



TOWARDS BUILDING LONG TERM URBAN RESILIENCE: LEARNINGS FROM NEPAL

POLICY BRIEF

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Towards building long term urban resilience: learnings from Nepal

Policy brief

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Tomorrow's Cities is the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) Urban Disaster Risk Hub – a five-year global interdisciplinary research hub. Our aim is to catalyse a transition from crisis management to multi-hazard risk-informed and inclusive planning and decision-making, for cities in low-and-middle income countries. We are one of 12 UKRI GCRF Hubs funded by a UKRI Collective Fund Award, as part of the UK AID strategy, putting research at the heart of efforts to deliver the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mission

Globally, more than two billion people living in cities of low-to-middle income countries are exposed to multiple hazards such as floods, earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes and fires, which threaten the cyclical destruction of their lives and livelihoods. With urban areas expanding at unprecedented rates, this number is expected to reach four billion by 2050. Failure to integrate multi-hazard disaster risk into urban planning and decision-making processes presents a major barrier to sustainable development, including the single greatest global challenge of eradicating poverty in all its forms. But this global challenge is also major opportunity. As ~60% of the area expected to be urban by 2030 remains to be built, we can reduce disaster risk in tomorrow's cities by design.

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Executive summary

This policy brief provides recommendations for building long term urban resilience by leveraging existing domestic institutional frameworks, facilitating collaborations across governance levels and co-produced, evidence-based, decision-making. This brief is developed as part of, and contributes to, the overarching research conducted through the Tomorrow's Cities¹ Hub, which engages with cities of the Global South to reduce disaster risk for the poor and marginalised communities in future cities.

In the face of rapid urbanization and increasing climate induced disasters and other natural hazards this policy brief provides an overview of some of the governance barriers and enabling mechanisms to support future urban planning strategies in Nepal. Poor policy implementation, technical inadequacies, fragmented decision making, and imbalance of priorities were highlighted as key governance challenges by representatives of various ministries of Nepal. Enabling mechanisms to build long term urban resilience were identified by community members of Khokana, representatives of the Lalitpur Metropolitan City (LMC), and national level policymakers. These include urban planning led by municipal governments, collaborations among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, building technical capacity and communication strategies of national and local governments, effective management of disaster related information and redesigning existing policy frameworks making them more holistic. Furthermore, based on our observation's relevant domestic non-governmental actors such as research organisations, civil societies and media should actively engage with future urban planning processes.

¹ Tomorrow's Cities is funded by the UK Research Initiative (UKRI) and Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF).

Nepal's urban growth and governance context

Like most South Asian regions, Nepal is experiencing rapid urbanization (Timsina, 2020²) and this trend will continue in the future. By 2050 the urban population is projected to rise to approximately 40% of the total population (UN, 2018³). At the same time, the country is prone to natural hazard related disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides. Hazards of hydrometeorological origin are being aggravated by changing climatic patterns (see Upadhyaya et al., 2022). The combination of both factors – rapid unplanned urbanization and natural hazard exposure – is increasing disaster risk in Nepal's cities. In that context, the economically and socially marginalised groups living in these cities are and will become even more vulnerable to the cascading impacts of hazards.

Nepal's institutional frameworks, make considerations for achieving sustainable development goals, reducing disaster risks (see Upadhyaya et al., 2022; Poudel and Blackburn⁴, 2020) and combating climate change without compromising the developmental aspirations. With respect to disaster risk reduction, the country is aligned with global norms⁵ and introduced several domestic policies, institutions and measures supported by budgetary allocations (see Poudel and Blackburn, 2020).

Envisioning Nepal 2030 is the long-term development strategy which aims to transform the country from a least developed country to a middle-income country status. This strategy, drafted by the National Planning Commission, focuses on creating liveable, smarter and greener cities (see

² Kathmandu valley is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in South Asia (Timsina 2020).

Timsina, N.P., (2020). Trend of urban growth in Nepal with a focus in Kathmandu Valley: a review of processes and drivers of change. Tomorrow's Cities working paper. <https://doi.org/10.7488/era/722>

³ United Nations (2018). World Urbanisation Prospects: Country profile. Department of Economics and Social Affairs. United Nations. Link: <https://population.un.org/wup/country-profiles/> (last accessed on 31st March 2023).

⁴ The institutional framework to deal with disaster risk reduction involves ministries from the national, provincial, district, local (city) and ward level (community level) (for more details see Poudel and Blackburn, 2020).

⁵ The country adopted global norms like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030). Additionally, many international agencies started focusing on Nepal. This fostered collaborations between Nepal's national government and several international agencies such as World Bank and UN agencies.

Government of Nepal, 2016⁶). To support future urban planning in Nepal, it is important to understand the domestic institutional arrangements. Under the federal structure consolidated in 2015, the governance system comprises three tiers: the national/federal, sub-national/provincial and local/municipal governments. The devolution of power across the three tiers of the governance system are defined by the constitution similarly to what occurs for urban planning and disaster risk reduction. National level policy planning and budgeting is overseen by the national ministries. National governments provide policy implementation guidelines which are customised as per need by the provincial and local level. The sub-national or provincial governments mediate between the national and local government and their roles often overlap with the two tiers of the government. Within the federal structure, local governments, particularly the municipal governments, are responsible for implementing nationally designed policies. Despite the devolution of power, in practice the central government still makes most of the macro-level policy decisions which are adapted and executed by the provincial and local governments. Local governments are involved in micro-level or local level policy planning and resource allocations. Moreover, local governments have relatively limited financial and technical resources required to effectively design and implement policies. Local governments continue to rely on national governments and international donor agencies for technical and financial support.

TCDSE in learning cities: Khokana, Nepal

Through the Tomorrow's Cities Hub there was an opportunity to engage with diverse Nepalese stakeholders such as national and local level policymakers and community members⁷. A national level consultation was organised involving senior representatives of the National Planning Commission, Ministry of Forest and Environment, Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, and

⁶ Government of Nepal (2016). Envisioning Nepal 2030 Proceedings of the International Seminar. Asian Development Bank and National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal. Link to document: https://npc.gov.np/images/category/Envisioning_Nepal_2030_Proceeding.pdf (last accessed on 28th March 2023).

⁷ Community members from Khokana have been engaged through the Hub. Khokana falls under the administrative division (ward 21) of the Lalitpur Metropolitan City. More details on Khokana including administrative evolution, community composition, and hazards are captured in Tomorrow's Cities working paper (see Upadhyaya et al., 2022). Upadhyaya., et al., (2022). Understanding Vulnerabilities through an intersectional lens in Khokana, Kathmandu Nepal. Tomorrow's Cities Working paper. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7488/era/2767>

National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA). At the local level, community members from Khokana and policymakers working at the local level (officials of ward number 21 and Ward Disaster Management Committee) were invited to identify enabling mechanisms as part of the [Risk Agreement Workshop](#).

Existing governance barriers surfaced during engagements with national level policymakers. Furthermore, some enabling mechanisms to promote long term resilience were highlighted by both policymakers and community members. The governance barriers and enabling mechanisms discussed in this brief are relevant Nepal's case but many are applicable to other cities of the Global South.



Image 1: Khokana community members at the risk agreement workshop. Credit: Sukirti Samatya



Image 2: Consultation with representatives from relevant national level ministries, Nepal

Credit: Thaisa Comelli

Governance barriers for future urban planning

Some of the governance challenges highlighted by the national policymakers during the national level consultation are listed below.

- a) **Poor policy implementation:** the national level government officials felt that existing domestic policies are well designed and have the potential to build long term urban resilience. However, due to poor implementation the full potential of these policies remains unexplored. A major cause for this governance barrier was the involvement of multiple agencies (several line departments at provincial and local level) in the implementation process. This leads to a lack of ownership and siloed approach with respect to furthering policies.

- b) **Limited technical capacity:** the technical capacity to comprehensively understand and design urban resilience strategies is often limited or missing among the sector specific ministries at the national level and at the city level. Additionally, data management is often not a priority for the governments especially at the local level.
- c) **Fragmented decision-making:** effective policy making requires coordination across relevant departments; however, in most cases there is limited coordination. There is a lack of coordination between relevant line departments at the national level. Additionally, coordination issues also exist between the national and municipal governments. All of which hinder cross-sectoral planning and urban resilience building.
- d) **Short term vs long term objectives:** driven by political cycles, the government often prioritises objectives that show immediate benefits. However, building long term urban resilience requires a balance of short term with long term objectives, which is yet to be achieved.

Enabling mechanisms for future urban planning

The national and local level policymakers and Khokana community members discussed some enabling mechanisms that can support future urban planning processes.

- a) **Local leadership and accountable decision-making:** it was proposed that within a federal system there is a need for local level leadership, particularly from the municipal government, to ensure effective implementation of urban planning and disaster risk reduction policies. The municipal governments should be supported by national governments (e.g., in the form of policy guidelines and resource allocations) and community members (e.g., supporting policy implementation) in this process.
Local governments will be better suited to customise policies befitting local requirements. This is because local governments experience risks at close quarters and understand citizen needs better as compared to higher level government agencies. Moreover, having one agency responsible for implementation will address existing challenges of lack of coordination and siloed implementation involving multiple agencies.

b) Inclusive and collaborative decision-making: building urban resilience requires cross sectoral and disciplinary coordination. More specifically, coordination is required both vertically and horizontally.

In terms of vertical coordination, both the national government officials and local stakeholders felt that all three tiers of the government need to work closely. Furthermore, the local stakeholders from Khokana felt that involvement of international actors (e.g. international non-governmental organisations like Red Cross and Scout) would leverage domestic efforts.

With respect to horizontal coordination, the national government officials felt that relevant line ministries need to coordinate with each other. While the local stakeholders felt that local governments need to engage with non-government actors such as civil societies, traditional groups (*Guthi*), youth groups and community members.



Figure 1: illustration of actors and collaborations to promote urban resilience

c) Capacity building and effective communication strategies: Nepal's national government officials emphasised the need for capacity building on multiple fronts. Firstly, local government officials need to be made aware of urban resilience building processes, especially since they are responsible for policy implementation. Secondly, relevant national level line ministries need to understand, and support future urban planning. Thirdly, local communities need to be informed via media and other popular channels about the consequences of development

and disaster risk reduction measures. Senior officials of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority expressed interest in collaborating with the Tomorrow’s Cities Hub to formulate local disaster resilient frameworks for Nepal.

- d) Knowledge management: national policymakers expressed the need to effectively manage knowledge and use effective communication channels accessible to all. Moreover, local governments should be actively involved in supporting the national government maintain and manage disaster related data and online portals such as Nepal’s Bipad portal.

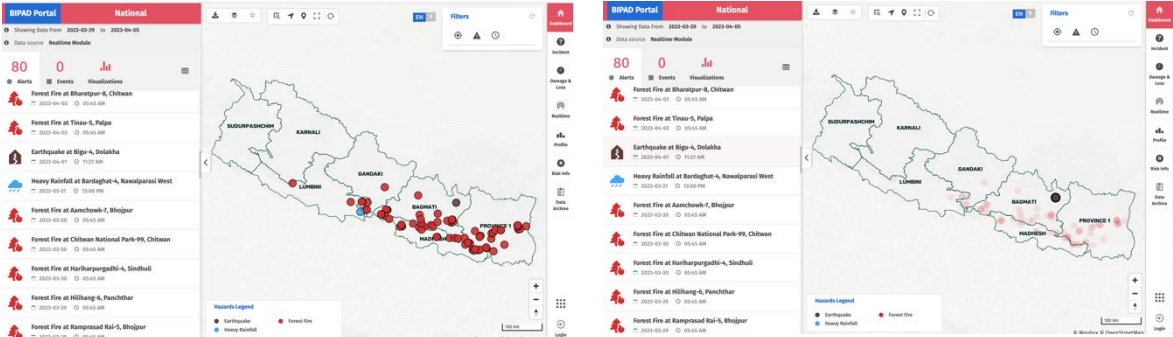


Figure 2: Real time data of hazards in Nepal Source: Bipad portal

- e) Dovetailing and expanding domestic policy framework: the national level government officials expressed interest in integrating climate and disaster concerns in Nepal’s existing governance framework at a national and local level. More specifically it was discussed that national budgets can make considerations for climate, gender and disaster relates issues and that urban resilience concerns can be incorporated into Nepal’s prevalent domestic policy architecture. For instance, plans such as the Green Resilient and Inclusive Development (GRID⁸) strategic action plan and the Local Disaster and Climate Resilience Plan (LDCRP) can be used to further integrate development planning. Furthermore, policies can be modified to accommodate urban resilience concerns. An example of this is the incentivization of green buildings or the use of local materials at the local level through tax rebates. Additionally, green building concepts can be incorporated into existing building bylaws through necessary modifications.

⁸ The GRID is a joint venture between Nepal Government and several development partners. See details: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/09/24/government-of-nepal-and-development-partners-join-forces-on-nepal-s-green-resilient-and-inclusive-development>.

Recommendations

Based on our engagements with diverse stakeholders from Nepal and the learnings of the Hub, we highly recommend establishing a collaborative decision-making environment that involves domestic actors more actively and significantly. The Nepal government has adequate experience of collaborating with several international agencies on projects related to disaster risk reduction, climate change and sustainable development. This experience can be harnessed to engage with domestic non-governmental actors such as civil societies, research organisations, media, private sector. Such a collaborative and inclusive decision-making approach will help comprehensively plan and meet the needs of current and new cities of Nepal in the future.

The Tomorrow's Cities Hub has developed a methodology for a) facilitating engagements across governance scales and b) co-producing risk and equity related information that can bolster urban planning processes in the future. This methodology can support the Nepal government in creating a more inclusive and collaborative decision-making environment and identify a local leader to build urban resilience.