

Date: 7 February, 2013

Education key for landslide & flood risk in Nepal

Education is the most important factor in whether people in Nepal will survive natural disasters such as landslides and floods, according to a new study by IIASA researcher Samir KC.

The study, published last week in the journal *Ecology and Society*, examined disaster vulnerability in Nepal, a country where floods and landslides are common during the monsoon season. It found that in communities with greater levels of education, disasters that occurred caused fewer deaths and less property damage.

“Many people die each year in Nepal, and a lot of property is lost because of landslides and floods,” said KC. KC is from Nepal himself, one reason for focusing his research on the country. “The main question that I was trying to answer was whether education at the community level was associated with the impacts of disaster.”

KC used government data on disasters and census data that included education levels in Nepal to analyze the connections between disaster impacts and education and other demographic variables such as wealth. While previous studies had found links between education, wealth, and disaster vulnerability, no study had been able to separate the effects of education from the effects of wealth.

“The effect of education is every clear,” says KC. “In all of our models, for different regions of Nepal, we found that education always had a positive effect in reducing the vulnerability.”

But KC pointed out that a strong correlation doesn’t explain the cause of the effect. Just what is the link between higher education and the chance of surviving a seemingly unpredictable event like a flood? To explore the possible explanations, KC followed up by traveling to Nepal and conducting interviews with local residents.

The interviews provided a number of possible answers to help guide further research. First, KC says, people with a general school education have more capability to make good decisions and locate information about risk. He says, “Education helps in terms of preparing yourself, making you less vulnerable by anticipating the risks that are coming towards you.”

In addition, specific education on disaster risk in schools or communities can help people prepare for and understand the risks that specifically threaten them. Specific information on disaster risk can be taught to children in schools, or shared more generally in the community by local authorities or outside organizations.

Having more educated people in a community could also contribute to better preparedness and sharing of information, KC says. The interviews showed that more educated people often acted



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as leaders to spur education efforts or to advocate for their communities at regional or national levels. “Based on these interviews I see a clear importance of having more educated people in the community,” says KC.