**Overview**

Welcome to the second 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.

Since our first Newsletter back in April we have been joined by some new members to the project team. We would like to extend a warm welcome to Sunil Tamang, Tek Bahadur Dong, Anuradha Puri, and Nyima Dorjee Bhotia who started as Research Associates on the project on 1 June, based at the Social Science Baha. They will be working primarily on WP1 across our case-study palikas. We would also like to welcome our most recent additions to the team: Arishma Gadtaula, Sarmila Paudyal, Ram Shrestha, and Sweata Sijapati who started as Research Associates on 1 July, based at NSET. They will be working across WPs 1, 2, and 4 and liaising between NSET, university partners, the RCO, and the NDRRMA. All together, this is a fantastic collection of talent and skills, and it’s very exciting to see the team come together. A big thank you to Amy for organising two online social events via Gather Town so we can begin to get to know each other informally. We are planning another social event later in the summer – please look out for further details.

I’m also very happy to report that Katie and Tom have moved forward with plans for mentoring across the project, and that many of the team are now matched up with a mentor and are making plans to meet. If you are not yet part of this effort but would like to participate, please get in touch with Katie or Tom. The first workshop as part of the Early Career Network, which will focus on the theme interdisciplinarity, is planned for September. Further details to follow.

The 2021 monsoon arrived both early and in force, with unusually high rainfall falling in the first week. This led to some widespread landsliding across many parts of Nepal, including Sindhupalchok, Mustang, and Myagdi, and some very destructive flooding. After our project meeting on 18 June to discuss what had happened and how we could support the response, Shobhana Pradhan and the team at BBC Media Action kindly organised a knowledge-sharing session to discuss what was known, and not known, about the events with the Nepali media. This session took place on 21 June and was attended by about 15 journalists from various media outlets. Nick Rosser and I then summarised what was known about the events in Helambhu palika to the UN Humanitarian Country Team on 24 June, and passed on information and satellite imagery that Mark Kincey had collated to the NDRRMA.

As I write this, our colleagues at the UN RCO are moving ahead with this year’s monsoon contingency planning, which was delayed due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A really important task over the next few months will be to look over their shoulders as the monsoon progresses, both so that we understand the plans and how they are used by the clusters and other actors, and so that we can identify and address ways of improving both the plan and the information that underpins it.

Alex Densmore

**\*\*SPOTLIGHT\*\***

We are delighted to announce that Amy Johnson has won the Britain-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC)’s PhD dissertation prize. The title of Amy’s dissertation was “State Re-Making: Federalism, Environment, and the Aesthetics of Belonging in Nepal”. You can read more about it [here](https://www.wenepali.com/2021/05/77838.html). I’m sure you will join us in offering our congratulations to Amy on such an outstanding achievement.

As part of our ‘spotlight on research’ Amy took part in our quick quiz, please read on to find out more!

**Q1. Tell us a little bit about you and your background**

I am an environmental and political anthropologist interested in the interactions between environmental and social-political change in Nepal. My doctoral research focused on the everyday experiences of state restructuring in Nepal, specifically the design and implementation of federalism, and the ways recent political-administrative transformations are shaped by relationships to environment, migration and mobility between Hills and Lowlands, and territorial, spatial, and cartographic imaginations. I received my PhD from Yale University in December 2020. Before starting graduate school in 2013, I worked in Nepal for The Carter Center (2011-2013) and completed a Fulbright Fellowship in Sindhupalchok district, Nepal, in 2009-2010.

**Q2. What drew you into your research area?**

I have always been interested in relationships to place and landscapes. But I became more academically curious about this topic while in Nepal for study abroad during college. At the time (2008), Nepal was holding elections for the First Constituent Assembly to write the new constitution. The topic on many people’s minds then was how to best reorganize Nepal’s territorial administrative units to achieve inclusion and equality and reduce socio-economic differences between different areas of the country. I was struck at the time by the explicit discussions taking place in Nepal about the relationship between spatial and territorial order and social values, identity, and political ideology. I followed this theme in my Fulbright research after graduation and again while employed at The Carter Center to study federalism and the peace process. During this work, I was based mostly in the Farwestern Development Region, an area that was experiencing tense, and sometimes violent, communal relations between indigenous peoples from the Tarai and high-caste Hindus from the Hills around the process of delineating and naming provinces, as each group had contrasting views about the kind of federal structures they desired for the region and, ultimately, Nepal. These differences clashed most visibly in the Farwestern Tarai districts of Kailali and Kanchanpur. Having spent more time in Kailali during my two years at The Carter Center, I became interested by the ways in which Tharus and more recently arrived high-caste Hindus were calling upon affective ties to place and environmental histories to support their oppositional visions of ideal provinces for the region. In many parts of the district, I began to notice how Tharu and high-caste Hindu individuals were navigating the process of Nepal’s transformation into a federal republic through their interactions with neighbors and family, everyday relationships to the landscape, and social (and, in some cases, personal) memories of migration into the region from other areas of the Tarai, the adjacent Hills, and the Gangetic Plain. How these ordinary, grounded, ways of experiencing federal transition intersect with and shape national and international debates on federalism and the territoriality of contemporary nation-states became the subject of my dissertation, “State Re-Making: Federalism, Environment, and the Aesthetics of Belonging in Nepal.”

**Q3. What part of the project are you looking forward to the most?**

As an ethnographer, I am excited to learn more about the meanings people give to landslides and, in general, how landscape features become part of the social life of communities in the context of hazards and environmental/socio-political change. I am especially looking forward to experimenting with visual methods as a way to think with and represent landscape change and disaster governance. I am also extremely interested in working with the natural scientists in the project to gain a better understanding of the physical geography of landslides and mountain hazards and to collaborate on writings and other products that help bridge the natural and social sciences within and beyond the project.

**Q4. What do you hope to have achieved by the end of the project?**

In an ideal world I would love to move into an academic teaching and research position where I can continue to explore interdisciplinary research at the intersection of environmental and social-political change in South Asia. I anticipate learning new knowledge and methods that will help me grow as an interdisciplinary scholar and to publish widely in peer-reviewed journals and for public audiences. I also regard my time in the project as an opportunity to help me build more collaborative relationships with Nepal scholars in diverse fields and institutions. A personal goal for me is to publish a Nepali language piece before the end of the project.

**Q5. Tell us an interesting/surprising fact about yourself**

I have a one-year-old pug, Margo, who is an absolute clown. She likes to make Zoom appearances, so look out!

**Updates from the Work Packages**

**Work Package 1**

Amy, Katie and Jeevan have put together a comprehensive induction programme to welcome the SSB RAs - Anuradha, Sunil, Tek and Nyima - to the project and prepare for field work in the autumn. The programme has introduced key concepts and literatures, research ethics, and ethnographic and visual methods, and has involved guest speakers from across the Sajag-Nepal team. Following a recent session on ethics in disaster research with JC, the team is currently translating the Disaster Studies Manifesto into Nepali. You can read more about the manifesto, which has informed our own project principles and ways of working as a team, [here](https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/power-prestige-forgotten-values-a-disaster). Nick, Mark, and Tom have drafted a parallel induction programme for the NSET RAs and that has now begun as well.

Since March, the WP1 team has been holding a bi-weekly interdisciplinary reading group to get to know each other’s work and to explore different concepts and ideas with a view to informing our own conceptual framework. We are in the process of preparing a literature review paper which sets out our approach to studying changes in the natural and socio-political environments in the context of Nepal’s mountain hazard chain. We look forward to sharing this with the wider team in due course.

Amy participated in the International Visual Sociology Associated Conference in June with a view to informing our approach to using visual methods – principally photography – within WP1. Anudeep and kindly connected us with photo.circle in Kathmandu which brings together photographers and other visual storytellers who are documenting social change in Nepal and we are currently exploring opportunities for a workshop on visual methods in preparation for our planned fieldwork and exhibitions.

Finally, just to note that a Durham student, Ethan Collins, will spend part of the summer collecting information on available hazard inventories and susceptibility maps, as part of our efforts to bring together as much data as possible into a common framework.

**Work Package 2**

WP2 would like to welcome Sweata Sijipati to the team as one of the NSET RAs who will be based at the UN RCO. Part of Sweata’s role will be working with the different UN clusters to determine both what data they have available to help our modelling as well as to embed the model outputs within the cluster earthquake emergency response and preparedness plan (ERPP), which involves better understanding issues of scale both temporally and spatially, which Alex Dunant has begun to grapple with.

We’ve started to engage with WP1 and WP3 to consider cross-cutting issues. In particular, Alex has been working closely with Mark Kincey to understand the geohazard data that exists from work prior to the Sajag-Nepal project as well as the data that WP1 is hoping to produce during Sajag-Nepal. This data will form a key input into the multi-hazard modelling in WP2 so this is big step forward in being able to understand the information we will have to seed the models. Alex Dunant also joined the first WP3 team meeting to help understand the data that WP will be producing and how that can also help feed into the post-earthquake multi-temporal modelling that WP2 hopes to achieve. Tom will shortly be organising a meeting between WP2 and WP3 to discuss some of the issues around scale that have come up so far in WP3 – especially the differences between the scale at which we have information on things like rainfall and the scale at which we might want to understand hazard – which matches with discussions we’re currently having in WP2.

We’ve also started to have discussions with teams external to Sajag-Nepal that have expertise that will be useful for both our intended hazard and exposure modelling. Alex Dunant met with Pascal Horton and the Flow-R team in Switzerland to discuss the possibility of creating individual runout models at large regional scales which will help to expand the landslide hazard modelling. Tom met with Nick Horspool and Finn Scheele of GNS Science in New Zealand and briefly chatted about the overlap between their work on exposure modelling and what we intend to do in WP2. A meeting with them is scheduled for w/c 5 July to advance discussions. Tom also met with Malcolm Campbell at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, who works on mobile phone data to understand population exposure from a GeoHealth perspective.

Alex Dunant, Tom, and Nick have also been working with two Risk MSc students at Durham to develop a questionnaire on people’s daily movements, in order to start to gather some higher level population movement data at daily and weekly scales. We hope that these data may be able to be collected repeatedly if required as a potential back-up to the data we hope to get from Flowminder.

Alex Dunant has begun gathering publications and data to inform and test a multi-hazard pilot model for the Sindhupalchok district (DEMs, existing susceptibility maps, etc.).

**Work Package 3**

The WP3 team met on 24 June to hear updates on progress and to consider the existing monsoon ERPP, and how it could be adapted and improved. Simon Dadson and Sihan Li are continuing to adapt the Hydro-JULES hydrological model for use in Nepal. The initial work by Sihan has shown that different sources of precipitation data used to drive the model give variable fits to the observed rainfall, although both can match some aspects of the observations. A major challenge over the next few months will be to obtain the datasets that are needed to both run and calibrate the model. We are starting to talk to colleagues at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) about this, and about ways in which the model could be used by DHM to provide forecasts of both river flow and (eventually) landslide susceptibility.

We also discussed the current monsoon Emergency Response Preparedness Plan, and identified some ways in which Sajag-Nepal research could feed into or underpin it.

Nick and Alex Densmore joined a training session in May run by the ARRCC project for meteorologists at DHM and hazard experts at the NDRRMA. The session focused on the current state-of-the-art around rainfall-triggered landslides, and what we do and don’t know. This was followed up with another workshop in June, looking at how to support DHM in using available landslide hazard information to devise impact-based forecasts. DHM started to issue impact-based forecasts in Sindhupalchok, Rasuwa, and Gorkha districts on 16 June, just after the first round of heavy rainfall and flooding, and we are staying in close contact with ARRCC and DHM as the pilot project goes ahead. We are especially interested in comparing the developing multi-hazard inventory, rainfall forecasts from DHM, reports of impacts collected by DHM as part of the impact-based forecasting pilot, and the evolving picture of landslide susceptibility, particularly in the districts that are the focus of the ARRCC project. This comparison should ultimately allow us to better understand the link between rainfall and landsliding and to help DHM to refine their impact-based forecasts for the next monsoon season.

**Work Package 4**

We’ve temporarily paused work on WP4, which builds on the work from WP1-3. 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 and several team members are active on Slack – if you are interested in exploring this as a way to communicate across the project, please contact Alex directly (alexandre.dunant@dur.ac.uk).

The Sajag-Nepal project website is currently under development by SoftNEP, and we will be in touch once this is ready to access.

Project communication guidelines have been developed with input from the WP leads, with guidance for good practice and things to consider when communicating about the project. This is available on the project OneDrive and Google Drive. We will continue to update and refine this, so please send any suggestions to Rachel.

**Upcoming events and milestones**

* Nick, Tom, and Alex Densmore gave an online presentation on the Sajag-Nepal project to the Nepal Geological Society on 28 July 2021. More information is available on the NGS website (<http://ngs.org.np/ngs-webinar-series-2021/>), and a link to the talk should be posted there eventually.
* 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.

**Recent publications**

If you have recently published a paper or other output that is relevant to Sajag-Nepal, please send the details to Rachel and we will list them here for the team to see. Please include the DOI and a link to any open-access version, if possible.

Dunant, A. (2021). Are We Missing the Target? A Bias-Variance Perspective on Multi-Hazard Risk Assessment. Frontiers in Earth Science, 9, 419. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feart.2021.685301>