article which stated the following main focus areas of STA:

1. Alleviating the level of awareness among the stakeholders towards disaster risk and its mitigation,
2. Providing support for capacity enhancement of communities to carry out appropriate measures and actions towards disaster risk mitigation and,
3. To enhance institutional capacities to promulgate appropriate regulations and policies for disaster risk mitigation. (Dhungel, et al., 2019)

Main responsibility of STA as defined by the Government of Nepal; National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) is as follows:

1. STA facilitate to meet the policy, "*No one left behind*" through the rapid field level assessment to identify beneficiaries that require additional and targeted support from the project.
2. Mobile Mason is responsible to support in private housing reconstruction for those people who are unable to construct their own house due to various reasons.
3. Coordinate with local government and like minded organization to facilitate housing grants from NRA to vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged households.
4. STA identifies the problem faced by beneficiaries during the reconstruction work then mobilise the community and local resources to assist the vulnerable households to build their houses (earthquake resilient house), procurement of construction materials, management of water, etc.
5. Aware the community people and vulnerable households about the facilities, policies and program of Government.
6. Facilitate for capacity building training and income generating activities through line agencies and local Partner Organizations. (Lama, Karki, Laudari, & Joshi, 2020)

In the connection of above-mentioned responsibilities of STA, the aim of this study is to identify their role in private housing reconstruction. The study was conducted in Okhaldhunga district as a case study.

Materials & Methods

The study was conducted in Okhaldhunga district from Oct – Nov, 2020 among the vulnerable household who were supported by Socio-Technical Assistance (STA) team mobilized by National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). The study was based on the mixed method – both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect the data. The data was collected from the 35 vulnerable households and discussed on the different aspect on role and support of STA. simple random sampling technique was used to select the household from total vulnerable beneficiaries. The quantitative data was analyzed from the statistical software (SPSS 20v) and qualitative data was analyzed thematically based on the thematic areas of discussion. Conclusion was drawn based on the findings and overall observation of research team.

Result & Discussion

The study had discussed on the role of socio-technical assistance team in private housing reconstruction. The concept of STA was indorsed by Nepal Government, National Reconstruction Authority since 2019 basically for the earthquake victims. Main objective of STA is to support those people who are unable to construct their own house due to old age, poverty, aloneness, child-headed family, single women headed family or any other serious problem. The study had collected the demographic data, grant received from Government and expenses in reconstruction, contribution of STA, perception of beneficiaries towards STA, support mechanism, and adequacy of space of house for all family members.

Demographic data of Beneficiaries

The demographic data presented in Table 1 shows that higher number (54.3%) Janjati were benefited from the STA whereas least number (5.7%) Brahamin were also benefited. Similarly, from the vulnerability perspective, higher number (40%) were senior citizens above 70 years and least numbers (5.7%) were minor-headed household benefited from the STA support. The average age of beneficiaries was 63.13 years (15-88 years).

Table 1: Demographic data of Beneficiaries

| | | Gender | | Total |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| | | Male | Female | |
| Caste | Brahamin | | 9.1% | 5.7% |
| | Chhetri | 15.4% | 22.7% | 20.0% |
| | Janjati | 61.5% | 50.0% | 54.3% |
| | Dalit | 23.1% | 18.2% | 20.0% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Types of Vulnerability | Senior citizens above 70 years | 30.8% | 45.5% | 40.0% |
| | Single women above 65 years | | 45.5% | 28.6% |
| | People living with disabilities (red or blue cardholders) | 30.8% | | 11.4% |
| | Minor-headed households (under 16 years) | 15.4% | | 5.7% |
| | Poor | 23.1% | 9.1% | 14.3% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Descriptive Statistics | | | | |
| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Age | 15 | 88 | 63.13 | 16.946 |

Source: Field Survey 2020

As the main concept of STA assigned by GoN, NRA, they had to support those vulnerable people as defined by the NRA but in practice, with the recommendation of local government, STA was supporting those people also who were very poor, helpless and unable to construct their own house.

Grant money received and expenses for reconstruction of house

The study team had discussed with the vulnerable people and observed their physical, social and economic status during the time of field visit. It was observed that almost all vulnerable family were living either in the broken house or temporary shelter which was not secured for them. They were even unable to visit the local government office and bank to collect their grant provided by Government. In such condition, they were seen in urgent need of support in reconstruction. In this connection, the study found that still 50% households were just received the 1st tranche (50,000/-) only where females (52.4%) were more vulnerable than males (46.2%). Those who received 3rd tranches (300,000/-) were supported either by local government or STA team after completion of their household.

Table 2: Grant money received and expenses for reconstruction of house

| | | Gender | | Total |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| | | Male | Female | |
| Grant money received | 50000 | 46.2% | 52.4% | 50.0% |
| | 150000 | | 4.8% | 2.9% |
| | 200000 | 15.4% | 14.3% | 14.7% |
| | 250000 | | 4.8% | 2.9% |
| | 300000 | 38.5% | 23.8% | 29.4% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total expenses of house reconstruction | Up to 2.5 Lakh | | 14.3% | 8.8% |
| | 2.5 to 3 Lakh | 53.8% | 42.9% | 47.1% |
| | Above 3 Lakh | 46.2% | 42.9% | 44.1% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Total expenses to complete the house | 250000 | 600000 | 341764.71 | 77984.870 |

Source: Field Survey 2020

The total grant (NPR. 3 lakhs only) was only support of Government to build the house. It might not be adequate to complete the reconstruction of house as the need of beneficiaries so remaining amount should be managed by house owner. In discussion, the study team also explored the total expenses of house reconstruction. In this response, 8.8% household completed their house within 2.5 Lakh, and higher number (47.1%) of Households completed within 3 Lakhs whereas 42.9% had spent more than 3 Lakhs. It means, 42.9% household had managed additional amount by themselves. In average, NPR. 341,764.71 was the total cost to complete the reconstruction of individual house which exceed the total grant of Nepal Government so it also clearly indicates the need of additional amount to complete the reconstruction of house.

The researchers were eager to know their profession, income sources and arrangement of additional amount. The study found that all the respondents of this study were farmers – their profession was agriculture so income source was only agricultural product but it was even not adequate for their livelihood also. So, they had taken loan from their relatives, and neighbor. No one had access on financial institution. Nepal Government had provision to provide the soft loan to earthquake beneficiaries but such vulnerable household had neither idea of soft-loan nor access on it. In such critical condition, the role of STA was praiseworthy for the reconstruction of vulnerable household. Though, considering the socio-economic status of vulnerable family, Nepal Government should provide livelihood support to such household to improve their socio-economic status.

Number of Mobile Mason and Days spend for reconstruction of per household

Nepal Reconstruction Authority has deployed the 246 Social Mobilizer and 755 Mobile Masons in 14 most severely earthquake affected districts (Dhading, Dolakha, Nuwakot, Okhaldhunga, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Rasuwa, Makwanpur, Gorkha, Kathmandu, Bhaktpur and Lalitpur) (Lamsal, Karki, & Poudel, 2020). The study district (Okhaldhunga) is one of the severely affected districts which was supported by STA team for reconstruction of vulnerable households. In Okhaldhunga, at present, 16 Social Mobilizers and 71 Mobile Masons have been working to support vulnerable beneficiaries (Lamsal, Karki, & Poudel, 2020). The study team tried to find out the number of mobile masons jointly worked for reconstruction of one house and days spend by them for completion of one house.

Table 3: Number of Mobile Mason and Days spend for reconstruction of per household

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| No. of Mason worked for reconstruction | 5.00 | 9.00 | 7.2083 | 1.79320 |
| No. of days spend by Mason for reconstruction | 5.00 | 25.00 | 16.6429 | 4.21825 |

Source: Field Survey 2020

The data presented in above Table 3 shows that minimum 5 to maximum 9 mobile mason worked for reconstruction of one house where average 7.20 person worked together. Similarly, they had spent 5 to 25 days to complete the reconstruction of one house so average 16.64 days was spend by the mobile mason. The number of Mobile Mason was determined by considering the geographic location, availability of masons and size and status of house.

Perception of Beneficiaries towards STA

STA is important for the vulnerable groups to speed up the reconstruction work. Beneficiaries were asked about their perception towards the work of STA. In this connection, almost all

(97.1% stated very good followed by 2.9% stated good) beneficiaries had positive perception towards the work and support of STA.

Table 4: Perception of Beneficiaries towards STA

| | | Gender | | Total |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | Male | Female | |
| Behaviour of STA | Very Good | 92.3% | 100.0% | 97.1% |
| | Good | 7.7% | | 2.9% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Field Survey 2020

The situation of vulnerable households was miserable because of the lack of support in reconstruction so mobilization of STA team become the means to solve their problem. The vulnerable people got chance to get all tranches as well as they were supported to complete the reconstruction of house. They had own new house to live safely so they expressed their happiness with the research team.

Support Mechanism

Social mobilizer is one part of STA who were responsible to identify the vulnerable household and informed them about the support and facilities provided by Nepal Government. Besides that, local government also informed their public who are in need of STA and recommended them for further support. In this connection, vulnerable people were asked about the support mechanism; how they became in contact of STA?

The data presented in the Table 5 shows that majority (85.7%) of households were contacted by STA team and they were supported by STA in reconstruction of house. Besides that, 14.3% household asked the STA and local government for help.

Table 5: Support Mechanism

| | | Gender | | Total |
|---|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | Male | Female | |
| How beneficiaries received support from STA? | I asked for Help | 7.7% | 18.2% | 14.3% |
| | STA came themselves | 92.3% | 81.8% | 85.7% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Could you able to build the house without support of STA? | No | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: Field Survey 2020

The vulnerable households were asked about the possibility to build the house without support of STA. In this question, 100 per cent beneficiaries replied that they were not able to build

house without support of STA. The finding clearly indicates the important of STA for the support of vulnerable household.

Conclusion

The study had explored the role of socio-technical assistance team to support the private housing reconstruction of vulnerable household. Majority of Janjati were found vulnerable where higher number of vulnerable beneficiaries were senior citizens above 70 years. At the time of field survey, 50% households were just received the 1st tranche (50,000/-) only because they could not build their house to take the 2nd and 3rd tranches. Regarding the total cost of reconstruction of individual house, 42.9% had spent more than 3 Lakhs to build the house. It means, 42.9% household had managed additional amount by themselves. In average, NPR. 341,764.71 was the total cost to complete the reconstruction of individual house which exceed the total grant of Nepal Government so it also clearly indicates the need of additional amount to complete the reconstruction of house. The vulnerable household had taken the loan from relatives and neighbor to complete the house. 100 per cent beneficiaries shared their happiness towards the support of STA and also shared that they were not able to build house without support of STA. The finding clearly indicates the important of STA for the support of vulnerable household. Though, considering the socio-economic status of vulnerable family, Nepal Government should provide livelihood support to such household to improve their socio-economic status.

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