

# BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR ALL: INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES FOR REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO NATURAL HAZARDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE



FINDINGS FROM NEPAL

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Image: Abbie Traylor-Smith

## INTRODUCTION

This note provides insights from the ODI report *Building resilience for all: intersectional approaches for reducing vulnerability to natural hazards in Nepal and Kenya*,<sup>1</sup> which highlights challenges and opportunities for understanding intersecting inequalities and delivering effective intersectional approaches that help build resilience to natural hazards and climate change. This note presents findings from the Nepal study. A companion paper analyses findings from Kenya.

People's experiences of natural hazards, climate change and climate variability are dependent on the social, economic, cultural, political and environmental context in which they live. Marginalised and disadvantaged groups tend to be particularly vulnerable to natural hazards, and often live in areas that are more exposed to environmental shocks and stresses. There is a need to understand how different factors intersect to create exclusion, inequalities and vulnerabilities in multi-hazard contexts, to ensure that policies and programmes that aim to build resilience respond to the local context and support those most in need.

## WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality is a way of understanding the interaction between categories of social difference and how these affect individuals, social practices, cultures, institutions and power relationships. It provides insights into the ways in which different factors or identities interact, such as gender, age, disability and ethnicity, thereby providing a better understanding of people's needs, interests, capacities and experiences. Intersectional approaches take historical, social and political contexts into account, recognising that vulnerable and marginalised groups are neither homogenous nor static, and that different factors will influence their ability to prepare for, cope with and respond to natural hazards, climate change and climate variability.

There is growing interest in intersectionality as a concept among policy-makers and operational agencies, but its application is new and challenging. There is an acknowledged need to find effective and practical ways of analysing intersectionality, and how intersectional approaches to vulnerability reduction and resilience-building can be developed and integrated into policies and programmes.

<sup>1</sup> Lovell, E., Twigg, J., and Lung'ahi, G. (2019) *Building resilience for all: intersectional approaches for reducing vulnerability to natural hazards in Nepal and Kenya*. London: ODI.

## CASE STUDY: NEPAL

The research in Nepal focused on the experiences of women and men in different ethnic and caste groups. This includes women and men from disadvantaged groups (the ethnicity/caste groups that belong to the categories of Dalits, disadvantaged Janajatis and disadvantaged Madhesis) and women and men from other groups (all caste/ethnic groups that do not fall under the category of disadvantaged groups). The fieldwork took place in Bardiya district. It was carried out by ODI in partnership with the Anukulan project (in collaboration with iDE Nepal). A mixed-methods approach was used:

- Quantitative research using a household survey to understand people's resilience to natural hazards and climate change, based on four components of resilience: economic, social, infrastructural and institutional (see Box 1).
- Qualitative research through national and local key informant interviews with policy-makers, practitioners and local leaders, and focus group discussions.





### Key findings

The quantitative study indicates that men are more resilient to natural hazards and climate change than women. There is a statistically significant difference between men and women

within both disadvantaged and other groups (this is particularly evident in institutional and social components). In general, men have better access to and control over financial resources, as well as higher earning capacity. Women appear to be less able to cope with a disaster or shock. In terms of location and the built environment, there is marginal difference. Men participate more in public decision-making processes, where their views are more likely to be listened to than those of women. The results show no significant difference overall between the resilience scores of the two types of social group. The differences between women and men are larger and more significant within the disadvantaged groups than the other groups (owing mainly to their scores in the social and institutional components of the index), but there are significant differences between women and men in the scores for both types of group.

Qualitative data revealed a range of personal, situational and social factors affecting vulnerability, particularly poverty and assigned gender roles, as well as settlement patterns, limited livelihood options and migration of household members to seek employment. There was some recognition of discriminatory practices, but there was more emphasis on poverty than on social tensions between ethnic and caste groups or power relations in society. Possession of wealth makes it possible to build more resilient houses and people with money are better able to respond to flooding. Poverty forces families to live in flood-prone locations close to riverbanks, and in housing that is not flood-resistant

### Box 1: Four components to assess different aspects of people's resilience at the local level

<b>ECONOMIC</b> 	<b>SOCIAL</b> 	<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b> 	<b>INSTITUTIONAL</b> 
<p>Access and control of economic resources makes it easier for people to prepare for and respond to disasters. This category considers the overall economic strength of households, the availability of personal finance and opportunities to access financial instruments. Key indicators in this category also measure people's access to, and control over, natural resources and livestock to support their livelihood options, as well as their engagement in small and medium-sized business enterprises.</p>	<p>Human resources (e.g. people's health status and educational attainment) and social resources (e.g. being able to rely on support from household members or neighbours and belonging to community or religious groups) are critical to the resilience of people in terms of being able to prepare for, cope with and respond to disasters. Key indicators in this category also assess how people's resilience is influenced by migration patterns, the prevalence of gender-based violence and the level of personal disaster preparedness.</p>	<p>Reliable infrastructure ensures communities can reduce the initial effects of a disaster, minimise structural damage and allow for evacuation. Thereafter, good infrastructure enables faster recovery. Key indicators in this category measure the extensiveness and reliability of infrastructure for people to access basic services (i.e. safe locations, housing, clean water and sanitation, transport, power, and communications technology); and whether there is a functioning early warning system (EWS).</p>	<p>This category examines the extent to which people are participating in and leading decision-making processes and whether their perspectives are accounted for by public institutions. Key indicators in this category also measure how effective the government is in the implementation of disaster management plans and activities, and whether people trust local government and the media to reflect and respond to their needs.</p>

Source: Lovell and le Masson, 2015





Image: ILO/Pradip Shakya

(there is an inevitable trade-off between economic or livelihood opportunities and living in an unsafe location).

The implications of Nepal's new federal governance structure are still being worked through at local level. Gender and social inclusion is becoming more important in Nepal's development policy and planning, but household roles and responsibilities remain gendered. There is a gradual shift in focus from response to disaster risk management, although local capacities are often limited. There have been significant improvements in early warning system (EWS), and more effort is going into building household and community capacities to cope with hazards.

## Summary of survey results by components of resilience

### Economic resilience

- Men appear to have better access to, and control over, financial resources and therefore have more economic capacity to anticipate and smooth the economic impact of a shock. Survey evidence suggests there is a significant

gap between the number of women and the number of men who report having the same type of access to financial resources as other family members. The difference between women and men is substantial in the disadvantaged social group: 71% of women report having similar access to others, compared to 91% of men. Women are also less convinced than men that migration gives them and their families a better income.

- The survey findings show that the most important difference between men and women is capacity to earn cash on a daily basis. On average, 43% of the sample earn some cash every day, but the difference between women and men is substantial. In the disadvantaged social group, 12% of women and 63% of men can earn cash daily; in the other social group, 27% of women and 72% of men can earn on a daily basis.
- There is also a statistically significant difference between women and men in their ability to repay loans on time: 44% of women and 89% of men from the disadvantaged group and 58% of women and 88% of men from the other group can repay loans on time.

## Social resilience

- The survey results reveal that the difference between women and men in average social resilience is large and statistically significant: women are 10 percentage points (45% compared to 55%) less resilient than men to natural hazards and climate change. In the disadvantaged social group, the difference between women and men is even more pronounced: these percentages are 42% and 57% respectively.
- Women are far less likely than men to receive information from official sources (e.g. government announcements) in both groups (scores for those stating they receive such information are 26% and 86% respectively in the disadvantaged group, and 42% and 64% in the other group).
- Among women, questions around food security demonstrate differences between social groups. Only 32% of women from the disadvantaged group felt there was enough food in the household to feed everyone adequately throughout the year, against 62% of women from the other group.

- Women are less convinced than men that migration gives them and their families a better income (29% and 49% respectively from the disadvantaged group, and 38% and 64% from the other group).

## Infrastructural resilience

- The survey results show that the difference in average infrastructure resilience between men and women is not statistically significant.
- Access to phones and radios and fetching water for the household are the main areas where results differ between women and men. Men have better access to phones than women, which makes them more likely to be the first recipients of early warning messages; 65% of women from the disadvantaged group fetch water for their households, while 46% of women (compared to 32% of men) from the other group do.
- Women feel much less safe in public shelters during disasters than men: 18% and 34% respectively from the disadvantaged group, and 27% and 56% from the other group. It is noteworthy that men from disadvantaged groups also feel unsafe: this could perhaps be due to fear of discriminatory practices.



Image: Antoine 49/Flickr



## Institutional resilience

- On average, men have a higher institutional resilience score than women (55% for women compared to 68% for men).
- 74% of women from the disadvantaged social group take part in decisions in their community, while 100% of men in both social groups reported participating in decisions.
- Men from both disadvantaged and other groups are very confident they have the same access to leadership roles as other family members (94% of men from the disadvantaged group and 98% of men from the other group). Far fewer women in both groups believe they have such opportunities (43% of women in the disadvantaged group and 58% of women in the other group).
- Access to training opportunities shows a distinct difference between women and men, with men enjoying higher access; this is more pronounced in the disadvantaged group (53% of women compared to 96% of men in the disadvantaged group and 75% of women compared to 92% of men in the other group).
- Knowledge of the existence of local disaster plans was consistently very low in all categories (13% of the overall sample); 9% of women from the disadvantaged group were aware of an official disaster plan, while 16% of men from the other group were aware of a plan.

## Intersectional approaches to vulnerability reduction and resilience

- **Institutional structures to support intersectional approaches to vulnerability reduction and resilience.** Overall, intersectional approaches to vulnerability reduction and resilience-building do not feature in current thinking and planning. Key informants recognised the complexity of intersectionality and the challenges in developing appropriate policies and practices to address it. There is a need for more integrated programmes to build community resilience, and comprehensive integration of risk management into sectoral development plans and projects to ensure the continuity of systems and services (including education, health and employment) that promote people's wellbeing, despite environmental shocks and stresses.
- **Data collection/information.** Little disaggregated data and baseline information is available, as well as data on those affected by flood events. It was acknowledged that there was a capacity challenge in integrating such information into existing data systems. Better-quality, disaggregated data on the differential impacts disasters have on

different social groups is needed if interventions are to reach the most vulnerable. Socioeconomic vulnerability appears to be more prominent in non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) thinking about risk assessment, and municipal officials recognised the support of local ward members and other organisations in helping them identify and mobilise vulnerable groups.

- **Local capacity-building and approaches to build the resilience of households.** Key informants recognised that economic and livelihood pressures on poor and marginalised people could be a challenge to their participation in disaster risk management. Considerable effort is going into building household and community capacities, with extensive community training and the creation of task force groups at the community level. Building the capacity of community organisations is a focus of NGO interventions; local institutions have limited capacity and there is a widely acknowledged need for more training, awareness-raising and leadership development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

### 1. Address the lack of methodologies and approaches for measuring and understanding intersecting factors

There is currently a lack of methodologies and tools for identifying and understanding intersecting inequalities. Gender analysis is standard in resilience planning and programming, but methodologies and tools are needed for identifying and understanding the intersection between different inequality factors affecting people's ability to prepare for, cope with and respond to natural hazards and climate change. Monitoring and evaluation processes rarely systematically include data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability and other socioeconomic factors. Inadequate data can make it difficult to identify vulnerable and marginalised groups. It also means that policies and systems are not informed by the local context and do not respond to the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of these groups in relation to natural hazards and climate change.

#### Recommendations

- Champion systematic data collection, disaggregated by sex, age, economic status, ethnicity, caste and disability (as a minimum), to identify marginalised groups and make their different needs and capacities more visible to decision-makers.

- Build methodologies and tools to better capture the complexities of intersecting inequalities and means to identify and measure differences between groups, so that policy-makers and practitioners can devise locally appropriate solutions to build resilience to natural hazards and climate change.

## 2. Address the lack of capacity and coordination to implement policies and programmes that respond to intersecting inequalities, and take an intersectional approach to building resilience to natural hazards, climate change and climate variability

There are challenges relating to capacity, coordination and lack of resources for designing and implementing policies and programming which aim to build inclusive resilience to natural hazards and climate change. Intersectional approaches to vulnerability reduction and resilience-building remain a new area for most organisations, many of which still target their programmes at supporting particular social groups, for example, women, children and people with disabilities. There is also a tension between approaches that subscribe to the ethos of 'inclusion for all' and the need to target particularly disadvantaged groups.

## Recommendations

- Enhance knowledge and capacity to manage and build the resilience of the most marginalised groups to natural hazards and climate change at the sub-national level, and put in place the technical, financial and human resources to support effective and inclusive policies and preparedness, response and recovery implementation.
- Ensure better coordination around policies and programmes that aim to build resilience to natural hazards, climate change, climate variability, gender equality and social inclusion. This includes building more effective vertical integration between national, sub-national and local levels of government and organisations, and horizontal lesson-sharing and coordination between different sectoral ministries/departments and organisations to scale up action on inclusive climate change adaptation and disaster risk management.

## 3. Address the lack of longer-term inclusive programming

Disaster risk management remains largely focused on reactive, short-term emergency or relief responses, and much research tends to focus on the short-term, direct impacts of natural hazard-related disasters on people, as opposed



Image: ILO/Pradip Shakya





Image: UN Photo/Kibae Park

to considering the indirect and longer-term impacts on their wellbeing and development outcomes. Donor funding is often short term, reducing the likelihood of meaningful or transformative change. Donor demands may not be aligned with what organisations identify as necessary for a resilience programme to be equitable and inclusive. This is a challenge for organisations trying to respond to multiple donor requirements within short timelines and limited budgets.

### Recommendations

- Agencies and organisations should work with governments and donors to promote a better understanding of how different factors intersect to shape vulnerability and

exclusion over a person's life course, and the need for longer-term funding that builds inclusive resilience in research, policy and programming.

- Donors and governments should invest in comprehensive, long-term, integrated programmes that take into account the full disaster risk management cycle and ensure the continuity of systems and services (including education, health and employment opportunities) that promote people's wellbeing, despite environmental shocks and stresses.

### Find out more on intersectional approaches in vulnerability reduction and resilience-building:

- Building resilience for all: intersectional approaches for reducing vulnerability to natural hazards in Nepal and Kenya, [www.odi.org/publications/11339-building-resilience-all-intersectional-approaches-reducing-vulnerability-natural-hazards](http://www.odi.org/publications/11339-building-resilience-all-intersectional-approaches-reducing-vulnerability-natural-hazards)
- Intersectional approaches to vulnerability reduction and resilience-building, [www.odi.org/publications/11307-intersectional-approaches-vulnerability-reduction-and-resilience-building](http://www.odi.org/publications/11307-intersectional-approaches-vulnerability-reduction-and-resilience-building)

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