



**Rebuilding Nepal:
Women's Roles in Political
Transition and Disaster Recovery**

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FOREWORD

Communities emerging from conflict often must rebuild their economic infrastructure, political system, and social institutions. Nations recovering from major natural disasters must similarly rebuild from the ground up. Countries such as Nepal—which experienced both of these challenges simultaneously—face overlapping effects, presenting significant challenges but also major opportunities for regrowth and recovery.

Recovery processes affect every part of society—and require everyone’s contributions. Women’s voices, skills, and experiences are crucial to rebuilding stronger societies and to making institutions at all levels more inclusive and effective. Across Nepal, women have responded to the needs of their communities and are now seeking new ways forward, helping their country emerge from conflict and disaster. By doing so, they are making their communities and country stronger.

The experience of women in Nepal in the wake of a civil war and earthquake can inform discussions about good practices for recovery moving forward, particularly as climate change creates the risk of more frequent and potentially more severe dislocations. This report details the ways in which women in Nepal have addressed the challenges that they and their neighbors faced. These women have taken into account the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, built strong networks for action, and engaged in humanitarian and political work at the national and local levels.

The report builds on prior research by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security examining the role of gender in humanitarian relief and long-term recovery efforts, including a study on the 2010 Haiti earthquake that the Institute conducted in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Nepal is at a crossroads. This is a defining moment for addressing the challenges of Nepali society, governance, and community relationships. Incorporating women’s experiences and perspectives into the country’s long-term reconstruction and future disaster risk reduction efforts is critical to building stronger, safer, and more resilient communities.



Ambassador Melanne Verveer
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List of Acronyms

General Terms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil society organization
NAP	National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Nepal

CA	Constituent Assembly
CDO	Chief District Officer
CIEDP	Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Accord
CPN-M	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist
FEDO	Feminist Dalit Organization
LDO	Local Development Officer
NCDMC	National Network of Community-Based Disaster Management Committees
NSET	National Society for Earthquake Technology
PDRF	Post-Disaster Recovery Framework
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
WOREC	Women's Rehabilitation Center
WHR	Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group



Earthquake destruction, Kathmandu Durbar Square

Executive Summary

Communities experiencing or emerging from conflict are often also affected by natural disasters, creating intersecting challenges and sometimes threatening further instability. The effects of climate change include more frequent and possibly more severe natural disasters, which means that post-conflict and post-disaster recovery processes will be increasingly intertwined. To understand how fragile communities respond to and address the challenges posed by natural disasters, it is crucial to understand the key roles that women play. Nepal provides a case study of women's roles in post-conflict reconstruction and disaster recovery.

Since the resolution of Nepal's ten-year civil war in 2006, the state has attempted to implement a political transition and reshape political institutions. Yet, more than a decade later, many communities still need resources to support the post-conflict recovery and create accountability for the violence experienced during the war. In 2015, Nepal experienced a devastating earthquake, leaving communities even more vulnerable and creating challenges for the ongoing political transition.

Women and women's civil society organizations (CSOs) played key roles in Nepal's post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction processes, both in addressing women's specific needs and in bolstering the overall recovery of the country. Women's CSOs used advocacy, including demonstrations, to advance women's rights during the political transition. After the 2015 earthquake, women provided direct aid, and they continue to make their voices heard in the post-conflict and post-disaster decision-making processes.

Three main findings emerge:

- ① Gender-based discrimination and legal barriers amplified the adverse impacts of the conflict and the earthquake for women, specifically by inhibiting their access to political, economic, and social rights; justice and reparations; and aid and recovery efforts.
- ② Women and women's CSOs worked to meet the needs of marginalized communities, including women, following the conflict and the earthquake, helping to save lives, preserve communities, and rebuild livelihoods.
- ③ Women's CSOs advocated for long-term change and women's rights by investing in capacity-building at the local and district levels and advocacy at the national level.

Addressing women's needs and opening opportunities for women's full participation in the wake of conflict and natural disaster is crucial for sustainable peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. Women's CSOs in Nepal emphasized the needs of women and other marginalized groups and pursued local and national responses in the wake of political and environmental instability. These efforts benefitted not only women, but entire communities. For example, women worked as first responders, providing services to communities that otherwise did not have access to them. These women helped to physically rebuild the nation and increase the pace of renewal. Driven by their experience of discrimination in accessing services—



Earthquake destruction, Bhaktapur

which slowed the overall rate of recovery—women also advocated for policy and humanitarian changes that will ultimately help communities become stronger and more resilient.

Advancing the rights of women in Nepal has helped ensure that they are able to be leaders in their communities and respond to the country's post-conflict and post-disaster needs. The strategies deployed in the Nepali context also provide lessons for other states and communities facing similar challenges. As the case of Nepal demonstrates, addressing women's needs and ensuring that their voices are heard facilitates long-term stability and peacebuilding.

Introduction and Motivation

Disasters pose serious challenges for building peace in conflict-affected states; likewise, political volatility inhibits disaster recovery. When these crises intersect, complex and interconnected problems emerge. To rebuild communities most effectively, it is important to understand these processes together. It is also imperative to understand women's roles; indeed, research shows that women are critical to effective disaster recovery and post-conflict reconstruction.¹

There is a growing understanding that people in fragile and conflict-affected states are vulnerable to natural hazards, and that fragility, conflict, and disasters affect many of the world's poorest people.² Between 2005 and 2009, more than 50 percent of people affected by disasters lived in fragile and conflict-affected states,³ and, of the 15 countries with the highest vulnerability to disasters, 14 are among the top 50 most fragile states.⁴ While much of the literature shows that there is little evidence of direct causality between disasters and conflict,⁵ studies do demonstrate that the two are often mutually reinforcing, and each is likely to exacerbate the impact of the other.⁶ It is critical to understand how these phenomena intersect in order to provide more effective response measures and build long-term resilience and stability.

This study examines the nexus of post-conflict transition and disaster relief through the contributions of women in Nepal. It analyzes how the state can better prepare itself to rebuild by accounting for women's unique vulnerabilities and creating space for their full participation in recovery efforts. Women in Nepal have been very active in the political transition, influencing constitutional reform, transitional justice, and legal reform. They have also been leaders in organizing disaster relief, providing services to underserved populations and physically rebuilding communities. Future conflict prevention and disaster preparedness policies should take into account how the advancement of women's rights mitigates the effects of such damaging events. When women's needs are considered and when women's contributions are heeded, recovery processes are more viable overall.

This paper contributes to the growing discussion about the intersection of political fragility and natural disasters and highlights the contributions that women and women's CSOs have made in post-conflict and post-disaster Nepal. Understanding the unique challenges women experience during crises and the key roles women play in rebuilding after political and natural disasters provides important lessons for reconstruction processes in other states.

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Approach and Methods

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- How have women been involved in Nepal's political transition since 2006?
- How have women contributed to the management of and recovery after natural disasters in Nepal since 2006?
- Where is the overlap in these activities or types of involvement?

To answer these questions, the authors organized their research using four processes: an in-depth literature review, the systematic identification of participants, data collection through semi-structured interviews conducted in Nepal, and grounded coding and thematic analysis of the data collected in those interviews. Further details related to the research methodology can be found in the appendix, including the search terms and source material used to identify interview participants, full list of interviewees, interview protocol, questionnaire, and framework used to conduct grounded coding and thematic analysis from the primary data collected.

Nepal has experienced several major political transitions as well as earthquakes and floods at different times in its history. In order to make this study useful, the authors limited the temporal scope to 2006 to 2016, from the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) until the year in which the fieldwork was conducted. The focus is on the post-conflict developments and the 2015 earthquake that took place during this period.

In Nepal, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews in August 2016 with civil society leaders, government officials, and representatives of international organizations who had been directly involved between 2006 and 2016 in the political transition, disaster recovery processes, or both. The authors conducted 30 interviews in Nepal and worked with an interpreter to conduct interviews in English and Nepali, depending on the preference of each interviewee. The research team conducted most interviews in Kathmandu over two weeks. The authors also conducted Skype and phone interviews to reach participants in areas outside of Kathmandu. Understanding that women of different backgrounds have varied perspectives, the authors made an effort to interview women from diverse social, ethnic, class, religious, and political groups.

The reconstruction process in Nepal continues at the time of this study's publication, and analyzing data collected about dynamic and evolving processes is often challenging. The authors mitigated these limitations by making the study process-oriented, focusing on the networks and strategies that women found useful. This means that the findings are actionable for policymakers and practitioners even as the long-term relationship between peacebuilding and disaster recovery continues to unfold.

Nepal's Conflict: Tumult and Transition

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal is a South Asian nation bordering India and China, with a population of 28 million people who speak over 100 different languages or dialects, and who live in tropical plains as well as the world's highest mountain range. One of the poorest countries in Asia, Nepal has long struggled to manage its diverse population, its powerful neighbors, and its topographical extremes. Nepal has been affected across its history by both conflict and disasters, and political upheaval has at times directly impacted the state's ability to respond to crises.

A powerful monarchy

For most of the twentieth century, Nepal was a monarchy managed by a Hindu family group, the Rana, and governed in accordance with a strict caste system. Under Rana rule, the state owned all property and partitioned it out to government officials, mostly members of the upper-caste Brahmin and Chhetri groups.⁷ In 1951, a new pro-democracy rebel movement—working in tandem with India—briefly overthrew the Rana and the king, but by 1962 the monarchy retook control and promptly suspended the parliament and the constitution.⁸

In the 1980s, political parties coordinated to push for democratic reforms. At the forefront was the Nepali Congress, the country's oldest political party, which promoted a democratic socialist platform and aimed to overthrow Rana rule. By 1990, mass street protests and the resulting clashes between protestors and security forces had led to deaths and numerous arrests. The monarch, King Birendra, ultimately agreed to a new democratic constitution,⁹ which ended a 30-year ban on political parties.¹⁰ Despite these changes, many opposition activists felt the constitution did little to limit the powers of the monarchy and was not representative of Nepali people.¹¹ Women, the landless, ethnic minorities, and members of the lower castes were not included in the commission to draft the new constitution.¹²

Nepal has been affected across its history by both conflict and disasters, and political upheaval has at times directly impacted the state's ability to respond to crises.

The 1990 constitution restricted the king's power by creating new government institutions, such as an executive Council of Ministers, an elected House of Representatives, and an appointed National Assembly.¹³ Within the legislature, three seats in the National Assembly were set aside for women and at least five percent of candidates had to be female.¹⁴ Despite these changes, democratic institutions remained fragile and many of the former elite remained in power. In 1991, the first democratic elections were held. The upper-caste Brahmin and Chhetris represented 55 percent of the elected representatives, despite making up only 29 percent of the total population.¹⁵

Outbreak and escalation of conflict

Although the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) participated in the 1991 election, it did not remain in formal politics for long. During the 1994 elections, the government severely cracked down on communist activities in western Nepal and the CPN-M did not compete.¹⁶ Tensions between the government and the Maoists escalated, resulting in a CPN-M attack on a police post in 1996—a move that sparked a decade-long civil war.¹⁷ The Maoists wanted to abolish the monarchy and establish a people’s republic.¹⁸ They gained support in many rural communities by giving voice to the frustrations of impoverished Nepalis.¹⁹

The first years of the Maoist insurgency were characterized by intermittent violence, with the government responding primarily through targeted arrests.²⁰ The 2001 Royal Massacre led to a change in government policy. After Crown Prince Dipendra allegedly killed his father (the king), most members of his immediate family, and himself, the king’s brother Gyanendra succeeded to the throne. Gyanendra declared a state of emergency and the army mobilized to fight the Maoists.²¹ The intensity of the conflict quickly escalated; by the following year, around 4,500 people had been killed.²² The violence was particularly intense in the impoverished rural and mountainous areas of the country,²³ where the Maoists leveraged the lack of infrastructure to deploy guerrilla warfare tactics.²⁴

Peace and transition

By 2004, the Maoists had seized control of several districts, and in December 2004 they blockaded Kathmandu for several days.²⁵ Amidst growing civil unrest and increasingly common Maoist attacks on government outposts, the king dismissed the constitutional government in February 2005, restoring the monarchy’s total authority. Yet the Maoists remained in control of much of rural Nepal. Declaring a unilateral ceasefire in September 2005, the Maoists held talks with several major political parties to present a common front against the monarchy.²⁶ Facing growing protests, a unified opposition, and an inability to retake land from the Maoists, King Gyanendra gave up power in April 2006. Six months later, the new democratic government, headed by Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress party, signed a peace agreement with the CPN-M.²⁷

Women’s roles in the conflict

The results of the decade-long conflict were severe: 13,000 people were killed and Nepal experienced “large-scale disruptions to education, health and basic government services across the country,” in addition to widespread fear and instability.²⁸ Women were particularly vulnerable during the conflict, suffering from sexual violence carried out by government forces and Maoist rebels.²⁹ Sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence, and gender discrimination were widespread before the beginning of the conflict, and the use of rape as a weapon of war heightened the possibility of violence against women.³⁰

However, women were not only victims of violence; they were also active participants in the conflict. Women made up about 20 percent of verified Maoist combatants, serving as policymakers, mid-level commanders, couriers, organizers, health workers, and foot soldiers.³¹ The female CPN-M members generally came from

poor rural areas and were members of traditionally oppressed groups, such as the Madhesi ethnic group.³² Some were ideologically motivated to join; others joined out of necessity to gain protection, food, and wages to support their families.³³

Nepali women, whether serving as combatants or not, faced significant economic challenges. As men left to fight or were killed in the conflict, women became the heads of households.³⁴ Many women took on traditionally male jobs in agriculture in addition to their existing work.³⁵ They often struggled with these added agricultural responsibilities, given restrictive social norms that limited their ability to market and sell their goods. This caused a decline in agricultural productivity during the conflict and exacerbated the problems of poverty in the rural areas.³⁶ The conflict thus further feminized agriculture and poverty.

Women were not only victims of violence; they were also active participants in the conflict.

Yet this aspect of the conflict also offered an opportunity for women to become more politically active. Even if they did not join the Maoists, women benefitted from the breakdown of traditional customs. They “gained new freedom, flexibility and opportunity...perform[ing] both reproductive and productive roles, and . . . [meeting] the economic and other needs of the family.”³⁷ However, the breakdown of traditional norms during the conflict was short-lived; many women had to readjust to “old hierarchical gender relations” after peace was reached.³⁸

Post-conflict progress and pitfalls

Following the 2006 peace agreement, a temporary constitution formally abolished the monarchy and allowed the Maoists to enter the political mainstream.³⁹ In April 2008, elections were held for the new Constituent Assembly (CA), and the CPN-M party won a majority of seats.⁴⁰ The 2007 constitution was meant to be temporary, but it resulted in a years-long political transition that has seen nine different government administrations.⁴¹ The drafting process for a new constitution was exceedingly slow, in part due to political infighting and disagreements about whether former Maoist fighters could be integrated into the armed forces.⁴²

Despite the stalemate, the immediate post-conflict period saw significant progress on women’s rights. The 2007 interim constitution officially enshrined provisions for gender equality—including the right against discrimination, the right against violence, and the right to equal property—and created a quota of 33 percent women in representation at the national and local levels.⁴³ While women were excluded from the formal peace negotiation process, they played an active role in informal peacebuilding initiatives.⁴⁴ They founded and led CSOs that helped drive the burgeoning political sphere around the newly formed government.⁴⁵ Notably, in 2011, Nepal adopted a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP), with the goal of ensuring meaningful participation of women in all stages of peacebuilding in the post-conflict period.⁴⁶ It was the first country in South Asia and only the second in Asia to do so.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain for Nepali women. The interim 2007 constitution was followed by a less progressive constitution regarding women’s rights. Women lack the ability to confer citizenship to their children or spouses, they do not have equal inheritance rights, equal pay for equal work is not guaranteed, and gender discrimination is not explicitly outlawed.⁴⁸ Only 19.71 percent

of women own land, and only 54.3 percent of women participate in the labor force.⁴⁹ More than a quarter of Nepali households are female-headed—an increasing number of men emigrate for work—which makes the high levels of discrimination especially problematic. Studies show that these households have lower educational and literacy levels and smaller average land holdings, demonstrating again the feminization of poverty.⁵⁰

Earthquake disruption

In April 2015, Nepal experienced a disastrous setback when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck the country. Nepal has experienced many types of natural disasters, including severe earthquakes in 1980, 1988, and 2011 that each resulted in hundreds of casualties.⁵¹ Landslides are also common—and deadly.⁵² The destruction of the 2015 earthquake, however, was unprecedented. Nearly 22,000 people were injured, and over 8,000 were killed.⁵³ At least 750,000 homes were destroyed, and there were major losses to livestock and other economic resources, resulting in an estimated \$5.17 billion of damage.⁵⁴ The resulting devastation included some of Nepal’s most famous historic and cultural sites, among them several UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage locations.

The effects of the earthquake have lingered. At the end of the 2015 fiscal year, the Nepali Ministry of Finance reported, “[The] poverty situation is likely to escalate as nearly 80-90 percent of rural homes belonging to low income families that were made from stones, clay and wood have been destroyed,” and agricultural and livestock-based occupations were also devastated.⁵⁵ The World Bank has estimated that poverty in the country could continue to rise by as much as 3 percent,⁵⁶ a significant increase in a country already fighting extreme poverty. The earthquake also strained post-conflict reconstruction and peace efforts, given the necessary shift in resources and attention to post-disaster reconstruction.

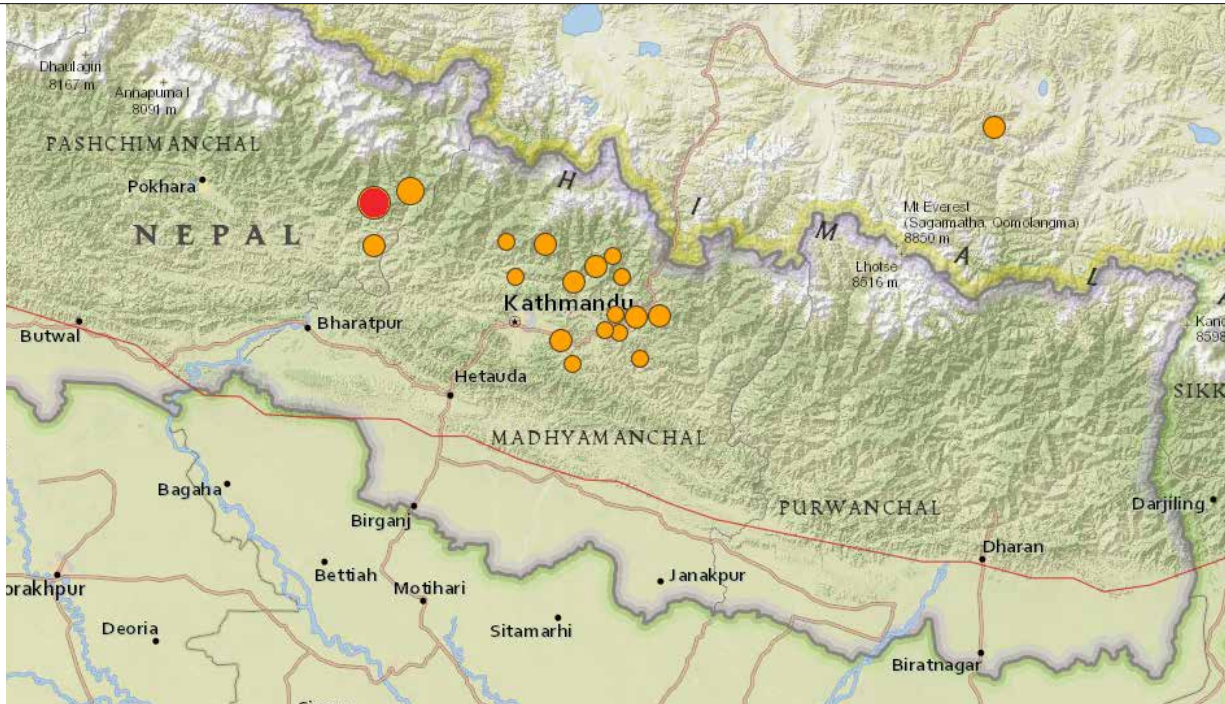
Women were particularly affected by the earthquake. In surveys conducted by the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project, 73 percent of women respondents said in July 2015 that their needs for shelter, financial support, healthcare, and clean water and sanitation were not being met.⁵⁷ In October, 49 percent of women said they believed that there had been an increase in tensions, risk of violence, or harassment as a result of the earthquake. They perceived this risk from community members, local government, and strangers.⁵⁸ In December, one of the greatest needs identified by both male and female respondents was the creation of safe spaces for women and children.⁵⁹

73 percent of women respondents said in July 2015 that their needs for shelter, financial support, healthcare, and clean water and sanitation were not being met.

Despite the challenges brought on by the earthquake, the disaster catalyzed the drafting of a new constitution that was finalized and adopted in September 2015. After eight years with a draft constitution, the country’s adoption of a new constitution was a significant accomplishment. Despite the unification of political parties around the document, it remains controversial. It replaced the existing ten federal states with just seven and reduced the proportional representation requirements for parliament, worrying historically marginalized ethnic groups who felt their representation would be further diminished.⁶⁰ Women’s groups were also unhappy due to discriminatory provisions regarding hereditary citizenship; the

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Map of the April 25, 2015 earthquake that struck Nepal. The main earthquake is marked in red. Subsequent aftershocks are marked in orange. The size of the circular marker indicates the intensity of the shock. Source: United States Geological Service (USGS) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

constitution dictates that Nepali women cannot pass on their citizenship to their children.⁶¹ The backlash included massive protests and a blockade of the Nepali-Indian border, resulting in significant fuel shortages and 57 casualties in the southern Terai plains.⁶²

Since the adoption of the new constitution, women have gained positions of power in several institutions. In October 2015, Bidhya Devi Bhandari was elected the first female president and Onsari Gharti Magar became the speaker of parliament. Sushila Karki, the only female Supreme Court justice, became chief justice in April 2016.ⁱ

ⁱ Karki was briefly suspended as chief justice in May 2017 after an impeachment motion was filed by the ruling coalition in Nepal's parliament. A court ruling reinstated her several days later. Karki retired in June 2017 after she turned sixty-five, as is required by Nepal's constitution. See "Nepal: Chief Justice Sushila Karki suspended," *Al Jazeera*, May 1, 2017; "Nepal Gets New Chief Justice," *XinhuaNet*, July 17, 2017.

Obstacles to Women’s Full Participation: A Literature Review

One of the poorest countries in Asia, Nepal has long been a priority for the international development community. The literature regarding the status of women largely reflects this development lens, with many authors focusing on education, public health (particularly menstruation), and economic participation. In order to situate this report within the literature on Nepal’s unique situation as a post-conflict country undergoing an extended political transition and recovering from a devastating natural disaster, this section briefly highlights the more limited existing literature on women’s agency and participation in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.ⁱⁱ

Vestiges of a patriarchal society

Existing literature articulates that there are significant challenges to the full advancement of women’s rights. Women are prevented from participating fully in Nepali society due to barriers to citizenship, which are connected to defined gender roles, social stigmas, and caste and ethnic affiliations. Pradhan Malla,⁶³ Latschan,⁶⁴ Desouza,⁶⁵ and White⁶⁶ emphasize that the legal framework of citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis*, or blood right, but that this process is only straightforward for men. Sharma,⁶⁷ Thapa,⁶⁸ Mallika Aryal,⁶⁹ and Taormina⁷⁰ further discuss the barriers for Nepali women who are single or widows, trafficked, or who marry non-Nepali men: their children become stateless if unable to gain citizenship. Tamang,⁷¹ McCray,⁷² Haviland,⁷³ and Lazco,⁷⁴ along with organizations such as the International Crisis Group,⁷⁵ note that the significant differences in the treatment of and opportunities for women in different ethnic and religious groups—long a feature of Nepali public life—have been enshrined in the new constitution as well.

Women are prevented from participating fully in Nepali society due to barriers to citizenship.

The literature illustrates that barriers to citizenship create challenges when trying to achieve meaningful participation in public life, particularly for women who are single, internally displaced, part of an ethnic minority, or of lower socioeconomic status.

Women’s political participation

Many authors underscore the consistent work of women’s groups to gain access to political leaders and spaces. Organizations including UN Women,⁷⁶ the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),⁷⁷ Renaissance Society Nepal,⁷⁸ and the CA Secretariat⁷⁹ underscore that the requirement of 33 percent female representation in all levels of politics was a positive step.

ⁱⁱ The literature review for this report was conducted in 2016 and includes over 150 primary and secondary sources from academic, media, international organizations, and civil society groups. An acknowledged limitation of this review is that non-English language sources were not included due to language and resource constraints. Further, the majority of the authors were based in institutions in the Global North.

However, others argue that while the quota may appear operative, it has not adequately enhanced women's participation. Regan⁸⁰ and Jha⁸¹ point out that when women are in high-level political positions, it is often due to their husbands' connections rather than their own merits. Pradhan,⁸² Tamang,⁸³ and Sajjad⁸⁴ emphasize that women's invisibility in public spaces and lack of political experience reinforce the challenges of ushering women into formal systems.

Authors repeatedly show that the new constitution and the CA have fallen short of promoting full participation. Tamang⁸⁵ argues that, while the CA was meant to be the most representative body in Nepal's history, its structure favors large political parties whose members continue to be mostly men from high castes. Research conducted by the National Democratic Institute,⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch,⁸⁷ International Crisis Group,⁸⁸ and UNDP⁸⁹ identify specific ways in which the new constitution includes discriminatory statutes based on gender, ethnicity, and caste. Langford and Mohan Bhattarai,⁹⁰ Mathema,⁹¹ Karki,⁹² Sharma,⁹³ and the *Kathmandu Post*⁹⁴ support this claim by identifying the process by which gender discrimination was embedded during the drafting and final revision of the constitution. In particular, Koirala and Macdonald⁹⁵ and Giri and Rashesh⁹⁶ emphasize how the constitution discriminates against the Madhesi people of the Terai region.

Changing roles amidst conflict

The civil conflict that raged from 1996 to 2006 had drastic implications for women. Those who were aligned with the Maoist insurgency had the opportunity to serve in typically male roles, including as leaders, combatants, and informants. Authors such as Lohani-Chase,⁹⁷ Pettigrew and Shneiderman,⁹⁸ and Gul⁹⁹ focus on women's involvement in the insurgency as active fighters and how they challenged traditional gender stereotypes. Others, including Ramnair,¹⁰⁰ Valente,¹⁰¹ International Crisis Group,¹⁰² and IRIN,¹⁰³ have highlighted the reintegration challenges for female ex-combatants and what they face upon returning to their families and communities.

During times of reconstruction, countries such as Nepal have an opportunity to strengthen the links between transitional justice, development, and gender equality.

The literature also stresses how the conflict impacted women who did not serve in an infantry role. In the absence of their male partners, who were the primary income earners, these women needed to find ways to support their families. Authors Aguirre and Pietropaoli¹⁰⁴ point out that during times of reconstruction, countries such as Nepal have an opportunity to strengthen the links between transitional justice, development, and gender equality. Much of the literature, including pieces by Pasipanodya¹⁰⁵ and the International Center for Transitional Justice,¹⁰⁶ highlights how women face greater economic and political insecurity than men after a conflict ends, especially when they are widows. However, Menon and Rodgers¹⁰⁷ attempt to reshape this narrative by focusing on women's agency in peacemaking and peace-building processes.

This report seeks to add to the literature on women's roles during the conflict by investigating how women have been active in the post-conflict period and during disaster recovery.

Women's Roles in the Political Transition and Disaster Recovery

Women and women's CSOs in Nepal have played key roles during the political transition and disaster recovery processes. They have highlighted the unique challenges women experienced, responded to women's needs, and lobbied for legislative changes at the national and local level. CSOs have worked to address the range of vulnerabilities that women face and to open opportunities for women's political, economic, and social participation.

This paper highlights the experiences and roles of women in the post-conflict and post-disaster recovery processes. Three main findings emerge:

- ① Gender-based discrimination and legal barriers amplified the adverse impacts of the conflict and the earthquake for women, specifically by inhibiting their access to political, economic, and social rights; justice and reparations; and aid and recovery efforts post-conflict and post-disaster;
- ② Women and women's organizations worked to meet the needs of marginalized communities, including women, following the conflict and the earthquake, helping to save lives, preserve communities, and rebuild livelihoods;
- ③ Women's CSOs simultaneously advocated for long-term change and women's rights by investing in capacity-building at the local and district levels and advocacy at the national level.

The work that women have contributed to the political transition and disaster recovery has yielded important outcomes not just for Nepali women but also for the country. When discrimination limited women's access to services, it impeded service provision to numerous communities and slowed the country's overall recovery. Conversely, when women addressed the needs of marginalized communities that were otherwise removed from accessing services, they accelerated the country's regrowth and renewal. Inclusive policies and services are necessary to foster recovery from political and environmental volatility.

HOW DISCRIMINATION MARGINALIZED NEPALI WOMEN

The past decade of Nepal's history reveals how discrimination against women complicates and inhibits the nation's recovery and reconstruction processes. In the aftermath of the conflict and the earthquake, gender-based discrimination prevented women from accessing political, economic, and social rights as well as recovery services. Crimes that primarily affect women, such as sexual violence, were underreported in the recovery period. Legal discrimination against women prevented them from possessing the documentation necessary to access reparations and relief. Social norms concerning widows, most commonly referred to as "single women," severely restricted their access to aid. The limitations imposed on women have hampered the overall recovery of the country. Understanding the similarities in how gender-based discrimination affected women after the conflict and after the earthquake can help to inform the creation of stronger and more comprehensive policies.

For Nepali women, the instability of the conflict and the devastation of the earthquake exacerbated their discriminated status in a patriarchal society. A number of women were combatants in the Maoist guerrilla group, but very few have had the opportunity to integrate into the Nepali security forces, as their male colleagues have.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, women were the population most affected by the earthquake,¹⁰⁹ which is characteristic for natural disasters.¹¹⁰ The state's response to these events followed preexisting patterns of discrimination and neglect for women's specific needs. As civil society leader Rita Thapa noted, "Women have always been coopted, used, and not really given their due when such times appeared in our history....I personally feel the mission of the state has failed [women]."¹¹¹ The dramatic events in the past decade underscore the state's failure to address the vulnerabilities Nepali women face in times of extreme instability. Narayan Adhikari of the CSO Accountability Lab succinctly described a pattern: "Men will drink tea, women face all the problems."¹¹²

No accountability for sexual violence

Among those problems is the lack of justice for survivors of sexual violence perpetrated during the conflict and after the earthquake.¹¹³ During the conflict, members of the security forces and the Maoist guerrillas committed sexual violence targeted at women combatants, women relatives of fighters, and women civilians.¹¹⁴ In the rare instances when sexual violence was reported, little was done by law enforcement to investigate the claims.¹¹⁵ The first state assistance program for conflict victims, known as the Interim Relief Program, did not recognize victims of sexual violence as entitled to its benefits.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the statute of limitations for rape restricted the time of reporting to 35 days after the incident, making it highly unlikely that a report would be filed in time.¹¹⁷

Similar factors stifled justice for sexual violence victims after the earthquake. Displaced women residing in makeshift shelters were at high risk for sexual abuse, as communal toilets and shared living spaces afforded little privacy or protection.¹¹⁸ Women reported feeling very insecure, particularly given the high rates of human trafficking in earthquake-affected districts.¹¹⁹ These incidents were rarely reported or investigated, in part because the earthquake had damaged basic infrastructure, and justice institutions were often located far away.

Women reported feeling very insecure, particularly given the high rates of human trafficking in earthquake-affected districts.

WOREC created nearby health centers with trained counselors to document gender-based violence.¹²⁰ This opportunity to report sexual violence safely led many women to report assaults perpetrated not just after the earthquake, but during other periods as well, including during the conflict. In November 2015, six months after the earthquake, the statute of limitations on reporting rape was extended from 35 to 180 days,¹²¹ which opened a window of reporting for victims who experienced sexual violence following the earthquake, but not for those who were assaulted during the conflict. While WOREC has helped to document these crimes, this has not been translated into prosecution or accountability. Lack of justice remains a barrier to many women's full reintegration into society after the upheaval caused by the conflict and earthquake.

Codified discrimination and legal barriers

Gender-based discrimination codified in Nepal's constitution and legislation has obstructed women from accessing state aid after the conflict and the earthquake. The longstanding and inequitable standard for men and women's citizenship restricts possession of the citizenship cards necessary to access state-based aid.

Due to discriminatory legislation, women are less likely to receive conflict-related assistance if a male relative is not present.

There are over four million people living in Nepal without citizenship cards.¹²² Nepali women do not have equal rights to the principle of *jus sanguinis*, or citizenship via descent. The 2015 constitution does not automatically grant citizenship to a Nepali woman's child if the father is a foreign man; it also requires proof that a father is *not* a foreigner before granting citizenship if a father is absent.¹²³ While the 2007 interim constitution provisionally granted equal citizenship rights, longstanding patriarchal practices meant that district officials rarely allowed children to gain citizenship without the presence of a Nepali father.¹²⁴ Stateless people—those without citizenship and identity cards—cannot open a bank account, receive a driver's license, or apply to college.¹²⁵

In emergency contexts, the lack of proper documentation for women and their children limits their ability to get state aid and hampers overall recovery. During the political transition, women trying to document crimes committed against them during the conflict or trying to access state services needed citizenship cards to do so. Similarly, a lack of documents proving land ownership was an obstacle to reporting violations or receiving compensation. Only 19 percent of women have legal ownership of land;¹²⁶ when a woman's husband or father was killed, disappeared, or fled during the conflict, she had no legal claim on her home. In addition, women seeking reparations must have proof of citizenship to receive compensation from the state. Due to discriminatory legislation, women are less likely to receive conflict-related assistance if a male relative is not present.

The consequences of gender-based discrimination have been dire for earthquake survivors as well. Government relief and registration of land for rebuilding purposes was restricted to those with proper documentation—which means, in most cases, men.¹²⁷ Lumanti Joshi, from the CSO Lumanti, noted, "In the...government guideline, it has been clearly mentioned...unless you have the land title, you will not be eligible for the grant from the government or from the NGO [nongovernmental organization]." ¹²⁸ This policy was amended in 2017 by the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) to allow landless people to more easily access aid.¹²⁹ At the time of the earthquake, however, women were unlikely to have land titles and, if their husbands were gone, often did not have citizenship cards for other forms of relief.¹³⁰

Accountability Lab's Narayan Adhikari spoke of the difficulty of obtaining relief for those without citizenship:

People who are illiterate and have to travel almost a day to reach out to the nearest government office . . . and [she has] little children, [her] husband dies . . . how can you expect her walking two days and going down there and you are still not sure whether you will be able to recover your

document? They might ask, “We need your proof [of citizenship].” She doesn’t have any proof.¹³¹

In this way, discriminatory legislation prevented women from receiving aid when an emergency occurred.

Social norms deepen vulnerability

While many women faced barriers to state assistance due to legally enshrined discrimination, single women—widows and other unattached women—encountered additional challenges due to social norms that prescribe a drastically narrowed existence. Social stigmas (for example, that widows are unlucky or single women are involved in witchcraft), create a barrier between single women and their communities.¹³² This increased isolation during the turbulent post-conflict and post-earthquake periods intensified instability. The consequences of these stigmas were exacerbated for Dalit women—who faced the additional challenge of caste discrimination—and women with disabilities.

During the conflict, many men were disappeared by armed actors. In part due to stringent behavioral constraints for widows, the state mandated that women had to wait 12 years before officially registering as widows if their husbands went missing.¹³³ Women could not gain access to property for six years,¹³⁴ which left the land unused or open to claims by others in the interim.

Social norms for how single women should behave also limited their rights during the post-disaster recovery period. After thousands died in the earthquake, mourning requirements for widows were a barrier to relief distribution. Upasana Rana from the Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group (WHR) advocacy organization explained, “In the Hindu culture, there is provision of mourning for 13 days where the wife would wear everything white and they are not allowed to touch anyone and they are not allowed to eat.”¹³⁵ Women had to navigate these restrictive practices while still trying to meet their needs.¹³⁶ Rana described their predicament: “The recently widowed women, they cannot go in front to take their relief material because they aren’t allowed to touch anyone. So they are always at the back. So...there are many cases where they didn’t get any relief at all.”¹³⁷

Single women—widows and other unattached women—encountered additional challenges due to social norms.

Single women were also at a high risk for sexual violence, given their segregation from the community.¹³⁸ Rana noted that single women faced serious restrictions in their movement. She argued that they were more at risk of sexual violence after the earthquake because “[they] don’t have their house, they don’t have any protection, they are out in the field,” and after the conflict, “they are not allowed to go outside” because of strict social norms.¹³⁹

Conflicts and disasters affect women in similar and overlapping ways, and both exacerbate women’s existing vulnerabilities. Those who face discrimination on multiple fronts, such as Dalit women, are especially affected. This directly impacts women’s abilities to recover and rebuild in the aftermath of crises. Despite this, women in Nepal were powerful actors in securing services for women, rebuilding their communities, and leading the reconstruction of the country.

WOMEN'S CSOS' RESPONSE POST-CONFLICT AND POST-DISASTER

Women who are already marginalized or excluded from resources are especially vulnerable during times of crisis.¹⁴⁰ After both the conflict and the earthquake, women's CSOs responded to the needs of marginalized and underserved groups throughout Nepal. Women addressed the political, economic, and social needs of women and their communities, often with a particular focus on marginalized or underserved women. Local women and women's groups were well-placed to take action because they understood the particular needs of the community and could respond quickly. In particular, established CSOs expanded the scope of their focus and activity to meet the crises. For example, many women's groups with long

Women who are already marginalized or excluded from resources are especially vulnerable during times of crisis.

histories of working for women's rights quickly mobilized to provide earthquake relief. Other groups with a focus on disaster risk reduction began to incorporate gender equal-

ity work into their efforts. Women provided both rapid response and long-term capacity-building, laying the foundation to agitate for systemic change and equality. In many cases, women's CSOs used their pre-existing expertise in providing aid to communities and advocating for women's rights to inform their work during the political transition and following the earthquake. Women's organizations addressed the needs of marginalized communities, and especially marginalized women, in two ways: by responding directly to people's immediate needs for resources and services and ensuring more effective service delivery to a greater number of people, and by channeling women's voices and needs to government officials and institutions in order for government processes to take into consideration the needs of a broader cross-section of the community, including women.

Responding directly to needs

Women's CSOs are key actors in addressing the needs of women throughout Nepal, particularly marginalized and underserved women. Women's CSOs have a long history of serving women and communities in need, especially following the conflict.

Women's CSOs provided aid to women and other marginalized groups, which helped entire communities to recover more quickly.

Many of these organizations drew upon preexisting experience, resources, and networks to respond to the earthquake. Women's CSOs provided aid to women and other

marginalized groups, which helped entire communities to recover more quickly. This focus on serving vulnerable communities supports broader rebuilding processes throughout Nepal and makes recovery more inclusive and more effective.

Nepali civil society is a powerful source of support for women around the country, and it is not possible to summarize here all of the contributions of women's CSOs on political, economic, health, legal, and social issues. Women's organizations work across many different areas of focus, addressing the full range of women's needs and experiences. For example, WOREC, in addition to its political advocacy, opened a health center in Rukum district because of the high rate of sexual violence there.¹⁴¹ The organization also operates 25 women's health resource

counseling centers,ⁱⁱⁱ where counselors provide health information and resources about gender-based violence.¹⁴² The Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO), in addition to its work on political and economic rights for Dalit women, supports health services, works toward hygiene and food security improvements, and provides support to Dalit entrepreneurs.¹⁴³

Women and women's CSOs played an essential role in earthquake response and recovery; women were key to saving lives, preserving communities, and rebuilding livelihoods. The Honorable President of Nepal, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, in a statement to the research team, argued, "Women were in the first line in taking care of their own family members and emergency rescue and relief work in the neighborhood. Women in the government, non-government, private sector and the civil society organizations participated directly in the subsequent rescue, relief, and rehabilitation also."¹⁴⁴ Many different women's CSOs responded immediately to the earthquake, even if disaster response was not their primary area of focus. WHR's Upasana Rana said, "Actually, before the earthquake...I don't think there were any organization[s] in Nepal that were focused, that were solely working for disaster[s]. After the earthquake...whole Nepal was shifted to earthquake work."¹⁴⁵ Many organizations started providing relief by the third or fourth day after the earthquake, serving as a quick local force for distributing aid.¹⁴⁶ For organizations with no experience in disaster response, earthquake relief was learned by doing it on the ground.¹⁴⁷

Women's CSOs provided a wide range of aid and services following the earthquake, including basic necessities,¹⁴⁸ financial support,¹⁴⁹ relief centers specifically for women,¹⁵⁰ psychological support,¹⁵¹ and information about how to access government or international relief.¹⁵² Many of these organizations expanded their programs to transition from initial relief to long-term assistance, often including capacity-building for the communities they served.¹⁵³ Many of these organizations specifically prioritized women in their response,¹⁵⁴ and some focused more specifically on pregnant and lactating women or adolescent girls.¹⁵⁵ Women have also led reconstruction in Nepal, finding resources for their families, clearing rubble, providing first aid, organizing their communities, building temporary shelters, and rebuilding houses.¹⁵⁶

Many Nepali men work outside of the country, so much of the reconstruction work was left to women.

Many Nepali men work outside of the country, so much of the reconstruction work was left to women.¹⁵⁷ Rita Thapa noted, "In many of our communities, men are virtually nonexistent. Many of them had to return from all over. They did for a little bit of time, but largely spaces are held together by women."¹⁵⁸ This has been a common experience for many Nepali women; when men were engaged in the civil war or killed in the conflict, women had to take on additional responsibilities. The same has been true in the years following the conflict and the earthquake due to a high level of emigration by men to find work.

Many organizations used their existing resources, networks, and expertise to guide their earthquake response. The CSO Nagarik Aawaz had run a kitchen for conflict-affected homeless and displaced communities since 2004; after the

iii In Salyan, Dang, Siraha, Dhanuwa, Morang, Sunsari, and Udayapur.

earthquake, it instituted a kitchen for displaced survivors. Similarly, the philanthropic group Tewa did not have prior experience working on disasters, but it worked closely with Nagarik Aawaz, given their shared founder, Rita Thapa, and created the joint Earthquake Relief Fund.¹⁵⁹ Both these organizations, as well as WOREC and the National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders, mobilized their large existing networks—originally created for political movements, advocacy, and capacity-building—and deployed volunteers, support staff, and human rights workers to provide relief.¹⁶⁰ Together, Nagarik Aawaz and Tewa mobilized 289 volunteers and reached 23,271 households in 118 communities across 15 districts. The organizations supported five hospitals and fed 36,026 people through their soup kitchen.¹⁶¹ Organizations worked with the resources they had at the time the earthquake hit. Bushnudevi Mahila Saving and Credit, a community-based organization, distributed the money it had saved to victims in the immediate aftermath.¹⁶² Although these organizations were able to mobilize, it was not an easy task. The earthquake also affected CSOs and their staff and volunteers, and they had to work with staff and funding limitations.¹⁶³ Sujata Singh of WOREC said that it was a very emotional and difficult time for the organization,¹⁶⁴ and Bandana Rana of the CSO Saathi reported that the staff worked around the clock, often with no rest.¹⁶⁵

In both the political and disaster response spheres, many people emphasized that women can be especially effective in addressing women's needs. Post-conflict, some said that including women on the committee to draft the interim constitution helped make the document gender friendly,¹⁶⁶ and that having conflict-affected survivors on Local Peace Committees can provide justice and benefits for victims.¹⁶⁷ Others pointed to the role of a woman president who will work to take care of women.¹⁶⁸

Post-disaster, some civil society leaders emphasized that female volunteers helped women feel more comfortable sharing their stories and their priorities following the earthquake, often related to children, disabilities, and sexual and reproductive health.¹⁶⁹ Others commented that training women on disaster management is particularly effective because they talk with their community and train their friends, spreading the training further.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, women are able to invite other women and girls to meetings and distribution points to receive post-disaster relief.¹⁷¹ These arguments seemed to be widely accepted when speaking about women's efforts at the local level, but people were more skeptical of women's commitment to women's rights at the national level, citing tokenism,¹⁷² lack of capacity,¹⁷³ or lack of commitment to women's issues.¹⁷⁴ Finally, women and women's CSOs from Nepal and from the communities they were serving often had greater legitimacy and efficacy than external organizations providing aid.¹⁷⁵

Channeling women's voices to government institutions

Women's CSOs have advocated for conflict and earthquake survivors, supporting women in desperate need of government attention. Women's CSOs are a strategic access point for channeling local voices to government officials, particularly for conflict-related sexual violence survivors. Women's CSOs also structure citizen reporting and monitoring to keep the government accountable. While doing so, they often fill a service provision gap and respond directly to the needs of victims. Additionally, women's CSOs provide women with access to justice by creating their own tribunals, connecting victims with transitional justice resources, and forging

relationships between government institutions and local women to improve access to government bodies.

Connecting women to justice

Justice for violence experienced during the conflict remains a distant prospect for many Nepali women, but women's groups are well-placed to offer victims of sexual violence needed assistance. WOREC, the National Alliance for Women Human Rights Defenders, Nagarik Aawaz, and Advocacy Forum convened the Women's Tribunal on Sexual Violence on Women During Conflict, which was hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, on December 8, 2014. The tribunal emphasized the experiences of women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, hearing the testimonies of ten women before a jury of human rights experts and culminating with recommendations for policy and institutional reform. The coalition worked to secure justice for those ten survivors, accompanying them for two years in preparation for the tribunal and connecting them with the National Human Rights Commission.¹⁷⁶ This tribunal could not fill the gap that existed for many women seeking justice, but it provided an informal way to channel some cases to the government and bring attention to the many women in need of redress.

The potential impact of transitional justice institutions remains in flux; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) have been formed, but much of their work remains to be done and is heavily influenced by the political environment in Nepal. These commissions are also seen as overtly political, which means that decisions made by commissioners are often polemical.

As both the TRC and CIEDP are still in progress, women's CSOs' ability to connect victims with the specific transitional justice services is limited, but they can serve as a link between victims and existing processes. Organizations such as Saathi have been in conversation with the TRC about how to ensure hearings benefit and support conflict-affected people.¹⁷⁷ Other organizations help link victims to officials. Nagarik Aawaz helps women start the application process to report wartime incidents to their Local Peace Committee,¹⁷⁸ and Action Works Nepal encourages men and women to report cases to local governments and representatives of the TRC when representatives travel to local communities.¹⁷⁹ These organizations serve as a key link between victims and official justice processes.

Connecting women to resources

Women's CSOs were also key to connecting women with resources from national and international actors following the conflict and during the disaster response.¹⁸⁰ Tewa connected women with lawyers and local government officials to help them gain citizenship,¹⁸¹ and WOREC documented cases of violence against women and shared them with the National Women's Commission. Following the earthquake, WOREC created "female-friendly spaces," which provided services and referred women to other resources. Eventually, WOREC turned the spaces over to the district's Women and Children Office and supported the work by training clinic staff.¹⁸² WHR provided names of earthquake victims to aid organizations and guided their responses,

Women's CSOs relied heavily on their networks to provide relief after the earthquake.

referred gender-based violence cases to relevant stakeholders, and helped widows file cases with the village development committees for relief.¹⁸³ Women's CSOs relied heavily on their networks to provide relief after the earthquake;¹⁸⁴ many organizations partnered with each other to reach communities they could not reach by themselves.^{iv}

Some organizations focused on providing clear information on resources to those affected by the earthquake. WHR created information desks to provide answers for those affected.¹⁸⁵ Accountability Lab organized meetings and helped create local groups to provide clear and useful information to survivors and responders about available resources.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, the National Network of Community-Based Disaster Management Committees (NCDMC) acted as a bridge between local communities and responders to encourage communities to take advantage of available aid.¹⁸⁷

While local women's CSOs often led the way to connect communities to relief, international actors, often with the help of local groups, also played a significant and powerful role in addressing post-conflict needs. Many CSOs partnered with UN Women to provide earthquake relief, from providing basic necessities to psychosocial care.^v UN Women also played an important role in shaping how women could access services and relief, influencing international and national frameworks for disaster response. UN Women pushed for a gendered Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and co-chaired the Humanitarian Response Inter-Cluster Gender Working Group with the UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This working group was made up of staff of international organizations as well as local organizations and ensured that a gendered lens was used when distributing relief. UN Women also worked with the national Department of Women and Children in Kathmandu and at the district level to provide relief, and contributed to the gender empowerment and social inclusion section in the Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF) under the leadership of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare.¹⁸⁸ The efforts of local organizations to connect individuals with government resources and the efforts of the international community to open resources to women helped make the disaster response more accessible and more responsive to communities in need.^{vi}

Connecting women to decision-making processes

Other organizations helped connect people to local decision-makers and forge relationships to improve state services and ensure that women will be well served by government institutions. For example, Saathi put into place a gender-based violence mitigation program, which is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of

iv For example, Nagarik Aawaz and Tewa jointly partnered with 25 different organizations during their earthquake response. See Nagarik Aawaz, *Annual Report, 2014–2015* (Kathmandu, Nepal: Nagarik Aawaz, 2015).

v For example, Saathi, Women for Human Rights, Women's Rehabilitation Centre, Positive Women's Network, Home-Based Workers' Network-SABAH, Migrant Women Workers' Network, Rural Women's Network, FEDO, Trafficking Survivors' Network-Shakti Samuah, and the National Disability Women's Association.

vi It should be noted that these efforts faced challenges. In a survey conducted by the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project in July 2015, 73 percent of women respondents said that their needs were not being addressed. This number was still as high as 50 percent in August 2015 when the survey was repeated. See Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project, *Inter Agency Common Feedback Report August 2015*, http://www.cfp.org.np/uploads/documents/CFP_August_Report_Email_Version.pdf.

Women, Children, and Social Welfare to strengthen the relationship between government and civil society.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Nagarik Aawaz connects youth and women volunteers with the Ward Citizens Forum, an institution designed to promote community voices in decision-making at the Ward level, so these volunteers can assist local government institutions.¹⁹⁰ These relationships help to integrate women-centric services into state institutions and provide additional capacity to government actors. In these relationships, government, particularly local government, benefits from the expertise and experience of civil society and becomes more effective in addressing the needs of women as well as their communities. In other instances, women's CSOs monitor government institutions to assess their effectiveness and how sensitive they are to women's needs. Nagarik Aawaz organized women to observe members of Local Peace Committees, the TRC, and the CIEDP.¹⁹¹ Additionally, the 1325 Action Group, a civil society network led by Saathi,^{vii} monitors the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Nepal^{viii} and the Nepal Peace Trust Fund,^{ix} a body responsible for supporting the CPA.¹⁹² These organizations work to connect women with government bodies and ensure that institutions are responding appropriately to the needs of women and communities.

WOMEN'S CSOS' ADVOCACY TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women's CSOs have also worked toward long-term change, an especially important accomplishment after the earthquake, when many organizations invested solely in rapid relief efforts. Women's CSOs have advocated for women's rights at the national level while conducting capacity-building and organizing at the local and district levels. This multilevel approach has created various pressure points for making survivors' voices heard for political and disaster-related issues. These efforts have had far-reaching effects, and they have been crucial for advancing women's rights and supporting long-term and inclusive recovery throughout Nepal.

Women's rights are directly connected to women's ability to be resilient and to rebuild their communities after both conflict and disaster. Women's CSOs' commitment to women's rights and access to resources is reflected in their work bridging post-conflict and post-disaster recovery activities, recognizing that both events threatened women's political, economic, and social status. These organizations engaged in both national-level advocacy, which pushed for legal and political change, and grassroots capacity-building and organizing, which created accountability and monitoring at the local level.

Women's rights are directly connected to women's ability to be resilient and rebuild their communities after both conflict and disaster.

vii 1325 Action Group members: Center for Social Development; Didi Bahini; FEDO; Forum for Women, Law and Development; INHURED International; Institute of Human Rights Communication Nepal; Media Advocacy Group; National Network for Women's Security; Rural Women's Development and United Center; Sankalpa; Shantimalika; WHR; and Saathi.

viii For more information on monitoring of the Nepali NAP, please see Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction and 1325 Action Group and Saathi, *National Action Plan on Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820, Mid-Term Monitoring Report*, 2014.

ix The Nepal Peace Trust Fund serves as the coordinating body for peace-related initiatives, acts as a funding mechanism for the government of Nepal and for donor resources, and monitors the peace process. For more information, see <http://www.nptf.gov.np/>.

The different activities bolstered each other: national-level advocacy provided a framework for local activities, and local capacity-building supported national efforts by creating networks of women engaged on these issues. These networks established a way for women to make their voices heard locally and nationally and to build institutions that could better address women's needs and more effectively serve communities across Nepal.

National-level advocacy

National-level policy has far-reaching effects, particularly when a state transitioning out of conflict articulates its values and priorities. In Nepal, as the state has reorganized itself, created a new constitution, and agreed upon new legislative and legal priorities, women have focused on whether these policies benefit, protect, and empower women. Women have worked to ensure that their concerns and goals are central to rebuilding and reshaping the country.¹⁹³ The most notable policy issues have been developing the new constitution and shaping citizenship rights. These two points have also been key areas of unity for the women's movement more broadly.¹⁹⁴ National-level advocacy by women's CSOs depended heavily on networks to mobilize women across the country, whether to join demonstrations in Kathmandu or to take action in their own communities.

Advocacy strategies

Women's CSOs used a variety of strategies to push for their legal and policy priorities, including advocacy around national-level legal documents, using the Supreme Court to support policy change, and advocating through national and international bodies focused on disaster relief. These strategies served not only to advance women's rights, but also to facilitate a more inclusive and responsive transition.

Women's CSOs were consulted on drafting the constitution¹⁹⁵ and the NAP,¹⁹⁶ and they have aimed much of their attention on these broad legal rights. Women have especially focused on the constitution. Sujata Singh of WOREC noted that her organization has concentrated on the constitution because it is the only medium

that ensures rights.¹⁹⁷ Women's organizations worked to include women in the constitution, particularly a quota for women's representation, citizenship for women, and property rights.¹⁹⁸ President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, in a statement to the research team, argued, "The first priority right now for Nepal is the implementation of the Constitution. The Constitution guarantees all economic, social, and political rights of women. Women can make significant progress only if all these provisions of the Constitution are implemented effectively."¹⁹⁹ WHR's Upasana Rana argued that policies that ensure representation have long-term effects:

“Women were in the first line in taking care of their own family members and emergency rescue and relief work in the neighborhood”

—Bidhya Devi Bhandari, President of Nepal

[In] the initial phase...[men] would think like, “[Women] are just here trying to grab their post and trying to grab their seat.” But now their perspectives have been changed. Now they will think, “Oh, there should be women.” This is how the change happens. It won't just happen overnight, but slowly. It will happen. It is a slow process, but it is impactful.²⁰⁰

Women's CSOs have used demonstrations, particularly related to citizenship and the constitution, to push for national change. Susan Risal of Nagarik Aawaz explained, "In our women's movement, in two issues women are mostly connected: in the issues of citizenship and the issues of representation."²⁰¹ CSOs have mobilized collectively to organize mass demonstrations related to women's rights and representation. These efforts involved partnering with other organizations as well as mobilizing local networks across the country. CSOs have also come together to support widows' rights,²⁰² an interim constitution and a constitution that protected women's rights,²⁰³ the recognition of rape and domestic violence, the strengthening of protections for survivors,²⁰⁴ and citizenship rights for women.²⁰⁵ Sadhana Shrestha of Tewa, Women's Fund of Nepal emphasized women's groups' long-term commitment and mobilization:

In 2009 and 2013, we've gone on a hunger strike collectively with other women's organizations on the streets, to demand that the constitution be written in a women-friendly way. They didn't take much heed then, but I think they were already alert. But this time, in September 2015 during the constitution-writing process, we said, 'If we don't bring out a voice in public, we don't think anybody in a position of power and decision-making will take heed of it.'

These demonstrations allowed for diverse groups of women to work together, which required a significant level of coordination and logistical cooperation. Women's organizations divided the responsibility for organizing these demonstrations, with different organizations planning, providing resources, and mobilizing allies. Many demonstrations involved occupying public streets (often outside the CA), marching or taking part in vigils, or committing to take part in a relay hunger strike, in which different people took turns participating in the strike.²⁰⁶ Organizing demonstrations required the rapid and effective mobilization of many people and resources. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, in a statement to the research team, argued that these groups acted as a "watchdog" and helped to frame laws based on equality and end discrimination.²⁰⁷

One primary focus of women's CSOs' lobbying was increasing women's representation at the national and local levels.

Women's organizations lobbied for a wide range of legal issues at the national level, across the spectrum of women's needs. While many of these concerns, such as property or citizenship rights, appear to be specific to the political transition in Nepal, they were also crucial issues following the earthquake, affecting if and how women were able to access aid and rebuild their homes. One primary focus of women's CSOs' lobbying was increasing women's representation at the national and local levels,²⁰⁸ including in the Local Peace Committees,²⁰⁹ Emergency Fund Committees,²¹⁰ the TRC,²¹¹ and the cabinet.²¹² Organizations also lobbied to provide justice to conflict-affected communities more quickly,²¹³ provide financial support for widows,²¹⁴ extend the statute of limitations for rape,²¹⁵ prevent political influence from swaying the outcomes of cases related to violence against women,²¹⁶ provide earthquake relief more effectively for women,²¹⁷ ensure property rights for women,²¹⁸ support joint ownership of land between husbands and wives,²¹⁹ and allow families to receive aid from NGOs as well as loan support from the government in the aftermath of the earthquake.²²⁰ NCDMC, an organization focused on disaster management, also advocated for women's property rights and widows' rights, arguing that women's rights are a critical part of rebuilding communities.²²¹

This broad spectrum of concerns explicitly crosses the divide between political and post-disaster challenges.

Women's CSOs have also used the Supreme Court as a venue for pursuing their policy goals. In 2008, the government created a fund to pay men 50,000 NPR (460 USD) to marry widows. WHR filed a case in the Supreme Court in opposition to this fund and organized large-scale demonstrations, and the Supreme Court ordered the government to stop the fund, which was subsequently changed into an emergency fund for widows.²²² WHR has also filed a case in the court to allow the wives of missing husbands to inherit property after six years rather than 12, and this case remains under consideration.²²³ Lily Thapa, founder of WHR, worked with the National Network of Conflict Affected Women and the Common Platform for Victims to file a case in the Supreme Court about the TRC, because the commissioners were appointed by political leaders and were perceived not to be conflict-affected individuals, which could lead them to agree to amnesty for perpetrators.²²⁴ In 2007, WOREC petitioned the Supreme Court that children under 16 who were raped be considered the responsibility of the government, as well as the children born to them. In 2015, the court ruled that the government should be responsible for these children.²²⁵

CSOs have also advocated for an effective humanitarian response and for women to be included in decision-making processes during the post-earthquake relief and recovery phases. The NCDMC brought issues about individuals' access to relief to the Local Development Officer (LDO) and Chief District Officer (CDO), local government officials. In a separate instance, the NCDMC discovered that people were not receiving the funds promised by the government, so the group put together a petition from people in 14 districts and a press release, and soon the funding was available from the CDO. In 2016, the NCDMC also conducted a program with members of parliament about the Disaster Management Act, bringing local concerns to the national discussion on the bill.²²⁶

Additionally, women's groups created frameworks to help guide gender-sensitive relief efforts. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari, in a statement to the research team, explained, "Women, parliamentarians, women from political parties, and women-centered non-government organizations were also actively engaged in the advocacy with the Parliament and the policymakers about women's needs for giving [the]...PDRF a gender-friendly outlook, besides being directly involved in the rescue, relief and rehabilitation work."²²⁷ A group of CSOs^x created the Common Charter of Demands by Women's Groups in Nepal for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Post-Disaster Humanitarian Response, a document which called for recognition of women's representation and leadership; provision of food security, shelter, and sustainable livelihoods; prevention of violence against women and girls; and creation of special programs and funds for women.²²⁸ The charter stated,

Humanitarian assistance should be gender sensitive and address women's specific practical and strategic needs. Understanding gender differences, inequalities and capacities will improve the effectiveness of our humanitarian response and we must work together to promote and achieve gender equality—this is a shared responsibility of all humanitarian actors.²²⁹

x WOREC, Saathi, FEDO, JAGRAN Nepal, Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), WHR, Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), Media Advocacy Group (MAG), Sancharika Samuha, and Home Net South Asia, with assistance from UN Women Nepal.

In 2016, many of these organizations^{xi} gathered again at the National Women's Conference on Gender Responsive Disaster Management in March 2016 to create the 15-point Kathmandu Declaration on implementing effective and gender-responsive disaster management. The declaration was explicit in its intersectional approach and its view that disaster management and post-disaster efforts were an opportunity to address gender inequalities and create a more equitable society. The declaration focuses on high-level decision-making and programming and local-level participation, seeking to address the many different experiences of women as both victims and responders, as well as the diverse experiences of women across social groups.²³⁰ In this way, the disaster provided a moment to help reshape the post-conflict period and improve gender equity.

Women's organizations are deeply engaged in advocacy and lobbying at the national level, but mobilization for large campaigns and the creation of systemic change require action at the district and village levels as well.

Grassroots capacity-building and organizing

Women's organizations created networks across the country to both mobilize participants in national campaigns and increase women's participation at the local level. These efforts served not only to advance women's leadership in their communities, but also to create more responsive local institutions. Organizations such as WHR, WOREC, and the Women Security Pressure Group encourage their networks to engage in local lobbying and training.²³¹ These powerful networks support the work of their organization at all levels.^{xii}

Local-level advocacy played an important role after the earthquake, when Lumanti worked with local governments to adjust regulations related to house size and construction,²³² and Kirtipur Women's Network advocated for aid to be distributed appropriately to each family, even when multiple families lived in one household.²³³ The NCDMC also worked with district chairs to make sure that women were secure after the earthquake and had access to land and opportunities for income generation.²³⁴

Women's organizations also provide training on specific skillsets that women can use to improve their quality of life.

Some organizations provide training for women on how to lobby for change at the district and village levels.²³⁵ These training sessions often focus on political and electoral education,²³⁶ conflict transformation and community-building,²³⁷ and information about rights.²³⁸ Some organizations, such as WHR, help women to lobby and join district committees such as Local Peace Committees. WOREC advocates for women's representation at the community level while developing their skills and confidence to encourage their participation. Groups such as Action Works Nepal and FEDO empower women to challenge political leaders and provide suggestions at the district and village level.²³⁹

xi Jagaran Nepal, Home Net South Asia, Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), FEDO, Media Advocacy Group (MAG), WHR, Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), and Saathi, with assistance from UN Women Nepal.

xii For example, FEDO boasts over 53,000 women members through 2,100 women's groups, and WHR calls upon 100,000 members across 1,550 single women groups. See "About FEDO," Feminist Dalit Organization, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://www.fedonepal.org/about-fedo/>; Women for Human Rights, "Progress of WHR at National and International Level," accessed July 9, 2016, <http://whr.org.np/achievements/#.WWLq0NPYv-Y>.

In addition to preparing women to engage with local leaders, women's organizations also provide training on specific skillsets that women can use to improve their quality of life. After the conflict and the disaster, these organizations helped women adjust to new realities by providing professional opportunities and livelihood training. The National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) trained women to be included in reconstruction efforts and helped them build skills that are traditionally reserved for men, such as masonry. NSET also organized community groups and disaster management committees that trained women on how to create "go bags" and recognize architectural issues. Both the mason training and the go-bag instruction provided women with new livelihoods.²⁴⁰ Other organizations, such as WHR and the NCDMC, provided training for women about how to take care of themselves and their families, medically and legally, in the event of a disaster.²⁴¹ Some of these women, such as those in the Kirtipur Women's Network,^{xiii} then trained other women on how to secure their homes and save others through "non-structure mitigation."²⁴² While many of these training sessions focused on women's everyday activities, by providing a foundation for increased prosperity and security, they contributed to a broader empowerment agenda.

Factors that supported women's advocacy

Several factors particular to Nepal's political transition made women's activism at the national and local levels possible. Some women attributed the high level of activity to Nepal's transition to a multi-party democracy and the creation of a new constitution, which opened space for the discussion of women's rights.²⁴³ Grassroots women's organizations sprang up in the 1990s following the opening of multi-partyism and made demands around representation and property rights. After that, there was a sense that momentum continued to grow and the women's movement strengthened.²⁴⁴ Some women also discussed the importance of the public image of Maoist women combatants in redefining the public image of women in Nepal.²⁴⁵ Many women cited the progress that some women have made in gaining access to decision-making positions, particularly in the CA, as the president, and as the chief justice.²⁴⁶ However, there is a sense that having women in these positions is not enough; it is also important to have women in positions of power who will work on behalf of women's rights.²⁴⁷ Sadhana Shrestha of Tewa argued,

We have women in leadership positions, that's the first step. That doesn't necessarily mean that women who have been in power or in the leadership positions will guarantee that women's rights and empowerment will be promoted. So that's where I think if there is a true feminist that occupies a leadership position, who understands women's rights and women's empowerment, then we can hope to see positive change. But if it is a person who has gone from the political space, the alignment and the decisions are led more by the party than for women's rights. It's a good

xiii Per the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, "Structural measures are any physical construction to reduce or avoid possible impacts of hazards, or the application of engineering techniques or technology to achieve hazard resistance and resilience in structures or systems. Non-structural measures are measures not involving physical construction which use knowledge, practice or agreement to reduce disaster risks and impacts, in particular through policies and laws, public awareness raising, training and education." See UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, "Structural and Non-Structural Measures," *PreventionWeb*, February 2017, accessed July 9, 2017, <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/terminology/v.php?id=505>.



Mural in Kathmandu

start, but to give real power to women and break patriarchal norms, I think that is a struggle.²⁴⁸

International frameworks are also helpful to women's CSOs. Some women cited the 1995 Beijing Conference,²⁴⁹ the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),²⁵⁰ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security,²⁵¹ and Nepal's NAP²⁵² as useful tools as well as points of progress for women in Nepal.

Many women expressed a sense that significant progress has been made on women's rights since the end of the conflict. They cited the improvement in the extension of the statute of limitations for reporting rape,²⁵³ compensation for widows,²⁵⁴ lighter taxes for women who register their names on land compared to men,²⁵⁵ the creation of the emergency fund for widows,²⁵⁶ and the mandatory 33 percent of women on Local Peace Committees.²⁵⁷ Many women spoke about the importance of women holding high-level political positions in Nepal. In some cases, specific influential or powerful women leaders are responsible for progress.²⁵⁸ For example, Binda Pandey argued that because she was in favor of citizenship for women, no one dared speak to her against citizenship equality while she was the chair of the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles Committee of the CA.²⁵⁹ Women commissioners in the TRC and CIEDP argued that as women they have a special commitment to protect women's rights and demand protections for women in the commissions' work.²⁶⁰

Many women expressed a sense that significant progress has been made on women's rights since the end of the conflict.

Women's CSOs have simultaneously mobilized at the national and local levels to create pressure, and they have worked to create gender-sensitive policies as well as to ensure women's ability to participate in decision-making. This multi-level approach provides CSOs with the opportunity to support women through legislative changes and allows women to be leaders in their communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Disasters pose serious challenges for building peace in conflict-affected states; likewise, political volatility can inhibit disaster recovery. As shown in this case study of Nepal, women are key to rebuilding states and communities during periods of multi-layered instability. Women's specific vulnerabilities—due to gender-based discrimination and lack of rights—exacerbate the challenges of recovering and rebuilding after conflicts and natural disasters, slowing progress overall. When women cannot access aid or services due to discriminatory policies and social norms, fewer people are assisted and communities remain in need.

However, Nepali women's CSOs had a significant impact in pushing forward an inclusive and comprehensive recovery process in the wake of both a civil conflict and an earthquake. These groups provided direct services to marginalized communities, channeled government attention to those traditionally isolated or disregarded, and invested in long-term recovery through a two-pronged and mutually reinforcing strategy, combining national advocacy and local capacity-building. These actions connected more people to aid and broadened the scope of the challenges addressed by local communities and by the state. In doing so, the work of women's CSOs helped create a stronger recovery that more thoroughly addressed the needs of Nepali communities. A more robust societal recovery helps reduce future instability, and advancing the status of women and enabling their full participation can yield a stronger response to multi-layered instability.

Recommendations

This study examined the work of women's organizations in Nepal in responding to political, economic, and social challenges at the national and local levels in a post-conflict and post-disaster setting. The study uncovered several ways that international donors and partners can better support these groups and provide a more effective and inclusive crisis response.

Partner with organizations with transferable skills

When responding to a crisis, it is important to partner with organizations with experience meeting community needs. These skills may be transferable from pre-crisis work, such as supporting victims of violence or building advocacy networks. In this study, many Nepali women's groups had experience serving conflict-affected populations, but fewer had experience with disaster-affected communities. However, many of these conflict-related skills were crucial for delivering post-disaster aid, such as providing services to women who had experienced sexual or gender-based violence, connecting women to local decision-making bodies, and serving marginalized communities such as Dalits, widows, or people with disabilities. In addition, some of these organizations had pre-existing networks that were able to work at both the national and local levels—key for providing both short-term and long-term assistance.

Diversity matters

The impact of a crisis is directly related to the pre-existing vulnerability of an individual or community. Anticipating the different experiences of vulnerable individuals is crucial when providing aid to marginalized communities. This study found that women's organizations often focused specifically on helping women and other marginalized groups. Supporting organizations that already focus on minorities or groups with limited mobility helps to create a more effective response.

Plan ahead

Nepal has experienced political fragility for decades. Nepal's leaders and society are working to transform the country's legal, political, and social systems, but this process will continue to unfold for years to come. Given that Nepal also frequently experiences natural disasters, it is important for international donors and humanitarian actors to prepare for a response that anticipates a fragile political environment. Aid actors should map countries and communities that are experiencing political fragility and are frequently affected by disasters, and develop adequate preparation plans. These plans should also be tailored to consider groups that may be uniquely affected by a crisis or may experience obstacles in receiving aid.

Opportunities to restructure systems

Crises can provide an opportunity to restructure systems that marginalize or discriminate against women. Given that a lack of property rights for Nepali women affected their ability to recover in the wake of the earthquake, women's groups should seize the long-term recovery process as an opportunity to advocate for greater rights for women. International organizations should note these disparities and support local movements for change following a crisis.

Responders and affected populations

In Nepal following the earthquake, those who were providing relief were often personally affected by the disaster, having lost family members, homes, and stability. International actors should consider their partners' needs and build these services into their response plan.

Frameworks in action

It is critical to bridge the gap between achievements for women in national-level frameworks and services for women in affected communities. Creating inclusive policy frameworks is a key first step, but implementation must also be supported. Funders should analyze where the resources to implement inclusive frameworks break down and support efforts to close the implementation gap.

Humanitarian response is political

In a country recovering from conflict and fundamentally redrawing political, legal, economic, and social systems, humanitarian response is inherently political. Civil society groups are often tied to political parties or specific ideologies, and it is

important to understand the political impacts of financial and material support to different groups across the political spectrum. Humanitarian response lays the foundation for long-term reconstruction, and aid distribution and advocacy related to rebuilding can have far-reaching political effects. Aid actors must work to understand and mitigate the political impact of their efforts.



Earthquake destruction, Pashupatinath Temple

Appendix: Methodology

Appendix A.1: Search Terms and Sourcing Databases for Identifying Participants

The authors developed a set of Boolean terms used in searching media sources and organizations to elicit content that included the names of women's CSOs, women leaders, and women activists to be interviewed. Sources were included if they were dated between 2004 and 2016. The search terms were kept relatively simple in order to navigate the terminology used in media sources most effectively.

The search terms were:

- Nepal + women + peace
- Nepal + women + conflict
- Nepal + women + earthquake
- Nepal + women + disaster
- Nepal + women + politics
- Nepal + women + constitution

The authors developed a list of media sources, both international and Nepali, in which to conduct these Boolean searches. The international list was compiled from multiple sources detailing the top news sources, according to levels of readership and depth of coverage, for international peace and justice studies. The list of local news sources was compiled by corroborating across multiple lists of top news sources by readership.

News sources: *Al Jazeera*, *AP*, *Ekantipur*, *Foreign Policy*, *Guardian*, *Himalayan Times*, *Kathmandu Post*, *Nepali Times*, *New York Times*, *Reuters*.

The authors also compiled a list of international and national organizations that have an extensive knowledge of the field. These organizations were either included in the literature vetting process because of their expertise in this subject area or were included in this list because they appeared during the literature vetting process.

Organizations: Amnesty International, Asia Foundation, Asia Society, Human Rights Watch, UN News Centre, United States Institute of Peace, Wilson Center Asia Program.

Appendix A.2: List of Interviewees

Amod Mani Dixit, Executive Director, National Society for Earthquake Technology – Nepal (NSET)

Bandana Rana, Board of Advisers, Saathi; Member, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee

Bharat Nepali, Executive Director, Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)

Bhubaneswari Parajuli, Gender, Social, and Environment Management Specialist, National Society for Earthquake Technology – Nepal (NSET)

Binda Pandey, General Secretary, General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GE-FONT); Member, First Constituent Assembly of Nepal, Communist Party of Nepal

Binita Shrestha, Member, Bishnu Devi Mahila Saving and Credit

Chandni Joshi, Former South Asia Regional Director of UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

Hisila Yami, Member, Second Constituent Assembly of Nepal, Naya Shakti Party

Jagannath Prasad Kurmi, Chairperson, National Network of Community-Based Disaster Management Committees (NCDMC)

Kalyanee Shah, Women Security Pressure Group

Lily Thapa, Founder, Women for Human Rights

Lumanti Joshi, Program Manager-Housing, Lumanti

Manchala Kumari Jha, Member, Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Medha Sharma, Accountapreneur, Accountability Lab

Meena Acharya, Expert Advisor on Women's Empowerment and Development, Presidential Office of Nepal; Secretary General, Tanka Prasad Acharya Memorial Foundation

Mohammadi Siddiqui, Founder/Chairperson, Fatima Foundation

Narayan Adhikari, South Asia Lead, Accountability Lab

Radha Paudel, Founder/President, Action Works Nepal

Rita Thapa, Founder, Nagarik Aawaz and Tewa

Sadhana Shrestha, Executive Director, Tewa

Sandesh Basnet, Office Secretary and Program Coordinator, National Network of Community-Based Disaster Management Committees

Shubha Kayastha, Member, LOOM

Sujata Singh, Program Coordinator, Violence Against Women Campaign, Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC)

Sunita Shrestha, Chair, Kirtipur Women's Network

Susan Risal, Chief Executive Officer, Nagarik Aawaz

Upasana Rana, Program Manager, Women for Human Rights

Member of Civil Society Organization

Member of Civil Society Organization

Government Official

Government Official

Appendix A.3: Interview Protocol

Rebuilding Nepal: Women's Roles in the Political Transition and Post-Disaster Recovery
Georgetown University

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Introduction – Background and Purpose

A research team from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security is visiting Nepal for a project entitled *Rebuilding Nepal: Women's Roles in the Political Transition and Post-Disaster Recovery*. The Institute is based at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

The goal of our research is to document how women in civil society were able to gain access to the statebuilding and post-earthquake recovery processes. The study will include women in civil society who accessed the peace process through formal or informal channels and who had direct or indirect influence on the constitution, transitional justice mechanisms, rebuilding state institutions, or post-disaster recovery.

You are receiving these materials because you have been invited to participate in this study.

The results of the research will be available to the public.

Study Plan

You are being asked to take part in this study because you were/are a key participant in the political transition or disaster recovery process and/or represent the voice of women in civil society organizations or government. Approximately 25-30 individuals will take part in this study through interviews conducted in Nepal.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will take part in one individual interview. This interview should last around one hour. During the conversation, you will be asked questions about your own role (as well as the role of your organization) in the political transition or disaster recovery. Your answers should focus solely on your role and your organization's role in the political transition and post-disaster recovery during the period of 2006-2016.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for the purposes of accuracy. After the research process is complete, the recordings will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may stop participating at any time. However, if you decide to stop participating, we encourage you to talk to a researcher first.

Risks and Benefits

There are no risks or direct benefits to participating in this study.

Anonymity

We would like to include your name or other identifiable information in the publication that results from this research project. Where appropriate, we would like to use your name with regard to the information you provide in this interview. However, you have the option to not have your name used for any information you provide today when the data from this study are published; if this is the case, please indicate so on the last page of this form.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to keep any information collected about you confidential. However, it is impossible to guarantee absolute confidentiality.

In order to keep information about you safe, study data will be kept in a password-protected file on the researchers' personal computer, which only the researchers can access. Audio recordings, digital and paper copies of interview transcripts and notes will be kept during the research study period. We will code all of this information using a participant identification number to further protect your identity and keep the contributions you make today confidential.

Following the conclusion of the research study, audio recordings, digital transcripts, and paper notes of the interview will be destroyed.

Your Rights As A Research Participant

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary at all times. You can choose not to participate at all or to leave the study at any point. If you decide not to participate or to leave the study, there will be no effect on your relationship with the researchers or any other negative consequences.

If you decide that you no longer want to take part in the interview, you are encouraged to inform the researcher of your decision. The information already obtained through your participation will be included in the data analysis and final report for this study.

Questions or concerns?

If you have questions about the study, you may contact:
Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
Phone: +1-202-525-1980
Email: giwps@georgetown.edu

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have fully explained this study to the participant. I have discussed the study's

purpose and procedures, the possible risks and benefits, and that participation is completely voluntary.

I have invited the participant to ask questions and I have given complete answers to all of the participant's questions.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Consent of Participant

I volunteer to participate in a research project entitled *Rebuilding Nepal: Women's Roles in the Political Transition and Post-Disaster Recovery* conducted by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS). I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the role of civil society organizations and government in the political transition and disaster recovery in Nepal.

I understand all of the information in this Informed Consent Form.

I have gotten complete answers for all of my questions.

I freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that, if I feel uncomfortable at any time, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

I understand that my participation in this study will be kept confidential unless explicit written or oral consent is obtained from the study team. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview without my explicit written or oral permission. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, I understand that my information and involvement will remain confidential.

I understand that I will be audio recorded as a part of this study, and the recording will be subsequently transcribed by the research team as a part of this study.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgetown University for Studies Involving Human Subjects.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me and I have been given a copy of this consent form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, free of coercion.

Please indicate whether you agree to be audio recorded as a part of this study.

YES *(If you change your mind about this at any point, please let the researcher know)*

NO

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Once you sign this form, you will receive a copy of it to keep, and the researcher will keep another copy in your research record.

Please indicate whether you agree to have your full name as well as your organization's name used alongside your comments in the final publication that results from this research.

YES *(If you change your mind about this at any point, please let the researcher know)*

NO

ALTERATION

Name or pseudonym to be used: _____

(e.g. first name only, initials only, random pseudonym, only work position/title, only institutional affiliation etc.)

For further information, please contact: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (+1-202-525-1980 or giwps@georgetown.edu)

Appendix A.4: Interview Questionnaire

Political Transition

- How did you become involved in the political transition process since 2006 with/through [institution name]?
- What has your role been during the political transition process since 2006 with/through [institution name]? What are your priorities?
- What impact do you think you have had on the political transition process since 2006?
- What role have women played in the political transition process? Has this role changed? How?
- What are the challenges that women face when engaging in the political transition process?
- What impact do you think women have had in the political transition process?
- What are the obstacles that the Nepali government is facing for a successful political transition?
- Have you met with government officials/have you tried to influence the transition process?
- Given the process of political transition over the past several years, how has the government responded to the 2015 earthquake?
- What has been the impact of the 2015 earthquake and recovery process on the state?

Disaster Recovery

- How did you become involved in disaster recovery after the 2015 earthquake?
- What has your role been during the disaster recovery process? What are your priorities?
- What were the challenges immediately following the earthquake? What are the current challenges in the disaster recovery process? Are there challenges that are specific to women?
- What impact do you think you have had on the outcomes of the disaster recovery process?
- Have you met with government officials/have you tried to influence the disaster recovery process?
- What impact do you think you have had on the post-disaster recovery process?
- What role have women played in the post-disaster recovery process?
- What are the lessons learned from the earthquake and recovery process so far?
- Given the recent changes in the government, how has it been able to respond to the 2015 earthquake?
- What has been the impact of the 2015 earthquake and recovery process on the state?

Additional

- What is your hope for post-conflict Nepal?
- What is your hope for post-disaster Nepal?

Appendix A.5: Coding and Thematic Analysis

The authors used a set of research questions to frame the contours of the study.

They are as follows:

- How have women been involved in Nepal's political transition since 2006?
- How have women contributed to the management of and recovery after natural disasters since 2006?
- Where is the overlap in these activities or types of involvement?

These three questions guided the data collection and analysis processes. To collect the data, the authors used these questions to create the interview questionnaire and to conduct the semi-structured interviews. In making sense of the data, the authors used these questions to distill codes grounded in the data collected and to arrive at themes that emerged from the data.

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