

Falling through the cracks: women and vulnerability in urban housing reconstruction post earthquake 2015, Kathmandu Valley, Nepal

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Policy Pointers¹

- **Improve the National Reconstruction Authority vulnerability list:** Identify vulnerable groups, such as low-income single women in the Kathmandu Valley, overlooked by reconstruction support, with no formal land ownership or means, and include them on the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) vulnerability list.²
- **Conduct further research and direct consultation with these women:** Understand how being in a vulnerable situation limits women's access to resources and institutions, and impedes their recovery.
- **Initiate reconstruction programmes with accessible legal and technical support:** Fund

- **Recognise and enable the agency and capacity of local collectives:**

many of the women in the most vulnerable situations with food, materials and the construction of temporary shelters. Include local collectives as equal and active participants in long-term reconstruction stages.

- **Increase representation across reconstruction actors and empower the NRA's GESI and Livelihood Section:** Attract a more di-

include more women in leadership positions. Make increased funding available to the NRA's Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Livelihood Section to enhance their potential and continue their drive of change from within.

Context

gible households in the three urban districts of the Kath-
ing subsidy⁵

Complexities of urban reconstruction

Post-earthquake reconstruction in urban settings is

narrow roads in historical areas impede access for demolition and clearance of rubble, or for provision of materials. Rebuilding multi-storey, mixed-use buildings with high resident density and multi-family ownership is expensive and complex. Land prices increase because of rapid urban growth.

NGO rural focus

- The provision of 300,000 NPR loan at lower interest is in practice inaccessible to women and men as banks -
ucts at much higher “market level” interest rates.
- The Birta²⁰ provision that allows people who have been
a long process that needs to be supported by the ward
and neighbours, involving extended paperwork.
- Many women in vulnerable situations do not fall within
the NRA's vulnerability category. This policy is based on
a vulnerability list compiled by the NRA which can be
inaccurate²¹.

This research study found that while the coincidence in time of reconstruction and local elections had some negative impacts on reconstruction²², new local government bodies provided tangible support to women in vulnerable situations. In household interviews, women explained how the municipality had made concessions such as charging lower fees for permits and engineering plans for the most vulnerable. Local government bodies also responded to the needs of their constituents. Lumanti²³ while support-

that were delaying the reconstruction process. They lob-

codes and bylaws. Exceptions were then made for houses that were replacing those damaged by the earthquake. For example, permits were enabled to rebuild on land that was smaller than the original minimum plot, or coverage

further barriers that need to be overcome as owners were not allowed to register those properties and not entitled to use it as collateral.

Women's accounts: how being in a vulnerable situation impacted their recovery

Policies need to consider how being in a vulnerable situa-

Some reasons women cited in interviews for not being able to rebuild include:

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- Support further research into gender and vulnerability in the urban context. Direct consultation with women to better understand how being in a vulnerable situation limits their access to resources and institutions, and impedes their recovery is vital to build a body of knowledge that can be drawn on for this and future responses.
- Encourage initiatives that measure success in terms of number of women who have accessed socio technical and legal support that puts them on the path to recovery, as well as in terms of number of housing units built.

necessary change of paradigm on how aid is delivered.
- Be proactive about funding smaller organisations and initiatives directly.

Recommendations for Government

- Diversify the way they identify those in the most vulnerable situations in the Kathmandu Valley. This should not be limited to the criteria on the NRA vulnerability policy.

Elected ward members who have accurate knowledge of the needs and resources of their constituents should be supported to do this.
- Work with existing networks such as single women groups or poor farmer groups in their area. These groups need. Even the most vulnerable are part of a collective or network with agency and capacity.
- Review standards and codes to ensure they relate better to the experiences and needs on the ground. Local adjustments to practice to leave no-one behind.

Recommendations for NRA

- Ensure that their recruitment and promotion strategy at includes more women in leadership positions.
- Build on the work and expertise of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion and Livelihood Section, and make more funds made available for:
 1. leading on further research and consultation with women and other vulnerable groups in the Kathmandu Valley to understand how being in vulner-

2. developing and implementing policy to support the recovery of the most vulnerable based on consultation with women.

3. both in central and municipal locations

Recommendations for NGOs

- Initiate programmes to better support reconstruction of the houses of the most vulnerable women, such as low-income single women in the Kathmandu Valley, in collaboration with the NRA.
- Promote peer-to-peer learning on their urban interven-

1. likely to apply across the Kathmandu Valley and Nepal.
 - 2.
 3. Providing equal access across gender, ethnicity, caste, literacy level, age, disability and income level.
 4. Shelter self-recovery is a relatively new term used by humanitarians to describe the material, technical and economic support. This study and brief, however, looks at the collective aspects of shelter self-recovery such as those initiated and led by grass-roots and women's networks.
 - 5.
 - 7.
- Amnesty International, "Building Inequality" The Failure of the Nepali Government to Protect the Marginalised in Post Earthquake
10. See for example Irshad, Mumtaz, and Levay, 'Long-Term Gendered Consequences of Permanent Disabilities Caused by the 2005 Pakistan Earthquake'; Juran, 'The Gendered Nature of Disasters'; Enarson and Meyreles, 'International Perspectives on Gender
 - 11.