

The Roles of Local Governments in Disaster Management and Earthquake Reconstruction

April 2019



The Roles of Local Governments in Disaster Management and Earthquake Reconstruction

April 2019

Prepared by



With support from



The Asia Foundation

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Acronyms	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Objectives of the research	1
1.2. Research locations and methodology	1
2. Background.....	3
2.1. Roles of local stakeholders during the earthquake emergency response	3
2.2. Roles of local stakeholders in the reconstruction process.....	4
2.3. Roles of local governments in disaster management	5
3. Findings	7
3.1. Roles of local governments in the reconstruction process in early 2019	7
3.2. Roles of local governments in disaster management in early 2019	13
4. Conclusions and recommendations	18

Acknowledgements

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) would like to thank all the 82 respondents interviewed for this study in Chitwan, Dolakha, Kavre, Makwanpur and Sindhupalchowk. This report would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of elected representatives, local level government officials, political representatives, NRA officials, representatives of different organizations, journalists, and earthquake survivors.

This study was directed by Anubhav Ajeet and led by Nayan Pokhrel. Bhaskar Gautam, Chiran Manandhar, Lena Michaels and Nayan Pokhrel authored the report. DRCN extends its special thanks to the field researchers: Chiran Manandhar, Shekhar Parajulee, Smriti Rai, Anubhav Ajeet and Bhaskar Gautam. Mamta Acharya and Venisha Udas provided financial and administrative support throughout this study.

The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) provided financial and technical support for this study. We thank Meghan Nalbo, Binayak Basnyat and Lena Michaels for valuable guidance and suggestions throughout. All findings and analysis in this report are based on DRCN's observation and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CDO	Chief District Officer
DMC	Disaster Management Committee
DMP	Disaster Management Plan
DLPIU	District Level Project Implementation Unit
DRCN	Democracy Resource Center Nepal
DRRM	Disaster Risk Reduction Management
ENPHO	Environment and Public Health Organization
GMALI	Grant Management and Local Infrastructure
GoN	Government of Nepal
IRM	Independent Earthquake Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Project
LGA	Local Government Operation Act
MoFAGA	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NASC	Nepal Administrative Staff College
NRA	Nepal Reconstruction Authority
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
RHRP	Rural Housing Reconstruction Programme
VDC	Village Development Committees

1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives of the research

In March 2019, Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN), supported by The Asia Foundation, conducted field-level scoping research on the roles of local governments in reconstruction and disaster management. The objective was to document the perspectives, experiences, and needs of local governments to highlight challenges and opportunities and ultimately, contribute to improved disaster preparedness and future responses at the local level.

In early 2019, the Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) handed over several reconstruction related responsibilities to local governments in areas affected by the 2015 earthquake. Local governments also have constitutional authority, under the new federal structure, to design their own disaster management laws and policies and implement them.¹ In this context, it is important to better understand the capacity, resources, interests and needs of local governments to effectively engage with reconstruction and disaster risk management.

This report presents the following:

- Background information on the roles of local leaders, local government officials and later, local government representatives, in the earthquake emergency response and reconstruction (Sections 2.1. and 2.2.).
- Background information on the roles of local governments in disaster management (Section 2.3.).
- Main findings I: Local governments' engagement in reconstruction (Section 3).
- Main findings II: Local governments' engagement in disaster management (Section 4).
- Conclusion and recommendations to improve disaster planning and responses at the local level and strengthen the role and capacity of local governments.

1.2. Research locations and methodology

This report is based on DRCN's field observation in five districts – Kavre, Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha, Mankwanpur and Chitwan – between 12-21 March 2019. DRCN researchers visited 12 local units in these districts (five municipalities and nine rural municipalities). Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha are among the seven most affected districts, categorized as 'severely hit' in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA). Kavre and Makwanpur were included in the second impact category as 'crisis hit'. Chitwan was the least affected of the five districts visited, categorized in the third impact category as 'hit with heavy losses'.²

¹ 'Disaster Management' is listed under both the exclusive jurisdiction of the local governments under Schedule 8, and the shared jurisdiction of local, provincial and federal governments under Schedule 9 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015.

² The PDNA lists 31 earthquake-affected districts in six impact categories. Impact was determined according to damages to property and loss of human lives aggregated at the district level. Of the 31 affected districts, 14 were determined 'priority districts'. Of the five districts visited, four are priority districts while one district (Chitwan) is not. (PDNA Volume B: https://www.npc.gov.np/images/category/PDNA_volume_BFinalVersion.pdf)

Table 1: List of local units visited

S.N.	Name of Local Unit	District
1.	Bharatpur Metropolitan City	Chitwan
2.	Ichhakamana Rural Municipality	Chitwan
3.	Bimeshwar Municipality	Dolakha
4.	Kalinchok Rural Municipality	Dolakha
5.	Melung Rural Municipality	Dolakha
6.	Tamakoshi Rural Municipality	Dolakha
7.	Panauti Municipality	Kavre
8.	Bhimfedi Rural Municipality	Makwanpur
9.	Hetauda Sub-Metropolitan City	Makwanpur
10.	Thaha Municipality	Makwanpur
11.	Chautara-Sangachokgadhi Municipality	Sindhupalchowk
12.	Lisankhu-Pakhar Rural Municipality	Sindhupalchowk

DRCN conducted in-depth interviews with elected local representatives, including mayors and chairpersons of local units, ward chairs, Chief Administrative Officers (CAO), officials from the NRA and the Grant Management and Local Infrastructure (GMALI), NRA technicians, political representatives, journalists, members of different civil society organizations, and earthquake-affected citizens. Through the course of this observation, DRCN interacted with a total of 82 respondents in the five districts visited.³ The findings in the report are also bolstered by DRCN's larger nationwide research on functioning of local and provincial governments.⁴

³ Of the 82 people interviewed, 18 were local government elected representatives, 9 local level government employees, 25 NRA or district level officials, 9 members of civil society or journalists, 3 political party representatives, and 18 citizens/earthquake survivors.

⁴ DRCN has been observing the functioning of local and provincial governments through its provincial-level field research since January 2018. Reports are available at: <http://democracyresource.org/observation-of-local-and-provincial-governments/>

2. Background

2.1. Roles of local stakeholders during the earthquake emergency response

When a major earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015, killing nearly 9000 people, injuring around 22,000, and damaging or destroying over half a million homes and buildings, Nepal's post-war political transition was ongoing. In early 2015, the country's constitution was not finalized and there had not been any local elections in nearly 20 years. Nepal's earthquake response was largely centralized with local government offices playing coordinating roles as per provisions for the coordination and distribution of relief at the sub-national level.⁵ Reconstruction too, was managed centrally by the newly established Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) from December 2015.

Despite the absence of elected local representatives and local bodies at the time of the 2015 earthquake, Village Development Committees (VDCs), local leaders, and local political party representatives often played important roles during the early response. Previous DRCN research conducted between June 2015 and April 2017 as part of the Independent Earthquake Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Project (IRM) revealed the following on the roles and capacities of local actors:⁶

- Local government officials, leaders, party representatives, and informal local bodies, such as the All Party Mechanism (APM), were actively involved in VDC-level relief distribution committees and helped coordinate and distribute incoming aid, and address conflicts. While there were some examples of politicization of aid, the research found more examples of positive roles played by local actors: They were often instrumental in documenting damages, identifying those most in need, and bringing aid to places that had received less, or less timely attention, from the central government and outside donors. In particular, they were seen to organize distribution to remote wards in the VDC where people were facing difficulties accessing relief from more central distribution points.⁷
- Local actors often faced logistical and financial challenges transporting relief. Due to insufficient financial resources for the distribution of aid received at central VDC offices, some VDC officials decided to redirect other funds, in order to pay for transportation to more remote wards.⁸

⁵ The institution of the District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) was established in the Natural Calamities (Relief) Act 1982. The Local Governance Act 1999 encourages district and VDC authorities to assume primary responsibility for relief after natural disasters, without specifying working modalities.

⁶ The Asia Foundation's Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring project (IRM) published a series of reports titled *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal*, based on four phases of research. The IRM project was funded by UKAid/DFID and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). All IRM reports are available at: <http://asiafoundation.org/tag/independent-impacts-and-recovery-monitoring-nepal/>.

⁷ The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal (2015). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 1 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (June 2015)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation (pp. 33-34)

Can be accessed at: <http://asiafoundation.org/tag/independent-impacts-and-recovery-monitoring-nepal/>.

⁸ Ibid. (p. 34)

- In areas where district or VDC-level government officials were absent when the earthquake struck, coordination of the response was more problematic, often causing heightened tensions compared to areas where officials were present.⁹
- Coordination of the response and information-sharing between central, district and VDC levels was problematic, primarily due to a lack of clarity on roles, overlapping responsibilities, and unsystematic lines of communication.¹⁰
- Local residents largely assessed the roles of local leaders positively. They considered them to be more accessible and more likely to listen to, and act on, their concerns and needs. Given their continuing presence in the locality and the threat of repercussions should they fail to deliver, local leaders were seen to be more accountable. Indeed, most local leaders in highly affected areas were found to be actively involved in the emergency response, competing over who can facilitate aid distribution more effectively, and lobbying on behalf of affected communities.¹¹

Despite positive initiatives of local stakeholders, there was widespread agreement that the district and local levels were not adequately prepared for the disaster.¹² Many local officials and leaders said they had to fall back on a ‘learning by doing’ approach due to insufficient disaster regulations, resources, and coordination challenges. This approach worked better in some places than others, largely due to pre-existing local political dynamics, and the individual engagement and authority of local government officials at district and VDC levels.¹³

Further, local governance units did not have adequate data, nor the skills to collect and manage new data, at the time of the earthquake. A Martin Chautari publication on the early relief phase point out that initial failures of the response were due to poor preparation as much as lack of available data that could have been used by responders.¹⁴

2.2. Roles of local stakeholders in the reconstruction process

Previous DRCN research shows that local leaders, political parties and local government officials were increasingly sidelined after the emergency response, much to their dissatisfaction.¹⁵ The Government of Nepal’s (GoN) Rural Housing Reconstruction Programme (RHRP) and other forms of reconstruction support have been centrally managed

⁹ Ibid. (pp. 40-41)

¹⁰ Ibid. (pp.35-45). Coordination and information-sharing remained weak during the first two years of the response. See also subsequent IRM qualitative reports, Phases 2, 3 and 4, accessible at: <http://asiafoundation.org/tag/independent-impacts-and-recovery-monitoring-nepal/>

¹¹ Ibid. (p. 46)

¹² Ibid. (pp. 39-40)

¹³ Ibid. (pp.35- 48)

¹⁴ Yogesh Raj and Bhaskar Gautam. 2015. *Courage in Chaos: Early Rescue and Relief after the April Earthquake*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari. <http://www.martinchautari.org.np/index.php/for-more-chautari-books/617-courage-in-chaos-early-rescue-and-relief-after-the-april-earthquake>.

¹⁵ The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal (2017). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal: Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Nepal Phase 3 – Qualitative Field Monitoring (September 2016)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.

See also, The Asia Foundation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal (2016). *Nepal Government Distribution of Earthquake Reconstruction Cash Grants for Private Houses (July 2016)*. Kathmandu and Bangkok: The Asia Foundation

by the NRA.¹⁶ The role of local government offices, and later elected local bodies, was reduced to registering grievances and complaints filed by earthquake-affected households that had been left out of beneficiary lists identifying those eligible for cash grants under the RHRP.¹⁷

Other research too, highlights the shortcoming of a centralized approach to reconstruction which fails to adequately identify evolving local needs. Nepal Administrative Staff College's (NASC) political economy analysis of reconstruction, states that local elections gave hope to earthquake-affected people that local representatives could help address their concerns and needs. Yet, the ongoing 'power struggle' between the central and local level "has hindered the recognition of the role of local governments in the reconstruction process", limiting them to processing grievances, and preventing them from delivering on their commitments to expedite the reconstruction process. The NASC report further points to the limited institutional capacities of local governments, identifying capacity building and the strengthening of institutional memory and communication as key needs.¹⁸

More recently, new space may have opened up for local governments to become more involved in the reconstruction process. Between November 2018 and February 2019, the NRA handed several reconstruction responsibilities over to local governments in earthquake-affected areas through the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). According to the MoUs, the NRA is to continue to assign and manage employees such as technical officers, manage major facilities and infrastructures for reconstruction, allocate and issue money, and more importantly, address the grievances and manage and distribute the cash grants through District Level Project Implementation Units (DL PIU) and GMALI.¹⁹ Local governments' roles, on the other hand, include preparing and implementing reconstruction action plans, coordinating and overseeing the employees assigned by the NRA, and updating and sharing data on the housing cash grant distribution and its beneficiaries.²⁰

2.3. Roles of local governments in disaster management

¹⁶ The RHRP provides cash grants of NPR 300,000 (USD 3000) to those identified as beneficiaries and rebuilding according to guidelines for earthquake-resilient construction. The process of assessing damages, enlisting beneficiaries, signing beneficiary agreements, and distributing the grant in three tranches (dependent on progress made in reconstruction and adherence to building codes) was implemented largely without involvement of local leaders and later local elected representatives.

¹⁷ The government introduced a grievance process for those wrongly left out of beneficiary lists but this process has been slow and many grievances remain unresolved to date (see The Asia Foundation and DRCN's IRM Qualitative Field Monitoring reports Phases 3 and 4: <http://asiafoundation.org/tag/independent-impacts-and-recovery-monitoring-nepal/>). Lately, however, there has been a push to resolve remaining grievances and another round of damage assessment was conducted for this purpose. Those without official documentation, landless people in particular, have faced obstacles accessing government support.

¹⁸ Pokharel, T., Manandhar, MD., Dahal, A., Chalise, B., Bhandari, R., & Kharel, TP. (2018). *Political Analysis of Post-Earthquake Reconstruction in Nepal: An Assessment of Emerging Role of Local Governments*. Kathmandu: Nepal Administrative Staff College and The Asia Foundation.

¹⁹ GMALI is a district-level unit of the NRA which is tasked with management and distribution of reconstruction cash grants.

²⁰ See for example: 'Local levels in Nuwakot given reconstruction authority'. Rising Nepal, January 1, 2019. <http://therisingnepal.org.np/news/27950>

The federalization process provides opportunities to clarify and strengthen the roles of local bodies in disaster responses. Local governments have been tasked with drafting their own disaster response plans and laws. Based on Schedule 8 of the Constitution, which lists disaster management as an exclusive jurisdiction of local governments, Section 11(2) of the Local Government Operation Act (LGA) lists disaster management-related functions of the local governments. Under these functions, there are twelve specific authorities including making plans and policies for disaster preparedness, mobilizing municipal police for rescue and relief, mapping of risk areas and relocation, coordination with provincial and federal governments and non-governmental organizations, and data management and research among others.

The jurisdictions of different layers of government involved in disaster reduction and response, however, are yet to be clearly defined. In particular, the sharing of information and responsibilities between the provincial and local levels has not been defined in detail; there is no standard communication protocol between the chairs of federal, provincial and local government committees and CDOs. This may negatively affect coordination for disaster preparedness, management and response, according to a recent Oxford Policy Management (OPM) report. The report further highlights that local representatives are dissatisfied with the “centralized leadership” of the federal government and contested authorities between federal, provincial and local governments.²¹

Besides unclear divisions of responsibilities there are other challenges. Local governments also lack awareness, resources and technical and institutional capacity to effectively take up disaster management responsibilities (Section 3.2).

²¹ Manandhar, MD., Marker, P., et al. (2019), *Political Economy Analysis of Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM)*. Kathmandu: Oxford Policy Management – Policy and Institutions Facility

3. Findings

3.1. Roles of local governments in the reconstruction process in early 2019

“Our hands are tied. We don’t have any real power. We have seen a house damaged by the earthquake but we have not been able to enlist the house owner in the beneficiary list.” – Ward Chair in Thaha Municipality, Makwanpur.

The presence of local governments reportedly facilitated several aspects of the reconstruction process for earthquake-affected people.

Respondents across the earthquake-affected local units visited agreed that access to technical support and the cash grant had become easier after the arrival of local governments. In earthquake-

affected local units, technical officers were appointed as focal persons for reconstruction in local units, while at least one technician was deployed in each ward.

With technical officials present at the ward level, processes such as the approval of building standards required for receiving successive tranches of the cash grants had become faster. The grievance filing process, in particular, had become easier. Previously, people had to go the district headquarter to register their grievances regarding the assessments and beneficiary list for the housing grant. Now grievances can be registered at the ward-level of the new local units.

The presence of technical officers and ward representatives also improved access to information on reconstruction and related processes according to housing grant beneficiaries. The technical officers were observed to work as important channels of communication between citizens, local governments and other organizations involved in reconstruction.

Some municipalities decided to provide additional support to vulnerable earthquake-affected households in the area. Across local units, the displaced and landless are considered most vulnerable.

For example, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha provided funds to support landless people affected by the earthquake. The municipality had allocated NPR 15 million for programs related to social services and promoting inclusion for the current fiscal year. Of this amount, the municipality allocated NPR 1 million to buy land for landless earthquake-affected households. The municipality collected applications from landless households through ward offices and, after validating their applications, will buy them land worth up to NPR 15,000. The Chairperson stated that additional funds would be provided from other unspent headings if required to further support the selected beneficiaries. Yet, most local governments complained that their funds for reconstruction were insufficient (see below and Case Study 2).

In several other local units visited, local representatives and communities also pointed to the landless and displaced as being most vulnerable, but unlike in Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, other local governments seem to be waiting for the central level decisions on, and support for, the landless and vulnerable cases. For example, in Bhimfedi Rural Municipality of

Makwanpur, local representatives pointed to the around 100 earthquake-affected landless households in one of the wards who have not yet received any cash support as they do not want to resettle in another place.²²

In Icchakamana Rural Municipality in Chitwan, the Chairperson considered around 200 households residing on *Ailani* land (land that is not privately owned) to be vulnerable as they have not been able to sign housing reconstruction cash grant agreements due to lack of land ownership certificates. In the same rural municipality, 127 households were displaced by the earthquake and temporarily resettled in a community forest where they lack basic services such as drinking water and proper sanitation, according to a DLPIU official. Another 102 households in Icchakamana were identified as living on unsafe land and in need of permanent resettlement. Reportedly, 56 families had already been resettled while the process was ongoing for the others.²³

According to the Chair of District Coordination Committee (DCC), managing resettlement of communities on geologically unsafe land has been a major challenge. He also pointed out that there are many other locations in the northern areas of Chitwan which also face significant landslide and land fissure risks. The marginalized Chepang community lives in these remote northern hilly areas of Chitwan district. They were identified as particularly vulnerable by local representatives and government officials. Yet, according to several respondents, they have not received adequate support in the years following the earthquake. “Some villages in Chitwan, where Chepangs live, were badly hit by the earthquake but Chitwan district did not receive national attention. All the resources went towards districts such as Dhading and Gorkha,” said a journalist in Chitwan.

Generally, local governments did not see reconstruction as a priority and did not take ownership of the reconstruction process.

As outlined in Section 3.2, local governments were more focused on infrastructure development than disaster management or reconstruction – even in earthquake-affected areas where residents continued to face hurdles in their path to housing and economic recovery, such as inadequate housing and debts (see Case Studies 1 and 3). There are various factors which may explain why local governments did not take ownership of the reconstruction process, as discussed in this section: 1) Their authority over, and budgets for, reconstruction have been very limited; 2) They have other pressing responsibilities and their capacity and resources are already stretched.

²² The government provides cash support for resettlement and rebuilding to those rendered landless by the earthquake.

²³ Icchakamana Rural Municipality is one of the focus areas of the DFID-funded Durable Solutions program that supports the NRA by facilitating the implementation of the resettlement program. Awareness and progress of resettlement may therefore be greater in this local unit than elsewhere.
<http://www.durablesolutionsnepal.org/about/>

**Case study 1: “We built an ‘earthquake house’, not a house we would like to live in.”
– New houses do not meet earthquake survivors’ needs**

In Sindhupalchok and Dolakha, there is awareness among survivors of the earthquake that the new houses must be strong to withstand potential future disasters. According to technical experts, around 90 percent of the houses rebuilt after the earthquake meet official building standards. “I will give up my cherished [gold] jewelry to ensure that the new house is strong,” said Laxmi of Kalinchok Rural Municipality in Dolakha.

Yet, many feel that the newly built houses do not address the needs of survivors. Despite taking loans to add to the cash grants, most built only one- or two-room ‘earthquake houses’ houses, following NRA-approved building models. Further, families previously living jointly have split and moved into separate houses – increasing the total number of houses in the settlement. Temporary wood, bamboo and tin shelters continue to be used as either kitchen or storage space. As a result, unique local building designs have been lost and new houses form narrow and dense settlement clusters.

A survivor said: “We built an ‘earthquake house’, not a house we would like to live in.” Some of those who built single-room houses did so simply to receive the cash grant. Many continue to use their old houses. For example, a woman in Chautara Sangachokgadhi Municipality in Sindhupalchok continued to live in her partially damaged concrete house after minor repairs. Yet, her house was listed as ‘fully damaged’ and she qualified for the housing cash grant. She added NPR 50,000 of her personal savings to the cash grant and built a two-room house which she turned into a cattle shed. According to a reconstruction technician in the ward, around 30 to 35 new houses are not used for living.

A journalist in Dolakha also observed that with the housing grant, people built ‘strong storage spaces’ rather than houses to live in. People have already used a lot of arable land for the construction of shelters and ‘earthquake houses’, but many say they are yet to build ‘the house they would like to live in’.

Local governments visited in earthquake-affected district had signed MoUs with the NRA, but were dissatisfied with the division of reconstruction responsibilities, in particular grievance resolution.

There were no specific instructions from the federal government to local governments on matters of reconstruction. The focal person on disaster management in Chautara Sangachowkgadi Municipality said that they only received instructions to commemorate the earthquake on its anniversary day. However, as mentioned in Section 2.1., the NRA has recently signed MoUs with local governments giving them specific responsibilities on reconstruction. In earthquake-affected local units visited for this research, local governments had signed MoUs, in the form of eleven to fifteen-point agreements, with the NRA (between November 2018 and February 2019). The local governments were dissatisfied with these MoUs. They highlighted that the NRA had only devolved limited administrative and coordination-related responsibilities, without giving actual decision-making authorities on managing cash grants, addressing grievances, and other reconstruction related matters.

Local governments were particularly dissatisfied with their limited authority to resolve grievances, fearing they would be held responsible even though they do not have the authority to decide on grievance cases. They pointed out that the final round of grievances collection and the signing of MoUs happened at the same time.²⁴ This, reportedly gave people a false impression that the local governments had the authorities to decide over the beneficiary lists for the housing cash grant, putting pressure on local governments. For example, a Ward Chair of Bhimeshwar Municipality in Dolakha, expressed concerns that if the 150 households in the ward that had filed grievances are not included in the list, the ward-level representatives would be blamed of politicizing the process. “Our hands are tied. We don’t have any real power. We have seen a house damaged by earthquake but we have not been able to enlist the house owner in the beneficiary list,” said a Ward Chair in Thaha Municipality, Makwanpur.

All local government representatives interviewed thought that they should have the authority to address grievances. They saw themselves at the forefront of the grievance process, facilitating registration and follow-up of cases, without the powers to act. Beyond the issue of grievances, however, local governments did not show much interest in taking on a bigger role in the reconstruction process.

Local governments lacked a clear plan and the capacity to carry out, inform, and document reconstruction efforts.

As observed by DRCN and echoed by local stakeholders such as a coordinator for the Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (HRRP), local governments have not been able to take ownership of post-earthquake reconstruction and assume a leadership role. In none of the local units visited, were they found to be systematically and clearly identifying reconstruction needs and priorities. The NRA’s GMALI had recently asked the local governments to provide a detailed plan of action and information on the status of reconstruction, but according to GMALI officials in Sindhupalchok and Dolakha many local units could not provide the details on time.

Local governments lacked the capacity to compile consistent information on the status of reconstruction. The head of District Level Program Implementation Unit (DLPIU) in Makwanpur questioned the capacity of local governments to collect and maintain important reconstruction-related data: “They [local governments] cannot even provide the statistics asked for by the NRA,” he argued. According to the NRA focal person/technical officer in Lisankhu-Pakhar Rural Municipality in Sindhupalchowk, the technicians and representatives of local governments did not collect or compile any data and information on reconstruction other than the number of newly constructed houses.

²⁴ While conducting field work for this study, the last round of survey was being carried out by the government. It was collecting the last grievances and complaints, with an aim to identify and include earthquake survivors still left out. By 28 April 2019, 237,085 grievances had been registered out of which 205,584 were addressed. Latest updates from NRA website: <http://www.nra.gov.np/np> (accessed on 10 May 2019). As a result of the grievance process, the total number of housing grant beneficiaries has been increasing. Currently, there are 825,633 enlisted beneficiaries (<http://www.nra.gov.np/np>, accessed on 13 May 2019).

Case Study 2: “We would have to spend our entire annual budget” – Local governments on financing the reconstruction of monasteries in Sindhupalchowk

In Sindhupalchowk differences between local governments and the NRA emerged around the reconstruction of earthquake-damaged Buddhist monasteries. Local governments have expressed their dissatisfaction with the recent NRA provision, according to which the NRA should oversee the reconstruction of monasteries which were either older than one hundred years or whose reconstruction cost is more than NPR 10 million, while the local governments undertake the reconstruction of monasteries that are worth less than NPR 10 million. Sindhupalchowk has numerous monasteries, with the former Gumba VDC alone recording more than 30 monasteries that need to be rebuilt. According to NRA rules, the majority of these monasteries would have to be reconstructed by the local government. “If we were to reconstruct all these [monasteries], we would have to spend our entire annual budget [for reconstruction of monasteries],” one local representative complained.

Following the MoUs between local governments and the NRA, confusions or tensions between began to surface with regards to decision-making authorities. Local representatives have been particularly vocal about their demand to decide on grievances filed by affected households who were excluded from the beneficiary lists. However, the local governments’ limited budget for reconstruction work was also an issue of concern for local representatives and affected communities.

Coordination and communication between the NRA, local governments and other local stakeholders remained confusing and inconsistent according to local stakeholders.

While communication with affected people was said to have improved due to the presence of technical staff and ward representatives at the local level (see above), there were still gaps in the flow of information and communication between NRA, GMALI, and local governments in districts affected by the earthquake. The NRA held orientations in some districts. In Sindhupalchowk, the NRA gave two rounds of orientation trainings to the representatives of local governments on the contents of the laws passed by NRA on different aspects of reconstruction. Yet, district level officials and some of the technical staff in the local units admitted they were unaware of the details of and changes to reconstruction processes such as the addressing of grievances and provisions of interest-free and soft loans.

Local government representatives complained that the frequent changes to reconstruction guidelines and directives were not communicated to them on time. “Earlier, the directive said individuals could rebuild their houses anywhere within the district [Makwanpur], but later they said houses must be built in the same location only. Such conflicting provisions created a lot of confusion for us,” a Ward Chair in Bhimphedi Rural Municipality in Makwanpur said.

Similar concerns were expressed by a technical officer in Kavre district, who is also the focal reconstruction person: “The NRA changes provisions almost every month and even the technical officers are not informed about such changes on time. Initially, the NRA did not allow people to rebuild houses outside of their district, but a later provision allowed individuals to

rebuild in other districts as well. The provision was then changed again and again saying that houses could only be built within the district,” he said.

While confusions remain, local stakeholders reportedly communicate the information they have understood effectively. The NRA and GMALI use local FM Radio, Facebook, Viber, and Group Mails to communicate important instructions and information on reconstruction. Of these, FM radio is considered to be most effective by local representatives, technical officers and communities. A DLPIU technical officer in Chitwan said that they had also set up a hotline for registering grievances on housing grants, and pamphlets were distributed across the district to inform people about the hotline. Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality in the same district carried out a public hearing program on issues of reconstruction.

Case study 3: “We are still waiting for subsidized loans” – Reconstruction puts survivors into debt

In many severely earthquake-affected villages, borrowing from local saving cooperatives increased for reconstruction. Savings in commercial banks in districts like Dolakha and Sindhupalchok were also reported to have declined. In earthquake-hit local units, it is difficult to find households who have not borrowed at high interest rates to meet needs.

Chini Maiya in Chautara Sangagchokgadhi Municipality in Sindhupalchowk said she borrowed NPR 600,000 from three local cooperatives and another NPR 200,000 from local moneylenders under the exploitative *theki* provision (10% is initially deducted from the total sum by the lender, but an annual interest rate of 36% is charged on the total sum). “I need to build a strong house to survive [disasters], but a good, strong house costs fortunes. I am in huge debt,” she said.

There are multiple branches of NMB microfinance in Chini Maiya’s ward. A person who has borrowed NPR 700,000 from it has to pay a monthly installment of NPR 19,000 for five years. Because of such high interest rates, survivors hope for interest-free loans provided by the government. “My life would be so much easier if I got a subsidized loan from the government,” Chini Maiya stated, “We are still waiting for subsidized loans.”

3.2. Roles of local governments in disaster management in early 2019

“Only organizations such as the Red Cross and the CDO office would come to mind when thinking about disasters, but now we realize that we also have major responsibilities too.”
– Ward Chair, Dolakha

Even though local governments were increasingly aware of the importance of disaster preparedness and management, it was not a priority for them.

Local governments were becoming more aware that disaster management was an important responsibility given to them in Nepal’s new federal structure. “Only organizations such as the Red Cross would come to mind when thinking about disasters, but now we realize that we [the local governments] have major responsibilities too,” a Ward Chair in Bhimeshwar Municipality Dolakha said to DRCN. Respondents said that the scope of disaster was now understood to include not only floods and landslides but also fire, lightening, earthquakes and even non-natural disasters such as road accidents.

Yet, there were no clear plans on disaster preparedness and the attitude was to respond only in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. “Local representatives have a mind-set of responding only in the aftermath of the disaster; there is no interest or investment regarding mitigation and preparedness,” said the focal person for the disaster management unit in Chautara Sangachokgadhi Rural Municipality in Sindhupalchok. For example, some local governments prioritized the purchase of fire engines and ambulances over other measures.

Representatives of all the local governments visited conceded that disaster management had not received adequate priority in their planning and decision-making in the current fiscal year. “Our priorities continue to be dominated by infrastructure and road construction, we hardly have any time to think about future disasters,” the Mayor of Thaha Municipality in Makwanpur said.

Local Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) were mostly inactive.

In all the local units visited, a municipal level committee on disaster management had been formed, while ward-level committees had not been constituted in several of the local units visited. Both of these committees did not meet regularly and were mostly inactive. Representatives of the committees said that their roles would be limited to distributing relief after any major disaster.

At the ward-level, disaster emergency kits had been purchased and stored in ward offices. These included tarpaulin, buckets, shovels, buckets and ropes among others. But there was no clear guideline or assessment of local needs for such purchases and they were done arbitrarily.

Laws on disaster management were drafted based on the model sent by the federal government. In severely earthquake-affected local units, I/NGOs helped local governments to prepare disaster management plans. The laws and plans have not been implemented.

The 'Act Relating to Minimize and Manage Disaster Risk' had been passed in 5 of the 8 local units visited in Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Kavre, Makwanpur and Chitwan districts. These acts were based on the model law sent by MoFAGA, copied without any major adjustments. These acts define various aspects of disasters, and outline processes of disaster management including coordination with security forces and provincial and federal governments during disaster responses. Additionally, the acts define the roles of civil society and non-governmental organizations for the collection of statistics, assessment of damages, relief, recovery and reconstruction assistance, and orientation and trainings on disaster management. The Chairperson of Bhimphedi Rural Municipality pointed out that their Act included provisions to deal with the impacts of lightening. "Makwanpur is among the top five most lightening affected districts in the country with an average of 12 people dying each year, so we wanted to prioritize dealing with its impacts," he said.

In severely earthquake-affected local units like Chautara Sangachokgadhi Municipality in Sindhupalchok, Panauti Municipality in Kavre and Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha, the Disaster Management Plan was prepared with the financial and technical assistance of I/NGOs. Panauti Municipality in Kavre prepared a 'Local Disaster Risk Management Plan 2074' taking financial support from EU Humanitarian Aid, the Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO), and Practical Action. This plan appeared comparatively comprehensive. It identified risks, listed available resources and access to them, analyzed overall reach and possible impacts in every ward. What was lacking is clarity on the scale of emergencies the municipality can deal with and what kind of capacity and assistance it needs during the different stages of managing and responding to a disaster.

In Sindhupalchowk, Chautara Municipality recently completed a 'Local Disaster and Climate Resilience Plan 2075'. The plan was prepared with the financial and technical support from World Vision International Nepal and Community Development and the Environment Conservation Forum (CDECF). In Lisankhu Pakhar Rural Municipality in the same district, Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LIBIRD) and CDECF helped to prepare the plan. Responding to local risks in the region, the plan has identified ten types of disasters, including landslides, fire, earthquake, insect-inflicted crops destruction, alcohol-inflicted disaster etc. These plans, however, are not yet implemented.

In Chitwan and Makwanpur, all the local units visited for this study drafted Disaster Management Plans (DMP). These districts were less affected by the 2015 earthquake than the other districts visited. While the priority of disaster risk in Makwanpur is more on lightening and landslides, in Chitwan it is flood.

The process of drafting DMPs has provided local units with an opportunity to rethink disaster risks and priorities in their locales. Earlier, local disaster management was limited to clearing roads blocked by landslides. Now the perception of disaster risk has been broadened to include fire, lightening, earthquake, road accidents, and more. Makwanpur, for example, is one of the top five districts affected by lightening in Nepal. The president of Bhimphedi Rural Municipality in the district stated that "at least twelve people die every year by lightening, hence they are focusing on minimizing the risks related to lightening." Lama added that "the

rural areas of the district are so remote that any timely intervention is very daunting and having fire prevention vehicles (*damkal*) and other equipment will not be enough.”

All local governments included disaster management in their annual plans and programs, but allocated only limited budget for it.

With infrastructure and road construction being the priorities of local governments, disaster management did not receive adequate priority in the ongoing fiscal year. However, all local governments had to allocate some funds under the general heading of ‘environment, and disaster management’ as mandated by the ‘Budget Allocation Guidelines 2074’.²⁵ With exception of Lisankhu Pakhar in Sindhupalchok and Tamakoshi in Dolakha, which allocated budgets for specific headings under disaster management, rest of the local units did not provide specific details for the allocated budget. Of the NPR 4.7 million, Lisankhu Pakhar allocated NPR 1.5 million for flood and landslide prevention and soil conservation, NPR 1.5 million for disaster management, NPR 900,000 for buying galvanized iron (GI) wire for river embankment, NPR 300,000 for one specific landslide control, and NPR 500,000 for nursery management.

Some local units appeared to have misplaced priorities for disaster management activities. Sailungeshwor Rural Municipality in Dolakha for example built helipads in every ward instead of responding to the local communities’ demands for training on first aid and early response. This decision was later widely criticized in the local unit and beyond. Many municipalities are not even able to provide fire prevention vehicle, let alone helicopters. According to the Mayor of Panauti, they need at least eleven employees to manage and run fire vehicles, making it costly to operate them.

In local units which were heavily affected by earthquake – such as Chautara Sanghachokgadhi Municipality and Lisankhu Pakhar Rural Municipality in Sindhupalchok, and Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha – representatives said they prioritized connecting affected settlements through roads to make the transportation of construction goods easier and less costly for post-earthquake reconstruction. Reportedly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is supporting the construction of a 19km-long, black-topped road going through five wards of Tamakoshi. The bidding for the NPR 810 million project began in the current fiscal year.

The building of roads to facilitate reconstruction was also observed elsewhere. Kalinchowk Rural Municipality in Dolakha had bought two excavators arguing that they are needed to facilitate reconstruction. The ward president of Tama Koshi Rural Municipality said, “with the local government building roads in almost every settlement, the process of reconstruction of houses has become easier and less costly.”

²⁵ Section 4.5.2 of the Guideline lists the six thematic areas for budget allocation for local governments: 1) economic development, 2) social development, 3) infrastructure development, 4) environment and disaster management, 5) infrastructure development and service delivery, and 6) fiscal management and good governance. Under the heading of ‘environment and disaster management’ visited local units allocated the following budget: Panauti – NPR 1 million; Chautara Sangachokgadhi – NPR 1.5 million; Lisankhu Pakhar – NPR 4.7 million; Kalinchok – NPR 700,000; and Tamakoshi – NPR 2 million

The local units visited had set up revolving funds for disaster management. Below is a list of the funds allocated in the local units for which researchers could obtain this information:

Table 2: Funds allocated for disaster management

SN	Local Unit/District	Amount in Disaster Fund (NPR)
1.	Panauti Municipality (Kavre)	1 million
2.	Chautara Sanghagadhichowk Municipality (Sindhupalchowk)	1.5 million
3.	Lisankhu Pakhar Rural Municipality (Sindhupalchowk)	1.5 million
4.	Tamakoshi Rural Municipality (Dolakha)	400,000
5.	Kalinchok Rural Municipality (Dolakha)	700,000
6.	Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality (Chitwan)	1.5 million
7.	Bhimphedi Rural Municipality (Makwanpur)	1.8 million
8.	Thaha Municipality (Makwanpur)	200,000

According to representatives of these local governments, they would use the funds for various purposes including immediate relief, river embankment, and disaster compensation among others. For example, Lisankhu Pakhar Rural Municipality provided a cash relief of NPR 25,000 to 15 individuals impacted by floods and landslides. The same local unit also provided compensation for destruction of crops by wild boars to nine farmers, and the compensation ranged from NPR 750 to NPR 4000.

Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha and Chautara Sanghachokgadhi Municipality in Sindhupalchowk made provisions for cash assistance for loss of human lives and physical property. Similarly, an official in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality in Chitwan said that although the 1.5 million in the fund might be insufficient to deal with local disasters, they had provisions by which they could use additional money from contingency and current expenditure budget of the local government if necessary. Kalinchok Rural Municipality in Dolakha included a special provision in its disaster management act to charge all I/NGOs operating in the local unit a sum of 0.1% of the annual expenditure of the organizations. The raised money would go towards the special fund for disaster management. Two wards in Chautara Sangachokgadhi Municipality of Sindhupalchowk allocated NPR 100,000 each to set up ward-level disaster funds, but they had to relocate the funds elsewhere because wards do not have the authority to set up their own bank account.

Communication and information-sharing between the federal and local governments on disaster management has been limited.

Local units visited have not received specific instructions or circulars on disaster management from the federal or provincial governments. The acts and plans on disaster management mention coordination between different levels of government as well as security forces. Beyond state agencies, regular coordination with I/NGOs, private organizations and civil society is also identified. It is mentioned that non-state agencies could contribute to disaster management by collecting data, conducting damage assessment, doing search and rescue, distributing relief, and getting involved in reconstruction. Yet, these processes do not seem to be discussed in more detail with local governments, preventing effective planning ahead of any future disasters.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

This research revealed that local governments' roles in reconstruction remain limited even after they signed MoUs with the NRA in early 2019. This may be due to the fact that reconstruction has been highly centralized with limited roles played by local stakeholders, as well as due to local governments' limited resources, capacity and a lacking sense of ownership over the process. None of the local units visited had developed a clear plan to carry out and document reconstruction and most were unable to submit information asked for by the NRA or district officials. Communication and information gaps on reconstruction and related processes such as resettlement remain but the presence of local governments has reportedly improved local access to information and support with reconstruction-related processes.

Disaster management is not a priority for local governments who are more focused on infrastructure development. While local governments have made Disaster Management Plans, following central guidelines, few have developed their own plans by specifying local risks, needs and response options. Local laws on disaster management were drafted copying model laws by the federal government. Few local governments have implemented disaster laws and plans. Further, most local governments have assigned limited funds for disaster management without specifying where and how they should be spent.

There is growing awareness that disaster management is the local governments' responsibility. Yet, most local representatives are more concerned about responding to frequently recurring disasters such as fires, landslides, floods and lightening than planning and preparing for major disasters such as earthquakes. Hence, the purchase of fire engines or ambulances, or the building of helipads, were observed to be prioritized over improving local disaster preparedness by storing relief materials, assigning funds, and clarifying response and communication plans. Local Disaster Management Committees were mostly inactive. Communication and information-sharing between the federal and local governments on disaster management has been limited according to local stakeholders and DRCN's observation.

Based on these observations, DRCN recommends the following:²⁶

Recommendation 1: Awareness raising and education

Improve local governments' and communities' awareness of disasters and their potential impacts, as well as of what disaster management could and should entail. Thereby, increase interest in and prioritization of disaster management. Improve understanding that disaster preparedness, management and response need to be integrated.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen communication and coordination channels

²⁶ Other measures are needed to improve disaster preparedness and response (for example private sector involvement, improved insurance system, retrofitting unsafe buildings, or action research). Here, DRCN only makes recommendations that directly link to, and are based on, findings from this scoping research.

Clarify communication and coordination plans between federal, provincial and local governments on disaster management to support and facilitate effective disaster legislations, planning, and governance.

Build on best practices and challenges of communicating with earthquake-affected people to develop effective information-sharing plans and channels for future responses.

Recommendation 3: Clarify responsibilities

Improved coordination also needs more clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all involved stakeholders, ahead of disasters. Disaster legislation and plans should specify respective roles of various layers of government as well as of key local stakeholders involved in disaster responses.

Recommendation 4: Improve capacity to collect and process data

Invest resources to enhance local governments' capacity to generate timely and disaggregated data needed for disaster preparedness, early response and recovery. This is also important for the ongoing reconstruction process.

Recommendation 5: Consider resource and capacity constraints

Any disaster management efforts involving local governments should consider and address limited local resources and capacities, including budget constraints.

Recommendation 6: Work with local governments to determine local perspectives, realities and needs

In order to effectively work with local governments on reconstruction and disaster management, their views need to be included to determine their needs and the policies, programs and trainings that best address them. Disaster management efforts need to engage closely with local governments and communities to address, or work around, resource and capacity constraints (Recommendation 5), raise awareness (Recommendation 1), and strengthen their roles and responsibilities in disaster management processes (Recommendations 2, 3 and 4).