**Overview**

Welcome to the first in our series of quarterly newsletters for the Sajag-Nepal project. The purpose of these newsletters is to summarise the breadth and depth of research across the project, highlight outcomes and outputs that we want to share more widely, and draw attention to upcoming activities or milestones.

The Sajag-Nepal project started formally on 1 January 2021, although we have been meeting as a project team since April 2020, shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic began. We have all felt the effects of that pandemic and the ensuing lockdown, both of which have affected us in different ways and at different times. There is no manual for how to do research in the face of a virus – and at the same time the risks to Nepal from the mountain hazard chain remain as pressing as ever. As a result, we have had to invent new ways of communicating and collaborating with each other over this period. I am really pleased at the way that we have come together as a project team, recognising and working through the constraints that we face while still moving toward our shared goals of planning and preparedness. Our meetings and discussions have been a source of inspiration amidst all of the uncertainty, and a reminder of what we can achieve over the course of the project.

We have also been confronted with the UK government’s cuts to its Overseas Development Assistance budget, which have been both unexpected and brutal. Our funder, UKRI, had committed £245M in project funding for 21/22, but received a budget of only £125M. As you will be aware, we have managed to minimise the effects of those cuts on the project by deferring some of our PDRA positions and trimming some travel and overheads. I’m very grateful to you all for your patience, understanding, and willingness to contribute to these savings, which have collectively made this potential crisis much easier to manage than it otherwise might have been. I remain very strongly of the view that these cuts are immoral and deeply short-sighted, and I hope to have better news for you after the next UK government spending review in the autumn.

Over the last three months the Sajag-Nepal team has really started to take shape, as we’ve appointed a number of staff to the project:

* Rachel Middleton has joined as project administrator, based at Durham University and working Mondays-Wednesdays.
* Anudeep Dewan started on 1 January as a RA on WP1, based at the University of British Columbia. Anudeep is contributing to the project literature review and working with Sara Shneiderman on background research for the Dolakha case study.
* Mark Kincey started on 1 March as a PDRA on WP1, based at Durham. Mark is leading on the development and analysis of the national-scale multi-hazard inventory.
* Amy Johnson also started on 1 March a PDRA on WP1, based at Northumbria. Amy is leading the ethnographic work across the four case study districts, exploring how the social, political and economic transformations associated with federalisation, development and geopolitics are affecting geohazard risk in rural Nepal.
* Sihan Li started on 1 March as a PDRA on WP2, based at Oxford. Sihan is leading on the adaptation of the Hydro-JULES hydrological model to Nepal, as a way of turning precipitation forecasts into estimates of runoff and soil moisture change and linking that to patterns of landslide occurrence.
* Alex Dunant started on 1 April as a PDRA on WP2, based at Durham. Alex will be leading the multi-hazard and multi-temporal earthquake risk research in order to develop a more holistic understanding of earthquake risk and the potential variation in future impacts and inform contingency planning.

The Social Science Baha has led the recruitment of a strong group of RAs who will join the project on 1 June, working primarily on WP1 across the four case-study areas. In addition, as I write we are preparing to interview a very strong suite of candidates for four additional RA positions at NSET, working across WPs 1, 2, and 4 and liaising between NSET, university partners, the RCO, and the NDRRMA, also with a start date of 1 June. All together, this is a fantastic collection of talent and skills, and it’s very exciting to see the team come together.

Alex Densmore

**Updates from the Work Packages**

**Work Package 1**

The work package 1 team has been focusing on a large-scale literature review which is bringing together different bodies of work on the mountain hazard and risk chain, and the social, political, economic and environmental transformations underway in Nepal. As part of this, we have been holding a biweekly reading group to explore the literature and to begin to develop our conceptual framework.

We have begun to explore and test pre-existing approaches to the automated mapping of landslides across large spatial extents. This has included compiling lessons learned through the automated mapping work undertaken as part of the DFID-SHEAR-funded landslide mapping project, and a targeted literature review focused on establishing the current ‘state of the science’. Through collaboration with staff at NSET, we have also been undertaking ongoing analysis into the suitability of the HazMapper algorithm for automated mapping of landslides, including comparison of automated outputs with both our manually mapped landslide inventories and landslide susceptibility models.

Amy and Katie participated in the Britain-Nepal Academic Council Study Days in April providing an excellent networking opportunity, as well as feeding into and informing our literature review.

We have recruited four excellent Research Associates with experience in ethnographic and visual methods, who will be based at the Social Science Baha. We are developing a series of induction materials and training sessions as we prepare to welcome them to the team on 1 June.

**Work Package 2**

We held our first team meeting on 27 April where we discussed ongoing activities and planning updates. Due to the ODA cuts, we have had to pause the recruitment of the PDRA based at Northumbria University for now. We are now beginning to consider ways the WP can retain a focus on understanding the role of exposure and vulnerability in creating earthquake risk in the meantime.

We have started compiling a repository of key papers and technical reports from the team relevant to the WP. We intend to use these in future meetings as a starting point for assessing existing gaps and opportunities for collaboration that can form part of the initial WP priorities. We’d love to hear from anyone in the wider project team who has papers/reports that may also be relevant to WP2 that we may otherwise overlook.

We’ve had an update from Flowminder on the ongoing discussion with their mobile phone network partner NCell on accessing existing their Call Detail Records (CDRs). Discussions are positive and continue and we expect to hear further updates towards the end of May.

The next Team meeting has been scheduled for 20 May 0800 UK / 1245 Nepal / 1900 NZ time where we intend to formulate our key priorities and intended outcomes for the next 3-6 months.

**Work Package 3**

Work is underway, led by Simon Dadson and Sihan Li, to adapt the Hydro-JULES hydrological model to Nepal. In the first phase, Sihan is assembling the datasets that are needed to run Hydro-JULES at a national scale, with very simple inputs. This will provide the basis for more targeted model experiments and exploration of the links to patterns of landsliding from WP1.

Sajag-Nepal team members have met several times with staff from the UK Met Office who are leading research on impact-based forecasting as part of the Asia Regional Resilience to a Changing Climate (ARRCC) project, in collaboration with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) and NDRRMA. A portion of the ARRCC project is dedicated to building capacity within DHM to deliver impact-based forecasts – that is, forecasts that provide information on what kind of impacts are likely to be triggered, along with an estimate of their likelihood and severity. ARRCC have identified a number of target municipalities within which they are focused, and we are working with them to use this as a basis for our own field data campaign, which will aim to link patterns of rainfall, soil moisture, small-scale topography, and landslide occurrence.

Sajag-Nepal team members are contributing to an ARRCC training workshop on impact-based weather forecasting, aimed at forecasting staff at DHM as well as related staff from NDRRMA. The session, scheduled for 14 May, will cover the state of the science around landslide forecasting during the annual monsoon, and what can and cannot be said at present around landslide occurrence and impacts.

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**Work Package 4**

We’ve temporarily paused work on WP4 while we get the other work packages off the ground. The appointment of a dedicated PDRA on this work package has been pushed back to 2022 as a result of the cuts to Overseas Development Assistance. Elements of this work package will start to move forward later this year, in collaboration with the NDRRMA and IFRC.

**Social media**

Sajag-Nepal is active on Twitter (@SajagNepal) and our project website ([www.sajag-nepal.org](http://www.sajag-nepal.org)) is currently in development. Alex Dunant has started a project Slack platform – if you are interested in exploring this as a way to communicate across the project, please contact him (alexandre.dunant@dur.ac.uk).

Alex and Rachel are developing a communication strategy with input from the WP leads, with guidance for good practice and things to consider when communicating about the project. This will come to the team in due course for consideration and discussion.

**Upcoming events and milestones**

* We have been invited to give an online presentation on the Sajag-Nepal project to the Nepal Geological Society on 28 July 2021. More details will be circulated once this is finalised.
* Mark Kincey will present his work on analysis of the post-Gorkha landslide inventory in the 14 earthquake-affected districts, which forms the basis for the wider multi-hazard inventory, at the Asia Oceania Geosciences Society annual meeting in August 2021.