

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

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Abstract

Reconstruction and resilience programs led by the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) have not specifically addressed the Dalit community's issues of vulnerability and cultural heterogeneity. The NRA formed and implemented different policies and guidelines for all victims irrespective of their caste/ethnic, cultural, economic, and political status. Monolithic reconstruction and resilience policy failed to address the vulnerability and socio-cultural resilience of the Dalits. The state social engineering failed because the socio-cultural and political vulnerability of the Dalits was ignored both in policy and practice. The policy and practice of earthquake reconstruction replicated the traditional slogan of Nepali: 'We all are Nepali and all Nepali are equal'. Moreover, it established a rule of thumb to address other disaster victims equally. What are Dalits' knowledge and experiences of disaster reconstruction? What are the constraints and opportunities for the resilience of the Dalits? What are the resilience practices of the Dalits? Based on the field-based study, interviews, and observations, the paper explored the exclusion of Dalits participation both in policy formulation and implementation. The detailed fieldwork in 2018 explored the technological domination of the government and non-government agencies while implementing the resilience of Dalit community. The Dalits were at the bottom of the socio-cultural hierarchy, including power, prestige, and property. The major flaw of the reconstruction and resilience was ignorance of the diversity of victims and ignorance of people's knowledge of cultural resilience. The policies did not support their marginality and vulnerability.

Keywords: Disaster, Dalit, exclusion, resilience, vulnerability

1. Introduction

This study tries to analyze the resilience strategies and reconstruction of the government and responses of Dalits and vulnerable communities after the 2015 earthquake in Sindhupalchok district. 'The Nepal earthquake 2015 (7.8 Richter scale)'

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Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

destroyed 604,930 houses and killed 8970 people besides injuries and economic damage (Nepal Disaster Report, 2015 and 2017). The government of Nepal formed the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA hereafter) with the ultimate authority of leading and managing, and governing the processes for reconstruction. The NRA consulted and conducted many round studies and identified beneficiaries among variously affected people. The first was the direct cash support of NRs 400,000 in three installments and the second was technical support through technical persons and villagers. The earthquake beneficiaries were categorized according to technical criteria such as categorical coloring to indicate the degree of house damage (red for severe damage, yellow for partial damage, and green for usable house).

During fieldwork, villagers engaged in building their houses based on their political economy, and socio-cultural capacity. It is argued that the seed of disaster was already in the society because the vulnerable status of Dalits was observed before the disaster. The Dalits have the weakest capacity in all sectors. Many of them do not have land to construct houses. Those Dalits who have land did not have political and social networks. Furthermore, many Dalits did not have dignity and respect in society. The resilience and reconstruction motto of the NRA is 'built back better' (NRA, 2017). Dalits felt that their traditional knowledge and skill were ignored and their social harmony has not been rebuilt yet. This article tries to focus on the devaluation of cultural and social hierarchy and social justice-based reconstruction. The Dalits did not get any privileges despite their vulnerable socio-economic status. Newly constructed houses, irrespective of their designs, could not accommodate joint families and houses in the agrarian village meant shelter for humans as well as other properties. Moreover, the newly made house ignored socio-economic differences, festivals, ritual activities, occasional guests, and shelter for cattle, birds, and bees. They believed that the house must be the shelter of ancestors, gods, and other spirits. If non-human spirits did not accept to live in the house, the house turns into a ghost house or a house without people. To live a meaningful life, people try to maintain the cultural appropriateness of the house. Some indigenous people around the world preferred to stay in traditional huts rather than concrete houses (Oliver-Smith, 1996). For agrarian and certain cultural groups, a house is a more social and cultural institution where community people gather around the hearth and make decisions in the evening (Gray, 2011). Devaluation of the social and cultural aspects of the newly

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constructed house in the village is subject to be studied because many of the newly constructed houses were left and used for another purpose in the village. This article concentrates on the socio-economic and network vulnerability of the Dalit community. What are their stories and experiences of reconstruction and resilience aftermath of the earthquake? What are various practices of recovery in the Dalit community?

2. Methodology

This research is primarily based on an ethnographic study of the marginalized communities at Kunchok in Sindhupalchok. I observed and interviewed contestations and negotiations in the processes of reconstruction and resilience programs in heterogeneous settlements (Dalits, Tamang, Sanyasi, and Magar) in May 2018 and September 2019. Besides participation in meetings and living with the local community for about 3 months, observation, three focus group discussions, and six key informant interview methods have been employed to generate data. In focus groups, one was exclusively Dalit participants, and rest two were mixed caste group was conducted. Key informants were selected mainly from Dalits and other vulnerable communities (Magar, and Tamang). Old and knowledgeable people with references to the community were selected as key informants. Secondary data was employed from academic journals and published about Nepal Earthquake reconstruction.

3. Theoretical Framework

The political-economic framework is an appropriate macro model to link ethnographic contexts of reconstruction and community resilience processes. Within the political-economic framework, social capital, livelihood, and vulnerability approach articulate micro socio-cultural dynamics of the communities.

a. Social Capital of Dalits

Many social scientists conceptualized causal relations of reciprocity of social networks. Social capital is the relationship between people based on norms of reciprocal support and the network extended within and beyond the community. In social capital, two components: group membership and social networks; and mutual cognition and recognition are fundamental characteristics (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). In resilience processes, researchers concluded that the communities' social capital and leadership were the most effective elements in enhancing collective action and

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

disaster recovery (Quarantelli, 1998; Wijkman and Timberlake, 1984). This approach unified diverse interest groups in the line of disaster recovery and community development. Anthony Giddens (1991) argued that access to culture and social organizations was central to the long-term coping and resilience of a population in disaster. Based on the literature, it can be argued that the role of culture in recovery was most visible once the short-term, physical needs of the population and post-resettlement trauma and examination of the importance of community identity and culture in recovery.

Untouchables were legally at the bottom of the caste and political-economic hierarchy of the country until the inception of the New Legal Code in 1964 (Hofer, 1979). Untouchables were not only forbidden to own private property but also prohibited to use valuable clothes, head turban, shoes, and valuable ornaments (Cameron, 1998, Aahuti, 2005). They were legally deprived of land ownership and other political and economic access to the state (Hofer, 1979). Their settlements were designed at end of the village or marginal territory. They were obliged to the higher castes' mercy in relation to *Jajmani* system. Resonance of the historical deprivation of political-economic resources among the untouchables is still manifested in the write-ups of academic and non-academic research (Cameron, 1998; Bennett and Parajuli, 2009)². The theory of vulnerability assumes that the most vulnerable suffered the highest degree during and aftermath of the disaster. Because of the poor socioeconomic capital of the Dalits, they experienced the most difficulty in course of reconstruction and resilience.

3.2 Social Vulnerability of Dalits

Social vulnerability means both demographic and socio-cultural characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with resist, and recover from the impact of a disaster (Blaikie et al., 1994: 9). The approach assumes that the most vulnerable communities are highly affected by the disaster and they need extra support in course of resilience. Social vulnerability is historically and socio-politically created conditions of a person or a group. Addressing social vulnerability is the fundamental step to making society resilient. Steven Flynn (2004) conceptualized

²The World Bank study has identified 42 highly marginalized caste ethnic groups in the country out of 100 ethnic/caste groups in the 2001 census. Among them, all hill Dalit groups and Tarai Dalit groups were included in highly marginalized groups.

threefold processes of social vulnerability. The concentrations of energy, concentrations of populations, and concentrations of socio-economic power articulate the vulnerability status of a group or a person. Some of the contexts of concentration of energy (explosive and toxic substances, highly flammable substances, and dams) shows a level of social vulnerability. The concentrations of the population mean high-density populations in risky areas and around explosive and toxic substances. The concentrations of political-economic power situate a person and a group in everyday livelihood like caste, ethnicity, and prestige in the society. Concentrations of economic and political power allow the concentration of energy, generally using deregulation, and these tend to be where there are concentrations of populations.

In the process of recovery, cultural boundaries have been reinvented and culture-based discrimination has resumed. During this process, some people and community groups sought advantages while others were deprived of benefits and opportunities for recovery (Flynn, 2004). Notwithstanding the indiscriminate effects of disasters, it is commonly documented that disaster risk and vulnerability are not equally distributed. The recovery process is understood as sensitive to caste/ethnicity and social stratification (Fordham, 1999). Moreover, culture and social organizations are central to the long-term coping and resilience of a population in disaster.

Along with the natural and physical vulnerabilities, there are economic, social, political, technical, ideological, cultural, educational, ecological, and institutional vulnerabilities (Patnaik, 2001). A local reading of these vulnerabilities will differ from that of an outside observer. If we look at the shape that recovery efforts are taking and where discourse tends to be the most active, the affected people perceive themselves to be economically vulnerable above all else, followed closely by political, institutional, and technical vulnerability (Patnaik, 2001). Disasters also display and articulate the linkages between the local community and larger structures (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). Disasters result from a complex mix of natural hazards and social-political and economic processes. The socio-historical, political-economic, or vulnerability approach does not deny the significance of natural hazards as trigger events. It also focuses largely on the structural and systematic cause that generates disaster by making people vulnerable. Many studies (Zaman 1989; Fordham, 1999) have projected the fact that how disaster impacts are compounded by the pattern of resource control, land ownership, local stratification, and inequities that

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

define the everyday lives of disaster victims (Zaman, 1998). Therefore, the social pattern of vulnerability is a core element of disaster (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 2002). The researcher in the third world countries called for the rethinking of the disaster from a political-economic perspective, based on the high correlation between disaster proneness, chronic malnutrition, low income, and famine potential that led to the conclusion that the root causes of disaster lay more in society than in nature (Oliver-Smith, 1999). None of the societies experiences the disaster in the same way or to the same degree. Each undergoes catastrophes in the context of its profile of vulnerability. The same disaster agent will show great variation in patterns of destruction as well as interpretation of cause, effect, and responsibilities (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 2002).

Chaitanya Mishra (2010) succinctly analyzed the political-economic relations of Dalits and non-Dalits of Nepal. He argued that the relations of domination were not only manifested in cultural levels but also observed in linguistic, political economic, and inequalities of access to public resources, employment, livelihood, personal capacity, and capital (Mishra, 2010, p.xv). He delineated the political-economic history of the Dalits communities of Nepal and argued that their marginalization in all sectors of social spheres must be analyzed considering historical trajectories of the political-economic resources distribution including land and livelihoods. He added that the historically unequal relations in power and property between the Dalits and non-Dalits have been naturalized through state policies and practices through the history. At the end, he concluded that Dalits were treated underclass through the lens of cultural politics. Therefore, the issue of marginalization of Dalits was political economic articulations of caste politics (Mishra, 2010, p.xxi). Mishra's analysis provides a clearer framework for the understanding of historical trajectories of the marginalization of certain Dalit community. The articulation of caste based marginalization observed in the processes of reconstruction and resilience aftermath of the earthquake. Caste dominations were apparent but political economic influences on decisions and policies were underlying structure of the dominations and inequalities.

Socially and economically marginalized section of people were ranked the bottom of hierarchy and called untouchable in course of nation-state formation

(Aahuti, 2005). Aahuti has focused on the historical political economy of origin and appropriation of caste-based discrimination by imposing a fatalistic religious ethos. Higher caste categories tend to legitimize the existing caste system by giving it an aura of divine origin; both genuine personal beliefs and bad faith to perpetuate the status quo act on the creation of this sentiment (Bista, 1991; Aahuti, 2005). Dalit intellectuals were divided on main approaches of emancipation and many of them are projectized in I/NGOs that weakened Dalit liberation movement in Nepal (Aahuti, 2005). Contemporary forms of lower castes labor in Nepal are a historical consequence of their positions in society. This historical perspective on labor attempts to bring into "increasingly complex patterns of occupational multiplicity in the category of 'agricultural laborer'" (Cameron, 1998, p.217).

Edward Sampson (2013) provides a social vulnerability analysis when marginalized communities are severely affected on their social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological of the aspects during and aftermath of Earthquake in the Gujarat. Similarly, Gamburd (2014) showed how poor lost everything and were displaced by the Tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka in 2004. At the macro level Gunewardena (2008) argued that neoliberal approaches to disaster recovery were incomplete to address issues of marginalized community recovery. The neoliberal approach capitalizes on the disaster in third-world societies. Vulnerable communities were further marginalized in course of reconstruction.

4. Impacts of the Earthquake

There is a long history of earthquakes in Nepal. The first recorded earthquake in 1255 AD killed one-third of the population of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. Abhaya Malla was king in Kathmandu. The greatest earthquake (8.4 Richter scale) in 1934 AD resulted in more than 10,000 deaths in the Kathmandu Valley. Most of the infrastructure and major heritage sites had been damaged (PDNC, 2015, p. xi). Irrespective of caste, culture, and class differentiation, the government of Nepal provided small-scale support to the needy victims (Shamsher, 2015). There was no record of caste/ethnic loss and reconstruction strategies.

Nepal faced a devastating earthquake on 25 April 2015, followed by strong aftershocks on 26 April and 12 May and many mild aftershocks. The earthquake epicenter was Barapak village in Gorkha district. Including Gorkha district, the earthquake affected Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and its surrounding districts

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

Rasuwa, Dhading, Nuwakot, Kavre, Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha, Ramechhap, Makawanpur, Sindhuli, and Okhaldhunga. The devastating earthquake impacted the aspects of social, cultural, environmental, economic and along with destroying number of government and private infrastructures. National Planning Commission (2015) mentions that almost every aspect of life had been affected and the lives and livelihoods of 8 million had been directly threatened. The earthquake had destroyed houses and animal shelters, livestock, crops, seeds, food stores, and social infrastructure such as schools, health centers, banks, business centers, micrometeorites, roads, and trails. Therefore, the result was much stressful and disruptive because it severely affected health, threatened food security and disrupted production, employment, business, trade, and service (NPC, 2015). As collapsed and were severely damaged of house, a few respondents told me that some food grains were damaged which resulted in seed.

4.1 Disaster Reconstruction Governance

The NRA is an authoritative institution that governs the reconstruction and resilience processes following the April 2015 earthquake. Furthermore, NRA also executed the policy to build back better, assessed the damages, examined reconstruction, prepared policies programs, and facilitated implementation. Except for the distribution of relief materials for earthquake-affected households, the government played two major roles in reconstruction periods: 1) Assist with temporary shelter and 2) Support for building a new house (Nepal Disaster Report, 2017).

Shibalal BK said that the villagers shifted from emergency tents to temporary shelters after a month. He remembered that most of the temporary shelters were more personal though the government has supported tin. So-called higher caste people divided their households to get more relief and government supports. The local committee did not accept the division of households of the Dalits. A few months later of the earthquake, the government of Nepal began to distribute initial cash grants through VDC secretaries. Secretaries dictated the marginalized like police authority. Government bodies with the help of technicians identified beneficiaries on the basis of damage assessments undertaken in the early weeks after the earthquakes. Dalits were excluded and dominated by the technicians. The local technicians have the right

to accept and reject the status of damage. Local elites manipulated technicians and secretaries in their favor. The merchant and elites earned and made strong relations with donors after the earthquake. The technicians and secretaries observed and listened to local elites and teachers. Sita BK argued that those people who have houses in Kathmandu and in the village were lucky because they received relief materials and construction support quickly. They used and misused the Rahat (victim) card to earn unnecessary benefits from the government and other agencies. Her argument was like Gamburd's analysis of the 2004 Tsunami in Sri Lanka. Gamburd argued that Tsunami waves were golden for the rich and elites (Gamburd, 2014). Because of the earthquake, the rich and elites got opportunities of jobs, new income sources, got issues of donation and government support.

The first round of assessment of government is conducted by VDCs, generally in coordination with local teachers, leaders, and residents. They favored rich and their communities by listing names in the category of victims. Those whose houses were fully destroyed received Rs 15,000. and partial damage households received Rs 3,000. This assessment aimed to inform district and central government officials and agencies about the level of damage for immediate relief if required. Hence, each earthquake-affected household received a defined amount of cash to make a temporary shelter. The Dalits of Kunchok argued that the name list of the affected category was not value-free from caste, political alliance, and economic status. The government worried about cascading damage of the coming monsoon. Because of cracks and fragile landscapes, there was a possibility of huge landslides. The survivors were afraid of insecurity, landslides, and frequent irregular aftershocks. At the beginning of winter, the government also distributed Rs 10,000. for all earthquake collapsed recorded households as winter relief so that they could buy warm clothes, blankets, and fuel. Rich and higher castes have already managed warm clothes but they come first to get a winter support package.

There was a long gap in elected representatives in the village administration. Because of the lack of elected representatives and uniform rules of disaster management, Dalits felt the most difficult to receive material and legal process of registration. Amrit Pariyar (60 years male) said that government policy does not recognize the economic diversity of the village. There were well-up people who have more than one concrete house in Kathmandu valley also received the same package as the Dalits receive in the village. He argued that the socioeconomic differences in the

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

villagers were completely ignored because rich and higher caste people made policy. The policy of government treats them as homogeneous only because they lost their houses in the village. Some people completely left the village house and started to live in Kathmandu. After Earthquake, they came to the village to make the identity cards of the earthquake victim. They received government packages and made village homes for rare visits. For them, the NRA packages were the best package for bouncing back better. Monolithic policy and treatment of the government made injustice for the real victims and hampered socio-cultural appropriate recovery programs. Amrit ironically added:

Yes, caste was eliminated in Nepal. 'All Nepali are equal' is reflected in the reconstruction policies. Dalits have been experiencing caste-based humiliation and discrimination in their everyday life. Class-based differences were also eliminated in Nepal by this earthquake. The NRA policies and practices reminded me old slogan of Nepali people : 'We all are Nepali and all Nepali are equal' This understanding was main proposition of the government reconstruction programs. The government observed that all victims suffered equally. There were not caste, class and gender differences during disaster. Therefore, the NRA made the monolithic policy of reconstruction package. (Interview, 2018)

Amrit's statement was powerful to punch the government policy failure. The Government of Nepal had conducted a series of damage assessments to decide on who should receive beneficiary cards for housing grants and other opportunities. The classification of damage was not categorized on the basis of caste, ethnicity, class, and gender. One of the objectives of this assessment was to collect more comprehensive and standardized data than the previous survey. This assessment was more formal and was coordinated by the District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs), who deployed external assessment teams, led by Centre Bureau Statistics in collaboration with engineers in most locations. In the end, the data helped to prepare beneficiary lists and distribute the 'Earthquake Victim Identity Card' that would be used for the provision of earthquake assistance and housing grant. These cards had details of damages suffered by them which were used as a basis to provide facilities by the state. These assessment teams graded the level of damage to houses on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest damage ('negligible to slight damage') and 5 being the highest

(‘destruction’). Heavily damaged houses were listed under damage grades 3, 4, and 5 depending on the extent of structural damage and levels of destruction and these graded were deemed eligible for the reconstruction cash grant assistance. The CBS assessment led to a reduction in the number of beneficiaries in most districts and many earthquake victims, as well as some local officials and leaders, complained that the assessment was conducted inconsistently without sufficient staff and technical knowledge. Complaints were registered by local people against the second assessment. For example, many houses that had not been fully destroyed were listed as ‘partially damaged’, even though they were unlivable and would have to be rebuilt. People complained about inconsistent assessment procedures between and within districts, the lack of technical knowledge of the assessment teams, and the absence of local monitoring mechanisms. Political interference was reported by locals and political leaders in several areas leading to protests by political parties and residents against the cash distribution aimed at pressuring district-level officials to adjust the beneficiary lists. A process emerged whereby beneficiary lists were adjusted and readjusted based on new data and incoming complaints. The government developed Nepal Rural Housing Reconstruction Program (RHRP) to assist earthquake-affected villagers. The objective of the program was to ensure that houses destroyed in the most-affected districts of the country will be rebuilt using earthquake-safer building techniques through grants. Those houses that have been declared fully damaged declared eligible for the RHRP reconstruction grant.

4.2 Dalits’ Knowledge of Earthquake

Bhuichalo (*earthquake*) is Nepali colloquial word to represent earthquake. The term is composed of two words; *Bhu* means land and *Chalo* means movement. The literal meaning of this dialect is the movement of the land. It is also known as *Bhukampain* the Nepali language and it also has the same literal meaning. *Bhuichalo* is a locally accepted term. Elderly people easily understand this term whereas *Bhukampa* is a common media term among youths and educated people with formal schooling. However, both terms provide the same meaning. NRA officials, government authorities, and news broadcasting channels such as radios and televisions often use *Bhukampa*.

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

There were several stories and myths about the cause of *Bhuichalo/Bhukampa*. The story of a big tortoise carrying the earth on its back was still common among the elders. Some people believed that there was a big fish under the earth. When tortoise/fish change their back, there was an earthquake. The Dalit elders of the study area believed that the earthquake was caused of divine power. They shared the uncontrolled power relating to the different mythological stories. They argue that people forget their dharma (religion), responsibilities, and moral values in recent days. Therefore, a destructive spirit called demon visited to kill sinful (*papi*) people in earth. As a result, divine power and god punished them through the earthquake. For elderly people, the earthquake was the result of sinful acts performed by human beings. Their story was quite similar to the story of Sri Lankan people who articulated the causes of the Tsunami in 2004 (Gamburd, 2014). Killing animals for meat, prostitution at seashores, religious conversion, and loss of morality were considered as the main cause of the disaster. However, students and informants with formal education did not convince of the mythological version. They tried to relate it to an earth science and geological structure. Dalits in Kotdada and Jaudada considered that the earthquake unfortunately triggered the life of Dalits into a more panic situation. Hari BK shared the village situation of post-earthquake as follow.

I realized such a trembling of earth the first time in my life. The land moved. The reel of end of life also quickly moved in my mind. You know, trees, houses, and hills were observed upside down during shaking. I thought that it was time to end humanity and living things. I remembered gods and ancestors because they were the only hope to save humans in earth. The main cause was the anger of the gods. Because of human sinful acts and immorality, god tried to balance the earth. (Interview, 2018)

As Gamburd (2014) mentioned that religious and belief systems played a key role in the understanding of natural disasters. About the occurrence of the earthquake, locals assumed that religious practice and belief systems as major factors. For example, people from the Hindu, and Buddhist argued that the spread of Christianity in their village invited the earthquake. Whereas people from Christian (Dalits and Tamangs) have opposed the narrative. They stated that they survived due to the auspicious blessing of their almighty god in the Church. There were two churches in the

Shahid Kirti Multidisciplinary Journal (Vol.: 01, Jan, 2023)

Kunchok village. During the earthquake occurring day, Christian people were in the Church to pray. People from both religions strongly believed that there was a role of supernatural power. Both church buildings collapsed but people were saved. There were both Hindu and Christian Dalits in the village. Dalits realized that religious affiliation made differences capacity of family resilience. Christian Dalits and Tamang received better and quick support in comparison to Hindu Dalits and Buddhist Tamang. During my fieldwork, villagers said that both church buildings were constructed first in the village. It was said that there was an extra package of support for Christian people administrated by the Church in Kunchok. The Christian Dalits denied the story of extra support. They agreed that there were some extra relief materials and food packages distributed by the church. Birth, marriage, and death rituals of the Christians in the village were technically supported by the churches in and out of the village. In course of reconstruction, some households of Dalits and Tamang converted to Christianity.

Most of the Dalits in Kunchok have a small plot of land and livestock. Tradition patron-client relations almost disappeared. They were also farmers without adequate land and animals. Since many of them are poor economic backgrounds, they had to lend money from relatives and inter-caste neighbors to construct temporary shelters and food clothes. Sibal Pariyar said that the social contexts and cultural relations of Dalits and non-Dalits were changed in recent decades. When there were patron-client relations, there were norms to ask for food and clothes from the Higher castes (patrons). Now, any Dalits could not ask for support directly. Everybody has to buy the necessary material from the market. He added that the market economy weakened social relations and cultural ties among the agrarian communities. The Dalit have a distinct and pathetic scenario in the post-disaster. For a couple of days, they sacrificed chickens, pigs and purchased food materials from the market. They said that issues of vulnerability were not addressed during relief and reconstruction package distribution in the village. A relief package distribution committee was formed. Dalits were not included in the committee.

Dalits have deprived from access to knowledge of earthquake and preparedness from the disaster. They said that they did not have adequate access to means of communication and education. Preparedness trainings were not organized in the rural village. When disaster preparedness trainings were organized they were set

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

at district headquarters. Dalits were not included in the training and knowledge of preparedness for disaster. Therefore, they were more vulnerable.

To talk about disaster preparedness investment, marginalized communities were not included. Diversification of livelihood was the best strategy to resilient the household quickly. Since the Dalits were not trained and had limited options, they were more vulnerable from the earthquake.

After the earthquake, the representatives of the ward citizen forums were revitalized and nominated single person as ward coordinator for the management and proper distribution of relief and reconstruction resources. When relief material was carried into the village, the power elites controlled all resources at the very beginning. Dal Bahadur Bharati and Ram Bahadur Thapa urged meetings at Khutume. Then the meeting decided to nominate a coordinator for the inclusive distribution and share of relief materials. Four people were nominated as representatives from four different wards of Kunchok. There was no elected body at the local level. The names came from ward citizen members formed by political parties, elites, and the VDC secretary. None of them talked about inclusive relief material distribution committee. Shivalal BK said that there was no time and context for inclusive policy debate.

Lila Bahaur Giri, Ram B. Malla, Sushil Rana Magar, and Debi Giri were nominated. Representative of Tamang and Dalits were not included. When I observed settlements in terms of caste ethnic composition, Tamangs were the dominant community in previous wards no 1 and 2. Their presence in the disaster governance structures was not proportional representation. Dasnami (Giri) was the second largest community in ward 1 and Thakuri was the smallest community in ward 2. In ward no 3, Magars were the second largest community. Their presence in the disaster governance system was significant. The absence of the Tamang community in the coordination committee was interesting. Comparatively, non-proportional pictures could be observed in the school management committee and other decision-making bodies of the village. After restructuring and local election in 2073, all settlements were included in one ward and the ward was led by an elected chairperson from the Tamang community.

Shanti BK (32 years) said that about a couple of days later, survivors started collecting money from each household. Out of collected money collective kitchen and sleeping hut were managed. Caste-based hierarchy and untouchability were blurred for a week. All caste people ate together and live by sharing the same roof of a tent/hut. There was no caste-ethnic-based discrimination in the village. When outsiders came with Rahat (relief material), all survivors tried to capture more materials and live separately. Then, society bounced back to caste-ethnic discrimination. Dalits were unseen and unheard in the processes of relief and reconstruction governance.

Reconstruction policy focused on the reconstruction of houses for humans. Reconstruction of cowshed was not considered as the resilience of the agrarian community. The earthquake damaged their *Gotha* (Cowshed) with the loss of buffalo, cows, and goats. They had no money to reconstruct *Gotha* as a result they left the traditional types of agriculture for a few years, however, with the improvement of their economy and income they slowly started rearing livestock but not a major source of income. There was a serious dearth of agrarian labour in the village. All active labour was engaged in the construction of a new home. People left agricultural land barren for many years. Sanyasi and Magar also employed Dalit youths while cultivating and harvesting crops. Small plots of Dalits also found barren because they left agricultural activities. Sanyasi and Tamang told that landslides in the steep hills *Baari* and *Khetnot* only reduced the productivity of traditional crops but also threatened traditional settlement areas. *Jayala Majduri*, (wage labor) and foreign labour are major occupations among the Sanyasi, Tamang, Magar and Dalits in Kunchok. Sanyasi, Tamang and Magar have livestock farming. The *Parma* (labour reciprocity) was weakened because of cash labour employed by NGOs and reconstruction campaigns of public structures.

4.3 Relief and Reconstruction: Opportunity and Constraints of Dalits

Irrespective of caste ethnic and economic disparity, National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) passed a policy to support all listed households equally. Cultural, Social, and economic marginalization of the Dalits were ignored by the policy and practice of the government. Shibalal BK said that the government was culturally and economically blind. He added that the Dalits were at the bottom of human development. The NRA's policies support to perpetuation of caste and economic discrimination and inequality. His words can be interpreted with the socio-economic

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

and political vulnerability of the Dalits from national to local levels. None of the Dalits were included and consulted in the policy-making processes of the NRA. The Dalits have poor social capital both national and international levels. Because of poor human development status, very few Dalits have access to government and non-government agencies. In terms of social capital, Dalit communities of Kunchok could not share their voices with many stakeholders. When they said to the local government, elected representatives answered that policies were formulated at the national level. They could not address Dalit issues.

Shibalal BK said that he has started a two-story government-funded house. Because of a lack of cash economy and social capital, he could not complete it on time. The last installment which was supposed to be released after the completion of the house was the biggest installment. To get a loan in the community and neighborhood was equal to finding 'a God' after the earthquake. There was high demand for labor. The Dalit's opportunity was unskilled youths engaged in construction labor in the village. Their networks out of the village, Kathmandu and international levels were very poor. Their positions and access to livelihood options and freedom were limited. Shibalal waited for the last installment before completion of the house but the technicians and local authority did not pass for the last phase. For him, the house was to be completed or not to be completed. He said, "Nakhā'uṃ bhanēdinabharikōśikāra, khā'uṃ bhanēkānchōbā'ukōānuhāra, kēhō" (If we don't eat it, it will be the prey/bread of the day. If we eat it, it will be the face of the youngest father). It is very difficult to accept and reject the reconstruction fund. Another beneficiary of the Dalit community shared her story of reconstruction as follows:

Fulmaya BK (57 years woman) was sitting in the tin-roofed hut and a newly constructed two-story cemented house was used to keep goats. Five goats and their 2 kids were eating fodder that is kept in the house. She said "the new house was made not only with the fund given by the government. My son has spent 2 Lakhs in this house. We have not received the final installment from the government. While building, I and my husband were excited to shift to the new house. When we shifted, I and my husband got sick. He was suffering from back pain and headache. I got leg swelling and back pain. Both doctors and believers suggested to us not to sleep in the cemented house. The doctor said it is too

Shahid Kirti Multidisciplinary Journal (Vol.: 01, Jan, 2023)

cold which harms swelling. Believers said that the house was not auspicious. When we started to live in the hut, we became well. Then we decided to sleep in the new house. Therefore, we make the new house as storeroom and goat-house. (Interview, 2018)

Reconstruction brought two important changes to the village. They are roadside houses and monolithic structures of the house. Most of the houses under construction and made were either one or two rooms with similar structure and design. Though Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) authorized eight different models of house construction, local technicians promoted a single model. Their indirect promotion was single room cemented house. The smaller and one-room houses are easily and quickly passed without an observational check of technicians. Technicians are like the authoritative and highly welcomed person in the village. Dalits did not have close relations with them because most of them were so-called higher castes. They felt uncomfortable sharing food in the Dalits' kitchen. Therefore, Dalits experienced difficulty to make houses technically acceptable.

Most of the Dalits were artisan caste. They made different traditional arts and painting on their walls. One of the Dalits said that there was heterogeneity of arts, architecture, and structures of houses before the earthquake. Their arts and architecture were carved and painted by older people. Most of them were already passed, and the rest of them could not work. Shibala argued that Dalits' arts and architecture were lost forever. Their newborn children will not observe new-style houses in the village. Then Earthquake collapsed fashion, competition, and differentiation. Now all of the villagers were building a similar house. The traditional building designs were declined and replaced by concrete buildings in urban areas. But in rural villages, those traditional buildings were the typical identity of the community and place.

4.4 Resilience Strategies of Dalits

Dalits had mixed types of livelihood patterns with farming, livestock, remittance and paid labor. However, remittance is not the dominant source of income among the Dalits. The earthquake damaged cowsheds and livestock and the majority of Dalits are not able to restore their previous status livelihood. Most of them lost

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

livestock. Livestock rearing has multiple benefits in agrarian society. They provide fertilizers to their farming land for crop cultivation. Because of lack of land, agriculture could not cover their food and other expenditures in the village. Few of them were trained and started improved vegetable farming. To make the vegetable organic brand, they need cow manure and compost fertilizers. After earthquake, Dalits also trying to find new areas of engagement for their livelihood. They have limited family income. None of them continued traditional occupation like professional tailoring, leather work and metal work.

After the earthquake, some Dalits received many skills enhancement training. They did not have money for investment and initiation of new businesses in the village. Besides government reconstruction support and GNOs support, remittance played a significant role in the resilience of the household. Dalits said that at least one family member was out of the village. Most of them were from foreign countries. Few of them were from India and the urban centers of Nepal. They sent cash for the economic reconstruction of their houses.

Human development indication including income, health, formal education, social and political connection is lower than Sanyasi and Tamang. They are housemakers and their role is limited. All women and youth got wage labour in the village. Before the earthquakes, they mostly involved in agricultural work and wage labor. However, after the earthquakes, the Dalit women got the opportunity to participate in various community-level platforms organized by the local government, Ward offices, and non-governmental organizations in the village level. According to the informants, they received trainings on health, sanitation, and hygiene and reconstruction of the houses. Meanwhile, Dalit women also participated in meetings, discussions, and gatherings (*bhela*) organized by local governments and local financial institutions.

5. Conclusion

The 2015 Earthquake redefined social and cultural relations in the village. When Dalits and Non-Dalits shared food, shelter, and water for a couple of days, practices of untouchability were not followed strictly. A large number of construction workers from the western part of Nepal intermingled with local people. Their caste ethnic belongingness was not asked and treated accordingly. Human emotion, attachment, solidarity, and humanity are reflected on the front line during and after the disaster. It

can be argued that the disaster has revelatory as well as transformative power. After the earthquake, settlement patterns were changed, and the structure of the house and school were changed. Social capital, human capital and all livelihood approaches showed that the Dalits were the most vulnerable group before and after the earthquake. The general principle of vulnerability in disaster is: the more vulnerable community, suffers more and puts more effort for resilience. This principle was observed in course of resilience practices of the Dalits communities of Kunchok. Their poor social networks and new social relations delayed relief and reconstruction support. When they received support, they were entangled with technical approval and local government attention. When their names were missed from the list of beneficiaries, they were unable to include their names. They were unable to make separate support cards even if the household was practically separated. In the same case, non-Dalit castes successfully registered separate beneficiary names within the same household. Nongovernmental organizations likely to support marginalized communities but non-Dalit people were a decisionmakers in such agencies. Agency-level support is also manipulated and channelized to the dominant community. The positive change aftermath of the 2015 earthquake was the gradual weakening of caste-based discrimination. Though cultural practices of untouchability and inclusive disaster governance in cases of poor, women, and Dalits have not been completely implemented, people are oriented to social inclusion governance in other development activities. Therefore, caste-based cultural practices and traditions became less important after the disaster.

In the context of earthquake disaster reconstruction, a human-centered and diversity-centered approach was missed. The issues of marginalization and discrimination could not address the recovery of village life. The NRA policy and designs were monolithic regarding caste, ethnicity, and class. All caste, gender and class people were treated equally irrespective of their capacity and capital. Dalits were political-economically marginalized and that was reflected in their social network, knowledge, and skill. They were not prioritized when the distribution of relief and reconstruction. They were more vulnerable but the policy was class and cultural blind. They employed multiple resource-tapping strategies for resilience.

The noted flaw of the reconstruction policymakers was the monolithic construction of a house. Ignorance of caste, class and gender difference was ignorance of the diverse resilience knowledge of the people technocratic and

Vulnerable Community in Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction Process in Sindhupalchok

structural dominance promoted specific kind and class values and suppressed knowledge and skills of marginalized communities specifically the vulnerable underclass of developing countries. Hence structure and organization are influenced by the cultural meaning of the surrounding. The reconstruction and resilience could not bounce back social and cultural issues in better status. Therefore, reconstruction programs were not cultural, gender, and Dalits friendly.

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Shahid Kirti Multidisciplinary Journal (Vol.: 01, Jan, 2023)

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