

Chapter 3

3.3 Natural Disasters in Sindhupalchok and Their Effects on Economic and Social Rights

Background

Sindhupalchok is geographically situated at the central part of Himalayas at altitudes ranging from 735 to 6,966 above sea level. The land is composed of sedimentary rocks and loose soil particles and ranges and has three major rivers – Bhotekoshi, Sunkoshi, and Indrawati. The district has been prone to natural disasters owing to the high mountains, steep hills, and fast flowing rivers. The district has had major disasters in the recent past including the 2015 earthquake, the landslide at Jure July 2014, Jalbire Khamare landslide August 25, 2014 and floods in the Bhotekoshi (2016), Barhabise landslide (2020), and Lidi landslide (2020), among others.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Document and publish information on the impacts of natural disasters in different parts of the district and explore remedial measures, and
2. Support disaster victims to access support and to examine the efficacy of relief, relocation and rehabilitation support and systems.

Methods

The report is largely based on site visits, consultations, and interviews with displaced families and stakeholders. The study has also used information from secondary sources.

Disaster Damage

A. *Earthquake of 2015*

The entire district has faced high earthquake risks. The district suffered major damages in earthquakes of 1988 and 2015. The earthquake of 2015 had caused the loss of 3,557 lives and injured 1,569 people, and INSEC had documented damage of 67,383 households. The earthquake had affected the entire population, including children, women, and the elderly across all local jurisdictions. Many of the people were living in fragile and high-risk regions but in the absence of relocation opportunities, the people of Lidi, Nampha, Gumba, and Bolden had to return to their original residences after relief operations. The landslides have left deep scars at all these locations and is still vulnerable to future disasters. The loss at the settlements above can be avoided by relocating them to safer areas.

B. *Loss to Landslides*

The district has suffered major losses to landslides in the recent years. The Jure landslide on August 1 had killed 145 people and injured 15. It had swept away 113 houses and affected 319 families. The landslide of Jalbire Khamare of August 25, 2014 had killed five people and buried 18 houses. Similarly, that of Jambu on July 8, 2020 had cost two lives and the whereabouts of 17 people remained unknown; another five had been injured.

Table 1: Details of disaster damage in Sindhupalchowk (2014-2020)

S.No	Year of Disaster	Death	Injury	Disappearance	Displaced Families	Source
1	2077	74	25	33	389	Field report of Nepal Red Cross Society, 2077
2	2073	0	0	3	945	Annual report of Nepal Red Cross Society, 2074
3	2072	3570	1569	7	1924	Annual report of Nepal Red Cross Society, 2073
4	2071	150	15	0	337	Annual report of Nepal Red Cross Society, 2072

The landslide had buried 39 houses and damaged another 63. Another landslide at Khamare of Jalbire had swept away 10 houses on July 8, 2020 and one at Bulkot of Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality-5 of July 8 had killed four people, injured four and swept away four houses.

Likewise, the landslide of Lidi of Jugal Rural Municipality-2 of August 14, 2020 had killed 35, buried two, injured six and buried 29 houses. Similarly, another 172 houses had been affected by the Lidi landslide¹ and another one at Phulpingkatti of Bhotekoshi Rural municipality on July 16, 2020 had killed five people, injured one, buried two houses and damaged eight more.

Other landslides that have occurred in the district include one at Melamchi Bazar on August 3, 2020 had killed nine workers and buried a house. Another at Baruwa of Thampal Rural Municipality on August 3 had killed two and damaged five houses. Similarly, 32 houses were affected by the landslide in Thumpakhar of Sunkoshi Rural Municipality on August 30. Another landslide at Barhabise Municipality on August 30,

2020, had killed 17, injured nine, buried 14 people and swept away 27 houses.

The land at all locations mentioned above have deep fractures and are still fragile. However, people continue to live in those areas for lack of proper management of the people who were affected.

C. Floods

The district has also been affected by floods frequently. A flood in Bhotekoshi on July 5, 2016 had caused major damage to physical property, swept away three people and damaged different sections of the Kodari Highway to Nepal's border with China. After three months of opening of Nepal-China border, floods swept away the road from Barhabise to Liping. It had also swept away 98 houses and damaged 945 houses². The flooding resulted from a number natural factors, and were exacerbated by human-made factors such as haphazard construction of infrastructure and unscientific road construction. Another reason for the large loss of live and property is the unsatisfactory preparedness for such disasters at both the local and policy levels.

1. <http://kendrabindu.com/post/170726#.YBN--OgzBIU>

2. <https://ekantipur.com/ampnews/2015-02-14/403798.html>

Damages Caused by the Lidi Landslide

Thirty-five people lost their life, two were buried, and six were injured in the landslide of Lidi, Jugal Rural Municipality-2 on August 14, 2020. The landslide buried 29 houses and 127 houses were damaged. Affected families were relocated to Baskharka of Selang, where they were staying when this report was prepared.

The school at Lidi was also buried by the landslide, which affected the education of 234 children who were studying there. Seventeen children had died in the landslide and two were injured. Further, seven children lost their parents in the landslide and the health post was also shut down after the disaster.

Resettlement to safe locations is a major concern for the residents of areas affected by landslides in the district. However, unable to access suitable land elsewhere many of those who were temporarily displaced by the disasters have returned to their origins and have begun rebuilding their houses, which has exposed them to high risk.

The mismanagement of support to the victims is another issue. Support of NRs. 12.4 million collected for the relief of victims of the Jure landslide of August 2, 2014 remained to be handed over. This was largely because of dispute among political parties over how the relief fund should be operated. There was discussion between local representatives, Chief District Officer and other stakeholders on its distribution, which was eventually put on a hold reportedly upon orders of the Ministry of Home Affairs³.

Damage to Livelihoods

Most of the people at Lidi are engaged in agriculture. All the 175 families there depended on the production of maize, millet, potato and rice. The landslide of Lidi damaged maize, millet and po-

tato in 63.99 hectares of land and paddy in 85.72 hectares. After the landslide the residents of Lidi have been forced to live temporarily at Baskharka of Jugal Rural Municipality and were worried about their crops back in Lidi. The landslide had also damaged all 35 toilets and seven public taps that the families there had been using⁴.

Relocation of Settlements

The high casualties have resulted largely because people have continued to live in the high-risk areas. Many people have continued to live there because they have no place else to go and also because there have been no efforts by government to assist their transfer to safer locations. Further, some have stayed back because of cultural reasons and other attachments. In many areas locals have been continuously asking for assistance to move elsewhere. These include about people from about 500 households at Lampha, Sanchagaun, Lidi, Jhulke, and Nimlung. Experts have also recommended the relocation of settlements like Lidi. The government declared Sindhupalchok as disaster prone region and sent a team of experts to study the vulnerability of the settlements there on December 2. The team from the National Reconstruction Authority and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Center have submitted a report to the government with recommendations. The report said two out of the four settlements studied were at high risk to landslides. The report said that both Lidi and Nampha were unfit for settlement.

The affected families of Lidi have been moved to Baskharka after the landslide, which experts have said is safe. Those who were moved there said they would like to live here but have asked government for support for building the required infrastructure.

3. <https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/social-affairs/165480-1543664400.html>

4. *ibid*

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the analysis above:

- Prioritize risk-assessment and relocation of people living in areas that are at high risk to disasters, particularly landslides.
- Ensure sharing of authority for supporting disaster victims between all three tiers of government, and coordinate actions undertaken by the different levels.
- Establish relief centers and pre-position relief supplies near locations that are at very high risk from floods and landslides

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