

# A GENDERED LOOK INTO BHAKTAPUR'S RECOVERY AND REBUILDING: *An Applied Research*

EXPLORING THE RISKS AND STRENGTH OF **REBUILDING THE WORLD**  
**HERITAGE CITY** AFTER THE 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2015 EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL





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HONOURING ALL WHO **LOST THEIR LIVES** &  
ALL WHO SURVIVED THE NEPAL EARTHQUAKE 2015

*Photo credit: Rita Thapa, 23 June 2015*

## FOREWORD/S

**I**n the past 26 years, Nepal has undergone tremendous transformations owing mainly to the democratic movement of 1990, the decade long armed insurrection (1996-2006), the devastating earthquake of 2015, and the five months of India's blockade (late 2015 - early 2016). In these transitions, Nepal experienced several fundamental shifts, such as the end of the deadly armed conflict and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; concluding the centuries old institution of Monarchy and establishing a Republican State; the declaration of a secular nation with a federal system; and a wave of inclusion of diversity both at the local level as well as in the topmost structures. Furthermore, Nepal has witnessed massive changes in the existing power relations in the past 10 years, such as the President and the Vice President of the country hailing from the Madeshi community; the Chair of the Constituent Assembly and the Chief of the Army Staff from the Janajatis; and the President, the Chair of the Constituent Assembly/Parliament, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court comprising all women. These were nearly impossible achievements during the earlier decades. Although Nepal still faces a long journey of recovery and reconstruction, these significant achievements hold substantive and symbolic weight in the face of these overlapping national struggles. In the aftermath of political, social, economic and environmental upheaval, Nepal now needs to institutionalize and strengthen these national structures of governance and continue to work with a concerted approach for stability and further advancements. Ongoing research and analysis can contribute to this process, if research and its findings are prioritized, valued, and used appropriately.

The devastating earthquake of 25 April 2015 with a magnitude of 7.8 Richter scale and the second one of 12 May 2015 with a magnitude of 7.4 Richter scale, with a series of aftershocks that followed, drastically changed the social, economic, and psychological landscape of Nepal. According to the Post Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA) report (a government led joint initiative), 8,790 people lost their lives, and 22,300 people were injured. More than half a million houses collapsed or were severely damaged, with an estimation of eight million people affected in 31 of the 75 districts of Nepal. Out of these 31 districts, 14 districts were declared ‘crisis-hit’ and 17 districts were declared partially affected (7 June 2015 status). About 2,900 cultural heritage sites were damaged. Despite all of this destruction, the earthquakes could not quiet the spirit and strength of the Nepali people, who demonstrated a very high capacity for resilience, and a supportive attitude and dedication to help those affected populations. Nepali youth proved their mettle playing an unprecedented role in emergency rescue and rehabilitation. Many youth studying or working abroad returned to help, and youth residing in Nepal worked extraordinarily hard to contribute to the immediate needs of the aftermath. Even major political parties, often criticized for their power struggles, demonstrated a unique ability to work together in bringing out the new Constitution, which was pending owing to their earlier inability to come together. Just like the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia helped to end the ongoing, armed conflict there, the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, helped to bring Nepal’s new Constitution. People across the world expressed their solidarity with Nepal—a gesture of global solidarity that emboldened these national efforts across so many sectors of society.

So far, the government of Nepal has not given priority to research projects because of a lack of understanding about the role research can play in policy making, development planning, and broadly on nation building. Consequently, public institutions and universities are still weak in necessary research work. Therefore in the past years, some of these



gaps have been filled by individuals and private and non-governmental sectors, especially in social science-related applied and action research. Nagarik Aawaz/Tewa applied study entitled “A Gendered Look into Bhaktapur’s Recovery & Rebuilding: Exploring the Risks & Strengths of Rebuilding the World Heritage City, after the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015 Earthquake in Nepal” is an example of such kind of research.

Since I have known Tewa, the Nepal Women’s Fund – and its approach to develop and strengthen non-traditional local philanthropy to support organized groups of women as a means of overcoming poverty and promoting equitable justice and peace, I have been an admirer of its vision and accomplishments. Like Tewa, Nagarik Aawaz - Citizen’s Voice for Peace – is one of the very few organizations dedicated to responding to the escalating violence from the armed insurrections and committed to minimizing its effects, as well as creating safety nets through peace building initiatives. Interestingly enough, both these organizations were created, nurtured, and promoted by a team led by the well known social entrepreneur, established philanthropist, respected gender expert, and popular woman activist, Rita Thapa, also known as “Didi jyu” in these circles. And I recently came to know she also conceptualized the idea for this research. Her commitment to building knowledge, as a means of uplifting society, and women’s lives in particular, can be well appreciated.

As an applied research project, the focus of this study seems to be more on the practical, action-led, and solution-oriented aspects, rather than conceptual-theoretical and methodological debates. Hence, this research offers interesting practical findings and recommendations related to gender and disaster, trauma from disasters, as well as the effects of the earthquakes on the social, economic, cultural and infrastructural levels for planners, practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and anyone else interested generally, or in Bhaktapur particularly.

I congratulate the research team of Tewa and Nagarik Aawaz for their valuable work in bringing forth these important insights on the Bhaktapur post earthquake context, along with practical recommendations. In its most effective form, research brings issues to the forefront to be further explored in practice. Hence, this research has raised several concerns that need attention for further inquiry, action, and reflection. I hope the findings of this project will be used to minimize potential risks and maximize the resilience of the people in their recovery, as well as the rebuilding of the World Heritage City of Bhaktapur.



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14<sup>th</sup> June 2016

This research report is the result of a blending of empathy, social sensitivity, and scholarly curiosity, on Bhaktapur after the 25 April 2015 earthquake in Nepal. The research speaks of multiple experiences. Some of these are explicit, while others are not, but they can still be felt under one's skin. They traverse a huge range from the individual to the family, from youth to the elderly, from men to women or the third sex, and from psychological to the spiritual.

Exploring the consequences of this event is beyond the scope of a single study. However, it is mostly believed that in the “Age of Reason,” if we dig deeply enough, a rational explanation can appear. Maybe inspired by such a notion, a joint team of Tewa and Nagarik Aawaz, led by their Founder, Rita Thapa, and assisted by the local youth volunteers of Bhaktapur, showed scholarly courage to dig out some of the multi-faceted consequences of a disaster impacting everyone in general, but women in particular. They focused this study in Bhaktapur, a place where culture and arts have been embedded deep into one's psyche since times immemorial. This report is the outcome of an intense yearlong involvement of this team, to whom I offer my salute and sincere gratitude.

This study utilizes an applied research technique and seeks to solve practical problems. People in general and women specifically living in post-disaster situations have been struggling on multiple fronts. Searching for positive and dependable solutions is the need of the time. Applied research focuses on taking the results of scientific research and

applying it directly to real world situations; applied researchers often concern themselves with the external validity of their studies. This study's researchers implemented a mixed method, consisting of conventionally known "quantitative and qualitative" approaches, to arrive at a logical inference, which is further supported with a triangulation of information culled.

The study began with a talk programme on "The Historical City: A World Heritage Site" presented by historical/cultural expert Professor Dr. Purushottam Lochan Shrestha. His paper compels one to think about a way forward for the necessary rebuilding and recovery, helping to better institutionalize the culture and history of Bhaktapur, which are inextricably interwoven with the daily lives of the local people. Strengthening the quality of the local people's lives of Bhaktapur also reinforces the strengthening of its culture.


One of the central features of an applied research is to assess the application of theory with the practical situation. Taking this into consideration, this study took into account three major theoretical perspectives: disaster and trauma, cultural impacts of disasters, and disasters' gendered implications. With a goal to collect qualitative information emanated from the deep-seated feelings and opinions of participants, the researchers facilitated a total of four focus group discussions (FGD), two each of women and men. This initiative illuminated the various dimensions of a post-disaster situation. The female FGD participants expressed that the biggest effects of the earthquake have been the forced separation of a joint family into nuclear families; changes in their roles and life patterns in terms of their daily activities; deprivation of cultural activities such as celebrations of festivals and social gatherings; psychological distress; and the compunction to live a lower quality of life. The male FGD stated that their daily chores have changed as they are compelled to work in the kitchen and care for the babies because women have had

to spend much more time fetching drinking water. They asserted that these events have changed their behavior, such as daily and increased intake of alcohol with the illusion that this may help reduce their levels of stress. The researchers also found that male FGD participants, as can be expected with their roles as primary “breadwinners,” were overwhelmingly concerned with financial and economic matters or lack thereof.

The research team also conducted a survey of 498 respondents, selected based on purposeful and accidental sampling, of whom 63% were women and 37% were men. Researchers found the responses from this survey to be in line with the results of FGDs. The respondents expressed that this disaster compelled them to break many cultural norms. At the same time, some deviant behaviors such as domestic violence also became evident. They also felt that on the positive side, the conditions allowed for an increase in social harmony, solidarity, and togetherness. They all faced severe economic crisis immediately after the earthquake due to the destructions of their existing business spaces, as well as a slackness of the market, which was further aggravated by the informal India blockade. Respondents came to realize that cultural festivals, which previously served as a major source of their joy, happiness, and social cohesiveness, had now turned to moments of sadness, dismay, and annoyance. The researchers also found that people talked of switching from old styled homes, which were culturally and historically incomparable, to rebuilding new modern houses. From this, one can easily assume that the traditional features of glorious Bhaktapur is on a decline unless urgent attention and care are taken.

This study clearly brings out the qualitative and quantitative impacts on the lives of women and men of Bhaktapur, particularly through the inevitable loss of culture and traditions in post-earthquake world heritage city Bhaktapur. I sincerely hope that this study will be a guiding

lamppost for designing reconstruction policies, plans, and programmes that consider the religious, cultural, and historical aspects of the city of Bhaktapur, and the roles individual women and men can play in positively and equitably enhancing social transformations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by the name 'Shrestha' in a cursive script. There are two small dots below the end of the signature.

**Professor Shree Krishna Shrestha, PhD**

Tyanglaphant, Kirtipur, Kathmandu

26<sup>th</sup> June 2016

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# INTRODUCTION

On 25 April 2015, Nepal experienced a devastating earthquake with a 7.8 Richter scale magnitude with the epicenter in Barpak of Gorkha District, and the second one of a 7.4 magnitude on the Richter scale with its epicenter in Dolakha District. Since then the government records show over 450 aftershocks. According to the Nepal Disaster Risk Reduction Portal (Government of Nepal, 2015), 8,790 people died; 22,300 injured (more women than men); 10,790 government buildings fully destroyed; 14,997 government building partially damaged; 288,798 private houses reduced to rubble; and 254,112 private houses damaged enough to be uninhabitable. The government also named 20 districts as hardest hit: Lalitpur, Gorkha, Sidhupalchowk, Nuwakot, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Ramechhap, Dhading, Kavre, Rasuwa, Makawanpur, Dolkha, Solukhumbhu, Sindhuli, Lamjung, Chitwan, Bara, Parsa, Sunsari, and Okhaldhunga (Government of Nepal, 2015). Everywhere in the affected districts, former development work has been disrupted, and Nepal, already suffering over two decades of major political, economic, and social transitions, is now mired in disaster crisis.

Recently, Nepal declared its much-awaited new constitution (which had lingered over a decade). However, the new draft constitution failed to satisfy segments of its people in terms of being equitable and just, especially for the Madheshi people in the Tarai belt and some of the indigenous people. It failed to address the issues of women's rights and equality related to citizenship. There are other contentious issues, which require more work on federalism and executive powers. Since the constitution was announced, Nepal experienced large protests and



demonstrations resulting in the loss of over 40 lives. The 4.5 month-long unofficial India blockade followed this agitation and grinded Nepal to a complete halt, adding more suffering, especially for the survivors of the earthquake.

The political struggles for power continue to be apparent, and many Nepalis going about their lives have a nagging question as to when their country might actually have visionary political leadership and a stable government. As Nepal struggles to transition from a post armed conflict era to recovery from a major disaster caused by the earthquakes, it is imperative that the state and non-state actors prioritize responding to this situation in a sensitive and a delicate manner so that the Nepali people can experience stability and security with minimal additional burdens. In the report to follow, we draw from the background paper written for this research by Professor Dr. P. L. Shrestha and focus on the findings we acquired in Bhaktapur, more than a year since the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015 earthquake.

Just over two weeks past the first devastating impact, a major aftershock occurred on 12 May 2015, which further devastated Nepal because its destructions landed on the critical infrastructures of cultural and historic capital in Bhaktapur, which had survived the earlier earthquake. This second disaster destroyed about 2900 cultural heritage sites throughout the country. The survey report of the Department of Archaeology has divulged that 4047 monuments have been affected within the Kathmandu valley and out of them eighty-three collapsed from their ground, rendering rebuilding impossible. In Bhaktapur district alone, 333 people were killed and 2,101 were wounded, some severely; almost 19,000 houses were destroyed and 9,125 houses were partially destroyed; 33,305 families, within seconds, became disaster survivors. Nearly 232 cultural heritage sites were destroyed in Bhaktapur district alone. Among them, 106 were completely destroyed whereas 126 were

partially destroyed. In Bhaktapur Municipality, 110 heritages were partially destroyed and 6 heritages were completely destroyed. This second earthquake pronounced the permanence of loss for Nepal, as national monuments could not be recovered, even as social rebuilding plans took immediate form and garnered international community support.

In the case of the monuments of Bhaktapur city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Nritya-Vatsala, the Fasi dega/Nilkanthesvar temples were fully destroyed whereas the Kedaresvara temple, the stone temple of Siddhilaxmi including other temples of the Durbar Square are partially damaged. The western gateway of Bhaktapur Rajdurbar collapsed. The Simha-dhoka durbar/Art Gallery including the Lal Baithak, are partially damaged. The Nyatapola and Bhairavanath temples are partially damaged, but the Betal-pati of Bhairavnath fully collapsed. Furthermore significant landmarks in the Taumadhi tole collapsed, many Shiva monasteries of significance have been partially damaged. Furthermore, Changunarayana temple, another World Heritage Site, and the Kilesvar temple are also badly damaged. In other words, the damages of over 100s of monuments of Bhaktapur district is of inexplicable dimension, owing to their significance as World Heritage Sites, and their lived social and cultural relevance to the people of Bhaktapur.

The proposed applied research will focus on exploring and deepening the understanding of the implications and impacts of these devastating earthquakes among the local residents (women and men) of Bhaktapur District. The findings of the research will serve as a learning document for the larger stakeholders involved in Bhaktapur's long-term recovery and rebuilding work. This report is intended to assist in the longer-term strategies for the region's ongoing recovery/rebuilding processes to benefit the resident of Bhaktapur, and also hopefully impact positively on the long-term reclaiming of other heritage sites.



The loss of lived heritage

## THE ORGANIZATIONS CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH

### **Tewa - THE NEPAL WOMEN'S FUND<sup>1</sup>**

Tewa (meaning “support”), the Nepal Women’s Fund, was initiated in September 1995 and formally registered in April 1996. Tewa is a not-for-profit organization committed to developing and strengthening non-traditional local philanthropy for equitable justice and peace. Tewa supports organized groups of women all over Nepal in their struggles to overcome poverty, marginalization, and invisibility by enabling them to

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<sup>1</sup> [www.tewa.org.np](http://www.tewa.org.np)

raise their voices and visibility, strengthen their leadership capabilities, and overcome injustices and discriminations they face at the local level. Throughout its 21-years-old journey, Tewa has focused on building modern philanthropy in the country, to minimize dependency on external aid, and investing in the empowerment of local women in disadvantaged positions.

Founded by feminist activist, Rita Thapa, Tewa is comprised of 27 dues-paying women members from diverse backgrounds, of whom eleven are on the executive board. The present Chair of the Board is Dr. Nirmala KC, Ph.D., and the professional staff-team is currently led by Sadhana Shrestha. Tewa also has a gender balanced advisory committee, an active volunteer body, and thousands of local donors and allies. As a women's fund, Tewa's working philosophy is to be diverse and inclusive, non-hierarchical, transparent, and accountable. It works on the basis of a process-led approach, with ongoing reflection and analysis grounded in continuous appraisal, learning, monitoring and evaluation. All of these commitments are built into Tewa's various programmes in an ongoing way.

Spanning the period 1996 - 2016, Tewa disbursed 524 grants to 428 community-based groups in 68 out of the 75 districts of Nepal. Its volunteer development programme has trained, engaged, and mobilized 664 volunteers. Tewa's commitment to promote local philanthropy has cultivated a donor base of over 5228 Nepali individuals, in addition to institutional donors.

As a result of the escalation of the armed conflict (1999), and correlated drop in bank interest rates, Tewa invested its 17.2 million rupees endowment fund in a land and building development project. This has now culminated to be the Tewa Centre, created for the self-reliance and sustainability of the organization. Spread over two acres of land in

Dhapakhel VDC, with nine infrastructures, the Tewa Centre provides residential facilities for meetings, workshops, exhibitions, and events, demonstrating an organic, compassionate, and mindful way of life with nature, the ecology, and the planet earth. It practices a sustaining and caring way of life in consumption, practice and being. The philosophy and values of the Tewa Centre are aligned with Tewa - the Nepal Women's Fund, who provides the necessary legal and fiscal oversight.

### **Nagarik Aawaz - THE CITIZEN'S VOICE FOR PEACE<sup>2</sup>**

Nagarik Aawaz (NA) was founded in June 2001 as a response to escalating violence in times of the armed conflict between the Maoists and the Nepali State. Rita Thapa, the NA Founder, worked from its inception by focusing the organization's work on the conflict-affected population at large and marginalized youths, and women in particular, with a central goal to minimize the effects of the armed conflict, and to create safety nets through peace building initiatives. During the early days, NA invested its time and energies largely in personal/individual transformation of conflict-affected youths and women, promoting shifts from states of anger/vengeance to reconciliation and peace building. This could be done by providing community members with opportunities to expand their knowledge on conflict and peace, gain income generation opportunities through necessary skills building, and benefit from customized socio-psychosocial healing. As NA set out to increase the self-confidence and self esteem of individuals, it simultaneously promoted wider community and societal peace building.

Similarly now, led by its CEO, Susan Risal, along with Shobha Basnet, who is the current Chair of the Board, the key initiatives of Nagarik Aawaz focus largely on constructive mobilization of youth for social

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<sup>2</sup> [www.nagarikaawaz.org.np](http://www.nagarikaawaz.org.np)

transformation through engagement in peace building initiatives. A big part of NA's work is in necessary and ongoing capacity building of youth at various levels in a range of peace-building and social issues. Through its initiatives, NA has been able to develop the notion of collectivism and togetherness among the conflict-affected and marginalized communities. By advocating for individual rights and collective justice, NA promotes community and national peace and reconciliation in all of its initiatives.

During Nepal's heightened conflict, Nagarik Aawaz established the Sahakarya Shantiko Network (A Joint Initiative for Peace) in 2003, when 14 motivated district level organizations learned from each other to make peace central in their work, and to amplify the voice for peace building efforts related to Nepal's particular time and context. Together with its network member organizations, Nagarik Aawaz has been able to positively impact over 2,500 directly conflict-affected women and youths who in turn serve as change agents to build trust and understanding in their communities—a core value for peace building work. NA has always been a believer in a people-to-people approach to peace work throughout its 15 years long journey.

On April 30, just days after the first devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015, Nagarik Aawaz joined hands with Tewa to begin relief efforts and is currently focusing its work on recovery initiatives, as well as continuing its peace building initiatives through the mobilization of local youth as first-aid socio-psychological healers. Particularly in this region, the affected youth are helping in holding the fabric of their communities together and contributing to long-term peace building. This programme is ongoing in five of the most affected districts, as environmental destruction fostered ties that also contribute to Nepal's ongoing social and political development needs.

## GENESIS OF THIS RESEARCH

Owing to her personal fear and reluctance to face the impacts of the devastation, Rita Thapa (Founder Tewa/NA) only dared to visit Bhaktapur two months after April 25 earthquake. As she stood ruminating in her own grief in Nyatapola square, she saw Kabindra Dhaubadel (a stranger at the time) standing in dejection not unlike hers, in front of what was his damaged ancestral property. Rita walked up to him to strike up a conversation. His friend Radheshyam joined them. Introductions and conversations followed before parting. Rita walked around Bhaktapur, assessing and taking in the situation. On return, she broached the idea to the Tewa/NA team of providing “khaja” (tea-time snacks), a couple of times a week to the labourers (who she saw were mostly women) engaged in clearing the rubbles. Everyone at Tewa/NA thought that this would be a good idea. Rita made a following second visit to Bhaktapur to meet with Kabindra and Radheshyam, joined by Rama and Riva (Tewa Board members) and Urmila (Tewa Programme Manager). Manisha Dhonju a local Tewa volunteer, and Dipesh Sharma, a friend of Kabindra, also joined them. As the group talked through the concept, the Bhaktapur team agreed that it was a very good idea. Later in the discussion, the group learned that both Kabindra and Dipesh also worked as tour guides. Rita then promptly suggested a heritage tour to be organized by Tewa, which generated a resounding “Yes!” Things moved quite rapidly then, and Tewa/NA readied to move the initiative titled “**Supporting Our Heritage – Bhaktapur**” as a part of the larger Tewa/NA recovery and rebuilding programme. Rita then proposed the following:

- The programme would be locally focused, meaning Kabindra, Dipesh, Radheshyam, and Manisha would work in a volunteer capacity with small honorariums, and each would find their own niche in this programme.

- Tewa/NA would execute and financially support the entire recovery programme.
- The approach would ensure consultation, consensus, and transparency.

Rita next suggested that it might be worthwhile to build in an applied research programme resting on the suggested two activities. Involving the collected team as well as the people of Bhaktapur, this plan could be a way to alert and inform stakeholders working on post-earthquake recovery in Bhaktapur and other heritage sites in Nepal, particular in regard to:

- The changing gender roles and its implications for men and women
- Costs for women and men and the need to address both of them differently and equitably
- Costs related to the loss of lives, homes, and related trauma, economic hardships, inability to celebrate festivals and traditions as earlier done, and its impacts
- Traditional practices and infrastructure that needed to be retained and why
- Potential innovations and transformations for the better.

Rita asked if Tewa/NA would engage in an applied pilot research, which could help inform those involved in recovery work as it took momentum. Tewa/NA agreed that this was a very good idea and believed it could happen in conjunction with the relief and recovery work already initiated by the two organizations. Soon after, the team,





Clearing rubbles with a smile

with the addition of Susan Risal (CEO/NA), met again with Kabindra, Radheshyam, Dipesh, and Manisha and proposed engaging local residents in this research. Everyone present could see the value in this, not only for the benefit for Bhaktapur, but also for the larger possibility of influencing ensuing all recovery work in broader sense. From there, the applied research began simultaneously with other support work in Bhaktapur. This is the genesis for the applied research project.

# RESEARCH GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND RATIONALE

The goal of the research is to understand the recovery and rebuilding processes from a gender/class/caste dimension and assist in documenting the effects of the disaster from a multi-faceted perspective. It is the intention of this research to offer effective strategies for the longer-term recovery and rebuilding process of Bhaktapur as well as other heritage sites.

## **Objectives and Rationale:**

- To assess what changed (e.g., personal outlooks, economic realities, socio-cultural life, gender relations, others) after the human loss and structural destruction of the devastating earthquake for the people of Bhaktapur district, and analyze relevance, opportunities and threats related to those individual and structure changes.
- To learn where, how, and why inherent resiliencies, abilities, traditional skills and craftsmanship exist and to comprehend their impact on the recovery and rebuilding processes.
- To uncover the gaps in those processes.
- To document the people-led recovery and rebuilding processes in the form of an historical document to be critiqued from multi-faceted dimensions (such as religious/spiritual, gender/diversity, traditional/modern as well as other aspects that may exist).

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research team applied the following questions to this applied research: “How did the outcomes of the research help reduce trauma costs and maximize coping methods and resilience in the Bhaktapur community? How did the research document assist in formulating a better design or approach for long-term rebuilding and recovery processes, particularly for the benefit of the local residents (women and men) of Bhaktapur district and for the maintenance of Bhaktapur’s cultural heritage?”

This applied research project took both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The core components of applied research — planning, action, reflection, and analysis — framed this inquiry and practice. Reflective and reflexive processes were built into the entire research process and at all levels and tiers of this applied research project. The research team also acknowledged the limitations of this research.

This project’s data collection methods included questionnaires, research cycles used in applied researches, focus group interviews, and case studies. The research team also implemented participatory qualitative methods. Further, the team applied a feminist lens and approach to honour the experiences and perspectives of women to make women visible, and to benefit them equally during the process as well as in the intended outcomes, despite their being largely less valued in the given public domain.

The project took place in three cycles. In order to address the research questions, the Tewa/NA research team explored broader questions by deriving several sub-questions in all three cycles of the project. Each set of queries led to the next cycle, which the team found helpful in implementing and reflecting on research activities as well as in incorporating the feedback of each of the learning cycles into the following action or process.

Four student enumerators (three women and one man) from Bhaktapur (all fluent in the local Newari dialect) worked over five months administering the questionnaire that was prepared. They shared that because of the state people were in, as well as prevailing sentiments of mistrust toward external researchers, they sometimes revisited a respondent two to three times to get the necessary information. Researchers gathered data from a total of 498 respondents, of whom 63 percent were women and 37 percent were men. Almost in equal proportion, they ranged from 14 years to above 80 years in age, with the majority falling into the 20 – 30 and 31 – 50 age groups. Representative groups included senior citizens and young students from both genders. In terms of one's religion, over 95 percent identified themselves as Hindus, with a small percentage of Buddhist, Christians, and atheists. Education variables differed with age, showing marked differences in educational attainment, with more men having Bachelor's or Master's degrees, and more women being non-literate.

Owing to the skills and approach of the facilitators, participants shared openly and freely, and appreciated being given a space to share their challenges and grief.

## **FIRST CYCLE**

This cycle focused primarily on exploring and reviewing the current state of the local residents (women and men) of Bhaktapur district, especially in relation to their psychological, socio-cultural, and gendered dimensions and conditions. The research team tried to assess what had changed from before the earthquakes and how changes post-disaster were being managed, continued, or preserved. The existing literature related to this cycle was also reviewed. A series of meetings with the three local volunteer residents of Bhaktapur, along with the one Tewa

volunteer who also resided in Bhaktapur, took place to reinforce the need for conducting applied research in Bhaktapur after the earthquake. From these consultations and conversations, a Research Committee was formed, and the research team prepared an outline of the research, that they then shared with the local residents of Bhaktapur and members of the Research Committee. Both groups offered the research team useful feedback, which was then in turn incorporated into the research outline. Each process was well documented, and after completing each activity, the research team gathered together to reflect, assess, and plan further.

## **SECOND CYCLE**

This cycle continued assessing the psychological, socio cultural and gendered dimensions and conditions of the local residents (women and men) of Bhaktapur. To assess these, the research team developed a questionnaire for key informant interviews and planned for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The team provided an orientation training for key informant interviews to four local enumerators (all students) identified by volunteers from Bhaktapur district (in order to ensure that they could converse in the local Newari dialect). The sample comprised of 498 interview respondents (312 women and 186 men). The team held regular meetings with the enumerators to address the challenges they faced, help them in seeing the larger picture, and guide them in recruiting respondents in a sensitive and a respectful way.

The research team also conducted two FGDs with women's groups, and two FGDs with men's groups. These helped in assessing the reasons behind people's resilience and their ability to cope in the aftermath of the earthquake. They also provided spaces to discuss ongoing challenges for recovery. Because this is an applied research project, the research team also tried to find appropriate strategies for sharing the project's findings

with the FGD participants, to inform and prepare the affected people; thereby they could develop their own strengths, support one another, empower themselves, and reach out to others for improved coping and care.

Similarly, in this cycle the research team also conducted two feedback discussion sessions with academicians and cultural experts. These sessions provided valuable input for the development of the background paper crafted by Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha, PhD. This cycle was also well documented, and following the completion of each activity, the research team gathered for reflections, discussion, and further planning.

### **THIRD CYCLE**

In this cycle, the research team continued to monitor the changes or shifts for the residents of Bhaktapur districts. Specifically, the enumerators and the local volunteers conducted regular check-ins and field visits. This enabled the research team to better inform and assist concerned authorities, engaged in formulating, reviewing, and adapting strategies for long-term recovery and rebuilding initiatives with the intention of benefiting the local residents (women, men, and the children) of Bhaktapur district in particular. Recommendations based on the findings continue to be recorded and disseminated widely as the research emerges. This document will also continue to be a reference for ongoing recovery work, especially for heritage sites like Bhaktapur.

**Figure: First Cycle**

**DIAGNOSIS & DATA COLLECTION**

**Analysed the current state of the local residents of Bhaktapur**

- › Meeting with local residents
- › Interview sample size (N=498: Women=312; men=186)
- › Focus group discussions

**ACTIONS**

Meeting with Tewa/ NA team regarding research relevancy

Consultation with the local volunteers of Bhaktapur regarding research relevancy

Prepare research outline

Initiating writing of the background paper

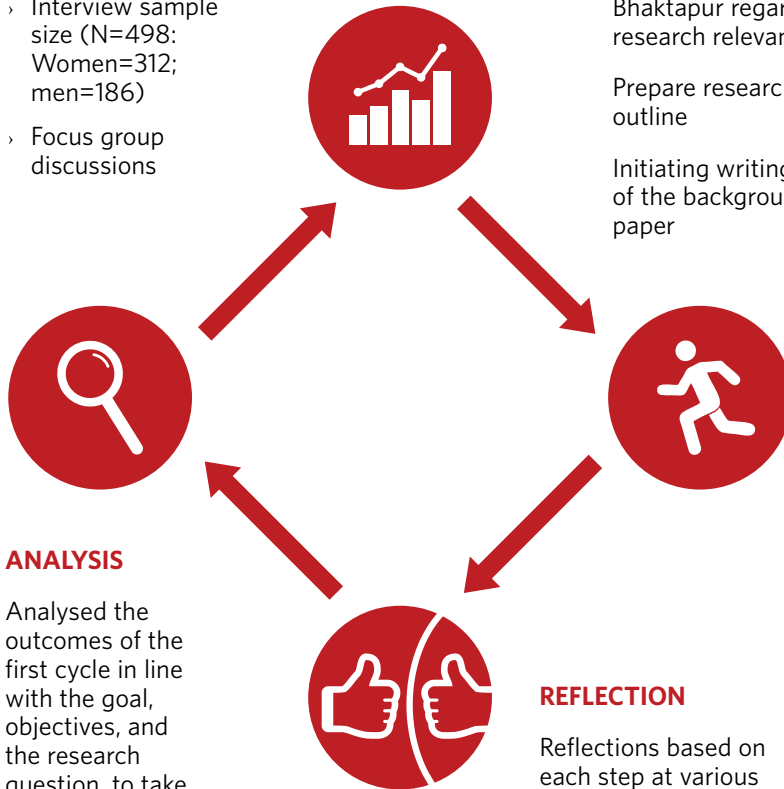
**ANALYSIS**

Analysed the outcomes of the first cycle in line with the goal, objectives, and the research question, to take the learning to the next level

**REFLECTION**

Reflections based on each step at various levels

Incorporating outcomes of the process into the research document



**Figure: Second Cycle**

**PLANNING**

**Taking the learning from 1<sup>st</sup> cycle:**

Formulated the questionnaire/s for the 4 FGDs and key informant interviews with local residents, youths group, men's group and women's group

- › Trained and mobilized the four local enumerators
- › Documentation
- › Formed the backstopping research committee & incorporated their feedbacks into the research outline.
- › Defining timeline for various activities/meetings



**ANALYSIS**

Conduct data analysis & Transition into next (3<sup>rd</sup>) research cycle

Take learning to next step

**ACTION**

First meeting with the academics/experts

Meeting/s with the enumerator team

Second meeting with academics/experts

FGDs with 2 men and 2 women group/s

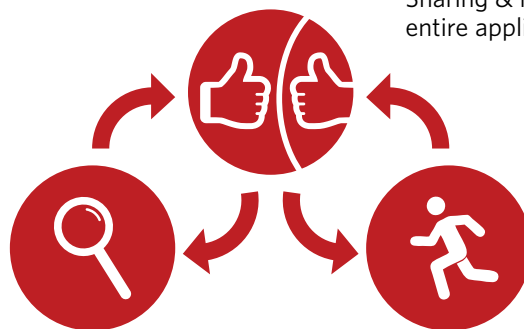
**REFLECTION**

Reflection session with local residents of Bhaktapur, local government structure and the Tewa/NA team to determine the appropriate strategies for best possible recovery & rebuilding initiatives & outcomes

Team's reflection comparing with theories

**Figure: Third Cycle**

Analysis & evaluation of the findings



Sharing & reflections on the entire applied research process

Recommendation for initiating the action plans



This research is guided by some philosophical principles—principles that have also guided both the lead organizations in their own practice and work. These principles are also in line with applied research. Some of them are as follows:

- An **inclusive** approach – For this project, that means including local people at all levels. For example, one of the members of the consultation committee in Bhaktapur wrote the key background paper for this research project. Further, the research team solicited input and feedback from not only groups of experts and the enumerators, but also from the research participants themselves.
- A **respectful** approach – At every level and at every stage of this research project, care has been taken to be respectful in all interactions and in every approach. This also means being sensitive to different needs, and across diversity of age, gender, class, caste, and ethnicity. The research team briefed and trained the enumerators accordingly, and they took care to ensure the enumerators were local and spoke the Newari Bhaktapur dialect fluently.
- The Tewa/NA research team took care to ensure **transparency** in every aspect of the project. The team did not make any important decisions without consulting the local stakeholders. Their identifying Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha, PhD as the writer of the key background paper, organizing the focus group discussions and recruiting participants, developing the “Heritage Walk through the Rubble,” and feeding the rubble cleaners and builders provided the necessary context and triangulation of the data collection for the research to be fully applied in its approach. Further, monies needed to conduct this research project were controlled at the local level, and almost everyone else worked with small honorariums.

- **Accountability** is at the core of this project. The research team gave special attention to informing stakeholder constituencies and soliciting their feedback at all levels.

## METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

This research project utilized a relatively small sample size of 498 respondents within the city of Bhaktapur. The project was also constricted by time: The goal was to complete this research within one year from start to finish and to complete the study largely in-house. As far as the research team could ascertain, background information and a viable review of the research literature did not exist, nor could said research be sought out, due to the aforementioned time constraints. Further, at this point in time, no one knows the extent of the damage or loss of existing research, perhaps now buried in the rubble. The likelihood of finding such in a post disaster context is quite low.

It certainly warrants noting that the local people involved in this research worked under very challenging conditions. On top of trying personal and contextual conditions they faced on a daily basis, the local people had absolutely no trust in local NGOs. Thus, simply by their affiliations with Tewa, local community members perceived the enumerators and other local volunteers as making big money and earning dollars. This, and the overall tragedy of the disaster, made the process painful for the enumerators. Many of the men and women the enumerators interviewed were inconsolable after experiencing such extensive loss and then revisiting their post-earthquake hardships. Oftentimes, the research team found respondents to be irritable, and at times, even short tempered which meant the enumerators had to muster up a great deal of patience and perseverance throughout the research process. With the absence of trust on one hand, and the mistrust generated by the

polarization of communities along party lines or identity politics, this work proved to be much more difficult than it actually needed to be. However, on the flip side, it also proved to be a tremendous learning opportunity for everyone involved as they witnessed and experienced the patience, resilience and the forbearance of the affected population.

Likewise, some of the limitations of this research project also turned out to be its strengths. Completing this applied project within a one-year time frame meant that it was possible to inform all the relevant people, government ministries, local level bodies, and the affected communities themselves. Ideally, this will positively impact long-term rebuilding and recovery work. Not having dedicated funds to begin this work initially could have been a serious hindrance, but this was what allowed the research team to experience people's generosity in the most difficult of times by people's willingness to often work voluntarily for a cause.

It is also essential to note that the five months long officially undeclared Indian blockade overlapped with the early recovery days and during the most grueling of winter days. This impacted research work at the most basic level, negatively affecting travel, food, and personal wellbeing. Yet, sanity, perseverance, and hard work prevailed. When a meeting needed to happen, wherever, it would always take place.

## CORE CONTENTS OF THIS RESEARCH

**Background Paper: “Bhaktapur, the Historical City – A World Heritage Site,” by Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha, PhD<sup>3</sup>**

In view of this rapid pilot research, we identified (with the help of our local friends in the city of Bhaktapur) and invited a key historical and

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<sup>3</sup> This paper is available as reference or as an addendum to this research on the Tewa/NA websites.

cultural expert, Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha, PhD, to write a background paper, which would serve as a reference for the historical and cultural significance of Bhaktapur. Professor Shrestha kindly agreed and wrote a paper entitled, “Bhaktapur – The Historical City: A World Heritage Site” (March 2016), in which he outlined seven sections of importance in relevance to the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015 earthquake:

1. Bhaktapur’s historical overview (e.g., name, people, history, and art and architecture),
2. Fairs & festivals of Bhaktapur as has been traditionally celebrated in cultural and religious practices,
3. Listing the lost and existing heritages, some of which are illustrated with priceless pictures of antique paintings,
4. Additional heritages built mostly during 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century, including Buddhist Bihars/Bahis, Jame-Masjid, and a vanished Church<sup>4</sup>,
5. The damage caused by the earthquake in a chapter titled “Rupture & Repair,” with a listing of 132 structures including palaces, temples, traditional patis or rest houses for travellers in the olden days, museums, and others,
6. A brief outline of the threats and challenges as Professor Shrestha envisions them, and
7. The opportunities that lie in possible recovery work.

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4 It is now present only in archival documents.

From the time of the completion of the first draft of Professor Shrestha's paper, the research team worked to ensure that the background paper was further strengthened by organizing two consultation meetings with relevant academics and cultural experts. The duly revised paper provides a strong basis to argue that unlike other earthquake affected districts, Bhaktapur City as a world heritage site symbolically represents - with given variations and specific context, other earthquake affected heritage sites in Nepal, and can be a guidepost to those involved in the recovery work of these monumental sites.

The important paper written by Professor Shrestha, as well as the references listed in his bibliography, provided irrefutable evidence of the historical and cultural significance of Bhaktapur City, tracing its documented roots to as far back as 477 A.D. Particularly, the paper illustrates Bhaktapur's history as the political, cultural, and religious center of Nepal. We can also trace the growth of arts and architecture, music and theatre, and oral and written literature and documentation in Bhaktapur. All of this paved the way for excellence in woodcarving, stone sculpting, phaubha painting, metal crafts, pottery, and the crafting of papier-mâché masks. With the honing of these skills and art forms, owing to the discerning eyes and minds of rulers such as Bhupatindra Malla, Bhaktapur, in Professor Shrestha's words, can to this day claim to be the cultural capital of Nepal. Professor Shrestha brings to light a community rich in arts and culture and grounded in a fertile agricultural land and lifestyle — a community that comes together in a way of life intricately woven with agricultural practices, laced with spiritual grounding and ritual, and infused with offerings of worship and celebration. Even to this day, the local people of Bhaktapur carry out fairs and festivals from the earliest days with the belief that they ward off evil eyes and usher in peace and prosperity to all its inhabitants. In doing this, the community safety net stays cohesive and strong.

The word “Sangit” means and includes vocal and instrumental music and dances or performances, which have been practiced over centuries in Bhaktapur, giving us all a glimpse of the social, cultural, and religious life of bygone days. As Professor Shrestha notes, “the past is still alive in Bhaktapur.” Even today, we can witness that the city lives between the medieval and the modern.

Professor Shrestha writes, “Bhaktapur is the Rome of Nepal and Bhaktapur Durbar Square is the monumental treasure of Bhaktapur.” Professor Shrestha goes on to describe the significance of the heritage sites of Bhaktapur, some of which have already been physically lost, and those that still remain are a testimony to the political and social glory that was once Bhaktapur. Besides the durbar squares and the key temples, Professor Shrestha’s paper also highlights other remarkable heritage sites of Bhaktapur, such as the Nyatapola and the Bhairabnath temple (the five tiered pagoda temple dedicated to Goddess Siddhalaxmi, and the smaller temple on its side in front, which has withstood even this earthquake). Besides these, Tilmadhavnarayan temple of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Dattatreya Square where the Dattatreya temple was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and other temples of significance, including the Pujari Math with its world famous peacock window (now damaged), the Wakupati Changunarayan Temple of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Buddhist Vihars and Guthis, the Jame-Masjid, and the non-existing Church, and many others are noteworthy. Altogether, Professor Shrestha lists 132 monuments and heritage sites of significance, out of which approximately more than half are fully damaged and the others are partially damaged.

In his background paper, Professor Shrestha also explains how the damage is much greater than what is visible to the eye: monuments and old homes are not merely of archaeological and historical importance, but they are also an integral part of the socio-cultural and religious lives of the people since the very beginning of their existence. Each building

lost had a direct or an indirect connection with the local people and the entire country. While the Bhaktapur Durbar lost its political and administrative power with the end of the rule of the Malla Kings, today, it survives as a centre-point of socio-religious and cultural activities of the people of Bhaktapur, and of Nepal.

The temples and shrines of the paramount Hindu deities (i.e., Taleju, Manesvari and Dumaju and their Agamas as well as others) around the Durbar Square have fashioned the entire square as a pilgrimage shrine for the general people. Hindus consider this square a sacred shrine and a cultural central-point for the main fairs, festivals, and socio-religious and cultural programs that inevitably proceed annually in the Durbar square. To this day, the Taleju priests perform their daily and annual tantric rituals inside and outside of the Agams and the courtyards of the Durbar Square. The Nilkanthesvar and Yakshesvar Mahadev temples have provided an opportunity to pay homage to Nilkanthesvar Mahadev/Silu-Mahadev and Lord Pashupatinath without having to visit the Pashupati temple of Kathmandu, or the Muktinath temple of Mustang. Similarly, the four temples of the famous four Pilgrimages (dhams) — Jagannath, Ramesvar, Kedarnath and Badrinath — have given the local people an opportunity to worship these gods without having to go to India. On the day of Bala Chaturdasi, people from all over Nepal swarm to these sites in remembrance of their deceased ancestors. Thus, just as the earthquake destroyed or damaged the structures of significance, it also disrupted the ongoing daily rites and rituals of the local residents and all others who visited them.

The earthquake also badly impacted on the social and economic life of Bhaktapur as the public lost their traditional homes which their ancestors had inhabited over generations. Many of them were compelled to move to relief camps and live in tents. For months in the aftermath of the earthquake, the entire city seemed like an abandoned war zone. Many

people fell through their social safety nets; almost overnight, they had to confront significant economic hardships. The undeclared economic blockade imposed by India further compounded the negative impacts of the earthquake and pushed people into additional scarcity, hardships, and despair.

Even more than a year after the earthquake, reconstruction work on the heritage monuments and other significant public houses has not yet begun. In the meantime, during his visits to some parts of the city, Professor Shrestha argues that many of the priceless carved windows, struts, and doors of the damaged homes are fast disappearing through possible theft or negligence. Similarly, many undocumented inscriptions, which prove to be the most reliable archaeological sources to document authentic history, seem to be missing. For example, Professor Shrestha cites a stone plate inscription attached to the wall of the Talako-math, a Shiva monastery at the pottery square of city of Bhaktapur that was completely destroyed by the earthquake; the inscription is at present missing. Likewise, after the rest house (Pati) of Jhattapew-Taulachhen community was completely destroyed, its post-medieval inscription went missing. Professor Shrestha opines that losses such as these will be irreparable to these historical communities, future generations, and the nation as a whole. Those families who are slowly beginning to rebuild are gradually renovating or reconstructing their traditional houses in a modern way and that is unlike the earlier age-old interlocking<sup>5</sup> wall system. Some contest that these changes pose a grave threat to traditional arts and architecture, and in his paper, Professor Shrestha expresses concerns that that they may be breathing their last breath.

Despite all of this, one can observe the survival of the social life of local communities in Bhaktapur. Since the 25 April 2015 earthquake, people have participated and observed culturally important fairs and

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5 Traditionally built without cement, with specially built bricks.



festivals - over 15 of them, including the recently celebrated nine days long Bisket Jatra. Yosinkhel is the main venue for the Bisket Jatra festival. This age-old, famous festival has been a cultural-identification of Bhaktapur since times immemorial. The earthquake destroyed the ceremonial Chyasimha-mandip and covered the traditional Chariot pulling route with insurmountable debris. Despite this, the local people successfully celebrated this eight nights and nine days long festival. This demonstrates that although lives have been lost and monuments have fallen to the ground, the lived ancient traditions, customs, fairs, and festivals endure. Also, skills, art and crafts, rites and rituals, and other culturally valuable traditional practices are maintained and revived as people continue to practice them in their daily lives.

While making a case for rebuilding heritage sites in the traditional style and salvaging what has survived, Professor Shrestha emphasizes the importance of the following points in his paper:

- Bhaktapur is of incomparable historical and cultural significance not only to Nepal but also for the world.
- More so, it is a living heritage site spanning from the medieval ages to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- The post-disaster condition poses many risks owing to the following:
  - › Loss of priceless inscriptions and other artifacts
  - › Economic conditions and other hardships that disrupt the way people conduct their daily lives
  - › People replacing traditional homes with modern cement structures
  - › Local people's deteriorated ability to perform traditional festivals and ceremonies in the ways they had done in the past and

- › The government’s inability so far, to respond and act promptly on the rebuilding and related works in Bhaktapur.

However, Professor Shrestha notes that owing to the resilience people have demonstrated, and the fine levels of skills and artistry they still carry, this disaster could provide opportunity and enable additional livelihood options for the local people as well as foster the rebuilding of heritage sites. Yet, he argues the government and related agencies must move in swiftly.

Near the completion of his paper, Professor P. L. Shrestha received two sets of expert<sup>6</sup> input on his paper draft. Overall, people praised Professor Shrestha for his work and his depth of understanding of preserving the heritage of Bhaktapur. All the experts on Bhaktapur, present at these two meetings, affirmed that he was the right person to be writing such a paper on Bhaktapur.

In the first cluster consultation, Dr. Bharat Raj Raut stressed the importance of incorporating traditional, indigenous technology and materials while rebuilding the homes and heritage sites as history has shown that they are resilient and much better than concrete structures. Mr. Bishnu Raj Karki noted that Professor Shrestha was a walking encyclopedia of Bhaktapur, but suggested that this applied research project “needed to have clear goals in order to ensure clear outcomes.” He also pointed out that the inclusion of both tangible and intangible cultures (e.g., family, community, and traditional cooperatives, i.e. the guthis and their role) is very important. He felt that the ownership of the inherent communities was important, and gave the example of the Machindranath jatra which was externally conducted like earlier times, but this was only owing to the Jyapu Samaj’s (a sect of the indigenous Newars) commitments.

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<sup>6</sup> Two sets of academics/technical experts are listed at the end of this report.

Sentiment, beliefs, and mythical trends are difficult to alter because of fear that ill fate may befall a person if she or he does something wrong or differently. Rebuilding structures directly connected with local people's sentiments and belief will likely heighten morale. An example of this is when the walls of the "Ajima Dea" were repaired, people claimed to derive much comfort in resuming their traditional customs. Mr. Niraj Rajbanshi expressed concern about the many inscriptions now buried inside temples and homes – how might the community retrieve and preserve them? Mr. Neel Krishna Tamrakar noted the challenges of rebuilding older homes in Bhaktapur owned by multiple family members with each wanting to rebuild in different ways. Also mentioned was the need to repair and strengthen heritage sites in a timely manner. Additionally, Mr. N.K. Tamrakar urged that Professor Shrestha's paper needed to be explicit about the importance of local community's participation in rebuilding efforts and how communities learned to support one another.

Likewise in the second cluster, Professor Dr. Ranjana Bajracharya stressed the need to draw on what was learned from the B.S. 1990 earthquake. How might local communities contribute to rebuilding, volunteering, and pooling funds? And importantly, in what ways did the earthquake impact on women in particular? Dr. Rama Pandey noted that even today, walking around Bhaktapur gives one the feeling of being in medieval times; while the outlook for rebuilding might be modern, the old sciences of 'Vastu' and the phauba paintings need to be retained in their authenticity. She expressed concern that the earthquake caused many families to disintegrate as some continue to live in tents, rented rooms, or damaged homes. She asked: How has this impacted the community, especially women, who largely bear the burdens of care-taking roles? This is exactly what this research is probing into.

Professor Dr. Meena Ojha also reiterated the need to be mindful of the chances of disappearing inscriptions, such as the “tamrapatrata” and others. She also suggested that the paper could elucidate the role of traditional community structures like the Guthi Sansthan in preserving culture. Dr. Mala Malla said that Professor P. L. Shrestha’s paper was very strong from a historical and political perspective. He could also include in his paper practices such as the “Dawa Bhajan Khala” so that it might serve as a strong historical reference about the cultural aspects of Bhaktapur for the coming generation.

Professor Sri Krishna Shrestha felt the paper was well written. Listing of all damaged and partially damaged structures must have been very difficult and tiring work, which was very commendable. He further said that culture reflected human made history for future generations and symbolized a certain time and context. While culture, traditions, and values change across time and context, it remains important to pay attention to how this composite heritage has developed and evolved for future generations. He added that because the paper is to provide reference for an applied research project, the information that would be pulled out from the survey data might not be reflective, or able to give a rounded view to capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects, such as the level of traumas and grief suffered and the impacts of those. Dr. Mohan Man Sainju appreciated Professor P. L. Shrestha’s highlighting of the socio-cultural aspects of Bhaktapur in this paper. He drew attention to the importance of the research design, the research questions, and conceptual framework of the research.

Mr. Prakash Darnal pointed out the uniqueness of the paper where rare and authentic information on temples, mosque, Church and Bihar is presented. The paper could be strengthened by highlighting the uniqueness of some of the residential homes, which also symbolize the heritage, culture, and archeology of Bhaktapur. He also noted that because nowadays it is rare to find the originality in the sculptures, some

information could also be added. Mr. Niran Rajbhandary also provided some invaluable input related to traditional homes and their value. Dr. Nirmala K.C., who is the Chair of the Tewa Executive Board, played a dual role of hosting as well as offering input. She added that there could be tremendous learning for us all, if it could be depicted as to what happened to the existing practices and the institutions supporting Bhaktapur's heritage.

Finally, Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha said his background paper attempted to give a 1) an historical context (e.g., culture, heritage, and festivals), and 2) the earthquake's impacts on the socio-cultural life of Bhaktapur. He highlighted that the present is a reflection of the past, and that destructions can also be times of creation. After the earthquake, he felt Bhaktapur was like a city that had been bombed with streets remaining deserted for days. Yet, Nepal has faced similar disasters and managed to return to normalcy in the past. He shared during Nepal Sambat 808 in the reign of Jitmitra Nepal experienced a huge earthquake, and the palace Thantra Darbar collapsed. It was replaced with the famous 55 Windows Palace. Thus, destructions also provide spaces for transfer of skills to the new generation. He further shared that in recorded history it is also written that Nyatapola was made in seven months as mentioned in the book by Janak Lal Baidya. He concluded by sharing that he would try to insert what he still could in his paper based on all the invaluable inputs he had received.

This input from the experts validated for the research team the following key points:

- The political, historical, cultural relevance and value of Bhaktapur
- The inextricable relations between the physical structures, people's way of life, and the safety net therein

- The need for urgent action on all sides to ensure the safety of invaluable artifacts and institutions
- The need to look into impact on women and men and their subsequent changed roles under the circumstances
- The importance of enabling the applied research to inform both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, and
- The value of private homes, which are no less valuable than palaces and temples.

Importantly, these two consultations with Professor Shrestha further helped us to see the value of preserving these cultural heritage sites, and how we had chanced upon the right person to write this background paper. The rich discussions and invaluable input not only helped in strengthening Professor Shrestha's paper, but also provided pointers for ongoing and long-term recovery work.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This applied research integrated three relevant theoretical perspectives to frame the literature review: 1) gendered implications of disasters, 2) disaster and trauma, and 3) cultural impacts of disasters. These theoretical perspectives are most relevant because they complement NA/Tewa's existing knowledge (owing especially to the work of NA during the armed conflict period) and also relate to the recovery and rebuilding work in Bhaktapur, in connection to the central topic of this applied research.

## GENDER AND DISASTER

Socially constructed gender roles define the responsibilities between men and women in social and economic activities, the authority to make decisions, and the likelihood of acquiring access to resources (The World Bank, 2016). In Nepal, generally, women do not have the opportunity to seek income-generating roles, as they are considered to be the primary caretakers for children and the household. The labor that accompanies these dual families and home responsibilities consume a large portion of women's time and limit their access to economic resources.

Men and women have different roles in societies and they have different needs and constraints. However, these roles are likely to change with social, economic and technological currents. In times of disasters and conflicts, socially constructed gender roles are often disrupted rapidly and dramatically. Nepal's civil war experientially validated these patterns, as women took on new responsibilities and burdens, as men engaged in the direct conflict. In the recent post-earthquake period, gender roles take on yet another level of change, as communities cope with the dual burdens of political and environmental crisis. While the research team of Nagarik Aawaz and Tewa conducted the four focus group discussions (FGD) with the two men groups, huge water scarcities arose in the region, forcing women to queue up at the community water taps for hours. With women out of the house, men had no choice but to engage in household activities (e.g., preparing and taking the children to school). Men complained that these added stresses diverted their attention from looking for jobs to earn extra money to support the family. Similarly, data collected from Bhaktapur research show that out of 312 women respondents, 20 percent have become decision makers for their families. Furthermore, during the FGDs, when men were asked about their psychological condition, they responded that they did not have any of those problems, but data from the questionnaires

showed that out of 186 men respondents more than 90 percent faced psychological problems. Given the prevailing gender roles ascribed by society, men hesitated to express their psychological conditions, whereas women respondents openly expressed that they were dealing with psychological problems, such as bad dreams and fearfulness, as well as anxiety about their financial constraints in these circumstances.

Women and girls, boys and men, belonging to different age and socio-economic groups, demonstrated distinct vulnerabilities. These shape the way they experience disaster and also their ability to recover from it. In Nepal's recent earthquake, more women lost their lives than did men. In the applied research project, out of the 498 respondents, it was shared that among the deceased persons almost 41 percent were women, disaggregating children, elderly, and men. In Nepal, because women are much more likely to be occupied by labor within the household, they were at greater risk when the structures collapsed, which ultimately led to the death of many more women during this crisis. On the other hand, men felt that they let their families down, as they could not protect them from the disaster. These perceptions, grounded in prevailing gender constructions, resulted in another layer of burden for men, who often carry a sense of guilt and perceived failure in their inability to protect their families.

According to Smawfield (2013), women and girls are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards in countries where gender discrimination is tolerated.

The UNDP Report on disaster shows that the incidents of gender-based violence (such as rape, human trafficking and domestic abuse) are also known to increase exponentially during and after disasters. Furthermore, the percentage of women and girls who die in these countries is higher. This could be due to the fact that disasters place additional burdens



on women and girls who are made responsible for providing care giving, water and food, and often incomes, despite having themselves gone through the trauma. Furthermore, as they face these overlapping struggles, women do not even get the time to talk about their own psychological traumas and pressures. In some cases, circumstances are so difficult that women see migration as one of the only options for assuring safety and protection. Yet, in these circumstances, women most often face increased threats and additional traumas as they are fleeing natural disasters. In the recent earthquake of Nepal, several local reports indicated that many women were trafficked to other countries, and faced various levels of gender-based violence as they fled the post-earthquake conditions.

These circumstances often directly impact women's health and longevity. An earlier 2010 report published by UNDP on gender and disasters stated that:

- The data collected from 141 countries affected by disaster between 1981 and 2002 showed that disasters lower women's life expectancy more so as compared to men's.
- During a disaster, women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men.
- Following a disaster, women are likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence, and they may not even use the shelters due to the fear that they may be abused again.

However, disasters may also create opportunities for women to be agents of change. Disasters may allow women to redress gender disparities and reconfigure relations between women and men. Furthermore, relief efforts provide spaces for dialogue on larger gender inequalities

in practice. During Nepal's post-disaster period, several programmes that were sensitive to women's needs confronted longstanding biases by involving women and men as equal partners in recovery work.

According to Laska et al (2009), the effects of disaster on women's status, whether it be immediate or long-term, depends on the resources that are available to her. Also, during disaster recovery, if women and girls are left out of planning, then relief, and rebuilding efforts exclude almost half of the population, making them highly unlikely to meet the needs of the most affected. When a disaster strikes, it paralyzes the entire eco-system and society. Hence, in order to deal with such a situation, an integrated approach needs to be taken to realize a successful disaster management intervention. The importance of various interrelated aspects of disaster management work needs to prioritize gender and integrate the diverse experiences of men and women. It is also essential to understand the activities undertaken earlier, during, and after a disaster because the work carried out in one stage needs to be linked in with ongoing recovery work, as discussed in the following interventions.

## **TRAUMA AND DISASTER**

According to Eranen & Liebkind, and Green (cited in American Counseling Association - Fact sheet #7), disasters generally result in a social disruption in which the social structure and the function of the local community are threatened. Disaster leads to the loss of financial, physical, environmental, and psycho-social conditions of the people who are likely to experience horrific traumatic situations suddenly. Disaster creates a crisis situation in people's lives. According to the American Counseling Association, the term "crisis" refers to the condition of instability, or danger. It is an emotionally stressful event, or brings a traumatic change in one's life (Fact sheet # 7).

In Nepal, the devastating earthquakes of April 25, 2015 and May 12, 2015 created an unimaginable crisis situation in the lives of people in 20 affected districts already living below the “poverty line.” The interrelationship between disaster and economic poverty in a country like Nepal is very high, primarily because Nepal went through ten years of armed conflict (1996-2006), and later experienced many emergent transitions and conflicts with disruptions of economic and human development. In the context of these interwoven upheavals, family and physical property became vital dimensions of security and stability. In Nepali society, homes are considered symbols of social security, and families are the main support systems for the people in the absence of government social safety nets. Owing to this, in the devastating earthquakes, people who lost their relatives and houses could not cope with this horrific incident and are now suffering from multiple problems in terms of psycho-social and economic conditions. The four men and women only FGD (two men FGDs and two women FGDs) conducted by the research team echoed these findings. Respondents reported that they are still living in fearful conditions and relying on substance abuse coping mechanisms. Similarly owing to the slow pace of rebuilding, many communities continue to live in hardship and financial difficulties long after the crisis.

The American Psychiatry Association defines trauma as “a direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury; or a threat to the physical integrity; or witnessing of an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by family members or other close associated” (Criterion A 1). The person’s response to the event involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror in children. Their responses often involve disorganized or agitated behaviour (Criterion A2). People of 20 districts of Nepal fall into criterion A1 and A2 as a result of their

experience with the two overlapping earthquake traumas. According to the data analysis done by the research team in Bhaktapur district, out of 498 respondents 63 percent indicated that they are living in constant fear, 20 percent reported that they are still stressed and tense, 3.2 percent said that they cannot sleep at night, 1 percent answered that they have recurring bad dreams, and a small percentage (mostly men) answered that relying upon substance abuse to cope. All of these findings validate that the psycho-social condition of the people of Bhaktapur is very fragile owing to this disaster. Everyone interviewed for this study, as well as those involved in the wider ethnographic observations, revealed that their physiological conditions are also very fragile.

According to Satapathy (2012), any disaster resulting from either natural or human-made hazards will affect countries in multifarious ways, resulting in undermining all major developmental measures and the financial stability of the countries. Apart from the quantifiable and tangible damages and losses, there is a loss of quality and productivity of life in a disaster situation, which cannot be easily and are often not measured or quantified. Satapathy further argues that the impact of any disaster on the mental health of the survivors is enormous and affects a country's development directly and indirectly. As Satapathy mentioned, in Nepal, people who suffered from the devastating earthquakes lost quality and productivity in their lives and continue to deal with unimaginable situations that negatively impact their lives at multiple levels. This has yet to be assessed qualitatively in the other affected districts here in Nepal, and at the broader level.

Thus, it is quite imperative to address the problems faced by the people of Bhaktapur district in order to support them to recover and to live healthy and dignified lives. Although the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management (2009) emphasized the importance of psycho-social conditions and the overall livelihoods of disaster affected people, we

learned that the government over a year after the disaster has taken little to no action.

## **CULTURE AND DISASTER**

Culture is defined as social institutions, customs, and beliefs that people hold, or characteristics that bind groups of people together. Culture refers to things like religious and traditional beliefs, values, and the importance placed on social structures, customary livelihood choices, and settlement patterns. At the same time, culture is dynamic and changes according to time and context. Culture and its practices shape values and belief systems, which, in turn, determine the reaction of an individual to a particular event in different societies.

The people of Bhaktapur district have maintained their rich cultural practices, interlaced with religion and tradition, since centuries back (as the background paper informs), and throughout all difficult times and eras. These communities have always been able to spring back to normalcy, even in the face of so many complex structural challenges. In a meeting held on February 18, 2016, Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha Ph.D., shared that the Bhaktapur people confronted similar disastrous incidents like the recent earthquake in Nepal, such as Sambat 808 during the reign of Jitamitra. At the time, a palace called “Thanthu-Rajkula”-Darbar existed, yet it collapsed during the earthquake. The world famous 55-windows palace that replaced the “Thanthu-Rajkula”-Darbar exemplified that destruction can also provide a space for the transfer of skills (e.g., wood carving, stone sculpting and masonry) to maintain its cultural heritage and values. In this way, the future generation grows with a more developed notion of the rebuilding of damaged infrastructures with further honed skills, which also help in creating social harmony among the people.

Bhaktapur is an ancient city where people maintain their community lives through the celebration of different festivals with various cultural and ritual values. However, during data collection and FGD discussions, participants expressed that they have stopped celebrating festivals in the traditional large and public way. Rather, they maintained it only symbolically now, owing to the unavailability of the space and financial constraints. Out of 498 respondents, 34 percent expressed that they celebrated festivals in a much smaller way and that they had lost their interest in these celebrations. On the other hand, while celebrating festivals and religious ceremonies with close family members, they shared that there have been quarrels and unhappiness as a result of economic or simply physical constraints. Although the municipality of Bhaktapur has provided small sums of money to the people to celebrate their regular festivals, due to multiple issues and problems people have not been able to celebrate the festivals in the big way, as they did earlier. Thus, it is obvious that various levels of problems, ranging from financial to psychosocial, need to be addressed in order to ensure the maintenance of the cultural values and social harmony of Bhaktapur.

Regarding some of the other aspects, culture shapes the ways of dealing with disasters because it influences individuals' interpretations of what a disaster may mean and how the people choose to deal with it. It also shapes the norms by which the acceptability of risk is defined: what seems too hazardous for one community may not appear as risky for others (e.g., those who are living in the floodplains). Culture also influences the level of disaster risks on any given society, as livelihood choices, settlement locations, social networks, and time availability for preparedness activities (including education and health) will all influence vulnerabilities. In some societies, cultural characteristics may be the determining factor in whether people will be adversely affected by climate change or disasters. Furthermore, culture plays a substantive role in how individuals perceive their own experiences in connection to

disaster. In the men FGDs, for example, five of the respondents shared that after sealing the cracks on the walls of their homes, they no longer felt their houses were damaged and continued to reside in their homes. Despite culture being a fundamental determinant of how individuals perceive hazards, it continues to be overlooked while considering the vulnerability to disaster risks. The role it plays in influencing vulnerability is often too poorly understood and is not included when talking about disaster risk reduction. It is not yet considered an essential factor in shaping the way people act and react in pre and post-disaster scenarios. As the Nepal context illustrates, raising awareness of this important dimension of vulnerability is a ‘must do act’ in post-crisis societies.

Although the need to study cultural or cross-cultural aspects of disasters and disaster management has long been articulated, it has only been in recent years that research in this area increased (Guss & Ateneo, August 2004).

A number of such research projects raised the issue of people resisting relocation and conflicting perceptions of safety. People refuse to abandon seemingly risky sites on the grounds of their history and of unbreakable ties to their lands, ancestors, and their identities. Therefore, cultural factors appear decisive under such circumstances. Even after disasters, local communities often stress that these lands had sustained them for centuries and their attachments are now further intensified after these calamities.

Culture also governs, in part, the efficiency of mitigation programs and emergency measures, and the pattern of human organization to tackle disasters. We might, therefore, say that culture mediates attempts to reduce the impact of disasters. Cultural understanding, as well as local myths and beliefs, lead to the understanding of local risk, which is associated with the local environment. At times, it might be helpful to

have an understanding of the cultural setting of a given population in order to make a point easier to understand. As people's ideas about the dos and don'ts are sharpened by cultures, it often creates a certain mindset or beliefs. These cultural beliefs play a major role in mitigating disasters and implementing disaster risk reduction activities. In the context of disaster, it is because the culture is shared that people realize that they are not the only ones experiencing trauma. Rather, in a shared cultural community, survivors gain identity by connecting to many others who have also been impacted by the disaster and align with a set of cultural values and practices. Confrontation with disaster is thus a shared experience. Loss, death, destruction, and grief, are essentially cultured experiences. Therefore, culture plays an important role in absorbing the impact of disaster through its inherent capacity for resilience (Joshi, 2016). After the devastating earthquakes, the entire population of Nepal has shown its resilience. Despite the difficult situations created by the earthquake, Nepalis have extended helping hands to each other to overcome the situation, thereby solidifying important dimensions of shared cultural locations. This resilience has been possible because for the past 25 years, the people of Nepal have not experienced the presence of a stable government causing them to rely primarily on themselves and each other. These cases demonstrate that as crises of political and environmental disasters increase, cultural cohesion very often increases, providing valuable resources for ongoing development.

The communities residing in proximity to the Merapi volcano in Indonesia provides a relevant comparative case. Despite Merapi being one of the most active volcanoes in the world, this Javanese community persistently lives on the slopes of the volcano. Their livelihood patterns, ancestral practices, and cultural beliefs play major roles in regard to their response to the unpredictable and extremely harsh impact of volcano destruction. The majority of this population perceives losses due to volcanic eruption as being under the control of divine forces. They carry



out annual offerings to the volcano according to their own traditions. During the eruption of the Merapi in the year 2006, going against the instructions of government authorities, some communities refused to evacuate their villages until finally they received instructions from their community leader (Lavigne, 2008). Furthermore, the community's belief regarding relationships between their god and humans is strongly evident from the inherent prayers communities offer to their gods. This context illustrates the importance of understanding and weaving in cultural belief systems in any process of development related to similar environmental crisis.

In a related manner, culture is also the “knowledge” that is transferred from one generation to another. The importance of indigenous knowledge on disaster was evident during the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004, as different communities and individuals reacted to the Tsunami disaster in different ways. Some survived with the best of the knowledge they acquired regarding the Tsunami in due course of time, whereas, some others were engulfed by the Tsunami. For example, from their traditional oral culture, the Moken community in Thailand identified warning signs such as the unusual behaviour of animals and birds, a low tide as indicators of the Tsunami. Thus, this community moved away from the sea towards safer grounds. Comparatively, most of the other communities, migrants, and tourists who did not have such an embedded historical knowledge could not identify Tsunami signs, and were left in the danger zone with no idea of apparent risks (Arunotai, 2008).

Despite the critical roles culture has been known to play in the past disasters, usually a cultural component does not yet form a part of disaster mitigation and disaster risk reduction strategies in many countries. It is clear that failing to address the cultural aspects of a given community could lead to an increase in vulnerabilities of the given

communities towards disasters and the development of unsuccessful Disaster Risk Reduction strategies (Nunn, 2007). Thus, a systematic approach that encompasses all the socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental aspects related to the disaster needs to be framed and implemented.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In order to triangulate the information we collected from the key informants and case studies, we also conducted four focus group discussions (FGD). These FGDs were comprised of two women only and two men only groups. Urmila Shrestha from Tewa and Susan Risal from NA facilitated the two groups with support from Smita Sharma and Prasanssa Karki respectively. Local volunteers logistically supported the FDGs throughout the study.

The questionnaires for the FGD focused on the following:

- Effects of the earthquake on participants and their families
- Changes in the roles and responsibilities of both women and men
- Changes in cultural and traditional practices after the earthquake
- Income sources for the family
- Risks experienced (mental, financial, violence, insecurity, substance abuse, and others)
- Support received following the crisis

In all the four FGDs, participants largely shared their mistrust that any relief or support would come from the government. A few of the participants had not even received the Rs.10,000 allotted for every household. Because in a joint family several families lived in the same house, a few participants noted money for reconstruction was only given to one of them per damaged house. Some NGOs offered support with cooked food or other items in the initial days, but that those donations were no longer available.

## **WOMEN'S GROUPS**

Urmila Shrestha facilitated the women's group, which included 15 women participants ranging from 18 - 69 years of age. They were mostly homemakers engaged in farm work from ancestral time. They were selected because they had all suffered the loss of their homes. At the time, four lived in temporary shelters, three in rented rooms and eight on the ground floors of their unsafe damaged houses. The participants shared how the earthquake had affected and disrupted their daily household routine, some of which were mentioned as follows:

- Most of them living as a joint family were forced to live separately (and subsequently missed a sense of community, caring, and sharing of joy, pain, as well as work), although they make efforts to come together for a meal or two.
- Women could not do their morning routine of daily worship after cleaning their homes and doorways with red mud and cow dung because those spaces no longer existed.
- Some of those who moved into rented spaces had communication barriers as they only spoke the Newari dialect of Bhaktapur and could not speak the national Nepali language.

- With toilets situated in inconvenient places, women and children faced particular security risks in the night time.
- Festivals went by with much reduced participation and celebration, with community members only fulfilling minimal requirements for rituals and reported diminished joys and celebrations.
- The undeclared 4.5 month Indian blockade in the midst of winter further compounded their hardships, leading to increased illicit trade, scarcity, and unavailability of essential items.
- Community members reduced the number of invited relatives for festivities as businesses dried up, families faced a lack of space to hold celebrations, and opportunities for income were non-existent (e.g., no tourists, no rebuilding of tourism).
- Even when they made efforts to return to normalcy, the surrounding rubble and the damaged homes constantly reminded them of their trauma and fears.
- Reduced income negatively impacted nutrition and education, especially for children,

In this FGD, one participant shared that her husband became paralyzed when the house collapsed, and they could no longer celebrate any of the festivals. Another participant shared that before the earthquake, she lived with her son and daughter-in-law, but now they lived separately. Before the earthquake, she depended on construction work, but now she could not find any employment and therefore had no other source of income.

It was obvious that the survivors suffered high levels of mental and psychological impacts. Children experienced fear, lack of concentration,

and memory loss. The women stated that men had increased their intake of alcohol after the earthquake, resulting in violent behavior and sometimes abuse. This created more fear and stress, especially for the children. A woman reported that her husband shouted and beat her after drinking, and then her daughter would begin to cry.

Susan Risal facilitated the second FDG group with 17 women respondents ranging in ages up to over 80 years. From this group, 14 had completely lost their homes and had no alternative space of their own to live. Homes of three others were partially damaged; however, none of them was habitable. Out of these, 13 families were still compelled to live in temporary shelters, four of them had rented spaces, and one of them lived in the tent. None had lost a family member, but each and everyone shared stories of losing their second cousins, friends, and neighbors.

These reflections were similar to the previous women's focused group, where participants reported unimaginable changes in their roles and responsibilities. Their temporary shelter space gave them no opportunity to observe their traditional practices of cleaning, cooking, and sharing. Rather they reported having to move things around constantly in their single rooms for sleeping, children's study, and food preparation. Clearing rubble was particularly painful. A 71-year-old woman said that she had not yet managed to clear hers because she has no one to help her. She was totally dependent on the small support the people provided her out of kindness.

None of them celebrated traditional cultures and festivals for economic reasons, lack of space, and their overall compromised emotional states. All this resulted in interpersonal conflicts and stress. They did not celebrate family feasts at times of religious festivals "nakhte" or annual death rituals "sarads" in the ways they had done so earlier. They did the bare minimum within the family. They noted that joy had gone out

of their lives. Out of 17 respondents, 15 respondents aged between 20-70 expressed sadness, frustration, and hopelessness. Older ones experienced sleepless nights, headaches, increased blood pressure, and losses of appetite. In their own words, they shared the following:

“Mother-in-law has high blood pressure after the earthquake.”

“The odor from the nearby river has made us sick.”

“Husband is turning alcoholic, affecting his health and spoiling our family atmosphere by starting quarrels and raising his hands.”

“I occasionally revisit my damaged house and revisit associated pain, while I dream of going back to my house again.”

“I always carry fear for myself and my daughter while living in the tent.”

“We shifted our mother-in-law who is sick to her daughter’s place due to lack of space, but she is not comfortable or happy to stay at her daughter’s place due to our cultural belief. But we have no choice.”

## **MEN’S GROUPS**

All together 16 men participated in the two FGDs conducted by Urmila (Tewa) and Susan (NA). All the men ranged between the ages of 22 – 74 years. They belonged to low income groups with minimal education. Of the 18 participating men in both the groups, 16 reported that their homes were fully destroyed. Those whose houses were still standing said they were uninhabitable. So their families lived in temporary shelters, rented rooms, or in the lower rooms of their damaged homes. Rebuilding work was delayed owing to government’s unclear directives,

which added additional frustrations for the community at large. None of them had suffered the deaths of their loved ones.

Although additional relief materials, including (tarpaulins, tents, sacks of rice, medicines, instant noodles and dry food, drinking water), were distributed in the city, only people with political connections received them, and the rest of the survivors received just a few bags of rice. Participants felt clear bias and political interference in the distribution of relief. The local people decided to help each other by mobilizing their own resources with the help of Indrayini Sarokar Samaj (a community organization), formed earlier to manage festivals (Jatras). After the earthquake, they decided to help people by serving hot meals. In the initial days, they served three meals every day to about 3,500 people, but later the number decreased. They used the organization's funds as well as raised support through donations and in-kind contributions. They mentioned the support provided by Chuchi Sang and TATA Company who also provided food supplies such as packets of rice, dal, and filtered drinking water.

As mainly shopkeepers, builders, and tour guides, all of these men participants felt they were hard hit economically. The sharp decline of tourists meant they generated no income. A glass shop owner said all his goods were broken, completely devastating his existing income source. In order to manage financially, one man took his child out of private school, and enrolled him in a government school. These economic realities presented a sharp confrontation to traditional associations to masculinity and the cultural beliefs about male identity ties to economic provider roles.

Generally in comparison to the women FGDs, men were relatively less open and more uptight. Researchers assessed that this pattern likely resonated with traditional social and cultural expectations that men

must be “strong” and not weak in public spaces. However, the men shared the women’s experiences of increased fear, stress, and worries. Overall, men were more aware on the political aspects of relief and recovery work owing to their constant touch with the outside world and therefore official government announcements, than were the women. Women’s homebound multiple care-taking roles did not allow for this.

Men experienced the following differently than women:

- Owing to acute shortage of water, women were out fetching water for the greater part of the day. This left men with housework and care of the children.
- The men participants shared that alcohol was a daily part of their lives, but said that there was no violence because of drinking habits.
- Men reported that although people celebrated their annual festivals, the days were shortened, and the costs were minimized. This negatively correlated with the upkeep of traditional practices and the in-built social safety nets.
- In these difficult times, men felt more pressure and anxiety as the only breadwinners in the families, along with the larger responsibilities of rebuilding and fending for the families.

## CASE STUDIES

These narrative excerpts are drawn from key participants’ reflections at the time of the interviews. They offer an overview of the living experiences immediately after the earthquake. Some of these conditions and positions may now have changed.



### **Mila Maharjan (32 years) of Chorcha VDC, Ward-8:**

At the time of the earthquake Mila was in the house with her family of fifteen people. The children were playing, and they were celebrating their family “dewali” worship. Everything shook violently, and dark dust surrounded them as they ran out. Her 200-year-old house collapsed, and her two aunt in-laws died. They spent the night under the sky for fear of another earthquake. For the following days, they took shelter in the brick kiln and construction site. Finally, the family moved to the elder brother’s house.

Prior to the earthquake, Mila recalled her happy life with her husband, four-year-old daughter, and extended family. She was in the process of writing a thesis for her Master’s degree. Their family enjoyed regular feasts and festivities. Now with deaths in the family, the lingering trauma of the earthquake, and their existing overall conditions, Mila does not know when next they can celebrate.

After the earthquake Mila and her family are facing many problems. The elder brother wants to rent his house rather than let them stay, so he is constantly fighting and quarreling with them. But with their 75-year-old father and a little child, they do not know where to go. Sometimes she wishes they had all died with their aunt-in-laws.

Mila’s husband took a house loan to build a home on another piece of land they owned. After this, they hope to live in peace away from the quarrels and naggings of the elder brother. But building is very complex, she feels, with new codes and approvals the local government requires and the ways old homes are built in forms that join together. Sometimes when one house is dismantled, even unharmed adjoining homes are suffering damage.

### **Mohan Laxmi Koju (44 years) of Bolachhen VDC, Ward-12:**

Mohan Laxmi lost her husband after the earthquake and is now a single woman. Their home was badly damaged and had to be demolished. She does not have children.

Before the earthquake, she and her husband lived by farming their land and felt happy and satisfied. When the earthquake struck, even though the house was damaged, they were receiving relief support and had enough food. But one day after the earthquake, her husband had a sudden heart attack and fell down in the house while she was working in the field. He died instantly. With this tragedy, she lost her only support.

Mohan is feeling dominated and threatened by the family and relatives. They wanted her to legally transfer her land papers, saying that they will build a house for her. But fearing she will be ditched, she refused. She is literally blackmailed and harassed all the time by being threatened and abused by the relatives.

Like many women, she is surviving by working a little bit in a hand-made paper factory. Sometimes she earns by knitting socks and gloves. She has some earnings from selling her farm produce. Luckily she has good cooperation from her neighbor. She is worried for her future. She feels she has to now struggle hard and stand alone, in a cruel world. She can only rely on God and see if she will be protected.

### **Keshari Nhuchhen (70 years) of Dogan VDC, Ward-12:**

Keshari was in her little shop at the time of the earthquake, when her house shook violently. She felt helpless and very afraid. Everyone around her neighbourhood was screaming and crying. She also ran outside the

home, crying and shouting for help and barely managing to take her grandson and granddaughter with her. Keshari's daughter-in-law was upstairs in the kitchen and she could not come down. When the tremor stopped after 56 seconds, with the help of some neighbours, she began to look for her daughter-in-law. Her son who had gone out returned an hour later. At the same time, the rescue police team arrived. He, along with the help of the security personnel, searched frantically for his wife. No one could find her.

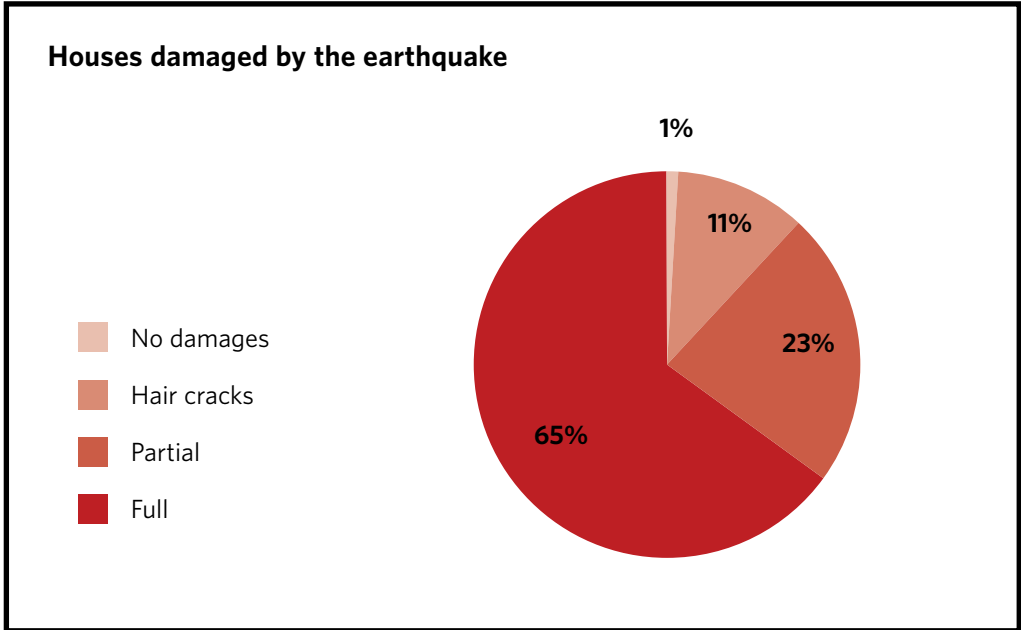
She gave some food to the grandchildren. That night they spent a sleepless night. The next day at daybreak they began searching through the rubble for her daughter-in-law, but with no success. She then went to the astrologer to ask about her daughter-in-law. The astrologer asked her to light lamps in the Bhadrakali temple. On the fourth day, her family lit oil lamps in Bhadrakali temple. After this, a team of Japanese rescue people found her daughter-in-law dead. Keshari, her son, and the grandchildren were inconsolable with grief. They completed the necessary funeral rituals for her daughter-in-law.

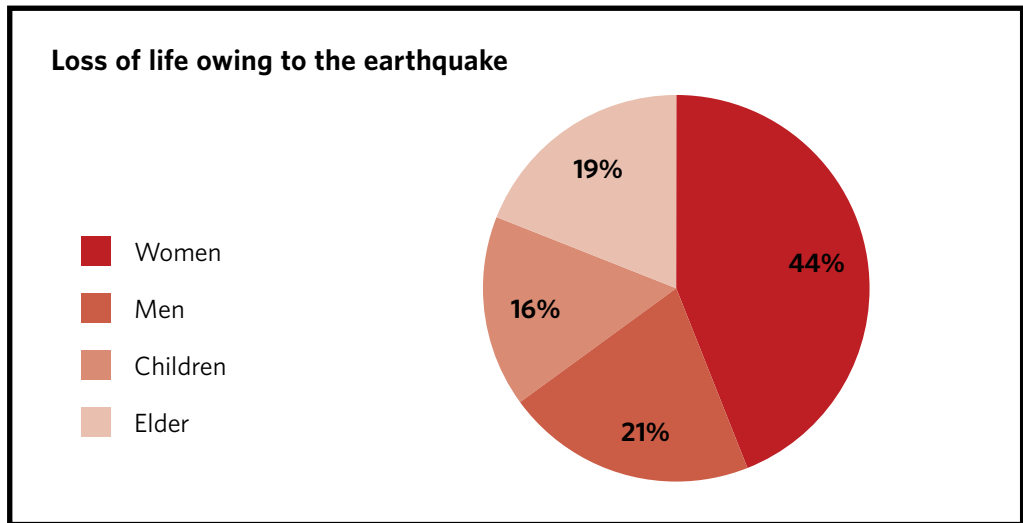
After this, her son began drinking alcohol the whole day. Keshari then assumed all of the responsibility for her grandson and granddaughter. Not being able to cope, she sent them to their maternal uncle's home. After a few days, an American tourist came to help. He managed to get a tourist visa for her son. After that, her son stopped drinking alcohol and soon left for America.

Keshari is now living alone. She does not have her son or her grandchildren with her. She no longer has her shop, which also collapsed when the house fell. She has little appetite, and faces sleepless nights. Keshari is now surviving on the kindness of the neighbours.

# KEY OUTCOMES FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

An interesting trend among the respondents could be seen in the slightly higher SLC completion rates of women over men. Yet this may be explained by having more women respondents than men in that age group. In terms of the occupation of the respondents, 30 percent of girls and 28 percent of boys were students; an almost equal percentage of men and women engaged in agriculture; 20 percent women were home-makers in comparison to less than two percent men in the same category; over 20 percent of men were doing businesses as compared to less than five percent women. Gender differences varied according to business sectors. In the cottage industry numbers of women and men were comparable; whereas 10 percent of women worked in service, in comparison to over 20 percent men. Also, eight percent of the men were engaged in working outside the home besides the categories mentioned above.





Most of our respondents, both men and women totaling to 65 percent average, reported that their homes were fully damaged by the earthquake. Another 23 percent average with proportionate representation of women and men reported partial damage, 11 percent reported hair cracks and minor damage, and only one percent each reported no damage. In terms of family units, 45 percent of women and men reported that they also suffered loss of a close family member. Death rates demonstrated clear demographic patterns with women in the highest fatality categories, followed by the elderly, children, and some adult men. The ratio for deceased women (44 percent) was double that of deceased men (21 percent).

At the time of this research, 35 percent women and 30 percent men remained living in temporary accommodations, with slightly over 20 percent of men and women living in rented homes and a few taking shelters in a Church or temple areas. In terms of immediate relief structures, a handful of men still lived in tents, whereas only one or two women continued to reside in the open camps. Five percent of women and a few more men took refuge in relatives' homes. Only 20 percent women and 25 percent men reported living in their own

homes. Although more women than men stated that they experience discrimination, an almost equal number of women and men said they were the decision makers in their households. In comparing their pre- and post-earthquake situations, 60 percent of both women and men reported that their conditions were the same as earlier, whereas 30 percent of both genders reported that conditions had changed.

Interestingly, over 60 percent of both women and men identified increased alcoholism among men. More men than women reported feeling fearful, being unemployed and assuming high levels of responsibilities. Men also reported loneliness, increased misunderstandings and quarrels as part of their social experience in the post-earthquake context. A small percentage responded a marked decrease in social activities, the streets as less busy, and increased social problems. Those who had moved into rented or temporary housing reported having to adjust to unfamiliar neighborhoods, leaving behind familiarity and friends. On the positive side, about 30 percent of the respondents said that they felt an increased sense of community, the need to help one's neighbours and the receipt of increased support. Five percent of the respondents felt an increased responsibility to help others in need.

In looking to the future, 78 percent of the respondents did not know when they could rebuild their homes. Both men and women said it would depend on the government support and or the approval of the government plan for rebuilding. Yet among these responses, many more felt that this would take an extended time period, from 4 - 8 years.

In terms of shifts in spirituality, about 15 percent said they frequented the temples more than they did before, whereas the majority said that they maintained the same levels of practices. Five percent said that they lost belief in God and that they were no longer going to the temples or performing any religious worships or rituals.

More women than men had no access to relief goods. More women than men did not know about government relief packages. The majority of both women and men felt they knew little about the government relief programme.

## GENDER AND DIVERSITY

Noting that until the earthquake, Bhaktapur straddled a time zone from the medieval to the modern. As a culture grounded in agriculture and steeped in traditions that reflected both patriarchy and Hinduism, hierarchal and stereotypical roles for both women and men ran deep in value systems and everyday life. Although there has been an increasing trend of urbanization and modernization, with Bhaktapur people moving into Kathmandu or Patan, and people from surrounding hills moving into Bhaktapur for income-generating activities associated with tourism, an essential core of this historical society remained virtually untouched. While Patan and Kathmandu morphed into an expanding concrete jungle with supermalls and soot-fuming vehicles, Bhaktapur seemed to have learned from this to some extent, as evident in its much slower pace of life and preserved historic buildings. As a world heritage city, and a priority tourist destination in the valley, the entire city was a living museum where cultural and religious practices strengthened over time.

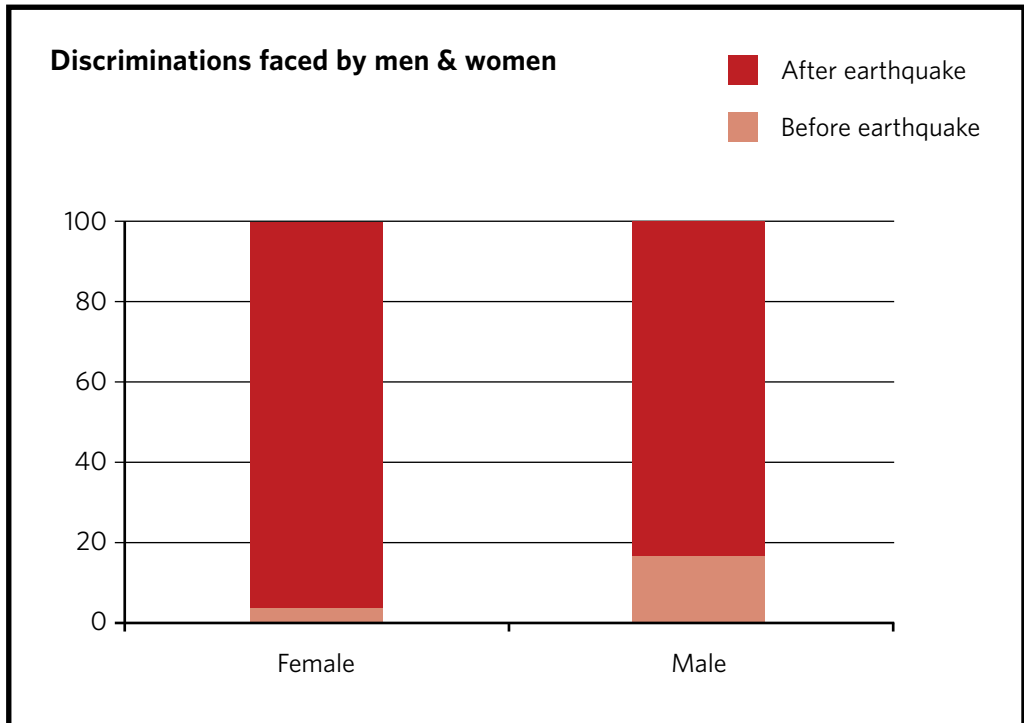
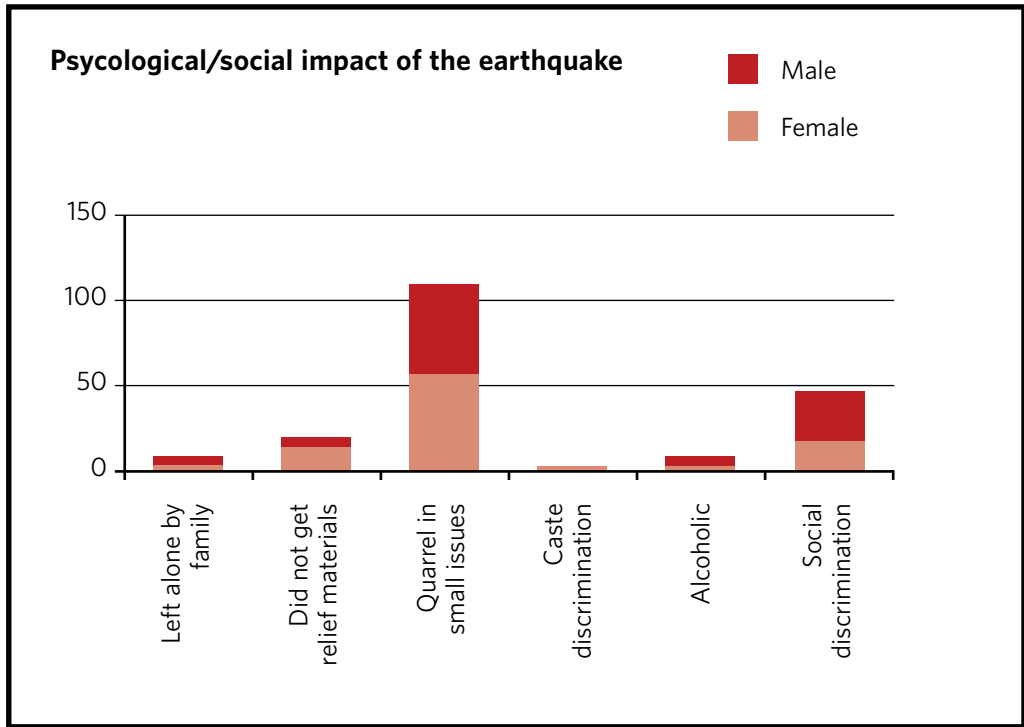
Professor Shrestha's paper has further highlighted the significance of fairs and festivals in Bhaktapur, where 26 key festivals take place in a year, including the nine-day Bisket Jatra, which involves worship, music, dances, chariot processions, fasting and feasting, mask-making, costume-making and so much more. Although both men and women participate equally, their roles have traditionally been prescribed to be more outside the home for men and more within the confines of the

homes for women. A society based on agriculture does demand equal field participation from women, yet the nature of work for women and men are different. Women are consumed with all the roles associated with reproduction, such as child-bearing, rearing children, cooking, washing, cleaning, care-taking of the elderly, hospitality for visitors and guests, the overall processing and preparations of food, and keeping of their homes. These gendered labor expectations are extremely time consuming, with little time for leisure and an overall low value in society. On the other hand, men's primary role as breadwinners and political and community networkers, gives them more exposure, leisure, and social status.

During this applied research, all these dimensions of gender inequality emerged in the triangulated data we collected. Many more women were non-literate than the men respondents, and far fewer women received a higher education in comparison to men. Men were much more likely to work in the service sector, businesses, and other areas in the public domain, with an insignificant number of men engaged in housework before the earthquake. With the earthquake, as we see in other contexts, these gendered labor patterns changed in the overall disruption to society. The data collected from the survivor respondents in Bhaktapur show that prior to the earthquake men were primarily involved in business and service, and women in housework. Yet after the earthquake, men were involved to some extent in housework and were seeking foreign employment, whereas women continued to be heavily engaged in housework, with an increased ratio of working as labourers.

Our sample data showed that the earthquake killed almost double the number of women than men. This was clearly owing to women's gender roles that relegated them to the more dangerous interior household space. The time the earthquake struck in the morning was right after the morning meal when men go to work or to leisure activities outside the home as women wash up and tidy the homes. Furthermore, these





gendered patterns played out in individuals' coping practices. While both men and women suffered from fear, sleeplessness, stress, and bad dreams, the ratio for women suffering was higher than for men. These findings reflect the potential that women expressed their needs and post-trauma conditions more freely, whereas men tended to be more closed up. This became clear in the focus group discussions. Most men were in denial, whereas women faced the crisis and talked more freely about it. Unlike women, men were additionally into substance abuse and alcohol, and also had suicidal tendencies. As these findings reflect, gender socialization impacted not only the actual death rates of men and women, but their experiences in rebuilding their lives as well. Likewise, children and the elderly comprised the other large groups who lost their lives, as they were also more likely to be inside during the earthquake.

Some of the emerging issues of discrimination are shown in the bar charts. Men tended to be abandoned by their families especially owing to their drinking habits. But in all the other ways, e.g., not getting relief materials, caste discriminations, quarrels in the home, and social discriminations, women were at a bigger disadvantage. Not surprisingly, more women in comparison to men felt higher levels of social discrimination after the earthquake. They said that these manifested in the way they were treated in general and in the way access was denied, (e.g., in getting relief materials and funds, and in the way they were "looked upon"). These circumstances created a sense of lack of self-esteem and dignity for many women, which in the long run could have increased negative impact on their psycho-social and mental health wellbeing.

## KEY FINDINGS

The findings are categorized into segments of social, economic, cultural, and infrastructural aspects. Key findings are as such:

## At the Social Level:

1. There was fragmentation of families and communities owing to the impact of the earthquake. People had to rent rooms or live in temporary homes. This has meant that a mother had to live in a daughter's home (culturally and socially inappropriate), and sons and daughter-in-laws had to live in rented rooms. These meant meals were no longer taken together, conversations were disjointed, and traditional healing and safety nets were not at the same level as they were before. As a result, men and women suffered in different ways. As an example, men reported feeling that they were not able to take care of their families, and mothers felt that they could not live and eat in their daughters' homes. Many other difficulties included "cheli-beti" and married daughters and nieces not be invited during festivals owing to economic hardships or lack of spaces. Therefore, in the post-earthquake context, men and women faced **many unforeseen social difficulties in very different and overlapping ways.**
2. Our sample data show that **for any small issue and micro instigating event, over 60 percent of both men and women reported quarreling.** This may be a result of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the earthquake. If overlooked, it might create increased disharmony and unrest.
3. **Women expressed their pain easily.** Although men can also experience emotional and psychological pain, from triangulating information from the questionnaires, FGDs, key informant interviews (from the group of local volunteers), and some informal conversations, this research project found men's expressions more guarded. Women readily expressed sleeplessness, loss of appetite, fear, and recurrent health problems, such as high blood pressure

and headaches. Men also reported experiencing the same things as well as increased alcohol consumption and outward migration.

4. **Domestic disharmony and violence increased.** Women subjected to men's outbursts of anger, scolding, and beating under the effects of alcohol faced additional threats. Further, as men denied this abuse, women's vulnerability increased even more substantially.
5. **Security risks were especially high for women and girls.** All women living in temporary shelters and tents feared for their own and their daughters' security.
6. On the positive side a majority of the respondents appreciated the community coming together to help one another. A very high percentage of the respondents, both men and women, said that they **felt an increased sense of social responsibility.**

#### **At the Economic Level:**

1. **With the destruction of homes, people also lost the space to do their entrepreneurial activities,** (e.g., shops on the road fronts; workshops for handicrafts or wood carving and metal crafts; and grocery shops). This ended vital livelihood opportunities for many families, thus cutting off the source of their incomes. Furthermore, many people faced additional economic burdens having to rent rooms. Most men said that they could not find jobs. Expenses owing to health reasons or inflation rose. This left both men and women with worries and stress to make ends meet.
2. Bhaktapur, as a world heritage city, **relies heavily on the tourism industry, which was virtually non-existent in the first year after the earthquake.** This meant the sale of crafts and service industry

(e.g., hotels, lodges, food industry; and tours and travels) resulting in huge economic implications for Bhaktapur and the entire Nepal.

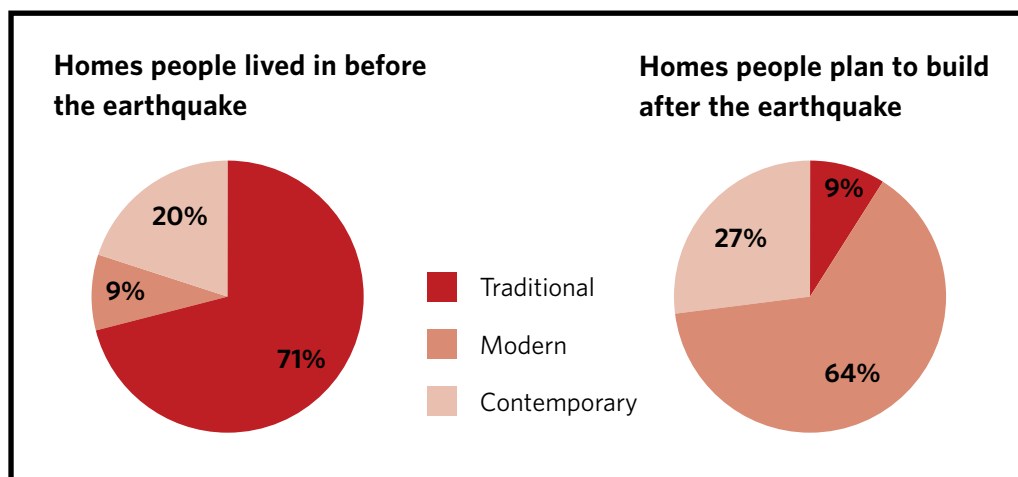
3. **The unannounced India blockade did further irreparable economic damage.** It created more hardships for all Nepalis but especially the earthquake-affected people. Community members had to make extraordinary compensations: cooking with firewood (rather than gas) experiencing 16 hours per day power cuts; walking because of a severe lack of transportation services, foregoing health care needs as health services became inaccessible; facing serious increases in inflation; and coping with an emergent illicit economy that grew during the blockade.

### **At the Cultural Level:**

1. All the respondents said that because of their economic conditions and lack of space, **they celebrated their festivals in minimal ways.** This meant having to cut down on celebration days, rituals, and feasting (and subsequently fewer new clothes and nutritious food as well as including extended family and friends to a much lesser extent).
2. The Municipality provided financial support to the families for the celebration of the post earthquake “jstras” – processions related to the festivals. The visual display for “gaijatra” was remarkable considering it was so soon after the earthquake. But we now know that it was **comparatively hollow and devoid of joys and enthusiasms** as it was experienced by the local people.
3. Festivals had **added worries, discontentment, and lesser joys, as well as increased social discord** within families. These were owing to a lack of space, inability to observe the rigorous rituals, or owing to economic constraints.

## At the Infrastructural Level:

1. Looking at the figure below, one can see that although 71 percent of the people lived in traditional homes before the earthquake, **at the time of this research project, 64 percent planned to build modern homes.** If Bhaktapur is to retain its heritage after the rebuilding this will be a very important consideration.



2. **For 78 percent of the respondents (both women and men) there was ambiguity regarding when people would be able to rebuild.** Many believed reconstruction would take four to eight years. Only a small percent of the respondents felt that they could rebuild as soon as related authorities gave the necessary official clearance.
3. People's social lives were greatly impacted not just by the destruction and damage to their personal homes, **but also by destruction of the sites of their lived cultural heritage.** This resulted in two critical costs: 1) loss of rituals in their lives, and 2) sense of feeling socially disconnected.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The research team puts forth these recommendations based on the findings of the applied research project. With two decades of political transitions and, and then the earthquake disasters, posing a particular plan of action is extremely complex and challenging, given the central dependence upon the central role of the Nepali State. Until now, with the successive transitions, the Nepali people have not experienced the Nepali State rising to the occasion or working on the primary interests of the Nepali people. This is deeply worrying. Although we have left no stone unturned in terms of triangulation from various aspects to ensure that information accrued is correct, we fear that this may officially remain a shelved document owing to the inability and the ineffectiveness of the Government to act promptly in using the recommendations on this research.

Yet, if a community as closely knit as the one in Bhaktapur can reorganize themselves not just from a traditional way of doing things, but to suit the present context to respond to existing and emerging needs, and to help all recover and rebuild, Bhaktapur may once more prove to be the monumental living heritage that it has always been. This model is a call for community leadership - one that is not invested in personal or political interest, but for the larger wellbeing and sustenance of all the people. If this can happen in the long-term, Bhaktapur and its reputation can once again stand the test of time. In doing so, Bhaktapur will not only model for all those suffering in similar ways who are also seeking support in Nepal, but it will also be an eye opener for the world communities at large. Why then, would Nepal ever suffer from a dearth of international visitors or “tourists” - earthquakes or not?

The government **Earthquake Recovery Committee** (ERC) needs to expedite its work in a very efficient and effective way as the needs and/ demands of the affected communities is very real and huge. In order to

prevent the surviving communities from becoming completely frustrated and feeling neglected by the State, it is important to act urgently to ensure hope is sustained and people feel that they are supported in overcoming their recent tragedy.

Similarly, civil society organizations have an opportunity to play a momentous role. Going beyond jobs and projects and working as allies to the ERC/government, these organizations need to concentrate their work on motivating and lending support to the survivor communities in their people-led recovery initiatives. Empowering them morally, civil society organizations can help affected communities in strengthening



Rubbles sprout wheat while fields remain empty



social cohesion (which is currently at risk, as seen in this research). This will also help build social harmony and reduce dependency on external donors.

The only role the State is then called to perform is to strengthen and maintain adequate standard infrastructures, such as roads, bridges, airports, cable cars, electricity, water, and irrigation; peace and security; and a reliable supply of cooking gas, and petroleum products. Nepal's new constitution has the intention to guarantee equity and justice, but this will need to be materialized and translated in equitable applications in the areas of education, health, and social service sectors, and in the deliverance of justice. The people of Nepal will do the rest and take this country forward, as confidence and trust is built back into all its systems.

It is with the ability to see these possibilities that the research team is daring to not only write these recommendations, but also believe that these recommendations will go beyond the expected in achieving all that is needed to provide the surviving population with the support, care, and love that they now need and the ability to go far beyond these existing circumstances of post-crisis recovery.

Tewa/NA also dare to make these recommendations because of their own time-tested experience of working in the 118 post-earthquake relief outreach posts in 16 districts, and in the ongoing recovery programmes, now active in six districts. We have learned that it is not about having money, dedicated projects and skilled and well-paid human resources; but rather, it is about good intentions, a willingness to serve, and the eagerness to plunge into making it happen. It is in being truthful, honest, transparent, and accountable. It is in being deeply respectful to the communities we serve. It is in building back trust in these communities when they can feel that we are sincerely empathizing.

Briefly, we need to endorse that the civil society needs to work with authenticity that can bring back trust to all our communities.

In making these suggestions, we realize that many of the following recommendations require prompt actions. But even if the government cannot act as it needs to, if the political leaders can level their grounds (because we feel this work is not about power sharing, but about getting their voters strongly back on their feet), and motivate the communities to organize themselves to act promptly together in an ongoing way until such efforts are not required, the recurring costs in the future in health, education, and skills needed in an environment of a lived heritage, will be much lesser than if it remains unattended. This, in itself, will be a huge gain for the Bhaktapur people, and even more so for the parties they serve.

### **Social:**

- Women's and men's roles have changed to some extent. More women are looking to work outside the home to earn badly needed income, and more men are finding that they need to care for the children and look after the homes. This is a total role reversal, necessarily not disadvantageous. More than anything, this needs to be understood and appreciated. So **orientation and leveling work is required for both women and men from new, informal, or formal social structures to better understand their changed roles and responsibilities.** Present conditions demand that men also work within the homes, but this needs to be done with orientation, ownership, and acceptance based on understanding.
- On one hand, women and men are no longer able to fulfill their cultural and religious roles, such as early morning worshiping at the front door of the homes, daily visits to the temple they were

attending, celebrating festivals like they did before with full rituals, or inviting the extended family for festival feasts. On the other hand, as these daily practices change, the vacuum created in their hearts and minds is not yet addressed. Resulting Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) and other ailments (e.g., health related like high blood pressure, or excessive intake of alcohol by men) need to be addressed urgently in an ongoing way. Initiative from the related Ministries will be required in the long run. But promptly, **local communities can build in yoga classes, bhajan mandalis, community health and recreational activities.**

- Owing to the stress of not being able to generate income as the given “breadwinners” for the families, more men are drinking much more than before and suffering additional health risks. This has implications for both increased domestic violence and long-term health, which often takes a toll on the entire family. Thus, recovery efforts needs to **ensure government or community programmes that can engage men in income-generating activities, keeping them productive and occupied** and helping them to earn money.
- Women and girl children are feeling vulnerable with increased risks. **Necessary safety and security measures need to be taken by the government as well as local communities.**
- Reduced income has impacted the education and nutrition of the entire family, especially children and adolescent/youth. **Supplementary diets need to be built into the schools. Education must be relevant and value-based, allowing the affected children to comprehend and understand their current situations with as little costs as possible post disaster based upon** the love and care of all involved in the home and in the schools.

- **Psychological healing needs to be built into every level for all the affected populations of all age groups** to ensure cases of PTSDs are managed and negated. **A substantial effort needs to be focused on long-term, gender sensitive healing work within the communities that continue to suffer in the post-earthquake context.**
- Because people have increased senses of community and their responsibilities, it will be easy to **look into evident social risks and work on mitigation strategies** with the ownership and participation of the affected people.
- The Indian blockade and its long drawn out effects (e.g., the power of illicit markets and related inflation that continues) have instilled more fear and insecurities in the minds of the people. **The government and the political parties will need to work swiftly to have people regain their confidence and trust** so that this will not be repeated.
- **Ensure equitable participation of women and marginalized communities at all levels in all post earthquake recovery and rebuilding work** ensuring they benefit equally.

### **Economical:**

- At the broader level, existing **systemic and inherent corruption** (especially in government structures) **needs to be acknowledged and done away with** for there to be any trust or confidence built around this, especially for the affected people's sense of wellbeing or future empowerment. This will otherwise be very debilitating.
- Building on community strengths can generate much needed livelihood opportunities:

- › **Professional tour guiding in the given context** (what is lost and what is going to be rebuilt and recovered).
  - › **Train, create, and deploy volunteer “shadowing”<sup>7</sup> work as first aid workers and mentors for different age groups** (senior men/women, adult men/women, young adults, girl and boy youth, and children). A monitoring and a learning evaluation system need to be built in to assess and adapt this in a timely manner.
  - › **Train the eager and willing on therapeutic crafts and art forms.** This can either be a part of the tourist industry, or be useful in the rebuilding of Bhaktapur.
- Nepal government urgently needs to **play a significant role in the revival of tourism.** Besides facilitating the processes for this, leaders need to ensure the provision of adequate infrastructures to run a viable tourism industry.
  - **Ensure consistent infrastructural support**, such as the cleaning of rubble, protection of heritage monuments, ongoing electricity, water supply, fuel and cooking gas provisions, so that the people can recover their economic status.

## Cultural:

- The political, historical, and cultural relevance and value of Bhaktapur is beyond full comprehension, even for those who are studying it. As a lived heritage, its contributions to Nepal’s visibility on the world stage; social security to the local people; and its contributions to arts and culture are unfathomable. Therefore, rebuilding its heritage and retaining its cultural practices are of tremendous importance. **With advice from related experts, in consultation with existing local traditional and modern**

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<sup>7</sup> Closely following on the affected or needy population, to provide prompt support and services.

**institutions, the Nepal government needs to act with utmost urgency to rebuild heritage sites** and enable them to revive with people's participation and use.

- **Private homes of value need to be categorized and prioritized for rebuilding** with the help of the local communities.
- Development interventions needs to take place in a way that allows the local people **to feel supported and able to rebuild in manners that are mutually advantageous** and in line with the cultural values of Bhaktapur.

### **Infrastructural:**

- There is a need **for urgent action on all sides to ensure the protection of irreplaceable and invaluable artifacts and inscriptions**, which based on the information and feedback gathered during the course of this research, seem to be fast disappearing or already lost.
- The **value of many of the private homes is no less valuable than the palaces and temples for Bhaktapur's lived heritage. There needs to be urgent action on the part of the government, in cooperation with the local communities, to salvage what can be saved, and rebuild** what is integral to the heritage of Bhaktapur.
- The presence of rubble and destroyed heritage sites and homes adds to the people's trauma and stress. **There is an urgent need to identify existing safe community spaces and conduct regular recreational programmes so that the community can be entertained and find some respite.** This can also help in strengthening community cultural aspects and provide creative spaces.

# CONCLUSIONS

Our intention was to craft a brief report, without too much details and elaborations, and to do so swiftly. We have provided empirical evidence for what we found and what we recommend. This we believe is what is most important. The empirical data we generated were triangulated through the background paper, key informant interviews, case studies, and focus group discussions, and we came to the same or very similar conclusions.

We feel that this research was well-timed and miraculously completed within a year, despite multiple challenges at all levels. Because the post earthquake recovery work generally has not picked up momentum, findings from this study can be widely useful in all related work. We will do our best in disseminating this information in Nepali and vernacular Newari languages. But after this, we call on all related agencies and individuals to share this document widely in order to use the learning, help reduce costs, and build support for the entire earthquake affected people.

The theories and the literature review provide a wider background for this applied research. The research findings validate many core themes from the literature, while adding new knowledge based upon Nepal's particular post-earthquake context. Central related links include the following: many people are dealing with psycho-social problems, facing multifaceted problem in terms of gender and cultural dimensions, and struggling to cope with how cultural practices and beliefs are inherent to the unseen damage in community safety nets. These costs may be difficult to fathom now, but may have multiple long-term implications unless addressed holistically. But it was heartening to note that people's inherent sense of altruism and responsibility was also heightened, even in this short period following the crisis.

A gendered look was essential because men and women have experienced the earthquake and issuing conditions very differently. We now need to ensure that women are no longer left out and that their needs and representations are prioritized. This, as we know, will lend to the wellbeing of the entire affected community/ies.

This report exemplifies to us that times of great disasters also open up immense opportunities and possibilities. It is how we act and which side of the coin we choose to pick that will determine our collective capacity to recover from these defining moments in Nepal's trajectory. We hope this report will enable all related sectors to build on foreseeable opportunities and possibilities so that we can together light the path to rebuilding, recovery, and hope!



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What Tewa and Nagarik Aawaz learned in doing this applied research is a testimony to the legacy of Bhaktapur and its people. All of us involved in this process came to know that much trust and hope still exist in our communities. It reassures us that even as we live in “aid-land,” our social capital far surmounts our economic limitations. Despite the huge level of mistrust with NGOs, community members welcomed, appreciated, and trusted us fully during the process of this research. Professor Purusottam Lochan Shrestha’s paper speaks for itself, but given the circumstances of his daily life in Bhaktapur, his willingness to write it within the timeframe is remarkable, and we owe our gratitude to him. We also owe our deep appreciation to Kabindra Dhaubadel, Radheshyam Joshi, Dipesh Raj Sharma, and local Tewa volunteer Manisha Dhonju for “walking us through the rubble” and into the intimacy of their homes and hearths! The four first-time student enumerators—Saru Tukanbanjar, Sarana Sharma, Unisha Dhonju, and Bikas Suwal—deserve accolades for their willingness to learn and their spunk in “facing the fear” repeatedly while interviewing 312 women and 186 men in Bhaktapur. We owe our sincere “dhanyabad” to all the respondents of this research for their time and cooperation.

The Advisory Committee, especially Peace and Conflict expert Professor Bishnu Raj Upreti, Ph.D.; Public Policy Management expert Professor Shree Krishna Shrestha, Ph.D.; and the Chair of Tewa’s Board Nirmala KC, Ph.D. served as our ongoing lampposts. In addition to the many experts who provided input for the background paper, we found all the people we met during the research process inspirational. The Tewa/NA team led by Sadhana Shrestha and Shobha Basnet, along with Deepak Dewan, Smita Sharma, Prasansa KC, Ganga Sagar Rai, and Hari Dhami, were especially hands on in this process with their note-taking, reviewing the literature, theorizing, and documentation work. Nothing could have come to fruition without

their devoted involvement. In fact the entire Tewa/NA Team needs special mention – the ability to complete this work within one year is owing to their readiness to do the extra bit at all odd times and hours.

Raju Manandhar and Anjana Rajbhandari tabulated and analyzed the data gathered by the enumerators. As serendipity would have it, when discussing this applied research project, two visiting academics, Jennifer N. Fish, Ph.D., Chair of the Women's Studies Department and Professor in the Graduate Program in International Studies of the Old Dominion University of Norfolk, Virginia/USA, and Jennifer Rothchild Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology and Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) at the University of Minnesota, Morris, kindly volunteered to do the necessary editing on this paper, lifting our nagging worries! We are deeply grateful for their meticulous and professional editing. Likewise the timely volunteer layout design by Keshar Joshi (kiirtistudio) is much appreciated.

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Most of all, this research bears witness to the **living** world heritage that the city of Bhaktapur is! Among others, Nepal shines because of this, and we cannot but feel privileged to do this work. In holding and writing this research, we are grateful how everything flowed seamlessly and came together magically.

But most of all, if this paper remains true to the survivors of the earthquake living in Bhaktapur city, we will feel the work is well done.

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