RESEARCH BRIEF

Post Project Sustainability (PPS) Study for VISTAR-II Project

BACKGROUND

CARE Nepal and Handicap International implemented a community-based disaster risk reduction project called VISTAR-II in Kailali, Dadeldhura, Kanchanpur, and Dang districts under the DIPECHO-VIII cycle. This project was funded by Civil Protection and Humanitarian aid Operations department (ECHO) and implemented by local partners NRCS, CSSD, FHRD, and NNSWA. This project was for a period of 22 months from March 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016. The project aimed to strengthen the resilience of communities and institutions to natural disasters through building leadership and management capacities from community level to national level. After five years of the VISTAR-II intervention, a Post Project Sustainability Study was carried out in two randomly selected intervention districts, namely Kailali and Kanchanpur, out of the four districts.

The Center for Research on Education Health and Social Science (CREHSS) carried out this PPS study for CARE Nepal from July to August 2021.

OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the study was to examine the sustainability of the project results to better understand whether, how, and why the VISTAR-II project would be able to make lasting impacts to sustain a flow of benefits over time.

METHODOLOGY

The PPS study adopted a sequential mix methods study design to collect quantitative data in the first phase, followed by qualitative data collection to triangulate and validate quantitative results with qualitative findings. Quantitative data was collected through household surveys and municipality-level key stakeholders' survey. A total of 403 households (HHs) (271 female and 131 male respondents) and 125 stakeholders (53 females and 72 males) were interviewed to gather quantitative information. Similarly, a total of 25 key stakeholders were interviewed, and six focus group discussions were conducted with the communities (beneficiaries) to collect qualitative information. The differences between endline and PPS, and between men and women were statistically examined, and a Test of Independence (Chi square Test) was used at a five percentage significance level.

Community women involved in mitigation activities to reduce risks of flood.

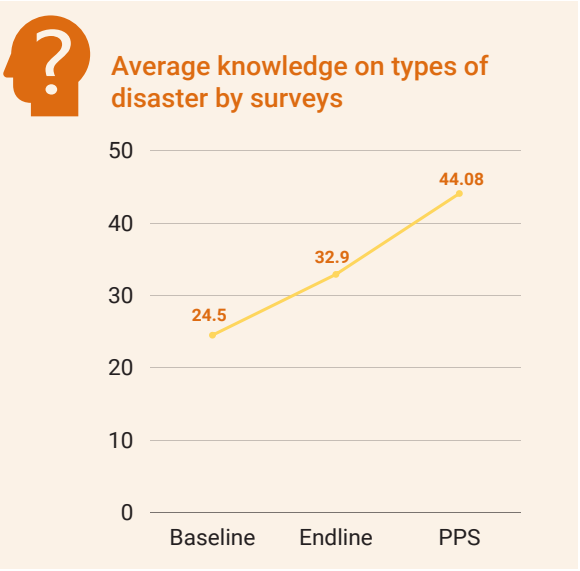
FINDINGS

Resilience/Capacity of Communities and Institutions

Anticipatory Capacity

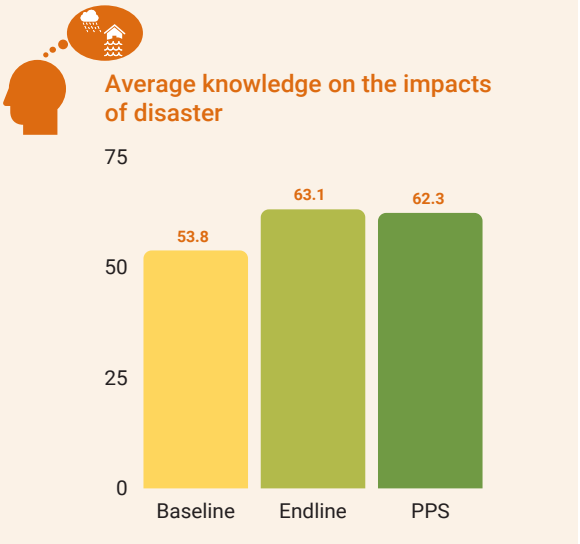
The ability of individuals and groups to foresee disaster risks that are likely to occur has increased significantly compared to the endline survey. Similarly, the capacity of the groups formed during the VISTAR projects has increased. Almost half of the groups are functioning well. This includes community disaster management committees and early warning groups. However, the majority of these groups have been functioning in silos in the absence of their vertical connection with other Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) institutions. The groups which are functioning have their meetings at the community level when required and have funds for emergency purposes.

The knowledge of various types of disaster, which increased for all types of disaster in the endline (24.5 in the baseline to 32.9 in the end-line), also showed sustainability in the PPS study (44.08) on average. The average changes show that there is an increasing trend in knowledge both for women and men. However, the overall knowledge is still on the lower side. Similarly, the average knowledge on the impacts of disasters (loss of human life and property, epidemic, food and residence problems) was found to have increased in the endline (53.8 in the baseline to 63.1 in the end-line), which remained almost the same during the PPS study (62.3).



The trend shows that knowledge regarding the impacts of disasters both among women and men has somehow been retained. Furthermore, the difference in knowledge between women and men is statistically insignificant.

It is impressive to note that the average knowledge regarding the different reasons for floods followed an increasing trend from the baseline to the PPS study (33.2 in the baseline to 46.3 in the endline to 49.9 in the PPS). The knowledge of the reasons for floods is increasing, but it is still on the lower side (49.9%) compared to the anticipated list. The effects of climate change were mentioned by only 15 percent of respondents. The qualitative study also found lower knowledge of climate change.

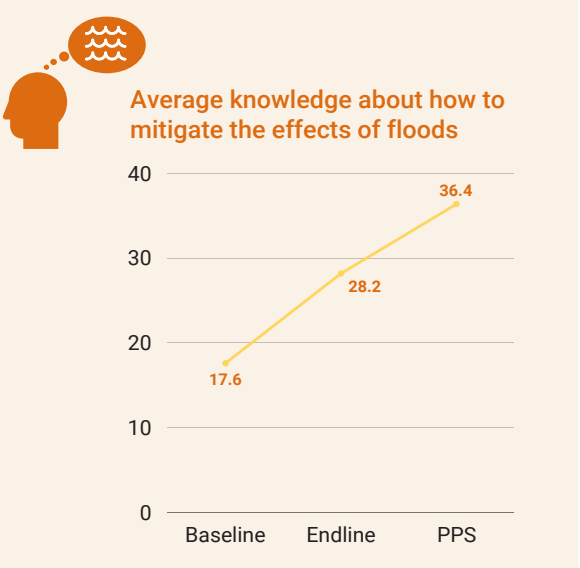


Adaptive Capacity

The knowledge of traditional methods to mitigate the effects of disasters remains on the higher side. The findings show that knowledge to mitigate the effects of flood, prevent fire, mitigate the effect of fire, and knowledge about disaster management have significantly increased. Likewise, both men and women have been found more sensitized towards the needs and protection of the most vulnerable groups. During the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Community Disaster Management Committee (CDMC) members clearly expressed that they are continuing to prioritize the most vulnerable groups during rescue and relief work. However, as there were fewer disaster reduction activities at the schools during the year of PPS, partly caused by COVID-19, the respondents also expressed the need for school-level activities towards Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities. The adaptive capacity of the groups is still sustained among almost 50% of the groups formed by VISTAR project.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents in all baseline, endline, and PPS (above 90% each) mentioned that there are traditional measures to tackle the effects of each disaster, such as flood, landslide, fire and epidemic.

Likewise, the average level of understanding of the various risks and consequences of disasters such as human deaths, injuries and damage/loss of property, crops, infrastructure, etc. has increased over the time between the baseline and PPS study (37 in baseline to 45.7 in endline to 51.5 in the PPS). Similarly, knowledge about the criteria of vulnerability (people at risk from natural disasters) on average followed an increasing trend from the baseline to the PPS study (47.8 in baseline to 53.8 in endline to 66.4 in PPS). The average knowledge about different flood mitigation measures has increased over time, improving the PPS study (from 17.6 in baseline to 28.2 in endline to 36.4 in the PPS). The increase in knowledge to mitigate the effects of flood (6.2%) in PPS from the endline is statistically significant. The difference in knowledge between men and women is statistically insignificant, meaning that both genders' awareness level is almost the same. Based on interviews, the awareness-raising influences bringing about this change include the formation of groups, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)/ Disaster Management (DM) capacity strengthened during the project and the local governments' work during floods.



The need for a household level plan increased in the endline (35.2) compared to the baseline value (17.6). However, this percentage has declined in the PPS study (24%). The knowledge of climate change after the project intervention has increased compared to the baseline. The respondents with medium-level preparedness to tackle disaster impacts have comparatively declined in the PPS study compared to the endline (83% in the endline to 66% in the PPS). Similarly, the percentage of respondents who mentioned that the central government should be the one to first respond to any disaster has markedly decreased in the PPS study (from 38% in the baseline and 50% in the endline to only 14% in the PPS).

The need for disaster reduction activities at school level has increased in the endline (93%) compared to the baseline (88%), but then it slightly dropped in the PPS study (89%). Likewise, the proportion of school students sharing DRR knowledge has drastically decreased (with statistical significance) in the PPS (37%) than in the baseline (67%) and endline study (86%). Similarly, mock drill practices in schools, which were found to have increased almost twice in the endline (79%) than the baseline (42%), have decreased

"Before the training, we lacked proper knowledge on how to express the needs of our community and convince the government to fulfil those needs in matters related to disaster management and other issues as well, but now, we have become more knowledgeable on these issues."

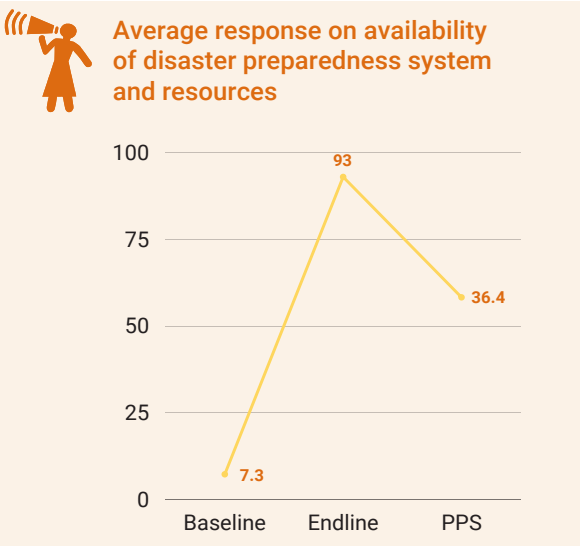
- CDMC Chair, Ms. Bauniya, Kailali

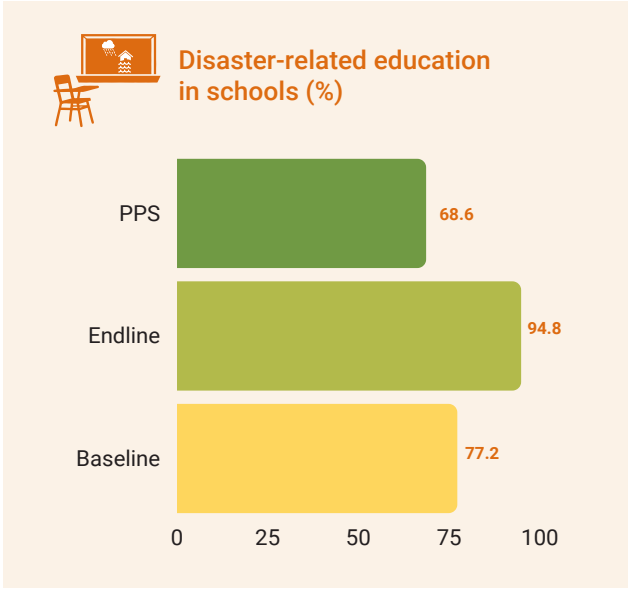
sharply in the PPS study to only 56%. This is most likely because physical classes at school have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Absorptive Capacity

Personal efforts to reduce loss due to disasters have remained the same. Based on qualitative findings, the availability of disaster preparedness systems and resources has drastically decreased due to the transition of local government, and their attention to COVID-19 overshadowing the DRR initiatives. However, they provided more emergency materials related to the COVID-19 pandemic and some rescue materials for floods. Based on information from key informants, the absorptive capacity is influenced by the project activities. The project ensured the active participation of all members (including socially excluded groups such as women and children) in all phases of disaster management. The process of risk, hazard and resource mapping, mock drills, awareness-raising, and disaster preparedness plans developed by Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) helped communities to improve their absorptive capacity. Some of the DMCs are still functional at the community levels, in different forms and names. Based on the surveys, one-third of respondents (32%) expressed that Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and DMC conducted participatory planning related to disaster preparedness.

The VISTAR-II project interventions were effective in the average individual and/or community efforts to reduce losses/impacts of disasters (such as planting vegetation, erecting a gabion wall, identifying and shifting hazardous materials to a safe place), which has increased in the endline (24.3) from the baseline (15.4). Sustainability in the PPS of 29% is also shown. Although the availability of disaster preparedness systems and resources had a sharp increase,





on average, in the endline (93.0) compared to the baseline (7.3), there was a notable decrease in this proportion during the PPS (58%).

Transformative

The percentage of the students in the PPS study who mentioned that schools provided disaster-related education increased in the endline (from 77% to 95%), but it noticeably declined in the PPS (69%).

From FGDs and interviews, it was noted there was increased levels of sensitization towards protection and addressing the specific needs of vulnerable people, including children, women, elderly citizens, and low-income families.

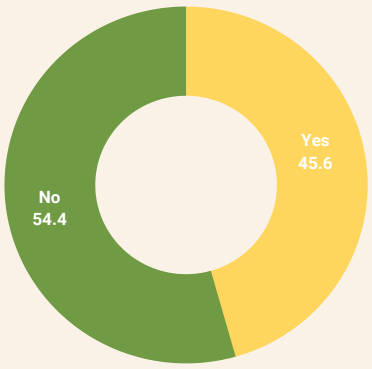
Notably, very few (8%) respondents mentioned they had raised their voice for disaster-related issues to influence national-level policy. This might be due to the shorter span of the project and the transition of the local governments from old to new.

Moreover, the availability of disaster preparedness systems and resources (institutional) has declined; which is attributed to the transition of the local government. Likewise, there has been less sharing of DRR knowledge among household members by school-going children in the absence of continuous awareness (closure of schools due to the COVID context) and lack of mock drill practices in the schools.

The project ensured more female engagement in project activities, which was reflected in interactions with different key informants.

Women have become more confident due to more interactions in public spaces for meetings and training in the

Contribution of the project to reduce disaster-related vulnerabilities and increased resilience of women and girls



community. Participation of women in CDMC had helped them gain knowledge and skills for disaster management and strengthened their leadership quality. Women also became capable of articulating the needs of their community to the government.

Enabling Environment

Rural Municipalities/Municipalities (RMs/Ms) have started the formation of Disaster Management Committees at Palika level and Ward level, following their Acts or policies. They have been preparing Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan (DPRPs), which focuses more on preparedness for the response as compliance. However, the Local Disaster and Climate Resilient Planning (LDCRP) is yet to be developed. The community-level DMCs (or previous VDC levels) have yet to be vertically aligned with the Palikas. There are only few examples where members of the community/DMCs were nominated into Ward level DMCs of a Palika. In the case of master trainers (MTs), MTs from the private sector (Chambers of Commerce) were continuously utilizing the skills and sustaining the practices learnt from the training, quite determined to mainstream disaster management in their own programs and plans despite not being engaged by the local governments. On the other hand, MTs from the government sectors were not able to utilize their skills properly due to alternations in their roles and responsibilities, especially due to transfers to other areas or departments. However, a few of them were willing and motivated to utilize their skills if they obtained the right opportunity.

One-third (36%) of the respondents expressed that a participatory process has been adopted by local DMCs or CBOs. This is, however, still low, which may reflect the transition process of local governments.

"VISTAR-II project changed the view towards disaster management. Previously, all we knew was the distribution of food and necessary commodities to the disaster-affected communities. Nevertheless, the most important thing we learned from the training is that coordination between different agencies (governmental and non-governmental) is a must for effective disaster response."

-Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce (MT), Kailali

Information from all the key informants revealed that the project fostered the participation of vulnerable groups at each step of planning and implementation. During implementation, a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) was conducted in the community first to identify the needs as well as the number and location of the most vulnerable people in the community. The project contributed to reducing the vulnerability of community members by increasing their capacities to prepare for, cope with, and mitigate the adverse impacts of disasters.

Half of the respondents (51%) mentioned that there is availability of stretchers in the organization, followed by first aid boxes (46%), life jackets (42%), and hand-mic (41%). Only one out of ten respondents (10%) mentioned the availability of rescue and emergency plans designed to reduce potential community risks.

Notably, only one-fifth of the organizations (21%) had disaster management plans for the school level. Many schools were found to have not updated the disaster management plan for the past two years due to COVID-19 and other factors. Based on an interview with the principal of one of the schools in Lamkichuha, before the pandemic, they used to update the DRR into the annual School Improvement Plan (SIP.)

However, most of the organizations (81%) have been providing humanitarian aid in their community.

"....Previously, there was no information system to let people know about the upcoming disaster. However, nowadays, due to the early warning system (EWS), people know about the disaster before it affects, so they can prepare to minimize the loss. So, the VISTAR-II project has a positive impact on the community."

- Teacher, Kailali

Nearly one-third of the respondents (31%) mentioned that their organization has a significant role in the disaster response network. However, the number of organizations conducting disaster-oriented advocacy is low (only 20%). Based on interviews, the advocacy efforts included the demand for safe houses, elevated hand pumps, and matching funds in the locally managed community level DRR funds.

Reducing Drivers of Risk

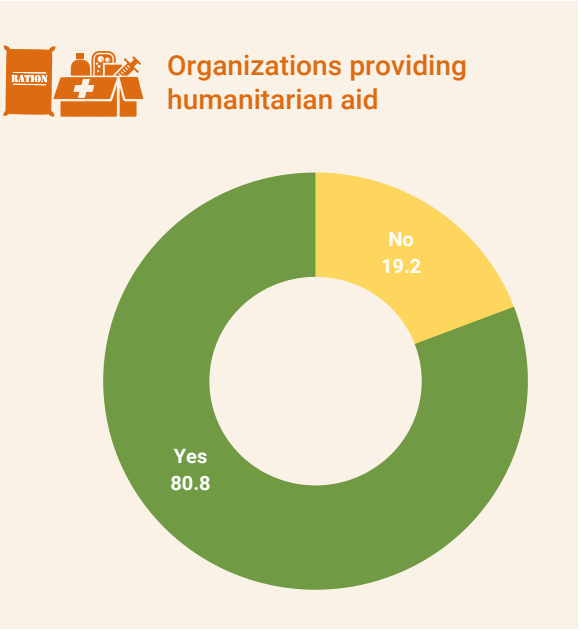
It is impressive to note that the average proportion of possible disaster mitigating measures followed by the community, such as the formation of rescue groups, formation of disaster management committees, and conducting village meetings, has an increasing trend between the baseline and PPS study (from 11.8 in the baseline and 20.4 in the endline to 25.9 in the PPS).

Sustainability

The sustainability of the VISTAR-II project has been studied under three major components namely, **Sustained Linkages, Sustained Resources, Sustained Capacity** and **Motivation.**

Sustained Linkages

The community-level structure, CDMC formed by the project, was still functioning to some extent. Some of the members were working actively during the time of the disaster. Although some other members of the prior task force



migrated/were not present in the same community and regular meetings were not conducted, the search and rescue team and early warning team were still operating at the time of the disaster with the available human resources and materials. Although the restructuring of government has a legal framework and provided space to leverage DRR in the days to come, the former CDMCs did not have direct linkages with the local government due to structural change. VISTAR-II also coordinated well with other projects like 'Hariyo Ban' in accomplishing certain project activities in schools and communities. Moreover, other organizations were working actively in both districts for disaster management.

Sustained Capacity and Motivation

Information from all the key informants revealed that the project fostered the participation of vulnerable groups at each step of planning and implementation. The project contributed to reducing the vulnerability of community people by increasing their capacities to prepare for, cope with, and mitigate the adverse impacts of disaster. The coping mechanism has been more effective because people linked their traditional coping mechanism with the skills learned from the project. It also empowered communities, including women, enabling them to express their needs related to disasters and other areas. The training for CDMC members was found to be effective not only for disaster preparedness but also for empowerment and capacity enhancement of communities as they became able to express the needs of their community to the government and convince the government to take the right actions.

Master trainers (MTs) are playing an important role in

mainstreaming disaster management in different areas as people from diverse fields, including both the government and private sector, were trained through the project. MTs from the private sector were quite active and determined to mainstream disaster management in their programs and plans and were continuously utilizing the skills and sustaining the practices learned from the training.

Sustained Resources

Disaster preparedness materials like life jackets, stretchers, first aid boxes, boots, mic, etc., which were provided to the community by the project, were still available at the community in both the districts, but not all of those materials were in good condition. Rural Municipalities/ Municipalities (RM/Ms) were found to yet capitalize on the skills of the master trainers who are still living there. The master trainers trained through the project were found to be still motivated to continue making efforts for disaster management in their respective fields. However, changes in the designation and roles of MTs from the government sector made it difficult to put their skills into practice efficiently.

RMs/Ms have allocated some funds for bio-engineering work. Some communities still had disaster management funds, and they were collecting and using the funds if needed in emergencies. The cooperative division has been continuing to allocate a certain percentage of net profit for disaster management funds.

The bio-engineering (structural mitigation) work completed during VISTAR-II was found to be still maintained and upgraded. Some of the good practices initiated by the project and continuing to date include the continued active role of available CDMC and task force members for rescue and relief during a disaster by utilizing the available materials and the continuation of interpersonal communication between upstream and downstream communities.

Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainability

The restructuring of local government has created an opportunity to scale up the disaster risk reduction work established during the VISTAR-II project. A few of the authorities, who were oriented and trained in disaster management, shifted to a new position under the new structure of government, resulting in a change in their roles and responsibilities and hence affecting the efforts they could make.

Only 70 percent of the surveyed respondents know that DMCs exist at the community, Ward or Palika level. This is because, despite preparing DPRPs as compliance, the Local Governments who have formed LDMCs have yet to inform their people, and some have yet to form LDMCs in all Wards.

The local governments have been provided with many financial resources, yet limited amounts have been allocated to mitigate disaster risk reductions. With LDCRPs to be prepared, there are opportunities to leverage funds for DRR/ DM.

The short duration of the project was also a factor affecting the full sustainability of the project as multiple activities were accomplished in a limited timescale.

CONCLUSION

It is admirable to note that, even after five years, the VISTAR-II interventions have been sustained to a greater extent for most of the project indicators in terms of quality, quantity, and delivering benefits to the target groups. Especially, the findings of the PPS revealed that there is a remarkable improvement in the knowledge of the respondents regarding various disaster-related issues. However, along with the VISTAR-II intervention, this improvement could also be attributed to the many other organizations that are currently and continuously working in the field of disaster response in the same program area. In particular, the level of knowledge of types and reasons for disasters, risks and consequences of disasters, disaster mitigation and prevention efforts, disaster preparedness and management, and practices towards disaster reduction has been sustained or increased.

The project fostered the participation of vulnerable groups at each step of planning and implementation as per the stakeholders. The community-level structure, CDMCs formed by the project, was still functioning as some members were working actively during disasters. In terms of empowerment of the communities, the project ensured more female engagement in project activities. Women have continuously become more confident due to more interactions in public spaces for meetings and training in the community.

However, the knowledge and practices of climate change adaptation and mitigation and the availability of a disaster preparedness system and resources (institutional) have declined. Likewise, there has been less sharing of DRR knowledge among household members by school-going children, which may be due to the absence of physical classes in schools in the present COVID context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are applicable to any future programming in the previous VISTAR-II areas.

Related Stakeholders

- Support to local government to localize the DM Act, Disaster Management Fund Mobilization Guideline, and Emergency Operation Guideline with referring LDCRP to address the actual context and scenario of risk.
- Some RMs/Ms have already allocated budgets for safe infrastructure for the settlements in the high-risk areas (of flood). It would be better to collaborate and provide technical support to build safe infrastructures that can be replicated in other vulnerable areas.
- Support to local government risk-sensitive land-use plan with risk visualization through a digital process to address the multi-hazards possible risk and prevent the emerging risk of haphazard ongoing development.
- Support the district and local governments in Emergency Operation Centres to develop DRR guidelines, assets, and human resources.
- Strengthening the capacity of local governments to access provincial and federal government allocated funds for the disaster.
- Strengthen the local government capacity on shock responsive social protection and for cash-based action.
- Provide technical support to local governments to localize the DRR platform cluster and response framework.
- Provide technical support to the environment and disaster management sector of local government to implement activities to contribute to the human and property losses in an effective and relevant way rather than only prioritizing infrastructure development as well as mainstreaming other sectors of local government.
- With reference to the multi-hazard aspect, provide technical support to local government to utilize the multi-sectoral institution, committee groups' engagement, and coordination collaboration space creation.
- Support local governments to apply acceptable, affordable and applicable science and technology with the fusion of indigenous knowledge and practices.

Local Government

- Establishing vertical and horizontal linkages of the Province, district and local DMCs/groups would be better: they could contribute, and at the same time, the local government (RMs/Ms) can capitalize on the skills of the local people and the resources they have. RMs/Ms are in the process of establishing local emergency operations centres (LOECs). The establishment of the centres would enrich information systems that include mainstreaming the early warning systems/ groups in their areas.
- National Strategic Plan for DRR (2018-2030)-Clause 5.1 talks about preparing a strategic plan at the provincial and local level, which is also the target of the Sendai Framework for DRR; clause 6.3 is the preparedness target for Local Governments and 6.4 is the capacity of Local Governments to provide disaster information to communities. Given that if there are good legal frameworks to scale up and consolidate the disaster risk reduction measures, then in the future the National Strategic Plan for DRR (2018-2030) has to be harnessed.
- Review the existing capacity and gaps of search and rescue teams and prepare capacity building plans.
- DRR initiatives under LDCRPs should include climate-resilient technologies and adaptations, which need to be promoted by the local governments.
- In the present context, schools could utilize the virtual platform of education to teach the students about different disaster-related issues even during the closure of schools, thus ensuring students are well informed and ready for disaster response whenever needed.

Suggested Citation:

CARE Nepal and CREHSS (2021). Post Project Sustainability (PPS) Study for VISTAR-II Project. Research Brief. Kathmandu Nepal

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