

When Participation Entrenches Authoritarian Practice: Ethnographic Investigations of Post-Disaster Governance

ABSTRACT

How does everyday politics of participation manifest in post-disaster contexts? Can disaster prompt a political system to shift to a more inclusive, open, and participatory governance direction? In this article, we draw on our ethnographic work in the Philippines in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 and Nepal after the Gorkha Earthquake in 2015 to explore these questions. Our comparative ethnographic analysis shows that attempts at institutionalising participation served to further entrench authoritarian practices rather than promote citizen voice and government accountability. Post-disaster policies that invoke people's participation, we argue, tend to (a) control rather than democratise information; (b) silence rather than promote citizen voice; (c) distort rather than respond to grievances. Our findings call for a reorientation of understanding of participation and accountability in post-disaster governance. Decision-makers, not merely disaster-affected communities, deserve to be the focus area of scholarly attention and policy reform, if community-led reconstruction agenda is to be realised in practice. Our conclusion has implications for the study and practice of democratic governance of disasters in unequal societies prone to disasters.

Keywords: Disaster; ethnography; governance; Nepal; participation; the Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

There is little disagreement about the importance of community-led recovery in post-disaster governance. As early as 1982, the United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation had identified community participation and accountability towards disaster survivors as key to the success of post-disaster rehabilitation [1], while disaster scholars had called for a participatory form of disaster governance that ensures disaster-affected communities have ‘the right to determine and influence’ decisions concerning post-disaster reconstruction [2]. Thirty-three years later, the United Nations General Assembly signed the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, an agreement that considers ‘all-of-society engagement’ as one of its guiding principles [3]. For the part of humanitarian organisations, ‘communication, participation, and feedback’ are among their core commitments in humanitarian response [4]. These, among others, demonstrate the widespread support for participatory processes in post-disaster response, at least in principle.

Critical analysis of disaster governance, however, tells a different story, with the global rhetoric of participation and accountability to have hardly translated into practice [5]. In this paper, we take this gap between rhetoric and reality as a starting point to critically investigate how old and emerging power structures subvert the principles and political possibilities of community participation in the aftermath of disasters. Our analysis is situated within the recent innovation in shared and comparative analysis of ethnographic case studies [6]. We draw on ethnographic evidence from two different fieldworks in the aftermath of 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (second author) and 2015 Gorkha Earthquake in Nepal (first author). In line with the exploratory tradition of ethnographic research, our aim in this study is not to test or refute a particular theory. Instead, our aim is to advance existing theoretical and empirical debates surrounding the process of and conditions under which everyday forms of politics of participation and claim-making unfold and responded to in post-disaster settings [7]. More specifically, it seeks to answer the following overarching research questions: how did everyday politics of participation manifest in the wakes of the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan and 2015 Nepal earthquake? Can disaster prompt a political system to shift to a more inclusive, open, and participatory governance direction?

In both cases, we observe that attempts at institutionalising participation further entrench authoritarian practices rather than promote citizen voice and government accountability. Post-disaster policies that invoke people’s participation, we find, (a) control rather than democratise information; (b) silence rather than promote citizen voice; (c) distort rather than respond to grievances.

We develop this argument in three parts. First, we begin by engaging with the critical theoretical and empirical literature on community participation in post-disaster governance. The literature, for the most part, recognises the mainstreaming of participation in post-disaster response and reconstruction. However, the implementation of these initiatives is often found to fall short of holding the powerholders accountable to the demands of affected communities. We extend this argument and argue that not only are these initiatives divorced from the everyday realities of communities in crisis, but they also reinforce authoritarian practices owing to unequal power relations that have taken root in local contexts long before the disaster. We then situate our analysis within the notion of authoritarian practice, highlighting the conditions, discourse, and practices that undermine community participation and accountability. We conclude this article by drawing lessons from both cases and their implications for democratic governance of disasters.

Community Participation in Post-Disaster Governance

Community participation and associated notions of voice and accountability have become globally circulated buzzwords in the field of post-disaster governance [8-9]. As Colin H. Davidson and colleagues point out, the concept of community participation ‘has been so widely expressed that it does not seem to mean anything clear anymore’ [8]. Indeed, the term community or people itself may be applied in a liberal sense, as in everyone affected by the disaster (disaster-affected communities), or in a relatively precise sense as in vulnerable communities or territorially-bound constituencies. The concept of participation or engagement suffers from a similar concern. It is ‘a polysemous concept,’ like justice and fairness, which could be conceptualised in various ways based on different normative traditions [10]. Indeed, to think of participation as a singular and linear process will be a mistake, as there is a ‘continuum of possibilities for participation’ in post-disaster governance [8]. They can take plural and distinctive forms, ranging from efforts to shape immediate decisions, co-creation of knowledge with authorities, direct action, and resistance against the top-down nature of reconstruction [11].

In recent years, both scholars and practitioners of disaster governance have paid closer attention to community participation’s practical possibilities, mostly because of two reasons. First, there is an *epistemic* case for pursuing a participatory approach, for there are no purely technical solutions for disaster risk reduction and rehabilitation.

Participatory mapping, closely associated with the developments in participatory development [see 12], gained prominence as a collaborative approach to disaster governance. GIS mapping may use the most sophisticated tools, but these do not deliver robust and actionable data without information about the social dimension of physical environments [13]. Therefore, knowledge of village leaders, elders, and household members are valuable in identifying areas prone to floods, sites that collect stagnant water that breeds disease, and poorly constructed homes vulnerable to typhoon damage. Second, community participation also offers a case for *legitimacy* in policymaking and implementation. Engaging communities create a shared understanding and ownership of hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities. Scholars have noted that inclusiveness in planning, decentralised decision-making, and transparency in funding allocation set the foundation for a longer-term community ownership in reconstruction [14-15].

The Everyday Politics of Community Participation

While in principle there are good reasons to support participatory approaches to post-disaster reconstruction, the way participation unfolds in its everyday context tells a different story. Beyond global frameworks, principles of good practice, and governance innovations are contingencies in everyday life and intractable political realities that shape the character of post-disaster participation. Recent scholarship has shown that much scholarly attention on community participation has focused on macro-level and policy relevance of participation, neglecting practical and micro-level politics of participation that often involves informal modes of collective action and solidarity movements [16]. Critical review of policy literature on disaster preparedness demonstrates that undue focus on macro-level or formal modes of participation, in turn, tends to conceal the claims, capacity and knowledge of local communities in shaping disaster risk preparedness and response [17].

Of significance is to note that there is no short of critical literature on participation that reveals its inadequacies and contradictions. Often, participation policies are neither reflective of the varied meanings and manifestations of participatory politics involving marginalised communities [18], nor do they account for local political conditions that influence or constrain the transformative ideals of participatory politics [19]. Such inadequacies are also prevalent in the context of disaster response and reconstruction. Community participation in post-disaster response is often lacking or limited to seeking inputs and feedback from affected communities in formal decision-making structures and spaces [20]. Much scholarly attention is centred on the early stage of rescue and relief, to the neglect of how longer community participation unfolds in longer-term recovery and reconstruction [21].

A common scholarly concern within participatory politics is how standardised participatory approaches conceal power dynamics at the local level [22]. Recent policy and ethnographic analysis into post-disaster Nepal has shown how participation of citizens in the immediate response to the Nepal earthquakes was widespread, but longer-run participation of disadvantaged groups such as Dalit, women and disabled groups was limited due to unequal access to information and resources [23]. In a similar vein, through narrative interviews with earthquake-affected women in Nepal, Arora [24] has demonstrated the prevalence of intersecting and complex nature of vulnerabilities in Nepal, which reproduced and exacerbated exclusion of marginalised women from reclaiming and improving their livelihoods post-disaster, and also subject them to abuse and violence. A recent study into the politics of disaster in post-Haiyan Philippines, provide a similar account of restricted political capacity of vulnerable communities to influence the process of resettlement, raising further questions over the authorities' promises for just resettlement and reconstruction post-disaster [25]. The longer-term sustainability and effectiveness of participatory politics also rests on civil society actors' availability and motivation in post-disaster context. In the absence of well-embedded and trustworthy civil society that can promote transparency in decision-making and mediate the relations between citizens and authorities, participation of ordinary citizens recovering from major disasters not only proves difficult but can further exacerbate pre-existing problems of mistrust and suspicion, which further erodes the prospect for inclusive recovery from disasters [26-27].

Along with transparency in decision-making, meaningful community participation in post-disaster response and recovery is closely intertwined with the history of local relations, together with the perception of trust towards local authorities, and a sense of attachment among a diverse group of community members [28-29]. By contrast, participatory initiatives fail to sustain when there is marked divergence or even conflict in the demands of disaster-affected citizens, local activists and community representatives, and the authorities fail to mediate or ignore such local demands. Thus, the very motivation to participate in post-disaster response and recovery is closely determined by whether or to what extent local authorities exercise fairness in sharing or distributing relief and recovery benefits [30].

Authoritarian Practice

In this article, we take a step further and raise caution that not only do participatory initiatives fall short of realising the promises of inclusive and accountable governance of disasters, they also risk reproducing unequal structures of power. We locate these failures into ‘authoritarian practices’ or ‘patterns of action that sabotage accountability over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation, and disabling voice’ [31]. We use the term ‘authoritarian practices’ to emphasise that even though post-disaster reconstruction is designed to be participatory in principle and enacted in democratic regimes, they purposively or inadvertently result in shielding power-holders from accountability by undermining principles of publicity, transparency and voice. In so doing, we draw on growing insights from disaster scholarship that show the political potential and pitfalls of disasters. Disasters may open up a window of opportunity for social change, but they also risk reproducing pre-existing power inequalities [32-34]. The distribution of political voice and capacity for decision-making may remain in the hands of experts, bureaucrats and elected officials, while subaltern and minority communities are further pushed to the margins [35]. Disasters may also enable State actors to downplay the value of participation and transparency, given the pressures on the State actors to respond quickly in the context of an emergency. As Edward Simpson, through his ethnographic work in post-earthquake Gujarat has shown, uncertainty and unpredictability are inherent features of post-disaster environment, offering a fertile ground for the consolidation of authoritarian religious values and exclusionary practices, together with further entrenchment of donor-driven, and top-down mode of reconstruction [34]. Meanwhile, in unequal societies, power often perpetuates under the various guises of community building and knowledge exchange and- or ‘consensus-building’ initiatives; ‘codification, classification and control of information’, subverting communities’ prospect to reverse deeply entrenched power hierarchies [36-37].

All these, among others, are reminders that disasters may temporarily challenge prevailing power relations and create spaces for local communities to enact everyday politics to secure aid and resources. Still, they also have the potential to reinforce or intensify political inequalities. This is an empirical line of enquiry which, we argue, demands an approach that captures the unfolding of politics of post-disaster participation in their everyday contexts. We conclude by calling for a shift in scholarly attention from disaster-affected communities as subject and object of inquiry, to interrogate the conduct of actors, experts and agencies that undermine citizen participation and accountability in post-disaster contexts. Before we turn to the study findings, in the next section, we make a case for a comparative ethnographic approach that informs this paper.

METHODOLOGY

We find ethnography a fitting approach to our work on everyday politics of participation in post-disaster contexts because it brings into sharp focus the taken-for-granted character of political life. Ethnography is an approach to research that has many definitions, though social scientists agree that ethnography, at the very least, ‘involves immersion in the place and lives of people under study’ [38]. Ethnographers spend time in the field to gather ‘close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space’ to understand how social reality unfolds from the perspectives of communities who are part of the study [39]. Often, community engagement programmes in post-disaster rehabilitation are designed within formal political institutions’ parameters while bracketing power relations in micropolitical contexts. Ethnography allows us to take a step back and interrogate informalities, and micro-politics of unequal state-societal relations that characterise post-disaster contexts [7]. Ethnography is also suited to bring to the fore voices and experiences of disaster-affected communities, accounting for the contingent and negotiated character of political practices, which, in turn shape the character and outcomes of community participation.

In disaster studies, comparative ethnographies are particularly favoured for its ability to go beyond the context-specific understanding of a specific disaster, to generate general theoretical and empirical understandings of varied forms of responses to disasters, the political conditions under which some gain prominence and effectiveness, while others are marginalised [40]. More recently, scholars have called attention to comparative ethnography of disasters for its ability to draw attention into the underlying process of making and unmaking of state-societal relations in the contexts of intersecting disasters [41], as well as for its promise to advance ‘humane’ and ethically oriented approach to reveal the voices, values and struggles of disaster-affected communities [42].

Our methodological approach builds on the recent calls for innovation in ethnographic inquiry that goes beyond a single case, with the aim to improve theoretical generalisation [6]. Although our research projects were initially conducted with distinct research aims, our analysis is informed by our shared theoretical interest in the politics of participation and accountability in disaster governance. Our methodology also responds to the recent calls to use ethnography in revealing concrete ways in which pre-existing power differentials between international

humanitarian actors and local communities produce or exacerbate at the local level [9]. Our analysis specifically takes advantage of joint ethnographic interpretation, through revisiting and sharing of data excerpts and analytical notes and engaging in de-briefing and dialogue [43], as elaborated below. Through such shared interpretive effort, we have sought to offer both overlapping and divergent themes and offer coherent theoretical lessons of cross-contextual significance.

Our article draws on ethnographic fieldwork in two post-disaster contexts: Tacloban City in the Philippines in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan and Sankhu (Sankharapur Municipality) in Nepal after the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake. On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan battered a cluster of islands in Central Philippines. A twenty-three-foot storm surge caused the deaths of over 6,000 people and left over half a million homes destroyed. More than five years since the disaster hit, many residents continue to live in makeshift dwellings, waiting for promised homes. Meanwhile, Gorkha Earthquake, also popularly known as ‘the Great Earthquake’ struck Nepal on April 25, 2015 and was followed by series of aftershocks, resulting in over 9,000 deaths, and destroying close to 500,000 private houses, making it a major humanitarian crisis. The Nepal earthquake also saw an influx of aid actors, who brought with them renewed imaginaries of reconstruction and redevelopment in a post-conflict country marred by political instability and governance deficit.

Space limitations prevent us from providing detailed descriptions of our ethnographic fieldwork that can be found in our other publications [26, 44]. In brief, we conducted our fieldwork in the response and recovery phase of both disasters. The fieldwork in the Philippines took place in twelve research visits (two to three weeks length) from August 2014 to November 2017 in Tacloban City, a highly urbanised city which was the ground zero of the disaster. Meanwhile, ethnographic fieldwork in Nepal was conducted in two phases in August-September 2015 and January-May, 2016, focused on Sankhu, a peri-urban community within the Kathmandu valley which was worst-hit by the earthquake.

Ethnographic evidence from Sankhu (Nepal) came in the forms of fieldnotes from participant observation of government-induced public hearings, reconstruction-related workshops, together with attendance of meetings organised by the Housing Reconstruction and Recovery Platform (HRRP) in Kathmandu. The meetings were observed in their natural context, and the researcher had no control over the agenda or the proceeding of the meetings. In addition, semi-structured interviews, comprising 13 policymakers, high-level public officials, or politicians in Kathmandu, and 8 local level officials and community members from Sankhu, were conducted. Interviewees were recruited using a combination of purposive and referential sampling techniques. Interview transcripts and field notes were complemented by documentary evidence, including recovery and reconstruction-related policy and legislative measures, select minutes from some of the reconstruction meetings organised by HRRP, reports published after the earthquake, and participation and accountability-related documents retrieved from the local government bodies. The LSE Research Ethics Committee granted the ethical approval for the study. Interviews were conducted after providing background information about the project and upon securing the informed consent.

Likewise, the second author conducted ethnographic fieldwork that involved participation at various community meetings organised by local activists, humanitarian organizations, and affected communities, along with community events to commemorate Typhoon Haiyan’s anniversary, annual events like fiestas, electoral campaigns. Participation observation encompassed both formal and informal avenues of community participation, geared at demanding aid, and exercising feedback. These observations took place in two coastal sites of San Jose and Tacloban, which saw the emergence of various forms of collaborative and contestatory avenues of citizen participation. With two research assistants, 122 interviews were conducted, with a quarter of interviewees composed of ‘elite respondents’ (e.g. humanitarian workers, government officials) while the rest of the interviews focused on participants from low-income disaster-affected communities. Analysis was also informed by purposively sampled posts from Twitter and Facebook, which captured the local struggle for participation and claim-making.

Our plan to engage in comparative ethnographic analysis originated during our participation at the third Deliberative Democracy Summer School in Turku, Finland, 27-29, June 2018. At the workshop, under the theme ‘models for the future’, the first author presented emerging evidence from his PhD research on the citizen-centric politics of governance in post-earthquake Nepal, where the second author served as a discussant. The exchange of ideas during the workshop further reinforced our shared theoretical interest in the democratic governance of disasters, the micropolitics of participation, and the larger structural and systemic conditions that interfere with the potential of participatory movements. We followed up on this original intellectual curiosity by exchanging de-identified data extracts and analytical memos from our respective fieldworks. Our review of each other’s analytical

memos was also accompanied by re-engaging with the theoretical literature on democratic governance in general and governance in development and disasters, making our analysis a combined outcome of deductive (theory-based) and inductive (data-driven) reasoning. In our respective projects, we found similar themes on the legacies of the disaster on displacement and citizen participation. For the purposes of this article, we particularly revisited our data to focus on how community members made sense of or experienced state-driven discourses and practices of community participation in post-disaster response and recovery. Through review of data and analytical memos, we came up with broad set of analytical themes spanning knowledge transfer (do citizens have access to information about decisions that affect their lives); voice (what avenues are available for citizens to express their preferences and hold officials accountable); and responsiveness (how do power-holders respond to citizen feedback). Upon further review of the literature, we found Glasius' [31] work on accountability sabotage as a useful notion to anchor our emergent analysis and findings. Findings are, as appropriate, backed by a combination of ethnographic evidence spanning interview quotes, field notes, ethnographic vignettes, and contextual information. Consistent with the ethnographic research, we also considered our analytical outcomes in relation to our positions, positionalities and ethical sensitivity as ethnographic researchers. As such, the papers' findings are not independent of, but closely shaped by our background as nationals of Nepal (first author) and the Philippines (second author), our tacit knowledge of the two contexts, and our experience of participating in disaster research [26,44].

Additionally, our focus on Tacloban, Philippines and Sankhu, Nepal as illustrative, comparative ethnographic cases are twofold.

- First, both cases used the 'building back better' agenda as framework for post-disaster rehabilitation. Promoted by former US President and Special Envoy for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Recovery Bill Clinton, this agenda challenges the primacy given to experts, state actors and aid workers in ascertaining disaster-affected communities' needs and instead considers the people as main drivers of their recovery [45]. In the Philippines, 'building back better' was both a slogan for recovery, printed in signs plastered all over the city, and an official framework for post-disaster governance articulated in official recovery and rehabilitation plans [see 46]. In Nepal, 'building back better' was adopted early on after the earthquake as a major motto by the government and aid agencies, based on which concrete post-disaster activities, including participatory and community-driven reconstruction were to be launched [47-48]. These shared imaginaries of post-disaster governance served as a foundation upon which we could investigate the areas of convergence and divergence between the rhetoric and reality of participation in two comparative contexts.
- Second, in both cases, national governments and local officials were the subjects of intense national and international calls for transparency and accountability in disaster response and recovery. International media coverage of the Philippines drew attention to the slow and selective disaster response, exemplified by CNN anchor Anderson Cooper's report that 'there is no real evidence of organised recovery or relief' [49]. Meanwhile, in Nepal, frontline humanitarian workers and policymakers were subject to multiple forms of accountability pressures from media, the general public and the government [50]. At the same time, in both contexts elected officials and bureaucrats were quick to defend or justify the adequacy and transparency of their response, as is a common political behaviour in post-disaster contexts [51]. Our ethnographies investigate how these conflicting accounts map on the experience of disaster-affected communities, particularly on issues of citizen voice and accountability.

While the analysis of two cases builds on recent advancements in comparative ethnographic analysis, there are key methodological gaps that merit attention. As previously noted, the ethnographic evidence comes from two distinct fieldworks, spanning two different timelines and distinct sets of data sources, limiting the scope of in-depth interpretation of individual cases. Compared to the second author, the first author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in post-earthquake Nepal for a shorter duration, focused primarily on observing the unfolding of the participatory workshops and meetings that are explicitly linked to earthquake response and reconstruction. Fieldwork in Nepal was also done at the time when the country was going through a major political transition. Five months after the earthquake, in September 2015, the country saw the promulgation of a new constitution that was set to change the country's centralised governance structures to the federal mode of governance. This evolving and fraught political situation had an impact on the study outcomes. In particular, the findings need to be viewed in relation to the uncertain and fluid nature of policy landscapes and governance structures that characterised the changing political context in Nepal. Compared to the first author, the second author's research in the Philippines involved longer-term field engagement, spanning ethnographic evidence that covered wider set of activities and events, ranging from town hall meetings and electoral campaigns to festivals and commemoration events. As such,

the current paper would have also benefited from longer-term field engagement in Nepal, making the data sources and subsequent comparison more analogous. We also acknowledge that post-disaster contexts' political realities are hardly static, but are continuously shifting and subject to contestation, as the post-disaster response itself evolves from immediate rescue and relief to longer-term recovery and reconstruction. Our shared methodological reflection is that the study of disasters demands longer-term field engagement that can capture ever-shifting political realms and realities of disaster contexts.

KEY FINDINGS: How Participatory Initiatives Can Entrench Authoritarian Practice

On paper, the Philippines and Nepal's political structure respond well to the globally propagated vision of community-led recovery and reconstruction. Both countries have decentralised governance structures conducive for grassroots participation. In the Philippines, 'reasonable participation' at all levels of decision-making is a constitutionally enshrined right, where the state, by law, is required to 'facilitate the establishment of adequate consultation mechanisms' [52]. The Aquino administration—the government in power during Typhoon Haiyan—ran and won the elections based on their good governance agenda [see 53]. Citizens, at least in principle, were treated as partners of government in anti-corruption programmes. A range of state-NGO collaborations took place under this regime, including monitoring public procurement and conducting a participatory audit of government funds. Meanwhile, in Nepal, local and participatory governance ideas gained momentum in the early 1990s after the advent of the multiparty democracy. They reached further heights after the end of the Maoist conflict in 2006. Like in the Philippines, in the post-conflict environment, Nepal saw the introduction of a number of policies and practical measures to ensure 'good governance' in the development sector and encourage citizen participation in monitoring and improving delivery of public services [54]. Additionally, legislative measures such as the 2007 Right to Information Act were introduced to give citizens the tool not just to obtain public information but also 'study and observe activities' that pertain to a 'Public Body' [55]; a right, like in the Philippines, enshrined in the new constitution that was promulgated in the aftermath of the earthquake. Taken together, these constitute a recognition of the democratic rights of the citizens to participate in the affairs of the state, while also foster citizens' participation and involvement in planning and overseeing the core activities of the state including in the context of disasters [56].

Power structures, however, are resilient and often outlast governance innovations. In the Philippines, decentralised governance means local governments are running their constituencies like personal fiefdoms as local power brokers hold monopolistic control over the economic and coercive resources within their jurisdictions [57]. Political competition in the Philippines is fought among clans, such that party politics holds no distinction from intra- and inter-clan competition. For decades, Tacloban has been run by the Romualdez family who rose to power at the height of the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s when first lady Imelda Romualdez-Marcos further consolidated the power of the Romualdez family in her hometown. When the typhoon hit, the city was run by Mayor Alfred Romualdez and District Representative Martin Romualdez (Imelda's nephews) and City Councillor Cristina Gonzales Romualdez (the mayor's wife), together with their political allies. Years after the typhoon, Tacloban leadership in Tacloban is impenetrable by political opponents, and is instead determined by a rotation of the Romualdez clan occupying different positions. In Nepal, the political instability that persisted in the years following the end of the Maoist conflict has had a significant impact on the practice of local and participatory governance of development. Despite a range of policy and practical measures introduced by both the GoN and the aid sector, 'good governance' in the public sector has proven elusive, with the state-mandated participatory and accountability mechanisms suffering from diminished citizen engagement, owing to a low level of public sector responsiveness [58-60]. When the earthquake struck, the country was suffering from a democratic void at the local level. Local bodies were devoid of elected representatives. Previous studies have shown to be a major impediment in the implementation of State-induced participatory practices and helped deepen a system of political patronage at the level of service provisions [61].

How does everyday politics of participation unfold in post-disaster contexts with unequal and resilient power structures? Can disasters prompt a political system to shift to a more inclusive, open, and participatory direction? Below, we present findings from our comparative ethnographic analysis that show how participatory initiatives in post-disaster governance serve to further entrench authoritarian practices.

Control Rather Than Democratise Information

We begin our analysis with the role of information in post-disaster governance. That right to information is a crucial element of people-led recovery is hardly a new assertion. Only when people have credible information can they 'plan for themselves, make informed choices, and act to reduce their vulnerability' [62]. Information, however, can flow in an unidirectional manner, as in the case of governments and humanitarian agencies releasing

public notices, situation reports and education campaigns, or it can be generated from the grassroots, as in the case of disaster survivor groups acquiring data through freedom of information requests [see 63]. It can also be co-constructed, as in the case of collaborative hazard-mapping we mentioned in the previous section [13], where citizens are treated as bearers of knowledge and information, not just subjects information dissemination and rehabilitation programmes.

Community engagement in the Philippines and Nepal faced challenges due to inequalities with the way information is viewed, assessed and co-created. While there were spaces for collaborative exchange of information on the level of powerful decision-makers, there was information vacuum among communities. Resulting from this inequality in information is the perpetuation of authoritarian practices that sabotages accountability to power holders.

The Philippines: Participation behind Closed Doors

In the Philippines, the inequality of accessing and co-constructing information is evidenced in the process of creating the Tacloban Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan. Developing this plan entailed a series of consultations, from local government officials to humanitarian clusters' coordinators [see 64]. Given the different interests, ideas, and capacities of various stakeholders, a series of workshops and planning meetings were conducted over six months. This kind of engagement, however, took place in 'closed spaces' [65]. Ethnographic fieldwork (second author) showed information sharing, deliberating, joint mapping exercises, and decision-making took place behind the closed doors of air-conditioned hotel ballrooms. Participants spoke in English, using the technical vocabulary of urban planning and public administration. Discussions were focused on relocating families to the northern part of the city. Such discussions, however, hardly saw local residents' involvement, as if uprooting families from places they call home was a matter of administrative intervention, undeserving of community involvement. None of the residents affected by proposed projects along the coast were invited in these spaces; neither were there moments for reflection for participants in these closed spaces to take the perspective of poor coastal communities. The moment the public was brought in the conversation was during a townhall-style meeting in March 2014 at the 4,500-seater Tacloban Astrodome. Over 5,000 people listened to the mayor explaining the plan, which, arguably, came closest to information dissemination.

With this arrangement, one could argue that information generation and dissemination took place in a controlled fashion. On the ground, information about rebuilding trickled down in the form of rumours that made people living in informal settlements along the coast anxious about their forthcoming eviction. For example, some thought there would be a new hotel built, so they will be evicted soon. Others heard from friends working in city hall that their homes will be bulldozed to make way for a boulevard. Others thought elections are coming up, and there is no way the Romualdezes will betray them for they need their votes. As residents speculate about their future, they had little control over the recovery efforts, for they did not know how soon they will be evicted from their own homes. 'What do you think,' a market vendor asked us in an interview, 'should I go for the loan shark's offer?' Here, the study participant is referring to a start-up capital offered by predatory lenders so she could build her market stall again. We said we could not offer advice, and to this she replied, in a resigned tone, 'come what may.' She said she will see where her fortune takes her, for she simply did not know whether it is worth rebuilding her stall so she could start earning money for her family, or whether it will all be in vain as the market could get demolished in the coming months. When we asked her whether she could enquire with the village leaders, she sounded dismissive, and said village leaders could not be trusted with information. This story is a common experience in our research. Information in post-disaster governance may be co-constructed and controlled from above, but patchy from below.

In an informal conversation we had with a humanitarian aid worker why there were few opportunities for the public to give direct public input and information about the recovery plan, the worker said this is one possibility, but it could also be redundant. Communities already have elected representatives that should be looking after their interest, the interviewee explained. And here lies our critique over implementing participatory practices devoid of context. It presupposes that representative politics works, despite its glaring deficiencies. It presupposes that co-creating information and decision-making in closed spaces extends to the co-creation of knowledge among vulnerable communities. Such practice, we argue, sabotages, rather than, improves post-disaster accountability.

Nepal: Information vacuum

Ethnographic evidence from Sankhu in Nepal reveals a similar experience with the Philippines' in terms of an unequal and controlled flow of information. As part of the immediate response to the disaster, the Government of Nepal conducted 'rapid needs assessment' of the situation that, in turn, tried to assure the public of a more

accountable and participatory approach to post-disaster governance [47]. This, among other things, involved commitment towards participation of women and marginalised groups in housing reconstruction, together with ‘setting up grievance redress forums at the local level, which will allow citizens to lodge their complaints formally and get a satisfying response and redress’ [47]. As talks of long-term reconstruction took root, under the auspices of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), the national body set up in December 2015 to oversee the reconstruction efforts, the focus shifted back to the top-down model of reconstruction that was devoid of transparency and consultation. A key manifestation of such opaque and top-down mode of reconstruction was the NRA’s declaration of 200,000 Nepali Rupees (NPR) (approximately 1,800 USD)¹, to be distributed to qualified households as a form of housing grant.

Like the Philippines, vulnerable communities in Sankhu operated in an information vacuum, creating chronic uncertainties and unverified claims about the future of reconstruction. Not only did communities have little information about how the housing grant was determined, but they also had little information about how it can be accessed. Although poor communities often get information from the media, almost one year into the disaster, there were few ways to validate and act on this information. As one local activist commented:

‘Whatever we know is from newspapers. But people expect us to have more information. We don’t have time to go to the (Sankhu) Municipality to find out what is going on. But even if you have time and go to talk to the government employee, it is not easy. You don’t know who to ask.’

Not knowing who to ask is an issue beyond the impenetrability of the bureaucracy. It is also an issue of accountability, for activist groups representing disaster survivors could not trace the personalities they should hold accountable. Local officials themselves confessed to having little knowledge over the decisions the NRA makes, which, in turn, disempowered them from properly liaising with local communities. As a consequence, there was increasing mistrust among community members, fuelled by rumours that local elites collude with local authorities to make decisions about housing grants.

In Sankhu (Nepal), unlike in Tacloban (the Philippines), the issue was further compounded by lack of elected representatives at the local level. Their absence meant that affected communities had to rely on either local government officials or unelected political leaders. Against the growing centralisation of post-disaster reconstruction, the local authorities and political leaders, in turn, had little to no formal authority in influencing policy decisions. In the wake of the disaster, Sankhu also saw the emergence of new civil society actors claiming to represent and defend the interest of Sankhu. Several of these civil society actors were insistent in pressuring the NRA to adopt a community-based model of reconstruction in Sankhu, which would uphold the ‘historical and cultural identity’ of Sankhu, as one activist put it. Like in Tacloban, some activists in Sankhu were able to organise what were called ‘interaction programmes’ at the local level that often saw participation of the senior NRA officials, together with local authorities and politicians. While such meetings were well-intended and vital in drawing the NRA officials and local authorities’ attention to the urgent and longer-term reconstruction needs of Sankhu, they were hardly successful in securing clear-cut commitment from the NRA regarding housing reconstruction that reflect the needs of the local communities. In fact, the NRA officials would use such meetings to share prior decisions surrounding eligibility determination for individual housing assistance, or to secure community ownership and support to the vision of ‘Integrated Reconstruction’.

At the community level, however, there was a widespread confusion about the nature and significance of ‘Integrated Reconstruction’, which many interviewees saw as a forced attempt at integrating local households with divergent social, religious and household demands. For many interviewees, the rhetoric of ‘Integrated Settlement’ was nothing but an effort to shift the attention away from the urgent demands to support the rebuilding of individual houses. The local level meetings, thus, proved to be what Arnstein, [66] has long called ‘participation through information sharing’, in which the NRA officials would update the community of the prior decisions, but with little commitment to involve community in making decisions that affect them.

Disable Rather Than Develop Voice

Disabling voice is another form of authoritarian practice that the analysis revealed. Power holders evade accountability by discouraging critical questions, penalising citizens who speak up or bribing journalists from reporting unsavoury news [67]. Disabling voice may be overt, such as sending thugs to intimidate activists, or, as in the case of democratic regimes, it can take place in a subtle but nevertheless disempowering manner, as in the

¹ This amount was later increased to NPR 300,000 (approximately 2700 USD) per household.

case of devaluing the voice of citizens over technocrats or stigmatising opposing opinions as obstructions in grand development plans.

These disabling tactics rather than developing voice continued to thrive in post-disaster Philippines and Nepal, despite their endorsement of the Building Back Better Agenda. Instead, the Agenda itself was used as an anchor to legitimise strategies that mutes voices that are not in line with a pre-determined reconstruction plan. Instead of ensuring community engagement, both the typhoon and earthquake served as opportune moments to implement 'ideas that were lying around', mostly in the form of urban development in the Philippines and restructuring of the State through a new constitution in Nepal, the latter sparking further political instability and disrupting reconstruction efforts in Nepal [68]. Additionally, in Nepal, support for 'ideas lying around' came in the form of a consolidation of 'good governance' agenda, and the imposition of forced consensus, while in the Philippines it manifested with the cost of stigmatising dissent through subtle pressures and threats.

The Philippines: Strategies of silencing

One agreement that came out of Tacloban's 'participation behind closed doors' approach to rehabilitation is the establishment of a new township in the northern part of the city. Weeks after the disaster, the local government declared the shoreline as a 'no build zone' effectively telling communities not to build back their homes in tsunami-prone areas where they once stood. Instead, the government, together with UN-HABITAT, proposed a masterplan to move 70,000 people to Tacloban North, a 'new city within a city' which puts Tacloban on the map as a 'vibrant, resilient' regional growth hub.

Community engagement about the relocation took place through various mechanisms. There were village assemblies, as well as consultations with aid agencies and philanthropic organisations involved in reconstruction. Many respondents received this well, especially those who felt traumatised by the storm surge but there are also those who raised issues about a 'second order disaster' that could happen when they move from the shoreline to the foot of the mountains. 'We may not have died of the disaster, but we will die of hunger,' was a common line we heard in our ethnographic interviews. They raised issues of livelihood as most residents living in the coast are either fishermen or market vendors. Others worried about the cost of transportation commuting downtown, where most economic activity takes place. A return jeepney fare costs are third of their daily wage.

When we asked our respondents about avenues where these concerns can be addressed, we instead found two strategies of silencing. The first was stigmatisation. Residents who spoke up are pejoratively labelled by village leaders, social workers, as well as fellow residents as 'troublemakers' who put the entire community at risk of not receiving aid. Post-disaster contexts are fragile contexts where power relations between givers and receivers of welfare are more pronounced. Being viewed as 'ungrateful' or 'uncooperative' deterred some of our respondent from speaking up. A young father, for example, told us that he is sympathetic to People Surge, a disaster survivor movement that held massive demonstrations calling out state neglect. He considered joining a demonstration because he was frustrated with the quality of relief goods his family received from the Department of Social Welfare. His village leader got wind of his sympathies, and was told, in a causal conversation, that he must avoid being in the company of activists. He could be tagged by the police as a rebel, which in turn, brands their village as undeserving of aid for they harbour thugs who wish to overthrow the state. This stigmatisation remains alive in the political imagination, especially of younger residents, whose view of activists is limited to targets of state violence undeserving of state support. Stigmatisation may seem benign, but in the everyday lives of disaster survivors whose only lifeline to concrete homes is through the state, 'good behaviour,' defined as not complaining, and not taking a political stand, is essential.

The second strategy of silencing is disparagement. When we interviewed disaster survivors who have taken the risk of speaking up against the impeding relocation, they confessed to feeling humiliated by rumours targeted against them. Their neighbours and village leaders who are known allies of the mayor dismissed their criticisms as 'fake anger,' that residents who speak up are paid by the political opposition to destabilise the reconstruction activities. Disparagement also took the form of not getting feedback when citizens muster the courage to ask questions in a forum, or in one-on-one conversations with officials of the National Housing Authority in-charge of relocation. From being made to wait for hours before the forum begins or for the official to arrive to not receiving feedback from formal enquiries made, disaster survivors' time and effort are belittled as unworthy of attention.

These strategies of silencing, among others, are legacies of an unequal political system that has long devalued voice in formally democratic Philippines. These strategies demonstrate the limits of community engagement, especially when transplanted to a context where critical voices cannot flourish.

Nepal: Forced Consensus

In Nepal, one idea that the authorities sought to implement was the uniformity and standardisation in delivery of cash assistance for housing reconstruction. Both the NRA and the donor communities providing much-needed funds for the reconstruction concurred that the cash assistance of NPR 15,000 per household, given as an immediate cash assistance to build temporary shelters, was widely misused by the ‘fake’ households. A new Census, therefore, was to be carried out, to ensure an evidence-based and standardised model of housing assistance. It was particularly aimed at tackling the risk of ‘inflated households’, together with strong attention to self-monitoring of the grant, whereby the financial discipline in the use of grants is secured.

Of significance is that the vision of uniformity and standardisation in aid was not a new idea that captured the attention of NRA. This idea had been lying around, as part of the broader government strategy of ensuring ‘good governance’ in the aid sector [69]. However, the 2015 earthquake prompted powerholders to consolidate and implement this idea. This was backed by key international aid agencies, who considered that the number of damaged households were less scientific and was potentially “inflated” at the local level, to qualify for housing assistance.

At the same time, the globally propagated rhetoric of ‘building back better’ served as a new imaginary to pass the State’s rebuilding responsibility to the affected communities. One such rhetoric involved NRA officials asking the local communities to come to a consensus in defining the nature of ‘Integrated Settlement’. This involved two-fold strategy of bringing uniformity in reconstruction but also cultivate a form of collective voice that met the consensus-seeking rhetoric of the NRA. As one community activist mentioned ‘The idea of “*Ekikrit Basti (Integrated Settlement)*” sounds very tempting and attractive but the local people really don’t know what it means. It is disconnected from their livelihood and local ecosystem and local culture. Communities are seeking support from the state and they are not understanding the complex jargons of policy.’ For local community members, the idea of an ‘integrated settlement’ was founded in the imagination of what one local activist said, ‘to maintain the original footprint of Sankhu’, as a town of cultural and historical significance. He further mentioned:

‘I don’t have problem with that (‘Integrated Resettlement’). But it is only done to make the town more appealing to the donors and tourists. That is what helps them (NRA) show their work to the donors. All of them (NRA officials, donors, local officials) are using the same language to get community support. But there is little talk about how to reconstruct individual houses, what kinds of support people need?’.

For this interviewee, the policy rhetoric of ‘Integrated Settlement’ involved a consensus among powerful state officials and donors to improve the economic prospect of Sankhu, but was devoid of local expectations. Furthermore, such consensus often went unchallenged in the absence of elected representatives and sustained local opposition. Instead, those claiming as political leaders, as observed in the public hearings and community meetings, joined the state officials in demanding support from the communities in realising the vision of ‘Integrated Settlement’.

In general, the earthquake served as an opportunity for the government to redirect some of its pre-existing policy and practical aspirations toward the service of state-driven and donor-endorsed reconstruction. Setting up systems of uniformity and standardisation became the major focus for recovery and reconstruction, which would, in turn, enable the government to bring ‘financial discipline’ and ‘harmony in the delivery of aid,’ as envisioned in some of the key policy documents prior to the earthquake [54,69]. The standardisation efforts undermined the varied voice of local communities.

Distort Rather Than Uncover Grievances

The final theme that we have observed in our ethnography is the authoritarian practice of distorting rather than uncovering and responding to grievances. Authoritarian practice, ultimately, ‘shield power-holders from accountability’ [31]. As in the case of suppression of voice, this practice may be overt as in the case of judiciaries or anti-corruption bodies partial to officials, or this may be subtle, such as practices designed ‘to promote an ideological project’ that distorts the lived realities and grievances of disaster-affected communities. This practice has authoritarian characteristics. It disempowers citizens from getting their views across representative political institutions and deters them from expressing collective grievances that have a fair shot at getting a response from decision-makers.

The Philippines: Performances of ideal victimhood

In the Philippines, the distortion of grievances comes in the form of official pronouncements that portray Tacloban to have recovered from the disaster. Less than 100 days since the typhoon hit, billboards in Times Square in New York and Piccadilly Circus in London came up bearing the colourful advertisement of the Department of Tourism that says, 'The Philippines Says Thank You.' The narrative of gratitude extends to activities of community participation on the ground, such as disaster communities building 'thank you shrines' for humanitarian organisations, or digital campaigns that portray Tacloban as a 'resilient city,' the home of the 'happiest people in the world.' These expressions of gratitude and recovery may be dismissed as simple marketing exercises for a city to demonstrate that they are back on their feet. However, another interpretation, one that we share, is that these narratives are part of coordinated performances of ideal victimhood, showing that Filipinos are ideal, resilient victims, who are grateful for the world's support.

While we do not find fault in the virtue of being grateful, we are worried when ideal victimhood becomes the official narrative of recovery. In our fieldwork, we met respondents who complained about the substandard quality of houses, the poor access to electricity and water, and patchy mobile phone connection in Tacloban North. We probed the kind of responses they received when they raise these issues in village assemblies and ad-hoc meetings, and to this, they received responses of discursive short-hands for performances of ideal victimhood. 'Be patient,' 'be grateful you got a house,' 'don't bite the hand that feeds you,' 'leave it to God,' 'don't speak ill of people who are trying to help,' and 'beggars can't be choosers.' These, according to our participants, were some shortcuts expressed by government representatives, even local aid workers, when disaster survivors stake claim over humanitarian aid, and demand accountability for substandard aid. These narratives, as mentioned in the previous section, were not only disparaging, but they distorted people's grievances by promoting a discourse that shifts issues of substandard housing and inefficient rehabilitation from a language of rights to a language of charity. When this takes place, the critical bite of community participation is lost, and community engagement becomes discursive spaces for an underperforming state.

Nepal: Narratives of standardisation

At the local level, the post-earthquake environment saw renewed interaction between citizens and authorities. Meetings were held at the initiative of local activists and politicians. Often, public hearings, conducted as part of the State's formal governance mechanisms, brought state actors and citizens together. However, such meetings, like in Tacloban, hardly served as a space to generate satisfactory response from powerholders about everyday grievances. Rather, they were used as a tactical space by local and central level authorities to pacify local grievances. While some community members passionately raised the everyday problems facing local communities, some made a strong appeal for quick delivery of housing assistance. Others alerted the local government officials about the increased involvement of predatory real-estate agents or 'brokers' who sought to take advantage of the misfortune facing local inhabitants. By contrast, state officials were insistent on pushing the ongoing plans to ensure standardisation and uniformity in reconstruction through implementation of housing Census. Those raising severe opposition to the delay in housing reconstruction assistance were often labelled as uncooperative, as happened in the Philippines. In addition, the burden of spearheading the reconstruction was transferred to local communities, under the logic of 'Integrated Resettlement', as discussed above. A senior level government official put it, "Government is here to do policy level intervention. For day-to-day changes, the community have to do it themselves. They are responsible for it". Community engagement and 'buy-in' was sought, in line with the pre-existing policy frameworks of citizen participation, in the forms of formation of 'beneficiary groups' that can, in turn, make stronger and concerted demands to expedite reconstruction activities. 'It has to come from bottom up', as the official stressed. Another government official, blamed the low of level of "community unity" in urban context, including Sankhu, as a hindrance for uniform plan for reconstruction of individual houses, as well as that of socio-cultural sites.

The efforts of the state officials to introduce standardised form of reconstruction, however, were in stark contrast to the everyday claims of local community members. Many local residents, especially women, complained about everyday struggles for basic public services in the wake of the earthquakes. As one example, women faced the brunt of the diminishing supply of water in Sankhu, which many considered because of the damages to water supply lines by the earthquake. This was a problem that especially affected local women due to their gendered obligations in the household. However, local women face the burden of proving and legitimising their everyday grievance concerning diminished water provisions. A woman mentioned of her experience of sharing the problem with local authorities but was asked to justify why she thought the water supply was deteriorating after the earthquake. Others raised questions as to how housing reconstruction will succeed in the absence of enough water:

‘There is not one thing, but so many problems that we are facing. People don’t have water (to drink). Water sources have run dry after the earthquake. Where will water for construction come from? Everything should be dealt with in package. But government is just concerned about giving away 200K (cash assistance).’

Several of the community members who were interviewed also expressed their hesitation to speak about their everyday struggles and problems in local meetings for the fear of backlash from the authorities. One interviewee said ‘I have lot to say but I am not doing it. They (local officials) can create problem at the time of delivery of (housing) assistance’. When civil society actors involved in organising community meetings were interviewed in private, they would themselves raise doubts over the instrumental value of locally organised ‘interaction meetings’. An NGO activist with experience working in Sankhu’s relief and recovery efforts noted that the efforts to formalise ways of collecting feedback are also problematic because it standardised what counted as useful feedback and, in the process, masked negative forms of feedback.

‘There is a lot of talk about introducing grievance handling measures in disaster reconstruction. Even international NGOs are implementing various forms of tools such as hotlines, mobile-based reporting. They say we are here to listen to communities. But nobody is talking about whether people even complain. Many don’t trust how their grievances are being handled. This is an issue in a place like Sankhu where many government officials are local. Local communities did not want to invite confrontation by complaining about people they knew.’

Government officials, on the other hand, were not only indifferent about following up on the grievances raised in such meetings but also rebuked the opposition stemming from the community members. A senior member of the government, with extensive experience of institutionalising participatory mechanisms such as public hearings, responded with a rhetorical and dismissive question, when probed about the opposition stemming from the communities about the amount and nature of housing grant. ‘We have to understand where the opposition is coming from carefully. What is the source of opposition?’ He further added that the opposition are often ‘politically motivated’, alleging many of the community members as active members of various political parties and using disaster as an opportunity to advance their petty political interests.

CONCLUSION

Disasters may invigorate demands for participation and accountability in the delivery of aid and resources. Yet, as we have demonstrated through our comparative ethnographic accounts, the political and transformative possibilities of such demands face resistance from power structures that predate the disaster. Our analysis draws attention to the everyday challenges of realising the vision of community participation in unequal societies with a history of democratic and governance deficit. Neglect of community participation is often more than just an operational lapse when faced with the pressures to respond to the demands of disaster [30]. It has roots in the history of unequal state-societal relations that has long plagued public sector in both Nepal and the Philippines. In such unequal societies that are prone to disasters, the rhetoric of participation in post-disaster governance, instead of cultivating voice, is subverted and used to legitimise authoritarian practice. In sum, our study offers four key lessons.

First, aspirations for community participation are confronted with competing political rationalities of control. Control takes many forms. In the Philippines, control was characterised by the exclusion of disaster-affected communities from key points of decision-making, silencing of dissent, and organised performances of ideal victimhood. In Nepal, it took the forms of information vacuum, combined with parallel attempts at manufacturing consensus, and deploying the logics of uniformity and standardisation that were not responsive to contextual realities and everyday claims. Both cases demonstrate that post-disaster politics may embrace community participation rhetorically but subvert its ethos through resilient and unresponsive authoritarian practice. But there are also some distinct contextual dynamics within these two cases that merit attention. For example, in Nepal, our analysis found the potential of localised, civil society driven participatory efforts to be questionable in the absence of elected representatives, a democratic void that had plagued the country for over two decades. In the Philippines, local voices and grievances were unheeded and silenced even in the presence of, and to some extent, enabled by elected representatives. These insights jointly unveil the deficiencies in the dominant mode of representative politics in deepening the prospect of accountable governance of disasters.

Second, our findings suggest that part of the failures for community participation lies in how powerholders see citizens' role in governance of public goods. We started our article with a discussion of how participatory approaches to post-disaster governance originated from the recognition that expert knowledge is not enough in

designing intelligent and legitimate responses to disasters. However, when post-disaster societies are shaped by experts and the legacies of exclusionary political systems—whether it is clan-based representative democracy in the Philippines or government-imposed participatory spaces in post-conflict Nepal—citizens are treated as objects that need to be engaged, but in the process, they are manipulated, co-opted, or ignored in collective decision-making. This observation, we argue, demands a reorientation of understanding of participation and accountability in post-disaster governance. Decision-makers, not citizens, deserve to be the focus area for reform, if community-led recovery agenda, as envisioned in the Building Back Better or the Sendai Frameworks, is to be realised in practice.

Third, by putting forward these observations, our intention is not to devalue community participation initiatives. We agree with the normative commitments of inclusiveness, voice, and accountability that underpin participatory politics, while also acknowledge the possibilities of localised efforts in shaping post-disaster reconstruction. Our comparative ethnography identified formal and informal avenues of participation where democratic deepening takes root, albeit in constrained contexts. In both the Philippines and Nepal, local civil society actors sought to represent the local communities, organise their own workshops and meetings related to reconstruction, and hold the state accountable. While the extent to which these localised agents shaped post-disaster recovery outcomes is a subject of further inquiry, our findings suggest that they have some agency to reconfigure unequal power relationships. In the Philippines, this took the form of the protest movement People Surge, which sought to amplify the voices of left-behind communities outside the narrative of ideal victimhood. In Nepal, local communities in Sankhu and elsewhere, despite facing indifference from the authorities, continued to put pressures on the government to increase the amount and nature of housing assistance and ensure inclusive reconstruction of urban communities.

Finally, although our comparative ethnographic analysis aims to develop a more holistic theoretical and cross-contextual understanding of everyday politics of community participation, it is limited in offering answers to the exact nature of policy or institutional changes, if any, resulting from such efforts. Beyond the ongoing scholarly focus on the intrinsic and normative value of participation, foregrounded in the notion of local communities' rights and voice, we call for further research into the consequential or instrumental value of participatory politics in post-disaster contexts. Examining the causal impacts of everyday forms of participatory politics demands longer-term research engagements in disaster contexts along various stages of post-disaster response and reconstruction. Such analysis, as previously indicated, should move beyond disaster-affected communities, to consider the role of decision-makers and authorities. In other words, it demands analysis of what Gaventa terms 'both sides of the equation' [70], spanning the exercise of rights by disaster-affected communities to influence the process and outcomes of disaster response and reconstruction, together with the conditions under which and mechanisms through which powerholders (i.e. policymakers, experts and bureaucrats) respond to, deflect or silence the voice of disaster-affected citizens. Such analysis of powerholders' conduct is suited to draw attention to various forms of state-driven politics of participation that are not supplementing and enriching but marginalising and even sabotaging everyday politics of participation spearheaded by and involving disaster-affected communities.

REFERENCES

- [1] United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, Shelter after disaster: guidelines for assistance, United Nations, New York, 1982.
- [2] F.C. Cuny, Disasters and development, Oxford University Press, 1983.
- [3] United Nations General Assembly, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, Undrr.Org. (2015). <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>.
- [4] Sphere Association, The Sphere Handbook | Standards for quality humanitarian response, Sphere. (2018). <http://www.spherestandards.org/handbook>.
- [5] E. Raju, K. da Costa, Governance in the Sendai: a way ahead?, Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal. 27 (2018) 278–291. doi:10.1108/dpm-08-2017-0190.
- [6] C. M. Abramson and N. Gong, The Promise, Pitfalls, and Practicalities of Comparative Ethnography, in: C. M. Abramson and N. Gong (Eds.), Beyond the Case: The Logics and Practices of Comparative Ethnography, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 1–27.
- [7] D. Hilhorst, Disaster, Conflict and Society in Crises: Everyday Politics of Crisis Response, in: D. Hilhorst (Eds.), Disaster, Conflict and Society in Crises: Everyday Politics of Crisis Response, 1st ed., Routledge, 2013, pp. 1–16.
- [8] C.H. Davidson, C. Johnson, G. Lizarralde, N. Dikmen, A. Sliwinski, Truths and myths about community participation in post-disaster housing projects, Habitat International. 31 (2007) 100–115. doi:10.1016/j.habitatint.2006.08.003.
- [9] M.N. Barnett, Humanitarian Governance, Annual Review of Political Science. 16 (2013) 379–398. doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-012512-083711.
- [10] R.J. Dean, Beyond radicalism and resignation: the competing logics for public participation in policy decisions, Policy & Politics. 45 (2017) 213–230. doi:10.1332/030557316x14531466517034.
- [11] S. Vallance, Disaster recovery as participation: lessons from the Shaky Isles, Natural Hazards. 75 (2014) 1287–1301. doi:10.1007/s11069-014-1361-7.
- [12] R. Chambers, Rural development putting the last first, Harlow, Essex Longman, 1983.
- [13] P. Tran, R. Shaw, G. Chantry, J. Norton, GIS and local knowledge in disaster management: a case study of flood risk mapping in Viet Nam, Disasters. 33 (2009) 152–169. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7717.2008.01067.x.
- [14] T. Ophiyandri, D. Amaratunga, C. Pathirage, K. Keraminiyage, Critical success factors for community-based post-disaster housing reconstruction projects in the pre-construction stage in Indonesia, International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment. 4 (2013) 236–249. doi:10.1108/ijdrbe-03-2013-0005.
- [15] D. Chandrasekhar, Y. Zhang, Y. Xiao, Nontraditional Participation in Disaster Recovery Planning: Cases From China, India, and the United States, Journal of the American Planning Association. 80 (2014) 373–384. doi:10.1080/01944363.2014.989399.
- [16] N. Curato and S. J. Calamba, Surviving Disasters by Suppressing Political Storms: Participation as Knowledge Transfer in Community-Based Disaster Governance. Critical Sociology. 46 (2). 2020. doi: [10.1177/0896920518796167](https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920518796167).
- [17] A. Tozier de la Poterie and M.-A. Baudoin, From Yokohama to Sendai: Approaches to Participation in International Disaster Risk Reduction Frameworks, Int J Disaster Risk Sci. vol. 6, no. 2 (2015). doi: [10.1007/s13753-015-0053-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-015-0053-6).
- [18] F. Cornish, Empowerment to participate: a case study of participation by Indian sex workers in HIV prevention, Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology. 16 (2006) 301–315. doi:10.1002/casp.866.

- [19] A. Cornwall, K. Brock, What do buzzwords do for development policy? a critical look at ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘poverty reduction,’ *Third World Quarterly*. 26 (2005) 1043–1060. doi:10.1080/01436590500235603.
- [20] S. Mannakkara and S. J. Wilkinson, Supporting post-disaster social recovery to build back better, *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment*, vol. 6, no. 2. (2015). doi: [10.1108/IJDRBE-06-2013-0019](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJDRBE-06-2013-0019).
- [21] A. Opdyke, A. Javernick-Will, and M. Koschmann, Assessing the impact of household participation on satisfaction and safe design in humanitarian shelter projects, *Disasters*. 43 (2019) 926–953. doi: [10.1111/disa.12405](https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12405).
- [22] G. Mansuri, V. Rao, *Localizing development: does participation work?*, World Bank, Cop, Washington (D.C.), 2013.
- [23] L. M. Lam and R. Kuipers, Resilience and disaster governance: Some insights from the 2015 Nepal earthquake, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. 33 (2019) 321–331. doi: [10.1016/j.ijdr.2018.10.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2018.10.017).
- [24] S. Arora, *Intersectional Vulnerability in Post Disaster Contexts: Lived Experiences of Dalit Women after the Nepal Earthquake, 2015*, *Disasters*. 2020. doi: [10.1111/disa.12471](https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12471).
- [25] J. Ensor *et al.*, Redistributing resilience? Deliberate transformation and political capabilities in post-Haiyan Tacloban, *World Development*. 140 (2021). doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105360](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105360).
- [26] N. Dhungana, ‘The politics of citizen-centric governance in post-earthquake Nepal’, Ph.D., London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2019.
- [27] M. Pelling, Participation, social capital and vulnerability to urban flooding in Guyana, *Journal of International Development: The Journal of the Development Studies Association*. 10 (1998) 469–486.
- [28] I. Davis, D. Alexander, *Recovery from disaster*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London ; New York, 2015.
- [29] L. Peng, J. Tan, W. Deng, and Y. Liu, Farmers’ participation in community-based disaster management: The role of trust, place attachment and self-efficacy, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. 51 (2020). doi: [10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101895](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101895).
- [30] E. Islam, H. A. Wahab, and O. G. Benson, Structural and operational factors as determinant of meaningful community participation in sustainable disaster recovery programs: The case of Bangladesh, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. 50 (2020) p. 101710. doi: [10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101710](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101710).
- [31] M. Glasius, What authoritarianism is ... and is not: a practice perspective, *International Affairs*. 94 (2018) 515–533. doi:10.1093/ia/iyy060.
- [32] M. Madianou, J.C. Ong, L. Longboan, J.S. Cornelio, The Appearance of Accountability: Communication Technologies and Power Asymmetries in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Recovery, *Journal of Communication*. 66 (2016) 960–981. doi:10.1111/jcom.12258.
- [33] M. Pelling, K. Dill, Disaster politics: tipping points for change in the adaptation of sociopolitical regimes, *Progress in Human Geography*. 34 (2009) 21–37. doi:10.1177/0309132509105004.
- [34] E. Simpson, *The political biography of an earthquake : aftermath and amnesia in Gujarat, India*, Hurst, London, 2013.
- [35] M. Tironi, *Disastrous Publics, Science, Technology, & Human Values*. 40 (2014) 564–587. doi:10.1177/0162243914560649.
- [36] U. Kothari, Power, knowledge and social control in participatory development, in: B. Cooke, U. Kothari (Eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny*, Zed Books, 2001, pp. 139–152.
- [37] U. Kothari, Authority and Expertise: The Professionalisation of International Development and the Ordering of Dissent, *Antipode*. 37 (2005) 425–446. doi:10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00505.x.

- [38] L. Wedeen, Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science, *Annual Review of Political Science*. 13 (2010) 255–272. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.052706.123951.
- [39] L. Wacquant, Ethnografeast, *Ethnography*. 4 (2003) 5–14. doi:10.1177/1466138103004001001.
- [40] A. De Waal, Towards a comparative political ethnography of disaster prevention, *Journal of International Affairs*. 59 (2006) 129–149.
- [41] A. Siddiqi, J.J.P. Canaday, Stories from the frontlines: decolonising social contracts for disasters, *Disasters*. 42 (2018) S215–S238. doi:10.1111/disa.12308.
- [42] S. Abramowitz and C. Panter-Brick, Bringing life into relief: comparative ethnographies of humanitarian practice’, in: S. Abramowitz and C. Panter-Brick (Eds.), *Medical Humanitarianism: Ethnographies of Practice*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, pp. 1–19.
- [43] I. Tavory & S. Timmermans, Sequential Comparisons and the Comparative Imagination, in C. M. Abramson & N. Gong (Eds.), *Beyond the Case: The Logics and Practices of Comparative Ethnography*, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 185–206.
- [44] N. Curato, *Democracy in a Time of Misery: From Spectacular Tragedies to Deliberative Action*, Oxford University Press, 2019.
- [45] W. Clinton, *Lessons Learned from tsunami Recovery: Key Propositions for Building Back Better*, UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, 2006.
- [46] City Government of Tacloban, *The Tacloban Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan*, Tacloban, Philippines, 2014.
- [47] Government of Nepal, *Nepal Earthquake 2015: Post Disaster Needs Assessment Vol. A : Key Findings*, ReliefWeb. (2015). <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/nepal-earthquake-2015-post-disaster-needs-assessment-vol-key-findings>.
- [48] United Nations Development Programme, *Supporting Nepal to Build Back Better Key Achievements in UNDP’s Earthquake Response*, 2015. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/UNDP_NP_supporting-nepal-to-build-back-better-key-achievements-in-undps-earthquake-response.pdf.
- [49] A. Cooper, Twitter Status, (2013). <https://twitter.com/AC360/status/400440546121891841>.
- [50] N. Dhungana and F. Cornish, Beyond performance and protocols: early responders’ experiences of multiple accountability demands in the response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake, *Disasters*. 45 (2021) 224–248. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12425>.
- [51] R.S. Olson, Toward a politics of disaster: losses, values, agendas, and blame, *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*. 18 (2000) 265–287.
- [52] Republic of the Philippines, *The 1987 Constitution – Article XIII*, Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (1987). <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/the-1987-constitution-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines/the-1987-constitution-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-article-xiii/>.
- [53] M. Thompson, Reviving Reformism in the Philippines, in: L. Diamond, M. Plattner, Y. Chu (Eds.), *Democracy in East Asia: A New Century*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2013.
- [54] Government of Nepal, 2008 *Good governance (management and operation) Act, 2064 (2008)*. Available at: <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/nep137755.pdf> (Accessed: 2 October 2017).
- [55] Government of Nepal, *Right to Information Act, 2064, 2007*. Available at: <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/right-to-information-act-2064-2007.pdf>.
- [56] J. Ackerman, Co-Governance for Accountability: Beyond “Exit” and “Voice,” *World Development*. 32 (2004) 447–463. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2003.06.015.

- [57] J.T. Sidel, Philippine politics in Town, District, and Province: Bossism in Cavite and Cebu, *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 56 (1997) 947–966. doi:10.2307/2658295.
- [58] G. Gurung, S. Derrett, R. Gauld, P.C. Hill, Why service users do not complain or have ‘voice’: a mixed-methods study from Nepal’s rural primary health care system, *BMC Health Services Research*. 17 (2017). doi:10.1186/s12913-017-2034-5.
- [59] G.P. Pandeya, Does Citizen Participation in Local Government Decision-Making Contribute to Strengthening Local Planning and Accountability Systems? An Empirical Assessment of Stakeholders’ Perceptions in Nepal, *International Public Management Review*. 16 (2015) 67–98.
- [60] K. Sharma, Politics and Governance in Nepal, *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*. 34 (2012) 57–69. doi:10.1080/23276665.2012.10779387.
- [61] S. Tamang, C. Malena, The political economy of social accountability in Nepal (Report No. 84072), Program for Accountability in Nepal, World Bank. 1 (2011).
- [62] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 1994*, Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1995.
- [63] C. Skanavis, G.A. Koumouris, V. Petreniti, Public Participation Mechanisms in Environmental Disasters, *Environmental Management*. 35 (2005) 821–837. doi:10.1007/s00267-004-0120-z.
- [64] G. Paragas, Amillah Rodil, Lysandre Pelington, Tacloban after Haiyan Working together towards recovery, International Institute For Environment And Development, 2016.
- [65] J. Gaventa, Reflections on the uses of the “power cube”: approach for analyzing the spaces, places and dynamics of civil society participation and engagement, CFP Evaluation Series No. 4, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, 2005.
- [66] S.R. Arnstein, A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. 35 (1969) 216–224. doi:10.1080/01944366908977225.
- [67] M. Glasius, Civil society and nuclear non-proliferation: How do states respond?, *Acta Politica*. 44 (2009) 346–348. doi:10.1057/ap.2009.3.
- [68] H. A., Ruszczuk, The Earthquake and Ideas Lying Around, in: L. Bracken, H.A Ruszczuk, T. Robinson (Eds.), *Evolving Narratives of Hazard and Risk: The Gorkha Earthquake Nepal 2015*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 125–139.
- [69] Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance, *Development Cooperation Policy, 2014 International Cooperation for Development Effectiveness*. Available at: http://www.mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/DCP_English_20140707120230_20140721083326.pdf
- [70] J. Gaventa, Towards participatory governance: Assessing the transformative possibilities, in S. Hickey & G. Mohan (Eds.), *Participation, from tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development*. ZED Books, 2004, pp. 25-41.