

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACTION LAB
Need-driven Research, Research-driven Solution: design, implementation, and evaluation
Nepal Study Center, University of New Mexico
May 12, 2016

Rebuilding Resilient Communities: Bahunepati Women's Community Center

Design

Bahunepati village (Nepal) was NSC's focus of a micro finance and climate change study site back in 2014 as a part of a doctoral dissertation. After the 2015 earthquake, it became a natural candidate for an earth quake resistant building design project. In collaboration with the Department of Civil Engineering, an undergraduate course was offered (Fall 2015 Dr. Mark Stone, with Dr. Bohara playing as a supporting advising mentor). Concurrently, a survey design mechanism was developed at NSC to study and test the theory of resiliency in the context of the women of Bahunepati and their capacity to bounce back. These women were engaged in a Dhulikhel Hospital (Kathmandu University) supported microfinance scheme. Losing the clinic, a site of their operation, gave rise to need for a women's community center (WCC) building idea.

Implementation

From New Mexico to Nepal: Women's Community Center, Bahunipati

A collaborative team consisting of a student group from the University of New Mexico (UNM4Nepal), Kathmandu University, Dhulikhel Hospital Kathmandu University Hospital, Pratiman-Neema Memorial Foundation (PNMF), the Department of Civil Engineering, and the Nepal Study Center of the University of New Mexico begins a construction project in Bahunipati: the Women's Community Center Project. The project is to last for one month (May-June), and the team hopes to change the rural reconstruction paradigm by focusing on "building resilient communities" to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Importantly, the UNM team hopes to teach local community members a simple and sustainable construction method, known as the earth-bag technique. The UNM4Nepal student led project's final design evolved after an extensive discussion between the student group and the Nepal-based collaborators. The project was conceived as a two-part civil engineering class (Fall 2015; Spring 2016) and as an interdisciplinary and inter-departmental initiative under the mentoring advisement of Dr. Mark Stone of Civil Engineering and Dr Alok Bohara of the Department of Economics. Valuable input and cooperation was provided by Dr. Biraj Karmacharya and his colleagues from Dhulikhel Hospital Kathmandu University Hospital and other Nepali partners, volunteers and coordinators, and exceptional leadership was displayed by the UNM4Nepal student president (Jennifer Van Osdel) and vice-president (Lo Jaramillo).

Evaluation

Using the baseline data collected in 2014, a research team from the Nepal Study Center began designing a set of survey instruments (Spring 2016). This study, to be carried out in collaboration with Dhulikhel Hospital (Kathmandu University) in December of 2016, will examine the post-Earthquake socio-economic status of the women of Bahunepati. In addition to analyzing various pre-post earthquake scenarios and welfare impacts, special attention will be given to assess the role of the WCC in generating social capital for the women and the community at large.