

EARTHQUAKE AND OTHER DISASTER RISK PERCEPTIONS IN LOCAL PEOPLE OF NEPAL

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Nepal is highly vulnerable to natural disasters. A high proportion of the national GDP is lost every year in landslides, floods, and many other forms of disasters. A high number of human casualties and loss of public and private property in Nepal due to natural disasters may be attributed to inadequate public awareness, lack of disaster preparedness, weak governance, lack of coordination among the concerned government agencies, inadequate financial resources, and inadequate technical knowledge for mitigating the natural disasters. In this context, quite a few awareness and training programs for earthquake and other disaster risk reduction (DRR) have already been initiated in Nepal and their impact assessments are also already documented. However, effectiveness of the various implemented DRR programs is not yet evaluated through an independent study. The work presented in this paper explores local people's knowledge on disaster risk reduction (DRR). Altogether, 124 local people from 18 to 74 years of age from randomly selected 19 districts of Nepal (Figure 1) were interviewed focusing on various questions on disaster information, disaster knowledge, disaster readiness, disaster awareness, disaster adaptation, and disaster risk perception. The collected response data were statistically analyzed using histogram and independent sample t-tests to examine the DRR knowledge of people.

The questionnaire survey results obtained during the course of this field-based research work clearly point out at the deficiencies and limitations in the process of DRR knowledge dissemination to the local communities of Nepal. This work has attempted to evaluate specific outcomes in relation to disaster preparedness of the local people, their ability to identify and address the risk of disasters, and disaster adaptation practice. However, in many DRR issues, people are still not very clear and at the same time, they respond incorrectly. Through this study, it is understood that there are many DRR lessons the local people need to learn further, and that the existing DRR knowledge dissemination programs and processes need to be revised. Despite also having the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (UNISDR, 2011) adopted, the survey results show that Nepal has not satisfactorily implemented the DRR education initiatives. The HFA well emphasizes the role of education in DRR, especially the need of earthquake and other disasters education for developing a culture of disaster prevention in communities and schools.

At the present political and social conditions, the disaster risk reduction programs run particularly by the INGOs or NGOs may sometimes also be misleading. As an important tributary of a broader sustainable development pathway, DRR must be integrated with the development process in the communities. It needs to be mixed up with the development process at different stages, and must become an integral part of the development activities. In DRR process, culture of safety can also be easily introduced if the communities are adequately educated, equipped, and resourceful through good governance.

In reality, the existing DRR programs in Nepal are rich in jargons and they cannot be simply or easily implemented in communities. Through this study, we have clearly understood that people are not adequately aware even of simple disaster issues, and that in some cases, they are over reckoning too. In general, people need information that leads to action, for example, what they should do on their own today or tomorrow and who they should consult for any additional support. Another tragedy about DRR in Nepal is that its practice is badly overshadowed and blended into various hypothetical approaches; and to the worst, most of the resources are spent more in discussions, workshops, and hiring foreign consultants instead of taking immediate action in the field with whatsoever available indigenous knowledge. As a result, DRR mainstreaming programs are likely to fade out between the communities and the line agencies leading to a dilemma of DRR knowledge among the local communities.

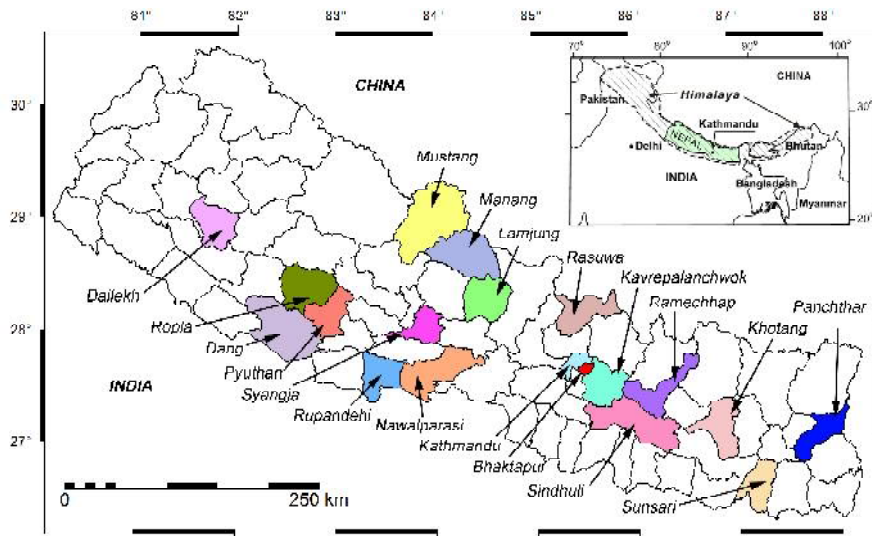


Figure 1. Location of randomly selected sample districts for the analysis

One of the major challenges in DRR practice in a rural country like Nepal is implementation method, especially at personal level. The method of disaster education provides people knowledge and information and promotes the DRR measures. To achieve this, local people need to be encouraged to learn about disaster basics, readiness behaviour, awareness programs, adaptation process, and risk identification techniques. To strengthen people's disaster risk awareness, proper and appropriate information should be disseminated to the local community leaders. Disaster education-related campaigns and programs may also provide a self-learning environment to the local people. School earthquake disaster education programs should also be encouraged in such a way that the community people can participate in the school earthquake disaster education program and the students can participate in community-based disaster awareness and adaptation activities. These activities may help increase the knowledge of DRR in the communities, which may lead the community and people to greater readiness for disaster risk reduction process.

REFERENCES

UNISDR (2011) Compilation of National Progress Reports on the Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, HFA Priority 3, Core Indicator 3.2

