

Postcolonial Futures for Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia

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While disasters continue to affect millions of people, push many of them into vicious cycles of poverty, processes of risk and vulnerability continue to be created. And recently, with an accelerated pace. This special issue is an attempt to highlight some of the untold stories from a South Asian perspective. These stories and processes of local actions are rarely studied and responded to using different lenses from the region. In this issue, we bring together various themes of caste, gender, the colonial roots of today's disaster problems and the question of self-rule in disaster governance. And we bring it from many points of view, where

some viewpoints so far are untouched.

2024 marks 20 years of the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, which affected millions of people across the oceans. Have the 20 years of learning from disaster responses and recoveries led to less risk creation? Or has the Nepal earthquake of 2015 and the many floods in Pakistan helped to change the landscape of understanding vulnerability and ensuring better disaster governance? All these questions force us to put the processes of *vulnerabilisation* and risk creation in South Asia, to start with, at the heart of understanding disasters.

South Asia is ripe for both, postcolonial and de-illusion DRR. Ripe because of a range of reflections as well as concrete results on the ground. As the write-ups in this issue suggest, there are cross-cutting themes on climate, coloniality and gender. There are de-illusion DRR processes calling for co-research, re-imagining, critiquing, and reflecting. There are cross studies on exclusion in Odisha, on flooding in Pakistan, organising in Nepal, and networking in Nepal. All, in the end, point to the greater agency of the affected population: self-rule.

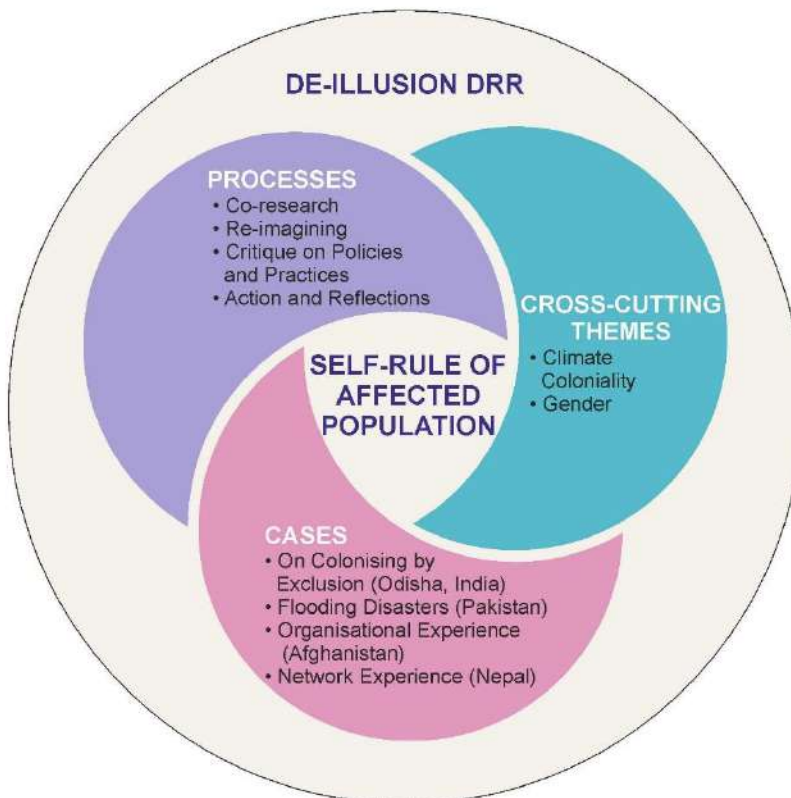
As the following diagram suggests self-rule by local people, of all age, gender identities, caste and physical ability, is at the centre of any postcolonial future of DRR. This publication offers three perspectives through which this happens.

The first is through the process of retrofitting self-rule. Making self-rule central is a process through which local people co-research re-imagine, critique policies, and reflect on practice.

Second, we offer four case studies that serve as examples of the process of retrofitting self-rule, its challenges and opportunities. These case studies are from Odisha (India), Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nepal.

Third, we have compiled articles that address cross-cutting issues such as climate change, coloniality and gender. It is our contention that considering these issues is essential for putting self-rule at the centre of de-illusion DRR.

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The postcolonial lens provides a powerful framework to support our agenda. By postcolonial we refer to a field of scholarship and praxis that is open to the future, that is, it goes beyond only pushing back against the past and its colonial heritage. Our postcolonial agenda recognises the devastating impact and enduring legacy of colonialism; one where disasters, in the name of humanitarianism and greater good, a powerful illusion in the Nietzschean sense, have been used to hide the imperialist agenda of the West. And imperialism has found new and many dresses to wear to suit the context and the company.

Nonetheless, our agenda acknowledges that terms such as disaster and its cognate concepts as well as the methodologies of assessment and frameworks of policy and practice are (unfortunately) here to stay with us for some time given the normative and powerful worldwide *dispositif* in place to reduce disaster risk. It is a collective duty to continue to challenge such global and neoliberal injunctions that

aim at standardising our understanding of what we call disaster after Western epistemologies and ontologies. This should be a long-term and very goal for all of us in our practice of disaster scholarship as well as in our actions to reduce harm and suffering. A small act of relief does not take much long to turn into a top-down, outside-in, structure.

In this special issue, our goal is less ambitious, yet similarly essential. It is to explore how the colonial legacy, that is, scholarship on disasters as well as policies and actions to reduce risk, is reinterpreted and subverted by local people across South Asia; how, oftentimes, the colonial legacy co-exists with a hidden and subversive set of indigenous practices geared towards understanding and dealing with environmental phenomena, not necessarily seen as hazardous. In this sense, the concept of disaster and associated policies and actions to reduce risk are also an illusion in that the imperialist agenda was doomed to fail because it has always neglected

the organic power of local people to be agent of their own life.

This is why our agenda embraces hybridity as a critical lens to understand what we usually call disaster. We acknowledge that the seemingly successful colonial legacy co-exists alongside, rather than fuse with, subversive and lasting indigenous practices. Hybridity thus allows us to look forward and hence not to fall into a nativist or essentialist trap that would both romanticise the past and prevent us from capturing the complexity and reality of a quickly changing contemporary world. However, we have seen that hybridity is neither a marker of subjection to the colonial heritage. It is a sign of resistance, a sign of protest, one that fosters agency and self-rule, one that opens up space for de-illusion disaster.

We hope you will join us in the journey of charting new pathways to unpack disaster risk creation and disaster risk reduction more critically. ■

POEM

Rains, Power and Waves of Recoveries

By **Emmanuel Raju**, Director, Copenhagen Centre for Disaster Research, University of Copenhagen, Denmark;
Extraordinary Associate Professor, African Centre for Disaster Studies, North-West University, South Africa

The monsoons and the trees
the colorful umbrellas come out
for some a pleasant time
on the balconies with chai and
pakoras.

The rains get intense
the roofs for fly away for some
saving the rice bags, saving the little
pieces of paper and identities.

Ah!! Did someone think it's a flood?
Did they call it a flood?
Oh wait, flood for some and not for
some.

And when they call it a flood
came the global banks
came the saviours of the world
with bread and water
with cash for the week
with tin for the roofs and an air of
hope.

She wanted to move on
hoping the next monsoon arrives
but one that doesn't take her roof.

The promises of a new home, in an
old city

for the compromise of her land, her
identities and her memories.
She moved...
'you are safe here', they said
'you can build a new home', they said.

Looking for a new livelihood
hoping for a new air of hope
moving on became a myth
stuck in the waves of the past
hoping for a new air of hope.

Until the next monsoon.
oh wait, in anticipation of hope
only until the next flood comes.

Disaster Risk Reduction as an Illusion

By **JC Gaillard**, Waipapa Taumata Rau, Aotearoa
University of the Philippines Resilience Institute

*'Es giebt keinen Trieb nach Erkenntniss und Wahrheit, sondern nur einen Trieb nach Glauben an die Wahrheit'*¹

F. Nietzsche (1922a, p. 96)

Disaster risk reduction, as a field of praxis, exists on the premise that there is such a universal thing as a disaster. An absolute truth that has global relevance. The problem is that this truth draws upon one single form of knowledge, that is, Eurocentric knowledge, informed by one particular set of ontologies and epistemologies. As a result, disaster risk reduction is an illusion devised in support of the imperialist project of the West; one that needs to be challenged so that knowledge can reclaim its true local dimension and value.

Knowledge is indeed different from truth. Knowledge refers to the facts we are aware of and the skills we acquire through experience and sharing. It reflects our diverse interpretations of the world that surrounds us, that is, in Nietzsche's (1922b, p. 13) terms: *'Soweit überhaupt das Wort Erkenntniss Sinn hat, ist die Welt unerkennbar: aber sie ist anders deutbar, sie hat keinen Sinn hinter sich, sondern unzählige Sinne. – Perspektivismus'*². Truth, rather, carries a pure and absolute meaning. Therefore, knowledge is

fundamentally plural, while truth entails universality. The imperialist and hegemonic agenda of Western science has made searching for the latter an absolute necessity; one that has obscured the inherent plurality of knowledge (Nietzsche, 1882, 1887, 1922a).

As a result, the truth that there is such a thing as a disaster that applies universally across diverse societies and cultures has been accepted as common sense. It has been supported by academic narratives and paradigms, which, although diverse and conflicting in many ways, have never challenged the ontological existence of the concept of disaster (Gaillard, 2021). Even though a disaster is inherently the perspectival interpretation of harm, suffering and hardship that is deeply dependent on an array of economic, social and cultural factors that vary from one individual to another or across social groups and societies. Nonetheless, thresholds of harm, suffering and hardship have been drawn by scholars and organisations in hope of coming up with universal standards, whether quantitative (e.g.

a certain number of people killed or affected) or qualitative (e.g. that people are supposedly not able to deal with the impact by themselves).

Such universal truth is however an illusion. As Nietzsche (1887, p. 127) emphasises, *'Es giebt nur ein perspektivisches Sehen, nur ein perspektivisches Erkennen; und je mehr Affekte wir über eine Sache zu Worte kommen lassen, je mehr Augen, verschiedene Augen wir uns für dieselbe Sache einzusetzen wissen, um so vollständiger wird unser Begriff dieser Sache, unsre Objektivität sein'*³. Searching for a definite objectivity or an absolute truth is thus an illusion; an illusion devised for a particular purpose, that is, to sustain a particular agenda meant to be definitive and universal as per the ambitions of Western science (Nietzsche, 1921, 1922a). Nietzsche (1922b, p. 13) adds that *'Unsere Bedürfnisse sind es, die die Welt auslegen; unsere Triebe und deren Für und Wider. Jeder Trieb ist eine Art Herrschsucht, jeder hat seine Perspektive, welche er als Norm allen übrigen Trieben aufzwingen möchte'*⁴. Therefore, it is through the alleged

¹ *'One does not wish to know the truth, but one wishes to believe in the truth'*. Our translation from the French version published in Europe, No. 141, in 1934.

² *'In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meaning - Perspektivism'*. From the English translation by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale published by Vintage Books in 1968.

³ *'Perspectival seeing is the only kind of seeing there is, perspectival 'knowing' the only kind of 'knowing'; and the more feelings about a matter which we allow to come to expression, the more eyes, different eyes through which we are able to view this same matter, the more complete our 'conception' of it, our 'objectivity', will be'*. From the English translation by D. Smith published by Oxford University Press in 1996.

⁴ *'It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm'*. From the English translation by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale published by Vintage Books in 1968.

As a result, the truth that there is such a thing as a disaster that applies universally across diverse societies and cultures has been accepted as common sense. It has been supported by academic narratives and paradigms, which, although diverse and conflicting in many ways, have never challenged the ontological existence of the concept of disaster. (Gaillard, 2021)

existence of such absolute truth that the imperialist project of the West has acquired its legitimation and universality: 'im Glauben gerade an die Wahrheit sind sie, wie Niemand anders sonst, fest und unbedingt'⁵ (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 168).

It is in this perspective that the seemingly universal standards applied to defining what a disaster is have informed the praxis of disaster risk reduction. They have supported normative policies and actions, whether hazard-focused and top-down or vulnerability-driven and bottom-up (and all sorts of combinations of both), that have been imposed all around the world as the ultimate solution to what we call disasters (Gaillard, 2021). International treaties and frameworks have been instrumental in pushing this agenda across cultures and societies, whether they fit traditional and local approaches to governance or not. For this reason, policies and actions for disaster risk reduction, in all their diversity, have largely been an instrument for the West to support an imperialist agenda that has prolonged centuries of colonisation (Bankoff, 2001).

It is now time to reconsider such normative policies and actions to

reduce disaster risk. It is also time to challenge the absolute and universal nature of Western concepts, theories and methodologies that sustain these policies. It is thus time to reclaim the real value of knowledge, in all its diversity and plural perspectives. It is ultimately time to look at how people interpret harm, suffering and hardship from their own perspectives, that are, perspectives that reflect their own understanding of the world.

Of course, these perspectives will necessarily be hybrid rather than essentialist and nativist. They will consider and integrate the legacy of pre-Western colonial trade routes and migrations, centuries of Western colonialism as well as contemporary global exchanges of information. These multiple perspectives will be hybrid in that these different heritages combine and co-exist in unique fluid and constantly changing forms around the world (Gaillard, 2023). A *pluriverse*, in Mignolo's (2000) and Escobar's (2018) terms, or a *Tout-Monde*, in Glissant's (1997), where there is no definite truth but culturally grounded, unique and interacting forms of knowledge in interpreting harm, suffering and hardship. It is essential to reclaim these diverse

forms of knowledge to inform culturally grounded actions to reduce what we call disaster risk. ■

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⁵ 'It is in their very belief in truth that they are more inflexible and absolute'. From the English translation by D. Smith published by Oxford University Press in 1996.

POEM

Price of *Patti's** Land

By *Suchismita Goswami*, Phd Researcher, Global Health section and Copenhagen Centre for Disaster Research, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Imagine a land found by chance
Bought in pence
And ruled by the whims of the Brits
The land with many names-
Madrasapattinam, Madras, Chennai

The find became a major port and trading center
The fisher folks and villagers' lives got shuffled and moved by scales
A white town and a black town emerged
Within a distance of as little as 2 kilometers

The French teased the place briefly
How did that whimsical chance meeting become true love?
Is not too hard to tell
The briny-smelling air and the softest rice cake can steal any heart

Many villages transcended boundaries to become part of the city
Mostly unplanned, to cater to the needs of the Raj
Susan Neild's works unearthed the fine history
Few copies are still breathing in the archives of the old libraries in the city

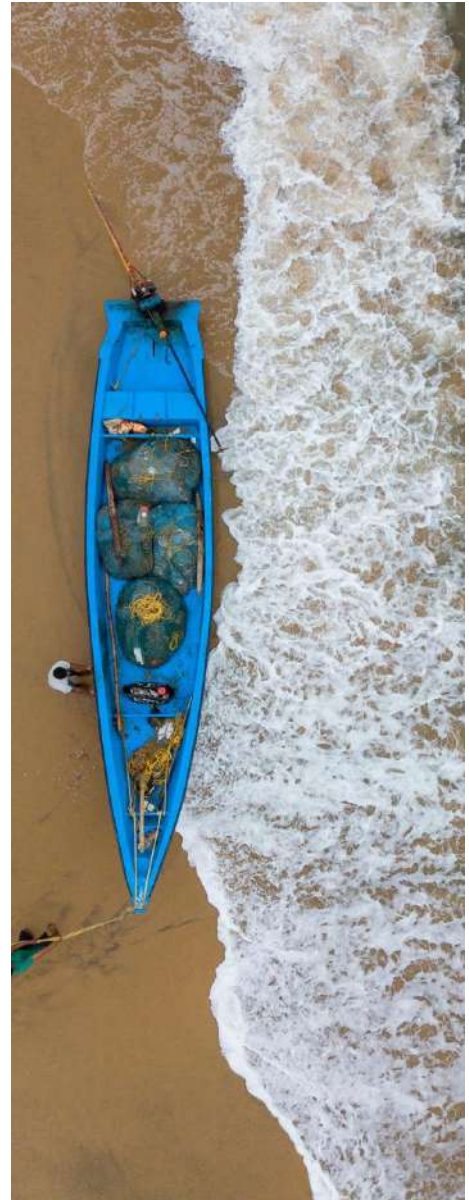
Independence came in 1947
Equality, democracy and fraternity were promised
Black town or white town ceased by name
For all spaces merged to become one with the city of Madras

Colonizers left but wars went on
The war for dignity, language and ecology
The resilient people of Chennai fought valiantly
Some were lost, and many were won

Over time, the city grew
Assemblage of villages, forests and wetlands were swallowed by the city
Lifelines of ecosystems destroyed and (un)assembles forgotten
Chennai chose immanence over transcendence

New boundaries created
By cyborgs of the new city
Forests turned into elite institutions and marshlands turned into huge department stores
Unmindful gentrification pushed the most vulnerable into state sponsored ghettos

During an untimely October downpour
40 km away from the center, in one of such ghettos for the flood-displaced resettlers
Wakes up *Paati* in sweat and chills in the middle of the night
Shouts out loud, facing her son
"Oh, you stupid! With how many pence did you sell my land for?"



* Grandmother in Tamil.

Postscript:

I intend to show through my poetry how a city and along with its people shifted from colonial times to the modern day. In that process, what happens to the vulnerable populations who are the original inhabitants of the land? Through several discussions, it was realised that the loss of their land and, with it, their associated livelihood has hurt them the most. The city was born by inheriting the land of several fishing villages, and now those people and their livelihood opportunities are pushed to the peripheries. The resettlements are done in several pretext of a flood, development projects and for river beautification. These groups were moved each time; the city expanded, and the peripheries changed. It is almost like once these groups of people make an

urban periphery to a viable centre they were pushed into another periphery. As if silently, they are making and growing the city and once it is viable, they are being further shifted away from that space. With every move, there is always an immense sense of loss in terms of memories, histories, identities and established livelihood.

An elderly woman from the resettlement area who used to be a fisherwoman inspires this poetry. She has personally moved along with her family five times since she was born due to either a disaster or a government agenda.

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Acknowledgement:

This poetry is inspired after interviewing an elderly woman who lives in one of the peripheral resettlement sites in urban Chennai. This discussion was part of my fieldwork, which is funded by an interdisciplinary and international research project called Disaster Risk Creation in Urban Resettlement Processes funded by the International Research Fund Denmark (2021-2025). ■

DRR IN SOUTH ASIA

What Postcolonial ‘Disaster Risk Reduction’ may look like in South Asia?

By Mahbuba Nasreen and Raisa Imran Chowdhury, GRRIPP-South Asia

South Asian countries are highly susceptible to natural and human-induced hazards due to multiple factors, including its geophysical location and land characteristics. The mechanisms for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in South Asia have historically been shaped by colonial inheritances that put the interests of the ruling elites above those of the underprivileged groups who are most susceptible to the effects of disasters (Attallah, 2016). In order to decolonise DRR systems, it is necessary to question and change existing power dynamics while advancing inclusive and equitable approaches to DRR. The history and context of postcolonial DRR in South Asia are intricate. Several nations in South Asia were colonised by the European powers, leaving a legacy of unequal power relations and history of exploitation

(Carrigan, 2015). The region's development and disaster preparedness have both been significantly influenced by this history. In South Asia, postcolonial DRR is a strategy that aims to acknowledge and address the historical effects of colonialism as well as the larger social, economic, and political elements that influence disaster risk. To provide a more comprehensive approach to DRR, it highlights the value of community involvement and local expertise in efforts to reduce disaster risk (Anthony et al., 2021).

Recognising the value of local knowledge and indigenous practices is one of the most important facets of postcolonial DRR in South Asia. Local communities often have their own systems and processes for managing hazards and reduce risks.

These techniques frequently draw from traditional wisdom and processes that have been handed down through the years (Carrigan, 2015). Postcolonial DRR acknowledges the significance of these methods and works to incorporate them into larger initiatives for reducing disaster risks. Additionally, in such an approach, there is a stronger focus on community involvement and empowerment. This entails giving local communities a voice in decision-making and making sure their voices are heard. This approach acknowledges that local communities are often the first to respond in the event of a disaster and that they have invaluable information and experience that may aid larger DRR efforts (Gupta & Sharma, 2006).

To resist against the hardships that its residents routinely face, the area has created disaster prevention and mitigation strategies over the past three decades (Mahbuba, 2022). However, there are challenges to inclusion of intersectional identities and contexts in risk management. The complex ways in which many types of inequalities and marginalisation intersect with disaster risk are highlighted by intersectional perspectives on postcolonial DRR in South Asia. These viewpoints underline how crucial it is for DRR initiatives to address structural disparities and power dynamics in order to produce more just and equitable results (Anthony et al., 2021). The gendered aspect of disaster risk represents an important intersectional perspective. Gender inequality and risks to hazards are intertwined in many different ways in South Asia. For instance, because of social norms and gender roles that restrict their mobility and access to resources, women and girls may be more at risk at the time of disasters (Enarson, 2018). Because of this, intersectional approaches to postcolonial DRR emphasise the significance of comprehending and addressing gender inequalities in risk reduction efforts, including the necessity of

involving women in decision-making processes and ensuring that DRR strategies take into account the strategic and practical needs of women and girls (Enarson, 2018). The significance of caste and class in disaster risk are other crucial factors. A variety of social, economic, and political variables contribute to the disproportionate impact of disasters on marginalised groups in South Asia, such as lower-caste communities in the hierarchical social structure and poorer populations (Haque & Etkin, 2018). Intersectional approaches, therefore, acknowledge the significance of addressing caste and class inequalities in DRR initiatives. This includes the necessity of involving marginalised communities in decision-making processes and developing strategies that are tailored to their particular issues and concerns. To that end, intersectional approaches emphasise the necessity of comprehending and addressing the ways in which various forms of marginalisation intersect with disaster risk, including the necessity of involving diverse communities in decision-making processes and developing inclusive and equitable DRR strategies (Nelson, 2018).

Within South Asia, Bangladesh, the low-lying delta, is more prone to

hazards like cyclones, floods, drought, salinity intrusion, etc. People have had to develop several strategies to face the challenges of disasters, most often with their indigenous community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) efforts. From the 1970 Cyclone to the 2023 Cyclone Mocha, different groups of people have proved their silent and diverse forces of resilience. Researchers (like Nasreen, 2019; Hasan, Nasreen and Choudhury, 2019) have argued that gender-inclusive mechanisms for strengthening DRR efforts of the people at the local levels require urgent attention from policymakers.

Bangladesh has an excellent early warning system for cyclones, however, there is still room for improvement for other hazards like floods and landslides. Bangladesh's postcolonial DRR has shown the importance of creating early warning systems that are adapted to the unique requirements of local people (Haque & Etkin, 2018). It must be noted here that Bangladesh's Standing Order on Disasters (SoD) developed in 1997 (revised in 2010 and 2019), has been recognised within South Asia for its 'whole of society' approach and incorporating 'gender and social inclusion' as a sector in the revised SoD (2019).



Income generating activities (IGA) of many non-government organisations are taking account the voices of the local community people. Women with disabilities are on the top of many of their beneficiary list. Photo credit: Raisa Imran, Barguna District, 2020.

Despite noted development in the postcolonial DRR agenda, GRRIPP (gender- response resilience and intersectionality in policy and practice) - South Asia research findings indicate that mainstreaming gender and intersectionality approach is yet to be adopted in different sectors. Key actions that could be taken to decolonise DRR systems in South Asia include:

- **Identifying and resolving the underlying social, economic, and political issues:** This is a key component of DRR strategies, which contributes to vulnerability of marginalised

groups. These strategies must go beyond considering disasters as isolated incidents. Engagement with marginalised communities is necessary to grasp their distinctive viewpoints and experiences.

- **Promoting local knowledge and expertise:** Decolonising DRR procedures implies recognising and embracing the information and skills of local people, who have a thorough awareness of the risks and hazards they confront. This can entail giving locals the chance to participate in decision-making procedures and involving local organisations in the development and execution of DRR projects.
- **Prioritising equity and social righteousness:** There is a requirement to acknowledge and deal with the disparities that increase vulnerability, such as those related to gender, caste, class, and ethnicity. This entails advancing social justice and fairness in DRR planning and implementation and making certain that the requirements and priorities of marginalised communities are at the forefront of decision-making.
- **Community-based strategies for building resilience:** Moving away from top-down strategies that emphasise infrastructure and technology and towards more bottom-up strategies that empower local communities and increase their resilience is necessary to decolonise DRR mechanisms. Supporting local initiatives for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery as well as giving local people the chance to influence DRR policies and programs can be a part of this.
- **Recognising indigenous knowledge:** Decolonising DRR processes also include recognising indigenous

knowledge and working with indigenous groups to include their viewpoints and methods in DRR initiatives.

These strategies aim to create a more comprehensive approach to DRR that addresses the larger social, economic, and political elements that determine disaster risk and vulnerability. In general, a fundamental change in how disasters are perceived and addressed is needed for South Asia's DRR systems to become decolonised. It necessitates questioning and altering the power structures that maintain vulnerability as well as advancing of more inclusive and equitable strategies that place a high value on local knowledge and skills, give social justice and equity top priority, giving more voice to the marginalised across intersectional category. ■

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Knowing the Landscape and Taming the Landscape: Local and Mainstream DRR Perspectives in Nepal

By Nyima Dorjee Bhotiya, Dipak Basnet, Tek Bahadur Dong, Anuradha Puri, and The Sajag-Nepal Project Team, Nepal

In recent decades, the South Asian nation-state of Nepal has been experiencing increasing and cascading disaster events as vulnerable populations confront a dizzying scenario of earthquakes, monsoon landslides in the middle hills, and flooding along Himalayan river valleys and the Tarai Plain.⁶

Although earthquakes, landslides, and floods are linked with Nepal's geography, they occur within the larger context of Nepal's development trajectory and anthropogenic climate change.⁷ Communities living in the mountain, hills, and Tarai regions of Nepal for longer periods of time, have

developed embodied knowledge and practices to assess and respond to changing hazards in their landscapes and apply their knowledge to reduce disaster risks in their communities. Local ways of knowing and anticipating hazards and risks, however, are not acknowledged within disaster



⁶ Ministry of Home Affairs. Government of Nepal. 2022. 'Risk to Resilience: Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in Nepal.' In *The Seventh Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction*, 23-28 May 2022, Bali, Indonesia.

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⁷ World Bank. 2021. Climate Risk Country Profiles: Nepal. https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/15720-WB_Nepal%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf

governance frameworks and policies in Nepal. Despite their localisation with promulgation of the federal Constitution of Nepal 2015, these policies remain focused on technocratic intervention and top-down approaches to disaster prevention and preparedness planning.

In this essay, drawing from our ongoing research project, 'Sajag-Nepal: Planning and preparedness for the mountain hazard and risk chain in Nepal', we describe local disaster risk reduction practices and forms of knowledge which are place-specific and informed by the local and indigenous community's knowledge of their landscape and its environment through longitudinal and intergenerational experience.⁸ We situate indigenous and local knowledge of hazards alongside the current Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) governance practices to discuss existing gaps of DRR interventions in Nepal and scope for dialogue between local practices and mainstream disaster governance. This essay argues that local ways of knowing the landscape problematises mainstream disaster governance's efforts at taming the landscape. Bringing the two approaches together in practice and policy can help make DRR more inclusive and diverse.

Taming the landscape: Contemporary disaster risk reduction practice

Hazards such as floods, earthquakes, and landslides are governed at the national and local levels by multiple actors (including bilateral and multilateral donor organisations)

and policies using competing paradigms that are often influenced by Western international policies. Despite Nepal's policies promoting decentralisation in disaster governance as outlined in the Hyogo and Sendai frameworks, practical steps to empower local stakeholders (including the people) and include local knowledge in planning and preparedness are not followed. When it comes to DRR, the central and local authorities tend to prioritise budget, technology, and expertise (engineers and geologists) for intervention and mitigation measures. This approach is influenced by techno-scientific understanding of disaster preparedness and intervention, which privileges a top-down, technocratic approach focusing on engineered solutions to the identification of hazard risks and disaster management process. This is done by taming the hazardous landscape with capital intensive mitigation measures. The practice of building embankments along a river settlement to safeguard against flood risk is a common DRR mitigation in Annapurna Rural Municipality, Myagdi and other river settlements of Nepal. Such mainstream practice of building embankments and other geoengineering solutions to river flooding/cutting attempts to 'tame' and control the river without considering its natural capacity. However, such practices often fail and people are caught unaware because they expect these technologies used to control the river to work every time. On this mainstream practice of DRR

mitigating measures, drawing from the experience of Thakali, indigenous community with a long history of living in the Kaligandaki river corridor, a young entrepreneur in his mid-twenties explained,

"...riverbed is increasingly being encroached and embankments are being built to safeguard the settlement on a riverbank, however, they fail to anticipate that the river's nature will revert back to its previous channel which can create a new risk to areas hitherto not considered at risk."

Furthermore, due to the complex bureaucratic processes, institutional hierarchies, and financial resources that accompany conventional DRR in Nepal, these approaches have proven to be inflexible and ill-adapted to quick changing and cascading hazard contexts. Evidence suggests that reliance on scientific mainstream approaches to disaster management can also have a negative impact on the environment, local community, and even enhance risk.

Knowing the landscape: Local disaster risk reduction practices and knowledge

Parallel to mainstream technocratic conceptualisations and practices of disaster governance are embodied indigenous and local knowledges of hazard and disaster risk. Such knowing of the landscape is diversely practiced and communicated within the communities through non-prescriptive means and conveys

⁸ Major local and indigenous communities in the four core sites for Sajag-Nepal: Planning and preparedness for the mountain hazard and risk chain in Nepal are Tamang and Newar in Temal Rural Municipality, Kavre; Sherpa and Tamang in Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality, Sindhupalchowk; Magar and Thakali in Annapurna Rural Municipality, Myagdi; and Thangmi and Brahmin/Chhetri in Bhimeshwor Municipality, Dolakha. The local communities refer to the diverse group of community – caste and ethnic groups – who have been living in the hills of Nepal and shares the common ethos and sensibilities of the landscape.

‘where to be’ and ‘where not be’ within the landscape of their knowledge. For example, the saying, “don’t claim ownership of the house on the steep slope or the riverbank” – “भिर र खोला किनारको घरलाई आफ्नो नभन्नुस” (*bhir ra khola kinarko ghar lai aafno nabhanus*), is frequently heard in our respective field sites, indicating known zones of avoidance for settlement. The community’s knowledge of precarious places to live is rooted in their long history of inhabitation and observance of failing slopes, rockfalls, and flooding. Such understanding of environment and landscape, particularly changing nature of river, is commonly expressed through the proverb, “a river reverts to its old channel every twelve years” – “बाह्र वर्षमा खोला पनि फर्किन्छ” (*barha barshama khola pani pharkincha*) which anticipate the changing nature of river channel and risk it poses. This longitudinal experience has allowed them to develop a deep understanding of the landscape and a heightened sensitivity to changes in the environment, particularly in response to natural hazards such as floods and landslides.

Drawing upon this ‘knowing’ of the landscape, the researchers employ various sensory methods to evaluate and respond to anticipated and unanticipated changes which have the potential to lead to disastrous outcomes. In a Kali Gandaki riverbank settlement in Annapurna Rural Municipality of Myagdi, Gandaki province, community members who have experienced flooding multiple times described a sensory method they used to detect a

likely flood and need to evacuate to safer shelter. As we explored local practices and knowledge about floods, an elderly man in his fifties shared the community’s practice as follows,

“...during the monsoon months, this river swells with the rainfall, however, we feel the risk of the river to our settlement only when we sense the odor of debris-flow in the river when it carries boulders, gravel, sand and other materials, which cause the change in the river channel and results in erosion of the bank.”

The elderly man shares that a river becomes dangerous only when it carries debris and sediments that can be detected by the smell of the river as it swells during the monsoon months. The statement highlights the community’s knowledge about the river and its risk at certain times of the year that they have adapted with experience and close observation of the river’s nature in different time periods. Hence, they have developed a practice based on their knowledge which helps them to sense changes in the environment and respond to it before risk arises. As such, local ways of knowing the landscape and its environment helps to anticipate disaster risk as well as ‘where to be’ and ‘where to not be’ when the changes are sensed. However, such practices and knowing are not incorporated into the disaster preparedness plan which is primarily a top-down, technocratic, development initiative and Western practice in its orientation and implementation.

To conclude, we urge for the recognition that local knowing of the landscape and mainstream disaster approaches are not inherently contradictory. Rather there is an opportunity for convergence of these two approaches to generate more inclusive and diverse DRR practices at the local levels. In practical terms, we note that climate change and development pressures, such as road and hydropower construction projects are reshaping patterns of migration in the Middle Hills of Nepal. In these circumstances, people can find themselves moving into new environments where their knowledge of hazards and practices of disaster prevention are untested. Sensory knowledge of specific rivers, such as that articulated by riverside communities in Annapurna Rural Municipality’s Kali Gandaki Corridor, is an embodied disaster prevention practice that can be channelled amongst community members without the need of expert interventions, strengthening risk reduction from the bottom-up. Such place-based knowledge can sit alongside and guide technical interventions by highlighting, in this example, the historical course of river movement and recognising the ever-present danger flash floods pose to riverside settlements, regardless of the presence of an embankment or other form of disaster technology. In this way, hazard history, experience, and preventative measures can be taken into the evolving hazard context, creating conversation across indigenous, local, and scientific knowledge communities for the benefit of those most affected by disasters. ■

Postcolonial Disaster Risk Reduction in Nepal: Insights from the Disaster Preparedness Network (DPNet) Experience

By *Surya Bahadur Thapa*, Chairperson, Disaster Preparedness Network (DPNet), Nepal

The colonisation of Southeast Asian countries by European powers like Britain, France, and Holland started in the 16th century and continued until the mid-20th century. Nepal, as an exception, was never colonised by any foreign power, which is a source of pride for the country's sovereignty and its people. During the colonisation period, the entire South Asia was preoccupied with politics, resulting in the neglect of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) issues. In the postcolonial era South Asian countries including Nepal have been developing policies, plans and structures to reduce the risk of disasters, prioritise risk reduction and disaster management in their national priorities, and save the life and property of their citizens.

Nepal is a country of diverse topography and climatic conditions, with an area of 147,516 square kilometers. The Himalayas and the plain lands are part of its geography. Nepal is highly susceptible to

various hazards because of its geographical position, varied topography, rugged mountains, and steep landscape. One-third of the world's total 2,400 kilometers of the Himalayas lies in Nepal. The prevalence of natural hazards is due to the variation of altitude from 60 meters to 8,848.86 meters within a distance of fewer than 200 kilometers. The steep slopes and still growing Himalayan range, coupled with heavy monsoon rainfall, lead to geological and hydro-meteorological hazards, including landslides, debris flows, floods, and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), epidemics, and droughts. Nepal is equally exposed to seismic activity resulting from the subduction of the Indian tectonic plate into the Eurasian (Tibetan) plate. In addition to geophysical and hydro-meteorological conditions, environmental degradation, climate change, socioeconomic conditions of the people, human development index, scattered settlements,

unplanned rapid settlements, environmental pollution, inadequate coping abilities of communities, and challenges to mainstream DRR in development and its localisation further elevate the risk of disaster.

The Natural Calamity Relief Act, enforced in 1982, made Nepal the first country in South Asia to have a disaster-specific act. This relief act was mainly focused on post-disaster than pre-disaster action and preparation. With the growth of understanding of disaster risk reduction all over the globe and Nepal's commitment to the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction, The National Action Plan for Disaster Management was introduced in 1996. Correspondingly in the same year (1996), individuals and organisations working in field of DRR in Nepal unites to form a platform called as Disaster Preparedness Network-Nepal (DPNet) which has been actively involved in disaster risk reduction



Learning and Sharing National Conference on DRR organised by DPNet in partnership with USAID.



DPNet conducting online program on contemporary issues (Koshi Flood).

and management (DRR&M) for over 27 years. The disaster management component was included in the Local Self Governance Act, developed in 1999, based on the Action Plan. To support this DPNet developed the guideline and provided technical Support to 11 districts for the development of District Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan instead of Disaster Contingency Plan. The institutional framework for disaster risk management has been significantly strengthened since 2009 with the adoption of the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management (NSDRM) in alignment with Nepal's commitment to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). Correspondingly in the same year (2007), to make it more action oriented, DPNet was officially registered in the District Administration Office in Kathmandu, and since then, it has fostered coordination, cooperation, and partnerships between national and international organisations, government bodies, and various

stakeholders involved in disaster management and humanitarian assistance. DPNet took the lead in publishing the Nepal Disaster Report, which was later adopted and endorsed by the Government of Nepal. Additionally, DPNet also spearheaded the organisation of important discussions on topics such as monsoon preparedness and other current disaster-related issues requiring urgent humanitarian support. Nepal's new federal structure and system of governance have provided opportunities to institutionalise a much more decentralised system of disaster risk management in Nepal. The Nepal Government (Work Division) Regulation, 2017, identified the roles and jurisdiction of all federal ministries, with MoHA identified as the 'nodal ministry' for coordinating disaster risk management activities throughout the country. The transition to federalism has provided an opportunity to prioritise stronger disaster risk management by all sectors at all levels. Disaster Risk

Reduction and Management Act, 2017; Local Government Operational Act, 2017; Nepal Government (Work Division) Regulations, 2017; National Policy on Disaster Risk Reduction, 2018; Public Health Act, 2018; Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Plan of Action (2018-2030); Private Housing Rebuilding Grant for the Flood and Landslide Victims 2017; Public Housing Program Implementation Sample Guidelines, 2018; and Guidelines for the Relocation and Rehabilitation of High-Risk Settlements, 2018 were developed during this period. The DRRM Act was enacted in 2017, replacing the 1982 Natural Calamity (Relief) Act. DPNET has played a significant role in introducing the long-awaited Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act and supported the whole process of Disaster Risk Reduction National Policy 2018 and Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Action Plan (2018-2030). The vision of having safe communities and a safer Nepal, and

mission is to strengthen the disaster resilience of communities and institutions through coordinated and collaborative planning, community action, and policy advocacy is on the way to fulfillment by those legal frameworks.

DPNet-Nepal has been a driving force for DRR&M in Nepal since its establishment in 1996. Starting with 12 members, the organisation now has 126 institutional and life members including NGOs, INGOs and UN organisations dedicated to coordinating, collaborating, and sharing experiences to avoid duplication in emergency response. DPNet works closely with the Government of Nepal, civil society networks and federation. DPNet efforts have led to the formulation of

DRR-related legal frameworks and other pertinent DRR works. The organisation has also actively participated in various national, SAARC level, and international forums to raise the voice on DRR&M in Nepal. As the SPHERE focal point for the country, DPNet-Nepal organised Sphere Training of Trainers (ToT) and published different Sphere Standards in the local language. DPNet play a role as the Secretariat of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR), which is chaired by the Executive Chief of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA). DPNet has initiated an open and online platform, the Virtual DRR Platform, where individuals can participate and share their thoughts

on disaster-related topics and discussions. Also, DPNet have created an Online Resource Center (ORC), a well-managed online hub or collection for scattered legal/research and any other documents related to disaster. For the solidarity and collective effort for DRR, DPNet is working in collaboration with National Disaster Management Network of Nepal (DiMaNN) and other disaster related networks at national level and affiliated with Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR), Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN) and South Asia Together for Humanitarian Imperative (SATHI) at regional and international level. ■

GENDER EQUALITY

Disasters and the “Other” Gender: The Case of the Hijras in Odisha, India

By Aditi Sharan, Waipapa Taumata Rau, Aotearoa / The University of Auckland, New Zealand

Introduction

The binary representation of gender categories has dominated the idea of gender in disaster risk reduction (DRR) for a long time. The conventional perception of gender in DRR is based on the Western understanding, where it is perceived as a categorical distinction between men and women and imposed on rest of the world (Gaillard, 2021). Overlooking the contextual realities across different societies, the calculated blindness by using “gender” and “women” synonymously has led to policies being continuously based on unexamined assumptions in disaster research in the West (Enarson, 2012). Similar to Spivak’s take on the assumed neutrality of Western

feminism that tends to speak for “all women” being a form of cultural imperialism (Spivak, 1988), the gender diverse groups in South Asia being clubbed under the category of the “other” or the umbrella of LGBTQ+ is equally problematic. These ‘vulnerable categories’ based are formed by pushing those who do not embody the norm to the margins of the social structure through the dominance of one group, by defining their abnormality and faults (Staszak, 2009). The *hijra* community, believed to be the oldest known ethnic non-binary group in India (Ramos, 2018), is one such group that have faced the consequences of this interpretation. As part of a broader qualitative research done in Puri, Odisha, India, this paper discusses

how the *hijra* community is “Othered”, with the backdrop of Cyclone Fani (2019). It tries to go beyond just their vulnerability, looking into its root causes and also *hijras’* agency at the time of disasters.

Cyclone Fani, 2019

Cyclone Fani caused widespread destruction on the eastern coast of India. The *hijra* groups were affected differentially because of their existing vulnerabilities which were exacerbated during this time, with limited resources to cope. They were immediately rendered homeless as water filled up their rented rooms and were left with no food or clean drinking water for days at a stretch. Some lost their main means of livelihoods as their shops were wrecked. Hence, leaving them with

no place to live, nothing to eat and no source of income for days to come. Unable to access the cyclone shelters, some slept at the railway station. Few who did manage to get in the shelters were not in priority when the relief was distributed and had to manage with whatever people at the shelter offered to them out of goodwill. NGOs stated that staying at the shelter was not the problem - it was the use of toilets. There were queues, they did not know where to stand and were often told off by the people and officials. The relief from the government was also categorised for men and women and *hijras* were ultimately left out. A few eventually got compensation later, months after the cyclone. Relief received immediately after the cyclone came mostly as charity from hotel owners and later by NGOs.

Disasters or Everyday Life?

A question then arises: why did the cyclone manifest itself in the lives of these people like it did? According to Spivak (1988), the subaltern with no history and no voice is a colonial invention. Who once held important positions in politics and royal *durbars*, *hijras* were criminalised under the Criminal Tribes' Act, 1871 (Sinha, 2016). It had a separate section on who the British classified as "Eunuchs" (again a Western interpretation), according to which for instance, there was penalty for "appearing in female clothes; or dancing in public, or for hire" (CTA, 1871), amongst other things. The narrative of reality provided by imperialism is often established as the normative knowledge (Spivak, 1988). The Act, even though repealed later, symbolically marked the beginning of their marginalisation in India (Sinha, 2016) and is linked with the issues they face now.

Nowadays, othering in a *hijra* person's life starts early in their life. It primarily takes place in the form of verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, even by their own families. Their "difference" from what/who is considered "normal" in the eyes of society based on the foregoing historical narrative is met with retaliation. Symbolic actions like cutting off hair, forcefully making them wear "male" clothing, stopping their education are all forms of abuse that results in their othering. In the end, they are abandoned by their families and are left to fend for themselves while they navigate through the city at very young ages. They face street harassment and discrimination at their place of work. With limited skills because of unavailability of opportunities, they become ineligible for employment. They perform their traditional role of *badhai* as their primary source of income in weddings and functions. But with decreasing numbers of such occasions, they have been forced into begging, sex work and doing odd jobs, which also pose a risk to their health. With very limited resources at their disposal, they are only able to occupy the most vulnerable areas to live in the city like the suburbs and slums located in the low-lying regions, which they can afford and are accepted to stay in. Therefore, increasing their existing vulnerabilities at the time of disasters, which was observed during Cyclone Fani.

Way Forward

Despite having suffered in their daily lives and more so during the cyclone, these groups have shown the power of their agency by helping community members to get to safety when the water levels rose. Also, with whatever relief they received, they shared with people in much

worse conditions than them, especially the elderly experiencing homelessness and children. Their support system and social safety nets are formed by their strong internal network and solidarity under the leadership of their guru. *Hijras* as a collective is their strength which needs to be acknowledged. They have their struggles, but they also have success stories that need visibility. Therefore, to understand their issues and needs, their vulnerabilities and capacities (which is engrained in their everyday lives), it is imperative to recognise, acknowledge and understand their history and contexts for more gender sensitive and inclusive DRR. ■

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Postcolonial DRR: COAR Experience in Afghanistan

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Citizens Organization for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR) formerly known as Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR), established in 1989, is a national NGO formally registered under the NGO laws of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It is a fully non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian organisation, functioning under the fully democratic governance of its elected Board-of-Trustees and technically operating under its Board-of-Management. COAR has a triangulated transparent accountability system under which we report directly to the local communities, funders/donors and the Afghan government, both at local and national levels. Financially, COAR is a portfolio of an average annual budget of 7 million USD, using multi-currency budget.

COAR, as non-profit humanitarian and development organisation, strongly believe in a strategy of complementarity and synergy, rather than working in operational segregation, individualism and a policy of monopolisation. We at COAR, based on our past 34 years of work experience in the field of humanitarian and community development operations, strongly believe that human development and alleviation of human suffering can best be addressed and healed through humanitarian cooperation and partnership within a transparent, accountable and well-defined frame of action for common human goals and purposes. We thus, in 2008 established Civil Society Empowerment Network (CEN) of 13 sister NGOs, mainly to synergise efforts and effectively utilise available resources for common humanitarian goals and cross-fertilise our technical capability in

the field and at strategic level human rights advocacy and lobby. Indeed, we are a human rights-based organisation as we strictly observe in all policies and operations: participation, empowerment, accountability, non-discrimination, equality and legality. We as a civil society organisation, strongly believe in human rights-based development and mandatory introduced since 2008 by the UN system.

1. Environmental protection, disaster risks reduction and climate change

Afghanistan has always been a remote, harsh and poor nation. Certain aspects of its geography, climate, people, economy, history of conflict, education, and health conditions are essential for understanding the country and its current humanitarian crisis. Afghanistan is in the midst of a profound humanitarian crisis resulting primarily from long-standing armed conflict, a devastating drought, and massive population migrations. By 2015, after years of conflict and turmoil, Afghanistan had achieved many milestones in diverse sectors including agriculture, education, health, governance and infrastructure.

To build on these achievements, humanitarian action must understand and where necessary adapt to these transitions to ensure those affected by conflict or disasters are not left behind. In this view, of educated Afghans for the sympathy with Afghan refugees in Pakistan and war, conflict affected people in the rural areas of Afghanistan gathered in Peshawar and established an NGO under the name of Citizen Organization for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR) &

has started its activities in the refugees' camps in Peshawar and soon extended to inside of Afghanistan.

Initially, CoAR undertook emergency projects such as water supply and irrigation in the Moqur district of Ghazni province and eventually extended its activities to Wardak and Logar provinces. Later, CoAR expanded its humanitarian assistance to other provinces of Afghanistan. Today, CoAR is implementing emergency projects in different sectors for Internally Displaced People (IDPs), returnees and Waziristan refugees around the country. the organisation strategically focuses more on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and environment protection. Therefore. CoAR established SHARQ Academia for further technical and scientific study about DRR for the young generation as well as for those government and NGO staffs who are working in the field of DRR. So far, this is the first higher education institute which was established by an NGO. The first batch students' graduation took place in March 2017. The graduates are now working as professionals in the field of DRR.

Currently COAR is the key member of DRRWG, Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) and Asian Disaster Reduction & Response Network (ADRRN), Common Humanitarian Standards (CHS) Alliance, Principled Humanitarian Aid Partnership (PHAP) and Network for Empowerment Aid Response (NEAR).

COAR has developed its capacity in response to the needs in emergency outbreaks, as follow:

- Training/Awareness on DRR
- Conducting of risk assessment and mapping
- Supporting the development of local disaster management plans
- Provision of training and equipment for Task Force Search and Rescue and First Aid teams
- Conducting mitigation activities
- Response/Emergency relief (distribution of food and other goods)
- Provision of first aid, search and rescue items and shelter
- Supporting environment protection projects, especially awareness programmes through schools and health clinics
- Training in DRR through SHARQ Institute of Higher Education (SIHE) established and run by COAR.

The main objectives of the humanitarian assistance, DRR and environmental protection department are:

- To save the life of most-in-need disaster-affected populations.
- To increase capacities of disaster affected people and

empower them to cope with disaster risk by themselves.

- To raise awareness and increase the knowledge of disaster affected people who struggle for clean, sustainable and healthy environment.

Through humanitarian, DRR and Emergency preparedness (EP) departments the following activities have been implemented:

- Providing basic needs for disaster-affected populations (water, foods, shelter, etc.).
- Awareness raising through trainings, workshops and conferences.
- Awareness raising a through books, magazines, brochures, flyers printing and their distribution.
- Specific hygiene-related training and hygiene kits distribution to targeted beneficiaries.
- Disaster risk mitigation related activities like construction of protection walls, water hand pumps, water Karezes and springs rehabilitation.
- Contribution to the country's coordination system through meetings at different stages of DRR and different levels of responsibilities.

- Collaboration with other actors for advocacy regarding IDPs, returnees and refugees at all scales.
- Organisation and implementation of t more than 500 small- and large-scale projects.

2. SHARQ and GRTV

COAR has established SHARQ University and Gorbati Radio TV in 2010. Gorbati radio TV broadcasts DRR messages, DRR awareness programmes, roundtables of technical and professional experts in DRR. We believe media play a vital role in raising awareness about disasters, warning of hazards, gathering and transmitting information about affected areas, alerting government officials, relief organisations and public on the specific concerns of affected populations in time of disasters, and in facilitating discussion about disaster preparedness and response. The success of this radio and TV station in providing information about DRR and environmental protection has been felt all over the country. As such, this radio and TV station plays an active role in community awareness especially in the field of DR and environment protection. ■



Terracing and trees plantation in the mountain areas of Faryab province of Afghanistan, 2017.

Towards a Postcolonial Disaster Risk Reduction Approach in Sri Lanka: A Critique of DRR Policies and Practices

By Nishara Fernando, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Introduction

The disaster risk reduction (DRR) mechanism in Sri Lanka has a very short history. The need for organised and systematic disaster management arose because of the massive destruction and loss of life caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Local level administrative bodies such as District Secretariats⁹, Divisional Secretariats¹⁰ as well as local authorities including Provincial Councils¹¹ and Local Councils¹² managed disasters and their effects prior to the tsunami. In 2005, the National Council for Disaster Management and the Disaster Management Centre were established as per the Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005 (DMC, 2005). However, due to a lack of financial means and technical expertise, the DMC had to obtain the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to establish key policies and practices of the center. The involvement of UNDP in building such policies and strategies of DMC can be identified as the first instance that the Western DRR dogma was introduced to the local disaster management system. UNDP took measures to provide technical expertise to the centre based on the Yokohama Strategy and

Plan of Action for a Safer World adopted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama, Japan in May 1994 (IPS, 2007). Moreover, DMC adopted all key international DRR approaches including the latest Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), 2015-30 promoted by the United Nations.

This Western dogma of DRR has served Sri Lankans since 2005 and has become instrumental in mitigating disasters and reducing various hazards. Nevertheless, it is evident that the existing disaster risk reduction mechanism is infested with short comings (Abdee et al., 2021). Most noteworthy is its failure to provide lasting, sustainable solutions to risks and challenges faced by communities'-especially vulnerable groups such as older people, women, children, and people with disabilities (Siriwadana et al., 2018).

During a conversation with a high-ranking official of the Galle District Secretariat, the official expressed concerns about the relocation process and its negative impacts on children. According to the official, *"The relocation process was solely*

focused on building houses and providing food for the displaced. Everything else received less attention from everyone." He further explained that it took both the government and non-governmental organisations over four months to establish a system for educational programmes to benefit the children. Even after this period, the children had to face numerous difficulties. As the official stated, *"For a long period children had to study in extremely hot tents, there was a shortage of an adequate number of teachers, and they also lacked sports equipment and other resources."*

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) decided to involuntarily relocate communities that had either lost their houses due to the Indian Ocean Tsunami or communities living within the "No Construction Zone" (Buffer Zone) declared by the GOSL as a risk reduction method. Nevertheless, the relocation process was considered a failure as it did not incorporate the needs and views of communities (Fernando, 2010). Findings from numerous studies reveal that nearly two thirds of originally relocated communities have moved back to the coastal region to overcome challenges at relocation settlements (Fernando,

⁹ The District Secretariat which is headed by the District Secretary is the superior administrative units to the Divisional Secretariat.

¹⁰ The Divisional Secretariats (DS) are the grass root level administrative units which deliver more than 90 percent of the government services to the citizen. There are 320 DS divisions in Sri Lanka.

¹¹ Provincial Councils were set up in Sri Lanka for the first time in terms of 13th Amendment to the Constitution and the Provincial Councils Act. No. 42 of 1987. The Council functions as the legislature of the province and has power to pass a statute on any subject assigned to the provincial council.

¹² Local government is the third and lowest level of government in Sri Lanka, after the central government and provincial councils. The local government bodies are collectively known as local authorities. They are responsible for providing a variety of local public services including roads, sanitation, drains, housing, libraries, public parks and recreational facilities.

2013). These include the collapse of livelihood strategies due to the distance to workplaces (e.g. fisherman to the harbour), lack of access to common assets, clashes with host communities, substandard infrastructure and housing, increased housing expenses etc.

According to a relocatee who transitioned from a government-built relocation site, the experience of living at the relocation site was fraught with challenges. The relocatee, identifying as a fisherman, conveyed, "*Life at the relocation site was full of challenges as I was a fisherman and the site was located approximately 9.00 km away from the sea. I had to rely on public bus services, enduring early morning travels, to reach the coast. It was impractical and inconvenient. I attempted to explore alternative job opportunities; however, the area offered limited employment prospects. Additionally, conflicts frequently arose with the host communities concerning issues such as water usage, access to playgrounds, and space for cemeteries. These conflicts created immense tension and discomfort. As a result, after residing in the community for over a year, I made the decision to return to our previous location.*"

Relocation has also been used as a DRR strategy during large-scale landslides that took place in the Aranayaka area in the Kegalle district. In these instances, relocated communities were compelled to give up their homes and adjoining land which were used to cultivate crops such as tea, beetle-nut, rubber, etc. As a result, the expenses of households increased while their income decreased significantly. Moreover, another shortcoming of the existing DRR mechanism is the

inadequacy of funds allocated to build owner-driven housing. Instead of providing equivalent or adequate compensation for previous housing of displaced communities, a fixed amount is provided to all displaced communities which is often insufficient to build a new house.

As discussed previously, the DRR mechanisms in Sri Lanka are not community based in nature. Failure to integrate the actual needs and wants of affected communities leads to the failure of risk reduction strategies and increases the vulnerability of displaced communities. As a result, communities affected by hazards are entrapped in a vicious cycle of poverty which is often intergenerational. The top-down approach further contributes to mismanagement of funds, duplication of DRR activities, implementation of ad-hoc DRR methods and practices etc. Another key shortcoming of the DRR strategy is the lack of coordination between administrative bodies involved in DRR, especially at the local level. As a result, such strategies and practices developed at national level often fail to be implemented at the local level resulting in greater vulnerability of communities.

In this light, it is important that the GOSL builds a postcolonial DRR strategy that has the capacity to address the shortcomings of the current DDR mechanism. The DRR strategy should inculcate a community centric approach that allows national level policies and practices to be enriched by local-level wants and needs in order to achieve greater success in addressing the true needs of the communities affected by hazards and disasters. Furthermore,

DRR practices such as relocation should be evaluated and adopted in a case sensitive manner to provide more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to different vulnerable groups. ■

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Disaster Risk Reduction in Pakistan: Reimagining an Inclusive Response

By *Nirmal Riaz*, Senior Research Associate, Karachi Urban Lab, IBA, Pakistan

Pakistan was hailed as the chief flagbearer on climate change funding interventions after the recent Loss and Damage Fund that was announced at the COP27 meeting in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt. Even though this is an important development for holding wealthier nations accountable, it takes away from the operationalisation challenges that exist on ground for inclusive disaster risk reduction in countries like Pakistan. Historically, Pakistan has been at the forefront of several disasters – these disasters continue to be exacerbated due to extreme precipitation events and global warming in general. The southern province of Sindh, alone, has experienced many flooding events over the past century and the recent floods in 2022 that impacted 33 million people across Pakistan, have once again resuscitated the national and provincial disaster management bodies into action. While risk reduction processes have gone through several bureaucratic transformations especially when it comes to the formation of disaster management authorities at the national and provincial level – these structures have failed to understand “risk” in a holistic sense: a process that emerges because of existing colonial infrastructures and reactive policies that do not take into account the situational knowledges and histories pertinent to specific regions and contexts.

It is not a truism to say that such climate events and disasters have become the rule rather than

exception when it comes to speculating about the uncertain future of the changing climate in Pakistan. Considering the frequency of such disasters, it is significant to note that the ways in which the State responds have been either reactive or bureaucratic. In the aftermath of the 2022 floods, this reactive and bureaucratic nature of the disaster management apparatus was apparent. To trace the genealogy of this apparatus, we must look back to the 1958 National Calamities Act, and how its shortcomings were exposed in the 2005 Kashmir Earthquake (Gul, 2022).

When it comes to risk reduction and disaster preparedness, Pakistan broke into action with the formation of the National Disaster Management Authority in 2007 – a body that was supposed to work in tandem with its provincial and local subsidiaries (Ahmed, 2010). However, according to a country report conducted by Pattan Development Organisation (2022), the communities affected by hazards and disasters such as flooding are not part of any consultation processes when it comes to designing and implementing disaster risk reduction (Khan, 2022). The landscape of risk mitigation and disaster management are deemed inadequate because of the existing unequal dynamics on the ground. For instance, in Sindh, which was the worst hit province during the 2022 floods, the topographical, infrastructural, and political dynamics that make disaster management challenging, came

immediately to the forefront. These dynamics are situated in the region’s hydrological and irrigation histories – which first became apparent with infrastructural projects that were built by colonial officers in the early to mid-1900s. As Sindh was inhabited mostly by agro-pastoralist and fishing communities, the Indus River, a literal life source for the province, was not hydrologically managed. The large infrastructural transformations triggered inequalities of land ownership and water provision. The old waterways and dependence on the river were disregarded in the interest of agricultural development that only benefited large landowners (Pirzada, 2023). Even though risk reduction has certain variables that are important for the assessment of potential vulnerabilities, it is also critical to note how certain risks emerge because of situated histories.

In Sindh, the intervention of irrigation networks such as the Sukkur and Guddu barrages and drainage infrastructures have upended the natural waterways. These disruptions have greatly impacted the lives and livelihoods of inhabitants in lower Sindh. At a conference held in February 2023 on the failure of the Left Bank Outfall Drain in Badin, Sindh, climate activists pointed out that large infrastructural projects built in an ad-hoc response to disasters and calamities, often exacerbate inequalities on the ground. Villages located in the lower riparian and coastal region of Badin are inundated

in every flooding event due to poor drainage infrastructure. In one of the speeches at this Conference, Abdul Ghafoor Chandio, an affected resident of the town of Kadhan, complained:

“The officers tell us there are no leakages in the Left Bank Outfall Drain. That is a lie as the banks of the drain are all coming apart. We complain of the incompetent officers and suggest that better engineers should be made part of the reconstruction of this project. When Faqeer Natho and Bahadur Khan Lund were against the construction of the drain then these same officers had a condescending attitude towards us, and they said we are uneducated people who are against development projects and progress. In the end, we only experienced hunger and decimation of the people living here” (Personal field notes, February 4, 2023).

At the national scale, disaster risk reduction responses fail to take into consideration the specific histories and topographies of given contexts and regions. Moreover, risk reduction measures are operationalised through bureaucratic financing of adaptation infrastructures at large, which are reactive and anti-poor in nature. For instance, since 2017, the World Bank has poured millions of dollars into Pakistan’s largest metropolis Karachi - also Sindh’s largest city - especially into the clogged stormwater drains that have triggered repetitive urban flooding in 2021 and 2022. Instead of building new infrastructure, the projects launched through the World Bank financing have led to the demolition of hundreds of homes and displacement of people living around the storm water drains. The residents living in these settlements

face not only the risk of eviction but additional risks where poor engineering interventions have led to people falling to their deaths in the overflowing drains (Anwar et. al, 2022). The government’s risk mitigation interventions through engineering solutions only respond in a reactive manner and do not consider everyday and long-term risks associated with flooding events as well as anti-poor development. The purpose of highlighting these examples is to underscore that the construction of “risk” is not apolitical, and disasters often unfold because of particular histories, planning interventions as well as political choices (Siddiqi and Blackburn, 2022). Therefore, risk reduction mechanisms in Pakistan must consider the larger gaps in the rehabilitation of existing colonial infrastructures and consultative processes when it comes to including people living on the margins and who are dealing with risks repeatedly. Moreover, risk during disasters as well as in the everyday can only be reduced in the long term if response is imagined beyond reactive approaches.

This reimagined inclusive response should have a ground-up instead of a top-down approach. For instance, presently, there are multiple policies being brought to the table but these are not being designed in a synchronised way and are not inclusive of people impacted by climate risks and disasters. Such as the National Climate Change Policy, Sindh Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy and isolated Heatwave management plans fail to take into account the relational effects of poor planning and development. There is a lack of coordination between federal and regional governments which

repeatedly leads to uncoordinated efforts in the event of disasters and in order for these policies to become more effective they have to imbibe these linkages in a nuanced manner. ■

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Decolonising Climate Coloniality

By *Farhana Sultana*, Professor, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, USA

Introduction

Colonialism haunts the past, present, and future through climate. The burden of climate damage is falling disproportionately on formerly colonised, brutalised, and racialised communities in the developing world of the so-called Global South. Frontline communities of the world are feeling climate destruction politically, ecologically, economically, socially, spiritually, and viscerally across the world. This is acutely so in formerly colonised countries across the tropics and subtropics of Asia, Africa, and Latin America that hold less geopolitical and economic power on the global stage. The outcome is a system of climate coloniality where those least responsible for contributing to climate breakdown are impacted more acutely over longer periods. We are still colonised, this time through climate change, the capitalist development industry, and globalisation, colliding into centuries of varied and overlapping oppressions, yet also concomitant existing and emerging sites of resistance.

The interactions at annual global climate negotiations or COPs (for Conference of the Parties) make dramatically evident the climate geopolitics reflecting this imbalance in power and positionalities. At the 2021 COP in Glasgow, colonial tactics were identified and openly called out. While some framed the discussion in terms of climate justice failures, others were more direct in calling out colonial and

racial tactics of control and disposal of marginalised communities across the South and South Asian nations and elsewhere. Many articulated a sense of injustice and climate delay in light of the decades of insufficient critical global action.

The COPs can be seen simultaneously as one of the theatres of climate colonialism (led mainly by corporations, powerful governments, and elites) and also as a site of decolonial, anticolonial, antiracist, and feminist politics (led primarily by activists, youth, Indigenous groups, academics, and unions). While international neocolonial institutions and platforms such as the COPs are resistant to radical change, these are nonetheless also spaces of opportunities to challenge the system, to utter necessary words for more people to hear, collectivise among young and old activists, learn from different positionalities, create new openings and possibilities of alliances—in other words, a repoliticisation of climate instead of the depoliticised techno-economist utopias that never deliver. The global theatres of climate negotiations showcase politics and the political, whether subaltern or suburban, where there are both reifications and ruptures in what constitutes politics and its pathways. A sense of despair, grief, rage, suffocation, stagnation, abandonment, and regression coexists with that of revolutionary potentiality, alternative possibilities, collectivising, determination, world making, and critical hope.

Understanding Climate Coloniality

Coloniality maintains the matrix of power established during active colonisation through contemporary institutional, financial, and geopolitical world orders, and also through knowledge systems. I argue it continues its reach through climate in climate coloniality, which is experienced through continued ecological degradation that are both overt and covert, episodic and creeping—for example, pollution, toxic waste, mining, disasters, desertification, deforestation, land erosion, and more—whereby global capitalism, via development and economic growth ideologies, reproduces various forms of colonial racial harms to entire countries in the Global South and communities of colour in the Global North. Thus, climate coloniality occurs where Eurocentric hegemony, neocolonialism, racial capitalism, uneven consumption, and military domination are co-constitutive of climate impacts experienced by variously racialised populations who are disproportionately made vulnerable and disposable. Legacies of imperial violence from active colonial eras live on, not only exacerbating environmental degradation but also increasing climate-induced disasters. As frequencies and strengths of climate-fuelled natural hazards such as tropical cyclones grow, the structural violence of colonialism is further experienced and vulnerabilities entrenched. Slow but compounding violence intensifies vulnerabilities that maintain climate coloniality and extend it into the future. Some lives and ecosystems are rendered

Decolonising climate would mean rethinking and addressing various institutions and processes at multiple intersecting scales. For instance, it would entail restructuring the world economy to halt the unequal ecological exchange that drains from the Global South to the Global North, which enables the latter's higher consumption and inequitable appropriations.

disposable and sacrificial, fuelled by structural forces both historical and contemporary. The racial logic of climate tragedies and cumulative impacts are ever present.

Climate coloniality is perpetuated through controversial global land and water grabs, REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) forestry programs, neoliberal conservation projects, rare-earth mineral mining, deforestation for growth, fossil-fuel warfare, and new green revolutions for agriculture, which benefit a few while dispossessing larger numbers of historically impoverished communities, often elsewhere. Interventions are called by various names and have different tenors—green colonialism, carbon colonialism, fossil capitalism—but often have similar outcomes of domination, displacement, degradation, and impoverishment. Carbon colonialism through carbon-offset projects, which are increasingly ramping up instead of down, despite known critiques and resistances, has been discussed for some time. Extractivism propagated by global capital and state-sanctioned interventions perpetuates geopolitical climate necro-politics within and beyond borders.

As transnational corporate monopolies travel the globe for

profit, patterns of colonial dispossession are further entrenched. Extraction and imperialism perpetuate unequal political economies, with imperial and emerging modes of hierarchies of power relations driven by global market systems.

Climate apartheid is what many call this socio-spatial differentiation in who pays the disproportionate price of climate break-down, who is made expendable, and who is spared for now. This form of eco-apartheid manifests between and across the Global North and Global South at multiple scales. Climate apartheid exists for those at the intersection of race, gender, and class exposed to ecological harms and toxic environments across sites.

Decolonising Climate Coloniality

There is thus an urgent need to decolonise climate to address the harms done and prevent future harm. To decolonise climate at a basic level means to integrate more decolonial, anticolonial, feminist, antiracist, and anticapitalist critiques and struggles into mainstream climate discourses and practices to redress ongoing oppressions and marginalisations. It is not about just recognising the problems but working toward distributive justice, reparations, and restitution. Decolonising means accounting for

and reflecting on the past and present, in order to configure future pathways to remove colonial and imperial powers in all their forms.

Decolonising climate would mean rethinking and addressing various institutions and processes at multiple intersecting scales. For instance, it would entail restructuring the world economy to halt the unequal ecological exchange that drains from the Global South to the Global North, which enables the latter's higher consumption and inequitable appropriations. Many climate "solutions" perpetuate the problems of climate coloniality and climate apartheid, so more caution and collaborations are necessary. Likewise, the debates around climate reparations remain contentious, as loss and damage acknowledgment has not been followed through with sufficient financial support.

At the same time, healing colonial and imperial wounds through transformative care, empathy, mutuality, and love holds possibilities. We desperately need to heal colonial wounds everywhere. Ethics of care and collectivity are how we have survived colonialism, capitalism, development, disasters, and disruptions. Caring for each other, despite differences, is what carries us forward through devastations of cyclones, sea surges, riverbank erosion, loss of livelihoods, and degradation of homelands. Nonetheless, it would be callous not to acknowledge the socially mediated, globally and locally produced, ecologically relational vulnerabilities that do worsen over time; how impoverishment and disposability persist; and how increased and repeated harms and shocks make us weary and more vulnerable.

Climate coloniality is thus perpetuated through mundane and institutionalised ways of subalternisation of non-Eurocentric, non-masculinist, and non-capitalist understandings of climate, ecology, and human-environment relations. As a result, decolonising educational systems is fundamental, as systemic cognitive injustices often begin through the formal Eurocentric capitalist education that has gone global. In recent years, the effort to decolonise knowledge and the academy has been powerful in Eurocentric universities. The decolonisation of the mind remains critical for epistemic justice and pluriverse, where recuperation of collective memory, dreams, desires, and cultural practices to foster conviviality are important to overcome the colonial matrix of power. Decolonising knowledge systems to confront climate coloniality requires indigenisation of knowledge and politics. Throughout history, this has been not only ignored, silenced, and resisted in dominant discussions on climate but also often violently oppressed or erased. Yet, power exists in the shadows, forging solidarity and cultural continuity against great odds.

While multiple indigenous knowledge systems are excluded in hegemonic climate discourses and practices, they are valuable existing cosmologies of decolonial knowledge and resistance that center on accountable, reciprocal, and ethical relations and processes across the globe. There are many different ways that decolonisation is enacted, ranging from direct action, law, care networks, leap-frogging alliances, cultural resurgence, and more to center BIPOC futures. For instance, blockades, resistance movements,

and land-back claims build community claims for liberatory praxis. Speaking in one's native tongue, collective memory and culture rebuilding, retelling of historiographies, and celebrating human non-human kinship are some of the strategies. Native singing and dancing are resistance, and valuing storytelling is decolonial action. Reclaiming sacredness is anticolonial, and counter-stories and counter-mapping are strategies of opposition. Defending territorial ontologies is de-colonial politics. Recognising relational entanglements and healing fosters well-being and conviviality. For many, various practices are simultaneously coping mechanisms, refusals, resistance movements, and decolonial actions, where recollections of collective memories and practices as well as enactments for liberation remain the goal.

Through such processes, ethics of care, care networks, and prioritising collective well-being instead of only individual well-being become more clarified. This accounts for embodied, ecological, economic, and political safety from harm and fosters flourishing. Healing the colonial wound through transgressive love and solidarity becomes possible. Alienation is fought against by reclaiming sacredness and relationalities, by moving toward liberation and self-determination without apolitically fetishising or romancing the local communities or cultures.

Solidarities and Political Liberations

What is evident is that political liberation from climate coloniality will rely on allyship and solidarities in intentional anti-imperial and anticolonial projects across peoples of occupied, postcolonial, and settler-colonial contexts –

particularly among BIPOC from across continents. Political consciousness informed by anticolonial politics is necessary for decolonisation and abolition of systems of harms. The natures of these relationships need to be worked out, but coalitions come together by working through contentions and differences. Kinship building can be fraught; it needs humility and humanity, overcoming alienation, and acknowledging differences and commonalities to build shared goals.

Decolonisation thus must build political community and practical solidarities that foster pluriversity and reparative relations, ethics of care, and restoration of humanity and agency in the battle against climate change and climate coloniality. The ruthless extractions and dispossessions across territories everywhere showcase the connections across place-based materialities to broader extractive ideologies and colonial-capitalist greed. Indigenous scholarship demonstrates the importance of self-determination and ecological kinship, more-than-human relationality, and multispecies justice. Recognising and valuing living complex ecosystems and agroecology, instead of marketised nature as commodity in a capitalist exploitative system, become vital for epistemic and material climate justice.

Ultimately, there is no single blueprint for decolonising climate, as decolonising is a process and not an event; it is ongoing unlearning to relearn. It is the many acts, small and large, acting in constellations and collectivities over time and place, that bear results. ■

Colonial Logics, Postcolonial Futures, and Flooding Disasters in Pakistan

By *Ayesha Siddiqi*, Assistant Professor, Human Geography, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

In 2022, the unprecedented floods in Pakistan made two facts particularly clear around the colonial logic of disasters. These large-scale floods are the product of (i) material and (ii) epistemic coloniality. The barrages built for water storage and release, by the British Raj, along the Lower Indus Delta (Haines, 2011; 2013) and the largest contiguous canal network in Punjab (Gilmartin, 2020; Ali, 1988) while successful at delivering political patronage for an Imperial regime, have always tended to work against rather than with the natural 'rhythmicity' of the river (Jackson et al., 2022). These (infra)structures however are not just vestiges of a by-gone colonial past but rather still regularly exacerbate risk during flood years. Assessments of the 2010 super-floods in Pakistan conclude that the worst damage was not from rainwater but from dam and barrage related issues such as backwater effects, sedimentation and aggradation that reduced the water channel capacity to carry water away and multiple failures of irrigation levees (Syvitski & Brakenridge 2013). Further, the significant drainage related challenges and rising waterlogging and salinity in topsoil because of the extensive irrigation networks are considerable problems even in non-flood years.

Residents living along the Indus Delta however, are equally vulnerable to flooding because of epistemic coloniality that produces these infrastructural realities. By this, I mean the unwavering ideological

belief since colonial times that a modernist river engineering paradigm relying on hydrological mega projects for water management more generally, and for flood management more specifically, is a 'solution' or panacea for avoiding such disasters. This conviction, in large dams and more engineering along the river as a solution, is as problematic as the actual structures that cause damage. My own research, on the 2010 floods, illustrates the ways in which this thinking causes havoc in people's lives every flood year. Through engineered projects such as the Left Bank Outfall Drain project (Siddiqi, 2023) that are also at the same time integral to state power. There is a vibrant conversation in the social sciences on ways of working with the 'rhythmicity' of the river, rather than against it, that does not appear to have reached state planning in Pakistan.

"Disaster!" But who decides?

"The army *walay* said you can't live here anymore; we have come to evacuate you because this land is dangerous, it will flood again. We went with them to the (relief) camp but a few days later snuck out without telling them - this is our home after all we will not hand it over without a fight".

Interviewee from Badin District, Pakistan, May 2012

When talking about some of the worst floods Pakistan had ever experienced in 2010 and 2011, my research interlocutors often spent

much longer discussing the trauma of being forced to leave their homes by State authorities. This special issue is especially interested in understanding 'harm and hardship' beyond imposed concepts of 'hazards and vulnerability'. My work in Pakistan has repeatedly illustrated what is considered to be the 'disaster' is not universal. For some, it is the State action being taken after the flooding, while for others, the real disaster was not being able to return to a 'home'. Some of them also pointed out that the biggest and most calamitous disaster was the moral bankruptcy in society unleashing the 'wrath of the Divine' through rivers, mountains or from beneath the earth. Acknowledging that disasters are in fact not equal to vulnerability times exposure, but rather what those who experience and live them explain they are, is the first step in exploring postcolonial futures for disaster risk reduction in South Asia.

Is there one postcolonial 'solution' to disasters & does it matter where it comes from?

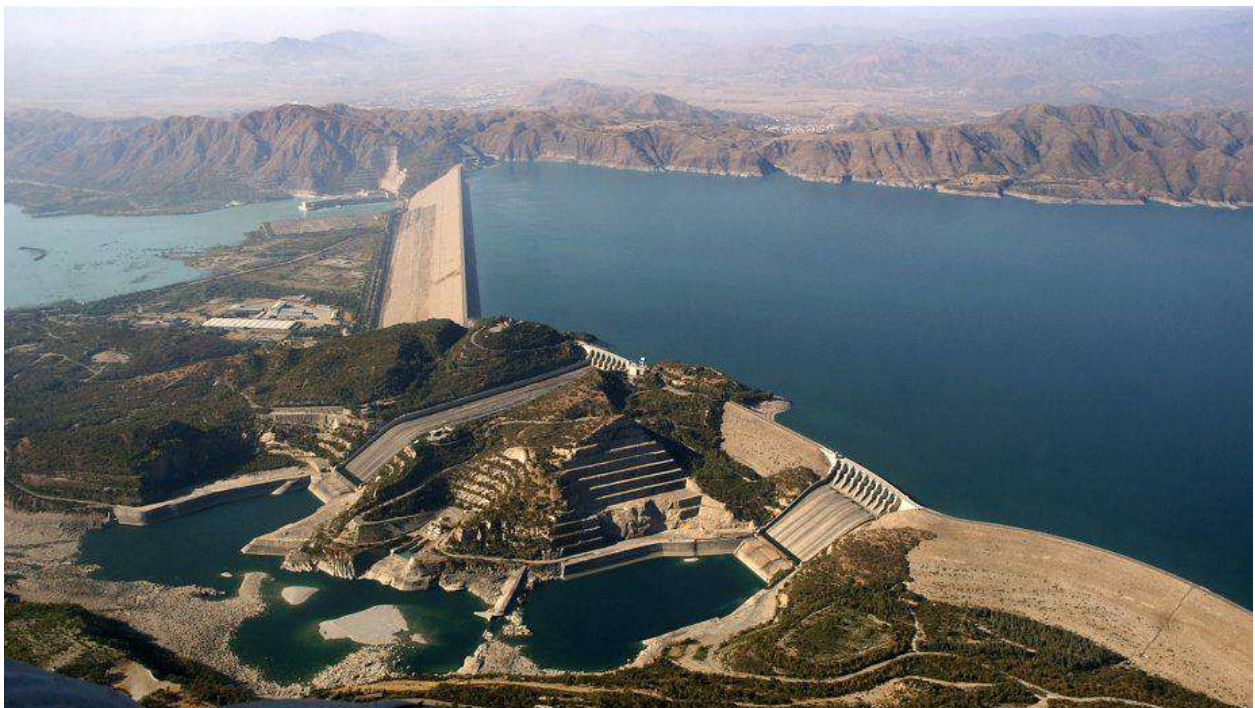
The large-scale floods in Pakistan in 2022 were catastrophic, affecting over 33 million people, and as estimated by the World Bank, the worst affected region was the province of Sindh ([The World Bank, 20 Oct 2022](#)). The political entity and landmass of Sindh is also the periphery for the Pakistan's largest city, and economic capital, Karachi. Supplying the latter with a constant supply of labour and agricultural produce. Every flood year it is this,

pejoratively called “interior” of Sindh, that suffers from floods of biblical proportions; while Karachi, its capital city, is not affected the same way. Increasingly, several locally conceptualised flood management methods are being explored through partnerships between practitioners in Karachi and residents who are regularly affected by floods along the Indus River Delta. The most notable example of this is the work being done by Pakistan’s first woman architect, based in Karachi, working with affected communities to build water resistant low-cost bamboo housing, drainage channels around homes and other building design related interventions (Fitz et al., 2023) to reduce the impact of flooding on people’s lives.

This model of self-sustaining residential communities has not emerged from traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) produced by indigenous communities. Although, it acknowledges and seeks ways to work with such a system. Neither has this thinking emerged from those farmers or residents living with these hydraulic systems (Mustafa, 2022). Rather it comes from a partnership between those who work on safe building and those who need to live in safer buildings. Is there a point at which postcolonial scholars on disasters (including me!) can recognise that ‘indigenous knowledge’ on environmental or hydraulic systems doesn’t have to be the same thing, in all places, at all times? Can working towards ‘indigenising’ any form of knowledge available a worthy pursuit if it helps people live safer lives?

Concluding thoughts

In Pakistan, large hydraulic infrastructure projects are considered ‘strategic assets’ of a powerful military. A postcolonial future for flooding disasters can therefore not be imagined without challenging deeply entrenched power structures. The devastating floods of 2022 were not a catalyst for starting this discussion in public discourse but rather were used by power to garner more support for another large hydraulic project ([Dawn, 11 September 2022](#)). Yet in my research, I repeatedly encounter people who are fighting to hold on to hope, so we should do better, be better, as critical theorists in not just critiquing this system but engaging tangibly with what this hopeful decolonial future of disaster studies looks like. ■



Illustrating the enormous and overwhelming nature of infrastructural projects on the River Indus. Photo credit: AP Photo/Anjum Naveed, File. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-cost-of-pakistans-dam-obsession/>

From Hazard to Haven: Empowering Child Co-researchers in Transforming a Hazardous Pond into a Vibrant Playground

By *Mayeda Rashid, PhD, Research Fellow, Monash University, Australia*

Introduction

In the context of Bangladesh, where the education system bears the weight of a colonial legacy, I had the privilege of witnessing a remarkable transformation in Tarua, a small village in Brahmanbaria district. Motivated by personal experiences of disparity and the impact of disasters, I embarked on my PhD project with a vision of empowerment and inclusivity. Through the participation of children as co-researchers, I aimed to bridge the power imbalance between adult researchers (me) and child participants, and the gap between rural and urban areas, providing opportunities for growth, education, and exposure to a world beyond their immediate surroundings. This essay highlights the transformative journey of empowering child co-researchers from Tarua and their pivotal role in transforming a hazardous pond into a vibrant playground through active participation.

The Disparity between Rural and Urban Areas: A Little Background

Bangladesh's education system, burdened by its colonial history (Ali, 1986; Rahman, Hamzah and Meerah, 2010), reflects a significant disparity between rural and urban areas. With an already overcrowded curriculum, the limited resources, and lack of facilities are more acutely felt in rural communities. Children in these areas face additional challenges such as limited access to quality education, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of exposure to broader

opportunities. The disparity in educational opportunities perpetuates social inequality and hinders the overall development of rural communities (Ahmad, Hossain and Bose, 2005).

In addition to the existing educational disparities, rural communities in Bangladesh are often more vulnerable to the impact of natural phenomena, including floods, cyclones, droughts, and river erosions (Akhter et al., 2015; Bhuiyan et al., 2017; Sarker et al., 2021). These hazards have a devastating effect on the lives and livelihoods of the people in these areas, especially children. Disasters disrupt access to education, damage school infrastructure, and the regular functioning of schools (Akram, Chakma & Mahbub, 2012). Even when the school itself is not destroyed, children's education is often disrupted because the route to school is either blocked or the school building is co-opted for use as a community shelter (United Nations Children's Fund, 2011).

As a child growing up in Tarua, I personally experienced the impact of these events. The frequent floods and cyclones would not only disrupt our daily lives but also affect our education. I witnessed firsthand how children would miss weeks or even months of school due to the aftermath of such events. This had serious adverse consequences for our individual growth and development, as well as the long-term intellectual and economic progress of rural communities and the country (United Nations, 2014).

Recognising this disparity, and driven by my personal experience, I was determined to create a platform where rural children could participate as equal partners in research, thereby empowering them and breaking down the barriers that hindered their growth.

Empowering Co-researchers: A Paradigm Shift

I completed my PhD in 2020 from Central Queensland University in Australia. In 2017-18, I went to Tarua where I sought to challenge the



Child co-researchers immersed in data analysis, creatively expressing their findings and ideas through hand-written posters.



Local village delicacies - a line of food plates featuring Khichuri (rice and lentil dish) and Daler Bora (lentil fritters), lovingly cooked by children for our picnic.

traditional power dynamics by treating the children of Tarua as my colleagues. I believed in their potential and actively involved them in the research process. In our research project (yes, it's ours, not just mine; because it's as much owned by the child co-researchers as by me), children were not mere subjects, not even so called "research participants"; instead, their voices were valued, and their opinions were sought respectfully.

Methods and Approach

I introduced myself as a learner who had not known where to look for information, and who was therefore looking for it from the children, because they were the experts and had the knowledge. This helped relax the environment, and made the children feel confident and empowered (Davis, 1998; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Graue & Walsh, 1998). I engaged the children as co-researchers by involving them in various activities, ranging from data collection to analysis and, importantly, in documenting the findings by writing a full chapter in my PhD thesis. To minimise the power differential more effectively, I incorporated child-friendly methods and techniques that build on children's competencies and interests and ensured that the children had support from each other (Barker & Weller, 2003; Brooker, 2001; Eder & Fingerson,

2003; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Mauthner, 1997; Punch, 2002). I aimed to create an environment of equality and respect. This approach not only empowered the children but also challenged the notion that knowledge and expertise reside solely within the realm of academia, produced and accessed by the so called highly educated adult academics.

Together, we formed a collaborative partnership where the children's experiences, insights, and perspectives were given equal weight, fostering a sense of ownership and agency. The children felt valued and respected for their contributions, gaining a sense of empowerment in the process.

Collaboration and Mentorship

In addition to my role as the researcher, I facilitated a collaboration between the child co-researchers and my Ph.D. supervisor, the late Professor Kevin Ronan, an esteemed Australian academic. This international collaboration not only provided mentorship and guidance but also opened doors to global connections and diverse ideas for these rural kids. Professor Ronan, along with Professor JC Gaillard, who joined my supervisory panel later, played crucial roles in ensuring that the children's voices and perspectives were heard at a broader level, strengthening their sense of agency, expanding their horizons, and thus fostering a sense of global citizenship.

Picnics, Friendship, and Bonding

In addition to treating the child co-researchers as colleagues, I also fostered an environment of equality and trust, which naturally opened the door for friendship to develop. Recognising the importance of holistic engagement, I organised picnics and recreational activities for the children beyond our research



Capturing joyful moments: Sharing laughter and striking a pose during a cultural program with a few of the child co-researchers.



The hazardous pond in front of the school, before its transformation, posing challenges and risks to the children and their community.

activities (which too were suggested and led by the children). We laughed, played games, shared meals, and created memories together.

They felt valued not only for their contributions to the research but also as unique individuals with their own interests, stories, and dreams. These shared experiences created a sense of camaraderie and built a strong foundation of trust, which ultimately enhanced the research process by allowing for more open and honest communication, enabling deeper insights and a richer research experience.

Transformation and Impact: A Powerful Story of Empowered Children

Following my return to Melbourne in April 2018, the child co-researchers remained committed to their learning and actively contributed to promoting positive disaster risk reduction (DRR) in their school and community. Despite the physical distance, we maintained communication through a WhatsApp group that included teachers and parents. This platform served as a space for sharing updates on their DRR activities, drawing inspiration from their experiences as

co-researchers, and fostering a sense of camaraderie and friendship. They viewed me not as an adult researcher anymore but as a friend, as someone they could share jokes and fun photos with. The WhatsApp group became a valuable avenue for continued collaboration and support in their ongoing efforts towards DRR.

Tarua, situated in a low-lying area, face frequent flooding during the monsoon season, posing significant challenges to the community. The pond, in front of Tarua Girls High School, prone to overflowing, was a hazardous obstacle, obstructing school access for the children.

The flooded pathways made walking impossible, exacerbating the situation due to the absence of

adequate transportation. This perilous pond not only hindered education but also posed a grave drowning risk to the entire community. The urgency to address this issue was highlighted when a teacher had a near-drowning incident while crossing the flooded bank on a bike, underscoring the potential dangers faced by the children and emphasising the importance of their DRR mission. The school children, led by the child-coresearcher group, identified this pond as a hazard and shared the incident that happened to their teacher to raise awareness about the risk, aiming for improved school access and community safety. Driven by a sense of empowerment and shared responsibility, the co-researchers, along with their fellow students, village friends, and teachers, rallied together to champion this cause.

They documented the impact of floods on school access, capturing the challenges faced while navigating the hazardous pond. Equipped with compelling evidence and personal stories, the children actively engaged with the school managing committee, local government officials, community members, and other key stakeholders. Through meetings, letters, and presentations, they



Rally for Transformation - Students, teachers, and community members united in their mission to address the risks of the perilous pond in front of the school.



Pure Bliss: Children celebrate the transformation of the pond into a vibrant playground with joyful dance and infectious laughter, radiating happiness in every step.

passionately expressed their concerns about the barriers caused by the overflowing pond. Through their dedicated advocacy and collaborative efforts for more than six months, the child co-researchers successfully convinced government officials to prioritise the issue and allocate resources. As a result, by the end of 2018, the hazardous pond was filled with sand, effectively transforming it into a safe and vibrant playground for the entire community.

Conclusion

By addressing the flooding and drowning hazards, the children not only enhanced school access but also safeguarded the well-being of the entire community. The empowerment of the co-researchers through their participation in my PhD served as a catalyst for transformative change, showcasing the profound impact of genuine participation in research, DRR, and overall community development. The active engagement of the child co-researchers allowed them to develop a sense of ownership and agency, acquiring valuable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration that will keep benefiting them both academically and in their future endeavours. This experience serves as an inspiring example of how inclusive research

and child empowerment can create positive changes and contribute to a more equitable and disaster resilient society.

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Implications of Disaster Risk Reduction from the Colonial Period

By *Eleonor Marcussen*, Researcher in history, Linnaeus University Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies, Linnaeus University, Sweden

Among historians, it is contentious to say that societies learn from the past. Every change, every occurrence happens in a context. Even if we can replicate an entire scenario from the past, one unexpected butterfly flap or the acceleration of time may affect the constellation and result in a different outcome. Yet, in historical disaster studies, historians concur with disaster management agencies that institutions and societies learn from experiences with disasters in the recent and distant past. Poor building construction or weak institutional infrastructure and not the occurrence of storms or earthquakes per se, are accepted as the root causes of the disastrous effects. Social, political and environmental history address these

questions of how social processes shape disasters and populations most at risk. It includes analyses of how technological, political, and cultural factors determine human capacity to deal with hazards, often interlinked with social factors such as gender and age in a complex manner.

History can, in some ways, serve as a laboratory for comparisons and reflections on how risk is negotiated and persist, rather than being reduced over time. With these reflections, we can argue for the need to pay attention to the importance of placing risk in its social and historical contexts. The 1934 Bihar-Nepal earthquake provides several examples of how disaster management was implemented

according to a discourse of modernisation and development. Reconstruction and planning for future earthquake involved experiments with ideas that synthesised knowledge from different fields of expertise. As literature on disasters in the postcolonial era often points out, vulnerability arising from disaster is left out of the development paradigm.

Global Disaster Experts

Turning to global experts in the field of disaster management is not as new as we may think. The rise of experts and professionals affected the field of disaster management already in the 1930s. In 1934, the Japanese earthquake expert Nobuji Nasu (1899-1983) stayed in Bihar for 50



Brick production in the aftermath of the 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake.



Brick kiln set up in the aftermath of the 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake. Source: "SCIIA – Service Civil International – International Archives, Bibliothèque de la ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland)".

days to research the impact of the earthquake. His work at the Earthquake Research Institute at Tokyo University made him an expert on soil sediments and its impact on surface movements in earthquakes. Bihar, and in particular north Bihar, was already known by then for its dense river systems and recurrent disastrous floods. The changes in land levels and sand deposits in agricultural fields after the 1934 earthquake caused much concern. Nasu held discussions on various impacts with the officers of the Geological Survey of India and commented on seismic damages, based on which he gave recommendations on earthquake-safe buildings.

Japan's history of earthquakes was essential in forming a global community of earthquake experts, as well as modes for communicating disaster to the public in the inter-war period. The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake made news for its spectacular destruction and the media coverage it gained was replicated in subsequent earthquake aftermaths. Photography and news reporting helped collect disaster relief from around the globe on an unprecedented scale in its aftermath. These media images of disaster were still fresh in mind in the aftermath of the 1934 earthquake, which would be the first South Asian earthquake extensively documented in photographs in national and international news outlets and that too from the air as well as in walk-through footage of ruined urban landscapes. From the start, aeroplanes accidentally played an important role. A commercial aeroplane had by chance flown over Muzaffarpur on its way to Calcutta (now Kolkata), and in response to the

message 'Earthquake Take Care' chalked in white across the ground, it had landed among the cracks and fissures at Sikandar maidan. In the immediate aftermath, aeroplanes efficiently communicated and carried mail to Patna since roads and telegraph lines took time to repair.

Urban Planning and Earthquake-safety

Towns across Bihar and in particular the communication hubs and commercially important towns Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga in the north and Munger on the southern banks of the Ganges, all suffered extensive destruction in the densely populated bazaars. People had died in considerable numbers in these bazaars, mainly under the crumbling brick buildings. The envisioned human suffering in future earthquakes motivated new town plans for these crowded urban areas. As a result, reconstruction and town planning approached earthquake safety mainly through the planning of wider roads and more sparsely populated settlements. These plans, however, did not follow a disaster management plan modelled on earthquake safety but on sanitation engineering. The same planning was arguably beneficial for both: lower population density and wider roads between houses improved hygiene conditions while it also served as an argument for risk reduction in future earthquakes. Less congested spaces with wider lanes would improve the chances of escaping the falling bricks. Building wider roads was also popular with businessmen as it would facilitate trade, although the planning and modernisation through, for instance, electrification attracted criticism for costs it entailed for the residents. This modernisation in the reconstruction phase was,

therefore both resisted and welcomed by various groups.

In villages of north Bihar, a sub-district officer noticed how houses of bamboo thatch and reeds "naturally rode out the earthquake without any damage as their materials were both light and resilient." Even though, these materials were suitable in villages with space between the houses, the experience of massive fires had shown how such constructions posed major hazards in the often-congested temporary urban colonies. Mud walls, bricks, tiles and corrugated iron in townhouses controlled the spread of fires, while bamboo and thatched constructions aggravated the fire problem. Even though the dangers of fire in the temporary huts made of grass were well known, they remained the most common type of construction in the reconstruction phase. The frequency of fires in the temporary grass huts was one probable reason for people's reluctance to move into the organised relief colonies.

Disaster risk reduction during the colonial period undoubtedly still plays a role in today's society due to its enduring impact on infrastructure and urban planning. Knowing how risk is conceived in a local context helps us to understand how choices are made to deal with a range of hazards. Availability and affordability of construction materials, in combination with reconstruction after disastrous experiences, can have a significant impact on the negotiation of risk in the future. In many ways, policy decisions of today could benefit from taking into consideration how past practices continue to have an impact.

Self-Rule is the Key to Achieve Postcolonial DRR

By *Mihir R. Bhatt*, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, India

For the past two decades, I have come to a growing realisation that without the initiative, active participation, and self-rule by the men and women of the vulnerable communities affected by disasters, it is almost impossible to achieve any credible degree of disaster risk reduction (DRR). When the victim or affected person uses his or her own time, resources, effort, and good ideas and exercises his or her sovereignty to self-rule during, before, and after a crisis, we can see sustainable and long-lasting disaster risk reduction.

A community cannot be rendered dependent on government-sponsored DRR—whether it is by an outside government or its own government if one wishes to avoid a colonial approach to DRR. Rather, the state and civil society should help and support what the affected community wants to do for relief and recovery while making sure never to take over, destroy, or weaken the agency and self-rule of the affected individuals or community.

For example, the people of Kutch, India, since the Gujarat Earthquake of 2001, have depended more and more on the government's public action, neglecting traditional local practices of managing cyclones, droughts, and heavy rains at the community level. As protection from the heatwaves, villages and towns in Gujarat, India, had a long tradition of building *parabs*, or drinking-water stalls, in public places, a practice that is disappearing rapidly for lack of support from DRR programmes. Supporting community efforts to revive old practices or implement new innovations of their own choosing would go a long way in

ensuring the self-rule of local communities, as well as the longevity and sustainability of a postcolonial approach to DRR.

In truth, any community exercising self-rule during “normal” times, in the absence of disasters, is already engaged in disaster risk reduction to some extent. It is imperative that the support they receive reinforces their agency and participation and does not make them dependent on the charity of individuals, authorities, or foundations. This does not mean that poor, disaster-affected persons, are to be left helpless and to their own devices; rather, it means that any intervention must fully follow local interests and initiatives.

These ideas regarding the self-rule of victims being central to any postcolonial DRR are based on my disaster-mitigation work with women, children, workers, minorities, migrants, and other marginal citizens. The following four insights are the result of three decades of my experience working with them.

1. When the affected population develops DRR plans based on their own experience, ideas, and insights, their impact on the community is remarkably greater and longer lasting. Such DRR leads the victims, their families, and communities towards greater self-sufficiency and self-rule. When one understands how floods affect one's village, one's farm, one's income, one's future, one's neighbours, and one's leadership, one is in a better position to design and implement postcolonial self-ruling disaster risk reduction strategies. Self-awareness of the

risk one faces is one of the most important factors for DRR.

2. Risk-informed investment comes from risk-informed citizens. In postcolonial, self-rule DRR, local money is used for local relief; reaching out to local people under their own self-rule has a greater and more sustainable impact in terms of risk reduction and preparedness. When society uses its own money, it thinks more carefully about the allocation and the return on those funds, reducing costs, reducing corruption, and reaping the fruits of good DRR investment. Self-saving, or saving from one's own income, is one of the most meaningful DRR relief strategies, reducing the need for government funds that come in the form of relief or reconstruction investment.
3. Self-management is the best kind of DRR management because self-rule yields direct and more successful results. There are several reasons for that. DRR planning for one's self and one's family fosters a greater engagement with others in the community. At the same time, accountability of governance to one's own self is more effective than accountability to each other, and accountability to each other is far more powerful than accountability to a third party.
4. The range of disasters and the rate at which they are increasing, spreading, co-locating, and impacting communities across the nation has engendered greater involvement and dependence on government, private, and civil society relief. The gap between the need for relief and actual relief is

increasing manyfold. The best and fastest way to reduce this gap is to create space and support for millions of affected citizens to take their own measures for DRR. Self-action is the best preparedness. To dig a well before there is a fire in the village is risk reduction planning at the community level of the best kind that is not dependent on national DRR

structures. "We know what to do when there are four heatwaves in a row over one summer season. Just allow us to do it," said a rural hot-pepper vendor in northern Gujarat this May 2023.

Based on the above insights, it is evident that DRR needs a bottom-up approach. DRR that moves ahead on the strength of budgets, and external

structures, causes greater inequality between those who have ways to face risk and those who cannot face the risk on their own. Despite scientific and evidence-based DRR resources, technology, ideas, and vision, such DRR is bound to remain colonial in character. Postcolonial DRR, on the other hand, builds on or leads to self-rule. ■

સંસ્થાનવાદી આફતનિવારણ અને સ્વરાજ (DRR and Self-rule)

By Mihir R. Bhatt, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, India

છેલ્લા બે દાયકાથી વધુ અને વધુ મને લાગે છે કે આફતનિવારણ અને સ્વરાજ આપણે ધારીએ છીએ તેના કરતાં ઘણાં વધુ એકબીજા સાથે જોડાયેલા છે.

આફતનિવારણ ક્યાં તો સ્વરાજ તરફ લઈ જઈ શકે છે (DRR can help build or break self-rule) અથવા તો સ્વરાજના અંશોનો — રાષ્ટ્રમાં અને નાગરિકોમાં — ધીરે ધીરે નાશ કરી પરાધીન કરી શકે છે. દાખલા તરીકે કચ્છના જે સમાજો સદીઓથી દુકાળનો સામનો પોતાની મેળે કરતા હતા તે હવે સરકારી રાહત માટે ઘણી વાર રાહ જુએ છે. ઉનાળાની લૂ થી બચવા ગામે ગામ પરબ બંધાવી ને હવે સરકારી ફ્લોડિંગ સેન્ટરની રાહ જુએ છે.

તે જ રીતે સ્વરાજ એટલે કે આપણે આપણા સમય, શક્તિ, સાધનો, અને સદ્ વિચારોના સંપૂર્ણ મુખત્યાર હોઈએ તેવા સ્વરાજમાં આફતનિવારણ આવી જાય છે. (Self-rule includes self-rule during crisis). સ્વરાજ ભોગવતો સમાજ સરકારી આફતનિવારણ પર જ આધારિત ન હોઈ શકે. સ્વરાજ ભોગવતો અસરગ્રસ્ત સમાજ સ્વૈચ્છિક સંસ્થાઓ કે દાનવીરોની રહેમ પર આફતનિવારણ કરવા આધારિત ન હોઈ શકે. સ્વરાજ ભોગવતો સમાજ આફતનિવારણ પણ પોતાની મેળે કરે છે. આનો અર્થ એમ નથી કે ગરીબમાં ગરીબ અસરગ્રસ્તને નિઃસહાય રાખી તેના ભાગ્ય પર મૂકવો કે સરકારને તેની આફતનિવારણની જવાબદારીમાંથી જવા દેવી. પરંતુ સરકાર અને સમાજ અસરગ્રસ્તને તેના આફતનિવારણના કામોમાં મદદ કે ટેકો કરવો પરંતુ ક્યારેય બાજી હાથમાં ન લઈ લેવી.

આ વાતો મને આફતોથી અસર પામેલા છેવાડાના બહેનો, બાળકો, કામદારો, અને લઘુમતી નાગરિકો પાસેથી સમજવા મળી છે. ઘણા બધા ત્રણ દાયકાના લાંબા

સમયના અને વિવિધ વિસ્તરેલી ત્રીસથી વધુ આફતોના અનુભવોને નીચેના ચાર વિચારો આસપાસ દૃઢ કરે છું.

1. આફતનિવારણની સમજ, જાણકારી, માહિતી, અને વિચારો સમાજના પોતાના અનુભવમાંથી જેટલા ઊભા થયેલા હોય તેટલા વધુ અસરકારક થાય છે. અને આફતનિવારણના સ્વરાજ તરફ લઈ જાય છે. મારા ગામમાં આવેલું પુર મને કેમ અસર કરે છે તે મારા માટે અને મારા ગામના અધિકારીઓ અને પૈસાદાર લોકો માટે જાણવું બહુ અગત્યનું છે જો અસરકારક આફતનિવારણ કરવું હોય તો. આપ સમજ જેવી કોઈ સમજ નથી. (Self-awareness is best DRR awareness)
2. આફતનિવારણમાં સરકારી પૈસા, પછી ભલેને તે રાહત હોય કે પુનર્યજનાની મૂડી હોય, તેના કરતા સ્થાનિક સમાજની પોતાની મૂડી, પોતાની રાહત, અને પોતાનું દાન ટૂંક સમયમાં વધુ અસરકારક બને છે અને આવા પૈસા આફતને ટાળવામાં ખુબ ઉપયોગી છે. કારણ કે પોતાના પૈસા હોવાથી સમાજ પોતે વિચારી સમજી અને થોડી મૂડી રોકાણથી વધુ લાભ થાય તે તરફ વિચારે છે, અમલ કરે છે, બગાડ અને ખાચકી રોકે છે, અને પૂરાં અને પાકાં ફળની રાહ જુએ છે. પોતાના પૈસા સૌથી ઉપયોગી રાહત આપે છે. (Self-saving is best DRR relief)
3. આફતનિવારણનું સ્થાનિક સંચાલન વધુ સારા, સરળ, અને સફળ પરિણામ લાવે છે. મારા ગામમાં આવતી આફત માટે મારે મારા સમાજના કોની જોડે કેવું વ્યવસ્થાપન કરવું તે સૌથી અગત્યનું છે અને તેના પછી જ જીલ્લા આફતનિવારણ આયોજન કે રાજ્ય આફતનિવારણ આયોજન કે રાષ્ટ્રીય આફતનિવારણ આયોજન આવે છે.

રાષ્ટ્ર નાગરિકોનો બનેલો છે અને તેથી જ સલામત રાષ્ટ્ર સલામત નાગરિકોથી બનેલું હોવું જોઈએ. આપ સલામત તો રાષ્ટ્ર સલામત. (Self-management is best DRR management)

4. અત્યારે પણ જે ઝડપથી આફતો વધતી જાય છે, તેની અસર સમાજ પર નકારાત્મક રીતે પડતી જાય છે તેની સામે સરકારી, ખાનગી અને સ્વૈચ્છિક સંસ્થાઓની આફત ટુંપણી પડે છે. બે વચ્ચે ગાળો વધતો જાય છે. આ ગાળો પુરવા અને વધતી આફતો કરતા આફતનિવારણ વધુ ઝડપથી આગળ લઈ જવાનો સૌથી સહેલો અને અસરકારક પહેલો ઉપાય ફક્ત સ્થાનિક સમાજ પોતે લીધેલા દૂરદેશીના નિર્ણયો જ છે. આગ લાગે તે પહેલાં ફૂલો ખોદવાનો વિચાર અને અમલ સ્થાનિક સમાજે કરવાનો છે અને નહીં કે રાષ્ટ્રીય તંત્રોએ. (Self-anticipation action is best preparedness)

ઉપર જણાવ્યા પ્રમાણે સ્વરાજ (Self-rule) એટલે મને પહોંચતી આફતનું હું પોતે મને યોગ્ય લાગે તે રીતે, મારા સાધનોને જોતા, અને બાકીના બધાને મારી જરૂરિયાત અને ક્ષમતા પ્રમાણે આફતનિવારણમાં (Disaster Risk Reduction) સાંકળું તે જ સાચું અને અસરકારક આફતનિવારણ છે. બાકી ઉપરથી નીચે આવતું, પૈસાના બળે ચાલતું, તંત્રોના વેગથી ધકેલાતું, અને અસમાનતા વધારતું આફતનિવારણ સંસ્થાનવાદી (Colonial) આફતનિવારણ જ રહેશે પછી ભલે તે રાહતના સાધનો, ટેકનોલોજી, વિચારો, અને દર્શન વૈજ્ઞાનિક અને પૂરાવા ઉપર આધારિત હોય. (Postcolonial DRR is not postcolonial if it does not build or stand on self-rule) ■

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Cover collage: A compilation of images collected in Chennai, included are scans of the Naxalite and Dalit community over a compilation of garbage, street art and pottery images. Special thanks to Aditi Sharan for energetic editing.

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