The London School of Economics and Political Science

The politics of citizen-centric governance in post-earthquake Nepal

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 79,174 words including references and appendices.

I confirm that Chapter 4 was jointly co-authored with Dr. Flora Cornish and I contributed 80% of this work.

Signed:

Nimesh Dhungana

Abstract

Set in the contested climate following the 2015 Nepal earthquake, this thesis examines the politics of disaster governance from the perspective of disaster-affected citizens. The thesis draws on three distinct debates on governance of disasters, with the notions of citizen-centric monitoring, enforcement of voice and conditions for voice jointly setting the conceptual framework for the thesis. The main body of the thesis comprises three distinct yet interrelated empirical projects that draw on interview and ethnographic data collected through over five months of field work in Nepal.

Paper 1, based on interviews with a mix of early responders to the Nepal earthquake, investigates the multidirectional accountability demands facing early responders, not only from donors and beneficiaries of aid, but also from the national government and wider publics. The paper shows that accountability is a live issue confronting early responders and argues that public interrogation and criticisms constitute a critical form of citizen-centric politics in post-disaster context, geared at promoting preventive action against misguided governance of disaster.

Paper 2 is a case study of a civil society-driven accountability initiative in post-earthquake Nepal. The paper shows how such initiative sought to amplify local 'voice' regarding failures in the aid delivery and expanded local spaces for dialogue between disaster-affected communities and local powerholders. Attention is drawn to the ways in which a donor-driven, technical mode of accountability and ambiguous lines of authority undermined the local civil society actors' efforts to promote inclusive and accountable governance of disaster.

Paper 3 explores the politics of participatory governance within the state-induced post-disaster reconstruction. The nature of politics is revealed in terms of the state actors' efforts to instrumentalise participatory spaces to legitimise their vision of 'owner-led reconstruction', on the one hand, and the local communities' growing political awareness about their legitimate expectations and entitlements in relation to the state actors, on the other.

Overall, the thesis argues that disasters are not merely an epicentre of human suffering but have the potential to trigger multiple forms of citizen-centric and civil society-based initiatives to influence the nature and practice of disaster governance, which tend to divert from and challenge the commonly understood bureaucratic form of disaster governance propagated by the State and the international humanitarian sector. While the empirical studies show that the transformative potential of such initiatives is often constrained by the State and international actors' refusal to cede power, they offer disaster-affected citizens the opportunity to interrogate and interpret the powerholders' actions, making them politically aware of their neglect and failures in ensuring inclusive and accountable governance of disaster.

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PREFACE

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD degree in LSE's Department of Methodology. The thesis is in line with the paper-based format, prescribed by the Department. It therefore departs from the traditional monograph format. It consists of an introductory chapter (Chapter 1), a literature review and conceptual framework chapter (Chapter 2), a methodological overview chapter (Chapter 3), three empirical papers (Chapters 4, 5 & 6) and a conclusion chapter (Chapter 7).

The three empirical papers constitute the substantive component of the thesis. Each paper is informed by two overarching research questions but also contains distinct empirical aims and methodological design. Due to the paper-based structure of the thesis, the papers unavoidably contain some repetition of the theoretical and empirical literature. Each paper contains details of the methodological design. Further information on the methods, including details on data sources, is included under Methodological Annex.

The following is the submission status/plan for the three empirical papers:

Paper 1: Beyond performance and protocols: Early responders' experiences of accountability demands in the emergency response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake (R&R from *Disasters* journal)

Paper 2: Doing accountability in humanitarian crisis: A case of civil society-driven social accountability in post-earthquake Nepal, is planned to be submitted to *Development and Change* journal.

Paper 3: The politics of participatory disaster governance in Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction, is under review for an edited book.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The 'Great Earthquake'

7.30 AM, British Standard Time (BST), Saturday, April 25, 2015. Close to four months into my PhD programme, I was making steady progress with my research, which focused on the topic of accountability and participation in Nepal's health sector. To start my field work by the start of the second year, I had started to shortlist potential case studies. At 9 AM, I was supposed to have a Skype meeting with a family friend who worked for a Nepal-based aid agency that supported community-based health governance in the health sector. I was up early to prepare for the meeting, only to discover an unforeseen twist of events, which would change the course of my PhD journey.

An earthquake had just struck Nepal. My first source of information was Facebook, which by now was rife with pictures of buried individuals, collapsed houses, words of panic and impassioned appeals for help, both from Nepal and abroad. As a native of Nepal, my immediate reaction was to make sure that my family members were safe. I frantically tried to call my parents and siblings. Nobody answered the landlines, as I later learned that the continuous aftershocks had made it risky for people to remain indoors. Mobile networks were not working due to an unprecedented surge in calls. About two hours after the earthquake, I managed to get hold of my brother-in-law, who told me that everybody was safe.

Preliminary media reports about the scale of the human suffering and physical destruction were confusing, but from the pictures that were appearing in social media, it was clear that it was a massive one. One of the early Facebook posts read 'Kathmandu is wiped out…'. Another captured the fallen *Dharahara*, a nine-storey historical monument at the heart of Kathmandu, which had in the recent past gained popularity among domestic tourists, as people could climb up the monument to see the beautiful yet increasingly congested Kathmandu Valley. Its collapse claimed over 60 lives.

The response

Observing from the distance, the conditions of the emergency response looked tough and made further difficult by the continual aftershocks and remote terrain of Nepal. Yet, the immediate response from both the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the international aid community looked promising. For example, although the earthquake struck on a public holiday[1], the government machineries were quickly mobilised. A state of emergency was declared the same

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[1] Several interviewees later mentioned that the overall death toll from the earthquake could have been much higher had it not been for the public holiday. Public holiday meant closure of schools and offices, and people were outdoors which saved lives. Many suggested that 'fate' was in Nepal's favour, while others said it was a 'warning sign' to prepare for the worst.

day. The Ministry of Home Affairs, the apex body for the governance of disaster, directed other line ministries and agencies to develop effective strategies, structures and policies relevant to their respective units. The GoN also relaxed visa conditions, which enabled quick inflow of both mainstream aid actors and volunteers, as well as unprecedented media coverage of the earthquake. Neighbouring countries, including India and China responded immediately with quick supplies of basic aid. International aid and humanitarian agencies, both with previous presence in Nepal and newcomers, mounted their responses. Local and international youth volunteers became increasingly involved in the rescue and relief efforts, with many using social media technologies to raise resources, identify affected communities and deliver aid. It was also a moment of unprecedented global solidarity, attracting volunteers from across the world, who raised money, delivered relief supplies, and attended to the survivors.

Within few hours of the earthquake, national and international media had started capturing news of deaths and destruction, along with stories of survival, courage and cooperation. I was soon learning that friends and family members, despite the continual aftershocks, were immediately swept into voluntary work, joining in rescue and relief efforts, arranging temporary shelters, collecting and distributing basic supplies. I was being sent messages filled with concerns and sympathy. Several people asked me if I was planning to go, to be part of the relief efforts. Although emotionally appealing, this was not a practical option, given my ongoing PhD commitment and family situation in London. Instead, I started to question: How do I involve myself in the emergency response? How do I make myself useful?

Inspired by some friends in diaspora, I decided to do my part by raising some funds that I could channel for some good cause. I had no prior experience of doing such activity. A friend of mine suggested 'crowdfunding' as an easy and user-friendly option. I quickly taught myself how it worked, and started a fundraising campaign using GoFundMe, although with little forethought into where and how the funds so generated would be disbursed. My sense was that with a major disaster of this nature, there will be need, and I will be able to find the right people who could help bring it to some good cause. I managed to raise about £2800 through this campaign, which I later disbursed to two separate community-based projects organised in the wake of the earthquake. Other than visiting one of the projects once and updating my contributors a couple of times through the crowdsourcing site, I have hardly followed up on my commitment to keep track of these projects, how the funds were used, and to what effects. I shall come back to this point later to discuss how it links to the broader questions of disaster governance, and especially monitoring of and accountability in ever-expanding space of humanitarian action.

The evolving research problem

By the end of the first day, I had started to grapple with several questions. Whether or how is this disaster going to shape the future development of Nepal? Do the state machineries have the capacity to respond to the short and long-term needs of the disaster? What is the role of the international humanitarian sector? Is my original research agenda on participation and accountability in Nepal's health sector going to be of any relevance in this context? How would the changed context affect my ability to do fieldwork in Nepal?

By the following day, my attention shifted to the news reports and social media posts that brought the GoN and the aid sector under sharp public scrutiny. Interestingly, several of these media reports and comments were specifically using the language of accountability and transparency to call into question the government's response, a subject of my original PhD research. In the week that followed, media reports pointed to bureaucratic mishandling of aid items, together with allegations of misappropriation and corruption. The affected communities, independent of other intermediary agencies, were posting pictures and comments on social media sites, demanding immediate rescue and relief assistance. Several of the Facebook posts were reporting, uploading, and tagging information and artefacts about misplaced and misappropriated relief aid. Terming the government response as inept, in many places, protests erupted and in some places reports of angry victims barring the politicians and ministers from entering the disaster zone became public. Globally, the Nepali diaspora were resorting to online forums such as change.org, demanding improved accounts and actions from the aid actors.

The international aid actors also became a subject of criticisms and controversies. They were accused of distributing relief materials that were socio-culturally offensive or inappropriate. For example, an international aid group became a subject of controversy for allegedly distributing beef produce in a predominantly Hindu community. One twitter message from a development activist read, "Soul Vulture NGOs are entering in Nepal: Beware". Another post mocked incoming aid workers as "voluntourists". A third urged people to become vigilant not just about the government's disaster response but also that of non-state actors. It read "while we are asking for Govt. to be accountable let's also be conscious about I/NGOs and Corp's initiatives".

Closer examination of the GoN's actions in the immediate aftermath showed that it was not being a mute spectator to the criticisms directed at it. Senior level government officials, including some ministers, were using mainstream media to tame public criticisms. Others were using Facebook and twitter to report on their actions. One of the senior members of the government, after having visited some of the affected sites including his home district,

wrote a long Facebook post, widely circulated publicly on social media, in which he defended the government's action, welcomed criticisms but also called on the public to, in his own words, 'spare the sanctimony from distance'. Below is an excerpt from his Facebook post:

After the dust settles

We now need people committed for the long haul. In a week or so, the fundraising will subside, the genuinely well-intentioned will head back to their day jobs, some pretentious do-gooders will sit pretty on a plan of career and business, the journalists will have parachuted to the next crisis leaving behind a lazy narrative of a "corrupt, inept state." As I stared at my ruined house in Bungkot, I could not help imagine the coming test of commitment: after the dust settles, who among us will remain standing for the painstaking task of rebuilding?.....Finally, to the thousands of Nepalis and foreign friends, who acted in good faith, gave it all, and sprung into action during rescue and relief, I say thank you. To those who have never paid a single rupee of direct tax in Nepal, but were generous with the vitriol, I say you're still welcome to help improve our country and its government from within or outside. And to those who got a little excited: insult me, fine, but kindly spare the sanctimony from a distance.

This post cemented my curiosity on the role of the government in the governance of disaster, the public pressures confronting public officials, as well as their rhetorical power to address and tame public criticisms. Amidst growing public scrutiny, mainstream humanitarian agencies were also relying on various modes of communication to report on their actions. Among other things, 'situation reports' about the help being provided, along with difficulties encountered, notably those posed by the extreme geographic context and continual aftershocks that hampered rescue and relief efforts, were being routinely circulated. It made me further question the main rationale that underpin the production and circulation of such communicative materials, whether or how such materials are being consumed by disaster-affected citizens, and what role they might play in making disaster recovery reflect the needs of the affected communities. In addition, one personal experience within the first week of the earthquake further helped consolidate my research interest in the nature, potential and limitations of citizens' efforts in influencing the agenda and practice of disaster governance, which subsequently became the central focus of my PhD thesis.

When I was living in the United States, prior to coming to London for my PhD, I had co-founded a loose network of young Nepali professionals that would meet on a regular basis to discuss contemporary issues confronting Nepal and beyond. An email group of this network had remained inactive for a while, but the earthquake sparked renewed conversations among the members. Like me, many in this network, had either individually and collectively, and without much forethought, started raising funds to send to Nepal. A major point of the conversation was how best to transfer the funds so generated. About five days after the earthquake, the members of this email group got involved in an intense debate over a decision

of the GoN. Below I provide a summary of this experience and then try to link this to the broader theme of my research.

On April 30, five days after the earthquake, an email inquiry came to our email group with the subject line 'NRB Circular'. The email pertained to a directive issued by the GoN, in which it seemingly demanded the funds being raised through varied and independent sources be brought under the purview of Nepal's central bank, the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). The email inquired about the new directive from the GoN, and how it was going to affect the varied forms of fundraising initiatives. The details surrounding these regulatory decisions were far from clear, which further added to the confusion. Please see the copy of the email (the name of the sender withheld to ensure anonymity):

Date: Thu, Apr 30, 2015 at 3:25 PM
Subject: NRB Circular
To: nepal-quake <nepal-quake@googlegroups.com>

Is this real? Does it mean all the donations pouring into Nepal through myriad organizations will all be earmarked to the PM fund? I'm just curious about the implications since a lot of us have been raising money for 501(c)(3) organizations here that channel it to Nepal.

This email inquiry was met with a chain of reactions from others in the group. A few were quick to accuse the government of trying to squander the funds in the guise of emergency management. One member proposed drafting a petition to encourage the international community to protest the government's decision. Albeit in a smaller number, there were others who were opposed to this idea. Discussions also moved to what government could or should do under the situation of emergency. A lawyer in the group seemed to defend the government action, terming it consistent with the emergency law of the country and part of the emergency responsibility of the government to regulate the mobilisation and distribution of aid. Another member wrote a long email, questioning the relevance of such online petitions, while urging the members to become "constructive". She wrote:

> "We have to ask what is the purpose/outcome of such petitions (This is not the first one I have seen so I am not coming at you personally), other than satisfying our needs of self-importance, therapy for the frustration we feel at how things are being managed, and diverting the attention away from the actual topic of being constructive to help the process."

She further suggested "Let's use our resources in actually gathering intel from the ground. Let's reach out to government directly and other private/groups to get more information."

The conversation became nothing but thorny. Having also raised some funds myself, I was forced to reflect how I was going to ensure transparent and effective transfer and use of such funds. My thinking was the funds may be independently raised with an intention to do good, but that doesn't mean they should go unchecked. But who sets the terms of how it should

be checked and reported? My own approach was to encourage the fellow members to pay attention to the rationale and scope of the government decision to bring the privately raised funds under the government's regulatory apparatus, the authenticity of which was still obscure.

Meanwhile, another controversy erupted. Less than one week since the earthquake, the GoN allegedly asked the international aid community to leave the country, claiming the initial phase of rescue and relief was over and that the government machineries needed to concentrate on longer-term recovery[2]. This incident further galvanised those who were in the favour of writing an online petition. One member offered to draft it but appealing to "empathy and responsibility" rather than playing on "fear, anger and emotion" as another member stressed. In the end, despite opposition from some and reservation of others (including me), the petition went online on change.org, with the heading "Please DO NOT send international rescue teams home or request their return for assistance. We need their help!"[3].

Little do we know if and to what extent this effort was able to garner the attention of the concerned authorities, let alone influence the government's action over emergency management. But this experience consolidated my interest in the politics of governance of disaster more generally in two ways. First, it made me realise how the Nepal earthquake helped spur conversations among a widely dispersed actors, to not just attend to the suffering of those affected by the disaster through mobilisation of financial and material resources, but also pursue concrete forms of political action to question and influence the nature of disaster response and recovery. It is also to note that it was not the only online petition to have emerged amidst the controversial climate of the Nepal earthquake emergency response. There were many, with some pursuing much more contentious agenda, leveraging online spaces, and appealing to a wider public than the one above. Second, it also served as a prompt for me to reflect that such efforts to speak on behalf of the distant sufferers and challenge the actions of the emergency responders are hardly straightforward but are subject to contestation and negotiation among concerned actors.

In Nepal, efforts to enhance the prospect of accountable and participatory humanitarian response were taking more concrete forms. Merely a week after the earthquake, two citizen-centric, civil society-based efforts came to my attention that specifically sought to

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[2] As I am writing this section, an earthquake and tsunami has hit Indonesia, with over 5,000 people presumed dead. Interestingly, the aftermath of the disaster triggered similar controversy as above, with the Indonesian government criticised for ordering the international humanitarian NGOs to leave the country (Lyons, 2018). Similar controversy also erupted in the wake of the Kerala floods earlier in the summer, where state government criticised the central government for refusing to accept foreign aid (Times News Network, 2018).

[3] The petition can be accessed here: https://bit.ly/2OvtYJA

monitor and influence the course of the earthquake response. At that time, I had no intention of doing research on any of these initiatives, but their mere emergence reinforced my intellectual curiosity regarding the aims and aspirations that underpin such efforts. One such effort later became the subject of my case study (Paper 2).

By the first week of the earthquake, I had also started to reflect on my own motivation and ability to conduct research on the topic of accountability and governance in Nepal's health sector. As it was looking increasingly obvious that the national discourse and activities were going to shift towards the longer disaster recovery, my interest in doing research on the political dimensions of governance of the post-earthquake response and reconstruction was solidifying. I brought this interest to the attention of my supervisor who encouraged me to keep the option open and start with a 'scoping of literature'.

Linking the research problem to the literature and back

When I started the scoping of the relevant scholarship, it did not take me long to discover that the governance of humanitarian disaster, and within it accountability is one of the enduring yet unresolved topics to have captured the attention of disaster scholars, humanitarian actors and policymakers. Particularly following the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s and the alleged failures of the international humanitarian sector, critical humanitarian scholars have noted how the topic of performance-driven and accountable governance of aid has become a major object of reforms within the mainstream humanitarian sector, mostly in the form of setting up of universal standards of performance, codes of conduct, which many also consider being divergent from the expectations and political realities of the disaster context (Hilhorst, 2002; Dufour *et al.*, 2004; Barnett, 2005).

The scoping of literature also made me realise that the previous literature on disaster governance mostly centred around critiquing the internationally-propagated reforms that were introduced in the wake of the Rwandan genocide, while relatively scant attention is paid to the 'bottom-up' citizen-centric efforts, public criticisms or what may be termed 'calls for accountability' that originate within specific disaster context, as were becoming apparent in the wake of the Nepal crisis. With my original PhD interest in conducting research on community-based governance in the health sector, I was also aware of the growing literature on participatory governance and social accountability in the development sector, which entailed concrete mechanisms undertaken by civil society actors or citizens to monitor the performance of service providers and hold them accountable for the delivery, quality and relevance of everyday public services (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Gaventa and McGee, 2013; Fox, 2015). As my research evolved, I also drew from the literature on the politics of disaster governance and disasters more generally, which provided

me with the conceptual tools to consider various forms of societal pressures confronting powerholders in the wake of a disaster, and how powerholders, in turn, respond to or overcome such pressures through both discursive and material exercise of power (Olson, 2000; Boin, McConnell and Hart, 2008; Pelling and Dill, 2010; Svedin, 2012).

At the same time, I was also aware that the empirical understanding of the political dimensions of the post-disaster governance needed to be viewed within Nepal's ongoing political and development realities. The post-earthquake environment was not the first time Nepali politicians and public officials became a subject of widespread criticisms. They have been regularly confronting public criticisms, for their failure to bring substantial improvements in the public sector governance, despite six decades of planned development, and more recent efforts at governance reforms. A country reeling from a major political conflict, the credibility of the ruling elite had further come into question in the years preceding the earthquake. Much of the criticisms are directed at their failure to institutionalise the promises of political and governance reforms that gained traction after the 2006 mass movement, which brought the 240-year old Monarchy to an end, and paved the way for the Maoist rebels to join peaceful democratic politics. The failure of the first Constituent Assembly (CA) to write the constitution had been a major source of public discontent. Political uncertainty loomed large as the timeline of the second CA was coming to an end.

Growing up in Nepal, I am hardly unaware of these turbulent political and development experiences confronting Nepal. Working for four years in Nepal's development sector, I had the opportunity to travel extensively across the country, gaining first-hand account of the deep-seated problems facing Nepal's development trajectory. A major part of my job was to conduct an independent monitoring and evaluation of development interventions. This experience brought me closer to the intricate functioning of the development sector, how aid programmes are negotiated and delivered, often with questionable impacts on local communities they claim to uplift. At the same time, growing up in a political family, I was never removed from Nepal's political realities and the long-standing struggle for democracy and development, which became further contentious after the democratic changes of the 1990s and the ten-year Maoist insurgency that followed.

Amidst the much-celebrated climate following the political change of 2006, I left my job in the development sector, to join a newly established youth-based civil society group, which sought to advance the agenda of youth participation and alternative politics. In the months prior to the much-anticipated first CA elections, I managed a nation-wide campaign to put pressure on the main political parties to offer candidature to the youth political leaders. It was met with wider support from other civil society groups and media, with political leaders also making public commitment to ensure increased youth participation into constitution-

making process. But when the time for elections came, the political leaders failed to keep their promise, with very few youth leaders being offered the candidature to run in the elections. This experience left in me a deeper realisation concerning the entrenched political status-quo in Nepal, and the continual tensions between optimism and pessimism that mar a society going through a perpetual political crisis. This represents a complex reality of a transitioning society that also became apparent in the immediate aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, a topic that has shaped my PhD research.

Thesis focus

The public outcry surrounding the Nepal earthquake response became less visible after about a month. But I was left with questions about the political meanings and implications of the public outcry, and especially the 'calls for accountability', and if and how they stand to influence the governance of the post-earthquake response and reconstruction. Having conducted a preliminary review of literature, which helped me to situate my evolving intellectual curiosity within the growing debates on the topic of disaster governance, and within it accountable and participatory governance of disasters, I decided to change the focus of my PhD thesis.

The main aim of this thesis, thus, is to examine the politics of governance in post-earthquake Nepal from the perspective of disaster-affected citizens. The next section offers an overview of the key framing of the thesis, while also situating the thesis within three sets of literature on governance, leading to the conceptual framework. The thesis seeks to answer two interrelated research questions: **How did citizens' efforts to influence the governance of disaster unfold in post-earthquake Nepal? What are the potentials and limitations of citizen involvement in disaster governance, in post-earthquake Nepal?** For the purposes of the thesis, the citizens' efforts in influencing the disaster governance in post-earthquake Nepal is conceptualised under three themes: citizen-centric monitoring, enforcement of voice and conditions for voice. The notions of citizen-centric monitoring and enforcement of voice, in particular, are situated within the theoretical debates on participatory governance and capability-based development, drawing on the seminal works of Amartya Sen and recent scholarship on voice and social accountability (e.g. Drèze and Sen, 1989, 2002; Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Couldry, 2010; Fox, 2015). The topics of participatory governance and social accountability are hardly new within development studies. Yet, they remain relatively underutilised within disaster and humanitarian scholarship. The broader aim of this thesis is to advance the theoretical and empirical understanding on the nature, potential and limitations of citizen-centric governance following a rapid-onset disaster (e.g. earthquake), and the interplay of democratic governance and disaster more generally.

The thesis follows a qualitative research design, drawing on a mix of interview and ethnographic (participant observation) data. It seeks to build the empirical understanding on the politics of citizen-centric governance of disaster, and more particularly what Ebrahim (2009, p. 891), drawing inspiration from Geertz (1973) calls 'thick description' of the contextually-embedded, political dimension of accountability, which moves beyond the current dominance of technical and normative understanding of accountability within disaster governance. However, 'thick description' does not mean that the thesis is devoid of my own interpretation as a researcher. As Geertz himself argues, the presentation of facts, should go hand-in-hand with the effort to 'reduce the puzzlement' (Geertz, 1973, p. 16). My own interest with this PhD is to develop a thick account of the politics that underpin citizen-centric governance in post-disaster context and contribute to the debates surrounding the potential and limitations of such politics in making disaster response and recovery participatory and accountable to the demands of the disaster-affected citizens.

Thesis structure

The thesis follows the paper-based format, following the guidelines of the LSE's Methodology Department. In addition to this introductory chapter, the thesis contains a literature review and conceptual framework chapter (Chapter 2), which provides an overview of the Nepali context, and reviews three major strands of literature related to governance of disasters that jointly inform my empirical projects.

After providing a brief overview on the methodological underpinning of this thesis (Chapter 3), the main body of the thesis then follows in three empirical papers (Chapters 4, 5 & 6). The three papers jointly seek to address the overarching questions of the thesis while each contains a distinct empirical question (s) and methodological design. The conclusion section (Chapter 7) synthesises the major findings from the three empirical projects, highlighting the nature, potential and limitations of citizen involvement in shaping the governance of the disaster. Major theoretical, policy and methodological implications of the thesis are discussed, together with key limitations and potential areas of future research.

Chapter conclusion

As Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 4) argue, a piece of qualitative research is a dialectical endeavour that is based on the researcher's personal engagement with the topic ('want-to-do-ability'), its intellectual and policy significance ('should-do-ability') and practical considerations for the fieldwork ('do-ability'). Accordingly, in this introductory chapter I have briefly introduced my personal motivation into investigating the politics of citizen-centric governance of disasters. The motivation, to a large extent, is located within the unforeseen climate following the Nepal earthquake. It developed as part of my journey to become a 'good

Samaritan', and subsequently took the form of a research agenda to contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding the politics of governance of disaster. This mix of motivation had a major influence in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of this thesis. With this, I turn to the next Chapter that provides an overall intellectual framing of my thesis, together with a critical review of the three sets of literature that I draw on and contribute to through this PhD thesis.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have briefly introduced the complicated environment of the emergency response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake. In so doing, the Chapter draws attention to several complex questions: How was the response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake governed? What role did accountability or the 'calls for accountability' play in the governance of the disaster? How were such 'calls' responded to by the government? In this chapter, I draw on this broad set of guiding questions to provide an overview of the main framing of the thesis, which focuses on the politics of citizen-centric governance of disaster. The chapter will then follow a detailed and critical review of three distinct strands of literature on governance, which jointly informs the conceptual framework and the overarching research questions for the thesis.

Socio-anthropological research on disasters has long posited that disasters are not to be treated as mere natural perils or even social problems, but as socio-political events that tend to alter the pre-existing socio-political configuration of a disaster-hit society (Quarentelli, 1989). According to Oliver-Smith (1999), disasters are 'totalising events' that give rise to varied forms of political struggle among differently situated social actors (Oliver-Smith, 1999). One such political struggle often takes place over the governance of disaster; how is disaster responded to, under whose terms, and to what ends.

In recent years, the topic of disaster governance has occupied major policy and scholarly attention (Tierney, 2012; Barnett, 2013; Raju and da Costa, 2018). Tierney (2012) defines disaster governance as 'the interrelated sets of norms, organizational and institutional actors, and practices (spanning predisaster, transdisaster, and postdisaster periods) that are designed to reduce the impacts and losses associated with disasters arising from natural and technological agents and from intentional acts of terrorism' (p.344). This definition offers an analytical entry point for my thesis for two reasons. First, more than a technical or bureaucratic process primarily involving state actors, this definition considers disaster governance as a polycentric political process, spanning a range of state and non-state actors. How the response to a particular disaster is governed, in turn, is shaped by the interests and motivations of these varied actors. According to Bankoff and Hilhorst (2009), state actors may be concerned with the short-term goal of establishing order in the wake of a disaster, particularly through the deployment of regulatory frameworks and standards of performance. Non-state actors, on the other hand, may seek to pursue disaster as an opportunity to advance a longer-term vision of social justice. Such framing contest tends to interfere with the short and longer-term governance of disaster. Second, Tierney's definition also emphasises the temporal element of

disaster governance. Here, attention is drawn to the fact that the governance of disaster is rarely a singular and isolated process. Rather, it takes place along a disaster-development continuum (Cuny, 1983), wherein the immediate aftermath of the disaster, widely understood as rescue and relief phase, is centred on addressing immediate human suffering, while the longer term intervention is geared at attaining broader development goals, or what is popularly known as 'building back better'. Such varying focus from disaster to development invariably calls for different priorities and techniques of governance. At the same time, the terms and techniques of disaster governance, both in the immediate and long-run, are closely intertwined with the pre-disaster political dynamics of the concerned society. This raises a question of not just how, but also under whose terms the agenda and practice of post-disaster governance is pursued. While acknowledging the polycentric and political nature of disaster governance, Barnett (2013) calls for an understanding of disaster governance through the lens of power inequalities that span global and local levels. Barnett draws attention to the preoccupation among global humanitarian actors in establishing and implementing professional standards, benchmarks and tools of disaster governance. This has, in turn, reduced disaster governance as a domain of international aid actors and their experts, undermining the prospect of disaster-affected citizens to shape the agenda and techniques of disaster governance.

Despite these vibrant debates, too often the scholarly attention on the topic of disaster governance has centred on the role of the State and the international aid sector. Relatively scant attention has gone into what it means for disaster-affected citizens or civil society actors to govern the disasters and the practical efforts they undertake to influence the agenda and practice of disaster governance. While power inequalities may permeate under the guise of disaster governance, disasters also serve as a fertile ground for a variedly located public to speak of and denounce the conditions under which the very idea of intervening in the lives of the distant victims takes root (Boltanski, 1999). The unpredictability and uncertainty that characterise disasters also serve as catalysing forces, giving rise to newer efforts by disaster-affected citizens to demand answers from those responsible for governing the disaster (Olson, 2000; Boin et al., 2008). Simpson (2013), through his ethnographic study of post-earthquake Gujarat has shown, that disasters may serve as a window of opportunity for the state and non-state actors to introduce newer social experiments, but it also encourage disaster-affected citizens to pursue alternative forms of redevelopment through seemingly mundane and everyday forms of political action.

At the same time, expectations of and efforts by citizens to influence the governance of disasters are hardly separable from the pre-existing political and democratic climate of the disaster-hit society. In particular, the last two decades have seen ordinary citizens and civil society actors across the global South actively expanding their role and reach in challenging

the ways the public sector is governed, mostly under the rubric of participatory governance (Fung and Wright, 2001; Gaventa, 2004). Part of the movement towards participatory governance is geared at improving the chronic performance deficit that mars the public sector. Increasingly, citizens are at the forefront of using their knowledge and voices in shaping the decisions surrounding the provision of public goods, an area long dominated by experts and professionals (Fung and Wright, 2001; Fisher, 2006). Beyond citizen involvement in decision-making, the participatory movement, as per Cornwall and Coelho (2007), is also characterised by citizens' efforts in translating local voice into appropriate response from the authorities. Relatedly, failures to bring reforms in the delivery of everyday public services through traditional mechanisms of democratic participation and accountability, notably periodic elections, have also shifted the focus to what scholars term 'social accountability', in which citizens leverage various mechanisms to monitor the performance of public officials and exert pressures to bring improvement in the quality and relevance of public services (Malena, Forster and Singh, 2004; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Fox, 2015).

These debates shed light into the expanding role and potential of what may be termed 'citizen-centric governance' that is not independent of, but closely intertwined with the political and bureaucratic conditions of a disaster-hit society. Of importance is the availability of state-mandated democratic and participatory spaces, which enable citizens to exercise their inherent rights to monitor the performance of powerholders and voice concerns over the manner in which post-disaster response and reconstruction is handled. Discussed at further length in the subsequent section, the 2015 earthquake struck Nepal while the reforms to remedy the historical maladies that inflict the public sector were underway. It also coincided with an important moment in Nepal's political history when the relations between state and citizens, state and non-state sector, were undergoing major shifts. This demands that the politics of citizen-centric governance be understood within the ongoing politics of democratic and governance reforms facing Nepal.

In sum, rather than focusing on the macro-level politics of post-disaster governance, notably those related to the setting up of regulatory and policy frameworks for post-disaster response and reconstruction, the thesis is concerned with the politics of disaster governance from the perspective of disaster-affected citizens. Accordingly, the empirical projects are geared at capturing the concrete expectations and experiences of the earthquake-affected citizens and civil society actors involved in shaping the governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction.

Within the broader framing of the politics of citizen-centric governance of disaster, the empirical chapters of the thesis focus on examining the role and practice of accountability in disaster governance. The focus on accountability as a core analytical subject rests on two-

fold justifications. First, in recent years, accountability as an object of governance reforms has received major attention in the international aid sector, an area in which this thesis is primarily located. In a recent example, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations have codified accountability, and related notions of transparency and participation as one of its major targets of reforms. 'Goal 16: peace, justice and strong institutions' specifically calls for the development of 'effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels of operations' (United Nations Development Programme, no date). Likewise, accountability is also a major focus within the disaster sector. Recent global policy initiatives such as the Sendai Framework promote the ideals of participatory and accountable governance of disaster (Raju and da Costa, 2018). In addition, since the mid-1990s, the international humanitarian sector has made concerted efforts to bring reforms in the humanitarian sector by introducing accountability standards, tools and practices. Despite these initiatives, Raju and da Costa (2018) argue that the notion of accountability within disaster governance is largely understudied, both at the levels of *what* accountability is, and *how* it is practiced. Second, the focus on accountability also stems from the empirical context, particularly the ongoing debates surrounding accountable governance of Nepal's public sector, and the 'calls for accountability' that emanated in the wake of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, as briefly discussed in the Introductory Chapter. The aim of this thesis is to use these developments to understand the nature of post-disaster accountability demands, and its bearing on the broader politics of citizen-centric governance of disasters.

Politics of governance: key debates

With the above overview, the following section of the literature review delves into four strands of literature, which jointly set the conceptual foundation for my PhD thesis.

First, I will introduce the empirical context of my thesis, focusing on the contested environment following the emergency response to the Nepal earthquake and the 'calls for accountability' that followed. The section will then trace the contemporary history of development and democracy in Nepal, in order to set the stage for the findings to come in the body of the thesis. In Nepal, concerns over the practices and outcomes of democracy, governance and accountability have been the subject of active, sometimes violent, movements and efforts. Prior to the earthquake, the ability of the Nepali State and particularly the public sector, to respond to the needs of the citizens was hotly contested, while efforts were also introduced in improving citizen involvement in the governance of the public sector. One of the arguments of this thesis is that citizen-centric governance of disaster is not independent of, but is shaped by, the broader socio-political conditions in which they unfold, and this

overview is intended to connect Nepal's past struggle for democracy and governance reforms with post-disaster politics of governance.

Second, I will trace the emergence of contemporary understandings of the politics of governance of aid, drawing on a mix of international development and humanitarian scholarship. Instead of being the main literature that this thesis contributes to, this section of the review tackles the key controversies facing the globally-propagated agenda and activities of governance reforms and their political implications. The topic is further investigated as part of the first empirical paper (Paper 1), with a focus on the contest over accountability agenda in the emergency response to the Nepal earthquake

Third, I will draw on the literature on the politics of post-disaster governance. While not solely focused on the humanitarian aid or development sector, this body of literature provides a useful conceptual lens to understand the contested nature of governance reforms triggered by disasters, and the reactions from powerholders when confronted with public criticisms in the aftermath of a major disaster.

Fourth, the final set of literature on the politics of citizen-centric governance constitutes the main theoretical framing of my thesis. By focusing on the rights and voice of citizens, and drawing attention to the potential and limitations of social accountability in spurring reforms in the delivery of public goods, this literature stands to overcome some of the conceptual shortcomings of the previous two literatures, while also learn from them, as I synthesise the key elements of the literature review and propose the main conceptual framework and overarching questions for my PhD.

Although political dimension of disaster governance is a central concern that underpins each of these three strands of literature, they have so far developed along parallel lines. The aim of the literature review, thus, is also to bring these literatures into dialogue with each other. As the thesis follows the paper-based format, some of these literatures and contextual background will be revisited as part of the three empirical papers.

Nepali context

The 'Great' Nepal earthquake and the emergency response

On Saturday April 25, 2015, an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 Mw and subsequent aftershocks brought upon Nepal an unprecedented level of humanitarian crisis, claiming over 8,790 lives, injuring over 22,300 and leaving over 2.8 million (about 10% of Nepal's population) homeless (Government of Nepal, 2015). Popularly known as '*Gorkha*[4] Earthquake' or '*Mahabhukampa*' (the Great Earthquake), the crisis cast a critical spotlight on the State's

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[4] A district in Nepal, about 50 miles northwest of Kathmandu Valley. The epicentre of the earthquake was a village called Barpak in Gorkha.

ability to manage the crisis, calling for immediate intervention from both Nepal-based and international aid actors. According to the initial estimate, 240 international relief agencies responded to the early days of the earthquake, including over 134 expert teams that came solely under the 'Search and Rescue' mission (Government of Nepal, 2015, p. xii). In addition, a wide range of civil society/non-governmental organisations already operational in Nepal responded to the crisis. Independent volunteers from all over the world, including those from the Nepali diaspora, contributed by providing funds, relief materials, professional expertise and physical labour.

While the earthquake proved to be a major hindrance towards Nepal's ongoing developmental endeavours, the level of attention it garnered from the international community, and their subsequent commitment of aid resources, enabled the GoN to pursue a concerted post-disaster governance agenda under the rubric of 'building back better' Nepal (Government of Nepal, 2015). The efforts in that directions were made in terms of setting up new institutional and policy arrangements, including those that specifically claim to make long-term recovery resilient, accountable and community-based (Government of Nepal, Nepal Reconstruction Authority, 2016).

The contested terrain of the Nepal earthquake response and the "calls for accountability"

In the introductory chapter, drawing on my personal reflections of having distantly involved in the emergency response, I have provided a brief overview of the contested climate sparked by the earthquake. The topic will be revisited in further detail as part of the first empirical paper (Paper 1) but a quick recap may be necessary.

The national and global attention that the Nepal earthquake received was unprecedented, but it also ignited major public criticisms and controversies over how the emergency and longer-term response is managed. Citizens and civil society actors, together with media and diaspora community, mounted pressure upon the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the aid actors to accelerate their rescue and relief operations. Citizens' reactions ranged from digital or online activism on the internet and social media platforms, notably Facebook, twitter, change.org, to direct or offline activism involving protests and sit-ins, blockades of rescue efforts and relief distribution (Sharma and Adkin, 2015). Media reports captured people's sense of neglect by the government (Siegler, 2015), while civil society groups called on the government and aid actors to ensure transparency and accountability in the mobilisation and delivery of aid (Thapa, 2015).

The GoN and other aid actors were quick to pledge that their responses would heed the demands of the affected populations and promised stronger and accountable governance of the disaster (Paudyal, 2015). To that end, the GoN enacted a major policy initiative which,

among other issues, committed to make the longer-term recovery focused on participation of and accountability to disaster-affected communities (Government of Nepal, 2015).

In sum, the emergency response to the Nepal earthquake sparked what may be termed "calls for accountability", surrounding the nature and direction of the disaster response. The GoN and the aid community came under closer public scrutiny, but they also reiterated their commitment to introduce reforms in the way the response and reconstruction is governed. This fraught environment following the Nepal earthquake sets the main empirical context for my thesis. However, understanding the contextual and political dimensions of citizen-centric disaster governance, the main aim of this PhD thesis, also requires the topic of governance, and within it participation and accountability, be located within Nepal's contemporary democratic and development history, to which I now turn.

Nepal, its quest for development, and enduring crisis of governance: pre-earthquake

Nepal embraced the vision and practice of development (*bikas*) in 1951 under its first democratic government and upon the overthrow of the oligarchic Rana Regime [5] (Shrestha, 1997). But the process of development and democratic reforms was soon obstructed when in 1960 the then King Mahendra, through a military coup, took over the reign of the country. King Mahendra pursued a centralised mode of development under the rubric of 'guided democracy', suspending fundamental democratic rights, notably multiparty democratic politics (Joshi and Rose, 1966). Previous research shows that the three decades of autocratic monarchy and single party system (*panchayat)* that followed was marred by lack of transparency in government operations and abuse of power by the ruling elites (Mahat, 2005). In 1990, a political protest, popularly known as *Janandolan (people's movement)* broke out, which overthrew the *Panchayati* system and restored multiparty democracy. The new constitution that was promulgated after the 1990 political changes, established Nepal as a parliamentary democracy, with the King in the role of the custodian of the constitution.

The democratisation of the Nepali polity in the 1990s thrust upon Nepal renewed imaginaries of development. With the country becoming amenable to the global community, it helped Nepali activists and civil society[6] groups to join global alliances to challenge the pre-

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[5] The Rana regime was a centralised hereditary autocracy that rendered the Shah monarchy as ceremonial head and ruled Nepal for nearly 104 years, until it was overthrown by a popular movement in 1950. For more on the contemporary history of Nepal, see Whelpton, 2005.

[6] The English term civil society is adopted in Nepal as '*Nagarik Samaj'*, which literally translates as citizen society. It encompasses a range of organisations, from traditional or informal grassroot organisations, cultural groups, professional NGOs, to advocacy groups (see for example, Bhatta, 2012). While acknowledging this plural and often contested understanding of civil society, in line with the main interest of this thesis on citizens' voice and social accountability, I use Mary Kaldor's working definition of civil society, that is, 'those organizations, groups and movements who are engaged in this process of negotiation and debate about the character of the rules — it is the process of expressing 'voice''(Kaldor, 2003, p. 11).

existing mode of development that was increasingly seen as devoid of public participation and accountability. One noteworthy case entails an emergence of a loose network of Nepal-based civil society activists that drew on growing access to information and an international coalition to reverse the World Bank's decision to fund a controversial Hydropower Project in eastern Nepal, while simultaneously compelling the Bank to introduce new reform measures (Udall, 1998; Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2000). Given the growing calls for rights-based and participatory development, the period also saw the State introducing policy and legislative measures with a stated aim of devolving the long-held administrative power from the centre to the local bodies, a noteworthy legislative change being the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 (His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Law and Justice, 1999). This Act was meant to equip the local bodies with a decision-making power in formulating development programmes and make them more responsive to the demands of communities at the level of service delivery.

Despite these legislative and policy initiatives, scholars have argued that the Nepali State's public sector performance remained weak during the 1990s, which, in part, contributed to the real and perceived social inequalities, and by extension, citizens' grievances (Deraniyagala, 2005; Lawoti, 2007). The period also saw a growing presence of both national and international NGOs that, among other issues, pursued the agenda of 'good governance' in Nepal's public sector. Critical Nepali scholars, however, argue that the agenda of 'good governance' followed the terms of international donors and failed to integrate itself into or bring substantive changes to ordinary citizens' experience of democracy, human rights and accountability (Panday, 1999, p. 381). The increased presence of the international aid sector also had an influence on the nature of Nepal's civil society, with the period witnessing a rapid growth of professional NGOs that were dependent on international aid. While providing some of the vital development services and contributing to elevate the agenda of rights-based and participatory development into the public discourse (Tanaka, 2011), a general critique is that the proliferation of professional and donor-dependent NGOs in the 1990s undermined the growth of an independent or 'genuine civil society', with the potential to act as a countervailing force against the State and international aid community (Dahal, 2001, p. 24).

Against this background of what, Pandey (1999, p.1) calls a 'halting effort and an unfulfilling experience' of development, in 1996, a little-known communist group, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M), waged what they called the "People's War" against the State. One of the main aims of the "People's War" was to abolish the Hindu Monarchy that they considered as the main source of Nepal's democratic and development maladies.

As the Maoist insurgency continued, affecting much of Nepal's rural landscape, in April 2006, another people's movement, popularly known as the *Jana Andolan II*, swept Nepal. The movement was supported by an understanding reached between the then

underground CPN-M and mainstream political parties in November 2005, to jointly fight against the autocratic regime led by King Gyanendra, who had assumed absolute political powers in February 2005. Despite the unfavorable democratic environment, scholars who have investigated the period leading to *Jana Andolan II* have traced the productive role played by Nepal's civil society actors, maintaining a safe distance from mainstream party politics, while helping build a broader political coalition against the Royal regime (Shrestha and Adhikari, 2010). After nineteen days of protests, the Monarchy relinquished its power, resulting in the ultimate overthrow of the 240-year-old Hindu monarchy. There is now a vast literature on Nepal's political conflict and the subsequent process of peace-building that I will not go into in further detail. But for the purpose of my thesis, two major developments that followed the 2006 political changes merit attention.

First, the change brought 'the State' back in public discourse. This is evident in the agenda of restructuring of the Nepali State, a grand vision to devolve the political and administrative powers from the centre to the local bodies. In April 2008, Nepal elected a Constituent Assembly (CA), to draft a constitution and to institutionalise these political changes. But the CA failed to promulgate the new constitution due to disagreement among major political parties, chiefly concerning the issue of State restructuring, that is, number, names and boundaries of federal states (Adhikari and Gellner, 2016). In November 2013, Nepal elected its second CA, to complete the task of promulgating a new constitution. Although political disagreement over the number and nature of provinces persisted, the new constitution was finally promulgated on September 20, 2015, that is, five months after the April 2015 earthquake. Despite the contention surrounding the new constitution[7], it was a key historical moment, and paved the way for the institutionalisation of the three-tier federal government structure consisting of the central government, provincial governments and local governments. This process coincided with the longer-term recovery and reconstruction efforts after the earthquake.

Second, the end of the Maoist conflict in 2006 also saw the ushering in of the agendas of accountability, transparency and citizen participation under the broader rubric of good governance. Of these, accountability is the agenda that has been most widely embraced by the GoN and donors alike. The following excerpt from one of the key government documents, the Good Governance Act 2008, illustrates how good governance, and associated notions of accountability, transparency and participation have attained a major policy focus:

> 'Whereas, it is expedient to make legal provision in relation to good governance by making public administration of the country pro-people, accountable, transparent, inclusive and participatory and make available its outcome to the general public; upon adopting the basic values of good governance like rule of law, corruption–free and

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[7] The constitution was particularly disapproved of by the *Madhesi* community, people originating from southern plains of Nepal, bordering India.

smart (lean or smooth) administration, financial discipline, and efficient management of public work and resources to create situation for providing public services in speedy and cost-effective manner; by bringing into execution (enforcement) of the right of the citizens upon having good governance by translating it to practical reality; and transform the administrative mechanism into service delivery mechanism and facilitator' (Government of Nepal, 2008, p. 1) .

Introducing 'good governance' into public sector, as the above policy document shows, is closely linked to varied and complex areas of reforms such as transparency, corruption-free and smart administration, financial discipline, efficiency in public work, cost-effectiveness etc. In the decade since the end of the conflict, the GoN had also introduced and institutionalised several legislations and policies, such as the Right to Information Act, 2010, the National Development Cooperation Policy of 2010, to spur effectiveness and harmony in the structuring of the development and the public sector. These policies and legislative changes are, in turn, accompanied by several practical measures to make the public sector accountable to the citizens. A manual commissioned by the World Bank, for example, identifies 21 different 'social accountability' tools being implemented in Nepal's development sector, including social audit, public hearings, community charter, participatory budget tracking, 'performance tracking survey', multi-level stakeholder review', 'third party performance review' (Khadka and Bhattarai, 2012).

At the same time, the government has also introduced a few noteworthy legislative measures, including the 2007 Right to Information Act, offering citizens with the tool to not just obtain public information but also 'study and observe activities' that pertain to a 'Public Body' (Government of Nepal, 2007), a right that is also protected in the new constitution. Likewise, the GoN had also sought to bring the international aid and NGO sector under stricter policy regulation. One such policy measure is the National Development Cooperation Policy of 2010, which draws on the globally circulated agenda of aid effectiveness and aid harmonisation, made popular after the Paris Declaration for Aid Harmonisation 2015 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, no date; Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance, 2014).

Together with the GoN, the aid sector has also sought to bring reforms in delivery of international aid. For example, one of the periodic plans of UK's Department for International Development's (DFID), a major donor for Nepal in the area of governance reforms, that was introduced in the backdrop of the political climate following the end of Maoist insurgency makes an explicit commitment to 'work with civil society to make itself and the government more accountable' (Department for International Development, Nepal, 2012, p. 3).

Despite these varied policy and practical measures introduced by both the GoN and the aid sector, recent evidence continues to question the governance of the public and aid sector in general and the very performance of the state-mandated participatory and

accountability mechanisms more specifically (Sharma, 2012; Pandeya, 2015; Gurung *et al.*, 2017). Sharma (2012) argues that while the notion of 'good governance' in Nepal's public sector continues to have a wider appeal among the government and donor community, it has fallen short of addressing systemic problems of social exclusion and discrimination facing ordinary citizens. It is also noted that citizens' engagement in state-mandated mechanisms of accountability such as public hearings has been diminishing, owing to low level of public sector responsiveness (Pandeya, 2015; Gurung *et al.*, 2017). A critical point is also the fragile and transitionary political environment of Nepal in which these mechanisms are implemented. In her study of public audit practices in Nepal's local infrastructure projects, Cima (2013) has noted several factors such as low level of incentive facing local powerholders, divergent ability and willingness of citizens to participate in local affairs, and lack of political representation at the local level, as key deterrents to effective implementation of such practices. The absence of representation at the local level is particularly stark, owing to the failure of the political regime to hold local elections for over two decades. Prior to the earthquake, scholars have found that the local democratic vacuum hampered not only the implementation of accountability-related practices but also contributed to the entrenched system of political patronage at the level of service provisions (Tamang and Malena, 2011). I will return to this topic of political and bureaucratic conditions as part of my effort to offer a conceptual framework for my thesis, but also in the empirical papers and the conclusion, to show its implications on the governance of Nepal's post-earthquake response and reconstruction.

While the thesis is set in Nepal's post-earthquake environment, in the above section, I have sought to shed light into the contested process of governance and accountability-related reforms within Nepal's fraught history of democracy and development. The thesis argues that the 'calls for accountability' in the post-disaster context and the politics of governance in post-earthquake Nepal is closely intertwined with the disaster-hit society's larger context of governance and democratic reforms. For instance, Paper 1 will show how the ongoing push for reforms in the aid sector had bearings on the ways government justified and pursued its emergency response. Likewise, Paper 2 and Paper 3 will shed light into the practical limitations facing local civil society-based accountability politics in post-disaster context, in the absence of functioning local democracy, notably lack of elected representatives.

Having set the historical and empirical context, I now turn to discuss the key intellectual framing of this thesis, drawing on three distinct bodies of literature on governance, which jointly inform my conceptual framework and research questions to follow.

Politics of aid governance

This section of the literature review aims to trace the contemporary understanding of governance reforms in the international aid sector, particularly within the humanitarian sector. After locating the rise of the agenda of performance-based governance reforms in the aid sector, which privileges setting up standards of performance and codes of conduct, mostly at the terms of northern aid sector, the section will discuss its main critiques. It will then argue that the critical scholarly debates on the governance of aid while offering important insights about the power inequalities that permeate the global governance regime fall short of offering an alternative understanding of the politics of governance, particularly centred on the expectations of and efforts by the disaster-affected citizens to influence the agenda and practice of post-disaster governance.

Putting humanitarian governance and accountability in its historical context

Literature review shows that the agenda of governance of humanitarian disasters, and within it the role of participation and accountability, is relatively a recent entrant in the humanitarian aid sector. Writing in early 1980s, Cuny (1983) argues '…many feel that because they [humanitarian actors] are trying to do good work, the impact cannot be negative' (p.128), implying that the moral underpinning of humanitarian action left it insulated from the demands for stronger oversight and regulation, with the debates for participatory and accountable humanitarian action hardly capturing the attention of the mainstream humanitarian actors.

With the increased incidence and intensity of both conflict-induced and naturally-triggered disasters in the late 1980s and early 1990s came a closer scholarly and public interrogation of the role and impacts of the humanitarian sector, mostly involving northern humanitarian NGOs (Harrell-Bond, 1986; De Waal, 1997; Uvin, 1998; Terry, 2002). Besides questioning the short-term performance deficiencies in the delivery of humanitarian aid, critics also posed questions over the humanitarian sector's ability, legitimacy and credibility to effectively address longer-term political and social causes and consequences of humanitarian crises. De Waal's (1997) study of African famine found, among other things, that aid-dependent African governments had framed the causes of famine as a solely technical problem of insufficient food supply, while ceding the political responsibility of addressing chronic problems facing the public sector. In conflict settings, humanitarian aid was found to have perpetuated political violence owing to poorly organised aid efforts, which became a subject of political manipulation and exploitation by the perpetrators of political violence (Uvin, 1998).

Critical humanitarian scholarship shows that it was mainly the Rwandan genocide of the mid 1990s that compelled the northern humanitarian NGOs to give serious attention to the governance deficit facing the humanitarian sector (Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Barnett, 2005). The consequence of this was framing of the criticisms facing humanitarianism in general as a problem of accountability, which in turn, set in motion the accountability movement within the aid sector.

A key outcome of this was the establishment of the Sphere Project, which marked a major global initiative to codify minimum set of standards upon which humanitarian NGOs were to ground their performance. The Sphere's major emphasis was on the quality and professionalisation in the delivery of humanitarian aid by the humanitarian NGOs (Buchanan-Smith, 2003). Its launch set the stage for the growth of a self-regulatory and performance-focused mode of accountability within the humanitarian sector, evident in a complex web of initiatives, protocols and standards such as Accountability Learning and Network Partnership (ALNAP), Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) and more recently Common Humanitarian Standards, geared at making humanitarian aid responsive and accountable to those it claims to serve.

The rise of what may be called performance-based governance of aid shall form the subject of critique as part of empirical Paper 1. What can be mentioned in brief here is that the extant standards and codes of conduct represent a major preoccupation among the northern aid actors to streamline and self-regulate the international response to humanitarian crisis. These standards are now accompanied by several practical tools and techniques, such as complaint handling systems, community redressal systems, and beneficiary feedback surveys, among others.

Performance-based governance of aid and its political implications

Critical humanitarian scholars, however, argue that the rise of the agenda of performance-based governance within the humanitarian aid sector is not solely a product of the Rwandan debacle. Barnett (2005) has linked the expanding outreach of the performance and accountability-driven aid to the neoliberal ideals of development that took root in the 1990s, alongside the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which emphasised sweeping reforms within the aid sector, particularly to ensure rational and efficient use of resources by norther aid actors and their southern counterparts. 'Donors, who were providing more funds, expected recipients (NGOs) to be accountable and demonstrate effectiveness', writes Barnett (2005, p.725). Indeed, although the political climate following the Rwandan genocide stimulated the urgent launch of the Sphere Project, Walker and Purdin (2004) argue that the launch of the Sphere Project preceded at least eight other international initiatives, suggesting an ongoing drive to ensure professionalisation and standardisation in the structuring and

delivery of humanitarian aid. The period also coincided with the global push for governance reforms in the aid sector more generally, with renewed emphasis being put by the large donors on monitoring and evaluation of and learning from aid interventions (Cracknell, 2000; King and McGrath, 2004). The recent version of this expanding frontier of donor-induced movement for monitoring and evaluation has come in the form of new 'infrastructures of accountability', with a focus on collecting information for the use by the national government and the donors, mostly under the emergent logics of aid effectiveness and harmonisation (Jensen and Winthereik, 2013, p. 1).

Scholars have argued that the governance of aid sector, and within it the agenda of performance-based and accountable aid, has left a major influence in the structuring and delivery of international aid. Besides the growing push for aid performance, the notion and practice of accountability is increasingly equated with NGO accountability to its donors (Everett and Friesen, 2010). It, on the one hand, reflected the donor community's preference for local civil society actors or NGOs as technocratic agents of aid reforms, incorporating the latter into the global aid governance framework, on the other hand, it undermined the political role of the NGO sector, enlarging the gulf between northern and southern NGOs, and by extension, southern NGOs and local communities (Kilby, 2006; Rahman, 2006; Lewis and Kanji, 2009). According to Ebrahim (2003), southern NGOs' dependency on the northern aid sector has made them to privilege 'functional accountability' (i.e. accounting for and reporting on resource use and immediate impacts), while negating 'strategic accountability' (i.e. accounting for an impact that an NGO's activities have on the actions of the other organisations and the wider environment) (p.815). Humanitarian scholars have also raised similar concerns, particularly regarding the potential of globally-induced standards of performance posing risk for local NGOs to exercise flexibility in working with local communities (Hilhorst, 2002; Collins, 2009).

The political implications of such globally-induced standards of reforms can also be traced in the manner governance-related reforms in the aid sector are narrowly likened to 'aid managerialism', through deployment of tools, indicators, and measurement of aid performance (King and McGrath, 2004; Kerr, 2008; Davis, Kingsbury and Merry, 2012). Following Foucault's work on the application of power, and particularly the deployment of techniques of routinization and monitoring as a way of regulating the conduct of individuals (Foucault, 1995), development scholars have long warned how techniques of planning and monitoring have resulted in the emergence and sustenance of bureaucratic power in the global South (Escobar, 1989; Ferguson, 1990). In Scott's terms (1998), powerholders are proficient at using monitoring and measurement to make complex social realities 'legible', to pursue homogenous and bureaucratic mode of development that often result in unintended social

outcomes. The instrumental logic that underpins such efforts also tends to treat citizens as mere recipients or 'beneficiaries' of interventions, while undermining the political agency of citizens (Krause, 2010). This is not to suggest that monitoring of aid is invariably a problematic undertaking. The fear here is how it is pursued and to what ends. A key concern is that externally-driven and donor-induced tools of reforms systematically negate learnings of failures of aid delivery, while documenting and demonstrating 'feedback' or learnings that aim to legitimise and sustain international aid system (Chambers, 1997; Easterly, 2002; Keen, 2008).

Besides the above claims, the relevance and continual prominence of the agenda of governance in the aid sector can also be questioned in terms of its narrow claim of making humanitarian action more effective and accountable to the communities it claims to serve. There is now a growing scholarly consensus as to how humanitarian sector is far removed from its rhetoric of making aid accountable to the communities in crisis (Terry, 2002; Vaux, 2006; Davis, 2007; Stein, 2008; Barnett, 2013). Davis (2007) argues 'anyone involved in humanitarian action is familiar with the continuing inadequacy of collective efforts to end suffering, and the moral outrage that comes with this failure. We must therefore ask whether initiatives designed to improve accountability really are the solution to the problems humanitarianism faces today' (p.1). Davis' argument aptly captures the continuing dilemma and weakness in the current discourse and practice of humanitarian governance that gives primacy to accountability-related reforms. A common theme within these critiques is the growing focus on the technical and normative standards of accountability, to the neglect of the political and contextual dimensions of accountability. As Stein (2008) argues 'accountability is always exercised within a context of politics, power, and interests, and humanitarian accountability is no exception' (p.142). A central aim of this thesis, thus, is to explore the political dimension of accountability that is rooted within a specific disaster context.

Another key limitation within this scholarship is also its treatment of the international humanitarian actors as the key players in defining the terms and conditions for governance of humanitarian aid, largely unchallenged from a wider public scrutiny. This is striking as the origin of the contemporary reforms in the aid sector itself, in part, is linked to the changing public concerns over transparency and accountability in the aid sector in the wake of the Rwandan crisis (Hilhorst, 2002). This suggests that the political climate of the 1990s, mostly the growing interlink between the northern and southern actors, the proliferation of media and technologies, together with the expanding realm of global network of activists, played a critical role in bringing the agenda of governance and accountability to an international prominence. In recent years, experiences from disaster-hit societies, including Haiti (Donini

and Walker, 2012) and Nepal (as discussed in the previous sections), to note a few, show humanitarian interventions are routinely confronted with public pressures, often involving demands for accountability and transparency in aid interventions. Despite adverse conditions wrought by disasters, in Haiti's post-earthquake climate, citizens and civil society actors have been found to form 'new social movements', geared at questioning and challenging the ways disaster response and recovery are conceived and executed in a top-down fashion (Schuller and Morales, 2012, p.7; Bell, 2013).

While the risk of new forms of disasters looms, scholars have also drawn attention to citizen and civil society-based 'sub-politics', which often take root to challenge the undesirable and undemocratic approaches to manage and respond to the growing threat of disasters (Beck, 2009). Sociological research on disasters also reminds us that the urge to intervene in the lives of the distant victims doesn't always assume a charitable action, but also takes the form of a political action to question and condemn the appalling conditions facing distant victims of humanitarian crisis (Boltanski, 1999). Chouliaraki (2006), building on Boltanski's argument, argues that an ever-expanding visibility of humanitarian disasters is also accompanied by a global climate of 'democratisation of responsibility', an emergence of active public who are inclined to think and talk about those who are deemed vulnerable in the face of humanitarian crisis (p.28). While both Boltanski and Chouliaraki are primarily concerned with the role of media in evoking moral and political responsibility to attend to the plights of the distant sufferers, their arguments signal the emergence of varied forms of citizen-centric efforts that emerge to contest and challenge the way humanitarian crises are governed. As highlighted in the Introductory Chapter, my own journey into this research developed under the unexpected circumstances of having served in a dual role as a charitable actor and a critic, to attend to the immediate human sufferings confronting fellow citizens, but simultaneously question what was viewed as the GoN's reckless handling of the emergency response. These insights stand to contest the way politics of governance of humanitarian aid is primarily viewed as a pre-defined, globally propagated agenda, largely shielded from the varied forms of political action that are undertaken by or on behalf of disaster-affected citizens.

A related gap in the empirical literature can also be noted in its use of donors and northern NGOs as the main unit of analysis. This effectively discounts the expectations of and efforts by citizens and civil society actors in contesting the agenda and techniques of post-disaster governance, together with the 'contextually-embedded accountability', that is, meanings, mechanisms and implications of accountability that take root within a specific disaster context (Ebrahim, 2009). The case in point is the "calls for accountability" that erupted in the wake of the Nepal earthquake, the nature and implications of which will form part of the investigation in empirical Paper 1. Equally critical is to locate such "calls for

accountability" within Nepal's socio-political context, notably the prior history of aid-induced development, together with the contested climate of governance and aid reforms, which will be investigated as part of Paper 3. Additionally, it is increasingly acknowledged that the question of how a disaster is to be governed takes a particularly urgent form in the fraught environment of disaster response, compelling the powerholders not only to manage the emergency response but also respond to the public criticisms, as was witnessed in the wake of Nepal earthquake. This is a specific strand of literature to which I turn next, with the aim to build the conceptual tools to understand the nature of citizen-centric governance politics that played out in post-earthquake Nepal.

Politics of disaster-related governance

This body of scholarship starts from the position that disasters or crises are political events that invariably give rise to an intense state-society struggle over how the post-disaster response is to be governed. A key utility of this strand of literature for my thesis is that it shifts the understanding of disaster governance from the narrow realm of the international aid sector, as discussed in the previous section, to that of government actors, who are often at the helm of defining, overseeing and explaining the response to disasters. As Olson (2000) argues, 'in any disaster, government officials are confronted with the need to not only *manage* the situation but also *explain* it' (p.154). Indeed, scholars have long treated disasters to have the ability to overwhelm government actors, sparking efforts at fault-finding, blaming and scapegoating powerholders (Drabeck and Quarantelli, 1967), while also giving rise to both conflictual and consensual forms of political outcomes (Stallings, 1988).

The aftermath of disaster, therefore, is not merely a moment of suffering and despair. It represents an opportunity for the citizens to frame disasters as a major problem in the system and engage in broader political alliance to question the negligence and incompetence of powerholders in preparing for or mitigating a disaster. Despite the human and social disruption wrought by disasters, disasters also serve as a fertile ground for an emergence of advocacy coalitions and pressure groups who seek to draw state's attention to pre-disaster policy limitations, with the policy elites compelled to attend to such pressures (Birkland, 1998). Disasters are also known to trigger intense framing contests between state and non-state actors over the nature of risk and vulnerability associated with disasters, together with the short-term and long-term recovery priorities (Bankoff and Hilhorst, 2009). Olmeda (2008), drawing on Tarrow's (1994) notion of movement entrepreneurs[8], shows how crisis can invigorate

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[8] According to Tarrow (1994), the emergence of social movement rests on the ability of 'movement entrepreneurs', who are able to forge a wider consensus based on pre-existing feelings of solidarity or identity.

democratic institutions (e.g. political parties and journalists) to expose incumbent powerholders' attempt to exploit disasters towards a narrow political aim.

Of importance is that such forms of political action often move beyond monitoring or questioning the performance of powerholders to respond to disasters. The political struggle over the governance of disaster involves casting a critical political net on the past and future role and legitimacy of the public officials or institutions responsible for managing or mitigating disasters (Boin, 't Hart and McConnell, 2008; Pelling and Dill, 2010; Brändström, 2016). At the same time, disasters can serve as a catalyst for renewed understanding of rights and entitlements among citizens (Pelling and Dill, 2010; Remes, 2016), while also resurrecting 'democratic values and principles, as well as in the mechanisms designed to safeguard them' (Svedin, 2012, p. 14). Such signs of democratic invigoration also became palpable in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter, with citizens and civil society actors challenging the ways the earthquake response was mounted, with powerholders, in turn, making commitment to set up concrete mechanisms to ensure participatory and accountable governance of disaster, a topic that is investigated in further detail as part of Paper 3.

Such reinvigoration of citizen's efforts in post-disaster climate, however, is not to overstate the transformative potential of such efforts. Instead, this line of scholarship makes it clear that disasters, instead of planting seeds of structural reforms, also risk reproducing pre-existing power inequalities (Pelling and Dill, 2010; Simpson, 2013). As Simpson, through his ethnographic work in post-earthquake Gujarat has shown, uncertainty and unpredictability are inherent features of post-disaster environment, offering a fertile ground for exploitative conditions to take hold, particularly in the absence of strong state oversight (Simpson, 2013). Klein's study of Hurricane Katrina shows how citizen-based efforts in the wake of the disaster had to face 'orchestrated raids' from powerholders, stifling the potential for locally-driven political organising (Klein, 2007, p. 6). Scholars also highlight how powerholders are skilled at framing disaster as an extraordinary or 'exceptional event', thereby, improving their defence mechanisms against public criticisms, and regaining their hold in politics (Boin, 't Hart and McConnell, 2009; Brändström, 2016).

Moving beyond the narrow interpretation of the politics of disaster governance as a facet of global aid governance, and more specifically related to setting up of standards of performance management and accountability, this scholarship invites us to treat the agenda and practice of disaster governance as a site of state-societal political contestation. Such contestation, on the one hand, is often instrumental at questioning the performance deficiencies of the powerholders in both preparing for and mitigating disasters. On the other hand, such politics also reflects the expertise of powerholders in using disasters to advance

their narrow political aims, or to deflate and shift demands for structural reforms emanating from the public. Notwithstanding above insights, two major limitations can be noted in the above literature that my thesis seeks to address.

First, this strand of literature tends to treat disaster politics generally and disaster-related governance more specifically as a two-way political struggle between citizens (as rights-holders) and public officials (as duty-bearers). Additionally, the adeptness by which public criticisms following a major disaster is handled is largely focused on high-level public officials, as opposed to local officials, who are often the prime target of post-disaster public criticisms and accountability pressures. In addressing these gaps, the thesis will not only examine how frontline humanitarian actors experience the contested climate of emergency governance, and particularly demands for accountability (Paper 1), but also explore the conditions that enable or inhibit local powerholders to engage with disaster-affected communities or deflate 'calls for accountability' (Paper 2 and Paper 3). Relatedly, the literature's shortcoming can also be traced in its relative neglect of the role of the international aid community and the power they wield in shaping the agenda and practice of disaster governance. As previously discussed, in aid-recipient societies, international aid community and their associates not only intervene to alleviate human sufferings but also have a major role in setting the terms and techniques of how disasters ought to be responded to and managed (Barnett, 2013). De Waal (1997), in his study of the African famine argues that accountability relationship between state actors and citizens is often undermined by the involvement of international aid community. To exclude international aid actors from the frame of analysis is therefore to overlook their role in shaping the agenda and technique of disaster governance, together with the concrete manifestation of accountability practice and politics in post-disaster context. Nepal earthquake was characterised by an increased presence of aid community, who brought with them renewed rationalities and resources for recovery and reconstruction. The involvement of aid community in Nepal's earthquake response, how their vision of governing the disaster, echoed or undermined the "calls for accountability" that emanated in the wake of the Nepal earthquake is a key analytical focus of this thesis.

Second, in drawing attention to the renewed public interest in securing rights and entitlements in the wake of disaster, the literature falls short in offering concrete set of evidence regarding the expectations and experiences of citizens or civil society actors in shaping the process of disaster governance. Rather, the literature is mostly focused on understanding the conduct of powerholders, their reactions and responses, when confronted with public criticism after disasters. The thesis addresses this gap, examining the practical efforts undertaken by citizens or civil society actors in seeking to alter the direction of disaster response, and holding powerholders accountable.

With this, I now turn to the literature on the politics of citizen-centric governance, with a focus on voice and social accountability, primarily drawing on the scholarship on capability-based development and participatory governance.

Politics of citizen-centric governance

The literature on the politics of governance of humanitarian aid draws attention to the contemporary history, nature and political implications of the globally-propagated and performance-based approaches to humanitarian governance. The literature on the politics of disaster-related governance, on the other hand, sheds light into the contested characteristics of governance that emanate in the wake of crisis. Yet, both these strands of literature fall short of offering specific conceptual tools to understand the nature, potential and limitations of citizen-centric governance of disasters, and more specifically, the 'calls for accountability' that unfolded in the wake of the Nepal earthquake.

This section of literature review on the politics of citizen-centric governance, thus, explores the potentials and limitations of governance of disasters from the perspective of citizens and civil society actors. In so doing, I first trace the conceptual origin of citizen voice and social accountability, situating within the literature on capability-based development and participatory governance. I will then discuss some of the limitations of citizens' voice and social accountability, particularly locating within the unpredictable and uncertain conditions of disasters. Investigating the conditions under which citizens' voice and social accountability take root is the core aim of this thesis and will be discussed further in empirical papers that follow.

Citizen voice and its value

The concept of citizen voice here is primarily linked to Amartya Sen's seminal work on the interplay of democracy and famine response (Drèze and Sen, 1989), and his subsequent work on Capability-based Development (Sen, 1999). According to Drèze and Sen (1989), within a liberal democratic order, public action that spans criticisms of, investigation and reporting on the performance of powerholders, and to engage in adversarial politics, serves as a major defence against the powerholders' tendency to neglect the sufferings of the citizens confronting a sudden or impending disaster. India's success in averting large-scale famine, for example, is attributed to the democratic opening and the environment of public scrutiny and criticisms that ensued after its independence in 1947 (Drèze and Sen, 1989; Sen, 1999). In further establishing the value of voice or public criticisms in the fight against famine, Sen (1999) argues that democratic climate offers three-fold societal values for citizens: intrinsic value to exercise one's voice and to overcome a sense of deprivation, instrumental value to garner political attention to citizens' immediate material needs, particularly when faced with

a major deprivation (e.g. famine), and constructive value in which citizens and powerholders are able to learn from one another to develop alternative social priorities and values. Voice, therefore, is a core capability of individuals to participate in social and political affairs, in a manner one can enhance the opportunities to pursue a life of one's choosing (Nussbaum, 2011).

In their later work, Drèze and Sen (2002) have sought to introduce further specificity to the notion and practice of citizen voice in overcoming structural impediments to human development. They define voice in terms of two-fold strategies: a) 'self-assertion' by marginalised communities and b) 'solidarity' among progressive social actors (i.e. social movement and political activism) (p.29). Both forms of voice, self-assertion and solidarity, are considered to have intrinsic and instrumental value, mostly in overcoming problems of governance (e.g. corruption, low quality of services, absenteeism of public officials) at the level of public service delivery.

Yet, voice is rarely the only option available to citizens to tackle public sector underperformance. As Hirschman (1970) has long argued, citizens may combine voice option with exit, to overcome chronic performance deficiencies facing public sector. For Hirschman, the voice option, in line with Dreze and Sen's (2002) notion of self-assertion, means citizens expressing their dissatisfaction directly to management or to some other authority to which management is subordinate, or through lodging of complaints addressed to anyone who cares to listen. The exit option, on the other hand, takes the form of citizens refusing to purchase public services or leave the public sector in favour of private sector (Hirschman, 1970, p. 4). This would, in theory, incentivise the public sector actors to introduce reforms in the quality and delivery of public services. While Hirschman's conceptualisation of voice and exit did not necessarily focus on the public sector governance within developing countries, in recent years is has been further advanced by governance scholars (Ackerman, 2004; Fox, 2015). Ackerman (2004) argues that in developing countries where citizens are primarily reliant on the public sector, neither efforts that seek to privatise public services so that citizens can choose between the public and private sector, on the one hand, nor inviting citizens to demand reforms (voice), on the other, are desirable to induce reforms in public services. Instead, he coins the term "co-governance" to mean newer forms of community-based governance of public services in which 'in addition to co-producing specific services and pressuring government from outside, societal actors can also participate in the core functions of the government' (Ackerman, 2004, p. 451). Fox (2015) further argues that voice in the form of citizen participation in altering public sector governance must be complemented by the capacity of state agencies, which would then make enforcement of community voice possible.

In recent years, both public sector governance and capability-based development scholars have sought to offer fresh insights into the value of voice. Goetz and Jenkins (2005) have linked voice to the mechanisms of accountability that enable citizens to seek justifications from powerholders, collectivise and make claims for improved public services. In a similar vein, Couldry (2010) argues that the value of voice be understood not just as an individual ability to give account of oneself, but also as a collective effort, notably in challenging and even reversing those conditions that constrain the exercise of voice in the first place, which he calls 'voice denying rationality' (p.10). For others, exercise of voice may not necessarily result in immediate improvement in one's material conditions (i.e. instrumental value) but have important implications for one's 'capacity to aspire', compelling powerholders to give recognition to marginalised communities' source of deprivation (Appadurai, 2004). The value of voice, thus, transcends the realm of consensual decision-making (i.e. constructive value) or realisation of material gains (i.e. instrumental value). It encompasses a range of political potential, such as spurring marginalised communities' sense of self-dignity and rights as citizens (Rao and Sanyal, 2010; Dryzek, 2013).

Citizen voice and social accountability

Recent scholarship has also sought to examine the nature and prospect of voice and accountability within the current challenges facing representative democracies. Concerns are raised that under representative democracies, elections are often the main mechanism of evaluating and sanctioning the powerholders. Elections, however, happen infrequently. When they take place, elections run the risk of becoming manipulated by the powerholders (Schedler, 2002; Sen, 2009). A mismatch is also noted in the rhetoric and practice of representative democracy in which introduction of institutions and policies tend to take precedence, at the cost of public participation and deliberations or what Sen (2009) calls 'government by discussion' (p.348).

These problems confronting representative democracy, however, have not gone unchallenged. Keane (2010) argues a shift to 'monitory democracy' is in progress, evident in newer and innovative forms of monitoring and evaluation of powerholders by ordinary citizens, instead of exclusive reliance on elections as a way of evaluating and sanctioning powerholders. This is also accompanied by a growing appeal to deliberative forms of governance, which have enabled citizens and civil society actors to identify and problematize local issues and bring them to the attention of public authority (Habermas, 1996). The monitorial and deliberative role of citizens is also located in the growing transnational networks of civil society, and their potential to serve as an 'alarm system', holding the state and international actors accountable to pre-existing standards of performance and regulation

(Brown and Fox, 1998, p. 486; Keck and Sikkink, 1998), and fostering newer forms of political awareness about state-society relations (King, 2015).

In a similar vein, the democratising potential of citizen voice and accountability is also traced as part of the long-standing struggle for rights-based and participatory movement in the global South (Cornwall, Lucas and Pasteur, 2000; Newell and Wheeler, 2006). Faced with growing public pressures to bring improvement in the public sector performance, state actors are increasingly seeking citizens' involvement in decision-making processes (Fung, 2006). As the evaluative role of the conventional form of accountability mechanism, notably elections, has become questionable, scholarly attention has shifted to 'social accountability', an alternative form of bottom-up, citizen-centric activism geared at evaluating the performance of powerholders and holding them to account. Malena, Forster and Singh (2004) defines social accountability as follows:

'.. an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens or both, but very often they are demand-driven and operate from the bottom–up' (p. 3).

In contrast to the above definition of social accountability that tends to emphasize constructive state-society engagement, according to Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006), social accountability is a contentious form of social action, not just by direct beneficiaries of public services but involving 'disparate groups of civil society– and media-based initiatives who deploy multiple strategies as show of accountability in response to governmental actions' (p.3). Others view social accountability encompassing a mix of collaborative and confrontational strategies, which range from use of technical tools to monitor the performance of powerholders, to a more contentious forms of political action (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; King, 2015). Joshi and Houtzager (2012), distinguish two forms of social accountability strategies: widgets and watchdogs. Widgets include tools and technologies such as social audit, grievance-handling systems, or community score cards, used by citizens or civil society actors to monitor the performance of service providers to identify and rectify immediate problems. Watchdogs, on the other hand, refer to forms of collective organising, including publicising information, investigative journalism, demonstration and protest, aimed at ensuring that powerholders' actions are publicly scrutinised to limit the risk of neglect of citizens' demands.

With the growing speculation and optimism surrounding the voice and social accountability initiatives, scholarly attention has called for voice and voice-based citizen

action be understood within the broader political, social and administrative conditions under which they unfold (Gaventa, 2004; Couldry, 2010; Nussbaum, 2011, Fox, 2015; Appadurai, 2015). Nussbaum (2011), while agreeing with Sen and others on the intrinsic and constructive value of voice, calls for a more nuanced understanding of the political structures, notably the history of democratic and political struggle of the society in question, which influences both the exercise and realisation of the value of voice. Within aid-recipient societies, the concern regarding the value of voice is not separable from the power wielded by the international aid sector. Often, the internationally-mandated policy decisions that are geared at improving participation and accountability, although couched in the ideas of rights and voice, tend to dismiss, as opposed to promote, the voice of marginalised communities (Cornwall, 2003). Mansuri and Rao's (2013) extensive study of varied forms of donor-driven participatory projects has shown that externally driven, 'induced-spaces' of participation often fail to complement bottom-up, 'organic spaces' created by citizens, owing to donors' preoccupation with linear, predictable and 'less contentious' aims of participatory projects (p.290).

O'Meally (2013) seeks to bring further specificity to the different forms of contextual factors that interfere with voice-driven, social accountability initiatives. He calls attention to the capacity of civil society, willingness of the state actors to respond to citizens' demands, and conditions set forth by donors, among other things, to have an influence over the implementation of voice and social accountability mechanisms. Joshi (2014), in turn, encourages closer attention to the micro-level context, which among other issues, include limited access to information and incentive structure that tend to interfere with the potential of accountability mechanisms. A common theme within this emerging literature on what may be called 'conditions for voice' is to move beyond the focus on citizen or civil society-based voice and accountability activism, to give attention to the bureaucratic structure or what Fox (2015) terms 'teeth', in understanding the potential of voice to turn into response from powerholders.

The politics of citizen voice and social accountability in disaster context

While the debates on citizens' voice and social accountability have advanced considerably in the recent past, they are largely focused on 'normal development context'. Scant attention is paid to how and under what conditions these initiatives unfold in disaster context, which tends to evoke distinct forms of socio-political contestation compared to a 'normal development context'. Disasters, according to Oliver-Smith (1999), take the form of 'totalising events' that simultaneously trigger 'consistency and inconsistency, coherence and contradiction, cooperation and conflict, hegemony and resistance' (p.19-20). For Guggenheim (2014) disasters are 'cosmopolitics' that forces reconfiguration of a given society at multiple spatial

and temporal levels, demanding a distinct epistemological focus (p.8). As the previous strand of literature reminds us, the political climate post-disaster may invigorate among citizens a renewed sense of rights and entitlements, but it may also prompt powerholders to characterise disaster as an exceptional situation in order to pursue their narrow political aims (Boin,'t Hart and McConnell, 2009; Pelling and Dill, 2010). The uncertainty and unpredictability that is characteristic of post-disaster context opens up a range of exploitative, as well as emancipatory possibilities that those facing the brunt of disaster are routinely forced to interpret and manage (Simpson, 2013). The situation may be further compounded by the involvement of global actors, who tend to de-politicise the disaster context, imposing newer forms of rationalities and techniques of governance that favour the international aid actors and their experts, as opposed to local communities (Barnett, 2013). While access to public information is considered a critical ingredient for citizens to participate in voice and accountability politics, in crisis context, Keen (2008) argues that information is often withheld or 'selectively' disseminated by powerholders, precluding citizens from participating in and influencing the agenda and practice of disaster governance.

Although limited, emerging evidence from disaster-hit societies also lends support to these structural constraints facing voice-based approaches to governance of disaster. Madianou, Longboan and Ong (2015) in their ethnographic account of the post-Haiyan response found, voice-based approaches to accountable humanitarian response, with their emphasis on tools and technologies, are limited in their ability to engage with and empower marginalised communities due to pre-existing structural impediments including fear of neglect and reprisal. Erica Caple James, through her ethnographic account of post-Haiti earthquake reconstruction succinctly reminds us of similar structural constraints. Disaster-affected citizens may have the agency to speak, but it may not mean any changes to ones' well-being or 'security' when the topic of rights and voice are merely used to maintain and expand bureaucratic scope of disaster reconstruction (James, 2010, p. 223).

These emerging evidence contests the normative value attached to voice and accountability in enabling ordinary citizens to realise 'freedom' and 'human security' (Sen, 2009, p.348). Rather, not only does the unpredictability of disaster context calls for a distinct theoretical and empirical orientation to understand the nature of citizen-centric governance of disasters more generally, it also begs a question regarding the dynamic socio-political conditions which prevent citizen voice from attaining its political potential. In other words, from a sociological perspective, the conditions under which citizen voice in the context of disaster materialises into social value become a major concern (Couldry, 2013). Given these concerns, the experiences of and efforts by disaster-affected citizens in monitoring the

performance of powerholders, together with the conditions that influence the transformation of voice as a social value is what underpins the core empirical aim of this thesis.

Conceptual framework and overarching research question

In sum, this thesis, while assuming disaster as a 'totalising event' that produces multiple forms of political contestation, is concerned with the politics of governance of disaster from the perspectives of disaster-affected citizens. The empirical focus of the thesis is less on the macro-level politics of governance of disaster, in the form of formulation and implementation of policies and standards in response to the Nepal earthquake. Rather, the emphasis of the empirical projects is on capturing the micro-level expectations and experiences of citizens and civil society actors in shaping the governance of the 2015 Nepal earthquake. How did citizens or civil society actors imagine the idea and practice of post-disaster governance? What role did accountability play in the governing of this disaster? What is the role and involvement of citizens or civil society actors in making disaster response participatory and accountable? What socio-political conditions determine or undermine citizens or civil society actors' expectations of or experiences in changing the course of post-disaster response and reconstruction? This thesis is an inquiry into these broad set of questions. Of importance is the *value of voice in terms of citizens' ability to not only exercise voice (i.e. intrinsic value of voice), but the conditions that facilitate or undermine the voice to translate into response from powerholders (i.e. instrumental value of voice)*, a central theoretical interest of my thesis. While each of the three empirical papers that follow contains distinct empirical aims, the thesis in general seeks to answer the following two interrelated questions:

- **How did citizens' efforts to influence the governance of disaster unfold in post-earthquake Nepal?**
- **What are the potentials and limitations of citizen involvement in disaster governance, in post-earthquake Nepal?**

Here, the first question seeks to build a descriptive account of the concrete expectations and experiences of citizens or civil society actors to shape the way the response and reconstruction to the 2015 Nepal earthquake is governed. The second question, on the other hand, is concerned with the critical assessment of the value of such efforts in making the governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction accountable and responsive to the voices of the disaster-affected citizens. In order to bring further specificity to the empirical projects, citizens' efforts in influencing the governance of the 2015 Nepal earthquake is conceptualised along the following three concepts: citizen-centric monitoring, enforcement of voice and conditions for voice, which I summarise below.

Citizen-centric monitoring

Citizen-centric monitoring here entails spaces or practices that enable citizens and civil society actors to scrutinise the performance of powerholders – both governmental and NGOs. Such practices can take place under routinized and formal mechanisms mandated by the government or NGOs (e.g. public hearings). This may also encompass informal mechanisms, which are implemented independent of or in opposition to the government mandated mechanisms (e.g. protests). Two considerations are due. First, in post-disaster context, the practice of citizen-centric monitoring of the performance of powerholders may transcend the locus of immediate victims of the disasters. It also involves efforts by other actors and agencies, such as media, civil society or advocacy groups, exposing the negligence and incompetence of powerholders for consumption by the ordinary citizens. Second, as a process, monitoring is closely related to and builds on citizens' access to information. In other words, the role of information is indispensable within the debates of citizen-centric governance, as it is what enables citizens or civil society actors to scrutinise the performance of powerholders, to compel powerholders to engage in 'reason-giving' (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005, p. 31), and in turn, enforce voice, the concept that I shall discuss next.

Enforcement of voice

The conceptual terrain of enforcement is much broader in both democratic governance and disaster literature [9] but for the purpose of this thesis, enforcement is defined in a much narrower sense of execution of the demands voiced by disaster-affected citizens. From the perspective of powerholders, enforcement means being responsive to voice. In that sense, monitoring and enforcement are closely intertwined concepts but they also have important differences. Monitoring here means one's inherent right to know about the performance of powerholders, with or without the expectation of it resulting in immediate improvements in one's material conditions. In Sen's terms, monitoring has an intrinsic value for citizens' experience of democracy and freedom (Sen, 1999). The concept of enforcement, on the other hand, implies an instrumental aim, geared at realising material changes in the lives of those on whose behalf monitoring is exercised. Following Newell and Wheeler (2006), the focus here is on outcome, or turning citizens' voice and rights into concrete resources (e.g. housing assistance). The use of enforcement as one of the conceptual underpinnings of this thesis does

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[9] Enforcement is commonly understood as the exercise of democratic means (e.g. elections) to directly punish the powerful state actors for improper performance, or when citizens can use other mechanisms to impose sanction (Schedler, 1999, p. 15). In studying political accountability in the context of famine prevention, (Rubin, 2016) has defined enforcement from the moral perspective, as 'the extent to which the individuals or bodies in power can be held responsible for not living up to the moral responsibility of protecting people from famine' (p.74).

not mean it is designed as an evaluation study, to examine the causal link between citizen-centric monitoring (process) and enforcement of voice (outcome). This is beyond the scope of this PhD. Rather, the aim is to critically examine how the notion of enforcement, with its instrumental logic, plays out in the real world of disaster response and recovery. In critically examining the interplay of monitoring and enforcement, I also aim to contribute to the contemporary debates surrounding the conditions under which voice materialises into value (e.g. Couldry) and more specifically, in bringing qualitative improvement in the public sector governance (e.g. Fox, 2015), situating it within the hitherto underexamined context of disaster response and recovery.

Conditions for voice

The thesis also delves into three distinct yet mutually reinforcing conditions that influence or undermine the productive interaction between citizen-centric monitoring and enforcement of voice.

Firstly, the thesis gives a close attention to the *bureaucratic condition* of a disaster-hit society. It stems from the growing scholarly consensus that, despite varied efforts made by civil society and citizens to wield influence over the public officials, under a liberal democratic set up, it is ultimately the public officials who hold the power and resources to translate citizen voice into improved public sector performance. This demands the process of citizen-centric monitoring be located within its potential to locate, engage with and command appropriate response from the government bureaucracy, mostly at the local level of service delivery. The question is even more important in Nepal's case. As discussed in the previous section, despite the long-standing demands for public sector reforms, concrete progress in that direction has been slow and uneven. The thesis closely considers the bureaucratic conditions under which the government's policy commitment for accountable and participatory governance of disaster is translated into practice.

Secondly, the thesis assumes that both citizen-centric monitoring of powerholders and enforcement of voice, do not operate in vacuum. It is influenced by and, in turn, influences the ongoing *political climate* of the society in question. Of significance is to situate the citizens' ability to exercise and enforce voice within Nepal's fraught history of democratisation and governance reforms, as discussed in the previous section. In understanding how the ongoing political reforms impinge upon citizens' efforts, the thesis also considers the conditions or mechanisms through which powerholders tend to circulate new rationalities of disaster governance, and in the process, reinstate status quo, discredit, or undermine the citizen-centric efforts in shaping the governance of the earthquake.

Thirdly, the international aid sector has for long pursued the agenda of governance reforms in disaster context, as previously discussed. Too often, their efforts to make

humanitarian action accountable, have further expanded the gap between the international aid actors and disaster-affected citizens. The earthquake and the subsequent pressures for reconstruction brought the international aid sector back into prominence in Nepal's governance debates. The empirical chapters seek to trace the involvement of *international aid sector,* the power they wield over how the governance of post-earthquake response and reconstruction is pursued, and their influence on citizen-centric governance of disaster.

This thesis, therefore, is an investigation into the politics of citizen-centric governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction. Such politics is conceptualised as the concrete efforts undertaken by citizens and civil society actors to monitor the performance of powerholders (process) and enforce voice for improved humanitarian response (outcome). Here, the two concepts of citizen-centric monitoring and enforcement of voice are also assumed to influence one another. For instance, monitoring becomes desirable if citizens consider it to have the potential in spurring improved delivery of humanitarian services. By contrast, in the absence of improved humanitarian services, citizens tend to disengage in or withdraw from such activities. At the same time, as previously discussed, such efforts by citizens are not independent of but are closely intertwined with the political, bureaucratic and aid conditions within the specific disaster context (as shown in Figure 1). While not exhaustive of the varied forms of conditions that tend to influence the politics of citizen-centric governance of the disaster, consideration of these three conditions offers a focused analytical lens to the three empirical papers that follow.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the thesis: politics of citizen-centric governance in post-earthquake Nepal
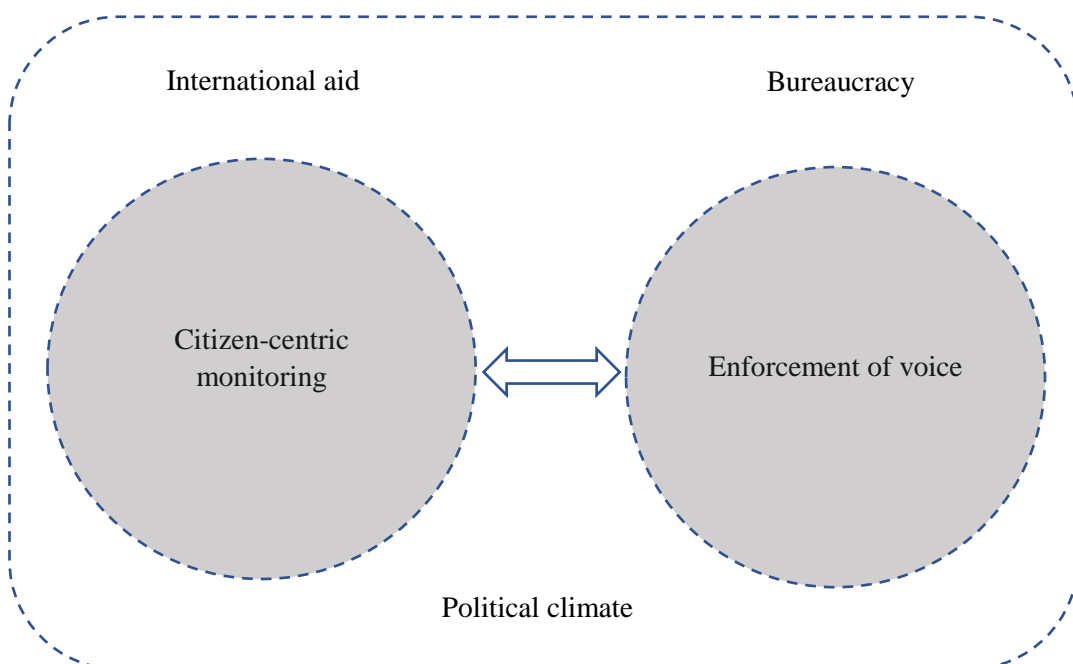
Introduction to the empirical papers

Each of the empirical chapters that follow is informed by the overarching empirical aims to examine a) citizens' efforts to influence the governance of disaster and; b) potential and limitations of such efforts. Yet, as a paper-based PhD, each empirical chapter contains distinct research question (s) and methodological aim and are situated across two distinct timeframes: early response (Paper 1 and Paper 2) and reconstruction (Paper 3).

The first study (Paper 1) is set in the immediate aftermath of the Nepal earthquake. It examines:

- *How do early responders to the Nepal earthquake experience humanitarian accountability demands?*

The aim of this paper is to examine the nature of 'calls for accountability' that emanated in the wake of the Nepal earthquake, through the experiences of a mix of early responders to the earthquake. Besides critiquing the dominant understanding of the performance-driven accountability, the paper sheds light into the multiple forms of accountability demands experienced by early responders, and discuss their implications for the broader politics of post-disaster governance

The second study (Paper 2) draws on an ethnographic case study of a civil society-based accountability initiative in Nepal's earthquake response to examine:

- *How do civil society actors understand their role and practice of social accountability in post-earthquake Nepal, that is, in a) giving 'voice' to the communities and; b) securing response or 'teeth' from local powerholders?*
- *What forms of politics shape or undermine the practice and outcome of civil society-based social accountability in disaster response and recovery?*

The paper describes both the concrete experiences of civil society actors in implementing post-disaster social accountability activism, together with the conditions that constrain the instrumental logic that underpins such activism. The implications of such efforts in promoting a democratic and inclusive governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction are discussed.

The third study (Paper 3) casts a slightly broader analytical aim, to examine the interfaces of policy and practice of participatory disaster governance within the 'owner-led reconstruction'. It investigates:

- *How did politics of participatory disaster governance manifest in Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction efforts?*

- *In what ways did such politics enable or undermine the disaster-affected communities' ability to influence the longer-term, post-earthquake reconstruction?*

The paper traces the efforts by disaster-affected citizens to influence the agenda and practice of state-driven 'owner-led reconstruction', while highlighting the complex state-societal politics that underpins the policy and practice of participatory governance of disasters.

Before moving to the above empirical projects of the thesis, the next chapter will provide a brief methodological overview of the thesis. Each paper also contains details of the methodological design. Further information on the methods, including details on data sources, is included under Methodological Annex 1.

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CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

This thesis, as previously noted, follows the paper-based format prescribed by the Department of Methodology, LSE. Each empirical paper, therefore, contains details on the research design, data sources and analytical procedure. In this chapter, I synthesise the broader philosophical and methodological underpinnings of my PhD thesis. The chapter also seeks to situate my thesis within the contemporary conceptual and practical debates in disaster research in general and disaster ethnography more specifically.

Methodological motivation

As discussed in the Introductory Chapter, the intellectual and personal motivation to study the politics of citizen-centric disaster governance and accountability originated under the unexpected circumstances triggered by the Nepal earthquake. The thesis is largely inductive in nature, focused on understanding the meanings of the "calls for accountability" and more broadly the concrete manifestations of citizen efforts to influence the governance of post-earthquake response and reconstruction. Broadly, the thesis draws on the accounts and experiences of a mix of actors who were involved in responding to the Nepal earthquake, and more specifically, to pursue the agenda of participatory and accountable governance of the disaster.

The methodological design of this thesis follows a pragmatist tradition of qualitative research. For Creswell, pragmatist approach to qualitative research is problem-driven, context-specific, flexible, and draws on multiple research designs and data sources, but it is also informed by researcher's own background, intuition and values (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). Pragmatist qualitative research is also considered well-suited to examine the unfolding of the specific social mechanisms and their socio-political implications in a situation of relative unpredictability and ambiguity (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the research project followed a flexible research design that was responsive to the emerging field experiences and evidence, an approach commonly associated with qualitative and ethnographic research (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 36; Robson and McCartan, 2016). The use of flexible approach is also considered invaluable in embedding the research within the unpredictability and uncertainty that characterise post-disaster context (Fortun, 2012). As further discussed below, this thesis has sought to make such flexibility an integral part of the entire research planning and execution process.

Given the central role of personal intuition and background in pragmatist qualitative research, the decision to understand the nature, potential and limitations of the politics of

citizen-centric disaster governance followed my own experience of witnessing and navigating the Nepal crisis from a distance, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter. It was also shaped by my background as a native of Nepal, my prior experiences working in Nepal's development and civil society sector, and in conducting qualitative research in the field of health governance. More substantially, the focus on citizen-centric, 'bottom-up' politics of disaster governance also stems from the relative paucity of empirical evidence on the topic, despite the enduring debates that question the relevance and implications of globally-propagated agenda of disaster governance.

The qualitative research employed for this thesis also draws inspirations from the long-standing contribution of qualitative and ethnographic research in advancing knowledge concerning the complex socio-political dimensions of disaster. Samuel Henry Prince's case study of Halifax Disaster is widely considered the first systematic analysis on the social aspects of disaster and the ways disaster can serve as a stimulus for social change (Prince, 1920). Others, such as Kai Erikson's classic ethnography of environmental disaster in West Virginia provides a poignant account of the often-overlooked issues of trauma, hopelessness and apathy facing disaster-hit communities (Erikson, 1976). In recent years, disaster researchers have also sought to expand the scope of disaster ethnography, to understand the political incentive and disincentive in preventing disasters (De Waal, 2006), and to shed light into the social vulnerability and neglect facing disaster affected communities (Fortun, 2009; Klinenberg, 2015).

More specifically, this thesis stands to complement the current methodological advances in critical humanitarian scholarship that seek to understand the changing space of humanitarianism through the experiences of humanitarian responders that are at the frontline of humanitarian crisis. The aim is to capture the everyday experiences of those who participate in and respond to disaster through different motivations and affiliations (Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006; Krause, 2014; Curato, 2018), together with a closer account of the practical unfolding of the globally-induced systems and technologies of humanitarian governance (Andersson, 2014; Madianou et al., 2016). To follow Slater, my research design follows 'urgent ethnography', which emphasises 'direct accounting' of the often-overlooked activities and actors that disasters tend to engender (Slater, 2013, p.33). Although far from complete, the three empirical papers that follow jointly aim to get 'as close as possible to the moment' and document varied forms of political possibilities and limitations that underpin citizens' efforts to influence the governance of the Nepal earthquake.

Data sources and fieldwork

The three empirical papers for this thesis draw on a combination of data sources. It uses interviews with a mix of responders to the earthquake (Papers 1, 2, and 3), along with those affected by the earthquake (Paper 3). As will become clear from the empirical chapters, by responders to the earthquake, the thesis considers a diverse set of humanitarian workers (informal volunteers, formal NGO workers, policymakers, community activists, and disaster-affected communities). Given the empirical aim of the thesis to investigate the concrete manifestation of citizens' efforts in influencing the governance of post-earthquake response and reconstruction, developing a rich empirical base merely through interviews with those who responded to "calls for accountability" or enacted accountability-related practices was deemed insufficient. As Becker and Geer (1957) argues interviews run the risk of distorted understanding of the reality given the higher possibility of bias inherent in interviews. Participant observation, with its focus of getting closer to 'everyday contexts' of social actors (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3), therefore, serves to overcome some of the inherent limitations of the interviews. This is, however, not to dismiss the value of interviews in disaster research in general and in realising the overall aim of the thesis in particular. In fact, the two forms of data collection were used in a complementary basis and based on the empirical aim of the concerned papers. While both individual and group interviews proved instrumental in exploring what the research participants said about their experiences in organising humanitarian action or responding to the accountability demands (Paper 1), together their sense of accomplishments and dilemmas in organising social accountability campaign (Paper 2), participant observation complemented interview data to understand the operationalisation of the participatory and accountability activities (e.g. everyday office interactions, meetings, public hearings, learning and exchange events) in their everyday context (Papers 2 and 3).

The fieldwork for the thesis was conducted in two phases within the first year of the earthquake. I first conducted five weeks of field work from August-September 2015. The first round of field work involved interviews with 15 early responders to the Nepal earthquake, to understand their experiences with the "calls for accountability" that took root in the emergency phase of the earthquake (Paper 1). During this preliminary field work, I also met with representatives from international aid organisations to get a sense of varied accountability-related practices being introduced in the wake of the crisis. Through these meetings, I shortlisted potential case studies that fit the definition of voice and social accountability, as discussed in the literature. Accordingly, I met with officials from a mix of international and local NGOs that were involved in various activities, implicitly or explicitly, geared at promoting participatory and accountable governance of earthquake response. I came back to London with a list of potential NGOs, discussed the suitability of the case with my supervisor,

reengaged in literature review, and finally settled for two cases for further investigation (Paper 2 and Paper 3). The second fieldwork was then conducted for a period of four and half months from January to May 2016.

Table 1: Summary of Empirical Projects/Papers

Empirical /Papers	Design	Data Sources	Analytical techniques
Paper 1; Beyond performance and protocols: Early responders' experiences of accountability demands in the emergency response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake	Exploratory-Interpretive Interviews	-15 In-depth interviews	Thematic Analysis
Paper 2; Doing accountability in humanitarian crisis: A case of civil society-driven social accountability in post-earthquake Nepal	Focused Ethnographic Case Study	-16 semi-structured interviews (13 NGO actors/staff, affiliates, donor representatives directly involved with the campaign under investigation, and 3 government officials) -Participant observation of the everyday office activities and 5 focused events. -2 group interviews with the local staff in two districts.	Ethnographic Analysis
Paper 3; The politics of participatory disaster governance in Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction	Ethnographic Interface Analysis	-Participant observation of 9 policy and community-level meetings in Kathmandu and Sankhu -21 semi-structured interviews (13 policy makers, 8 local level officials and community members in Sankhu) -12 ethnographic Sankhu, and Kathmandu	Ethnographic Analysis

Research challenges and improvisation

It is well acknowledged that the aim of getting closer to reality through fieldwork is often constrained by unanticipated challenges in the field. According to Cerwonka and Malkki (2007), such challenges and resultant adjustment in the fieldwork, however, should not to be viewed as an impediment to, but as an enabler of knowledge production. This becomes particularly important in disaster contexts in which seemingly mundane field-level challenges, ranging from organising travel and logistics, negotiating access with the gatekeepers, navigating one's identity as a researcher, can offer critical insights about the functioning of a society reeling from a disaster (Mukherji, Ganapati and Rahill, 2014).

During my fieldwork, I encountered several such challenges that not only required me to adjust my research agenda, but the process also nurtured my awareness towards the substantive topic of my research. One such experience helps to elucidate the point.

The original aim of Paper 1 was to conduct interviews with a mix of government officials and international aid actors in charge of the emergency response, and to understand their experiences of and response to the post-earthquake 'calls for accountability'. Through a GoN-mandated website, the Disaster Risk Reduction Portal, which was a major source of information in the aftermath of the earthquake, I compiled a list of 20 government officials involved in the emergency response and approached them for interviews. About half of them responded to my email and agreed to be interviewed. But as I started my field work in August 2015, about three and half months after the earthquake, I learned that many of those individuals I had purposefully selected for interviews were no longer serving in the same role as they did during the emergency period. It turned out these individuals were temporarily designated and deployed for emergency response, and as the official timeline for the emergency response came to an end[10], they returned to their original portfolios. As a result, several of the proposed interviewees said they were no longer available for interviews, while others directly refused to participate.

A similar problem was also encountered with the international aid workers. Several of the international aid workers who were originally contacted for interviews had already left the country by the time I began my fieldwork. In some cases, I was refused an interview at the last minute. At least in two occasions, the interviewees opted out citing their unsuitability to talk about the topic of accountability and related experiences (Paper 1), and instead suggested their colleagues be approached. One such incident involved a high-level official of a reputed international INGO. His suggestion to interview a member of his Monitoring and Evaluation

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[10] The timeline of the emergency period itself was a subject of major controversy. While the GoN was keen on shortening the period of emergency, characterised by distribution of essential relief measures, to proceed with the early recovery and reconstruction. By contrast, NGO workers favoured extension of emergency period to allow for immediate relief materials to reach the communities.

team never materialised. In another case, a local staff of an international NGO withdrew at the last minute, owing to lack of prior "approval" from her international counterpart.

This experience, on the face of it, pointed to the common forms of uncertainty involved in disaster research. But more substantially, these experiences also made me reflect on the possibility of my research topic on accountability may have raised an alarm among potential interviews, owing to its controversial nature, and close link with the topics of monitoring and evaluation in the aid sector. In other words, despite making my intent and background clear, I was potentially seen more as an evaluator of their performance, and less as an independent researcher interested in understanding the potential and limitations of citizens' efforts to influence the governance of disaster response.

Another experience during the second phase of my fieldwork further lends support to the above point. Building on my first fieldwork, one of my plans was to conduct a case study of the implementation of 'downward accountability' system of a major international humanitarian agency. Downward accountability here entails a system of complaint handling, which allowed disaster-affected communities to participate in and express their voice regarding the implementation of community-based humanitarian assistance. Through a personal contact, I approached a major international humanitarian organisation working in Nepal and submitted a formal request to conduct an in-depth case study of this system in two of the earthquake-affected districts. The request mostly entailed access to the implementation sites in two districts, and interviews with the central level staff involved in managing this system. A series of negotiation then followed, with a Nepali staff serving as an intermediary between me and a senior level staff of non-Nepali origin. Through this Nepali staff, I was asked to provide information regarding my research, analytical aims, and how my research is going to be mutually beneficial to me and the organisation in question. In one of the emails, I was asked to assure how my research 'do not pose any risk' to the organisation. In response, I provided details of my research plan, reiterating my role as an academic researcher, the ethnical conditions that will be followed, and the possibility of the research to help enhance, rather than undermine, the [accountability related] activities taken by the organisation.

Despite having provided the best explanation possible and negotiating for almost two months, I failed to secure a clear-cut approval from the organisation. This led me to shift my case study to examine the politics of participatory governance of disaster involving state-led reconstruction (Paper 3), an experience, in hindsight, proved much more intellectually rewarding.

The above experience in failing to secure a timely approval and access to conduct the case study of 'downward accountability' made me reflect on two issues. First, it was a limitation on my part of having failed to garner necessary trust from the 'gatekeepers' to conduct research on a topic that has for long been a subject of controversy in the aid sector.

While focused on capturing memories of disaster from victims', Tota (2004) argues that conducting research in post-crisis context demands extra patience on the part of the researcher to overcome being viewed as an intruder. The sensitivity of the topic, together with the short-term nature of field work may have proven an impediment in securing such support from those whose consent was necessary to pursue this research. Second, this experience also made me reflect on the broader issue of impenetrability of the aid sector. As Smirl has shown through her study of the aid environment in post-Tsunami Aceh, my experience of having struggled to secure formal support from the aid agency is reminiscent of the growing efforts by aid sector to protect their sense of self-presentation and insulate them from outside scrutiny (Smirl, 2015). This experience served as a crucial reminder in shaping my subsequent analysis about what it means and takes to be accountable in humanitarian crisis situation. It particularly encouraged me to think of this experience at odds with the notion of learning and accountability that continues to capture the attention of the aid community.

Reflexivity and positionality

As a key ingredient of qualitative research, reflexivity was closely followed as part of the fieldwork and subsequent analysis. Beyond the use of reflexivity as a dialogue with self (Burawoy, 1998), in conducting fieldwork in disaster context characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability, disaster researchers are also encouraged to exercise regular dialogue and debriefing with peers (Phillips, 2014, p.152). I tried to improve my data collection and analysis through continual dialogue with myself, but also through regular discussion with my supervisor as the fieldwork evolved (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007).

As one example, about two weeks into the second phase of my field work (January 2016), I encountered a problem with my data collection, which I thought stemmed from a lack of specificity with my interview guide. My interviewees showed the tendency of deviating from the core research topic concerning their aspirations and experiences of social accountability. Instead, interviews were spending much of the time describing their personal experiences with the disaster; how they experienced the earthquake, how they responded to it, what affect it had on them, etc. My initial leaning was to revise my interview guide and make it more structured, asking the interviewees specific questions on citizen participation, government response and accountability. On discussing the issue with my supervisor, however, we decided to allow my research participants enough time to speak about their experiences of confronting the earthquake and its response, recognising that participatory and accountability activism was not an abstract concept for them, but one concretely located in their own memories and experiences, which were fraught, intense, consuming, and which demanded discussion.

This dialogue helped me revise my interview strategies for both Papers 2 and 3. Providing individuals more space to express their experiences of the earthquake not only enhanced my understanding of the larger context of response, but also fostered a more empathetic relationship with the interviewees and develop appreciation of the adverse conditions under which local actors participated in or organised social accountability practices. This experience also proved useful to expand my sample size for ethnographic interviews and include in it specific questions on conditions that influence the implementation of localised spaces of participation (Paper 3), to understand how the response from the local government in the immediate aftermath influenced local communities' understanding of the local government.

For Berger (2015), one of the ways of exercising reflexivity in qualitative research is to be aware of and fruitfully engage with one's dual position as an outsider and insider. My background as a native of Nepal, equipped me with the basic skill-set required to conduct research in Nepal. Most of my interviews were conducted in Nepali language. Having collected and transcribed all the data on my own, I was able to quickly decode some of the intricate meanings within both participant observation and interview data. For instance, use of proverbs is very important part of Nepali language. Proverbs were used extensively during interviews, to express one's sense of neglect from the government, and express dissatisfaction of being deprived of the information about the reconstruction. A closer engagement with such linguistic peculiarities within interview data allowed me to understand the larger social conditions under which individuals exercise their voice.

The advantage of being an insider is also reflected in my early attention to the controversies surrounding the Nepal earthquake, as discussed in the introductory chapter, and the subsequent efforts by local civil society groups in monitoring the delivery of aid. Relying on my intuition and curiosity, I carefully documented some of the key controversies early on as my research interest was evolving. In addition, my position as an insider also allowed me to reflect that efforts at monitoring the performance of public services and aid interventions, particularly driven by NGO actors and young social entrepreneurs, have in the recent years become increasingly common in Nepal. These efforts owe in part to the post-2006 socio-political changes (as discussed in the literature review chapter) that have reinstated the agenda of 'governance reforms' into the larger public discourse, and ignited a new craving among youth-based civil society groups to seize the political spaces that have opened up since the end of the Maoist conflict. This has, in part, been facilitated by proliferation of information and communication technologies and social media platforms. This realisation stems from my past engagement with Nepal's civil society sector, particularly in areas of youth empowerment and political participation. In addition, through my past involvement in Nepal's development and NGO sector, I was also aware of the struggle to raise resources, together with the strategic and

operational comprises that local civil society actors often have to make in working with the external funding agency. It was also through my past involvement in youth activism that I came to know one of the main conveners of the civil society group I did a case study of, as part of my second empirical project (Paper 2). This awareness was crucial to understand the origin and development of the campaign, and the strategic and operational challenges facing local civil society actors.

Not that the insider position was entirely short of disadvantages. My background as an upper-middle class male youth of Nepal, pursuing higher education in the West, sometimes posed challenges in my interaction with my research participants. For example, Sankhu, where I did my fieldwork, garnered major national and international attention in the wake of the earthquake. But when I did my fieldwork almost a year since the earthquake, there was hardly any presence of external aid agencies. For many locals interviewed, there was a sense of abandonment and neglect, as evidenced in Paper 3. My presence, as an outsider, allowed many to vent their frustrations, but also raised some expectations. Some of my interviewees were keen to explore my support in raising resources for local reconstruction. On one occasion, I was asked by a group of elderly if I could help find resources for regeneration of a small local temple. This was not an unreasonable request on the part of the local elderly, who were oblivious of the help they could secure from the government or aid community. But it was unreasonable for me to attend to this request to explore resources and I had to politely turn it down. In so doing, I have tried to exercise what Patton (2002, p.50) calls 'empathic neutrality', trying to understand the everyday challenges confronting local people but also making sure that my field presence did not generate unnecessary expectations among local communities, nor did it divert from my main goal of producing knowledge.

Ethical and quality considerations

The ethical approval for the PhD was secured from the LSE's Research Ethics Committee. Each of the empirical papers that follows closely adhere to these ethical standards. In general, the study has strictly complied with the anonymity and confidentiality standards, to protect the identity of the research participants. Except where consent is secured to identify participants or organisations, identifying information of individual research participants and organisations have been withheld. Interviews were conducted after securing either written or verbal consent from the participants. In either case, the participants were provided adequate information about the identity of the researcher, nature and scope of the study, and the process of analysis and dissemination of data. Most of the participant observation data came from attendance of meetings that were, in principle, open to public. As such, no informed consent was asked from individual participants of such meetings. Whenever feasible the organisers of the meetings were made aware of my involvement, and identity of individual participants de-

identified in subsequent analysis and reporting of data. Although the identity of a few individuals, due to the nature of their professional status may be traceable, their words were spoken in public settings and I consider the findings presented here possess no significant physical or professional harm to such individuals.

In addition, the research has closely followed quality standards that are applicable for qualitative research. According to Hammersley (1992), two criteria is useful to ensure quality in qualitative research: validity and relevance. Validity, as per Hammersley, refers to 'selective representation of reality' (p.78), involving sufficient use of evidence from the study of a given social phenomenon. Relevance, on the other hand, entails the utility of the research findings for a wider audience, typically beyond the immediate realm of a scientific community that shares interest with the researcher. In other words, scientific knowledge could be geared at informing policy interventions.

The three empirical projects, both independently and collectively, contain sufficient evidence, about the specific topic of the politics of citizen-centric governance in post-disaster context. As previously mentioned, continual adjustment and improvisation of the research, together with my reflection on how this research idea originated and progressed through my own involvement in Nepal's earthquake has also helped bring further transparency and rigour to the research (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007; Duneier, 2011). Besides the complementary use of interviews and participant observation, I also consulted with necessary documentary evidence, to understand the context and supplement my analysis. The newspaper articles were constantly referred to, to keep myself updated with the situation, and to use the media information to probe my research participants. From the very early on as my interest in the topic developed, I also collected relevant social media posts by key public officials and activists, reports by local NGOs and aid agencies, various online petitions on the topics of accountability and transparency in aid delivery, which helped in conceptualising the research and also formed part of the contextual analysis for Paper 1.

The relevance of research, although primarily geared at the scholarly community, is also expected to be of interest for humanitarian policymakers and practitioners. While policy analysis is not the main aim of the thesis, I have indicated some basic implications of the thesis for policy and practice, particularly given the long-standing focus of accountable and participatory governance in disaster context. As appropriate, data relating to experiences and concerns of communities is also expected to inform the ongoing efforts at longer-term reconstruction in Nepal.

Generalisability

The goal of qualitative research is less about generalisation of findings in quantitative or statistical terms. The fact that each disaster evokes unique 'event characteristics' also limits

generalisation of findings to other disaster contexts (Rubin, 2016; Donner and Diaz, 2018, p.292). Particularly when studying political aspects of disaster, like the one that this thesis has sought to do, it is important to move away from the demands of generalisability, to focus on specific context of disaster and to understand the nature and implications of politicisation of disasters in their own right. In addition, Nepal represents a unique case, given its history of development and democratisation, and fraught history of governance reforms, as discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, the findings are largely to be understood within Nepal's current context of socio-political changes. Yet, the case of Nepal may have a theoretical 'resonance' (Lund, 2014, p.226) with other post-disaster contexts in terms of political contestation and controversies that tend to follow a major disaster, and more specifically citizens' expectations and experiences in trying to make disaster response accountable and participatory.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to set the broad methodological context of my thesis that is informed by my personal curiosity, but also rests on the intellectual motivation to contribute to the current theoretical and empirical understanding on the politics of citizen-centric governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction. I have also discussed some of the challenges and opportunities associated with planning and implementing fieldwork in post-disaster context, with the aim to contribute to the ongoing practical debates surrounding research on the social and political dimensions of disasters more generally. The thesis is set in a tradition of ethnographies of disaster response and recovery and is informed by my own reflexivity and positionality as a qualitative researcher. Each empirical paper that follows contains specific details of the methods of data collection and analysis. Further details on methods are provided in Methodological Annex.

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CHAPTER 4: EMPRICAL PAPER 1

Beyond performance and protocols: Early responders' experiences of accountability demands in the emergency response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake

Abstract:

While critics have long questioned the push for professionalised and performance-driven accountability in the humanitarian sector, scant attention is paid to the accountability demands experienced by early responders to humanitarian crisis. Set in the contested climate of the emergency response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake and drawing on interviews with 15 early responders, this paper reveals three forms of accountability demands: a) accountability as compliance; b) accountability as an object of government regulation and; c) accountability as public opposition and interrogation. Beyond the performance-centric, NGO-driven understanding of accountability, early responders to the Nepal earthquake experienced accountability demands as multidirectional, coming not only from donors and beneficiaries but also from the national government, and wider publics. The paper argues that engaging with multiple and often conflicting accountability demands constitutes a significant feature of the politics of disaster governance that deserves further attention from the humanitarian community.

Introduction

In the last two decades, the international humanitarian sector has made steady efforts in improving the governance of humanitarian action, evident in a range of protocols and practices intended to improve the effectiveness, appropriateness and harmonisation of humanitarian aid (Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, 2010; The Sphere Project, 2011; CHS Alliance, Group URD and the Sphere Project, 2014). Critical humanitarian scholarship, however, has raised concerns over the de-contextualising and de-politicising effects of universal protocols and standards, and unequal North-South power relations they tend to produce (Slim, 2002; Tong, 2004; Barnett, 2005; Stein, 2008; Everett and Friesen, 2010; Barnett, 2013). Recent empirical evidence, although limited, has found that current push for accountable humanitarian action, with their intensive focus on results and benchmarks, have, for example, impeded local aid workers' efforts in engaging crisis-affected communities (Makuwira, 2006; Daly and Brassard, 2011), and discouraged open communication and collaboration with other NGOs (Schuller, 2012), given their focus on upward accountability to donors at the cost of downward accountability to disaster-affected communities (Taylor, Tharapos and Sidaway, 2014).

Two major gaps can be observed in the current scholarship that this paper seeks to address. First, the analysis of accountability within the current debates of humanitarian governance is largely centred on the northern NGOs-centric approaches to bring reforms in the humanitarian sector, to the neglect of accountability claims and counter-claims that emanate in specific disaster context. Second, with notable exceptions (Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006; Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010; Taylor, Tharapos and Sidaway, 2014) there is a paucity of scholarly attention to the field-level experiences of humanitarian responders in responding to the demands for accountability and practicing accountable aid action.

The paper first provides a context of the contested climate of the emergency response triggered by the 2015 Nepal earthquake, and the 'accountability demands' it triggered. This is followed by a discussion of the two major modes of accountability (performance-based and public-centric), which sets the conceptual context. Drawing on 15 in-depth interviews with a mix of early responders to the crisis, the paper then presents the early responders' experiences in responding to the complicated environment of the earthquake response that span multiple and multidirectional accountability demands. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of 'multidirectional accountability demands' for the ongoing debates on the governance of humanitarian crisis.

Nepal's 'Great Earthquake' and accountability demands

On Saturday April 25, 2015 at 11:56 AM (Nepal Standard Time) a major earthquake of 7.8 magnitude and subsequent aftershocks brought upon Nepal an unprecedented level of

humanitarian crisis, claiming over 8,790 lives, injuring over 22,300, and affecting lives of an estimated eight million people, almost one-third of Nepal's population (Government of Nepal, 2015, p. XI). Popularly known as the 'Great Earthquake', it, on the one hand, raised questions over the response capacity of the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the humanitarian sector, on the other hand, it also thrust upon the country renewed imaginaries of reconstruction and development, captured in the popular slogan of 'building back better and resilient Nepal' (Government of Nepal, 2015; United Nations Development Programme, 2015, p. 1).

The emergency response to the earthquake also proved to be a fraught environment, with the affected populations, media community, local and national civil society groups accusing the GoN and aid actors of a bureaucratic disregard, lack of transparency, embezzlement and hoarding of aid resources (Adhikari, 2015; Ghimire, 2015; Harris, 2015; Thapa, 2015). Protests and demonstrations were reported from several parts of the country, including the capital, Kathmandu (Adhikari, 2015; Sharma and Adkin, 2015; Siegler, 2015). In one controversial incident, locals from Nuwakot, a heavily affected district, seized a truck loaded with galvanised zinc sheets meant for temporary shelters, alleging the incumbent finance minister of corruption, which he vehemently denied (Adhikari, 2015). In Sindhupalchowk, another worst-hit and highly impoverished district, angry locals were reported to have blocked a convoy of army trucks carrying relief materials, sparking a tense situation between the locals and the army (Sharma and Adkin, 2015). Citizens also protested outside the parliament in the capital Kathmandu, demanding improved transport services to travel across the country to attend to family members (Sharma and Adkin, 2015).

Amidst the seemingly chaotic emergency response, the GoN initiated the controversial 'One Window' policy, which sought to centralise the widely dispersed aid resources under the GoN's bureaucracy (Giri, 2015). This decision, in turn, was criticised by the activists and Nepali diaspora. For instance, a memorandum signed by 36 Nepal-based civil society organisations/NGOs demanded the government 'not to stick on its stance on one door system based on the nature of rescue and needs of earthquake affected community' (Civil Society Organizations and NGO Federation of Nepal, 2015, p.1). It further alerted the government against 'curtailing the rights to the people' under the pretext of emergency management. Others such as the National Human Rights Commission, a constitutionally mandated body, demanded that the government protect citizens' rights and also called for transparency in aid operations (National Human Rights Commission Nepal, 2015). Opposition parties and parliamentarians launched aid monitoring activities in several districts and criticised the aid response for failing to reach to the most deprived and 'powerless people' (Jayashi, 2015). Through social media and online campaigns, the Nepali diaspora questioned the GoN's competence and trustworthiness in handling the disaster. One change.org petition that quickly amassed 18,100 signatures sought direct intervention from Transparency

International, the United Nations, and the National anti-corruption body, claiming that the GoN was likely to misuse aid resources (Change.org, 2015).

The GoN, in turn, publicly committed itself to transparency, accountability and coherence in the delivery of aid (Giri, 2015; Paudyal, 2015). The Prime Minister Relief Fund Website, a GoN website that served as a gateway of information regarding national humanitarian crises was reorganised to update citizens with information about the governmental response. In response to the questions surrounding corruption in aid delivery, the then Prime Minister himself made a public commitment that those found misusing the relief fund would be punished (The Rising Nepal, 2018).

In sum, in addition to the human and physical devastation wrought by the Nepal earthquake, how the emergency response is to be governed became a major area of controversy and public concern. It is in this context that early responders to the Nepal earthquake performed their work. This paper's main goal is to understand early responders' experience of accountability demands in an emergency response to a major humanitarian crisis. Current conceptualisations locate accountability demands to two different sources: performance-based accountability spearheaded by the international aid sector, and public-centric accountability from the public. Each is discussed in what follows to frame the analysis.

Performance-based accountability

The question of humanitarian accountability attained global prominence in the mid-1990s, particularly following the Rwandan genocide, in which the humanitarian community faced major criticisms for mishandling of the crisis and performance failures (Hilhorst, 2002; Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Barnett, 2005). The international community's response was to introduce stronger professional standards and charters for humanitarian action, intended to set principles to which humanitarian organisations could be held accountable (Hilhorst, 2002).

This approach is termed 'performance-based accountability' here to mean a focus on performance, effectiveness and efficiency in delivery of humanitarian aid, particularly involving northern NGOs (Slim, 2002). Accountability under this conceptualisation mainly involves: a) establishment of universally applicable performance standards and; b) monitoring, evaluation and learning from humanitarian action. This form of accountability is subject to three major critiques.

Firstly, the appropriateness of universal standards of humanitarian aid is contested. They are seen to favour the interests of northern NGOs and their technical experts at the expense of the priorities of the southern actors and the rights of beneficiaries (Dufour *et al.*, 2004). Scholars have also raised concerns that technical interpretation of accountability lead to rigidity or inaction on the part of mainstream humanitarian actors, if adherence to them is deemed unrealistic in a local context (Tong, 2004; Keen, 2008). Professional logics that

underpin universal standards are also seen to promote de-contextualised and de-politicised responses to humanitarian crisis (Davis, 2007, p. 14; Barnett, 2013).

Secondly, it has been argued that the performance-based approach leads to simplification and instrumentalisation of accountability, with its focus on monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian NGOs' effectiveness, concealing politically contentious topics such as donor accountability, and public disclosure of performance (Everett and Friesen, 2010). Excessive focus on NGO performance, learning and measurement, in turn, undermine 'politically sophisticated self-examination of [aid agencies'] interventions' (Middleton and O'Keefe, 1997, p. 158) and their learning from failures (Keen, 2008). Newer practices of accountability such as beneficiary feedback mechanisms are also seen to be limited to realising the immediate project aspirations of mainstream NGOs (Krause, 2014), often promoting self-evaluation and self-censorship within such efforts, while leaving little opportunity for actual beneficiaries of aid to critically evaluate the performance of aid actors and sanction in case of underperformance (Pérouse de Montclos, 2012).

Thirdly, excessive focus on northern humanitarian NGOs as the key object and subject of humanitarian accountability tends to negate the involvement of state actors in setting agendas, regulating and overseeing humanitarian response (Stein, 2008; Coyne, 2013), together with strategies they deploy in responding to, or deflating disaster-induced accountability demands (Boin, McConnell and Hart, 2008). Performance-based logic also overlooks the involvement of informal aid workers, or 'new humanitarians' such as independent volunteers, diaspora community, private sector, media, activists (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010; Sezgin and Dijkzeul, 2015), who are increasingly staking claims in humanitarian response.

Taken together, the above discussions expose the limitations of current discussions and practices of performance-based, internationally-driven accountability. Yet, it falls short of providing a conceptual tool to understand the contested and political nature of accountability claims and counter-claims that emanate in the disaster context. The public-centric view of accountability stands to overcome this limitation.

Public-centric accountability

The public-centric view of accountability may be accredited to the pioneering work of Amartya Sen, who argued that public action, involving public voice and criticisms play a critical role in compelling powerholders to respond to a looming disaster (Drèze and Sen, 1989; Sen, 1999). India's success in averting large-scale famine, for instance, is attributed to the democratic opening and the environment of public scrutiny that ensued after its independence in 1947 (Sen, 1999).

Although Sen's work on the value of democracy, and more specifically, voice and public criticisms have mostly centred on the study of slow-onset disasters such as hunger and famine, scholars have signalled that public criticisms and media scrutiny in the wake of the Rwandan crisis in the 1990s played a vital role in propelling contemporary accountability-related reforms in the humanitarian sector (Hilhorst, 2002, Buchanan-Smith, 2003). The potential role of public and media scrutiny in checking the abuse of power by the national government and aid workers is acknowledged (Jalali, 2002; Mizohata, 2011; Roddy, Strange and Taithe, 2015). Media and civil society have been found to act as 'warning sensors' against state's excesses in the face of major disasters (Jalali, 2002, p.130), while the proliferation of new media technologies has also made public scrutiny over aid workers further possible. This, according to Donini and Walker (2012) 'can become a formidable tool for accountability, responsibility and transparency; empty promises, sloppy programming, shady deals, but also successful programmes will be easier to document' (p.262).

The potential of voice in commanding response from powerholders is further reinforced by recent scholarly movement in the area of social accountability (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Gaventa and McGee, 2013; Fox, 2015). Accountability, within this body of work, can be understood along two dimensions. First, in line with Dreze and Sen's (1989) conceptualisation of voice in terms of public scrutiny, social accountability is understood as politically motivated action by not just direct beneficiaries of public services but different groups of civil society– and media-based initiatives who deploy multiple strategies to hold powerful actors to account (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006, p. 3). Second, social accountability is aimed at challenging and countering the state's neglect to previously held promises. Joshi and Houtzager (2012) defines it as citizens' actions *to monitor* the performance of duty-bearers, *seek justifications* for unmet demands, and *protest* when legitimate voices are denied. Protest, under this conceptualisation, is considered 'an especially vigorous form of voice' (Fox, 2015, p.353).

Study rationale and question

It is increasingly acknowledged that humanitarian responders are subject to growing pressures to perform, and become accountable to multiple stakeholders (Bryant, 2007, p.170; Taylor, Tharapos and Sidaway, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Not only are humanitarian responders subject to ever-growing moral standards of performance, they are also expected to conform to newer forms of global governance standards concerning, for example, efficiency, results and cost effectiveness of aid (Rubenstein, 2015). At the same time, public expectations within humanitarian crisis situations are taking complex forms, arguably posing challenges to the field-level action of humanitarian responders (Donini and Walker 2012), as was also witnessed in post-earthquake Nepal. As the space of humanitarian action is becoming

increasingly contested through the involvement of newer actors, whose aims and aspirations of responding to humanitarian crisis transcend the conventional understanding of material aid delivery (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010; Sezgin and Dijkzeul, 2016), critical rethinking on how not merely mainstream aid workers, but a wider network of humanitarian responders experience accountability demands in crisis situation seems imperative. Many of these newer actors in humanitarian response, as Hilhorst and Jansen (2010) argue, may even be dissatisfied with and inclined to disassociate from mainstream humanitarian actors. Despite these understanding, previous studies have paid scant attention to field-level experiences of diverse group of early responders, who have explicit or implicit roles, in realising the long-standing agenda of 'accountable humanitarian action'.

Using the contested environment of Nepal's earthquake response as an empirical context, the current paper aims to address: how do early responders to the Great Nepali earthquake experience humanitarian accountability demands?

In what follows, the paper provides a brief overview of the methodology, data sources and analysis for the empirical understanding of the accountability demands experienced by the early responders to the Nepal earthquake.

Study methodology

The study is situated in the interpretive and exploratory tradition of qualitative research, with the aim being to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people make of them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). To that end, in-depth interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of 15 early responders to the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques, participants were selected based on the fulfilment of one of the two criteria: a) participation in rescue and relief efforts during the emergency response; b) participation in planning and monitoring of the emergency response.

The 15 interviewees represented different backgrounds but all with close involvement in and/or intimate knowledge of the emergency response. 2 GoN employees were interviewed, 1 of whom was closely involved in formulating the policy response to the Nepal earthquake, but with little prior background in humanitarian or disaster sector; the second interviewee was part of Nepal's National Disaster Relief Network, with previous experience in handling localised disaster responses and was closely involved in coordinating the earthquake response of government and non-governmental agencies. While government staff were difficult to recruit and thus only two could be included in this study, their interviews are complemented by review of key policy documents and media reports. Interviewees also comprised of 7 international aid workers, of whom 2 were employed by bi-lateral aid agencies and 5 by

INGOs. 1 of the bi-lateral aid agency workers had no experience working on disaster management but was deployed to work on a high-level policy response following the earthquake, extending the study's information on the government experience. The rest of the aid workers had a mix of experiences working as evaluators, implementers and policy analysts. 3 interviewees were members of Nepali civil society who were involved in monitoring the disaster response, of whom, 2 had a background in Nepal's rights-based movement, and 1 in disaster preparedness and planning. Finally, 3 youth/social activists were interviewed, with a mix of experiences in delivering and monitoring disaster response but had little to no prior humanitarian experience. The interviewees were predominantly men; of the 15 only 2 were women. Only 1 was non-Nepali and rest were Nepali nationals.

All interviews were conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal in August-September 2015. Ethical approval for the study was secured from the LSE Research Ethics Committee. Interviews lasted approximately between 60-90 minutes. All interviews were held in Nepali language, except for one with a staff of an international NGO that was conducted in English.

Interviewees were asked about the general context of the Nepal earthquake response, followed by their specific involvement in and experiences. Probing questions centred on specific controversies (e.g. One Window Policy), instances of local protests as reported by media, public concerns about transparency, corruption, etc. Those representing I/NGO community were questioned about their experiences of implementing specific standards, practices and tools of accountability. An open-ended question about the meaning and significance of accountability was asked to all interviews in the latter part of the interview.

Two major limitations of this interview-based study merit attention. First, although every effort was made to make the interviews reveal early responders' concrete experiences of accountability demands, interviewees were also keen on expressing their normative views of what accountability is, and how it ought to be translated into practice, which largely surfaced from their unique motivation and background in participating in the response. This limitation, in part, is addressed by allowing enough room for participants to express their views about accountability but also asking probing questions centred on the concrete policy and programmatic response to the earthquake that, in turn, sparked political contestation. Second, as shown in the table below, although interviewees are grouped under different categories, each interviewee is unique with regards to the broader condition or motivation under which they decided to participate in the emergency effort, and by extension, their experiences of 'accountability demands'. The analysis section, as appropriate, has tried to disentangle such unique motivation and experiences of individual interviewee, to show the complicated politics of accountability in humanitarian response.

Table 1: Interviewee's pseudonym and affiliation

Interviewee's pseudonym	Interviewee's affiliation
Irfaan	Civil Society/Disaster management
Khem	Staff, bi-lateral aid agency
Mohan	Staff, bi-lateral aid agency
Brajesh	Civil society/rights activist
Ananta	Youth activist/Emergency Volunteer
Bikram	Youth Activist/Emergency Volunteer
Suraj	Staff, INGO
Ravi	Staff, INGO
Kopila	Staff, INGO
Rajan	Human Rights/Civil Society
Sama	Staff, INGO
Rahim	Staff, GoN
Ashish	Staff, INGO
Keshav	Staff, GoN
Pramod	Youth activist/Emergency Volunteer

Analytical process

All interviews were translated and transcribed by the author. Thematic analysis was performed to identify patterns (themes) within the data, following Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001). Thematic coding of the interview transcripts was conducted in two phases; first developing a set of descriptive codes, followed by analytical codes that jointly revealed explicit and implicit ideas expressing the ways accountability demands were experienced by the participants. Development and identification of specific themes, was informed by both literature review, as discussed above, and also inductively generated through coding and analysis of the interview data.

The final step involved checking of and organising the themes against data extracts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Throughout the process, reliability and rigor were given special emphasis, cross-checking ongoing analysis with the original transcripts (Tobin and Begley, 2004).

Key findings

The thematic analysis resulted in three different interpretations of accountability demands experienced by study participants: a) *accountability as compliance b) accountability as object of government regulation*, and c) *accountability as public opposition and interrogation.* Each of the main themes and their sub-themes are discussed below. Interview quotations are used to better represent the voice of study participants. The professional affiliation of participants is indicated, as applicable, and to tease out the unique experiences of individual interviewee. As per study's ethical requirement, personal identities of individual participants are

anonymised, but pseudonyms are used to describe the background and interview quotations (see Table 1).

Accountability as compliance

'Accountability as compliance' here refers to early responders' experience of accountability demands, characterised by self-regulation, based on personal values and aspirations, coupled with adherence to minimal standards of performance delivery.

Compliance with the ethical norms to respond to suffering

Most interviewees described the early days of the Nepal earthquake as characterised by an environment of self-directed and discretionary action. For most study participants, the sight of widespread suffering prompted immediate action. A youth activist, Bikram, describes his involvement in rescue and relief efforts as follows:

> "When I saw the devastation in Sankhu[11], tears ran down from my eyes. I wanted to do something but was not sure what to do. I had never seen an earthquake like this. Initially, I didn't know what to do. There was nothing to eat. We did whatever our heart asked us to do."

Although having no prior experience as a humanitarian worker, Bikram was driven by a moral obligation 'to do something' amidst his assessment of slow-moving rescue and relief efforts. He immediately mobilised youth volunteers to clear up debris in one of the affected locations in the periphery of Kathmandu. Another civil society activist, Pramod, mentioned of experiencing an extreme form of "restlessness" in the early hours of the earthquake. Like Bikram, he was also concerned about the seemingly slow and uneven aid distribution. He spearheaded a campaign to monitor the rescue and relief operations. With no prior experience in or formal affiliation to the humanitarian sector, Bikram and Pramod became spontaneously involved in making the earthquake response ethical and effective, although with different aims and approaches.

Several interviewees echoed that complying with the ethical and normative standards also characterised the early phase of government response. The earthquake struck just before noon on Saturday, a public holiday. The first earthquake was followed by continual aftershocks, which posed serious challenges to the immediate rescue and relief efforts. For Keshav, a government official who was associated with the National Disaster Relief Committee, this did not stop him from heeding the calls of public service. He recalled spending many sleepless nights working alongside senior government officials, responding to the demands of national and international workers.

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[11] A peri-urban town in the outskirt of Kathmandu valley of historical and cultural significance. 98 lives were lost in this place and several individual and community infrastructures were severely damaged.

Ashish, a local staff member of an international NGO, had professional experience of governing localised disasters such as floods and landslides. But, for him, the demands and deprivation wrought by the earthquake were unparalleled. He stated that the early response was largely unplanned and was characterised by "doing what was deemed possible at that stage". The situation of uncertainty made it virtually impossible to distinguish victims from non-victims, so the relief was distributed to "whoever sought help" (Ashish). Despite international efforts at codifying minimum standards for accountable humanitarian action, interviewees perceived that quick action took priority over effective and targeted action in the early days.

Compliance with international and national humanitarian protocols and frameworks

The ethical urgency to respond was not the only form of compliance, however. Interviewees also recalled adhering to minimum procedural standards set by the GoN. It included declaration of emergency and activation of the National Disaster Act, a key regulatory instrument to manage national disasters. Keshav, who was involved in governing of relief efforts, mentioned that the activation of policy measures happened with bureaucratic precision: "the systems got auto-activated" (Keshav).

Several interviewees representing INGO community also mentioned being attentive to the internationally circulated guidelines and frameworks such as the Hyogo Protocol, the Sphere guidelines, HAP, CHS, as important. Additionally, the activation of and participation in thematic clusters[12], was also described by many as conforming to globally circulated values of maintaining harmony and coordination in the aid response.

Compliance with organisational mandate and performance standards

For many interviewees, particularly representing mainstream NGOs, compliance also meant ensuring their actions were consistent with the core mandate and mission of the organisation in question. Ravi, a senior staff of humanitarian INGO working in the area of food security mentioned avoidance of "mission drift" as a critical measure of compliance-based accountability. In his line of work, it meant sticking with the core mandate of food distribution, and not over-reaching their expertise by addressing water and sanitation, for instance, in the name of emergency need.

Another key area of compliance relates to adherence to everyday performance management standards. These were described to have been systematically inscribed into staff

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[12] Thematic clusters (e.g. shelter and health cluster) constitute a global initiative endorsed by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. These clusters embody ambitious aims of improving "capacity, predictability, accountability, leadership and partnership" within crisis context. http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/cluster-coordination

training programmes, monitoring and evaluation protocols and processes. "We also have the practice of providing orientation to our new staff. So, accountability is embedded in our orientation package", asserted Mohan, a senior level staff from another global relief agency. Sama, who represented another international NGO, equated accountability to a process of intra-organisational monitoring and sharing, with "programme quality" department maintaining a scrutiny over the performance of different divisions. Being attentive to the tools and practices such as community-based grievance and feedback mechanisms was also emphasised. Mohan further commented how community feedback served as a vital tool to "set quality benchmark" and "rectify service delivery", while also help deter potential misconduct by staff during aid operations. In a similar vein, procedures of needs assessment, selection and targeting of beneficiaries, information sharing with communities of the proposed aid services were brought up as key indicators of compliance.

The theme of 'compliance' here suggests that the initial days of Nepal earthquake, in large part, was characterised by normative and self-directed mode of action. The GoN's mode of making the emergency response accountable, was primarily limited to inviting and facilitating the entry of aid actors. However, as the relief efforts progressed, myriad of accountability-related protocols and practices are described to have entered the emergency landscape. Although many of the international standards and codes are voluntary in nature, the interviewees representing established humanitarian NGOs viewed them as practically binding. They demonstrated knowledge of and commitment to international and organisational codes of conduct, together with the regulatory conditions set by the government. The latter included reporting to the Social Welfare Council, a government body responsible to supervise the NGO sector, working closely with the respective government line agency, attending the cluster meetings etc. "The government hold us accountable based on that", said Mohan.

Accountability as object of government regulation

This second form of accountability demands concerns the regulatory aim of the GoN. The source and nature of this form of accountability may first be traced to the coordination problem that ensued during the early days of the emergency response.

The GoN declared a state of emergency within 24 hours of the earthquake and appealed to the international community for immediate assistance. The GoN's quick action, and decision to relax visa conditions for international aid workers enabled early and easy arrival of humanitarian actors.

The influx of both formal or mainstream NGO workers and informal actors (faith-based groups, foreign volunteers, Nepali diaspora) was described as unprecedented. Many had minimal in-country aid-related experiences, which triggered coordination problem. As one

example, Nepal's only international airport in Kathmandu, was described to have become inundated with international rescue workers. It put further strain on government's coordinating capacity and demanded reconfiguration of governmental logistical arrangements in order to deal with the growing demands of the myriad aid actors. Keshav, a government official involved in coordinating the emergency response described his experience:

> "There were foreigners all over. They would come asking me, 'where should we go?' But I had to manage other things. Some of them were just sent to some (disaster-hit) districts, but they didn't find work and had to return. For some of them we had to create work."

Faced with increased pressures to coordinate and 'create work', and in a context lacking a clearer framework of coordination and accountability, the government introduced regulatory measures.

Regulation for regularity in aid

GoN responded to the sense of uncoordinated aid with a series of measures including streamlining the field presence of aid actors, wherein aid actors were required to self-identify the expertise and resources they brought to bear. At the district level, relief efforts were expected to follow a Memorandum of Understanding with the Chief District Officer, specifying accounts of planned sites and aid delivery.

While the explicit logic of the early government action was to address the coordination problem, a more implicit logic involved the government's resolve to claim authority over emergency response. Keshav explained the logic:

> "In our [government's] global appeal which was placed on the foreign ministry website, we had asked the international community for what we needed. List of things were there. When they didn't come with those, we had the right to refuse the services. That was also treated as controlling. But we have the right to determine what we need and we can't allow everything to come in in the name of emergency."

For Keshav, the state of emergency did not mean that the aid workers could undermine GoN's authority. Several interviewees considered it normal, and to some extent desirable for the government to assert its authority or exercise "right to refuse" services in the emergency context. Others, particularly those representing international aid sector, likened the government's action to historical pattern of behaviour of "over-controlling" the entry and deployment of aid resources.

One regulatory framework that was frequently referred to was the National Development Cooperation Policy that was launched in 2014, just a year prior to the earthquake. It draws on the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 2005, the Accra Agenda for Action 2008, and the Busan Commitment 2011, reiterating principles of aid effectiveness,

accountability and transparency (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance, 2014). For GoN, the influx of aid actors in the post-earthquake environment escalated the previous concerns over 'fragmented' aid delivery that frustrated the government's efforts at improving the governance of international aid (The Government of Nepal, 2014, p.6). The Nepal Development Cooperation Policy served as a legitimate ground upon which aid actors were expected to 'adopt accountability in their process and to enhance transparency' (The Government of Nepal, 2014, p.12-13).

The need to assert stronger monitoring and regulatory presence of the government was also linked to what may be called 'role insecurity' confronting government officials. As the public criticisms over government's competency in handling the situation were brewing both nationally and internationally, government officials, in turn, were concerned, that the non-governmental sector may be seen as an efficient and credible alternative to transfer the aid, as had occurred in other disaster-hit countries, notably Haiti (Schuller and Morales, 2012). Khem, a major aid agency staff who worked closely with the government in preparing the emergency policy response, mentioned that the senior officials within the government were concerned that they may have "no role to play". Another INGO interviewee, Suraj, echoed this claim. He further added that the government's sense of losing control over the emergency aid, was described to have escalated a sense of "competition" between the government and INGOs, prompting closer monitoring of aid actors and imposition of regulatory order.

The expansion of the regulatory mode of accountability involved, among other instruments, the 'One Window Policy'. The policy envisioned that aid money should enter the country through a single, centrally-determined, government-mandated channel. This policy, although widely criticised by the wider public, showed a strong resolve within the GoN to bring non-governmental actors within the purview of government's monitoring apparatus.

Regulation to manage future blame and criticism

A subtler form of regulatory accountability concerns government's efforts to minimise the likelihood of long-term criticisms arising from unregulated emergency operations.

Interviewees recalled instances in which the emergency efforts were met with public resentment and anger. Bikram, the youth activist, described of his aspiration to serve one of the hard-hit communities resulted in a near physical confrontation among community members. The conflict ensued because of Bikram's other identity as a member of one of country's main political parties. Although he mentioned of his involvement as entirely neutral, it was considered "politically motivated" by local communities, and he was alleged of discrimination in aid response. The incident was resolved only after the local police intervention. In another district where Bikram served, the volunteers had to be escorted out by the government officials because the local communities opposed the way aid was distributed.

He argued the effects of such incidents were that the local governments were becoming involved in resolving local disputes instead of delivering aid. "That means the government resources were going to waste. There was no work being done", he lamented. Such "uncoordinated actions", according to Bikram, and associated local tensions, were further bolstering government's claim of the need to bring order to aid response and its "right to refuse" incoming aid services.

Additionally, reports of haphazard distribution of aid were widespread. Rajan, a human rights activist who participated in an independent monitoring of emergency response, termed it as "highway-based aid delivery", in which aid workers were mostly catering to communities that are easily accessible by road networks, while those inhabiting in remote and inaccessible areas were being excluded. Stories about duplication and disparity in aid efforts were circulating, prompting the government to closely monitor the aid actors.

Interviewees also indicated that the government's move to bring harmony in aid delivery was not only driven by growing cases and concerns over unregulated aid response. It was also to insulate itself from future blames and allegations. Suraj, who participated in an NGO-delegation to discuss problems and progress with the relief efforts, recalled the following remark made by a high-level government official in charge of overseeing disaster response:

> ".. When you [I/NGOs] go and distribute those [zinc] sheets to the communities, would you say that the sheets also have contribution from the government? Government gave up tax revenue on that but when you distribute them, you would not give credit to us. Then the communities will blame us. They will say INGOs gave us zinc sheets but they [government] gave us nothing."

Thus, the government was not just eager to secure 'credit' for its action, but also sensitive to the future blame arising from failures to protect and manage its own role in regulating aid efforts.

Accountability as public opposition and interrogation

The final theme that emerged from the analysis of data is accountability as public opposition and interrogation, which refers to a range of public oppositions, disapprovals and scepticisms confronting early responders.

Public grievances over unmet material needs
Overall, participants described a fraught emergency environment, involving sharp public criticisms against both the GoN and aid actors. They described of a range of public reactions, ranging from sit-ins and public demonstrations in various places, to blocking of roads and transporting of materials destined for someplace else.

Gombu, another youth activist, attributed public criticisms to both material shortages; "gap in supply and demand", a situation that is characteristic when a large-scale disaster strikes a resource-constrained setting, together with a sense of unfairness in aid distribution. Gombu recalled his experience as follows:

> "..in some cases, some people got certain type and quality of food another group of people got something else. So that also led people to raise questions. At that time, it was impossible to control the aid distribution. Some relief agencies would distribute 25 Kgs. of rice per household, others would do 10 Kgs., some would give lentils, others would give oil. Some would give tents [for immediate shelter], and another would give tarpaulin, a simple one. That was another reason why people got angry."

Public criticisms were also directed against supply-driven, and de-contextualised aid efforts. Pramod, who organised a campaign to monitor the immediate aid response recalled one community's resistance to temporary shelter and food aid when their priority was housing. As illustrated in the comment below, the public resented the tendency of the aid actors to 'standardise aid delivery', without considering the local context and demands:

> "…. They did not have a problem of where to live [temporarily]. Lots of them were local and they had a place to live with their relatives and other community people. They also were not concerned about food. They could manage it on their own. They were mostly demanding immediate permanent housing. They were saying 'nobody talks about long-term housing. Don't come distributing food.' The houses there are historically congested and it was hard to remove the debris. So for them they were saying, 'we don't want food, please help us remove the debris. Help us build the houses.' So the issues and demands were quite diverse."

Interviewees representing the mainstream humanitarian NGOs reflected how implementation of accountability-related standards and tools for quality and appropriate aid, for instance, proved unrealistic, and even conflictual. One salient example involved implementation of community-based needs assessment to distinguish 'fake' and 'genuine' victims, in order to provide immediate cash assistance. The process was described to have been a subject of intense negotiations, and even resistance, amidst the pressures to deliver quick impact act. Ravi, a staff at a major bi-lateral aid agency working on food assistance, mentioned that for desperate communities, needs assessment and eligibility determination meant nothing but an unnecessary impediment to their claims for immediate aid.

> "When I was in the field there was nothing. People were already starting to get angry. They did not want us to enter. 'What assessment are you going to do? There is no need for such assessment. Everything is gone here. We don't want you to find out how many people died and what we lost. Just bring us relief. Our immediate needs are food and shelter bring them to us.' They would say."

Accusations of historical neglect of disaster preparedness

Public opposition was also traced to government's negligence in elevating the agenda and practice of disaster preparedness. Nepal's vulnerability to both natural and human-induced calamities such as floods, landslides, glacier lake outbursts, wildfires etc., is well established (Aryal, 2014). Despite this knowledge, government's neglect of disaster preparedness was widely resented. Even a senior level government staff, Rahim, admitted government's continual neglect towards disaster planning and response. The National Disaster Act, which was formulated decades ago in 1983, although having undergone two amendments in the past, was seen as outdated, and inadequately prepared to reflect the contemporary 'humanitarian demands' of the country, consisting of recurring disasters, together with myriad of established and emerging national and international players. The GoN had "petty policies, like rule books" to manage large-scale disasters, and that the "the government never invested in it", Rahim claimed.

Public criticisms coalesced around a pattern of GoN's behaviour that treated disasters as naturally occurring, unexpected hazards that needed immediate fixing but abstained from longer-term responsibility. Irfaan, with long-standing experience in Nepal's disaster governance, while appreciating the immediate, moral logic that underpinned government action, was critical of government's tendency to evade its obligation to provide for the long-term recovery needs of affected communities.

> "Clearly, if we look at government's role in light of the past few disasters, and specifically last one year of disaster history, whether we call Nepali government or Nepali state, it is not that they don't do immediate response. Even in floods, there is an incident, so local administration gets activated. There are security systems that get mobilised to rescue people and also some relief is provided. They give some immediate compensation to the victims and families of the deceased and also to the injured. Then things start to falter. State apparently thinks its responsibility has been discharged. When it comes of thinking of recovery, reconstruction or subsequent follow ups, nothing happens."

The pattern of assuming responsibility in the short-term, and then abstaining from it, is described to have been deeply embedded in the public psyche, fuelling further questions about the future course of recovery from the 2015 earthquake.

A culture of short-term aid delivery, lack of reflection and learning-based approach to disaster recovery also marred mainstream I/NGOs. After offering a detailed account of Nepal's susceptibility to natural disasters, Pramod, a civil society actor reflected how the aid sector has managed to escape the responsibility of sharing information about their past achievements and failings:

> ".. In such kind of larger humanitarian crisis, what the government did, what NGOs did, what communities did we don't know anything. We basically have no institutional memory of what happened and how it was responded to. There is nothing

in public domain. That explains [why] we are so unaccountable towards what we do. That applies to both government and non-government actors."

Several respondents also echoed that the GoN's efforts during the emergency phase as excessively concerned about bringing coherence and discipline to the aid response, but devoid of offering a healing and humane touch to the public reeling from a major tragedy. Rajan, a civil society activist who was engaged in monitoring relief distribution gave a poignant reflection of how affected communities, who had assembled outside the district government office to question the reasons for ongoing delays in relief delivery were shunned by the district in-charge, the Chief District Officer (CDO), claiming it to interfere with government's relief efforts:

> "Naturally people would come when they didn't get the relief. But the CDO would say 'why are you here? You are not supposed to be here.'"

Instead of making efforts to listen to and engage with the grievances of affected communities, public officials were seen to have tried to maintain a 'safe distance' between citizens and government, which further triggered opposition and anxiety among local communities.

Criticisms against business as usual

Business as usual here means adherence to familiar and ritualistic approaches to disaster response, negating calls for alternative and flexible forms of responses triggered by the crisis. It also represents a pattern of behaviour on the part of both GoN and aid actors that lacked commitment towards open and transparent governance of emergency, despite the widespread calls for the same.

One example of business as usual was attributed to the GoN's efforts to bring the widely-dispersed humanitarian aid to a centrally-located government system, under the instrument of One Window Policy (Giri, 2015; Paudyal, 2015). According to Irfaan, this move was widely resented, because the GoN was considered neither competent, nor trustworthy, given its poor track record in effectively allocating, monitoring and implementing regular development budgets.

> "Government doesn't have proper system and mechanisms. More so, government is not even capable of spending the budget. That is the reality. In such situation, when the government says that the money has to be channelled through us, then people would obviously ask: what is going on?"

Further, the post-earthquake environment served as a space for the local activists and public to pose uncomfortable questions concerning the pattern of aid interventions, which paid little attention to transparency in the process of decision making and budgeting, deployment of experts and staff, among others. These questions, as Pramod who represented a local civil

society group stated, "were always there", indicating enduring public concerns over the governance of aid sector. At a public event organised to disseminate the lessons from the emergency response involving the INGO sector, Suraj, a senior INGO official, who helped coordinate the event recalled of being challenged by a civil society activist to clarify public concerns regarding the budget and overhead charges of INGOs:

> "..Like some activists who worked as citizen volunteers raised question about the large overhead that INGOs are criticised of spending. Like there was a question by one member from a local volunteer group [informal aid actors] that they spent about 1% of total budget as overhead but the INGOs are supposedly spending about 50% as overhead. So those kinds of questions were asked."

For others, even prior to the earthquake, aid workers faced local scrutiny. "[We] are seen as experts in cultivating dollars, not results", Khem who worked for a large bilateral aid agency reflected. However, communities' concern became much starker with a large influx of foreign aid workers under the banner of emergency response. Ravi, who worked for a large international relief agency, mentioned how he had to continually confront questions from the public regarding the necessity of foreign workers and their value over national counterparts:

> "People would complain that there were lots of foreigners there, too many consultants were brought in." (Ravi)

As the early responders scrambled to meet the needs of those affected by Nepal earthquake, they also described confronting public criticisms and critique. Some of the reasons behind such public scrutiny are linked to the unpredictability and unpreparedness that is characteristic of high-impact crisis, while others are rooted in Nepal's fraught history of governance reforms, involving grievances and doubts harboured by the aid-recipient communities, media and local civil society over the capacity and credibility of the GoN and aid community to govern the disaster.

Discussion and conclusion

Accountability as an agenda and practice has occupied a central position within the contemporary debates of humanitarian governance. Yet, humanitarian literature has paid scant attention to the nature of accountability demands experienced by early responders to the humanitarian crisis. Using the contested climate of the Nepal earthquake response, this paper has provided concrete evidence of the ways accountability demands were experienced by the early responders to the Nepal earthquake. The nature of such demands and their implications for the governance of emergency response are discussed below.

In the early aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, the humanitarian responders, representing both formal and informal sectors, were driven by a sense of personal responsibility, conforming with the normative values of doing what is possible to alleviate the

immediate suffering of the affected populations. However, as the earthquake response progressed, the early responders had to confront not just public scrutiny but also had to adhere to regulatory norms and guidelines of the organisation in question and also the national government. It is increasingly known that early responders to the disasters are required to respond to what Bryant (2007) calls 'multidirectional accountability', which are part of the broader, and often times competing governance expectations and aspirations of state actors and disaster-affected citizens. Of significance are three major issues that deserve scholarly and policy attention, because of the ways multiple and multidirectional accountability demands tend to implicate the governance of humanitarian disasters more generally.

First, the paper has sought to overcome the gap in the present scholarship on humanitarian accountability that has mostly focused on the accountability of international NGOs, to the neglect of the growing role of the national government as a regulator and monitor of humanitarian response (Stein, 2008). Despite facing an unprecedented crisis, the paper shows that the GoN's focus of governance of emergency response followed the logics of ensuring 'order' and 'regularity', through the deployment of accountability agenda, and related notions of harmonisation and coordination of humanitarian aid. Given the small number of interview sample from the government sector, the paper falls short of locating the precise governmental motives and their consequences. But it signals that such motives are both historically produced and disaster-related. A historically fraught relationship between the GoN and non-governmental actors, coupled with growing public concerns over haphazard aid distribution, may have triggered the government to closely monitor and regulate humanitarian responders. The notions of aid effectiveness, harmonisation and coordination that in the recent years have captured the attention of both the government and aid community (CHS Alliance, Group URD and the Sphere Project, 2014; Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance, 2014) served as a legitimate ground for the government to expand its regulatory focus. More importantly, the government's aspirations to govern the disaster, under the pretext of coordination and harmonisation, may have resulted from the perceived risk to the long-term legitimacy, image and survival of the government following a major disaster (Boin, McConnell and Hart, 2008). Such governance aspirations of the government have implications on the practice of humanitarianism, as the international aid actors' claims for 'right to assist' in crisis situation (Dufour et al., 2004), may come in conflict with, as the study shows, the government's assertion for "right to refuse" services to regulate the flow and involvement of aid actors. Future discussions of humanitarian governance and accountability need to pay closer attention to the governing aspirations of the government, and more specifically the standards of monitoring and accountability, which may interfere with or impede the independence, autonomy, and effectiveness of humanitarian responders.

Second, that humanitarian responders are faced with increased demands for performance and accountability is acknowledged (Makuwira, 2006; Bryant, 2007; Taylor, Tharapos and Sidaway, 2014). However, previous research on multidirectional accountability has mostly focused on the experiences and views of humanitarian actors representing mainstream NGOs. Too much attention on NGO-related accountability, on the one hand, risks losing sight of the varied, contextual, and often times incoherent accountability demands facing humanitarian responders. On the other hand, such critiques tend to discount the role and aspirations of a wider network of humanitarian responders whose growing involvement marks a changing, and complicated landscape of humanitarian response (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010; Sezgin and Dijkzeul, 2015). Of particular importance is to consider 'early responders' as ones whose aims and aspirations to attend to the human suffering move beyond the conventional understanding of material aid delivery. Rather, their involvement represents an evolving and fluid boundary of humanitarianism, with early responders assuming a mix of responsibility to attend to the sufferings of the distant victims, as well as speak on behalf of those deemed vulnerable (Chouliaraki, 2006). This is evident in the diversity of the study participants who ranged from youth activists organising conventional form of relief efforts, to human rights activists who organised an independent effort to monitor and flow of aid response. Still others were involved in a more unconventional effort in monitoring 'rights-violations' in aid response. The paper argues that the conditions under which early responders participate in humanitarian response and their experiences of accountability demands are not fixed. At the same time, their involvement may often be inconsistent with, and even contradict the values and mechanisms of accountability propagated by mainstream NGOs. Future research should attend to the involvement of a wider network of aid workers, and their accountability aspirations and experiences in humanitarian crisis.

Third, as a major facet of accountability pressures, public criticisms merit special attention. The paper argues that such criticisms are not to be dismissed as mere 'emotional outbursts' emanating from or on behalf of populations confronting sudden deprivation. Instead, such action has to be understood in terms of what Boltanski (1999) terms the 'politics of the present' (p.191), with the public involvement geared at not only mobilising concrete action to alleviate the pressing material demands of the disaster victims, but also bringing to the attention the discriminatory practices that might take root under the guise of emergency response. These insights supplement emerging evidence that shows how politics of denunciation is often at the core of post-disaster public action, aimed at challenging the mode of disaster response that are divorced from local voices and preferences (Curato, Ong and Longboan, 2016). Moreover, following the theory of public action (Dreze and Sen, 1989) and the recent advancements in the study and practice of social accountability (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012; Fox, 2015), the paper casts a positive spotlight on the role of public voice

in commanding the attention of concerned authorities. Beyond exposing the 'performance gap' in the delivery of humanitarian aid following the earthquake, the coalescing of public criticisms bore both retrospective and prospective characteristics. The themes of 'historical neglect of disaster preparedness, and 'business as usual', for instance, represent the ways in which the public interrogated the governing capacity and credibility of the state agencies, together with transparency in and results of aid interventions, among others. At the same time, the material disadvantage sparked by the earthquake, coupled with an unprecedented influx of aid resources and aid 'experts', prompted public concerns over the ways aid resources are mobilised and allocated for future recovery. Indeed, it can be argued that the coalescing of such criticisms, as both the introduction and findings from the study show, was mediated by the presence of democratic climate in Nepal (e.g. a democratically elected government, opposition party, media, civil society), bringing democracy to bear in making powerholders alert and promoting preventive action against misguided aid response.

Finally, it is beyond the scope of the paper to suggest specific policy and practical measures to help humanitarian responders overcome divergent and conflicting accountability demands. Suffice it to say, the practice of humanitarian governance is intrinsically linked to humanitarian responders' ability to engage in what (Thompson, 2014, p.175) calls 'politics of visibility'; to comply with the regulatory and performance standards of humanitarian response, but also find ways to appeal to, communicate with and justify ones' actions to wider publics. Paying sufficient policy attention to public-centric accountability would be critical to enhance early responders' accountability to communities in crisis, while also help build wider public acceptance of and confidence in humanitarian community in general.

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CHAPTER 5: EMPIRICAL PAPER 2

Doing accountability in humanitarian crisis: A case of civil society-driven social accountability in post-earthquake Nepal

Abstract

While accountability is a central concern within the contemporary discourse on humanitarian governance, the potential of localised effort in promoting accountable aid delivery has received far less attention than the standards and tools of accountability involving international NGOs. Moreover, developments in information technology, and widespread promotion of citizens' rights to information and improved public services, have recently revitalised small local organisations' ability to take an active role in pursuing the agenda of 'social accountability'. Drawing on Jonathan Fox's (2015) definition of social accountability as a combination of citizen action (voice) and state's response (teeth), this paper presents a case study of a civil society-led social accountability initiative in post-earthquake Nepal (the Mobile Citizen Help Desk, or MCHD). It draws on interviews with MCHD actors and participant observation of the main activities of the MCHD. The paper shows how MCHD sought to amplify local 'voice' regarding failures in aid delivery and expanded local spaces for dialogue between disaster-affected communities and powerholders. However, its effectiveness in translating local voice to response from powerholders ('teeth') was undermined by (i) its incorporation into a donor-driven humanitarian accountability initiative, in which reporting feedback to donors proved more pressing than gathering and amplifying citizen 'voice' and (ii) unclear lines of authority and accountability at the local level of service delivery, which impeded the civil society actors' aim to engage with "the right authority". In conclusion, I argue that civil society-driven social accountability initiatives are unlikely to succeed in holding powerholders to account in disaster contexts, in the absence of wider changes in national and international aid structures.

Introduction

On Saturday April 25, 2015, a major earthquake of magnitude 7.8 Mw brought upon Nepal an unprecedented level of humanitarian crisis, claiming over 8,790 lives, injuring over 22,300 and leaving over 2.8 million (about 10% of Nepal's population) homeless (Government of Nepal, 2015). The Nepal earthquake also received major national and global attention. Some initial estimates suggest that over 240 international relief agencies responded to the earthquake, including over 134 expert teams with the sole purpose of 'Search and Rescue' to save immediate lives (Government of Nepal, 2015, p.XII). Independent volunteers from all over the world, including those from the Nepali diaspora, contributed by providing funds, relief materials, professional expertise and physical labour.

The multi-faceted response to the Nepal earthquake also proved controversial and contested. Citizen groups, ranging from the earthquake-affected populations to local and national civil society groups, youth activists, media, mounted pressure upon the Government of Nepal (GoN) and aid actors to ensure accountability and transparency in emergency response (Civil Society Organizations and NGO Federation of Nepal, 2015; Ghimire, 2015; Thapa, 2015). The GoN and aid community, in turn, vowed to make their recovery efforts accountable and transparent (Giri, 2015; Government of Nepal, 2015; Paudyal, 2015).

That disasters often give rise to informal, citizen- or civil society-driven initiatives to challenge the top-down, state-driven mode of disaster recovery is increasingly recognised (Jalali, 2002; Schuller and Morales, 2012). Disasters have also been found to enable disaster-affected communities to expand the scope of inclusive and democratic disaster recovery (Hayward, 2014; Curato, 2018). The recent expansion in information communication technologies has facilitated a growth of 'digital humanitarians', meaning ordinary citizens who transcend local and global boundaries and are driven by the motive to mobilise resources, challenge and change the delivery of humanitarian aid (Meier, 2015; Twigg and Mosel, 2017).

The contested environment following the 2015 Nepal earthquake provides some supporting evidence for this emerging perspective on post-disaster citizen and civil society invigoration. Yet, Nepal's post-earthquake climate also evoked a distinct characteristic, especially in terms of its emphasis on accountability and transparency in disaster response. Beyond the immediate environment of criticisms and contestation, as indicated above, several local and international civil society organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) launched initiatives, with an explicit or implicit aim of making disaster response and recovery accountable to the affected populations (McMurren et al., 2017). One such initiative called Mobile Citizen Help Desk (MCHD), was organised by two Nepal-based civil society groups, combining a mix of strategies to promote what the organisers termed 'people-powered accountability' in Nepal's earthquake response and recovery.

This paper presents a case study of MCHD, to contribute to hitherto underexamined topic on the practice and potential of civil society-based social accountability in improving the governance of disaster. The notion of social accountability i.e. mechanisms through which citizens and civil society actors hold service providers accountable, has in recent years made major inroads in the field of development studies, but its theoretical and practical potential remain largely unexplored in disaster studies. Theoretical and practical underpinnings, together with recent critiques of social accountability will be first discussed, in the interest of framing the overall aim of this study. Through an ethnographically oriented case study of MCHD, the paper then explores the possibilities and limitations of such initiative in promoting social accountability in disaster context. The findings seek to contribute to the long-standing debates on rights of, and accountability towards disaster-affected communities, and the role of local civil society actors therein more specifically in deepening the prospect for an inclusive and accountable governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction.

Social Accountability: aims, actors and approaches

The conceptual and practical premise of social accountability may be traced to two recent developments. First, the discourse on rights-based development that gained prominence in the 1990s, which established the notion of development not merely as fulfilment of basic material needs, but as the protection and promotion of conditions that enable citizens to voice their concerns and criticise powerholders (Sen, 1999). Second, the growing concerns over the performance of representative democracies, and more specifically, the failings of vertical (e.g. elections) and horizontal mechanisms of accountability (e.g. state-mandated ombudsman, audit systems), which allowed social accountability to emerge as an alternative form of citizen-centric action to hold the powerful to account (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Joshi and Houtzager, 2012).

At its core, social accountability constitutes a mix of formal and informal mechanisms through which citizens or civil society actors can monitor the performance of service providers and hold them accountable for the delivery, quality and relevance of everyday public services (Gaventa and McGee, 2013; Papp, Gogoi and Campbell, 2013). The role of civil society actors in generation, dissemination and politicisation of information related to the performance of powerholders remain the central tenet of social accountability (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Jenkins and Goetz, 1999; Newell and Wheeler, 2006). Civil society actors' involvement, however, transcends the immediate realm of performance monitoring of powerholders. According to Goetz and Jenkins (2005), seeking accounts from powerholders is 'inseparable from the language of rights' and consists of efforts 'to obtain information, and to insist that officials engage in public reason-giving and thus, by definition, imposes obligations on holders of power' (p.182). Commanding powerholders' response to everyday public-sector

deficits such as inefficiency, corruption, absenteeism, delays and breakdowns constitute the core focus of social accountability.

Recent scholarship has also sought to examine the specific strategies of social accountability. Scholars have tried to distinguish social accountability as being either confrontational, aimed at exposing the wrongdoings, together with naming and shaming of policymakers (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2002), taking belligerent approach to tackle the disregard from frontline officials (Hossain, 2010), or more collaborative approaches, in which different stakeholders agree to find ways to leverage local information to tackle public sector underperformance (Caseley, 2006; Björkman and Svensson, 2009). The latter approach involves close monitoring of the state's performance but also active engagement of citizens, to improve local services marred by corruption and bad governance (Webb, 2012). It also involves evoking moral responsibility among local authorities to respond to local demands, particularly when the formal systems of accountability are non-existent or weak (Tsai, 2007), and encourage mutual recognition of the rights of citizens and responsibilities of the state (Bukenya, 2016).

Politics of social accountability

While the above body of evidence largely casts a positive spotlight on social accountability, recent studies have called attention to the local and international conditions that tend to undermine the potential of social accountability in bringing concrete societal changes (Gaventa and McGee, 2013; Joshi, 2014; Grandvoinnet, Aslam and Raha, 2015). The following three contextual factors merit special attention for the purpose of this study.

First, there is a growing realisation that bottom-up, voice-based approaches, and corresponding efforts at increasing information and transparency in government operations (e.g. open government, audit reports, legislative hearings, complaint offices) do not necessarily follow through to improved public service performance from powerholders. According to Fox (2007), voice-driven approaches, at best, produce accountability in the form of institutional answerability, but not sanctions in the event of underperformance or abuse of power. A case in point is India's Right to Information (RTI). Originally hailed as a major legislative victory in giving citizens more power to scrutinize public officials, its instrumental value in enhancing public sector performance has been questioned, largely owing to the chronic problem of government unresponsiveness and bureaucratic rigidity (Baviskar, 2010). The problem of low level of responsiveness of the government bureaucracy, on the one hand, is symptomatic of a poor incentive structure, together with limited resources and increased work demands confronting local officials (Madon and Krishna, 2017; Verma, Gupta and Birner, 2017). On the other hand, local officials' ability to respond to citizen voice is also influenced by the multiple accountability demands they are expected to work under. Bovens

aptly characterises this situation as 'the problem of many eyes', in which officials are under constant pressure to justify and prove their performance to not just citizen groups (e.g. civil society actors, pressure groups, activists), but to a range of actors and agencies within and outside the purview of the government bureaucracy (Bovens, 2007, p. 455). Nowhere is the 'problem of many eyes' more acute than in the post-disaster context, where the disaster responders are under intense pressures to work under multiple accountability demands and relationships (Bryant, 2007; Taylor, Tharapos and Sidaway, 2014). These debates demand the potential of social accountability in post-disaster context be understood within the broader bureaucratic context under which powerholders at the local level of service delivery are expected to respond to citizens' voice.

Second, with the civil society or local NGO actors often spearheading social accountability initiatives, the influence of international aid structures over the agenda and agency of local NGO actors also deserves attention. Of importance is to understand the agency of pro-accountability NGO actors within the global push for professional and managerialist mode of international development (Dar and Cooke, 2008). It has been long recognised that the unequal nature of aid partnership within the aid sector often forces aid-recipient southern NGOs to privilege upward accountability to northern donors, at the cost of both learning from interventions and downward accountability to communities they claim to serve (Ebrahim, 2005; Makuwira, 2006). Recent scholarship has noted that pressures to conform to a rigid reporting, monitoring and evaluation of aid interventions along specific indicators and measures have further reproduced power inequalities between northern and southern aid actors (O'Connor, Brisson-Boivin and Ilcan, 2014; Biradavolu *et al.*, 2015), eroding local actors ability to pursue 'locally-intelligent means of programme improvement' (Shukla, Teedon and Cornish, 2016, p. 14). Donor-induced pressures to monitor, measure and report aid programmes have made local NGOs privilege 'upward accountability' to the donors, making them further removed from their claims of serving as 'civil society' or as a countervailing force against an unresponsive state or powerful international actors.

Third, a related yet underexamined concern is the growing use of tools and technologies of accountability in the aid sector and their de-politicising effects in the disaster context. In response to long-standing concerns regarding accountability deficit, the aid sector has been at the forefront of launching newer measures and technologies of humanitarian accountability (The Sphere Project, 2011; CHS Alliance, Group URD and the Sphere Project, 2014; Sandvik *et al.*, 2014). Local NGOs are, in turn, expected to adapt to this expansive terrain of 'infrastructures of accountability', which gives primacy to collection and use of local information by the national government and the donors (Jensen and Winthereik, 2013, p.1). Feedback mechanisms, complaint and grievance handling systems, for instance, are measures deployed to realise the global vision of aid accountability and associated notions of

effectiveness and transparency in aid. Critics, however, liken these measures to 'thermostatic approach to accountability', geared at ensuring self-control in the delivery of international aid, while negating long-standing concerns surrounding power inequalities that characterise aid provider-recipient relationship (Ramalingam, 2013, p. 105). Although aid actors often use the language of rights and information to make humanitarian interventions more accountable and responsive to disaster-affected communities, they are often operationalised in a narrower sense of managing and sustaining aid projects (Krause, 2014). Scholars have found that the value of community voice under such technologies of aid accountability is pursued to bring reforms in aid interventions (Madianou *et al.*, 2016), in the process, masking the political nature of accountability demands that emanate in disaster context.

Study rationale and questions

While the above review of literature draws attention to both the possibility and limitation of social accountability in general, scant scholarly attention is paid to the role and practice of social accountability in post-disaster context. Moreover, existing literature that is concerned with the politics of social accountability are mostly focused on discussing the political implications of performance-based governance reforms and accountability movement initiated by and involving international humanitarian sector (Barnett, 2013; Madianou *et al.*, 2016), to the neglect of locally-driven, civil society-based governance and accountability initiatives in specific disaster context.

The above constitutes a major limitation in the current understanding of post-disaster governance and accountability, as disasters are widely known to trigger 'emergent' citizen-based efforts, geared at addressing the unmet needs of the disaster-affected, together with pushing for reforms in the governance of disasters (Forrest, 1978; Stallings and Quarantelli, 1985). Emerging scholarship has also noted active participation of civil society actors in advocating for the rights of disaster-affected populations (Jalali, 2002; Schuller and Morales, 2012; Twigg and Mosel, 2017), and expanding the scope of participatory governance of disaster (Hayward, 2014; Curato, 2018). Moreover, increased access to information and communication technologies has created new spaces for ordinary citizens to use 'online' and 'offline' strategies to advocate on behalf of disaster affected communities (Meier, 2015; Twigg and Mosel, 2017, p.453). Despite these evidence, the role of civil society actors in pursuing the agenda of improved governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction, together with the conditions that shape or constrain civil society's efforts in negotiating and promoting an accountable and inclusive governance of disasters remain scantly understood.

The 2015 Nepal earthquake, which sparked several local initiatives aimed at improving the emergency response, with some explicitly focused on promoting accountability and transparency in aid response (McMurren et al., 2017), serves as an opportune empirical

context to enhance our understanding of the role, practice and potential of civil society-driven social accountability in disaster context. Through an ethnographic case study of Mobile Citizen Help Desk (MCHD), a Nepal-based civil society effort to promote what the organisers termed 'people-powered accountability', the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions on the possibilities and limitations of social accountability in the context of disaster recovery.

In so doing, the study uses Jonathan Fox's definition of social accountability, involving two synergistic metaphors, voice and teeth (Fox, 2015). Voice here constitutes everyday grievances and demands of service recipients, expressed through collective action by service recipients themselves, or through local civil society or NGOs. Teeth represents governmental capacity to respond to citizens' voice. As Fox (2015) argues, 'voice needs teeth to have bite – but teeth may not bite without voice' (p.357). This study's analytical pursuit rests on this definition of social accountability for two main reasons. First, the voice and teeth metaphors seek to advance a clear normative standard for social accountability, against which the practice of civil society-based social accountability activism could be examined. While the present study is not designed as an evaluation study, this definition informed the research questions, and in turn, helped develop focused interpretation of the possibilities and limitations of the MCHD as a form of social accountability initiative. Second, underlying the 'teeth' metaphor is the concern for lack of responsiveness that often plague public sector, as discussed above. Broader bureaucratic and humanitarian politics that shape or constrain the responsiveness of frontline officials informs this definition, and the case study of MCHD that follows.

The study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do civil society actors (within MCHD) understand their role and practice of social accountability in post-earthquake Nepal, in a) giving 'voice' to the communities and; b) securing response or 'teeth' from local powerholders?

2. What forms of politics shape or undermine the practice and outcome of civil society-based social accountability in disaster response and recovery?

The case: Mobile Citizen Helpdesk

The case under investigation is that of Mobile Citizen Help Desk (MCHD), a post-disaster accountability campaign, spearheaded by two Nepal-based NGOs, Accountability Lab (AL) and Local Interventions Group (LIG). Both AL and LIG are run by young social entrepreneurs, with a history of organising transparency and accountability activism in Nepal's development sector. The MCHD campaign was set up in the immediate aftermath of the Nepal earthquake, to promote what the organisers termed 'people-powered accountability'. Within a few weeks of largely independent operation, the MCHD campaign managed to secure major funding from

a multilateral aid agency, in charge of coordinating and overseeing international relief and recovery efforts. Funding was provided to the campaign as part of the Common Feedback Project (CFP) that was set up in the wake of the Nepal earthquake. The CFP had its origin in the Communicating with Communities Working Group, a globally-mandated tool by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). One of the project's aims was to promote two-way communication between disaster-affected communities and humanitarian agencies, using contextually relevant tools of monitoring and community engagement (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Nepal United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator Office, 2015, p. 2).

One of the major elements of the CFP was 'micro-perception surveys', a form of community feedback surveys that were carried out on a bi-monthly basis to monitor the progress of humanitarian service delivery across 14 highly-affected districts. The community feedback was intended to disseminate 'operational and actionable findings to all those [state and non-state humanitarian agencies] involved in the response' (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Nepal United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator Office, 2015, p.6). The partnership with MCHD was particularly sought to leverage existing local network and experiences of AL and LIG in the disaster-affected districts.

MCHD and its core activities

Over the course of one year, four major activities were performed under the banner of MCHD. They were: a) *regular community feedback surveys*, which involved surveying 100 households per district (aggregate sample of 1,400) on key earthquake related experiences and expectations, funded through CFP; b*) rumour tracking*, conducted in conjunction with another international NGO, in which community based volunteers tracked local rumours and misinformation facing affected populations and provided validated information to debunk these rumours through weekly bulletins and radio broadcasts; c) *follow the money*, which aimed at tracking, identifying and publicising discrepancies in the flow of financial aid for recovery and reconstruction; d) *community meetings*, at the local level, where service providers, service recipients and relevant stakeholders are invited to discuss the local problems and issues. Over time, the campaign was rolled out across 14 earthquake affected districts in Nepal, mobilising over 80 community-based monitors or Community Frontline Associates (CFAs).

Methodology

Following Simons' (2009, p.21) definition of a case study 'as an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context', the current study was designed as an

ethnographic case study of MCHD, an accountability-related campaign, in Nepal's earthquake response and recovery.

The MCHD was selected as a case for investigation mainly because of three reasons. First, it was set up by local civil society groups with an explicit goal of ensuring "people-powered accountability" in the aftermath of Nepal earthquake. It thus fit the conceptual realm of social accountability, as a citizen or civil society-based mechanism deployed to hold powerholders accountable to the delivery and quality of aid services. In other words, the enactment of 'people-powered accountability' offered a lens through which the role and practice of social accountability in post-disaster context could be examined. Second, the MCHD's accountability activism involved a mix of technology-driven strategies (SMS, mobile phones, and crowdsourcing techniques), together with conventional mobilisation of local activists (community monitors). This allowed a deeper analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing a civil society-led, social accountability initiative with a mix of strategic approaches. Third, as discussed above, the campaign that was initiated as a relatively small initiative by a group of pro-accountability actors, was subsequently brought to scale through funding from an internationally mandated feedback project, the CFP. This aid partnership served as a critical window to examine the areas of consistencies and contradictions inherent in the global and local aspirations for accountability in the disaster context.

The case study followed 'focused ethnographic' approach of data collection (Knoblauch, 2005). Like traditional long-term, open-ended ethnography, focused ethnography relies on closer engagement with communities through participant observation and interviews. However, it typically employs short-term, yet intensive fieldwork, to focus on set of practices or themes in a specific social context (Knoblauch, 2005; Pink and Morgan, 2013). Amongst a range of activities performed under the MCHD, the use of focused ethnography here involves investigation of two main activities: the surveys and community meetings.

Fieldwork

The field work was conducted for a period of 17 weeks from January to May 2016. It involved 16 in-depth interviews, comprising 13 NGO actors/staff, affiliates, donor representatives directly involved with the MCHD, and 3 government officials working in the field of right to information, anti-corruption and public-sector accountability, with knowledge of the MCHD. Interviews were semi-structured in nature, aided by an interview guide that was adapted for different categories of interviewees. Interviews with the campaign organisers mostly focused on capturing interviewees' experience in implementing the campaign, together with the sense of accomplishments and limitations serving in the capacity of pro-accountability actors. The interviews with the government officials were particularly focused on getting insights into the general context of accountability and governance reforms and challenges facing Nepal, before

and after the earthquake. All interviewees were specifically asked an open-ended question about their overall understanding of the meaning and context of accountability in the disaster recovery context.

The study also draws on approximately 120 hours of participant observation of the everyday office activities of the campaign organisers in the Kathmandu office, including attendance at various formal and informal meetings of the campaign organisers. Participation observation also covered 5 different events: i) 1 two-day workshop for community monitors from 14 campaign districts; ii) 1 community meeting between frontline officials and disaster affected populations facilitated by the MCHD actors; iii) 1 informal get-together among members of the MCHD and its affiliates and iv) 2 knowledge and experience sharing meetings involving the MCHD representatives and other local youth activists, NGOs. The Kathmandu Office of the MCHD was a major hub, from where most of the field activities were organised and coordinated, offering deeper insights into the ways the campaign took effect. Participant observations in this office while providing insights into the everyday working of the campaign, also allowed interactions with the staff and collaborators of the campaign in a more casual setting, and then juxtapose what the interviewees say to how they perform their role as social accountability actors. The observation of learning and sharing events provided important insights into the aspirations, struggles and dilemmas facing the MCHD campaign organisers and pro-accountability activists in Nepal more broadly.

In addition, 2 group interviews with community monitors and district coordinators in two earthquake affected districts where the campaign was implemented, were conducted. To supplement the in-depth interviews and participant observation, the group discussions focused on unpacking the experiences of community monitors and district coordinators, their dilemmas and challenges of working with the local authorities, and their relationship with the campaign organisers based in Kathmandu. The group interview data was analysed in conjunction with the interview and participant observation data, as discussed below. The analysis was complemented by review of key documents that were generated as part of the campaign. These include progress reports to the donors, website materials, terms of reference and guidelines for local staff, various iterations of community feedback and rumour tracking reports. The reports served as references to trace and confirm the technical underpinnings and evolution of the campaign.

Except for two interviews that were conducted in English, all other interviews were conducted in Nepali and audio-recorded. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the author. Throughout the process, accuracy and authenticity of the data were given due consideration. Field notes from specific interactions, meetings or office visits, including observations and casual interviews, were written in detail soon after they were observed. The accuracy of the observations was also ensured by conducting follow up conversations with the MCHD

organisers. Some field notes, mostly from specific events, such as trainings and workshops attended, were audiotaped and transcribed.

The ethical approval for the study was granted by the LSE Research Ethics Committee. Interviews lasted up to 90 minutes and were conducted upon securing an informed consent. The two focus groups were conducted after providing the participants with details of the research project and after securing verbal consent from all the participants. Participant observation of both everyday office activities and specialised meetings were conducted with the prior consent of the main conveners of the campaign. Informed consent to identify the names of the two NGOs involved in organising MCHD was secure prospectively through email. However, identities of individual interviewees are anonymised in the findings as per the original ethical approval.

Data organisation and analysis

For Simons (2009), the organising and analysis of ethnographic data is to 'begin at the beginning' (p.119). In line with this idea, majority of field notes from participant observations were written while in the field. The intuitive memos, or initial interpretations, while carefully distinguished from the main observations or data, were noted as what seemed interesting, what struck as significant, odd or puzzling and how different pieces of information relate to each other (Simons, 2009).

To ensure necessary rigour and validity to data analysis, the analysis then closely followed the ethnographic analytical techniques proposed by Gobo (2008) and LeCompte and Schensul (2013). Gobo (2008) offers three important steps of analysing a mix of ethnographic data. It involves coding based on the concepts of deconstruction (open coding), construction (axial coding) and confirmation (selective coding). It is then expected to develop a 'spiral reflexive process' of analysis, leading to progressively narrower focus of data analysis and final interpretation (Gobo, 2008, p. 227).

The analysis involved detailed and repeated reading of three sets of data. This led to development of 52 descriptive codes, aided by the NVivo 11 software. The open coding resulted in descriptive accounts of the history/timeline of the campaign (start of the campaign, critical turning points), actors involved in the campaign (staff, affiliates, donors), activities (set of major strategies, tools and technologies deployed), aspirations (motivations, beliefs of the actors), areas of success and challenges, leadership, decision-making process, staff relations, donor relations, among others. The second stage involved construction or axial coding in which the in-progress 'codes' development was merged and reassembled with the aim of constructing a narrower set of codes.

The codes were then condensed in relation to two research questions of the study: a) to understand the role and practice of MCHD actors, using 'voice' and 'teeth' framework of

social accountability and (ii) to identify major contextual factors shaping or undermining the practice of social accountability. The axial coding resulted in three major analytical categories: ideas and principles, tools and strategies, areas of successes and challenges. This step also involved writing up of notes and memos to help support the final stage of analysis. The final stage entailed confirmation, or selective coding. Here, attention was shifted to data extracts compiled in the first stage of open coding across all three datasets. Specific statements/quotes, or descriptions were attended to and pulled together in a form of writing, in order to develop and substantiate the findings. As noted before, this process of analysis and writing was not a linear but a cyclical process. Throughout the process, emerging findings were linked with and compared across different data sources (LeCompte and Schensul, 2013).

Findings

In line with the two research questions, the findings are divided into two main parts. The first describes the role and practice of social accountability in terms of its potential of building local voice and securing state's response (teeth), while the second explores two main political impediments to the practice of MCHD. Each of the two major findings are divided into appropriate sub-headings. Findings are substantiated by individual and group interview quotes, identified as INT and GINT respectively, and the observation notes as OB.

Putting social accountability into practice
Bridging supply-demand gap through local monitoring

Interviewees reported that the MCHD was originally set up with a vision of "people-powered accountability", to serve as a "virtual space" of aid monitoring, leveraging both information technologies and a network of community monitors, called Community Frontline Associates (CFAs). Over time, the campaign mobilised over 80 community monitors across 14 disaster affected districts, who engaged with the local communities on an everyday basis, identified local needs and grievances, and sought to bridge the gap between supply and demand of aid services. The role of community monitors was to build an environment of community vigilance against potential exclusion, misuse and corruption of humanitarian resources. One interviewee who helped set up the MCHD described the origin of the campaign as follows:

> "..what we were seeing at that time was that people had many needs. People did not have food to eat, place to live… And there were many organisations trying to help them. But we were thinking that the impact of these [aid interventions] can be long term. There will be corruption, and people might be further victimised. So that is how the 'quake help desk' [MCHD] idea came about. So it was mostly about how to make people equipped with information." (INT_IS)

As a main element of the campaign, investigative journalists were engaged in the campaign owing to their "influence and power" at the community level, one of the senior managers of the campaign noted. Their ability to "extract and publicise information", because of their close contact with the local authorities was seen pivotal to bring transparency in local aid distribution. Since the majority of the community monitors came from the earthquake-affected communities, who in many instances were themselves the survivors of the earthquake, they were also described as uniquely suited in capturing and publicising grievances of local communities.

Information as aid entitlement

For the MCHD founders, the unprecedented influx of humanitarian aid in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake was not sufficiently accompanied by information about the incoming aid: what the aid items entail, who the aid is primarily targeted to, from whom it was provided, and how it could be accessed. This was framed as a major accountability deficit. One recurring example raised was that concerning access to "victim cards" issued by the government. Although ownership of the victim card was a prerequisite for securing short and long-term aid from the government and aid agencies, many affected households, particularly elderly and women-headed households were described as either unaware of or complacent about the future benefits that its ownership guaranteed. As one of the original members of the MCHD stressed, making local communities aware of the value of such documentation was intrinsic to the process of giving local communities necessary voice and power over future entitlements:

> "It is difficult to make people realise that information is more useful than rice. Information gives you power, and that gives you empowerment to go to the government and say give me this and I have the right to this. Another thing we do a lot is how people get the victim card. People don't realise how important it is to get the victim card. Rice will finish. But empowerment and information is something that will stay with you…" (INT_AO)

The approach of promoting information as aid entitlement evolved, as the overall disaster response itself shifted from immediate rescue and relief effort to future recovery. One of the main organisers of the MCHD described this shift as performing the role between "eyes" and "ears" on behalf of the communities. While "eyes" here was suggestive of being vigilant about the sources of and discrepancies in aid delivery, "ears" meant being sensitive to the demands, grievances and criticisms prevalent in local communities. In practice, this involved a regular interaction with local communities, documenting their grievances, identifying and dispelling local rumours that have taken root, given little to no official information from the government. Dispelling local rumours involved community monitors securing official information from concerned authorities and circulating such information back to the communities on a regular basis.

Bringing voice to the attention of "right authority"

For the MCHD actors, the massive response to the Nepal earthquake also brought with it the risk of aid resources being misappropriated and misused. The role of MCHD was articulated as promoting local vigilance against possible aid diversion and misappropriation, while also providing communities with a channel to raise their concerns "to the right authority":

> "I think whatever problems that we are seeing in Nepal, the main cause is the lack of accountability. There is corruption, mismanagement, misuse of public funds, I think all these are linked to accountability. I don't think people question the right authority. People are always raising questions, but they are not raising questions to the right authority. So we have started to work on this.." (INT_UH)

For the above interviewee, the public concerns regarding corruption and misappropriation of public resources were historically prevalent. Yet, the influx of aid resources following the earthquake injected a renewed sense of urgency and opportunity to address such concerns. One mechanism through which the MCHD sought to address this concern was through local meetings, designed to provide local communities with the opportunity to voice their concerns, while local officials, in turn, could provide justifications of their actions. In articulating the relevance of such meetings, one interviewee noted that in many instances, communities' grievances were limited to "tea-stall conversation", which typically escaped the attention of local authorities. Community meetings were described as an effort at amplifying the "tea-stall conversation" into a public conversation. Proceedings of such meetings were captured and circulated through local media and community radio stations affiliated with the campaign. Not only were such meetings described as important in amplifying local voice for improved humanitarian services, but they were also considered instrumental to tackle growing cynicism and complacency facing affected populations:

> "The civil space that we created in the form of community meetings are like, the more you interact with the government, the more you know about the services you are entitled to. If that is not done, citizens will say, it is going on and will continue like that, nobody will bother to demand more." (INT_UI)

Several interviewees, however, acknowledged that organising local spaces did not guarantee immediate redressal of local concerns. A close observation of the organisation and proceedings of one such community meeting by the researcher helped uncover this challenge (OBS_2). At the meeting, many participants questioned the contents and implementation of the New Building Regulation introduced by the government, with one participant claiming that the Regulation would "render the entire community homeless", because local households lacked enough landholding to comply with the new regulatory standards. Another participant mentioned that despite the massive disaster, the local government has been least forthcoming about providing information to communities. "When we go to the Ward Office with questions

about the reconstruction, they say come tomorrow, come tomorrow. Or they ask us to go to Municipality office…", drawing attention to a pattern of behaviour of local authorities to disregard the grievances of local communities.

The nature and intensity of voice within such platforms also varied. While some community members made forceful pleas for protest and demonstration against continual neglect from authorities, others chose to employ a more compromising approach, calling for patience from other community members to avoid continuing neglect and potential backlash from the local officials. This was a typical scene of community meeting, according to community monitors, who organised over 100 of such meetings across 14 earthquake-affected districts. Organisers of such meetings admitted that finding immediate solutions to local concerns through such spaces was far from straightforward. Yet, for the community monitors, such meetings had merit in their own, providing local communities the opportunity to exercise their intrinsic right to demand information and voice concerns, regarding the ongoing delays facing disaster recovery.

Promoting local engagement amidst growing mistrust

As described in the introductory section, the post-earthquake Nepal proved to be a contested environment, bringing to the centre of the public debates the questions concerning the governance of disaster response and reconstruction. The concerns over transparency, corruption and misappropriation of aid became even starker at the local level. Faced with slow and uneven aid response, coupled with historical mistrust in local authorities, local communities often accused local officials of neglect, underperformance and misuse of relief funds. The MCHD actors sought to cast their role in a separate light. Instead of resorting to blaming, alleging and scapegoating individual public officials, the MCHD actors articulated their role within disaster context as promoters of an environment of dialogue and understanding. During one of the group discussions, a community monitor claimed how the exchange of "real information" and explanation helped ease local environment characterised by "rumours" regarding corruption and discrimination in aid allocation:

> "..So what happened is that in the first phase there were 80, 316 households that were identified as [disaster] affected. But later it came out that the number was fake. So the government refused to release the promised funds. Even the Deputy Prime Minister said that enough money has been released and no more will be released. For example, in Rayale [one of the severely affected communities], no more money came. That led to rumours that VDC [Village Development Secretary] secretary embezzled funds. Before we did the community meeting, the VDC secretary even had a difficulty walking around the village. After the meeting, everyone was happy. People got the real information and the VDC secretary had a chance to explain." (GINT_2)

Through creation of "civic spaces", the MCHD sought to both overcome the local environment of rumours and allegations, while also uphold the affected communities' right to know about aid distribution.

Politics of translation of community voice into response

The findings thus far describe how the MCHD understood and pursued social accountability in giving voice to the communities in crisis. However, the study also highlights the political tension that have a bearing in the implementation of civil society-driven, localised social accountability in disaster context, particularly when viewed through the lens of translating community 'voice' into 'teeth' from local powerholders.

De-politicisation of voice and rights through humanitarian technologies

The MCHD campaign, as previously mentioned, was originally set up with a mission of "people-powered accountability", with a focus on generating and publicising information concerning incoming aid. However, the process of making information public took a different turn as the campaign became increasingly embedded with the monitoring logic of CFP.

The CFP, as discussed in the introductory section, was an internationally-mandated humanitarian feedback project that the MCHD became part of after a few weeks of independent operation following the Nepal earthquake. Funded by major international donors, and coordinated by a multilateral agency, the CFP and the MCHD shared common objectives of enhancing community engagement and accountability post-disaster through introduction of contextually-relevant tools and partnership with local actors. The CFP was set up and promoted as a third-party monitoring platform, to draw lessons from the ongoing aid interventions and find actional evidence to enhance the humanitarian response, primarily for the humanitarian actors but also for the government. As part of the project partnership with the MCHD, a major task for the MCHD actors was to conduct bi-monthly community feedback surveys across 14 disaster affected districts. The processing and dissemination of feedback to major international aid agencies and government units, in turn, was done by the donor itself. In addition, the community monitors at the local level were also required to prepare qualitative reports, which captured community-level grievances and "success stories" involving local recovery efforts.

While the idea of community engagement and monitoring was originally valued by the MCHD actors, they expressed scepticism over how the routine collection and upward reporting of data (regular feedback surveys, stories and narratives) and "success stories" would result in improved service provisions at the local level. A Kathmandu-based staff of the MCHD who was involved in documenting and processing the feedback and reports questioned their purpose:

"[the donor] used to say we need these many reports, these many success stories, but I don't think the reports are being used. I don't even know why they want daily reports? Even for them the daily reports are same. How do they analyse up to 70 reports a day? And most of them are in Nepali language. I used to go home and try to work on those reports even at home. But later I stopped doing it. I used to ask my colleagues how they used the reports, for what purpose? And nobody knew." (INT_AH)

The routinisation of community feedback also led to the MCHD actors questioning their own sense of agency within the aid partnership. When asked to describe what he thinks of the role of the MCHD actors within the aid partnership, one of the campaign's co-conveners offered the following reflection:

"If I have to say in frank words, we are contractors, like if you are building a house, you have to get bricks, you have to bring various construction materials, you don't go around buying them on your own, you get hold of a contractor, and the contractor will bring someone to work as a builder, a carpenter, we are the contractor." (INT_AD)

The term "contractors" here is meant to evoke a largely technical role of data collection and reporting being performed by the MCHD actors. As other interviewees also concurred, the MCHD became a project of mechanical exchange of data and reports, and occasional negotiation of operational changes, budgeting decisions etc.

An interesting tension ensued when as part of the CFP the community monitors were required to collect the feedback using smart phone technologies. A two-day workshop was organised in Kathmandu, to orient the community monitors to the techniques and practicalities of collecting real-time community feedback through smart phones. The stated goal of the mobile-based surveys was to bring efficiency and accuracy in the collection and dissemination of community feedback. Amidst much enthusiasm, a quick piloting of the mobile-based surveys was done in Kathmandu, as part of the orientation workshop, and soon afterwards, the mobile-based feedback surveys were rolled out across 14 districts.

For small NGOs like AL and LIG, the introduction of the mobile-based feedback collection brought new and somewhat unanticipated challenges. Collecting feedback through this new technology demanded reconfiguration of the existing roles and responsibilities of the community monitors recruited under MCHD, but also increased management demands upon the Kathmandu-based staff. A "Project Manager" with "monitoring and evaluation" skills was soon hired to closely monitor the unfolding of the mobile-based survey. Reshuffling of local staff was also felt inevitable when the community monitors, most of whom were local journalists and youth activists, originally valued for their "influence and power" at the local level proved increasingly unsuitable to meet the new demands of technology-induced, time-bound feedback project.

The introduction of mobile-based surveys was met with severe dissatisfaction by the community monitors. While acknowledging enhanced efficiency in collecting and reporting

feedback, which was previously done in paper formats, community monitors expressed having to deal with undue pressure to come up with timely and error-free feedback. Questions were raised over specific aspects of technology-induced feedback collection that they saw having little relevance to building voice at the local level. As one example, the mobile-based surveys had to mandatorily record the exact field location of surveys, to ensure quick and accurate reporting and processing of local feedback. For community monitors, however, this was not just an attempt to bring increased discipline in survey administration, but it also represented a dwindling level of trust between the central and the local staff. A participant in one of the focus groups raised his concern over the significance of the mobile-based feedback, beyond its use as "a very good experiment":

> "As I said, if we want to see this [mobile-based feedback] in a positive light, this is a very good experiment. But if you look at it more negatively, this is the case of not trusting. Whether one is in the field or not, whether they are working from home or actually in the field. That I think is their focus." (GINT_2)

As the campaign became narrowly focused on collecting feedback, community monitors expressed a growing sense of detachment from local communities, who they thought were becoming increasingly sceptical of the value of recurring feedback surveys. A community monitor in one of the group discussions reflected by saying that communities probably consider them (community monitors) as government "spies", recurrently visiting communities to take stock of "household wealth" in order to determine the future and nature of aid for each household. Questions were also raised over the continuing insistence from the donor to capture local grievances along pre-defined questions, to the neglect of other ways of listening to community grievances and rumours that were part of the original practice of 'people-powered accountability'. For community monitors, who mostly came from journalistic and activist backgrounds, it was particularly seen to have stifled the possibilities of pursuing and publicising local stories that reflect the legitimate demands and concerns of the community. In one of the group discussions, one of the community monitors expressed this concern:

> ".. So when we go to the VDC, we not only look at it from the perspective of the survey. We are in a lookout for news. That is also our profession. People express many grievances. Many people express their concerns about not receiving social protection services. We cannot just take surveys and leave. We have to listen to them." (GINT_1)

The fact that surveys questions were structured and closed, prevented the community monitors to capture varied forms of local grievances. Several interviewees also raised concerns over how the feedback project took precedence over other activities, particularly the community meetings. These meetings, despite unpredictable proceedings and outcomes, as

discussed before, were seen by the community monitors as an important vehicle to promote dialogue and alleviate mistrust at the level of service delivery. However, the meetings could not be sustained, owing to lack of continual funding from the donors. What the MCHD actors and particularly the community monitors thought was an important approach to build voice of the local communities was terminated in favour of standardised feedback surveys, the relevance of which was seen as far-removed from the original idea of "people-powered accountability".

Engaging with the "right authority": who is accountable to whom?

As previously noted, a central goal of the MCHD was to build an environment of local vigilance. Part of the effort was to ensure local grievances are responded to by "the right authority." However, the actual practice of bringing local voice to the attention of "right authority" proved daunting, as the role and responsibility of local and central level agencies became ambiguous. As one interviewee put it:

> "The main challenges after the crisis has been that the line agency for VDCs are the Ministry of Local Development and Federal Affairs. How about the line agency that is responsible for earthquake recovery? There is so much confusion, whether it is Home [ministry], whether it is CDO [Chief District Officer], whether it is LDO [Local Development Officer], or NRA [National Reconstruction Authority]. Under whose jurisdiction is disaster recovery? So, OK, we collect grievances, who is supposed to address them? Only if these grievances are redressed in timely manner then people will start having faith." (INT_RU)

The fact that the disaster response demanded sharing of the public service delivery responsibility with a range of domestic and international humanitarian agencies further compounded the situation. At one of the focus group discussions, a participant expressed that the uncertainty in the aid delivery role between NGO and state actors, and by extension their authority and obligation to respond, also added to their dilemma as accountability actors:

> "..people even say that if the concerned authority doesn't listen to our demands, we will be forced to protest. But the confusion is who is that concerned authority? In the post-earthquake situation, there are two major concerned authorities. First there is the government and second other relief agencies…." GINT_1

Despite the MCHD's awareness of growing community grievances over sluggish recovery efforts, a lack of clarity over which of the governmental and non-governmental agencies were responsible made it difficult for the MCHD to build on community 'voice' to demand action.

Another recurring issue raised concerned the absence of elected representatives at the local level. The earthquake struck at the time when Nepal's local bodies lacked elected representatives, a democratic void at the local level that has persisted for almost two decades.

This posed a major crisis of representation at the local level. In the absence of elected representatives, the MCHD monitors had to engage with local bureaucrats. Local bureaucrats, however, were described to have neither enough incentive nor authority to redress community concerns. They were primarily concerned with coordination of local activities of various governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Getting response from local officials proved further elusive as the disaster recovery efforts became further centralised under the command of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), a newly constituted national body to oversee policy and programmatic aspects related to disaster recovery. Although localised efforts such as community meetings were seen vital to alleviate local level mistrust and misunderstanding, their ability to generate concrete response to the satisfaction of local communities were questioned:

> "So when we do the community level meetings, we mostly have VDC secretary as the lowest level government official. But they cannot answer the questions. They say this is all we know, this is all our authority. They say 'whatever [aid] we have received that was meant to be distributed to the citizens. We have done that as per the rules and regulations of the government.' They also don't give any assurance." (GINT_1)

The interviewees described that the post-earthquake environment was characterised by ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of various implementing agencies. This, together with lack of elected officials, and limited incentive and authority facing local government bureaucrats, posed a challenge for the MCHD actors to pursue social accountability at the local level.

Discussion and conclusion

This case study set out to examine two questions: a) the role and practice of the MCHD, a civil society-driven social accountability, which emerged in the contentious environment of post-earthquake Nepal, and b) the politics that underpin the implementation of the MCHD. In what follows, I discuss some of the main lessons from this case study that have implications for the contemporary thinking and practice of civil society-based, social accountability in post-disaster context, but also the politics of disaster governance more generally.

That disasters often invigorate varied forms of citizen-based initiatives to mobilise aid resources, expedite disaster recovery and mount pressure upon disaster responders is increasingly acknowledged (Stallings and Quarantelli, 1985; Meier, 2015; Twigg and Mosel, 2017). Yet, little is known about the practice and potential of such initiatives in improving participation in and accountability of aid response, a topic of primary concern within contemporary debates of disaster governance. The study has sought to contribute to this debate, drawing on an innovative role assumed by local NGOs to scrutinize the performance

of disaster responders and promote information as a 'lever' (Calland and Bentley, 2013), based on which disaster affected populations could claim improved aid services.

Although the notion of rights has garnered traction among international humanitarian community, it has, in large part, been narrowly pursued to realise the goals of aid management (Krause, 2014), as opposed to overcome the pre-existing power hierarchies between local communities and humanitarian responders. Through mobilisation of local monitors, the MCHD sought to overcome such power inequalities, giving concrete meanings to voice and rights, with community monitors serving as 'infomediaries'(Hanna, 2010, p. 103), affording disaster-affected communities with the 'right to know' about local aid services, and also bringing local grievances to the attention of local powerholders.

At the same time, the findings from this case study also challenge the notion of voice and rights that tends to idealise the ability of disaster-affected communities to influence the course of disaster response and recovery. The mental and material strain triggered by large-scale disasters arguably compel disaster-affected communities to concentrate more on recovering basic conditions of recovery, instead of participating in, and exercising their right to demand improved services. In more unequal and resource-constrained societies, both disaster-related and historically-produced factors, ranging from local level cynicism, patronising tendency of aid responders, potentiality of backlash from powerholders, may further constrain local communities to make such demands from powerholders. While limited, previous research on social accountability in Nepal has shown that communities prefer not to voice against local service providers, given the prior experience of neglect, and by extension, low service delivery expectations from local authorities (Gurung *et al.*, 2017). To follow Drèze and Sen (2002), under conditions of sudden deprivation such as that resulting from a major disaster, local communities find themselves politically constrained from self-asserting their rights as citizens, making solidarity with local activists a viable political alternative to realise their claims for improved public services. The MCHD's role and practice of social accountability is reflective of such solidarity movement, wherein the local monitors performed 'accountability by proxy' (Twigg, 1999, p. 55), gathering and elevating voice of those who run the risk of being further excluded in the face of a major disaster.

The 'proxy accountability' role assumed by the MCHD actors, however, is not only limited to elevating the voice of local communities. It may be understood to address what we can term 'mutual voicelessness' facing local settings. Mutual voicelessness here is suggestive of a limited space for interaction between local authorities and citizens. As the case study shows, local communities had little to no formal means to demand answers from powerholders. Local powerholders, in turn, faced the brunt of increased pressures to perform, coupled with growing allegations and blames, without themselves having proper outlet to give accounts of their performance (or lack thereof). Through face-to-face meetings or what one

interviewee termed "civil space", together with everyday outreach efforts, the MCHD sought to afford local communities with the platform to express their everyday problems and bring their discontent to the attention of local powerholders. Local powerholders, in turn, had the opportunity to render accounts of their performance and dispel allegations. The case of MCHD encourages us to look at the practice of accountability in disaster context beyond the realm of aid actors and aid recipients, to highlight the importance of local intermediary actors or 'proxy accountability actors', in concretising the notions of rights, voice and deliberation in disaster context.

This is not to suggest the practice of 'proxy accountability' invariably results in redressal of local demands, as the case study shows. Nor the organising of "civil spaces" always results in alleviation of local tensions. Yet, the effort of MCHD merits attention on its own, because of the way it stood in contrast to the antagonistic version of accountability, namely protests and demonstrations, naming and shaming and exposing of wrongdoings (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2002). Whether or to what extent such antagonistic forms of accountability activism would have been more desirable or effective in bringing concrete reforms in aid delivery is a question that merits further investigation. But if disaster is to be viewed as what Barton calls 'collective stress situation' that afflicts the society-at-large, including both local service providers and citizens (Barton, 1969, p. 38), the normative and practical value of accountability initiative that privileges spaces for dialogue, over confrontation and protest seems plausible. The MCHD's approach, therefore, is suggestive of what Freedman calls 'constructive accountability' (Freedman, 2003, p. 111), focused on building an environment that transcends from scapegoating and blaming individual service providers, to a more dynamic local engagement, foregrounded in the notion of rights of citizens to exercise voice and obligation of powerholders to respond to such voice.

Notwithstanding the above potential of civil society-based social accountability in disaster context, the paper draws attention to two forms of political factors that tend to undermine the outcome of such accountability, particularly when examined through the analytical lens of voice and teeth (Fox, 2015).

First, the study shows the tendency of globally-promoted rationalities and technologies of humanitarian accountability undermining locally-embedded accountability activism. Through project partnership with globally-mandated CFP, a small-scale MCHD campaign, was able to have a national presence, mobilising a large network of local monitors across 14 disaster-affected districts. The partnership, however, came with a cost. As the MCHD became increasingly embedded with the CFP, the role of the MCHD became myopic in scope (Ebrahim, 2005), with the local monitors consumed with the task of routine collection and reporting of community feedback as per the terms of the partnership arrangement. Not only did this arrangement give rise to the long-standing problem of NGO actors' upward

accountability to donors, at the cost of downward accountability to communities, it stifled the potential for local innovation, injecting undue competition and uncertainty among community monitors, and putting the collective vision of "people-powered accountability" at risk.

Disaster scholars argue that voices of local communities reeling from disaster take a range of forms: 'pressing accounts of need, deprivation and anguish' (Davis and Alexander, 2016, p. 193). Aid community, however, has been found to de-politicise voice, experimenting with tools of accountability that misrepresent data for voice (Madianou *et al.*, 2016), and to deploy mechanisms of accountability that focus on what Ramalingam says 'what can be counted as opposed to what counts' (Ramalingam, 2013, p.106)

This case study lends support to this body of evidence. In so doing, the point is not to completely undermine the potential of technologies and tools in promoting citizen-centric, civil society-based accountability in disaster context. In fact, the MCHD actors were themselves not averse to such tools and had keenly pursued them, to complement their approach to expand local outreach through the involvement of community monitors. The point is to question whether such tools and technologies reflect the demands of specific disaster context, and whether they are consistent with the political aspirations of local actors. The case highlights that the international aid sector's growing emphasis on newer technologies of monitoring aid (Jensen and Winthereik, 2013), together with cultivation of local civil society actors as professional and technocratic agents to spur reforms in aid sector (Norman, 2014), risk de-politicising or even displacing contextual and political approaches to rights-based social accountability involving local civil society actors.

Second, it is increasingly recognised that governance of large scale disasters is a polycentric undertaking, involving a range of state and non-state actors, with varying roles and responsibilities (Pandya, 2006; Koliba, Zia and Mills, 2011). This, in turn, results in unclear accountability relationship between local communities and service providers.

The MCHD actors' approach to accountability must be understood in this context, marked by unclear lines of responsibility and authority under which local officials performed their role. Despite the MCHD's aim of engaging with "the right authority", and to engage in constructive dialogue with the local officials, this approach proved limiting as a dynamic reality of post-disaster bureaucracy became palpable, with those responsible to heed to local voices unclearly distributed across various administrative scales. The MCHD's role was further compounded due to local democratic vacuum. Lack of elected officials at the local level, together with the growing influence of the National Reconstruction Authority, emerged as a challenge to engage with "the right authority" at the local level. This lesson stresses the need for the civil society actors to negotiate and adjust their accountability activism based on the elusive nature of authority structures that take root in the humanitarian crisis situation. In other words, it calls for the civil society actors to broaden their accountability activism to

engage with different 'accountability scales', (Fox, 2007, p. 342), from local to national powerholders, to bolster their role as 'proxy accountability actors'. More specifically, these lessons suggest localised efforts at engaging with local officials may have to be complemented by more assertive, advocacy-oriented measures that are targeted to policy actors, legislatures and political representatives, to generate concrete response to the voice of disaster-affected populations.

In sum, this case study has sought to offer new insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of doing social accountability in the wake of a large-scale disaster. The paper argues that civil society driven accountability in post-disaster context has the potential to make the abstract notions of rights and voice concrete in the interest of disaster-affected communities, while also help overcome the post-disaster environment of mistrust, allegations and scapegoating. Despite such potential, the study also draws attention to two forms of politics that tend to undermine the effectiveness of rights-based, civil society-driven social accountability in disaster context. First, it shows that the globally-propagated rationalities and technologies of humanitarian accountability interfering with the ability of local civil society actors to translate community voice into response from powerholders. Second, the shifting and often ambiguous lines of authority, and by extension accountability, in the wake of a major disaster, poses challenge to such actors' ability to engage with and command appropriate response at the local level. The paper concludes that the potential of civil society-driven, social accountability in promoting an inclusive and accountable governance of disasters remains limited, unless there are corresponding changes in the national and international structures of accountability in post-disaster situation.

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CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL PAPER 3

The politics of participatory disaster governance in Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction

Abstract

Despite growing calls for participatory and accountable governance of disasters, little is known regarding the dynamics of the policy and practical landscapes in which post-disaster participatory governance take place. The aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, during which the Government of Nepal introduced a policy commitment to make housing reconstruction participatory and accountable, serves as an opportune context to investigate the interfaces between policy and practice of participatory disaster governance. The paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork, comprising participant observation of various spaces of participatory governance, and 21 semi-structured interviews with a mix of policymakers and local actors. Fieldwork spanned two sites: Kathmandu, the centre of policy-making, and Sankhu, a peri-urban community in the outskirt of Kathmandu Valley, which was devastated by the earthquake. The paper presents a complicated and contested landscape of participatory governance within Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction. On the one hand, the Government of Nepal instrumentalised the spaces of participatory governance with a narrow aim to justify and realise its vision of 'owner-led reconstruction', while also consolidating its historically pending agenda of governance reforms in Nepal's aid sector. On the other hand, and in spite of the government's narrowing of the frame, such spaces served as interrogative encounters, enabling disaster-affected citizens to become vigilant regarding the governmental neglect produced under the guise of 'owner-led reconstruction'. While disaster-induced participatory spaces may be limited in altering the more entrenched power relations in state-society relations, these are subtle forms of citizen-centric politics triggered by disasters that demands further policy and scholarly attention.

Introduction

On Saturday April 25, 2015, a major earthquake of magnitude 7.8 MW, and subsequent aftershocks, brought upon Nepal an unprecedented level of humanitarian crisis. It claimed over 8,790 lives (as of 7 June, 2015), injured over 22,300 people, damaged 498,852 houses, and left over 2.8 million (about 10% of Nepal's population) homeless (Government of Nepal, 2015). Popularly known as 'the Great Earthquake' or 'Gorkha Earthquake', initial damages and losses from the earthquake were estimated at Nepali Rupees (NPR) 706 billion, equivalent to US$ 7 billion (Government of Nepal, 2015).

The post-earthquake Nepal also proved to be a contested environment in which both the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the humanitarian community became a subject of public scrutiny and criticisms. Amidst such criticisms, the GoN adopted the globally-circulated vision to 'build back better Nepal', with a focus on 'owner-led reconstruction' of damaged houses that also pledged participatory and accountable mode of disaster recovery and reconstruction. The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Report, a major policy document introduced in June, 2015, less than two months after the earthquake, articulated the GoN's commitment to participatory governance of the longer-term reconstruction as follows:

> 'The GoN will work to strengthen governance systems more broadly in line with the Good Governance Act of 2006. This will include strengthening accountability processes, working collaboratively with civil society, strengthening citizen service centres and rule of law processes, and ensuring the participation of the most vulnerable, affected populations in decision-making processes' (Government of Nepal, 2015, p.255).

The National Reconstruction Act, promulgated in December 2015, further reiterated the GoN's vision for 'prompt completion of the reconstruction works', coupled with a sustainable, resilient and social-justice based approach to longer term reconstruction (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2015). The Act also set the foundation for the establishment of a central body, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), responsible to oversee and coordinate post-disaster reconstruction.

Using Nepal's post-earthquake environment as an empirical context, this paper engages with hitherto little understood topic of politics of participatory disaster governance within post-disaster reconstruction efforts. Drawing on the concept of spaces of participation (Gaventa, 2006)[13], and using an ethnographic mode of inquiry, the paper critically investigates the interfaces between policy and practice of participatory governance in Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction. It specifically aims to locate the politics of participatory

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[13] Gaventa's version of spaces of participation here builds on the works of other social and participatory scholars, notably Andrea Cornwall (2002), who, in turn, drew inspiration from Henri Lefebvre's (1991) work on social production of space.

governance of disaster within state-society relations and explores the potential and limitations of such politics in enabling disaster-affected citizens to influence the policy and practice of housing reconstruction.

Participatory governance of disaster

Disaster scholars have long called for participatory and accountable mode of disaster recovery that comprise of decision-making mechanisms that are responsive to the demands of the disaster-affected populations (Cuny, 1983, p. 128). Since mid-1990s, in response to the growing criticisms for performance deficit facing both state and non-state agencies working in humanitarian disasters, varied forms of international standards and procedures of accountability and participation have proliferated in the disaster sector, with the explicit or implicit aim of making disaster reconstruction community-centric, participatory and accountable (The Sphere Project, 2011; CHS Alliance, 2014; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2015).

Given the growing complexity of disasters and disaster response, the conceptual and practical boundaries of participation and accountability in disaster context are also expanding. Participation is no longer viewed from the standpoint of local communities' engagement in disaster response and recovery. Neither is the responsibility to govern disasters only confined to state actors. The practice of governance of disasters is increasingly becoming polycentric, understood as participation of and collaboration between variedly located state and non-state humanitarian agencies, communities and experts, who are expected to hold different roles and responsibilities in making disaster recovery responsive to the needs of those affected by disasters (Tierney, 2012; Bakkour et al., 2015; Bae, Joo and Won, 2016). While primarily focused on disaster risk reduction, the recently introduced Sendai Framework calls for a wider engagement of and clear responsibilities among both state and non-state actors, along the principles of 'mutual outreach, partnership, complementarity in roles and accountability and follow-up' (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2015, p. 13). Despite these global policy initiatives, Raju and da Costa (2018) argue, what it means and takes to pursue participatory and accountable governance of disasters remain relatively underexamined.

Politics of participatory governance

Notwithstanding the growing normative and policy appeal of participatory governance in disaster context, critical literature on participatory governance and development reminds us that power and politics often impinge on the practice and outcome of participatory governance. Arnstein's model of 'ladder of participation' constitutes one of the first analytical frameworks to shed a critical spotlight into the potential and pitfalls of participatory planning and decision-

making (Arnstein, 1969). For Arnstein, participation may span practices that provide local communities to make decisions from below, but it may also become tokenistic and manipulative process, mostly geared at legitimising decisions that follow from the top. In a similar vein, there is now a robust scholarship from the development sector that challenges the normative value assigned to participation. That participation is embedded in, intertwined with, and shaped by politics and power dynamics, leading to reproduction of power inequalities instead of empowerment of local communities, is now widely acknowledged in participatory governance literature (White, 1996; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mansuri and Rao, 2012).

As an empirical context for this study, Nepal's experience with community-based, participatory governance in natural resources management serves as a testimony to the unpredictable and often unintended outcomes associated with participatory governance. Hailed as an international success story in the 1990s for its unique approach to participatory resource governance, it has in recent years come under scholarly criticism because of its failures to overcome the unequal nature of benefit sharing and resource allocation (Shrestha and McManus, 2008). Nepal's experience also underscores deep-seated social inequalities impinging on the deliberative and democratic ethos that underpin localised participatory spaces (Ojha, Cameron and Kumar, 2009). Moreover, in aid-recipient societies, the rhetoric of participation and related notions of empowerment and accountability have the tendency of being used to realise previously determined agenda, not to democratise the structuring and execution of aid programmes (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). Donors' emphasis on professionalism, effectiveness and expertise often outweigh the demands for participation, accountability and justice in aid-recipient communities (Barnett, 2013).

Given the above critical evidence, a plural outlook towards the potential and pitfalls of participatory governance is warranted. John Gaventa's 'spaces of participation', encourages us to consider the complex landscape of participatory governance, which shall also serve as an analytical entry point for this study (Gaventa, 2006). He argues that in response to the growing criticisms over 'governance deficit' in the public sector, state agencies have actively sought and institutionalised varied forms of participatory spaces of governance (invited spaces). Citizens, on the other hand, continue to invent independent forms of participatory mechanisms to challenge and contest state's decisions (created or claimed spaces). 'Accountability through participation', or participation in both invited and claimed spaces of participation is considered a major vehicle through which citizens seek to hold powerholders accountable to prior policy and programmatic commitments (Cornwall, Lucas, Pasteur, 2000). Yet, for Gaventa, despite the availability of invited and claimed spaces, actual decision-making processes may still take place within the narrow realm of powerholders (closed spaces). Under such condition, the normative claim of participatory governance to improve

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the decision-making ability of local communities, and exact accountability from powerholders, therefore, can get compromised, co-opted or neglected.

Politics and complexity of participatory governance in disaster context

While the above debates mostly pertain to development sector, emerging evidence suggests that the processes and outcomes of citizen participation and accountability tend to become even more contentious and questionable in post-disaster situation. Scholars argue that the calls for participation and accountability are common in the wake of disasters, but in the longer run state actors prove their adeptness at deflecting public participation and demands for accountability and subvert the calls for reforms (Olson, 2000; Boin, McConnell and Hart, 2008; Pelling and Dill, 2006; 2010; Venugopal and Yasir, 2017). State actors also frame and even promote participation from a narrow logic of making disaster recovery effective and efficient. This may involve promoting voluntary citizen efforts for the emergency purpose of rescue and relief, but such actions may be neglected, or even considered as a deterrent towards longer-term reconstruction (Hayward, 2014). It is also found that citizen-driven activities for reconstruction often falter in the face of government's indifference and neglect (Davidson *et al.*, 2007; Cho, 2014). Transformative potential of participation in post-disaster context can also be hampered by issues inherent to participatory mechanisms. Absence of strong civil society, system of patronage and existence of partisan politics may further limit the interest and ability of disaster-affected communities to engage with local authorities (Pelling, 1998).

Yet, it is not to suggest that citizen-led, participatory initiatives do not take root in disaster context. Efforts to make disaster recovery deliberative and responsive to the voices of the communities have been found to emerge alongside state-driven mode of disaster recovery and reconstruction (Cho, 2014; Cretney, 2018; Curato, 2018). Curato (2018), through her ethnographic study in post-Haiyan Philippines, found the practices of post-disaster governance ranged from authoritarian, communitarian, and deliberative modes of governance, evoking the possibility for different forms of participatory ideals, spaces and struggles that disasters can spark. Cretney (2018) provides similar evidence of a mix of community-driven participatory initiatives to have emerged in the aftermath of 2010 Canterbury earthquake, which served as a countervailing force against the top-down, state-led recovery processes.

Study rationale and questions

Despite the growing realisation that politics and power dynamics shape the governance of disasters more generally, the exact nature of politics that follow, and how it affects the potential of disaster-affected populations to shape the terms and direction of post-disaster reconstruction, is little understood. The paper seeks to address this gap, drawing on the analysis of the politics that underpin the policy and practice of participatory disaster

governance in Nepal's post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction. It is done in the context when the Government of Nepal, made an explicit commitment to give primacy to the participation and accountability disaster reconstruction (Government of Nepal, 2015).

By introducing politics, the paper seeks to challenge the normative underpinning of participatory disaster governance, as one that views participation of local communities as a pre-condition for effective disaster recovery, on the one hand, and their democratic right, on the other. The paper seeks to locate the practice of disaster governance, and within it participation and accountability, beyond the managerial and administrative logics of effective disaster recovery but within the complex state-society politics that tend to both influence the response to disaster and, in turn, be influenced by disaster (Hilhorst, 2004, p. 60). The paper assumes that while participatory ideals and practices have the risk of falling prey of the state's technical and managerial logics to disaster response, citizens may simultaneously use such spaces to pursue 'a new form of [disaster] citizenship for a new era of governance', foregrounded in the values of rights, entitlements and solidarity (Remes, 2016, p. 20).

The paper is informed by two interrelated questions:

1. How did politics of participatory disaster governance manifest in Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction efforts?
2. In what ways did such politics enable or undermine the disaster-affected communities' ability to influence the longer-term, post-earthquake reconstruction?

Methodology

Methodologically, this study draws inspiration from and contributes to the contemporary forms of ethnography of development (Mosse, 2004; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Cornish *et al.*, 2012) and ethnography of disaster response (Klinenberg, 2003; Curato, 2018). Specifically, the study design is informed by 'interface analysis', in which ethnographers seek to bring variously situated actors and activities (i.e. beneficiaries, local implementers, state officials, donors) 'into one analytical frame' (Lewis and Mosse, 2006, Andersson, 2014, p.285). This mode of ethnographic design is particularly suited to examine the contradictions and complexities of policy interventions, that is, 'the relation of policy and practice not as instrumental or scripted translation of ideas into reality, but as a messy free-for-all in which processes are often uncontrollable and results uncertain' (Lewis and Mosse, 2006, p.9). In particular, the design seeks to examine the policy and practical interface of the GoN's initial commitment to make post-disaster reconstruction participatory and accountable to disaster-affected populations. The study is also meant to be an exploratory in nature, particularly with regards to the political contestation and possibilities triggered by invited and claimed spaces of participation (Gaventa, 2006). For analytical purpose, invited spaces here refer to state-mandated, formalised modes of participatory spaces (e.g. public hearings, consultative

meetings). Claimed spaces include citizens- or civil society led initiatives, primarily geared at discussing and deliberating state's policies and programmes for improved public service delivery.

Field work sites

Ethnographic field work was conducted in Nepal for three months from March-May 2016. Field work spanned two sites in Nepal: Sankharapur Municipality (Sankhu), a peri-urban community in the outskirts of Kathmandu, and Kathmandu, the centre of policymaking. A brief overview of the two sites follows.

Sankhu is a traditional Newari [14] settlement, with an estimated population of 28,854 (as of 2016), located in the North East of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. It was inscribed on the tentative World Heritage List in 2008. The location is about 17 KMS away from the capital city, Kathmandu, where central level government offices, including the NRA is located. The town was formerly divided into 3 Village Development Committee (VDC) namely Pukhulachhi, Suntol and Bajrayogini. In 2014, the town of Sankhu was declared as Shankharapur Municipality, merging 3 above mentioned VDCs and other neighbouring VDCs.

With 98 deaths, 6452 houses fully destroyed, 587 houses partially destroyed, the April 2015 earthquake and the subsequent aftershocks had a devastating effect on Sankhu. In the aftermath of the earthquake, Sankhu saw an influx of national and international NGOs, volunteers and citizen groups, providing rescue and relief measures to the communities. As a site of historical and cultural significance, it also became a centre of debates over longer-term conservation and recovery.

When the earthquake struck on April 25, 2015, I was in London, having just started my PhD study. As the situation in Nepal looked increasingly upsetting, I decided to organise a fundraising campaign to support the recovery process in whatever means possible. Part of the funds so raised was later channelled to a youth group, who helped build community-water projects in one of the Dalit villages in the outskirts of Sankhu. At that time, it was not my plan to conduct the field work in Sankhu.

When I went to Nepal in August 2015 for my preliminary PhD field work, I also visited Sankhu, where the devastation was still clearly visible, but there was little sign of recovery activities. Many affected households were living in temporary shelters. Some of the households, I learned, were awaiting cash assistance from the government to restore or rebuild their houses. Others were willing and capable to rebuild houses on their own but were hesitant

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[14] *Newars* are the original inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley. Famous for their indigenous culture and craftmanship, most of the *Newari* communities within Kathmandu operate through community-based organisations called *Guthis*. Many such *Guthis* also exist in Sankhu and played a critical role in early response and recovery.

to do so because of fears that changing building regulations that could render their newly built houses illegal.

I went back to Sankhu in early 2016 to conduct my full-fledged field work, but recovery activities were yet to take hold. It was also quickly revealed that the national and international attention Sankhu received in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake had dwindled. A question that shaped my thinking at this point, in line with Eric Klinenberg's ethnography study of the Chicago Heat Wave, was 'why despite the massive destruction and deaths, and subsequent national and international attention, the victims [of Sankhu] have been so easy to disregard or forget' (Klinenberg, 2003, p.23). While not the main question for this paper, this concern shaped the course of data collection and analysis.

It is also important to stress here that this ethnographic account is not to be treated as a study of the larger problems and opportunities of post-disaster reconstruction facing Sankhu. Sankhu represents a complex peri-urban town of Nepal, which also epitomises Kathmandu's growing urban vulnerability[15]. A short-term ethnography followed for this study is not able to do justice to uncover the complex socio-political realities, together with local level vulnerabilities facing a socio-economically diverse community. The aim of ethnographic engagement with Sankhu, therefore, is modest, insofar it helps to illuminate local level complexities and contradictions within Nepal's post-disaster reconstruction efforts, and within it, the policy and practical inconsistencies of participatory disaster governance.

The ethnographic inquiry was also conducted in Kathmandu. As the nation's capital, Kathmandu is the centre of administrative power and policymaking, and also the hub of major government and non-governmental actors that represented a polycentric post-disaster governance system (Tierney, 2012). Kathmandu as a site of fieldwork was chosen for the varied forms of exchanges and interactions it attracted among these different actors. One such site was the Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (HRRP), an internationally-induced and government-mandated forum intended to serve as a collaborative disaster governance forum. It comprised of government and non-government organisations involved in longer-term reconstruction, including the NRA, the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD), the two main ministries of interest, along with other relevant government units and humanitarian NGOs. HRRP meetings served as one of the sites of ethnographic evidence. Fieldwork in Kathmandu

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[15] See for example, Carpenter and Grunewald (2016) regarding complex urban vulnerability and disaster preparedness climate in Kathmandu Valley.

also involved attendance of less regular meetings such as one district-wide public hearing[16] and one policy dissemination meeting that was particularly focused on longer-term reconstruction.

Data sources

Ethnographic inquiry generated three sets of data: participant observation notes, interviews, and documentary evidence.

Participant observation primarily comprised attendance at 9 meetings (invited and claimed spaces) at the central and local level, involving a mix of public hearings, community meetings, reconstruction-related meetings, policy dissemination meetings. These meetings were identified through a mix of purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Attendance at claimed spaces was mostly made possible through information passed on by the study interviewees. In addition, a local NGO, subcontracted by the government to help organise local accountability-related activities, was closely consulted with, to identify and attend invited spaces of participation (i.e. two public hearings). A total of six meetings were attended in Kathmandu, including 1 district-wide public hearing, 1 policy dissemination event, and 4 regular HRRPs meetings. The meetings, on average, ran for about 2 hours each. I had no control over the agenda, timing and proceedings of these meetings, and they were observed as they unfolded in their natural context. Field notes were taken based on topic guide that focused on specific 'observational dimensions' including the actors involved in the meetings, main agenda of the meeting, proceedings of the meetings, discussions, among others (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2008). In addition, between April-May, 2016, I conducted around 20 days of field trips to Sankhu, observing the status of reconstruction, conducting interviews with local communities, and officials from the local governments, including Sankhu Municipality.

Data also includes 21 semi-structured interviews, comprising 13 policymakers, high-level public officials, or politicians in Kathmandu, and 8 local level officials and community members from Sankhu, who had direct roles in responding to the earthquake at the levels of policy development and local implementation. Interviewees were recruited using a combination of purposive and referential sampling techniques. The interviewees from Sankhu were regular participants in the local spaces of participation who provided their views and experiences about the role, significance and limitations of such spaces. The sampling process,

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[16] According to the Good Governance Act 2008, local bodies in Nepal are required to organise public hearings with the purpose of 'making the activities of the office fair, transparent and objective and addressing the lawful concerns of general people and stakeholders (Government of Nepal, 2008, p. 24). Since these public hearings are organised on a trimester basis and the organisation of these were entirely dependent on the government, I managed to attend only one during my fieldwork. It nevertheless served as a major lens to understand the general functioning of such meetings, the issues that get raised, and the government officials' reaction and conduct in such meetings.

however, was not static but it evolved through constant reflection and reflexivity in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Specifically, in Sankhu, interviews were purposively conducted with local community activists who had chosen not to participate in local meetings. Interviews were guided by interview guides, which were appropriately adapted to different interviewees. Questions were specifically asked for their reasons for participation and non-participation. In addition, a total of 12 'informal ethnographic interviews'(Spradley, 1980, p. 123) were conducted with local communities in Sankhu (10), and participants of the HRRP meetings in Kathmandu (2), to understand their views and experiences of the meetings attended, and more generally about their views and experiences on the status of reconstruction.

Data analysis was complemented by review of key documentary evidence, including recovery and reconstruction-related policy and legislative measures, select minutes from some of the reconstruction meetings organised by HRRP, reports published after the earthquake, and participation and accountability-related documents retrieved from the local government bodies. The documents were purposively sampled and collected as the data collection progressed, and some were retrieved from the NRA and the HRRP's website upon completion of the field work. They served as a major basis to trace the contextual background and structuring of the reconstruction programme, while also help triangulate findings from other sources of data, bringing further rigour and validity to the study.

The ethical approval for the study was granted by the LSE Research Ethics Committee. Interviews were conducted after providing background information about the project and upon securing the informed consent.14 of the 21 semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in verbatim by the researcher, while the remaining 7 were hand-noted with enough details to ensure quality and accuracy of the accounts. The interviews were handwritten in cases of direct refusal to be audio-taped, or when there was a sign of hesitation for the same. The short-hand notes were elaborated into detailed notes immediately after the day's field work. Proceedings from both central and local level meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed. Fieldnotes from the events attended, and also from community-level observation were taken in a detail manner, taking into account not just what happened in those meetings (e.g. issues discussed), but also those issues and concerns that were deemed excluded or absent. Identities of individual interviewees and attendees of meetings are either anonymised, or used as pseudonyms, as per the ethical requirements.

Data analysis

It is widely acknowledged that there is no single or linear approach of ethnographic analysis. Nor is the analytical process independent of the ethnographer's presumptions, biography and hunches (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Accordingly, the data collection and analysis for this study went hand-in-hand with and was supplemented by my understanding of and

reflexivity as a native of Nepal, former development consultant, and diasporic international student in London, as further discussed below. As data collection progressed, patterns started to emerge, supporting basic understanding of the politics of the reconstruction activities in general (LeCompte and Schensul, 2013). Such patterns were recorded in the form of notes for detailed review and analysis. The in-depth data analysis for this study followed the following steps:

In the first step, organising and ordering of data (interviews, participant observations and documents/artefacts) was performed in NVIVO 11, based on central/policy and local/implementation level. Second, the process of confronting the data began. In this stage, all available data were read thorough, to develop initial sets of ideas, noting down interesting issues, highlighting quotes etc. Also, seemingly striking 'data points' across three datasets were indexed separately for easy retrieval and reviewing. Third, interview and participant observation notes were openly coded in NVIVO 11 software. This resulted in over 42 different sub-codes, covering very specific issue such as "reason for bank accounts", "housing surveys", to broad topics such as "capacity of the government", "NGOs under government" etc. In so doing, notes and memos were taken, and special consideration was given to specific vignettes or 'snapshots or short descriptions of events', which provided a representative account of the phenomenon in question (LeCompte and Schensul, 2013, p. 269). Some of the vignettes are later used in the findings section, as evidence for the characteristic events observed, or views expressed by research participants. Fourth, the openly coded data in NVIVO were collapsed and merged, into fewer codes. Special attention was given to the number of files and references coded. The coded data were then reviewed in line with the two research questions, and turned into categories, leading up to the writing and elaboration of the main findings as presented below. Finally, the findings are presented in a descriptive manner, to the extent possible, recounting the actual practices of disaster governance observed and the views experienced by the interviews.

Reflexivity in data collection and analysis

Reflexivity is widely acknowledged as an integral element of ethnography. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) have suggested that the role of reflexivity in ethnography is not merely about being aware of the context of one's research but about establishing interlink between different phases and outcomes of research. Equally important is to locate one's own positionality as a researcher to the emotions, views and experiences expressed by the research subjects. As Henry Prince, one of the pioneers of disaster research has argued, maintaining scientific integrity of research does not mean one can detach from the emotions and sentiments that are integral part of disaster research (Prince, 1920). The present study sought to employ reflexivity in the analysis of data in three ways.

First, the ethnographic data that I generated bore various facets of emotions and frustrations facing local communities. Emotions surrounding loss of loved ones, loss of property, uncertainty of the future, doubts and suspicions, routinely featured both in interviews and participant observation of local meetings. More importantly, anguish against the government was pervasive among individuals interviewed and was also witnessed during the participant observation of the community meetings. A consensus among most local interviewees was that the government failed in its effort to provide for and even coordinate the emergency response. Many alleged the government of sluggish response during the emergency phase and considered the initial relief assistance of Nepali Rupees (NPR) 15,000 (approximately $ 150) provided to 'victims' was too meagre to cope with the disaster. Many also complained of discrimination in relief distribution. While the focus of the fieldwork was to examine the politics of participation in the reconstruction from the disaster, my initial impression was that despite being conscious of the value of participation to shape the longer-term reconstruction in community's favour, these past experiences and associated feelings of injustice and neglect precluded many from engaging with the local government. In non-disaster context, participation is often viewed normatively, as a rational means of helping improve decision-making or empowering local communities. I constantly reflected whether or to what extent such rationality holds true in disaster context in which feelings of injustice and neglect remain entrenched in survivors' memories, potentially limiting citizens' engagement with the state actors.

Second, my efforts at locating, and some cases, negotiating, access to various forms of participatory spaces, shaped both the process of data collection and subsequent analysis. Through varied experiences of seeking information about the rationale and nature of meetings attended, I also questioned the seemingly fixed boundaries of organisation and execution that invited and claimed spaces of participation tend to imply. For example, for analytical purpose, I have treated one of the local meetings that I attended as a claimed space because I was told that it was spearheaded by a local NGO. However, closer analysis of the event revealed a complex picture. Termed "interaction programme", the banner of the meeting had a logo of this local NGO, alongside that of one of the key bilateral agencies, the GoN, and an influential national level NGO. I did not manage to disentangle the complete story behind this mix of "logos". But it made me reflect, what I have termed here as a claimed space of participation organised by locals, may not necessarily be the case and it may reflect the interest of different actors, spanning local, national and international boundaries.

Third, the earthquake was a 'totalising event' (Oliver-Smith, 1999), which disrupted the functioning of the Nepali society at many levels. The underlying vulnerability facing local communities was palpable during the field work, but it also brought me closer to the adverse conditions under which government officials at the local level are expected to tackle public

criticisms. Growing up in Nepal, I am not unfamiliar with this situation. But it struck me how disaster tends to increase vulnerability of not just citizens, but also the service providers. One of the earliest realisations came when I visited one of the government offices in Sankhu. A one-storey house where the Ward Office is based was severely hit by the earthquake with the damages still palpable. It housed three staff who recounted their experiences of barely surviving the earthquake, followed by the immediate pressure to attend to the local sufferings. They also mentioned of the criticisms they continue to face from the local communities, despite having done their best in the situation with limited resources and support from the central government. In our treatment of these individuals as "frontline officials", primarily responsible for delivering timely and quality public goods in the wake of a crisis, it is easy to discount the adverse conditions that shape their conduct and performance, and their ability to respond to local demands. Not the original plan of my research design, this initial revelation also led me to reflect further on the power inequalities that characterised Nepal's central and local government bodies, and how it impacted state-society relations at the local level.

Findings

As previously discussed, the findings set out to answer two questions: a) the nature of politics of participatory disaster governance that played out in Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction efforts and b) the ways such politics enabled or undermined the disaster-affected communities' ability to influence the longer-term, post-earthquake reconstruction. In so doing, the context of the emergence of participatory disaster governance policy is discussed first, followed by findings on how it was politicised at the level of policy, and the major inconsistencies observed at the level of implementation, mostly drawing on data from Sankhu.

The context and pursuit for owner-led reconstruction

The 'Great Earthquake' of April 25, 2015, and subsequent aftershocks, not only exposed the public service delivery deficiencies of both the GoN and the humanitarian community, but it also brought them under sharp public scrutiny. In the weeks following the earthquake, adhering to the international standards for post-disaster reconstruction, the GoN conducted a rapid assessment of the socio-economic effects of the disaster, termed Post Disaster Need Assessment Report (PDNA) (Government of Nepal, 2015). The PDNA, among other things, estimated 498,852 houses as fully damaged and in need of reconstruction assistance. The GoN also coined the idea of 'owner-led reconstruction'. A donor conference was held in June, 2015, to coincide with the launch of PDNA, in which the international donor community pledged over $4 billion foreign aid to "building back better Nepal."

The topic of governance, and within it, participation and accountability, was given special consideration in the PDNA. A member of the multilateral aid agency, who contributed

to the planning and execution of PDNA remarked that prioritising governance within long-term reconstruction means "not on what forms of aid are delivered and how much [aid], but how recovery activities are delivered" (INT_NI). Establishing necessary institutional frameworks, standards and guidelines for the recovery and reconstruction was considered a major priority towards effective and resilient post-disaster reconstruction.

Eight months after the earthquake, in December 2015, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) was formed through a bill passed by the parliament. Upon its formation, the NRA established two conditions under which 'owner-led reconstruction' was to be pursued: a) verification of eligible individual house-owners for housing assistance b) establishment of monitoring mechanisms to ensure proper utilisation of the individual housing grant (INT_RK).

The government's conditions accompanied establishment of the "Multidoor Basket Fund" involving key bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors. As part of the plan, the eligibility determination of affected households/house-owners was to be carried out through a comprehensive household census, called Nepal-Household Registration for Housing Reconstruction, across 14 of the most affected districts. Through detailed, door-to-door surveys, the Census sought to capture information about the damaged houses, together with the demographic information about the house-owners. The analysis of database was to be followed, upon which a list of eligible house-owners would be generated and communicated to the local government unit (Village Development Committee or Municipality), which will then set up a legally binding "Participation Agreement" with the eligible house-owners.

While the assessment of damaged households was previously done as part of the PDNA, in which close to 5,00,000 houses were estimated as requiring reconstruction, the new Census was aimed at making the reconstruction more "scientific" and "evidence-based". The implicit goal of the eligibility determination was, however, to ensure minimal wastage in the deployment of housing assistance. The donor community was of the view that the original estimate of the damaged houses was "inflated" at the local level. It was also determined that the original cash assistance of NPR 15,000 (approximately $ 150) per household, given as "relief fund" to build temporary shelters to those with fully-damaged houses, was widely misused by the affected households (INT_EP).

'Owner-led reconstruction', thus, followed a model that closely embedded the ideas of self-regulation, monitoring and financial risk management. The government was to provide the eligible house-owners 200,000 Nepali Rupees in housing grant (approximately USD 2000), which was to be disbursed through three separate instalments, and upon fulfilment of specific conditions that would ensure construction of earthquake-resistant houses determined under the New Building Regulation. As part of the "Participation Agreement", the individual grantees were also required to hold, or set up a bank account where the assistance would be deposited. This was to ensure proper monitoring of the use of housing grant, and hence avert

the risk of misuse of the direct cash assistance (INT_AA). Despite the term 'owner-led', which evoked a notion that individual house-owners had the ultimate power to direct the reconstruction activities, it hardly gave citizens any ownership on deciding the course of reconstruction. Rather, it devolved to them the responsibility for standardised and high-quality reconstruction.

Conditional participation

The state-led, 'owner-led reconstruction', as indicated above, did not follow general public engagement. What is noteworthy, however, is that the possibility of participation of house-owners was not entirely eliminated under the 'owner-led reconstruction'. Rather, participation of and accountability to local communities were conceived and integrated, as discussed above, contingent upon the affected households proving their eligibility. This meant that after the completion of the Census, a list of eligible house-owners was to be made public by the local government unit (i.e. Wards or Village Development Committee), and those failing to make it to the list, were to have the opportunity to appeal, or lodge formal complaint. In other words, the voice of the affected communities was to be given consideration through a locally available Grievance Handling Mechanism.

The model was problematic for two reasons. First, the state's promised housing entitlement of NPR 200,000 and the criteria associated with its disbursal, was determined without meaningful citizen engagement. This, despite the policy rhetoric, undermined the inherent right and agency of the individual house-owners to influence the terms and techniques of post-disaster reconstruction. Second, the administration of the eligibility determination process produced an uncertainty for local communities awaiting reconstruction assistance. The possibility to voice or lodge a formal complaint in the event of non-eligibility was contingent upon the execution of the Census. The effect of this was evident at the local level. By the completion of my fieldwork in May 2016, 13 months after the earthquake, there was no clear sign of the Census starting in urban communities, including Sankhu. As a result, local communities' promised ownership and participation in the reconstruction were dependent upon government-led regulatory processes being effectively completed. But those very processes were slow or non-existent, and appeared highly technical, making it at odds with the democratic underpinning of participatory disaster governance.

Standardising NGOs' participation and a partnership of convenience

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the GoN made a special appeal to the international community to support the government in recovery and reconstruction. Many domestic and international humanitarian agencies responded to this appeal. But the growing involvement of the NGO sector soon became a concern for the GoN. A senior official in charge of coordinating and planning the emergency response mentioned that the NGO sector had

"systematically bypassed the government" (INT_IP). NGOs' lack of consultation with and approval from the local authorities in implementing local relief and recovery efforts were frequently cited by both central level and local level officials. The NGO sector was also criticised of competing with one another, leading to fragmented and uncoordinated recovery efforts.

A major goal of the NRA was therefore to ensure that the longer-term reconstruction took place in a coordinated manner. Participation in meetings with NGOs was primarily geared at realising this goal. This was mostly evident through my observation of Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (HRRP) meetings.

The HRRP, as noted before, was established in December 2015, coinciding with the establishment of NRA. Together with the NRA, the platform sought to bring together a widely dispersed domestic and international humanitarian and development NGOs as "partner organisations."

At the time this field work was conducted, the humanitarian NGOs had received a strong directive from the NRA, to temporarily suspend their reconstruction activities. This move had introduced a considerable confusion regarding the future role of the humanitarian NGOs in post-disaster reconstruction. The HRRP meetings, in principle, were to serve as an opportunity for the humanitarian actors to have a dialogue with the NRA, regarding such policy decisions. Yet, the observation of HRRP meetings did not reveal any major opposition to, or serious engagement concerning the apparently major policy decision to regulate the operations of humanitarian NGOs (OBS_1,2,4). Rather, such meetings served as a forum for the NRA officials to justify the reasons for the conduct of the Census, reassert its policy decisions, and more importantly, seek cooperation from the humanitarian sector to make the ongoing housing survey and subsequent "enrolment" of local communities into the housing agreement a success. Consider this comment made by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the NRA in one of the HRRP meetings.

> "….we would like to get your (NGOs) feedback on the policies, but before that I would like to emphasis on [the beneficiary] enrolment support. I know many organisations are willing to provide housing grant to the affected populations. But we have asked them to stop this for the time being until we streamline the overall approach. It has to be within the policy framework and, as you know, at the moment we have the survey going on, and on the basis of the survey we will be in the position to identify the poorest populations, marginalised populations to give extra level of support…"(OBS_1)

He further claims that the reconstruction efforts are to take place in full-swing once the housing surveys are done, but that the government is also anticipating the reconstruction activities to face difficulty due to shortfall in masons. He then urges the humanitarian community to remain prepared for "technical assistance", in training masons to help speed up the reconstruction activities (OBS_1).

Not only did such spaces show the NRA's attempt to legitimise its decisions and use humanitarian sector to realise its goal of reconstruction, such meetings did not seem to be taken seriously by senior NRA officials, who attended only irregularly and intermittently, raising questions over the participatory and collaborative rhetoric that underpin such meetings (OBS_2,3). Frustrations among meeting participants would be palpable when senior-level NRA officials failed to show up, or simply sought cooperation from the NGOs rather than engage with them. In one such meeting, a participant told me "there is no point in attending these meetings" (OBS_2). In another occasion, while the senior NRA officials were themselves absent, their agenda was indirectly endorsed by a major donor official, who while defending the NRA's absence, also encouraged NGO actors to cooperate and become "forthcoming" with the government in making the 'beneficiary enrolment' process a success.

The "weak capacity" and uncertain role of government-induced participatory mechanisms

In the years prior to the earthquake, the GoN had actively sought to bring reforms in the public sector governance. It had introduced various policy measures and practical experiments in areas of citizen participation and accountability. Across the country, community-based structures, local NGOs and volunteers were given attention and, in some instances, formal status, to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation of local projects. Local accountability activities, such as public hearings and social audits, were institutionalised and incorporated into regular government activities.

When the earthquake struck, the central government became anxious about the local government bodies' capacity to respond to the disaster on their own. Nepal had not had local elections for almost two decades, and local governments were managed by bureaucrats, who mostly did not hail from the local communities. This further compounded the issue of coordination and representation at the local level. To address this problem, in the aftermath of the earthquake, the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development instructed local bodies to mobilise local community-based structures and activists to facilitate the delivery of the emergency aid. Involvement of such local communities was considered central in view of the "weak capacity" of the local bodies in mitigating the disaster (INT_IP).

In Sankhu too, the government sought active participation of local community-based structures in coordinating emergency needs (INT_UA). One such community-based structure, Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs), was quickly mobilised, primarily to facilitate local-level coordination. WCFs are community-based structures, set up under the GoN's broader plans to institutionalise and upheld the agenda of 'good governance' at the local level, particularly in

planning, monitoring and evaluation of development projects [17]. A member of one such WCF mentioned having actively supported the government in its relief and recovery efforts. Another mentioned having collected data about the victims/households on his own, which was later used by the local government to develop household-level "beneficiary list" and deliver "relief fund" of US$ 150 per household (INT_IC).

However, as the emergency phase of the earthquake made way for the longer-term recovery, the local community members found their involvement not just diminishing but they also expressed a sense of abandonment from the government. As the NRA become preoccupied in formulating policy standards and mainstreaming the housing assistance, formal engagement between local communities and local authorities became further remote. In addition, the government induced spaces of participation proved increasingly removed from handling local concerns related to reconstruction. An excerpt from one of my field notes from a public hearing that was organised in Sankhu illustrates this point:

> During the whole public hearing that lasted for about 2 hours, only one question, towards the end, was raised concerning the earthquake recovery and relief. A participant asked that there are still some families who haven't received the [NPR] 15,000 assistance. 'Can you clarify, why is that?' He further asked 'what is happening to the further [housing] assistance, and what initiation is being taken by the municipality'? The Executive Director of the Municipality responded by saying 'the Central Bureau of Statistics' under the direction of NRA will soon be sending enumerators to assess the detailed damage of the houses. After that the real victims will be re-identified and assistance distributed. Beyond that even we also don't know much. We haven't been given specific budget nor instructions by the NRA, despite our repeated efforts for the same.' (OBS_8)

The above observation is telling for two reasons. First, against my expectation, in over two hours of the public hearing, only one question was raised that directly pertained to the earthquake relief and recovery of Sankhu. Instead, the first part of the meeting appeared as a ritual, providing local political leaders a formal recognition, and allowing them to make speeches, in which, among other things, many encouraged fellow community members to take an active role in local affairs. The second part of the meeting, in which local concerns, grievances and feedback, were sought, mostly focused on discussing activities such as local water projects, management and reconstruction of local roads, structuring of school

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[17] These structures were launched in 2005 in the backdrop of the Royal coup, and the brief suspension of democracy until the monarchy was overthrown in 2006 through a popular movement. Their origin and activity, therefore, was not short of controversies. Because these were not elected bodies and worked under the guidelines set by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, their claim of "independence" was hotly contested by locals. In particular, local politicians considered them illegitimate and claimed they needed to be scrapped as and when the local elections are held.

management committees, among others, which had little connection to the housing reconstruction.

The lack of questions concerning earthquake affected populations in such forums, however, did not mean such concerns did not afflict the locals. Field work in the local communities provided ample evidence that the earthquake reconstruction was a major, if not the sole concern, facing local communities. Consider this remark from an active member of a local women's group:

> "In my neighbourhood, many families are still leaving in temporary shelters. Three families had their roofs flown away by the wind. You know this is such a windy season, people don't feel secure. So the main problem is reconstruction [of houses]. Yes, people [in Sankhu] have everyday livelihood problem but people will eat whatever they find, they will manage, but building a house is a different thing. Even for middle class people, like me, it is difficult. For poor families this is impossible…The government has only promised [Nepali Rupees] 2 lakhs per household, but that is too little to build a house. How will people manage the rest?" (INT_SA)

The comment here represents a mix of uncertainty and opposition facing the interviewee, particularly regarding rebuilding of damaged houses. The interviewee, given her status and role in the community, mentioned having to routinely confront questions from local communities. This was corroborated by my fieldwork in the area. Almost a year since the earthquake, very few houses were reconstructed. Although the government had not explicitly prohibited the reconstruction of new houses, there was no dedicated mechanisms of communicating this message to the communities, limiting even those capable of building houses without the government's assistance from making further progress. Government-induced public hearings like the one above was deficient in addressing local level concerns and anxiety, let alone inviting citizen inputs concerning the reconstruction of Sankhu. Such events, as another NGO activist claimed, were mostly organised by the local government "because they are required to organise it" (INT_AA), meaning this was part of the government's bureaucratic obligation, but was devoid of political will to engage with the local communities.

Episodic participatory spaces, uncertain outcomes

Despite the growing uncertainty over the future of reconstruction, local communities and civil society activists were insistent on organising alternative spaces to pursue a vision of locally-driven reconstruction. The fact that the Census had not started in urban communities like Sankhu, and the 'owner-led reconstruction' had in effect not taken root, was also seen as a window of opportunity to push towards Sankhu-specific reconstruction (INT_AA). In other

words, the hopes of altering the course of reconstruction through bottom-up pressures were not completely eroded.

My fieldwork took me to two such local meetings, organised by a mix of civil society groups and political parties that illustrate the struggles underpinning participatory spaces. One "interaction programme" was jointly organised by local activists of Sankhu (OBS_7). Another such event was organised by the local wing of the then opposition party, to discuss "challenges and opportunities" related to Sankhu's reconstruction (OBS_9). Both meetings saw participation of senior level government officials, local activists, members of parliament and senior members of major political parties. Such meetings saw participants, among other issues, questioning the delay in the delivery of housing grant, and challenging the New Building Regulation introduced after the earthquake. They also brought to the fore historical concerns facing local communities. Issues related to small and fragmented landholding, depleting socio-economic opportunities facing local youth, and disregard for cultural and religious heritage of Sankhu were avidly raised.

Others used such meetings to raise more deep-seated issues related to power inequalities between Kathmandu and Sankhu. One attendee claimed that Sankhu, despite being close to the centre of power, Kathmandu, has been systematically marginalised in the past. Locals used these spaces to bring to the government's attention intricate socio-environmental problems that have escalated after the earthquake. One participant sought the local government's attention to environmental degradation in the form of illegal riverbed mining from a nearby river of cultural importance, which he claimed to have intensified after the Earthquake, owing to lack of governmental oversight. Locals also used the opportunity to express how the promised governmental assistance for reconstruction was meagre, given the growing cost of reconstruction. Overall, these meetings were used as an opportunity to bring to the powerholders' attention varied forms of community voices that transcended the immediate goal of housing reconstruction but also encompassed historical grievances.

Despite such varied voices, the potential of such meetings leading to meaningful and substantial changes in the process of reconstruction appeared slim. A case in point is the same "interaction programme", held by a local NGO, which saw participation of the CEO of NRA, senior officials of Sankhu, together with local civil society leaders and politicians (OBS_7). The agenda of this "interaction programme" was to discuss "Community-led, Community-based Reconstruction", particularly geared at "regeneration of Sankhu". The presence of the NRA's CEO, along with the local Member of the Parliament and the Executive Director of Shankharapur (Sankhu) Municipality, at the meeting was a unique opportunity for the participants to demand accounts from and engage with powerholders.

The meeting started with some local activists making a strong case for the unique reconstruction needs of Sankhu town. A local activist highlighted the need for Sankhu to

pursue a distinct model of reconstruction given its historical and cultural significance, while also ensure the new houses are equipped with state-of-art infrastructure. The CEO listened to the presentation. But the meeting showed a similar pattern of behaviour to that observed at central level meetings. For the CEO, the meeting was yet another opportunity to communicate the activities of the NRA, update on the ongoing Census and enrolment status, and express regret over the slow start of the reconstruction assistance in Sankhu. The CEO assured of the swift start of the reconstruction activities in Sankhu. He mentioned "1600 engineers have been mobilised to do reassessment of damaged houses. They will soon be starting the assessment in Sankhu", he reiterated. Among other issues, the CEO also mentioned that the reconstruction of Sankhu would take into account local needs and priorities. Crucially, the onus was put on the affected communities to come with a plan for reconstruction. He mentioned "give final shape to the master plan and I will make sure it gets supported." Subsequent speaker, a political leader, echoed the CEO's remarks, asking the local communities to become more forthcoming in coming up with specific agenda for Sankhu's reconstruction. After addressing the meeting, the CEO left the so-called "interaction". Chaos ensued into the meeting hall, with many following the CEO with unresolved questions, while others leaving the meeting shortly afterwards, in a visible sign of displeasure over the CEO's intermittent presence in the meeting, and lack of opportunity for a meaningful interaction.

Participatory spaces turning into scenes of high-level officials visiting Sankhu, making conciliatory remarks, providing a vague vision for the future recovery and asking local communities to come up with specifics of local reconstruction, as one interviewee claimed, had happened several times during one year since the earthquake. "People come to the meeting to know what the government's plan is for Sankhu? How long do we have to wait?..all we know now is from the media, news, but nobody [government] has told us what is happening for Sankhu."

Participatory spaces failing to generate meaningful engagement between powerholders and locals were also observed at the central level. As one example, in one of the HRRP meetings in Kathmandu, local civil society/NGO activists were invited to present their perspectives on the reconstruction issues facing urban communities within Kathmandu Valley. The idea to include local representation gained traction when in one of the earlier meetings concerns were raised that local NGOs and local activists were given little space in such meetings. A well-known civil society actor from Sankhu, involved in campaigning for Sankhu-centric reconstruction, was also invited to share his ideas, in yet another infrequent opportunity to represent Sankhu and bring local issues to the attention of the NRA. During his presentation, he made an impassioned appeal to give special attention to the unique reconstruction needs of Sankhu. Among other things, he criticised the tendency of the

government actors to overlook the role of local civil society, while also demanded more meaningful engagement between the communities and the local government. He mentioned:

> "We are the local civil society organization, and we are here not to wait for; but for raising our voice and action for rapid assistance for reconstruction…..
> We need more and more access to the local government, the Municipality, because that is our primary point of contact" (OBS_6)

What was striking, however, was that officials from the government, including those from NRA, who were ostensibly supposed to hear and respond to such a voice in the HRRP meetings, were not even present in this meeting (OBS_3). The facilitator of the meeting, representing a multilateral aid agency, reassured that the meeting minutes would be prepared, and the proceedings would be brought to the attention of the NRA leadership. Yet, for the local activist it was a moment of missed opportunity, for having failed to engage with the NRA, which stirred the reconstruction activities, and local officials, whose engagement he sought.

"Don't ask the road of the village you are not travelling to."

The ethnographic evidence shows that the earthquake reinvigorated interest among local communities and local civil society actors in finding alternative spaces to debate the future of Sankhu. While intermittent, the local meetings brought to the government's attention community-level concerns that were both earthquake-induced and historically-produced. But the ethnographic evidence also suggests that such spaces may have stoked suspicion and mistrust within and among local communities. Interview data pointed to community members having opted not to attend such meetings because of lack of or limited prior information about such meetings. During ethnographic interviews with locals, many questioned the overall motive of the organisers of such meetings, which often saw the presence and intermingling of donors, government and emergent local activists. One issue that was raised by several interviewees is that out-migration had been historically increasing in Sankhu prior to the earthquake. Many socio-politically active members of the community had abandoned Sankhu, to pursue a better quality of life in Kathmandu. Yet, claimed some, the earthquake brought those people, and others, back to Sankhu, calling themselves "locals."

These kinds of scepticisms and doubts were widely echoed by many interviewees. But for others, participation in local meetings, at the minimum, meant being informed about or reconfirming their understanding of the sources of delay in housing reconstruction, and the growing weakness of local authorities in responding to local concerns. A telling comment was made by a community activist, who recounted his experiences of having survived the earthquake, lost his house and faced a major psychological trauma for a few days, only to recover himself to join the efforts in local rescue and relief activities (INT_SD). He added how the early days of the earthquake were marked by a sense of communion and solidarity.

The outpouring of national and international support was also described as something that elevated the social and cultural profile of Sankhu. Governmental efforts were slow and sluggish, but they were supplemented by spontaneous local efforts. Interactions between government officials and local activists like him were more frequent, with community activists like him providing much needed support to the government in identifying victims and coordinating responses. But for him, those moments of citizen invigoration have long evaporated. When asked if he had recently attended any of the community meetings or consulted with the local officials from the Ward Office or the Municipality to put pressure on the reconstruction, he poignantly replied in a Nepali proverb *"najane gaunko bato nasodhnu."* This translates as "don't ask the way of the village you are not travelling to", reiterating a sense of futility in engaging with the local authorities regarding their everyday questions related to the reconstruction.

Discussion and conclusion

In examining the politics of participatory governance in Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction, the paper brings out three main points for discussion: first, the gap in policy and practice of participatory governance within Nepal's post-earthquake housing reconstruction; second, the bureaucratic governance context of Nepal and its influence on the participatory disaster governance and third, the possibility of the disaster-induced participatory spaces to shape the longer-term state-society relations. Each of the three points are discussed as follows.

First, the paper shows that despite the initial policy commitment of the GoN in making longer-term reconstruction from the Nepal earthquake participatory and accountable, participation of affected communities was marginalised under the government-driven, 'owner-led reconstruction'. The finding is consistent with emerging evidence from the Nepal earthquake that exposes the GoN's failure to engage with disaster-affected urban communities with regards to longer-term reconstruction (Daly *et al.*, 2017). The disjuncture in policy and practice, however, is only one side of the problem. The problem is also how the notion of participation and associated ideas of voice and feedback were distinctively conceptualised and integrated as conditional upon the disaster affected communities proving their eligibility for housing assistance. The paper suggests that such mode of conditional participation is far removed from and contradicts with the normative underpinnings of participatory and accountable disaster governance in which disaster-affected populations have the 'right to determine and influence' decisions concerning post-disaster reconstruction (Cuny, 1983, p.128). Rather, in reality, the paper shows the state actors' narrow framing of 'owner-driven reconstruction' was merely aimed at turning disaster-affected citizens as target beneficiaries

of housing reconstruction programme (Krause, 2010), systematically negating the rights of citizens to participate in and influence the course of reconstruction

When confronted with a major disaster, powerholders not only have the obligation to manage the resultant social and physical disruption, but are also forced to explain to the wider public their decisions, action and inaction (Olson, 2000).The study shows that while both state-mandated (invited) and locally-induced (claimed) spaces of participation existed in post-earthquake Nepal, they have the potential of being co-opted by the powerholders to pursue their pre-determined vision of post-disaster governance. At the central level, the NRA was found adept at using spaces such as HRRPs to justify its vision of 'owner-led reconstruction', communicate its regulatory decisions, and in the process, consolidate the agenda of bringing harmony and standardisation in aid sector. Although such spaces were framed as promoting participatory and collaborative disaster governance, the paper shows the risk of such spaces being instrumentalised by the powerholders to merely justify decisions and escape public criticisms that pose serious risk over the authority and political survival of powerholders (Boin, McConnell and Hart, 2008).

Second, while the NRA undoubtedly failed disaster-affected citizens with delayed reconstruction and empty promises of participation, the power and performance of the NRA itself has to be understood within Nepal's contested climate of political and bureaucratic reforms. The NRA came into existence 8 months after the earthquake under controversial circumstances. The first Chief Executive Officer of the NRA, under whose leadership the original ideas of owner-led reconstruction and participatory governance of disaster were coined, was replaced merely two weeks into the job owing to disagreement among major political parties. Reflective of the intense power struggle among major political parties to have control over how the post-earthquake reconstruction is to be governed, the NRA assumed a complex organisational structure, spanning actors from different government agencies, political parties and donor agencies. By the time the NRA came into full effect, the national reconstruction agenda that garnered major national and international support in the aftermath of the earthquake was already eclipsed. The overall process, in part, was also complicated by the fast-tracked promulgation of the constitution in September, 2015, four months after the earthquake, which sparked protests in the southern plains of Nepal and subsequently an economic blockade of basic goods flowing in from India. The event further pushed the reconstruction agenda to the margin. The mandate of NRA, not as an executive body, but as a coordinating and overseeing body meant it had to constantly manage its role in relation to other actors and activities associated with post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction. The findings highlight that the policy and practical interface of participation and accountability within disaster governance, therefore, is not independent of the disaster-hit country's larger political context. In the present case, the proceeding of reconstruction more generally, and

participatory governance of reconstruction, closely intertwined with Nepal's ongoing politics of state-restructuring, with the old structures of governance being dismantled, and bureaucratic and power relations in a state of flux (Nightingale *et al.*, 2018).

Of significance is also the ways in which the NRA had to inherit and engage with the key international donors that held the string to so-called "Multidoor Basket Fund" for reconstruction. Although the international aid community had pledged close to $ 4 billion for the reconstruction in the wake of the earthquake, the actual disbursement of resources remained ever-elusive. A major precondition for the disbursal of financial assistance was the execution of the Census in all earthquake-affected districts. In policy this was meant to ensure that the reconstruction is done in a standardised and scientific manner, but in reality, it focused on minimising the perceived risk of misuse in delivery of cash assistance. The condition of disbursal meant the NRA's power to expedite reconstruction activities was closely intertwined with its accountability to the donors. As a coordinating body, it was also essential that the NRA build on and adhere to pre-existing policy and practical experiments, designed to bring 'good governance' in the aid sector. In keeping up with the government's pre-disaster efforts to bring coherence and harmony in the work of NGOs, which further escalated in the wake of the disaster, "streamlining" post-disaster reconstruction became a major agenda for NRA. The NRA's participation in discussions with non-state actors, namely humanitarian NGOs along HRRPs, for instance, represented one such strategy to integrate the agenda of uniformity and standardisation in housing reconstruction.

The case of the NRA itself is highly intriguing and it requires further inquiry. Tentatively, it can be argued that the NRA became an object of a complex mix of governance aims and aspirations. The situation, on the one hand, is reminiscent of the previous history of disaster management in Nepal, in which the national level disaster preparedness and recovery practices faced a major hurdle, owing to an intense power struggle among various actors (Jones et al., 2014). On the other hand, it also exposes the deep-rooted power inequalities that characterise the global disaster governance system, where the international aid community is often at the helm of dictating the terms and conditions for post-disaster reconstruction, but are largely insulated from having to heed to the voices of the disaster-affected (Barnett, 2013).

Third, while the paper shows adeptness by which the government officials responsible for the governance of post-disaster reconstruction instrumentalised the participatory spaces to advance their narrow agenda of 'owner-led reconstruction', almost paradoxically, it also reveals how such spaces helped redefine the post-disaster state-society politics, potentially in a manner unanticipated by the government actors. At the very minimum, claimed spaces (e.g. civil-society organised local meetings), and, to a lesser extent, invited spaces (e.g. state-mandated public hearings) of participation enabled the disaster-affected communities to voice their concerns regarding both the reconstruction needs and perceived sense of neglect from

the state officials. Although the instrumental value of such spaces in altering the course of reconstruction remains open to investigation, it can be argued that such spaces helped local civil society actors and communities to build an impression of the larger functioning of the state-led reconstruction, and the wider assemblage of experts and donors that make up or reinforce the massive undertaking of providing housing assistance to close to 500,000 house-owners. In other words, disaster-induced participatory spaces have an intrinsic value, enabling disaster-affected citizens to 'see the state' and become critical of the workings and failures of the government bureaucracy at the level of service delivery (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005, p. 7; Bukenya, 2016).

One clear 'sighting' that the local communities have developed is the 'weak capacity' of the local authorities to respond to pressing local demands. Despite years of efforts in public and local governance reforms, the low level of responsiveness of local bodies in Nepal is hardly a new insight (Pandeya, 2015). Yet, findings from Sankhu show, the local meetings that focused on the topic of reconstruction have enabled the local communities to become further aware of the entrenched power inequalities that characterise Nepal's central-local bureaucratic relations. The NRA officials, in their attempt to engage with, and provide accounts of their performance, on the one hand, served to magnify the power differentials between the central and local government, and to reinforce the weak service delivery capacity of the local authorities. On the other hand, this offered the local bureaucrats a recipe to deflect the responsibility to the centre, portraying themselves having limited authority in changing the course of reconstruction.

What is important to note is such conduct of the mix of government officials did not go unnoticed among local communities. Although episodic and uncertain, the unfolding of the local spaces of participation encouraged community members to develop a specific understanding of the NRA, as becoming increasingly preoccupied in setting up systems of governance that are geared at standardising the reconstruction programme, and in the process, turning unresponsive to local demands and grievances. Local authorities, on the other hand, were seen by the local communities as politically unequipped to negotiate the terms of reconstruction that reflect the aspirations of local communities.

To conclude, although a sense of cynicism was observed among community members who considered their potential to make powerholders responsive to their voices through participation in both invited and claimed spaces increasingly remote, the paper tentatively concludes that such cynicism is not to be misunderstood as a sign of disempowerment. Even when the powerholders seek to tighten their grip on the participatory spaces, ignore or co-opt them, citizens are hardly unaware of such tendencies of the powerholders. The emergence of local spaces in the wake of the Nepal earthquake enabled the local communities to become conscious of the increasingly homogenised mode of longer-term housing reconstruction, while

also reimagine an alternative mode of post-disaster governance that gave primacy to the long-standing local needs and voices of the affected citizens (Remes, 2016). Participatory governance in general and participatory spaces, in that regard, served as 'interrogative encounters', enabling communities in distress to keep a record of the power and performance of the state actors. While disaster-induced participatory spaces may be limited in altering the more entrenched power relations in state-society relations, these are subtle forms of citizen-centric politics triggered by disasters that demand further policy and scholarly attention.

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CHAPTER 7: THESIS CONCLUSION

In recent years, the topic of governance of disasters and within it the role of accountability, has attained major policy and scholarly attention. However, critical research on this topic has mostly centred on critiquing the contemporary discourse and techniques of governance of humanitarian aid, that privilege standardisation, performance monitoring and learning from aid, primarily as per the terms and conditions of mainstream humanitarian agencies. Scant attention is paid to the politics of citizen-centric governance of disaster, notably expectations and experiences of disaster-affected citizens in shaping the agenda and practice of post-disaster governance.

Set in the fraught environment following the Nepal earthquake, in this thesis, I have sought to address this gap by investigating two interrelated overarching questions: How did citizens' efforts to influence the governance of disaster unfold in post-earthquake Nepal? What are the potentials and limitations of such efforts in influencing the governance of disaster, in post-earthquake Nepal? Drawing on three distinct strands of literature on governance, for the purposes of this thesis, the politics of citizen-centric post-disaster governance is conceptualised as an interaction between citizen-centric monitoring, enforcement of voice and conditions for voice.

Through three distinct empirical papers, the thesis has sought to advance the understanding of the politics of citizen-centric governance of disaster, while also supplement small yet growing literature on politics of disasters more generally, bringing to the focus the political aims and experiences of local communities and civil society, who draw on the notions of rights and entitlements, broadly aimed at resisting and reversing the course of disaster recovery that is removed from the voices of disaster-affected communities (Jalali, 2002; Schuller and Morales, 2012; Remes, 2016; Curato, 2018).

This concluding chapter consists of five sections. First, in line with the two overarching research questions for this thesis, I synthesise the major findings from the three empirical papers to address a) nature and potentials of citizens' efforts in influencing post-disaster governance and; b) their limitations. Second, I discuss the broad theoretical and policy/practical implications of the thesis. Third, the methodological implications of the thesis follow, which supplements Chapter 3. Fourth, key limitations of the thesis are discussed. Finally, the fifth section highlights some of the potential areas of future research.

Nature and potential of citizens' efforts in post-disaster governance

While each of the preceding empirical chapters contain distinct empirical aims, the thesis has collectively examined the role and involvement of citizens in shaping the governance of disaster in post-earthquake Nepal. In other words, the thesis has sought to uncover various

forms of political action undertaken by citizens in making disaster response accountable and responsive to those confronting the 2015 Nepal earthquake.

Taken together, the thesis argues that citizen involvement in disaster is not limited to alleviate the immediate human sufferings, but also assumes multiple forms to improve the governance of disaster, spanning public interrogation and protests (Paper 1), civil society-driven, social accountability activism (Paper 2), and localised spaces of participatory politics (Paper 3). Despite the adverse conditions triggered by the Nepal earthquake, the thesis underscores the potential of such myriad forms of citizens' efforts in drawing attention of the aid responders to the potential neglect and abuse of aid resources (Paper 1), expanding the scope of dialogue and interaction at the local level marred by misunderstanding and mistrust (Paper 2), while enabling disaster-affected communities to monitor and keep record of the functioning of the state (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005) and the bureaucratic indifference it may engender under the guise of 'owner-led reconstruction' (Paper 3). The thesis argues that public criticisms in response to a major disaster is not to be dismissed as mere emotional outbursts emanating from citizens confronting deprivation and hardships. It represents a form of political action that has the potential to redefine the long-standing yet unfinished global agenda of participatory and accountable humanitarian action.

In making these arguments, I have sought to shift the notion and practice of 'accountable humanitarian action' from the grip of the international humanitarian sector that has for a long time occupied a central role in defining the terms and techniques of humanitarian governance. Instead, the thesis has revealed the politics of citizen-centric governance of disaster, locating it within the experiences of local actors, and their struggle for making post-disaster response participatory and accountable. While the "calls for accountability" in the immediate aftermath of the Nepal earthquake seemed rather spontaneous, emanating from not just those affected by the earthquake but wider publics (Paper 1), it also took more organised forms, documented in the efforts of small yet innovative group of civil society actors who used a mix of strategies to translate citizens' voice to concrete response from local powerholders (Paper 2). These findings highlight the plurality and vitality of the politics that underpin such efforts, expanding the possibility for a citizen-centric governance of disaster that seeks to reverse the often technocratic, expert-driven and de-politicised versions of disaster governance propagated by the international aid community (Barnett, 2013).

Although the empirical chapters are mostly concerned with building a 'thick description' of the concrete manifestation of accountability-in-practice in post-disaster context, they also highlight major conditions under which they took root. Previous scholarship has shown that within a democratic order, an active or imminent disaster often brings powerholders under sharp public scrutiny (Drèze and Sen, 1989; Boin, McConnell and Hart,

2008). Others have argued that disasters be viewed not just as an unfortunate natural event but as a window of opportunity, having the potential to enhance 'provocative social processes at multiple social levels', often difficult to forge during normal times (Pelling and Dill, 2006, p. 2). In a recent study, Apodaca (2017) has argued that post-disaster situation may lead to violation of human rights from state actors, which, in turn, compels citizens to resort to political mobilisation and protest to resist government actions. The thesis concludes that the democratic environment within Nepal's post-earthquake context, represented an opportunity for 'thickening of publics' (borrowing from Fox, 1996)[18], primarily geared at making powerholders alert of the potential violation of rights of disaster-affected, and abuse of resources.

One recurring theme around which such 'thickening of publics' seems to have occurred, is the public concerns over corruption in mobilisation and delivery of humanitarian aid. Not only did such concerns manifest in the aftermath of the earthquake that saw influx of aid actors and resources (Introductory Chapter and Paper 1), they also motivated the origin of a rights-based accountability activism, with civil society actors framing the unchecked flow of aid and aid actors as a potential source of corruption and discrimination (Paper 2). The 'thickening of publics' around the topic of corruption, and by extension abuse of authority may, to a large extent, be specific to the Nepali context, given the long-standing problems of public sector governance (Panday, 1999; Sharma, 2012). But such concerns are by no means limited to Nepal. Disaster scholars have noted that corruption in its various manifestations, spanning financial irregularities, exploitation of disaster by corporate interests, bureaucratic mishandling of aid, have historically plagued various disaster situations (Angotti, 1977; Cuny, 1983; Alexander, 2017). Cuny (1983) has long raised caution against 'second disaster', involving misuse and misallocation of aid resources that further undermine disaster-affected communities' ability to cope with the negative consequences of disaster (p.3). While democratic environment is known to enable disaster-affected citizens to scrutinize the performance of powerholders, the thesis concludes that the concerns over misallocation and corruption of resources are becoming a rallying point around which both sporadic and organised forms of accountability politics are pursued.

Such politics, in turn, have important implications for the governance of humanitarian action and humanitarianism more generally. The thesis argues that public interrogation is an important form of political action in disaster context, keeping early responders to the disaster on their toes, potentially minimising the abuse of power and resources (Paper 1). On the other hand, growing concerns over corruption and abuse of power imply that claiming a moral

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[18] Fox uses the term 'thickening' in the context of civil society organising in rural Mexico, the nature and potential of which varies from the ways civil society actors are able to build political support across local and national scales.

imperative of humanitarianism is by no means a sufficient justification to operate in disaster context. Nor does this mean that the mainstream humanitarian actors' claim of right to serve the distant victims (Dufour *et al.*, 2004), or deploy newer techniques of planning and management that tend to instrumentalise citizens as 'beneficiaries of aid' merely to sustain aid interventions (Krause, 2014), are going unchallenged in post-disaster context. Rather, the thesis has highlighted that the emergence of newer forms of citizen-centric post-disaster monitoring represents a shifting terrain of humanitarianism in which early responders are under increased pressure to become answerable to local communities (Paper 1). Whether in their efforts to promote information as aid entitlement (Paper 2) or demand answers from state actors regarding longer-term reconstruction (Paper 3), localised efforts at accountability stand to challenge the ways contemporary humanitarian action is structured and pursued. Such efforts also mean that a narrow interpretation of humanitarian disaster as an epicentre of human suffering fails to do justice to the varied forms of political action that disasters tend to engender. To follow Boltanski (1999) and Chouliaraki (2006) the thesis contends that as disasters become increasingly visible to the global audience, it also opens up the possibility for emergence of newer forms of citizen-centric politics of governance that transcends the boundary of charitable action, but are aimed at raising wider public awareness about the explicit and implicit sources of injustice that tend to take root under the very guise of humanitarian intervention.

Limitations of citizen involvement in post-disaster governance

Notwithstanding such potential, the thesis falls short of making any claims about the instrumental value of such politics in bringing material changes in the lives of the disaster affected. This is where *conditions* that facilitate or impede citizens' efforts to monitor the performance of powerholders and enforce voice, become an important part of the equation, a major subject of investigation of this thesis.

To build on the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2, the thesis argues that the potential of citizens' efforts to shape the governance of disasters must be understood within the national and international political and bureaucratic structures under which powerholders engage with and respond to such efforts. Such structures, in turn, can be elaborated under two broad themes: *distractive situations* and *deflective tendencies*. Distractive situations here entail broader aims and activities towards the bureaucratic governance of disaster, which may be removed from and even contradict with citizens' efforts at monitoring the performance of powerholders, exercising and enforcing voice for improved post-disaster response and reconstruction. Deflective tendencies, on the other hand, signal adeptness by which powerholders deploy excuses and justifications, to dismiss or escape citizens' voice (Olson,

2000). Such distractive situations and deflective tendencies may reinforce one another, enabling powerholders to build their defence mechanisms against citizens' voice.

As the thesis shows, distractive situations became palpable in the wake of the Nepal earthquake as the GoN became quick to prioritise the agenda of governance of disaster response under the rationalities of uniformity and standardisation of emergency response (Paper 1), a major national and international agenda of aid reforms. It gained further traction as the longer-term reconstruction agenda took hold under the auspices of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), with the establishment of systems and standards of reconstruction taking precedence over meaningful engagement with local communities (Paper 3). A key distraction was adherence to the terms set by the donor community, notably the execution of the Census for eligibility determination, and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to ensure the promised cash assistance was not misused by the eligible households (Paper 3). The process not only contradicted the state's original commitment to participatory and accountable disaster response, but also contributed to delayed reconstruction.

Deflective tendencies, on the other hand, may vary across individual powerholders but they may be further reinforced by distractive situations. The complex post-disaster governance system, involving multiple state and non-state actors, resulted in the ambiguous lines of accountability between and across central and local level bureaucratic actors. This, together with the lack of elected representatives, posed specific challenge for local level civil society actors to monitor the flow of aid, engage with and demand response from "the right authority" (Paper 2), while also prompted local officials with a suitable alternative to shift responsibility to the central authority in charge of the reconstruction, the NRA (Paper 3).

A point that merits attention is that both distractive situations and deflective tendencies have roots that transcend local and national boundaries. In Rubenstein's terms, they operate within the unequal nature of accountability relations that operate at various levels of global aid governance (Rubenstein, 2007). Consider these findings. First, despite growing calls for localisation and participation in disaster response, frontline disaster responders faced increased pressures to comply with both globally propagated practices of humanitarian accountability, and regulatory standards of the national government (Paper 1). Second, the donors' preoccupation and pressures to monitor and report feedback distracted the civil society actors from their original goal of bottom-up, "people-powered accountability" (Paper 2). Third, the dependency on major donor agencies for resources compelled the state actors to focus on the task of fulfilling the conditions of aid disbursal for longer-term reconstruction, at the cost of meaningful engagement with the disaster affected-communities (Paper 3). Fourth, the growing centralisation of the reconstruction under the auspices of the NRA, interfered with local governments capacity to engage with citizen voice (Paper 3).

While the unequal accountability relations operated in post-earthquake Nepal under different rationalities, the thesis particularly draws attention to the international aid community's preoccupation to use aid as an instrument of monitoring and regulation. This is reflective of a long-standing problem within the international aid system, which scholars have argued to have interfered with the state actors' ability to respond to the priorities facing disaster-affected citizens (De Waal, 1997). Moreover, despite having a key role in Nepal's disaster reconstruction, the donor community, mostly bi-lateral donors, remained largely insulated from the scrutiny of disaster-affected citizens. This represents a major weakness in the current direction of performance-based governance in the aid sector, which emphasises development of standards and codes of conduct to improve the conduct and performance of local aid workers, but accountability understood as disaster-affected citizens' 'right to participate in and determine their lives' post-disaster, through control over the agenda and actions of international aid community (Cuny, 1983, p.128), remains ever-elusive.

In sum, the thesis argues that the governance of disasters is not merely a bureaucratic endeavour but constitutes a political action, involving concrete efforts undertaken by civil society and citizens to engage with, and demand response from powerholders. However, the instrumental value of such citizen-centric governance of disaster, particularly in translating voice of disaster affected communities into response from powerholders remains questionable. In making this claim, the thesis contributes to the enduring debates regarding the value of voice and social accountability in spurring ordinary citizens' experience of democratic governance and development (Hirshman, 1970; Drèze and Sen, 1989; Goetz and Jenkins, 2005; Fox, 2015), but focused on hitherto underexamined context of disaster response and recovery. The thesis concludes that the understanding the potential of citizen-centric governance of disaster requires giving adequate attention to what Gaventa (2004) terms 'both sides of the equation' (p.27), spanning citizen involvement geared at monitoring and influencing the performance of powerholders, and the conditions under which powerholders respond to or escape voice of disaster-affected.

Theoretical and policy/practical implications

Implications for theory

The study's major theoretical contribution lies in exploring the social change potential that underpins citizens' role and involvement in influence the governance of disasters. Broadly, the research has sought to advance the theoretical interplay between disaster and democratic governance, mostly drawing on Amartya Sen's seminal works on the interplay of democracy and famine prevention, and capability-based development, which give primacy to the public voice and participation as safeguards against disaster and deprivation. The theoretical interplay of democracy and disaster has been fruitfully employed in the study of slow-onset

disasters, namely famine and hunger (Drèze and Sen, 1989; De Waal, 1997; Keen, 2008; Rubin, 2011) but its application in other forms of disasters has been limited. This study has sought to apply these theoretical insights into a rapid onset disaster, and to push the debates concerning how voice and accountability shape and, in turn, are shaped by such disasters. The study has also encouraged more theoretical discussions on the twin and often contradictory assumptions between democratic and bureaucratic governance, both at the level of state and international humanitarian sector. Two major areas of theoretical interest can be gleaned from the thesis.

First, in their assertion of democracy as a safeguard against famine, Dreze and Sen (1989) had introduced the idea of 'complacent irresponsibility' (p.276), casting a critical focus on state indifference that may take hold in the absence of democratic politics. Others have argued that it is not merely the presence or absence of democratic institutions (e.g. media, opposition party) but how the absence of functioning democracy (e.g. elections), entrenched system of local political patronage, chronic underperformance and corruption within government bureaucracy, among other factors, prevent immediate response to disasters (De Waal, 1997; Keen, 2008; Rubin, 2011).

The 2015 earthquake struck Nepal at the time when the country was going through a major political transition, as discussed in Chapter 2. At the national level, Nepal had a democratically elected government, but the local governments suffered from an absence of elected representatives, which previous scholarship has noted as a major impediment in both delivery of development services and holding local public officials to account (Tamang and Malena, 2011; Cima, 2013). The democratic vacuum at the local level meant that the response and recovery was primarily managed by local bureaucrats. The thesis shows that not only this fuelled the problem of representation at the local level (Paper 3), it also obstructed civil society actors' efforts to make "the right authority" responsive to citizen voice (Paper 2). More specifically, democratic vacuum at the local level meant lack of 'peer-to-peer accountability' from local representatives to local bureaucrats in post-disaster context (Svedin, 2012, p.168)

The above insights, on the one hand, suggest a closer understanding of the interplay between pre-and post-disaster governance. In other words, how the pre-disaster governance aspirations of the state impinge upon the post-disaster governance agenda and practice requires further scholarly attention. On the other hand, it calls for a shift in the attention from macro-level democratic and governance institutions to the local level politics of governance within a specific disaster context. In particular, the role of local democratic institutions and elected representatives and their influence over how the disaster is to be governed demands further scholarly attention.

Second, the thesis calls for further theoretical discussions regarding the convergence and conflict between democratic and bureaucratic governance of disaster, mostly at the level

of international humanitarian sector. While the rise of the contemporary performance-based humanitarian governance in the humanitarian sector is located to the public criticisms that followed after the Rwandan debacle (Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Dufour *et al.*, 2004), it is also linked to the ideals of the neoliberal mode of development and the New Public Management agenda that took root in the 1990s (Barnett, 2005). Notwithstanding these two divergent assumptions, there is a growing consensus among critical humanitarian scholars that pursuit of governance within humanitarian sector is taking professionalised and bureaucratic forms, experimenting with newer tools and technologies that are not only removed from but systematically de-politicise demands and voice of disaster-affected communities (Barnett, 2013; Madianou *et al.*, 2016). The findings from this thesis are consistent with these debates. It shows that globally-induced values and technologies of humanitarian governance, namely aid harmonisation (Paper 1), technology-enabled feedback mechanisms (Paper 2), housing Census (Paper 3), instead of attending to the voice of disaster-affected citizens have the tendency to serve as 'voice denying rationalities' (Couldry, 2010), further limiting the potential of citizens to pursue inclusive and accountable governance of post-disaster response and recovery.

In sum, the adoption of language of rights, participation, local ownership within contemporary humanitarian accountability discourse, in part, constitutes the responsibility assumed by international humanitarian sector to democratise the aid sector. This implies being transparent and reflective about misplaced humanitarianism, and anything associated with it, including the failures or unintended consequences arising from the introduction of newer approaches to make humanitarian action accountable. The research calls for more theoretical debates about the responsibility and responsiveness of international humanitarian sector, and how they tend to undermine or uphold the potential of citizen-centric governance of disasters.

Implications for policy and practice
The thesis is not designed to inform specific policy or practice of accountability in disaster context. However, the following two broad lessons can be drawn from the thesis that have policy and practical implications.

Upholding citizens' right to know
Despite national and international commitment to strengthen feedback and communication measures in the face of humanitarian crisis (CHS Alliance, Group URD and the Sphere Project, 2014)[19], local communities are often deprived of or struggle for basic information regarding humanitarian aid. As the thesis has shown, lack of timely and adequate information

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[19] One of the major 'commitments' under the Core Humanitarian Standards is 'communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.'

not only constrained citizens' ability to access aid entitlements (Paper 2), but also led to strained state-society relations (Paper 3).

Consistent with the findings from Paper 2, the thesis argues that both state and non-state responders to humanitarian crisis need to do more to ensure *information is treated as aid entitlement*, not independent of it. Information should be proactively supplied to disaster affected communities not only in the aftermath of the disaster but as a regular activity of longer-term recovery and reconstruction. Disaster-affected citizens have the right to know the status of reconstruction, and if it is stalled, the reason for the same. The same applies to the international humanitarian sector. Dissemination of information means not just providing accounts of performance or disseminating results, but it should also entail, for instance, being reflective and transparent about why certain communities are not included in disaster recovery, and the rationale for such exclusion (Slim, 2015, p. 104). This was overlooked in Nepal's longer-term reconstruction efforts, which produced further anxiety among local communities (Paper 3). Access to information is central to alleviate immediate uncertainty and anxiety experienced by disaster-affected communities, while also promote the instrumental value to monitor disaster response and enforce voice.

Role of local accountability activism

The thesis has underscored the potential of local civil society actors in deepening the prospect for an accountable and participatory governance of post-disaster response and reconstruction. By serving as 'proxy accountability actors' (Twigg, 1999), local NGO actors in post-earthquake Nepal were able to establish their role as a constructive intermediary between state and citizens (Paper 2), while also offering citizens the opportunity to keep account of the functioning of the state-centric disaster reconstruction (Paper 3).

Yet, the thesis also raises caution that localised, and constructive approach to accountability activism may be self-limiting. Despite efforts by civil society actors in expanding the scope of local dialogue and vigilance (Paper 2 and Paper 3), their transformative potential was obstructed due to bureaucratic indifference. This, in part, became evident in the struggle of civil society actors to engage with the "the right authority" (Paper 2), an expression that epitomises the often-elusive nature of power in disaster context. In addition, civil society actors' efforts at participating in or organising spaces of participation in disaster context were neglected and instrumentalised by powerholders (Paper 3). Such neglect represents a latest manifestation of an enduring crisis of governance within Nepal's bureaucracy, as discussed in Chapter 2, and shows little attempt by the state actors to reshape itself to fit the voices of disaster-affected populations.

Such form of politics means expanding both the scale and repertoire of accountability to include a range of collaborative and confrontational strategies, which can engage with powerholders across both policy and practical realms of disaster response. More specifically, tackling such structural problem may mean civil society actors to take a more confrontative stance, in making powerholders responsive to the voice of the disaster-affected, and in so doing, overcome the source of 'unfreedom', including chronic neglect of public services (Sen, 1999, p.3).

Methodological implications

The thesis, to my knowledge, is the first in-depth empirical investigation into the politics of post-disaster governance and accountability from the perspective of disaster-affected citizens. As a native of Nepal, the research project developed as part of my effort to attend to the unprecedented human suffering triggered by the earthquake. As discussed in the Introductory Chapter, such motivation grew into a mix of loosely designed charitable action, as well as a political action to garner government's attention towards the perceived inadequacy in the emergency response. With this personal experience culminating into a full-fledged research project, I also drew on my own positionality and reflexivity as a pragmatist qualitative researcher, improvising my theoretical and empirical pursuit based on the emerging insights and experiences from the evolving empirical context (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007).

Disaster researchers have called for a 'urgent' execution of research in disaster context, given the uncertain and unpredictable landscape of disaster response and recovery (Slater, 2013). Yet, the unpredictability that characterises disaster situation itself can prove overwhelming, forcing disaster researchers to conduct fieldwork much later after the actual event of disaster. The cost of delayed fieldwork, however, is to lose insights into the unique socio-political responses, power struggle and politics that emanate in the wake of the disaster. The fact that this research was conducted within the first year of the Nepal earthquake, while Nepal was also going through a major political transition, allowed a deeper analysis of both potentials and limitations of politics of accountability in Nepal's post-earthquake response and recovery.

As the agenda and practice of governance of disaster take complex forms, field-based research on the practical unfolding of complex network of actors and activities in post-disaster context has also seen a steady growth (Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006; Madianou *et al.*, 2016; Curato, 2018). Methodologically, the thesis aligns with these newer forms of disaster research and disaster ethnography, which emphasizes documenting the aims and experiences of a mix of humanitarian responders, who are not only involved in the delivery of material aid but redefining the values and practices of humanitarianism. The research has also sought to draw from and contribute to the seemingly parallel movements in the areas of ethnography of

disaster and ethnography of development. The use of 'interface analysis' in Paper 3, for example, is an effort to draw on the advancements in ethnography of development and aid, to help uncover the areas of convergence and disjuncture between the idealised world of disaster governance, and the real world of implementation (Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Andersson, 2014). Similarly, by applying 'focused ethnographic case study' in Paper 2, I have also sought to reveal the practice of a specific, locally-driven accountability activism and how it is intertwined with and undermined by power relations that permeate the governance of post-disaster response. The thesis hopes to stir further interest in ethnography of disaster, particularly focused on investigating newer practices of responding to disasters.

Limitations of the study

The following are three main limitations of the thesis:

First, instead of local communities, the thesis primarily draws on the views and experiences of a mix of responders (civil society actors, policymakers, public officials), who became part of the governance of the Nepal earthquake response. In so doing, the thesis has generally cast a positive spotlight on the localised civil society-based struggles at gathering and elevating the voice of local communities, and by extension, deepening the prospect for an accountable and participatory disaster governance. However, the thesis acknowledges that such efforts are not immune to internal deficiencies, and the effort to elevate varied voices of the disaster-affected, doesn't necessarily mean genuine representation of such voices[20]. In other words, it is not the intention of this thesis to conflate the two distinct issues of accountability and representation. Whether or to what extent local actors were able to represent the voice of local communities is a question that begs further investigation, which I acknowledge as a key limitation of this thesis.

Second, although the conduct of fieldwork within the first year of the earthquake helped capture key dynamics of the disaster response, the research would have benefited from a longer field work. Fieldwork for Paper 1 faced practical limitations in recruiting interviewees. While longer-term field work was planned for Paper 2, it was cut short, as the concerned campaign was suspended owing to funding constraints, while I also managed to collect enough data to answer the two main questions. Field work for Paper 3 mostly relied on the observation of the unfolding of varied forms of locally-driven participatory spaces. The organisation of such spaces was intermittent and unpredictable, making the longer-term fieldwork further difficult to sustain. Shorter field work meant having to rely on a smaller sample of interviewees (Paper 1). It also meant missing out on observing some of the key

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[20] Although focused on international humanitarian agencies, Stein (2008) provides an important distinction between accountability and representation. For her, accountability, commonly understood as being effective in delivery of aid, doesn't necessarily mean voices of victims are truly represented, as the latter may be at odds with what humanitarian agencies' claim of representing.

activities that did not coincide with the fieldwork (e.g. community meetings in Paper 2). The thesis contends that longer term engagement would have also enabled a better analysis of the rationales, process of negotiations in organising local participatory spaces (Paper 3), as opposed to only observing the unfolding of these spaces and making a narrow interpretation of the state-societal interaction within such spaces. As a result, the assessment of the potential and limitations of both civil society-based social accountability and participatory spaces is also needs to be viewed with caution, with a longer-term engagement potentially producing a different interpretation that this thesis lacks.

Third, the thesis was set in the contested environment of Nepal's post-earthquake recovery and ongoing political reforms. While not a limitation per se, the unique context of Nepal demands that the findings from the thesis be viewed in its own right. The thesis would caution against wider generalisation of the findings. However, the lessons from this thesis are well-suited to understand the political contention following a disaster in other comparable settings.

Future research directions

The study has uncovered several potential areas of research. Of which, the following four are important:

First, for the purpose of this thesis, I have defined the term enforcement of voice in a narrow sense, to imply changes in the material conditions of the disaster-affected communities owing to their ability to monitor the performance of powerholders and enforce voice. But, under liberal democratic order, elections remain a key mechanism through which citizens may enforce voice or even impose sanctions upon underperforming powerholders. Two years after the earthquake, and after a gap of almost two decades, Nepal held elections to the local bodies in which disaster reconstruction featured as a main electoral agenda. Future research can explore if and how the outcomes of the elections were affected by citizens' experiences of or perceptions regarding local powerholders' response to the earthquake. Such research can offer invaluable insights into the impacts on how local democratic outcomes are shaped by people's experiences and perceptions of post-disaster response and how local democracy, in turn, can influence preparedness for and mitigation of disasters.

Second, beyond enforcement through formal democratic mechanisms (e.g. elections), local communities may also seek to enforce material and moral demands for improved public sector governance through everyday politics. Recent scholarship has noted that when formal mechanisms of accountability are either non-existent or weak, citizens often resort to informal means of moral enforcement upon local service providers (Tsai, 2007). Drawing on Garfinkel's ethnomethodological study (1967), Hilhorst (2003) has drawn attention to 'everyday accountability' that local actors can engage in, imparting accounts of their conduct in the forms of stories and narratives, as opposed to commonly understood bureaucratic forms

of accountability (p.129). The local meetings that were observed as part of the thesis (Paper 3), provided some clues into the local communities' efforts to enforce moral standards upon local authorities, who, in turn, offered varied accounts of their performance (or lack thereof). As part of my field work for Paper 2, I have collected over 100 reports from the community monitors who documented proceedings of locally-held, face-to-face meetings between local powerholders and communities. These data sources were not used for the purpose of the thesis. Future research shall attend to these documentary evidence, employing 'content analysis', to build further insights into the nature of voice and response that permeate such local interactions.

Third, in line with the theoretical contribution of this research, more empirical research is necessary to understand whether and how disasters help deepen or dampen democratic values and practices. While the thesis has noted innovative efforts by local communities and citizens to deepen the prospect of inclusive and democratic governance of disasters, with the increment in the frequency and intensity of disasters, the potential of powerholders to use active or imminent disaster as an opportunity to exercise newer rationalities and practices to curtain fundamental democratic rights of citizens cannot be discounted. The thesis calls for further scholarly attention to the mechanisms and conditions under which democratic spaces are created or curtailed in the wake of disasters.

Fourth, Nepal's case also draws attention to the changing nature of state-society relations in a country emerging from what Hyndman (2014) terms 'dual disasters', a society with experience of a protracted political conflict followed by major a disaster or vice-versa, Emerging literature from Nepal has shown that the process of both peacebuilding and earthquake reconstruction followed a similar fate of state neglect, contributing to protracted political uncertainty (Harrowell and Özerdem, 2018). Paper 3 shows that the agenda of accountability-related reforms in the development sector, which gained traction after the end of Maoist conflict in 2006, was also pursued after the Earthquake, in part, leading to delayed reconstruction. Future research could compare Nepal with another country going through the experience of dual disasters and how the struggle for governance reforms tend to shape or interfere with the process of longer-term reconstruction.

To conclude, the thesis has investigated the politics of post-disaster governance in the wake of the 2015 Nepal earthquake from the perspective of disaster-affected citizens. It has offered concrete evidence on the post-governance expectations of the disaster-affected citizens, together with innovative actions undertaken by citizens and civil society actors to monitor and engage with powerholders, and their potential to shape the agenda and practice of post-disaster governance. The thesis underscores the hopes and possibilities that underpin such efforts in giving disaster-affected citizens a stronger voice and authority in making disaster response and recovery accountable and participatory. Although the thesis shows that

the instrumental value of such efforts in bringing concrete reforms in disaster context often faces the neglect and obstruction from powerholders, they have an intrinsic value, making disaster-affected citizens interrogative regarding their rights and entitlements in relation to the State and the international aid sector. The claim for 'concrete evidence', however, does not imply this research is full and final. Like any other research that draws on pragmatist tradition, this thesis is provisional and partial, and future research is necessary on the topic of political dimensions of post-disaster governance, and the theoretical interplay of democratic governance and disasters more generally.

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METHODOLOGICAL ANNEX

PAPER 1: Beyond performance and protocols: Early responders' experiences of accountability demands in the emergency response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake

List of interviews

Interview date	Interviewee's pseudonym	Interviewee's affiliation
18/08/2015	Irfaan	Civil Society/Disaster management
23/08/2015	Khem	Staff, bi-lateral aid agency
24/08/2015	Mohan	Staff, bi-lateral aid agency
26/08/2015	Brajesh	Civil society/rights activist
28/08/2015	Ananta	Youth activist/Emergency Volunteer
31/08/2015	Bikram	Youth Activist/Emergency Volunteer
01/09/2015	Suraj	Staff, INGO
01/09/2015	Ravi	Staff, INGO
02/09/2015	Kopila	Staff, INGO
06/09/2015	Rajan	Human Rights/Civil Society
06/09/2015	Sama	Staff, INGO
06/09/2015	Rahim	Staff, GoN
07/09/2015	Ashish	Staff, INGO
09/09/2015	Keshav	Staff, GoN
10/09/2015	Pramod	Youth activist/Emergency Volunteer

Interview guide

Questions
• Thank you for participating in the interview; • (Re) introduce self and project; • If not supplied beforehand via email, provide introduction sheet about the research project; • Give confidentiality assurance and take informed consent; • Ask permission to be recorded.
• Can you tell me about your position, your job? What is your role in…. at….. ? How long have you been working in this role?
• Can you describe what happened that day of April 25 (when the earthquake struck)? • How did you come to know about what the situation was like? What were the main problems that you saw, or came to know about?
• How did you respond to the immediate situation in your capacity as…..? • How did you see your role evolving?
• What were the key priorities of the government (or your organisation/ unit) in the immediate aftermath? • What were the key policies/programmes that were brought into effect? • What agencies/structures and resources were put into place to tackle the problem? • Were there pre-existing policy directions, guidelines that you were expected to work under? What are they? • Were there any international guidelines, protocols that you were working under or expected to follow? Can you provide some examples of what those guidelines were?
• Did you face any obstacles in turning this policy into practice? Can you provide some examples of what kinds of challenges you faced?
• There were some opposition towards the government's handling of the situation e.g. One Window Policy? • Did you experience/face any protests, opposition? Can you provide examples.

•	What is the current status of response? What are the key priorities? Can you give some examples of what it is focusing on?
•	What do you think about the meaning and importance of accountability in disaster context?
•	Anything you would like to add?
•	Any questions?
•	Ask if there are any relevant public documents/materials that could be useful for my research
•	Reassure about confidentiality/anonymity as necessary
•	Rethank.

Sample coding frame for thematic analysis

Codes	Descriptions
Commitment to humanitarian cause	Interviewee's aspirations, impulsive or thoughtful, to make oneself available to the service of those affected by crisis.
Influence of international standards and experiences	References to both formal and informal norms and experiences that the aid workers/respondents see themselves following or drawing from in their works during emergency period.
Adherence to government norms, policy regulations	Any references to government policies, acts, regulations that pre-existed, and were activated during the crisis.
Adherence to organisational procedures and standards	Any reference of systems, procedures, standards that needed to be followed in crisis response.
Regulation of aid workers/aid resources	Examples of measures used by the state agencies to monitor and supervise the inflow and performance of aid workers, both international and domestic.
Management of risk/liability	References that signal some kind of anxiety or uncertainty facing the government about the ways aid operations were carried out that can have future implications, and particularly put government in a position of further criticisms and blame. Any measures taken that seem suggestive of trying to address such anxiety are coded herein.
Curbing propensity for abuse	Here, references of the possibility of financial misuse, corruption, hoarding and manipulation of aid items are coded. Also strategies/regulatory measures introduced by the government in the effort to curb such activities are put here.
Regulation of service provisions	Examples of concerns regarding unfair distribution of aid, duplication of relief items, and the measures taken to address such concerns.
Apathy from the government	These include any references that signal disapproval about government's lack of interest to engage with citizens, efforts to keep a distance between government officials and citizens, avoidance of public communication etc.
Business as usual	Here, any references that suggest criticisms confronting government (and also non-governmental actors) about reproducing the regular way of doing things, not learning from the past disasters, not acting creatively given the unusual circumstances etc.
Exclusion from decision-making	Here, any forms of resentment about or feeling of being excluded from the policy-deliberation/decision making process are captured.

Protest against relief distribution	Any references that show more explicit expressions of dissatisfaction, disapproval and resentment from the public/affected populations over relief distribution are captured here.

PAPER 2: Doing accountability in humanitarian crisis: A case of civil society-driven social accountability in post-earthquake Nepal

List of interviews

Interview date	Interview Code	Interviewee's affiliation
10/02/2016	INT_AO	MCHD
15/02/2016	INT_UH	MCHD
17/02/2016	INT_IS	MCHD
22/02/2016	INT_MA	MCHD affiliate
23/02/2016	INT_AH	MCHD
25/02/2016	INT_ND	MCHD affiliate/civil society
28/02/2016	INT_RP	MCHD affiliate/media
03/03/2016	INT_RU	MCHD
13/03/2016	INT_RC	MCHD affiliate/civil society
14/03/2016	INT_UI	MCHD
18/03/2016	INT_OA	Government
20/03/2016	INT_AP	Government
28/03/2016	INT_UP	Government
21/04/2016	INT_LR	MCHD affiliate
02/05/2016	INT_IF	MCHD affiliate
22/05/2016	INT_AD	MCHD

Interview topic guide (MCHD)

	Questions
Introduction	• Thank for participating in the interview • If not supplied beforehand via email, provide introduction sheet about the research project/purpose of the interview • Explain the format of the interview, duration of interview • Ask, if interviewee has any question before starting • Give confidentiality assurance and take informed consent • Ask permission to be recorded.
Context	• Can you tell me about your role/position as…? What is your role in…. at….. ? What are the activities you undertake? How long have you been working in this role? • How did you get involved in the campaign? • How has it changed after the earthquake? • 'Inviting descriptions' with probes such as: o Is the issue of accountability important to you? Why is that?
Motivation	• What do you (and other people you know of) think about MCHD campaign? • What is the major motivation behind this campaign? • From general to specific probing (tailored to specific interviewee): o What do you think of the beneficiary feedback activity?

	o What do you think of the community meetings? o What do you think it is trying to achieve? o What do you think people like about the campaign? What do you think people don't like about…?
Main role/practice	• What are the ways through which communities receive recovery-related service info (in-person, website, sms)? • What do community people think of the info being released? (accuracy, completeness, trustworthiness, utility); are they happy with the information they get? • What are the ways in which community people are using the info from the govt.? (demanding improved services, accessing entitlements/services, monitoring the delivery of services, self-awareness about govt. programmes etc) • In what ways MCHD is using the govt. info to develop or reform its (monitoring/advocacy/campaign) activities? Please give examples. • What are the ways info/feedback ('voice') from the citizens are being transmitted to service providers? • What is being done with that info (by service providers)? Are you aware of any changes being made to the recovery services? Give examples. • What other strategies, if any, have citizens used to seek info related to services etc? Please provide examples. • Other strategies used by citizens to demand improved actions ('teeth')? Please provide examples.
Achievements/challenges	• How do you think the campaign is going so far? • What has gone well (any successes to report) • What has not gone so well (any failures) • Why do you think it has turned out like that • Did you face any obstacles in implementing (accessing or using) the campaign? Can you provide some examples of the kinds of challenges you faced? • Probing question (e.g.): what does the govt. officials, say, CDOs, think of the campaign? • What did you do to overcome such challenges (if any)? • Are there any particular factors that have helped the campaign? • Optional questions for more in-depth and repeat interviews with MCHD staff: o What do you think has worked better? And what didn't work? Give examples. (to elicit understanding on what the interviewees consider as example of "success" or "partial success" or "failure") • What would you do differently next time?
Closure	• Anything you would like to add? • Any questions? • Ask if there are any relevant public documents/materials that could be useful for my research • Reassure about confidentiality/anonymity and next steps, as necessary • Rethank

Interview topic guide (MCHD affiliates/government)

	Questions
Introduction	• Thank for participating in the interview • If not supplied beforehand via email, provide introduction sheet about the research project/purpose of the interview • Explain the format of the interview, duration of interview • Ask, if interviewee has any question before starting • Give confidentiality assurance and take informed consent • Ask permission to be recorded. Turn the audio recorder on.
Context	• Can you tell me about your role/position as…? What is your role in…. at….. ? What are the activities you undertake? How long have you been working in this role? • 'Inviting descriptions' with probes such as: o Is the issue of accountability important to you? Why is that?

Knowledge of/experience with MCHD	• What do you think about MCHD campaign?
	• Probing question (e.g.): what does the govt. officials, say, CDOs, think of the campaign?
	• From general to specific probing (tailored to specific interviewee):
	   o What do you think of the beneficiary feedback activity?
	   o What do you think it is trying to achieve?
	   o What do you think people like about the campaign? What do you think people don't like about…?

Information/general accountability status	• Tailored to specific interviewee:
	   o What forms of info. are being released from the govt.? What is not being released? How regularly are the info. being released? Please give examples.
	   o What do community people think of the info being released?
	   o What are the ways info/feedback ('voice') from the citizens are being transmitted to service providers?
	   o What is being done with that info (by service providers)? Are you aware of any changes being made to the recovery services? Give examples.
	   o What other strategies, if any, have citizens used to seek info related to services etc? Please provide examples.
	   o Other strategies used by citizens to demand improved actions ('teeth')? Please provide examples.

Achievements/challenges	• How do you think the campaign is going so far? • What kinds of challenges do you see in implementing these kinds of campaign in post-disaster context?
Closure	• Anything you would like to add? • Ask if there are any relevant public documents/materials that could be useful for my research

Participant observation

Date	Event	Event code	Duration
29/01/2016	NGO event on 'accountability' and learnings in post-earthquake relief and recovery	OBS_1	4 hours
28/02/2016	Community meeting, facilitated by MCHD staff involving local officials, local politicians, civil society actors and disaster-affected communities	OBS_2	3 hours
04/03/2016	AL get-together 'friendsraiser'	OBS_3	2 hours
08/04/2016 and 09/04/2016	Training/orientation on mobile survey applications for community monitors, with participation of MCHD affiliates and donors	OBS_4	14 hours
18/04/2016	NGO event on 'evidence-based' action	OBS_5	3 hours

Note: Participant observation also included about 100 hours of attendance at everyday office activities of MCHD, attendance of regular staff meetings, interaction with local MCHD staff.

Group interviews: experiences, opportunities and challenges working as MCHD monitors

Date	Number of participants	Code	Place
24/05/2016	6 (1 District Coordinator, 5 Community Monitors or Community Frontline Associates)	GINT_1	District 1
31/05/2016	5 (1 District Coordinator, 4 Community Monitors or Community Frontline Associates)	GINT_2	District 2

Sample of coding framework for Paper 2

Data sources	Research question of interest	Codes
16 interviews	RQ1. the role and practice of MCHD actors, using 'voice' and 'teeth' RQ2. major contextual factors shaping or undermining the practice of social accountability	-Background of the respondent and involvement with the initiative and overall organizations -Interests and motivations as pro-accountability activists/organisers -Challenges and opportunities faced together - Sense of success and failures, areas of enjoyment and disappointment -Interactions with colleagues, donors, communities, govt.
Participant observation	RQ1.See above RQ2. See above	-Day-to-day work structuring and organizing -Rules and regulations; areas of formality, informality; planning, leadership and decision-making process -Donors involvement, interaction and reporting; tensions with donors -Challenges, agreements/disagreements, tensions between central and local staff -Problems, challenges, grievances of communities (specific to community meeting)
Focus interviews	RQ1. See above RQ2. See above	-Areas of overall accomplishments at the local level; areas of dissatisfactions, tensions of the local staff - CBM outcomes (judgement, sanctions, responses); Views/experiences of local

Data sources	Research question of interest	Codes
		contextual enablers and disablers to the campaign

Paper 3: The politics of participatory disaster governance in Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction

Field Site	Interview date	Interview code	Interviewee's affiliation
CENTRAL/KATHMANDU	01/03/2016	INT_NI	Donor/reconstruction
	15/03/2016	INT_RR	Donor/reconstruction
	17/03/2016	INT_BM	Former policymaker/governance area
	18/03/2016	INT_CM	Policymaker/governance area
	23/03/2016	INT_IP	Government/governance area
	29/03/2016	INT_AA/MP	Civil society actor
	31/03/2016	INT_EP	Government official
	03/04/2016	INT_OP	Former policymaker
	22/04/2016	IN_IA	Government official/policymaker
	26/04/2016	IN_EU	Politician/lawmaker
	09/05/2016	INT_MI	Donor
	11/05/2016	INT_VI	Donor
	13/05/2016	INT_RK	Government official/reconstruction
LOCAL/SANKHU	04/05/2016	INT_AA	Local activist/civil society
	04/05/2016	INT_IC	Local activist/civil society
	06/05/2016	INT_UA	Local government, Sankhu
	15/05/2016	INT_SA	Local activist/civil society
	15/05/2016	INT_LO	Land registration/government official, Sankhu
	20/05/2016	INT_SD	Local activist/civil society

Interview guide for paper 3 for central level policymakers (adapted by interviewee background at the central and local level)

Questions
• Thank for participating in the interview
• Can you tell me about your position, your job? What is your role in…. at….. ? How long have you been working in this role? (as applicable both before and after the earthquake)
• How did you respond to the earthquake in your capacity as…..?   • How did you see your role evolving from response and recovery and reconstruction?
• What were the key priorities of the government (your unit) in the immediate aftermath? What are they now (housing reconstruction)?

Questions
• Were there any international guidelines, protocols that you were working under or expected to follow? Can you provide some examples of what those guidelines were?
• Can you tell us about the policy commitment of the government vis-a-via participation and accountability (i.e. Post-Disaster Needs Assessment)?
• What is the status of implementation of 'owner-led reconstruction'? • Probing questions: status of surveys, places they are conducted, timing etc.
• How is government giving information to communities? What are the key priorities? Can you give some examples? • What is the role of community meetings that government has supported? • What is the role of community meetings that locals are organising? • What are the challenges in implementing participatory disaster management?
• Anything you would like to add? • Ask if there are any relevant public documents/materials that could be useful for my research • Reassure about confidentiality/anonymity as necessary • Rethank.

Participant observation for paper 3

Field site	Date	Event/code	Location	Duration
Central Level/Kathmandu	17/03/2016	Regular HRRP meeting (OBS_1)	Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUBDC), Kathmandu	2 hours
	31/03/2016	Regular HRRP meeting (OBS_2)	DUBDC, Kathmandu	2 hours
	04/25/2016	1 DDC public hearing (invited space) (OBS_3)	Tokha, Kathmandu	2.5 hours
	12/05/2016	Regular HRRP meeting, including enrolment update. (OBS_4)	DUBDC, Kathmandu	2 hours
	12/05/2016	Post-disaster reconstruction, reconstruction framework launch event (closed space) (OBS_5)	Hotel Soaltee, Kathmandu	2.5 hours
	26/05/2016	HRRP meeting, with focus on community reconstruction in Kathmandu, including Sankhu. (OBS_6)	DUBDC, Kathmandu	2.5 hours
Local level/Sankhu	15/04/2016	"Regeneration of Sankhu" interaction programme (OBS_7)	Local School, Sankhu	3 hours

Field site	Date	Event/code	Location	Duration
	18/04/2016	Sankhu Public Hearing (OBS_8)	Jarsingh Pauwa, Sankhu	3 hours
	21/05/2016	Challenges and Opportunities for Sankhu's reconstruction (OBS_9)	Local School, Sankhu	3 hours

Participant observation topic guide for meetings

Topic guide
• Who are involved? (organisers, actors, participants)
• What are the agenda? Overall setting of the meeting…
• Proceedings (who is the speaker, what was presented)
• Discussions/ question and answers (as applicable)
• Who is not there? What is missing in the agenda?
• Closing

Interview guide ethnographic interviews with Sankhu residents

Topic guide
• Can you tell us about your experience of the earthquake?
• How has the earthquake changed or influenced your life?
• What are the biggest challenges you have faced after the earthquake?
• What do you know about the current status of reconstruction of housing?
• Have you tried to find out from the local government, if so how, and if not why?
• What was your motivation of attending the (local) meeting, what did you like/dislike?
• Closing