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# Social, Psychological and Cultural Factors Implications for Disaster Preparedness and Rebuilding

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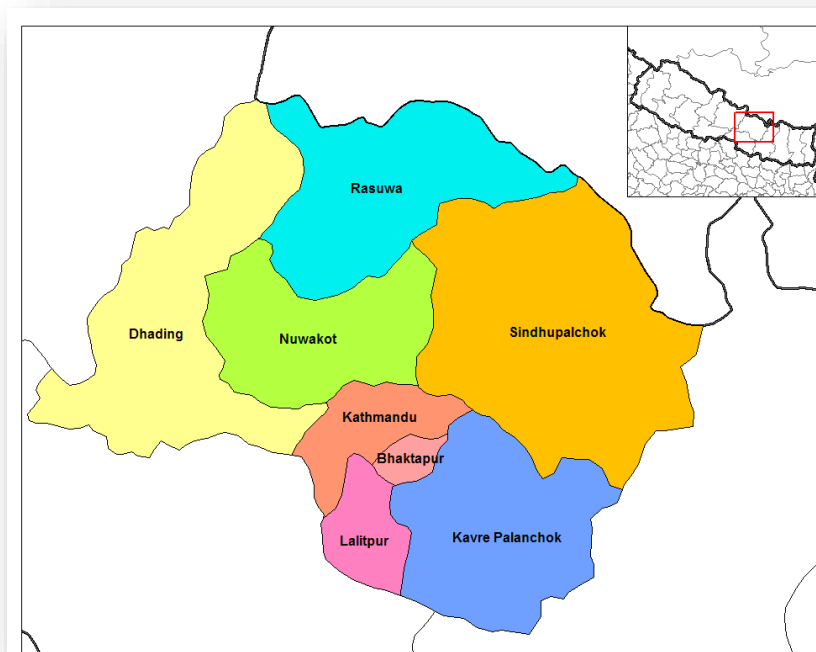
# Overview: Factors with Implications for Disaster Preparedness and Rebuilding

1. Rapid Assessment Methods
2. Disaster Attributions
3. Mental Health and Coping
4. Social Support/Cohesion and Conflict
5. Remittances, Remuneration, and Livelihoods
6. Relief Aid Mechanisms
7. Socio-political Considerations – Governance, Civil War
8. Gender, Caste/Ethnicity, Language
9. Summary
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# Rapid Assessment Methods:

## Earthquake Affected Areas

Informal interviews with approximately 80 community members, government officials and relief agency staff in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kavre Palanchok, and Sindhupalchok districts (May 31<sup>st</sup>-June 8<sup>th</sup>).



Source: ReliefWeb

# Disaster Attributions

## 1. Explanatory Frameworks:

Lost the path of religion

Gods are angry

Lack of proper site selection and preparation with priests

Gods protected some sacred structures

--- Kumari Palace, Pashupatinath



*7-year-old Living Goddess Yunika Bajracharya*



*Source: Nepali Times*



# Disaster Attributions

## 2. Preparedness and Risk Perception:

Perceived risk is high

“Puja” as potential risk mitigation

Puja is the act of showing reverence to a god, a spirit, or another aspect of the divine, through offerings such as fruit, rice, flowers, prayers, and songs.

---“Graha Shanti” & “Chyama Puja”

[after puja] *“we were content, it helped - now we are less fearful of aftershocks.”*



Offering for the deceased, Nepal.  
Photo: Barbara Weibel

# Disaster Attributions

## 3. Scientific Explanations:

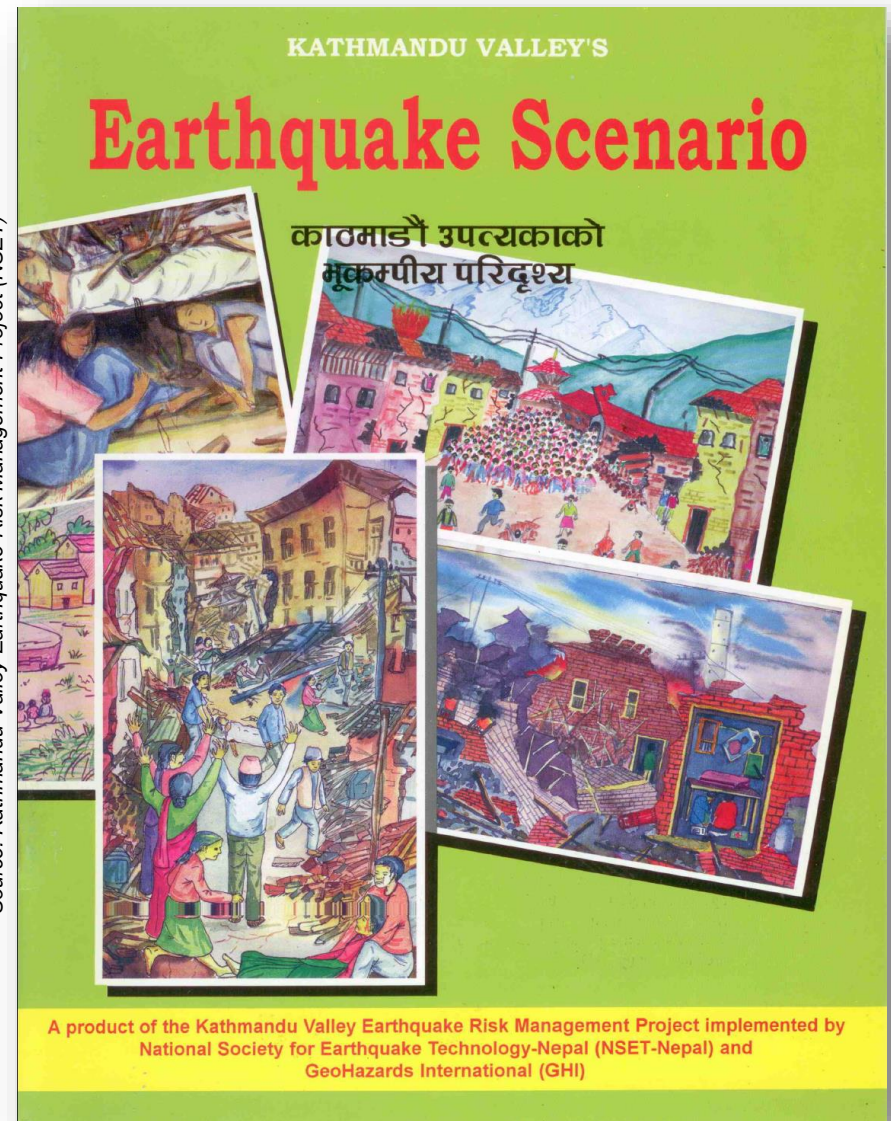
Coexist with such beliefs

People *are* receptive to disaster preparedness

Various stories: *“Gods help those who help themselves”*

--- reinforce responsibility for disaster preparedness.

Source: Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Risk Management Project (NSET)







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Fatalism must also be taken into account

*“No matter where you go, if it is written in your fate to die you will die.”*

– Tamang woman/Bhimdhunga, rebuilding in a landslide risk area

# Mental Health and Coping

Numerous mental health assessments with similar findings –  
Ongoing stressors related to - basic needs, livelihoods, social issues - all contributing to psychological distress.

Stressors Related to Basic Needs	Stressors Related to Livelihood	Stressors Related to Social Needs	Psychosocial Distress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shelter</b> (e.g. lack of tents and inability to rebuild homes; monsoon season approaching)</li> <li>• <b>Physical Health and WASH</b> (e.g. illness due to hygiene and sanitation concerns)</li> <li>• <b>Food and Nutrition</b> (e.g. food insecurity and inadequate food aid in remote areas)</li> <li>• <b>Clothing and blankets</b> in remote villages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Livelihoods and livestock</b> lost during the earthquake and landslides</li> <li>• <b>No source of income</b> and resulting stress of providing for the family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Loss of social support systems</b> (e.g. family or loved ones deceased, or missing)</li> <li>• <b>Separation of loved ones</b> (e.g. family separation due to displacement or medical evacuation to other areas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Loss and bereavement</b> regarding loss of loved ones and belongings</li> <li>• <b>Fear and anxiety</b> (e.g. that another earthquake will occur; that they will not be able to protect loved ones; frightening aftershocks)</li> <li>• <b>Sadness, hopelessness, and uncertainty</b> about the future; difficulty imagining how to move on, especially with monsoon season approaching</li> <li>• <b>Anger and irritability</b> in reaction to stressors</li> <li>• <b>Decreased sleep, appetite, and concentration</b>, affecting participation/ completion of daily activities</li> <li>• <b>Despair and suicide</b> in a number of reported cases</li> </ul>

Source: International Medical Corps, May 2015 – Rapid Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Assessment.



# Mental Health and Coping

Many Community Members Reported -

- **Depression/Hopelessness** –influencing motivation for harvesting/ rebuilding
- **Anxiety** - over disruptions in harvest, lack of livelihood opportunities, and impact on children's future
- **Intrusive Memories** – buried under rubble
- Re-experiencing (ground moving), sleep difficulties, alcohol abuse, interpersonal conflict/irritability, fear



# Mental Health and Coping



Various forms of coping –  
Religious/spiritual practices  
Reframing





Local Hindu temple  
Private shrine



# Mental Health and Coping

## Reframing –

Bhimdungha VDC, Nagarjun Municipality

- Only one injury, no fatalities
- Nearly all homes collapsed - adults working in fields, children together in one building that did not collapse

Gratitude for having been spared



# Social Support/Cohesion and Conflict

Volunteerism/cooperation in some communities -  
Observed in ethnically homogenous, rural places



Source: New York Times

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# Social Support/Cohesion and Conflict

Relief efforts by local business leaders, religious groups, and other community members

Pre-earthquake squatters' settlement, Bagmati River:  
Socially marginalized groups have been collecting money and providing temporary shelter for earthquake victims





# Social Support/Cohesion and Conflict

Conflict in communities – observed in semi-urban places, possibly more common among mixed ethnicity/caste groups

## **Conflicts over –**

- Relief Aid – jealousy regarding distribution
- Previous Conflicts – water use/access
- Use of Farming Land – temp. shelters vs. farming



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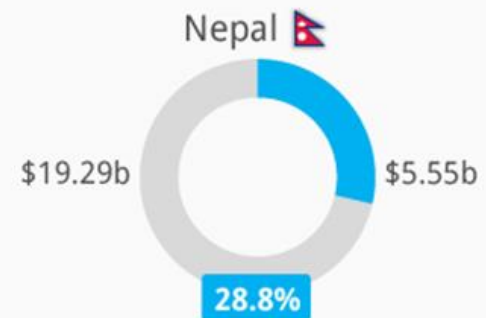
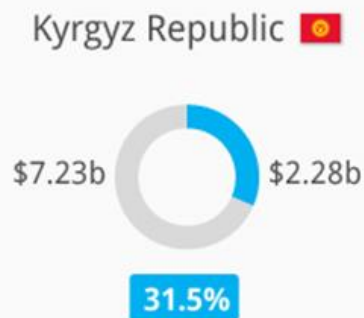
# Remittances, Remuneration, and Livelihoods

**Remittances** – dependent on money from workers outside of Nepal, remittances = 29% of gross domestic product (World Bank, 2014).

- 35% increase in remittances post-quake (Nepal Earthquake Assessment Unit, 2015).
- Young men leaving to earn wages – internal migration to urban centers, external migration to India, Qatar, SA, UAE, Malaysia.

## The Countries Most Dependent on Remittances

Remittance inflows as a percentage of GDP in 2013



Source: The World Bank. 2014.

# Remittances, Remuneration, and Livelihoods

**Remuneration** – payment for lost/damaged property and deceased loved ones

- Difficult to access without documents and political connections, many suspicious of government
- Many stated they won't apply for compensation







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## **Those ‘left behind’ will be in charge of rebuilding –**

“...burden of rebuilding will be placed upon women, adolescents, the sick, and the elderly because many healthy, young adult and middle-age men are not in rural communities”

(Interagency Standing Committee 2015).

# Remittances, Remuneration, and Livelihoods

## Livelihood Disruptions

- Loss of livestock
- Late harvest/planting
- Decrease in tourism
- Lack of available goods for small shop owners



## Opportunities for some

- Relief and recovery jobs with aid agencies
- Work clearing the rubble for 'unskilled' day laborers





# Relief Aid Mechanisms

## Humanitarian cluster system (see UNOCHA, 2015)

- Introduced in 2005
- 11 sectors with an agency lead (e.g. food, education, health), all related agencies must coordinate efforts and funding appeals

## Shelter cluster -

- Government of Nepal Post Disaster Needs Assessment (National Planning Commission, GoN, 2015) outlines long term housing recovery plans
- Shelter Cluster is supporting plans with 30 partner agencies with disaster and reconstruction expertise

*Cluster system activated quickly in Nepal, appeared to function well.*



# Relief Aid Mechanisms



- Local politics = conflicting disaster response plans
- Community trusts aid agencies; suspicious of politicians
- Remote areas hard to access
  - Helicopters, porters
- Discrimination reported in aid distribution



Source: International Business Times.

# Socio-political Considerations – Governance, Civil War

## Civil War 1996-2006 (‘Maoist Insurgency’)

No formal constitution since 2006 – new draft raising concerns (see Reuters, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

Earthquake could further destabilize the country if government response is perceived as inadequate.

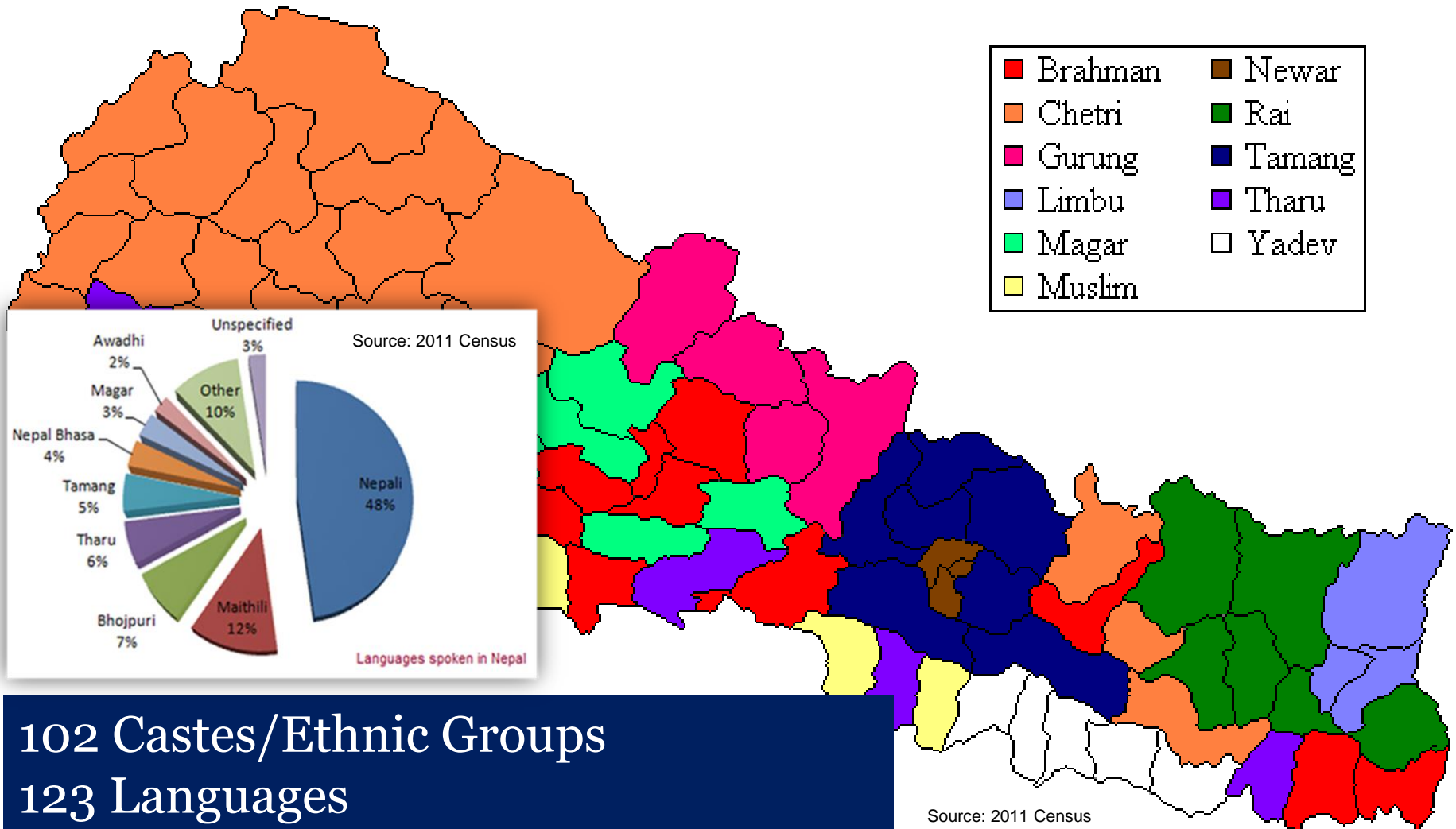


Source: Ami Vitale



Source: Parakhi News

# Gender, Caste/Ethnicity, Language





# Summary

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1. Disaster attributions should be considered in preparedness and rebuilding
2. Mental health must be addressed; otherwise may undermine recovery

We have two research projects in Nepal. Prelim data suggests including 1 and 2 in standard disaster preparedness curriculum can increase preparedness behaviors.

3. Cohesive (homogeneous) communities may be more effective in rebuilding
4. Remittances and livelihood challenges influence recovery
5. Relief aid, including shelter materials, may benefit some groups more than others
6. Socio-political challenges – constitutional process, cultural diversity
7. Difficulty with access to remote areas may hamper recovery

# Suggestions for Future Research

Over the long-term –

How will these social, psychological and cultural factors influence preparedness, recovery and rebuilding?

Motivation and resources to ‘Build Back Better’ or –

- 1) Replicate ancestral homes reusing same inadequate materials?
- 2) Add on to temp shelters hastily assembled for monsoon?



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