Towards a collaborative governance regime for disaster risk reduction

Russell, Caroline; Clark, Julian; Hannah, David; Sugden, Fraser

Towards a collaborative governance regime for disaster risk reduction: exploring scalar narratives of institutional change in Nepal.

Abstract

This paper contributes to the study of collaborative governance (CG) - systems where autonomous actors work together around shared objectives using pooled resources to address a common goal. Among CG's claimed benefits are boosting actor capacities for transformative action and increasing their resilience to complex multi-scaled challenges such as hazards and sudden catastrophic events. We engage with collaborative governance through a case study of changing public policy and institutional structures that govern hazards in Nepal. Following the shocking event of the 2015 Gorkha earthquake, Nepal's approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR) has been reshaped by federalisation and institutional reforms that aim to embed a governing system based on greater collaboration. We argue this amounts to a state transition to a collaborative governance regime (CGR) for DRR. Using primary qualitative data derived from 17 semi-structured interviews at national, provincial, and local scales, we identify state-sponsored scalar narratives around 1) actor capacities and tendencies in DRR; 2) knowledge production on DRR and its dissemination; and 3) formal and informal institutional DRR roles and responsibilities. We show how these narratives are being used as anchor points for a new CG approach to national DRR strategy. However, our analysis shows these narratives risk excluding local participation in DRR by marginalising grassroots politics to emphasise top-down state-led goals. In turn, this leads us to question the viability of the emerging governance regime as a truly collaborative project embedding principles of sustainability and inclusivity. We conclude that if these state scalar narratives continue to shape national policy, they will impede the potential for transformative collaborative action for DRR in Nepal.

Key Words: DRR, Collaborative Governance, Scalar Narratives, Resilience, Nepal

i. Introduction

Increasingly, collaborative governance (CG) is lauded as an apposite means to address complex social-ecological challenges such as natural hazards and sudden catastrophic events (UNISDR, 2015). Notably CG is a key mechanism to implement the UN's Disaster Risk Reduction programme (UNDRR), as set out in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). The SFDRR make frequent reference to coordination, participation, and collaboration across scales and sectors to increase community resilience to natural hazards. This shift towards CG is an escalation of previous decentralisation and participatory initiatives that are already well established in large-scale disaster response strategies, with the aim of formally instituting a practice of collaboration in the disaster management cycle (UNISDR, 2015). The UNDRR's stance is that CG approaches to DRR will boost actor capacities for transformative action and increase resilience to complex multi-scaled challenges (UNISDR, 2015). CG is thus seen as highly appropriate to achieve the SFDRR's priority actions, as it maps onto key attributes of resilience including diversity, heterogeneity and self-organisation, as well as innovation and learning (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

To date, most studies on CG have focused on the minority world countries, in particular the US and Canada (Emerson et al., 2017). This poses a challenge when exploring CG as a means of tackling DRR since disasters overwhelmingly affect majority world countries;

many of which have a history of opaque power relations between the state and non-state actors working in humanitarian and disaster relief. (Nightingale 2017; Jones et al., 2014). Many CG studies are also conceptual in approach, for example exploring system elements that hinder collaboration (Huxham,2003; Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015), or institutional frameworks to operationalise CG (Ansell and Gash, 2008;Bodin et.al.2016). Less work examines how discourses of CG are mobilised and executed. In particular, there are empirical gaps in our knowledge of how collaborative discourses are implemented and how they impact and shape disaster risk reduction. This is especially so in majority world countries that rely heavily on international development aid and humanitarian relief, beyond standard post disaster response and recovery. We therefore contend unpacking how CG is implemented by and through state action to facilitate or enhance DRR can greatly strengthen the future success of policy in this area.

This paper explores these gaps in CG scholarship through the lens of recent reforms in Nepal's DRR approach that were, in part, a response to lessons learned from the 2015 Gorkha earthquake. While many countries rely to some extent on disaster relief and response after disasters, Nepal's dependence is systematic at all stages of the disaster cycle. This makes it a paradigmatic example for examination of how putative CG in DRR is emerging among state and civil society groups, complimenting existing work in this area (see for example Ainuddin et al. 2013). Specifically, we contribute to this literature by examining the role of the Nepali state as both actor within, and arena for, collaborative governance through its recent changed approach to DRR.

Drawing on 17 semi-structured interviews, we examine the federal government's use of scalar narratives (González, 2006) to promote a particular type of collaborative DRR based around enhancing actor capacities and knowledge dissemination and production, through the introduction of new formal and informal institutional frameworks. We examine how these state-driven narratives are used by government and international NGO policy influencers as anchor points for collaborative DRR steeped in the mantra of inclusive sustainable development. In doing so our aims are to explore *how* these narratives of collaboration are being used; *if* the policies, reforms, and institutional restructuring they advance align with other elements needed for CG systems; and *what* impacts this might have on embedding a CGR for DRR nationally.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we engage with key literature on collaborative governance and define what we mean by CGR. We then set out the methodology that we employed for data collection and analysis. Contextualisation of the study follows, where we explore Nepal's recent DRR experience with particular focus on the shocking event of the 2015 earthquake that has, in part, prompted recent institutional changes in DRR governance. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, the paper then identifies and analyses the engagement of key policy actors with the new state scalar narratives. In concluding, we discuss the significance of these scalar narratives and their potential impact on national DRR policy and practice.

ii.   Building collaborative governance through scalar narratives

CG emerged as a response to addressing 'wicked problems' which are defined as complex, multiscale public policy challenges that require action beyond the capabilities of the nation-state alone (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Ansell and Gash, 2008). It is a multidisciplinary

approach drawing on insights from public administration, organisational sociology, and behavioural economics (Bodin, 2017; Huxham, 2003; Ostrom,2009). This multidisciplinary genesis of CG scholarship has spawned definitions that range from formal state-led systems where non-state actors are engaged directly by public agencies in collective decision making (Ansell and Gash, 2008), to broader definitions more aligned with polycentric thinking (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015).

We engage with CG at the polycentric end of the spectrum, using Nabatchi and Emerson's definition: "the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that enable people to engage across boundaries" (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015, 10). To operationalise this definition, they develop the idea of a collaborative governance regime (CGR) – "a system for public decision making in which cross-boundary collaboration represents the prevailing pattern of behaviour and activity" (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015, 10). A CGR has four characteristics distinguishing it from other forms of collaborative action: 1) it must be concerned with a public service or policy; 2) it involves a range of autonomous actors that have different interests; 3) it develops rules and customs specially designed to boost collaboration; and 4) it is designed for repeated exchanges between actors, with longevity in mind (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015).

Emerson and Nabatchi's framework allows for examination of emergent forms of CG, i.e., exploration of systems where a regime is in its infancy, via a categorization of formative types of CGR. These are threefold: "self-initiated", "independently convened", and "externally directed" (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015, 19). Using these categories allows a more nuanced understanding of the evolutionary stages of a CGR, and the role of actors in these emerging systems. We argue that the emerging CGR in Nepal is most akin to the "externally directed" category. Externally directed CGRs are usually instigated by state actors through mandated participation or incentives. Examples include requirements for stakeholder involvement in state convened committees, or stipulations attached to grants and funding opportunities. Externally directed CGRs also display a propensity for higher levels of formalisation which can hinder group autonomy (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015)

To explore the resulting political dynamics of this externally directed CGR, it is necessary to engage with how collaborative projects are realised and mobilised by and through the Nepali state. Here we turn to work on the concept of scalar narratives. Scalar narratives are a means by which actors engage in political strategies, and are defined by González as the "stories that actors tell about the changes in the scalar localisation of socio-political processes" (González, 2006, 839). González argues that by exploring these narratives it is possible to unpack the role of discourses in structuring understanding, meaning, and ultimately the transference of values through political interactions. Scalar narratives are thus much more than descriptive; they are rooted in causal explanation or "plot" (González, 2006, 839). Causal explanations can be used to link events through narratives that are beyond a simple temporal sequence; for example: *In 2015, Nepal experienced an earthquake and passed new legislation on DRM*, compared to *In 2015 Nepal experienced an earthquake which led the Government to enact long-awaited DRM policy reform*. The causal explanation then becomes the reason for those events being connected, which in turn creates a normative understanding that carries specific political and ideological implications.

In this way scalar narratives allow for complex circumstances to be reduced to linear chains of events. From a political perspective, they are powerful tools with which the state communicates how people should ground their values, ideas, and actions (González, 2006;

McGuirk, 2004). Narratives may also be used to shape possible futures by providing the context in which hazardous events are framed, policies are formed, and subjectivities are legitimised and mobilized (González, 2006). Thus narratives are "stories about changes in the spatial patterns of socio-political processes that are uttered by actors or groups embedded in specific historic and political contexts and which reduce the universe of political choices" (González, 2006, 840). Using narratives as an insight into possible futures is critical when working in rapidly transitioning states as it allows researchers to grasp potential trajectories of yet-to-be implemented policies. Given recent decades of political unrest in Nepal and the 2015 institutional restructuring, we argue scalar narratives potentially play a significant under-researched role in how collaborative processes of DRR are shaped and how public policies towards DRR are formulated, not least in terms of how collaboration is to be understood nationally, provincially, and locally.

iii.   Methods

Primary qualitative data was collected during two extended spells of fieldwork in Nepal from April-August 2019 and January -April 2020. The purpose of the fieldwork was to conduct semi-structured interviews with key DRR actors at national, provincial, and local scales. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. For the purposive sampling, participants were chosen based upon academic and 'grey' literature searches of active and past DRR projects in Nepal; using LinkedIn searches; 'known' international NGOs (INGOs - e.g. Red Cross); and government departments working at national, provincial and local scales. During interviews, participants were asked to nominate other key actors working in DRR who were then contacted for interview. In total 38 actors were contacted via email and phone, resulting in 17 semi-structured interviews (20 contacted actors did not respond, one initially responded positively, but missed the interview and did not respond to follow up emails). The 17 interviews undertaken were thus broadly representative of key policy practitioners currently involved in or with the new state administrative structures of DRR nationally, provincially and locally. By making sure that the people we interviewed were those in charge with making and implementing DRR strategy either in state or in civil society roles, our approach also sought to ensure that extra interviews would add only marginal value to our findings.

NGOs had the highest response rate, whilst government officials were harder to reach. The relatively low response rate was expected due to the ongoing national programme of federal restructuring. Several of the participants have been actively involved in DRR at the national/ international level for over two decades. During this time, they have held positions with the government and international organisations, such as the UN. They have been lobbyists and special experts for government consultations. As such the national DRR network is highly interdependent and interconnected. Common problems encountered throughout the field work were that actors previously involved in DRR had moved on, or were unwilling to be interviewed or to share names of other actors. Further, some of the new provincial, district and local authorities were still being formed and were not fully staffed or operational.

Most of the interviews were conducted in English by the lead author. All interviewees were offered the option of a Nepali translator if they preferred. A common spine of interview questions was used for both Government of Nepal (GoN) and NGO practitioners, as we wanted to capture the variability of different interpretations of CG in Nepal. Interviews

ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, with the majority around one hour. Interviews were conducted mainly in participant's offices, or in neutral spaces such as local cafes. Interviews were transcribed from audio recordings by the lead author or by a Nepali speaking research assistant. The transcripts were coded using NVivo 12 software. The initial codes used were selected based upon five key variables identified in the literature as crucial to successful CG. These were actor roles, actor capacities, knowledge production and dissemination, formal and informal structures, and scale (see Ansell and Torfing, 2015; Biddle and Koontz, 2014; Scott, 2015; Walsh-Dilley, 2016). These codes were analysed to find the framing and intent and then sub-coded based on the three main narratives that emerged.

These narratives are the focus of this paper, and are 1) actor capacities and tendencies in DRR; 2) knowledge production on DRR and its dissemination; and 3) formal and informal institutional DRR roles and responsibilities. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, field notes were used as anecdotal data. Alongside primary data, key 'grey' literature was identified through the interviewees recommendations and via the online archive of disaster prevention network Nepal (DpNET), which maintains a register of relevant Government documents published since the 2015 earthquake.

iv.   Shocking events: the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake and Nepal's emergent CGR for DRR

Nepal is classified as a low and middle income country, with a human development index (HDI) score of 143 (GoN, 2017a). It is located on the active Indus-Yarlung fault and is susceptible to strong seismic activity. Recently the country has seen increased exposure to natural hazards (both climatic and seismological) and is regularly ranked as high risk on disaster and climate vulnerability indices (HDR, 2019). The whole Himalayan arc region also shows increasing susceptibility to climate-related hydro-hazards such glacial lake outburst floods, shifting monsoon precipitation patterns, flash flooding, and landslides. According to recent GoN figures, up to 80% of the population is at risk of being adversely affected by natural hazards (GoN, 2017b). In 2017/18, for example, 968 people were killed, and an estimated 27,265 families were affected by hazards (GoN 2019, 4). After earthquakes, landslides and flooding represent the most impactful hazard, often resulting in large scale damage to infrastructure and livelihoods.

The country's differentiated physiography with its complex multi-hazard exposure is compounded by its unstable socio-political composition. The recent history of Nepali DRR governance is entwined with the struggles of a post-conflict state striving to introduce federalisation, whilst negotiating the global landscape of international development agendas, and dealing with the need for greater resilience to hazard exposure (Jha, 2014; Nightingale, 2017). In fact, the presence of multilateral and international development organisations has played a crucial role in shaping DRR. Research shows much national policy draws heavily on intergovernmental bodies, including the UNDRR and UNDP and INGOs (Jones et al., 2016, 2014, 2013; Yates, 2012). This close GoN-INGO relationship encompasses knowledge sharing, policy formation and financial support. Jones et al. (2016, 2014) characterise the pre-2015 DRR landscape as having minimal government input, with change coming through lobbying from INGOs and bi/multilateral agencies. They also show one of the biggest challenges to successful DRR is lack of coordination between intergovernmental agencies, INGOs, and the segmented tiers of the GoN. Thus, both civil society organisations and state

agencies cite instability and frequent churn of government officials within departments as critical issues thwarting effective DRR. As a result, Nepali DRR is mired in uncertainty over whom has authority to act, with shifting political structures and competing agendas among a wide spectrum of actors, resulting in little cohesion over policy aims and claims of corruption (Nightingale and Rankin, 2018; Watson, 2017; Yates, 2012). However, on the surface at least, this situation started to change in 2015, which became a significant year for DRR nationally.

In April 2015 Nepal was hit by an 8.1 Mw earthquake. The earthquake centred on the Gorkha region just beyond the Kathmandu valley, but caused widespread destruction nationally, killing almost 9000 people (GoN, 2017b). As a result of the severe aftershocks and landslides that followed, 811,154 were made homeless and GoN declared a state of humanitarian emergency. The effects of the earthquake are still evident at the time of writing, almost six years on, with an estimated 463,337 still without permanent shelters and major restoration works of world heritage sites in Kathmandu bogged down in bureaucratic disputes (GoN, 2019; NRA, 2017). In the aftermath, questions were rife over lack of preparedness. While there were plans in place for an anticipated major earthquake, these applied only if the epicentre had been in Kathmandu. The Government was unprepared for a seismic event with an epicentre outside the capital. The post-disaster assessments of the GoN response to the Gorkha earthquake paint a picture of a complex, multi-stakeholder network that struggled with poor co-ordination and lack of political will across political-administrative scales (Bisri and Beniya, 2016; GoN, 2017b; Watson, 2017).

In September 2015, the Constituent Assembly (CA) voted to pass all articles relating to the national constitution, making Nepal a federalised state. This act was emblematic of the end of a long struggle for political stability in a country that has been deeply divided by caste systems, waring political ideologies, and Maoist paramilitary insurgencies (for a detailed history of Nepal's recent political transitions, see Jha (2014)). The CA used a causal explanation of the Gorkha earthquake as a catalyst to pass the new constitution after a decade-long standoff between the central faction of Communist Party and Nepali congress, and other mainstream parties. This action caused widespread national protests as ethnic minorities, who felt unrepresented in the constitution, accused the parties of using the disaster to push through undemocratic policy reforms (Watson, 2017).

Despite these protests, the past five years since federalisation have been marked by major institutional changes and policy reforms that have relocated political authority to three main scales - the federal, the provincial, and the local. In relation to DRR, the spirit of the constitution places responsibility and authority locally, with provincial and federal scales occupying a position of support if and when they are needed (GoN, 2015; Oxford Policy Management, 2020). The aim is to promote resilience and capacity building, particularly at the local scale (GoN, 2015). However, as suggested in the Oxford Policy Management report, and reflected in our field interviews, the decentralisation of power and authority for DRR is plagued with confusion about roles and responsibilities. This is in part due to contradictions between the constitution and the new DRRM act which was passed in 2018.

In the 2017 National Disaster Report the key lessons learnt from the Gorkha earthquake focused on poor collaboration and communication during the earthquake and suggested that a new co-ordination mechanism was essential for effective response. Further, the report stated

that "co-ordination, collaboration and co-operation among governmental, non-governmental, private sectors and the affected communities is a challenge" to recovery (GoN, 2017b, 32). In bids to address this during and after the earthquake, major shifts were made by the Nepali state to reform disaster-related acts and policy.

First, the government introduced the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (DRRM act) which replaced the National Calamities act of 1983 (NCA); a move which sought to align Nepal more closely with global paradigmatic shifts in disaster management (Vij et al., 2020). The DRRM act focuses more on preventative measure and resilience building as opposed to solely response and recovery. The Act sets out formal structures and institutions that manage hazards and disasters and details their roles and responsibilities across the new federal, provincial, and local government scales (GoN, 2017a). Three new federal agencies have been created – the National Council for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, the Executive and Expert Committees, and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (DRRMA). Each of these newly formed bodies collaborate with a diverse set of actors as mandated in the organisational structure. For example, the DRRMA has a key responsibility to include NGOs, private sector, and communities in DRM activities and plans (GoN, 2017a).

The DRRM act also established provincial, district, and local scale Disaster Management Committees that work in conjunction with the federal scale. The intention is for provincial and district level committees to meet regularly, with membership including NGOs, elected representatives, private sector, and community volunteers. In addition, the DRRM act has acknowledged the district scale as a co-ordination mechanism to assist the province and local scales through a District Disaster Management Committee (GoN, 2017a; Oxford Policy Management, 2020). The district is part of the old governing structure and represents the bureaucratic arm of the Nepali government, however it retains authority over the police and armed forces who are crucial actors in DRR.

The second major policy from the government is the Disaster Risk Reduction National Strategic Plan of Action 2018-2030 (DRRNSPA). This policy document is a roadmap for DRR priority actions for the next decade based in part on lessons learned from the 2015 earthquake. This is a marked departure from the NCA and previous approaches to DRM in its emphasis on the critical role of collaborative action to Nepali DRR. The DRRNSPA is guided by the SFDRR and focuses upon i) understanding risk, ii) strengthening governance, iii) investing in resilience and risk reduction, iv) enhancing preparedness for response (UNISDR, 2015). Priority action vii explicitly mentions building collaboration and partnerships and priority area 3 focuses on public and private investment to increase resilience (MoHA, 2018).

Combined with the DRRM act, this document creates the state scalar narrative pushed by the Government of Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake. This seeks to communicate the state's centrality in managing all aspects of disaster preparedness and humanitarian and disaster relief work. It does so by attempting to reduce governance of multi-scaled complex catastrophic events to a routinised procedural series of operations, tractable to state-based intervention at different geographic scales, particularly the local, via a particular form of collaborative action. As Gonzalez observes, this narrative has "ulterior political implications" (2006, 840) by assuming GoN's ability to enhance the capacities of disparate actors to tackle complex DRR activities; to instil a collaborative vision among these actors through

knowledge production and dissemination; and to put in place institutional reforms sufficient to address the range of wicked problems triggered by events of this magnitude.

Our analysis provides the first account of whether the institutional changes put in place by GoN are up to this task by examining the ongoing scalar struggles over embedding this new form of DRR nationally. To do so, next we outline how scalar narratives were identified from our primary fieldwork around actor capacities and tendencies; knowledge production and dissemination; and formal and informal roles and responsibilities. As we show, actor positionality in relation to the new GoN policy on DRR alters depending upon their interests, perspectives, and resources, providing a new perspective on the political dynamics of externally directed CGR. We argue this complicates considerably the future development of a genuinely collaborative DRR, requiring due attention by GoN to the varied scaled responsibilities and understandings of actors revealed here.

v. State scalar narratives and unfolding institutional responses to DRR

v.1 Actor Capacities and Tendencies

Since 2015, policy and official government narratives have refocussed DRR action primarily to the local scale. This thinking was apparent to all our respondents, for example:

> *"Decentralising the capacity, decentralising the knowledge, decentralising the skill, and decentralising the resilience, everything we have to go to the local level, to the local people, to the individual." (GON_02)*

Yet concerns were expressed by interviewees in response to whether administrative capacities at different scales were enough to engage with this new DRR mandate. Crucially, interviewees noted that existing capacities were the product of a track record of previous poor policy implementation nationally. Anxieties were expressed about the ability of the newly formed local government DRR structure to be fully functional and to work at full capacity. 'Capacity' was used by interviewees to denote the ability to transfer knowledge into action, formulate DRR strategies and access services, and manage funds and networks:

> *"we have not taught our local leaders, our local employees, our local people about the planning, we asked them to submit the plan, but we have not taught them how to develop the plan." (NGO_04)*

Since the 2015 earthquake, interviewees made plain there had been very little staff training on the new policies aimed at DRR, namely the DRRNSPA and the National Building Code (2015). Crucially this training is needed to increase actor capacities across different scales to address DRR. Policies have been introduced to boost capacity building as part of federal restructuring, such as the Local Government Operationalization Act. Despite this, many of our interviewees highlighted a chronic lack of implementation:

> *"We have legal frameworks but the implementation still we have to do more."*
>
> *(GON_02)*

Interviewees were unanimous that capacity building was crucial to address this problem - namely instruction focused on enabling local level government bodies to execute national

DRR policy in a locally appropriate way. The federal restructuring was presented as providing the perfect means for this, through its promoting the local municipalities as the platform for collaborative action via community workshops and greater stakeholder engagement. However, our interviews with NGOs confirmed a tension between the potential for future work with local governments and existing capacity related constraints, as the following comment shows:

> "Federalisation process is an opportunity for us to work but also the challenge is there because we are not able to capacitate all the local level representatives of 753 local levels." (NGO_02)

Alongside capacity concerns, interviewees also highlighted actor tendencies to work independently rather than collaboratively as another challenge. Cross-sectoral collaboration between GoN and NGOs is essential to move towards a CGR that the federalisation programme has attempted to address. This was a key lesson learned from the 2015 earthquake, where GON/NGO interaction was characterised as more consultative than collaborative, and indeed some NGOs we interviewed are now moving from lobbying to playing advisory roles. However, whilst some interviewees could identify examples of small-scale collaboration between NGOs and the GoN in parts of the country, they also spoke of a lack of more systematic collaboration between GoN and NGO networks:

> "One institution is working here, other one is neglecting that result and working in their own way, so it's not integrated at all" (GON_01)

A noteworthy exception was DpNET and the International Federation of the Red Cross/Crescent (IFRC) who are the secretariat to the MOHA and provide data collection functions to GoN. This relationship was characterised as more collaborative, though ultimately the GoN maintains final decision-making responsibilities.

This general unwillingness to work collaboratively was described by interviewees as affecting all actors in DRR; for example, poor interdepartmental collaboration was noted in GoN, with weak cross-sectoral working and low levels of collaboration between GoN and civil society, business, and NGOs. Our respondents advanced two reasons for why this was so. First is Nepal's historical reliance on international assistance. The vast network of international actors working on DRR follows global disaster paradigms of risk reduction and resilience building in line with the SFDRR. However, the lack of co-ordination results in different interpretations of disaster approaches and duplicated effort. NGOs often have their own agendas guided by their donors and funding objectives, as one government official noted:

> "the people they come to us for collaboration and partnership with their priorities… we say please come to us with the national priorities, so we can work together for the common goals." (GON_02)

While some NGOs we spoke to highlighted pockets of collaboration, often this only applied to specific time-limited projects, rather than longer-term more sustainable initiatives. Further, respondents noted the private sector has little or no place in collaboration due to limited experience of working in risk and resilience as opposed to post-disaster relief:

> "In Nepal, the collaborative approach is comparatively new in the DRM. And people are very much interested to support people in the time of crisis but there is less

attention or interested to invest, or work on or collaborate on pre disaster scenario."
(NGO_01)

To combat this lack of collaboration, interviewees spoke of the need for formal co-ordination mechanisms to help align actors, even if this meant prioritising state goals above their own:

> *"By 2020 if we could be able to make the national strategies to the local level as well then, the problems of coherence could be reduced." (GON_02)*

v.2   Knowledge production and dissemination

Since 2015 there has been a concerted effort by the GoN to create government operated data platforms through a new national data base which will be run out of Emergency Operating Centres (EOC). These centres are currently part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), but will shortly come under the remit of the NDRRMA. The EOCs are in the process of being set up at each government scale, i.e. national (NEOC), provincial (PEOC), and local (LEOC); with an additional branch at the district level (DEOC). Each centre will aim to provide a platform for collaborative data collection and storage that is accessible to scientists, INGOs and government agencies working on DRR. Data is uploaded in a standard format by the municipalities and is to be made publicly accessible via government websites. The national platform will aim to streamline knowledge production that can be created and accessed collectively by DRR actors:

> *"we have developed this one disaster information management system, that will be used for the local levels, government, and by the province and by the federal ministries. "(GON_02)*

The goal is to assert state ownership of knowledge production on DRR to address the current dearth of Nepali-led research and data collection, and to impose a more 'joined-up' approach to its organization:

> *"the data is discrete here; we cannot find all the data at this place. This new information management system may gather the data. Because it is open. And the organisations they have to put their data and other organisation they have to put their data in the system… the priority one is know you risk, increase your resilience"*
> *(GON_02)*

The current uncoordinated approach was attributed by our interviewees to the historical relationship between INGOs and the GoN, with much of the research conducted in Nepal funded by international organisations, consultancies, and foreign researchers. This gap in state-led research into DRR is due to economic constraints, civil and political unrest, and persistence of outdated policy paradigms that focus on response and recovery. As such the dominant form of knowledge production and management of DRR is influenced by international organisations, namely the UNDRR and UNDP:

> *"Nepalis are committed to implement all those international commitments even the Paris agreement even the sustainable development goal. So, Nepal in committed to watch those international policies." (NGO_02)*

According to our respondents, the GoN's reliance on global paradigms of knowledge production conducted by international researchers has detrimentally affected the adoption and

incorporation of local knowledge, which is seen as incompatible with the more scientised expert knowledge of agencies such as the UN:

> "We have ancient and our traditional knowledge. But the modern knowledge we have not adapted in our context, and the traditional knowledge also we have ignored, so this is the transition." (GON_02)

Consequently, there are ongoing discussions on how the EOC structure can make knowledge production more inclusive and improve knowledge dissemination nationally. Specifically, this focuses upon improvements to knowledge transfer that is affected by the lack of collaboration between actors. This is particularly so between civil society groups, NGOs and GoN, and between different tiers of government. Here, low capacity and differing levels of understanding of key DRR principles between newly formed local municipalities and the established bureaucratic branches of the higher levels of government have emerged as a substantial challenge:

> "The knowledge and data of the stakeholders working at the national level is quite different than in the community level. These are so many gaps in knowledge sharing, still we need to sensitize them about what is the DRR." (NGO_02)

Partly to address these gaps, the DRRM act has introduced Disaster Management Committees (DMC). The DMCs are committees that have been or are in the process of being formed at each government scale other than the national i.e. provincial (PDMC), local (LDMC), and with an additional one at the district scale (DDMC). DMCs are intended to be the co-ordination mechanism bringing together actors from all sectors including security forces. They meet regularly to update local risks and preparedness needs. Moreover, the DMC is a forum to disseminate knowledge upwards from the communities, in the case of LDMCs, to the larger district and provincial chapters. The DMC also disseminate knowledge downwards facilitating training and knowledge transfer from the national scale. Crucially, during any response to a large hazard event, the DMCs will act as co-ordination mechanism for response and relief activities:

> "If the committee can handle the role, they can do by themselves. They only coordinate with CDO when they need, and solving the problems related to the endorsement which is not solved at the local level. Then they come to the DDMC committee because the DDMC must endorse the problems to address the community high level problems. The DDMC endorses and it shares to the headquarter. So, that time they come to the DDMC, otherwise they can manage their problems by themselves." (NGO_07)

However, in most cases these are new structures and we heard that to date many were not functioning due to lack of understanding around their remit and purpose.

v.3 Formal and informal institutional roles and responsibilities

The DRRM act was portrayed by interviewees as a road map for reforming and reshuffling relevant state institutions and apparatus. According to respondents from within and outside the GoN, the DRRM act's main achievement has been to create disaster-focused formal institutions - namely the DRRMA and executive and expert committees. These new institutions have assumed existing responsibilities from the MOHA:

> "Now every DRR document, every log of the act have defined on every stage of the government of DRR." (GON_04)

According to our interviewees, this streamlining of DRR governance has created an institutional structure that potentially is more effective in policy terms. For example, by establishing a national DRR focused department, the act gives greater scope for DRR actions to be co-ordinated and implemented by staff with appropriate expertise and training. Moreover, by defining 'the local' as the apposite scale of intervention for DRR actions, the act grants increased autonomy to localities in their relations with the provincial and federal scales. The logic behind this move is that local scale government and affected communities are better placed to assess their own needs and hence to implement bespoke capacity and resilience building measures. This was endorsed by interviewees who claimed that more local level decision making and tailoring to local requirements would boost self-sufficiency at the grassroots:

> *"In this process the country is trying to make people, the local…responsible to decide their own destiny. (NGO_03)*

However, these new bodies will only be effective if they work with the grain of informal norms and beliefs across the country. Deciphering these informalities is challenging because of their geographical specificity, but it was clear that effective DRR must take these into account:

> *"There are certain institutions who are primarily responsible for DRM and they think that is government responsibilities, they think that is the municipalities responsibilities, but it is not that. Disaster management is the responsibility of everyone." (NGO_01)*

Moreover, it is unclear how citizens' DRR roles and responsibilities 'fit' with state scaled narratives of CGR. While some interviewees stated that DRR was the duty of every citizen, there was consensus that individuals don't have clearly defined responsibilities within the state's vision for collaborative action. Instead, they are seen as passive recipients in its implementation: for example, it was striking how interviewees seldom mentioned citizens' roles in DRR activities. A similar trend was evident when we discussed the responsibilities of the private sector in DRR. Many respondents saw potential for future private sector involvement, but due to a lack of historical engagement expressed uncertainty over what form this might take.

Nonetheless many interviewees believed that government and its dedicated DRR institutions were now the best way to approach to DRR, and that private sector and other non-state actors should work through these newly formed organisations to achieve shared goals:

> *"The civil society, the researchers, the students can help the government to help change their policies, to change their laws and to change their actions. But we have to go through the government." (GON_02)*

Indeed, many interviewees hoped that if the policies and institutional changes are implemented, then more effective collaborations can be developed:

> *"If we look at the new policy, the government has put the Red Cross in a high profile. Before, it was said that a member from the community but now within the organizations the Red Cross has been made mandatory. The Red Cross is also in the local government body." (NGO_09)*

vi.   Narratives into practice? The prospects for collaborative DRR

The state-based narratives we identified during our interviews are driving what we believe is a national transition towards an emergent CGR around DRR in Nepal. According to our analysis, this CGR aims to instil cohesion in the previously uncoordinated DRR system, and to decentralise decision making autonomy and power to the municipalities to increase community disaster resilience through sustainable DRR actions. However, to date moves towards CGR have focussed more on centralising government institutions in DRR networks rather than exploring how state and non-state actors can work collaboratively. By exploring these tensions, we can start to see how state scalar narratives are being mobilised and with what effect.

A key example of this is seen in the narrative that positions the local scale as the pivotal site for DRR action and intervention. This move is in line with international CG approaches which portray 'the local' as being closest to the grassroots; if local government is functioning and strong, then it can facilitate collaborative actions that bring together citizens, businesses, and NGOs in their jurisdiction (Acharya, 2018). In Nepal, this focus on 'the local' is seen in the narratives surrounding actor capacities, knowledge production, and formal and informal roles and responsibilities.

However, our analysis makes clear the tensions between narrative intent and effect on the ground. For example, capacity building and knowledge production and dissemination narratives focus mainly on the failings of the local municipalities and how to improve the recently formed local governments. The normative 'solution' is top-down capacity training, aimed at making the municipalities meet the needs of national policy, driven by data that meets an externally directed scientised format. Thus, the story line – the "plot" (González 2006, 839) – is about a 'flawed' local socio-political process that justifies reinforcing a top-down approach to DRR. Linking back to González's views on embedded context of story tellers it becomes apparent how this story line actively undermines autonomy at the municipal scale by mobilising specific types of actor (central government) and promoting a certain type of knowledge (external/scientised). Crucially it does so by limiting, not extending, the local political choices available, and risks rendering traditional or indigenous knowledge obsolete.

The narrative of 'the local' also presents recent federalisation as leading to greater access for citizens, and increased voice for community concerns. Yet, our data suggests there is limited engagement with how to make local scale government more accessible to citizens as the LDRMC are represented as being democratic and a sufficient pathway for citizen engagement. Here the promotion of GoN established platforms as being the most democratic way to engage with community members, limits the options for non-state actors to collaborate outside this context. This is a crucial point considering that at the time of writing many LDRMC are not active. In areas where they were formed, we were told little had been done to clarify their role or purpose to communities.

National DRR policies have sought to clarify the roles and responsibilities of new institutions within an emergent CGR. Nonetheless there is an underlying conflict between the DRRM act and the constitution of Nepal which is centred around retaining the district as a functioning scale of government. The narrative presented   the district as an additional co-ordination and collaborative platform between municipalities and the provinces. According to interviewees

this has caused confusion and power struggles about knowledge transfer and formal roles and responsibilities between the district and the municipalities. 'The district' – embodied in governance terms as the chief district officer (CDO) - retains authority over the armed forces and the police, as well as running monthly DDRMC and a small DRM fund. The purpose of the DDRMC is to gather the assessments from the municipalities and transfer that knowledge up to the province, whilst relaying information down from the national scale concerning DRR policy. But under the new federal system, the local municipal chairs rank higher than the CDO. This has resulted in municipal leaders refusing to attend the monthly DDRMC meeting and asking for help only in post-disaster scenarios. This tension further compounds the tendency for local action to focus on response and recovery rather than risk reduction.

The policy documents and position of the GoN is that the local scale is the best platform to co-ordinate DRR action, but our findings suggest not enough attention has been given to helping resolve the political tensions resulting from this assumption. The sentiment behind the state narrative seems to be that municipalities will need to fall in line with national structures and policies, again suggesting that 'the local' is the problem and reinforcing and legitimising the need for a top-down non-collaborative approach to DRR.

Lastly, the drive for greater collaboration with non-state actors is represented as a chance to increase knowledge, awareness of risk, and ensure sustainability by mandating INGO partnerships in GoN-DRR action. An example of this is the perceived role and responsibilities of INGOs who have historically led DRR actions in Nepal and lobbied strongly for the policy changes that have been seen in the last five years. Within the new institutional landscape, some INGOs have transitioned to working alongside the GoN in consultative roles, providing expert input on policy reforms and future DRR action. The collaborative relationship is evident in the examples of the IFRC who staff EOC gathering data and supporting district offices and local municipalities to implement training and preparedness action within communities. However, our analysis suggests that the scope for INGO engagement is still limited by conflicting agendas, with the GON taking the position that civil society should play a supporting role for its aims. This on-the-ground experience conflicts with the purported greater collaboration that is promised by the state narrative; in fact, it again risks the potential CGR in Nepal being rendered ineffective by heavy-handed top-down enforcement of GoN objectives.

vii.   Conclusion

We have explored institutional changes in Nepali DRR since the 2015 earthquake. These changes have been attributed, in part, to the lessons learnt from past disasters and extreme events that are increasing in severity and frequency in Nepal due to climate change. Nepal's new institutional and policy landscape is geared towards enabling greater collaboration between state and non-state actors. This follows international trends of CG approaches to DRR for greater resilience building. We examined this trend towards CG through the lens of scalar narratives, which are the stories told about scalar localisations and changes in social-political process (González, 2006). Drawing on empirical data from transcribed semi-structured interviews with key state and non-state actors in DRR, we identified three scalar narratives surrounding 1) actor capacities and tendencies in DRR; 2) knowledge production on DRR and its dissemination, and 3) formal and informal institutional DRR roles and responsibilities.

Our analysis showed that these narratives tell a story about how state-based change – namely federalisation - has defined the local municipal scale as the most effective site for DRR action. This narrative is now being embedded through targeted policy reform and institutional remaking aimed at supporting greater autonomy at the local scale. The aim of this is to provide a preeminent geographical site at and from which collaborative action is performed. This move marks a major shift from previous top-down, uncoordinated DRR actions involving a myriad of international and national actors. To justify the privileged role of the local municipalities, building capacity has been placed at the forefront of current DRR action. Whilst we acknowledge this is an essential step, capacity building is spoken of in terms of bringing the local up to the standards of national priorities and needs to the detriment of traditional and local knowledges. Further, in practice institutional and policy changes have been concentrated primarily upon centring the newly formed provincial and local DRR institutions within the wider network of DRR actors.

Overall, the GoN's action is in keeping with traits of an "externally directed" CGR (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015). However, this version of CGR has been shown to struggle with low levels of autonomy which runs contrary to the aims of policy objectives to create an autonomous local scale. In leaning towards this form of CGR, priority has been given to top-down objectives that inform local DRR institutions, with non-state actors expected to play a supporting role to state interests. Furthermore, little attention has been given to address local political tensions that have arisen due to partial retention of pre-federal structures. Combined, these tensions threaten to undermine the autonomy and efficacy of the newly formed local scale by emphasizing top-down state-led prescriptions. In turn, this leads us to question the viability of the emerging governance regime as a truly collaborative project.

Narrative scholars suggest that the world is understood and interpreted through the stories we tell. Stories have the power to shape how we distinguish problems, frame our policies, impact how subjectivities are mobilised, and determine what knowledge is legitimised. While we acknowledge the changes are promising first steps in Nepali DRR, we contend that further actions are needed in future to ensure a genuinely collaborative DRR regime. To do this we suggest less emphasis on state-driven scalar narratives as they threaten to impede the potential for transformative sustainable action in Nepal. Instead, we suggest a narrative that embraces a more nuanced approach to DRR needs, including meaningful engagement with the complexity of local political tensions. Critically, this engagement with local political tensions extends to grassroots narratives told by those at the community level. In this paper we presented the top-down discourse of collaboration; future work will examine other narrative perspectives within the DRR network. Nepali DRR is still in the process of transition and the move towards embracing greater collaborative action is cause for hope that this policy is now being placed on a more sustainable and resilient footing.

The place specificity of our research allowed us to provide a rich empirical insight into the current political narratives shaping Nepali CGR. However, while our study is anchored to Nepal, there are substantive issues that arise from our approach that can be applied to other states and regions. Chief among these is our engagement with narrative scholarship to explore global trends in CG via international DRR strategies and policies. By focussing on scalar narratives, we have foregrounded the need for further examination of the discourse of CG and its potential use as a political tool in other empirical contexts, which is still an under researched area of DRR. Work on CG frameworks, actors' interrelations, network efficacy

and sustainability is essential to the future success of CG for DRR. Yet, to date, much of this work assumes that it is the mechanistic and procedural aspects that are politically problematic, whilst the discourse itself is portrayed as intrinsically inclusionary and democratic. However, as we have shown, the way that powerful actors understand, implement, and legitimatise acts of collaboration though policies, institutional documents and narratives matters. Primarily, it can have major implications for actors who are historically marginalised, making CG a deeply political discourse. As such, our approach to CG research has wider applicability to other countries and policy makers who are in the process of implementing CGR.

viii.   References

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