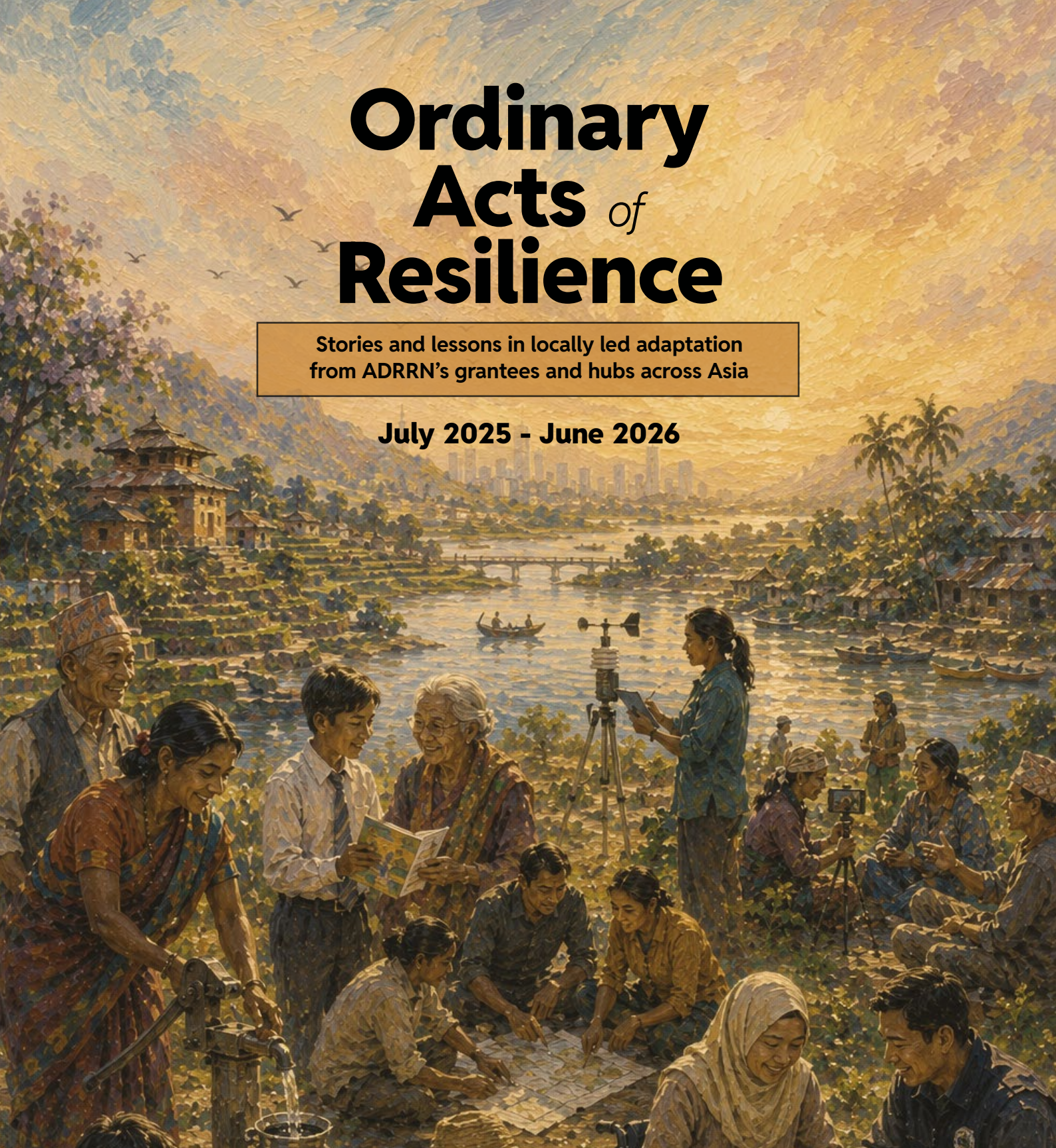


Ordinary Acts *of* Resilience

Stories and lessons in locally led adaptation
from ADRRN's grantees and hubs across Asia

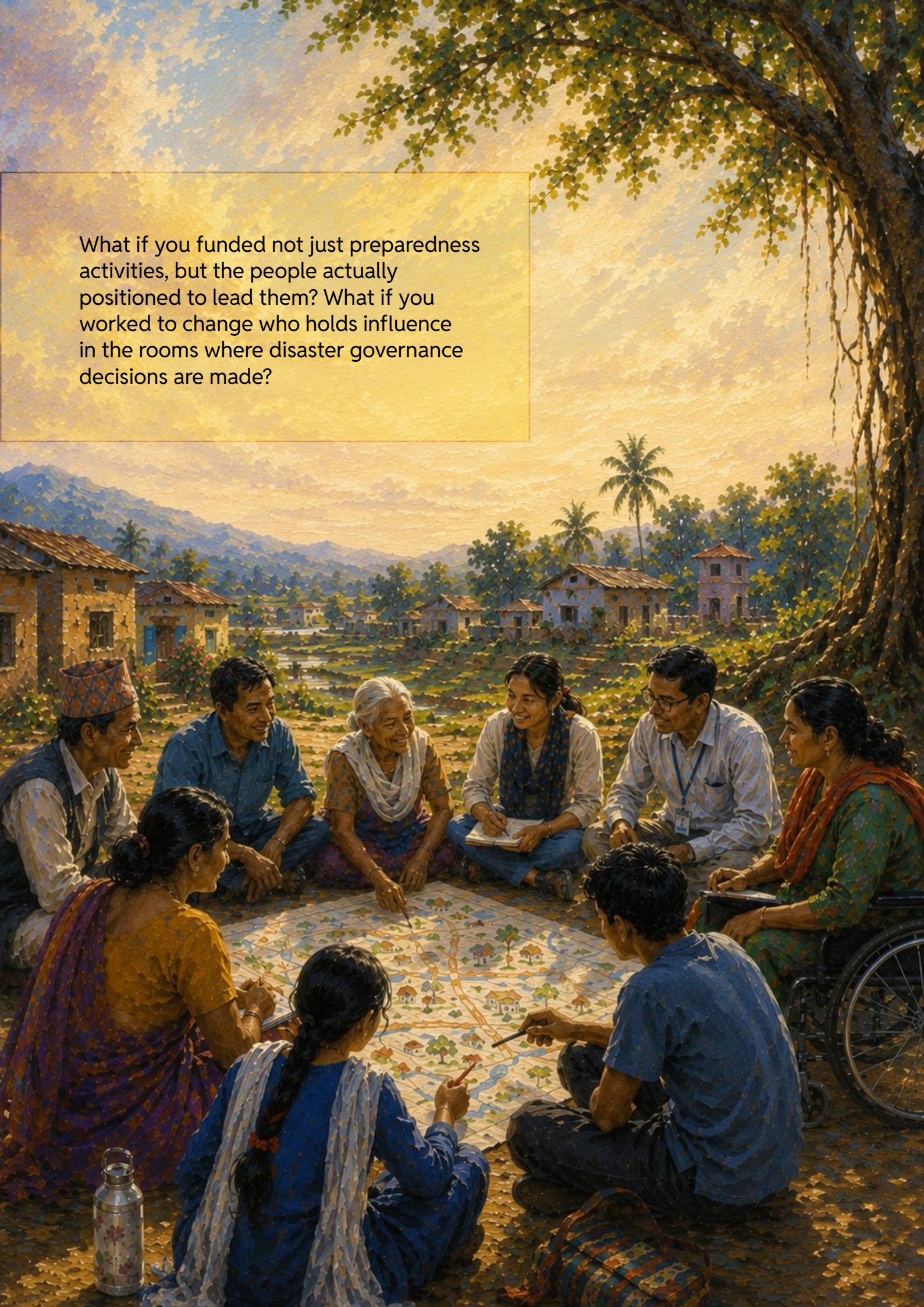
July 2025 - June 2026



Strengthening Inclusive Disaster Risk Governance for Climate Resilience in Asia (SIDRRA)



What if you funded not just preparedness activities, but the people actually positioned to lead them? What if you worked to change who holds influence in the rooms where disaster governance decisions are made?



Trusting the Ground

What if you funded not just preparedness activities, but the people actually positioned to lead them?
What if you worked to change who holds influence in the rooms where disaster governance decisions are made?

The SIDRRA project, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), was created with a simple belief: the people closest to risk are often the people closest to the solutions. The SIDRRA project advances scalable, locally informed solutions that strengthen disaster preparedness and risk reduction across Asia through cross-learning, evidence generation, and targeted advocacy. The project is driven by a consortium of Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN), the International Rescue Committee, and Duryog Nivaran with support from the Philippine Business for Social Progress, Mercy Malaysia, CWS Japan, and JanataKshan. Each partner brings deep regional knowledge and a commitment to inclusive disaster resilience. Together, they adopt a multi-level approach focused on building the capacity of civil society networks, promoting community-led adaptation initiatives, and challenging structural power imbalances that exclude women, marginalised communities, and at-risk populations.

As a result, across the region, ADRRN member organisations had funding to pursue their own analysis of what their communities needed. More importantly, they had connection to a broader movement happening around them. The thematic hubs that ADRRN cultivated became spaces where community expertise and technical knowledge could inform each other in ways that had rarely been structured before. Someone working on flood prediction could learn from earthquake engineering. A humanitarian storyteller could sit with someone working on climate adaptation. Knowledge didn't flow downward from experts. It circulated.

What surprised many observers was not that these interventions worked, but how they worked. And how member organisations and the network as a whole was strengthening through these activities.

As the project progressed, what emerged was a gradual shift in how regional platforms opened up for those leading interventions on the ground. At the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR), ADRRN deepened its role in coordinating civil society voices so that perspectives from the ground shaped policy conversations from the beginning, not as afterthoughts. ADRRN's Localisation Hub launched its Asia-Pacific Local Leaders Forum for Disaster Resilience Awards, giving community-based leaders a regional platform. At the Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week, one of Asia's most significant humanitarian platforms, ADRRN helped weave frontline perspectives into the core agenda rather than relegating them to the margins, a change that has now become standard practice.

For ADRRN itself, the period strengthened the network in tangible ways. Member organizations got more opportunities to innovate, pilot interventions, and collect data. The hubs became genuine platforms for knowledge-sharing rather than just coordination mechanisms. And ADRRN's presence at the regional spaces where Asia's disaster future gets shaped became more integral.

The People behind the Change

Somewhere in a village in Nepal, a woman turns on a handpump and watches water flow into her bucket, where there was once only a long walk and a daily struggle to collect it.

Along a flood-prone river, citizen scientists check rainfall gauges and water levels before the monsoon arrives.

In Indonesia, people with disabilities, humanitarian practitioners, and government officials sit together in the same training room, reimagining what disaster preparedness looks like when everyone is included.

On the coast of Tamil Nadu in India, young volunteers return each morning to water saplings that may one day protect their villages from storms and erosion. While in the Indian hill city of Dehradun, children are carrying lessons about extreme heat from classrooms into their homes, starting conversations their city has never had before.

These may seem like small acts.

But together, they tell a bigger story.

Across South and Southeast Asia, ADRRN supported a diverse group of grantees through the SIDRRA project, who worked on challenges that look very different on the surface. Alongside these community innovations, ADRRN's thematic hubs have been exploring another important question: how can knowledge travel further? From community practice to policy. From local innovation to regional learning. From one country to another. Together, ADRRN's hubs are creating spaces where practitioners, researchers, communities, and decision-makers can learn from one another and turn lessons into action.

What connects these grantees and these hubs is not a single hazard or a single solution. It is a shared understanding that resilience is not built by projects alone. It is built by people.





The pages that follow take you to villages, coastlines, settlements, schools, conference halls, and community meeting spaces across Asia. You will meet the people behind the ideas, the champions behind the innovations, and the communities transforming challenges into opportunities.

All of them are giving resilience a different shape. One that places people, dignity, and local leadership at its heart.

All of them assert what becomes possible when communities are not seen as simply beneficiaries of change, but as the people who make it happen.

Here are their stories.

ADRRN's Locally Led Adaptation Grants

The Water That Came Home (DiMaNN)

Reading the River (Institute of Himalayan Risk Reduction)

Inclusion is Not an Invitation (MPBI)

The Shore Remembers (SEEDS)

What the Children Brought Home (words. rhythms. images.)

The Hill That Moves (YAKKUM Emergency Unit)

The Water That Came Home

(DiMaNN)

In a Dalit settlement in Nepal's Madhesh Province, a community-led project is proving that the most durable climate solutions begin with listening.



A Daily Burden

The drought that struck Madhesh Province in 2025 was not a surprise. It was the latest in a series of slow-building crises: rising heat, shrinking groundwater, the drying up of ponds that had sustained communities for generations. In Ward No. 17 of Janakpurdham Sub-Metropolitan City, in the Dalit settlement of Pashwan Tole, the crisis had a particular shape. Women and children woke before the heat peaked and walked, sometimes for hours, to find water. They stood in queues and often returned home with containers only half full.

Nepal's Madhesh Province sits in the country's southern plains, a region of extreme heat and erratic monsoons. Climate change has made a precarious situation worse: temperatures have risen, rainfall has become unpredictable, and groundwater levels have declined steadily due to over-extraction and the disappearance of traditional ponds that once recharged the aquifers below. For Dalit communities, these environmental pressures compound existing ones. Limited access to land, water, public services, and decision-making meant that when the climate shifted, they had the least to fall back on.

Listening First

Into this reality came the National Disaster Management Network Nepal (DiMaNN) with a project designed to address water scarcity and drought through a community-led approach. Before any infrastructure was installed, DiMaNN and their local partner ANANT Nepal held consultations. Women, Dalit households, youth, farmers, and community leaders were brought in not as recipients to be informed but as decision-makers to be heard. They identified the problems, proposed the solutions, and selected the sites. In a region where development projects have often been designed elsewhere and delivered from above, this was a meaningful distinction.

What emerged was not a single solution but an integrated one. Water scarcity in Pashwan Tole could not be separated from poverty, from caste discrimination, or from the loss of traditional knowledge systems. Any intervention that ignored those connections would only go so far.



Reviving what was Lost

The Maithili people of this region have long managed a network of traditional ponds, locally called *pokhar*, that captured monsoon rains and recharged groundwater through the dry months. Over decades, as land use changed and the commons gave way to individual extraction, many of these ponds fell into disuse. With that went the knowledge of how to maintain them.

Part of what DiMaNN set out to do was recover that knowledge. Using bamboo embankments, clay-based earthworks, and indigenous Maithili water conservation techniques, the community restored a traditional pond, channeling rainwater from rooftops through PVC pipes into the pond and down into the aquifer below. 2 tube wells were drilled, two elevated water storage tanks installed, and soak pits added across the settlement. The total cost came to roughly USD 67 per beneficiary. More than 100 vulnerable households gained reliable access to safe water near their homes.

Women at the Centre

Women made up between 60-65 percent of project participants, not by chance but by design. DiMaNN's approach explicitly targeted women, Dalit households, and other marginalised groups as agents of change, not just recipients of services.

Babita Pasman, Chairperson of the Community Women's Group and a Water User Committee member, is one of the people the project helped bring forward. She participated in consultations, attended training sessions on rainwater harvesting and climate-smart agriculture, and encouraged other women to take part. Women who had never spoken in a public forum before found themselves shaping how their community accessed water.

"For years, we struggled to find water every day," she said. "Today, water is available near our homes. Our children are healthier, women feel safer, and our community feels respected."

“Amrit Jal”

After the water system was completed, the DiMaNN team visited Pashwan Tole to see how families were using the new facilities. As women gathered at one of the handpumps, an elderly woman filled her container, looked at the flowing water, and said quietly: *“This water is like Amrit Jal.”* Holy water.

She explained that before the project, her community had fought daily for access to something that should have been a given. Now, with water flowing close to her home, something beyond the practical had shifted. *“Water has come closer to our houses, giving us back our dignity,”* said Babita Pasman, whose words carried what the woman at the pump was trying to express.

The project also began to change how the community farms. 25 smallholder farmers received training in drip irrigation and climate-smart agriculture. *“We are now producing more while using less water,”* said Rina Thakur, one of the participants.

A Model Worth Replicating

Perhaps the clearest sign of the project’s success lies in what the community intends to do when the formal support ends. Residents have committed to maintaining the infrastructure themselves, pooling money for repairs if needed. *“We will not let it break,”* said Anjila Pasman, a community water governance representative. *“This is our system, our responsibility, and our future.”*

Government officials have taken notice. The Chief of the Agriculture Division of Janakpur Sub-Metropolitan City described the initiative as a practical model for climate-resilient water management. Provincial engineers have flagged it as replicable. **At a cost of USD 67 per beneficiary, with community ownership built in from the start, it is not hard to see why.**

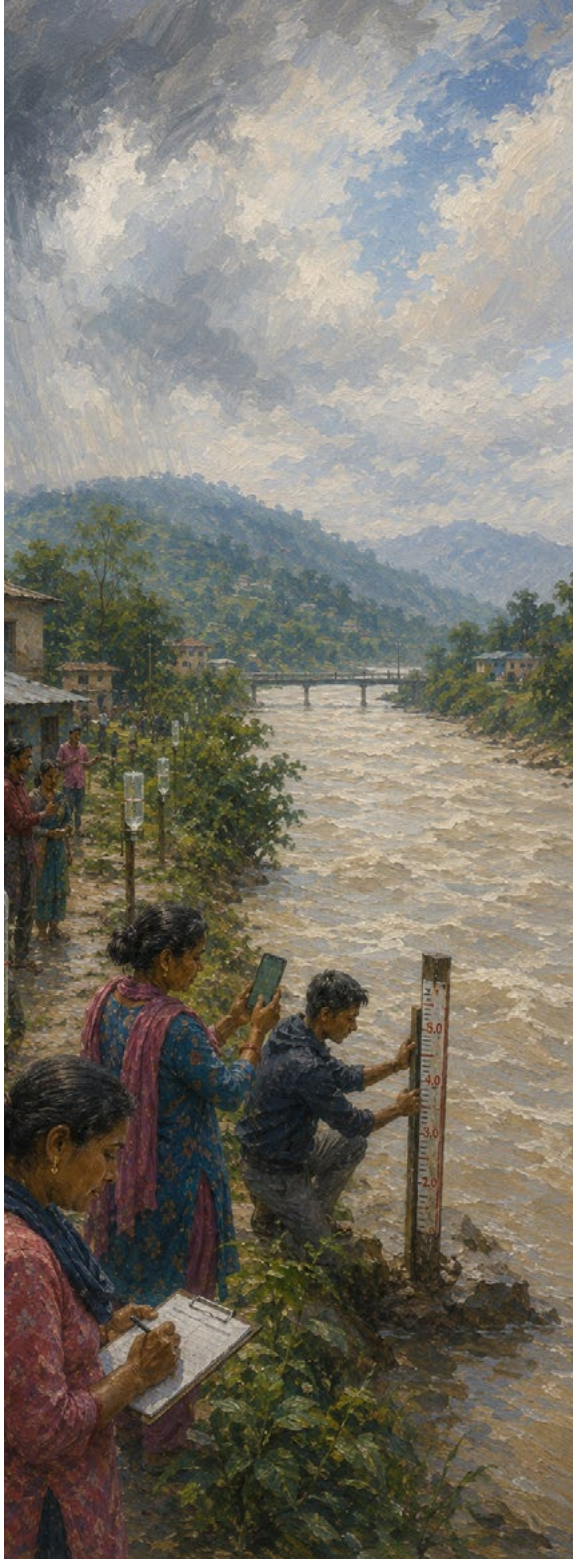
In Pashwan Tole, the ponds are filling again, the groundwater is being replenished, and children are spending less time in queues. It is a modest set of changes, but in a community that has long been overlooked, it carries a weight that goes well beyond the practical outcomes.



Reading the River

(Institute of Himalayan Risk Reduction)

In a flood-prone municipality in Nepal's far west, a network of citizen scientists is turning local knowledge into life-saving data.



The Problem With Waiting

Every monsoon season, the residents of Beldandi Rural Municipality in Kanchanpur district brace for the same uncertainty. The Chaudhar River, which runs upstream through Bedkot before entering the low-lying Terai plains where Beldandi sits, has a history of sudden flooding. When its earthen dams breach under heavy rainfall, water spreads fast across flat terrain. Wards 3, 4, and 5 have borne the brunt repeatedly.

The problem was not simply the floods. It was the not knowing. Communities had no reliable way to monitor rainfall or track rising water levels in real time. The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology issues national forecasts, but translating those into local action requires local data, and that data did not exist. By the time a flood was visible, preparation time was already gone.

Soda Bottles and Staff Gauges

The Institute of Himalayan Risk Reduction (IHRR) arrived in Beldandi with a project called SAFER-Chaudhar. The approach was deliberate in its simplicity. Rather than deploying sophisticated technology that would require outside expertise to maintain, the team built a system around tools that communities could own and sustain themselves.

25 rain gauges, several constructed from repurposed soda bottles, were installed across all five wards. River staff gauges, calibrated bamboo poles fixed at the riverbank, allowed water levels to be read by eye. 31 community members, 19 of them women, including 14 from marginalised groups, were trained as citizen scientists. Using a mobile application called VICTORY, their daily readings feed into a dashboard that municipal officials can monitor in near real time. By May 2026, the network had submitted 642 rainfall records and 74 water-level records.



What Local Knowledge Adds

None of the monitoring equipment was placed arbitrarily. Before a single gauge went into the ground, ward officials, Community Disaster Management Committee members, and residents sat together to map what they knew about how floods move through their municipality. They identified entry points, flagged vulnerable settlements, and marked areas most likely to trap water. That accumulated knowledge shaped where the instruments went.

Purushottam Joshi, the municipality's Disaster Risk Reduction Focal Person, put it plainly: local initiatives work best when they build on what already exists. Citizen scientists were selected from within the Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMC) precisely because those people already carried community trust and some disaster management experience. The project added tools and training to a foundation that was already there.

Rainsara and the Long Ride to the River

Ward 4 is where Rainsara Khatri lives. She is one of the 31 trained citizen scientists and has become the network's informal anchor.

Every day, Rainsara cycles to the riverbank to take her water-level readings, even though the monitoring site is far from her home. She submits her data, checks that it has registered on the application, and then makes her way to the homes of other citizen scientists to help them troubleshoot their reporting. She has become the person the network calls when something is not working.

When the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology issued heatwave forecasts earlier this year, Rainsara took it upon herself to share that information with her neighbours. It was not part of her formal brief. It was simply what made sense to her.

Students at the Gauge

One unexpected result came out of school outreach sessions conducted across all five wards, reaching 208 students. After one session, several students asked how they could actively participate. The conversation led to a practical arrangement: a rain gauge was installed at the school, students were assigned daily readings, and their science teacher would support data submission through the mobile application.

It is a small addition to the monitoring network. But it points toward something the project is quietly building: **a generation of young people in Beldandi who understand how to read their own environment.**

A Rehearsal Before the Rains

In May 2026, just before the monsoon, IHRR organised a simulation exercise with 51 participants, including local government officials, security forces, emergency operations staff, civil society, youth groups, and citizen scientists. The exercise ran through 13 disaster scenarios and tested how information moves across the system when a flood is approaching. 151 emergency messages were exchanged across six working groups.

It was a rehearsal. And rehearsals matter because when the Chaudhar rises in July, the system will not be new. The people operating it have already practised using it.

CDMC member Shushila Rokaya noted that the shift in her community's relationship to early warning had been real. Having community members directly involved in monitoring, she said, had improved trust in the system and helped ensure that warnings reach households more quickly.

The project ran for just 6 months, a constraint IHRR acknowledges openly. Whether the monitoring network sustains itself beyond formal support is a genuine question. But the gauges are in place, the data is flowing, and Rainsara is cycling to the river every morning.



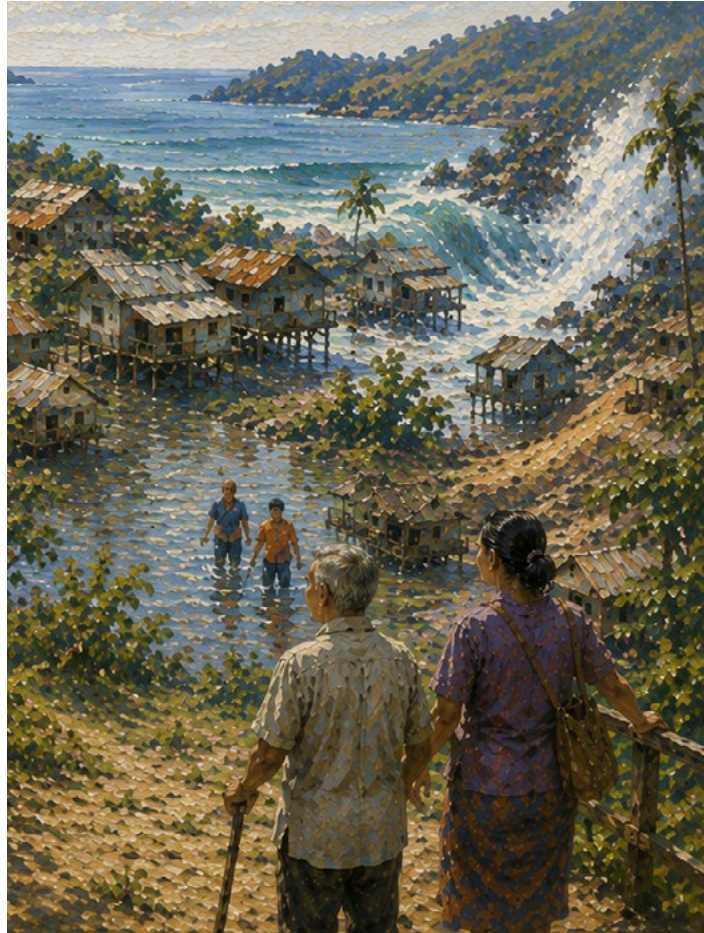
Inclusion is Not an Invitation

(MPBI)

Across Indonesia, an ambitious training project is asking a simple question: what does disaster preparedness look like when the people most often left out of it, help design it?

The Gap in the Room

Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and landslides are not hypothetical risks but recurring realities. The country has invested significantly in disaster management systems, and humanitarian standards such as the Sphere Handbook are widely referenced across the sector. But for years, a gap persisted in how those standards were taught and applied: the people most likely to be left behind during a disaster were rarely in the room when preparedness was being planned.



People with disabilities, older persons, and women face compounding barriers when disasters strike. Early warning messages arrive in formats they cannot access. Evacuation routes are not designed for them. Shelters may be physically inaccessible. WASH facilities, health services, and food distribution points often assume a level of mobility or communication that not everyone has. These are not a few cases. In Indonesia, an estimated 22 million people live with some form of disability.

What SEHATI Set Out to Do

Masyarakat Penanggulangan Bencana Indonesia (MPBI) designed the SEHATI project to address this gap directly. Working with YAKKUM Emergency Unit and supported by CBM Global, the project developed and delivered an inclusive version of the Sphere Basic Training, bringing together a deliberately mixed group of participants: persons with disabilities, representatives from Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD), humanitarian practitioners, government officials, and local facilitators.

The five-day training was held in Banda Aceh in April 2026 and drew 37 participants. 17 came from OPDs representing a wide range of disabilities, including physical, visual, hearing, psychosocial, intellectual, and multiple disabilities. 16 were humanitarian actors. Representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs and provincial government institutions also attended.

The mix was intentional. Inclusive humanitarian action, MPBI believed, cannot be learned from a manual alone. It requires direct engagement, and active conversations with stakeholders.

Two-Way Learning

What emerged from the training room confirmed that instinct. Participants with disabilities and OPD representatives gained stronger understanding of Sphere Standards and humanitarian coordination systems. But the learning that surprised facilitators most came from the other direction.

Participants without disabilities reported that direct interaction with their peers changed how they understood their own work. They learned to think differently about communication, about accessible facilitation, about what it actually means to design a service or a training that everyone can use.

As one participant from the Ministry of Social Affairs put it: *“The simulations helped us understand how difficult it can be for persons with disabilities to access shelter, information, and services during disasters. It changed the way I think about preparedness and response.”*

Another participant reflected: *“The training became more than a technical capacity-building activity. It became a space where humanitarian actors and persons with disabilities learned directly from one another and challenged existing assumptions about inclusion.”*

This mutual learning was not accidental. MPBI had spent months before the Banda Aceh training working with OPDs through a series of preparatory activities, including basic disaster management training, development of emergency response protocols, and advocacy workshops. By the time participants gathered for the Sphere training, OPD representatives were not newcomers to the conversation. They arrived as people with experience, confidence, and things to say.



What Inclusion Actually Requires

One of the clearest lessons from SEHATI is that inclusion is not achieved by issuing an invitation. Accessibility, the project found, extends far beyond ramps and physical infrastructure. It includes how information is communicated, how training materials are formatted, how long sessions run, how feedback is gathered, how facilitation is paced, and how decisions are made. Each of these required deliberate planning and, in many cases, additional budget.

“The inclusive facilitation methods demonstrated that accessibility is achievable when inclusion is planned intentionally from the beginning,” noted one participant. This emphasis on intentionality runs through everything SEHATI documented. Accessibility retrofitted at the last minute is rarely accessibility at all.

The On-the-Job Training component, which sends participants into flood and landslide-affected areas in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra to apply Sphere Standards in real contexts, is designed to extend this learning beyond the classroom into the field.

A Shift that Travels

Perhaps the most significant outcome of SEHATI is one that extends beyond its direct participants. MPBI is a deeply networked organisation within Indonesia’s disaster management and humanitarian ecosystem. It contributes to national and subnational policy discussions, convenes coordination platforms, and supports guideline development. Through SEHATI, the organisation has become more intentional about integrating disability inclusion into all of that work, not just into SEHATI-specific activities.

That institutional shift matters because it creates reach. The estimated indirect beneficiaries of the project, through participant networks and OPD connections, range from 1,500 to 3,000 people across multiple provinces.

Joko Widodo, an OPD representative from East Java, captured what the training meant from his side of the room: *“Before joining this training, I understood disaster response mostly as emergency assistance. Through this training, I learned that inclusion means ensuring everyone can participate safely and equally in all stages of humanitarian response.”*

That, in essence, is what SEHATI is trying to establish as a norm, not an exception.



The Shore Remembers

(SEEDS)

Along the Tamil Nadu coast in India, fishing communities are growing their own armour against the sea, one sapling at a time.

A Coast Under Pressure

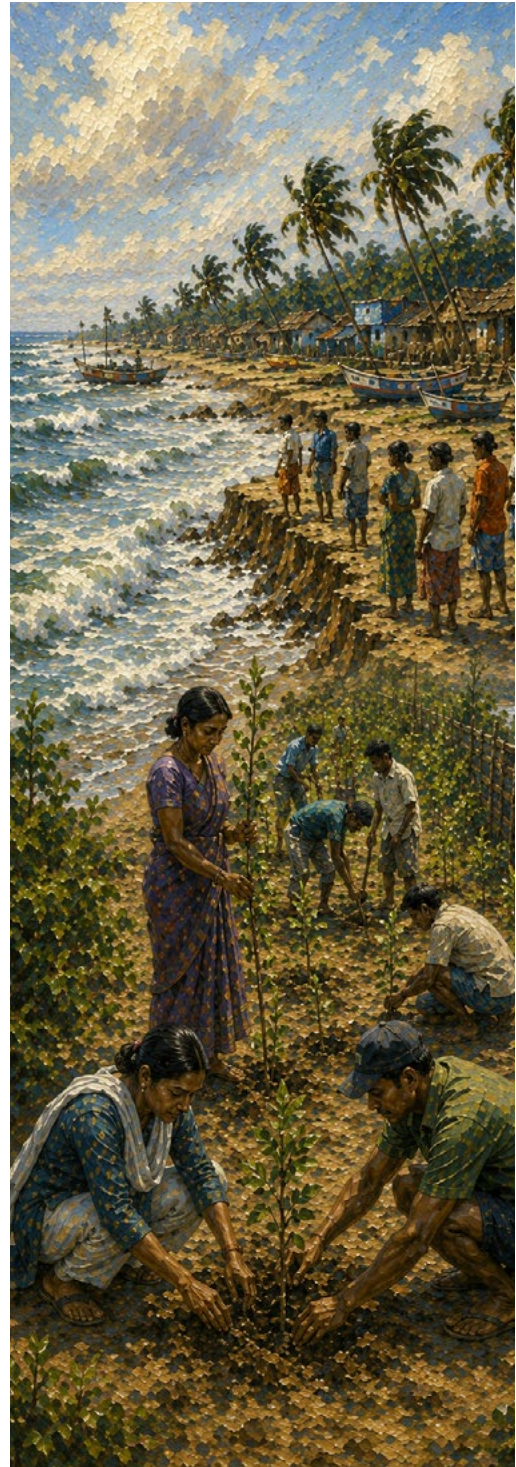
Stand on the beach at Sothikuppam, a small Indian fishing village in Tamil Nadu's Chengalpattu district, and the vulnerability is not hard to read. The land is flat, the vegetation thin, and the sea close. Every cyclone season, communities like this one brace for the same combination: storm surge, coastal erosion, salt-laden winds cutting through whatever lies in the way. The 2004 tsunami left a scar on this coastline that people here still talk about. Since then, the risks have not diminished; they have grown.

For years, the standard response to coastal hazards has leaned on concrete: seawalls, breakwaters, engineered barriers. SEEDS India, a Delhi-based disaster resilience organisation, went in a different direction. What if the coastline could protect itself?

Planting a Buffer

The answer SEEDS arrived at was a bio-shield: a multi-species, multi-layered belt of native vegetation running along the coast, dense enough to absorb wind, slow erosion, and reduce storm impact. Casuarina, neem, coconut - these are species chosen because they belong here, because their root systems suit this soil, and because local people already know them.

Over twelve months, SEEDS worked across nine fishing villages in Chengalpattu and Cuddalore districts, establishing approximately 11,500 square metres of coastal plantation with around 3,500 saplings. The bio-shield is still young. Trees take years to mature into meaningful barriers, but the ecological groundwork has been laid. GIS mapping, baseline assessments of vegetation, soil, hydrology, and climate vulnerability were completed before a single sapling went into the ground. Science and local knowledge were brought into the same conversation from the start.





The People Who Already Knew

Here is what the technical assessments could not have told SEEDS on their own: which patches of land were prone to waterlogging, where the wind came from during the worst storms, which sites had been informally used as rubbish dumps for years. That knowledge lived in the villages.

Tamil Nadu's coastal communities have their own governance structures, the *Oor Panchayat* and *Oor Nirvagam*, traditional village institutions that predate the formal local government system. SEEDS worked through them. Panchayat members helped identify suitable plantation sites, selected species, and mobilised their communities for the labour-intensive work of land preparation, planting, and fencing. More than 1,700 instances of community participation were recorded across the nine villages, from planning meetings to plantation drives.

In New Kalpakkam, a site that had long served as an informal dump was cleared by community members and replanted. Residents now collect organic waste to use as natural manure for the saplings. The transformation of that particular patch of land, from something people avoided to something they tend, says something about what this project has been quietly doing.

The Boys Who Showed Up

In Sothikuppam, the most visible champions of the bio-shield turned out to be a group of young men the community knows informally as the '**7½ Boys Team**.'

They showed up for fencing. They showed up for planting. On days when no one asked them to, they came back to water the saplings. When the plantation needed extra attention, they organised it themselves. Dhinakaran, a traditional Panchayat member in the village, worked alongside them throughout, showing up not because his formal role required it but because he had decided the bio-shield mattered.

"Protecting these bio-shields is a shared responsibility," he said. "When communities come together to care for these plantations, we are also investing in the future safety and resilience of our villages."

In Venpurusham, former Panchayat leader Harikrishnan and a group of associates took on a different kind of maintenance: repairing damaged fencing after storms, watering during dry spells, chasing away goats that wandered into the plantation. In Pattipulam, community members used their own money to replace saplings that had not survived.



Trust Takes Time

One of the more honest things SEEDS documented in this project is the story of Sithiraipettai, which did not go the way anyone expected.

Early in the project, the community members on one side of the plantation site were vocal and enthusiastic. They promised labour, support, participation. On the other side, people were cooler, more guarded, asking questions about the time commitment involved. SEEDS assumed the enthusiastic group would become the project's backbone.

They were wrong. As months passed, it was the initially hesitant community that developed the deepest ownership. They took over the watering, maintained the site consistently, and eventually requested a borewell connection, not for themselves but so that the bio-shield would have a reliable water source. They then assumed responsibility for managing it.

The lesson SEEDS drew was simple but hard-won: early enthusiasm is not the same as ownership. Ownership builds slowly, through action and shared responsibility, through seeing a thing grow that you have tended to. You cannot rush it.

What Grows Next

The Mahabalipuram Town Panchayat has expressed willingness to take over maintenance of the Venpurusham bio-shield site after the project formally closes, which would make it one of the first instances in the region of a local government adopting a community-led bio-shield as its own responsibility.

It has not happened yet. The trees are still young. The monsoon seasons that will test them are still ahead. But across nine villages, communities that were not traditionally in the business of ecological restoration are now tending coastal land as though it belongs to them, because, increasingly, it does.

"These saplings are important for our village and for future generations," said members of the Sithiraipettai Panchayat. "If more land becomes available, we would like to expand the bio-shield further."

The sea is not getting calmer. But the coastline, slowly, is being taught to hold its ground.

What the Children Brought Home

(words. rhythms. images)

In Dehradun's low-income settlements, a storytelling project is shedding light on an emerging climate threat and letting children lead the conversation.

The Risk Nobody Was Talking

Uttarakhand knows climate anxiety well. In recent years, the state has watched glaciers recede, hillsides collapse in landslides, and rivers flood with little warning. These are the risks people here know by name, the ones that make it into news cycles and disaster plans.

But in the lower-lying, densely packed settlements of Dehradun, something else has been quietly building. The summers are getting harder, longer, and hotter in ways that thin-walled homes in low-income settlements

like Kathbangla Basti and Sapera Basti cannot absorb. The summer of 2025 left residents with memories of heat they had no framework for and nobody telling them what to do.

Extreme heat is new territory for Dehradun. The city has no Heat Action Plan, no early warning protocol, and until recently almost no public conversation about heatwaves as a local climate threat at all.



The Book and the Camera

Into this gap came words, rhythms, images (WRI) with an approach that did not look like conventional disaster preparedness.

WRI worked across four low-income settlements with Aryan Group, a community organisation with years of established trust in those neighbourhoods. Together, they brought two tools into community learning centres: the COPE Disaster Champions storybook on heatwaves, translated into Hindi and paired with activity booklets, and a methodology called the Digital Storytelling for Social Change (DiSSC), which trained community members to document their own experiences through short videos.

8 women teachers, themselves residents of the communities they worked in, ran weekly Saturday sessions from September 2025, reaching 157 children through drawing, role-plays, and group discussions designed to make heat risks tangible. In November, a 2-day DiSSC workshop equipped over 60 participants to tell their own climate stories on camera. By March 2026, the videos were ready for a public screening attended by government officials, scientists, and activists.

Children as Messengers

What nobody fully anticipated was what happened between the training sessions and the screening event, in the hours children spent at home.

Teacher Sona noticed it first. After the COPE book sessions, children were correcting each other's behaviour outside the classroom, stopping friends from drinking cold water after physical exertion, reminding them what they had learned. Nobody had asked them to do this. The knowledge had moved from the page into instinct.

Teacher Sakeeta watched the ripple spread further. Children were going home and explaining heatwaves to their parents: what causes them, what the risks are, what the family should do. Parents were receiving climate education delivered by their own children, with the confidence of someone who had genuinely understood something new.

The project officially reached 157 children. Through them, it reached considerably further.



Why Hindi Mattered

The original COPE books exist in English. Translating them into Hindi was not a formality. In settlements where literacy is uneven and English largely inaccessible, a heatwave guide that cannot be read is no guide at all. Climate education that bypasses local language will consistently miss the communities most exposed to climate risk.

The activity-based format mattered equally. In learning environments where rote instruction is the norm, illustrated stories and role-plays were different enough to make children want to show up. Teachers mentioned almost in passing that attendance had improved. In communities where children face competing demands on their time, that is not a small thing.



The First Conversation of its Kind

On 6 March 2026, community-made videos were screened in front of government officials, scientists, educators, community members, and activists. Climate activists noted that it was the first time in Dehradun that children, community members, scientists, and government officials had gathered around the single issue of extreme heat. A city accustomed to talking about floods and landslides was, for the first time, sitting down to talk about heatwaves.

The community members were not subjects of discussion. They were presenting the evidence.

That event has since opened conversations about developing a Heat Action Plan for Dehradun. While this is an unfolding story, the conversation is happening partly because children in four low-income settlements made videos about their summers and showed them to people with the power to act.



What Was Hard, and Who Made It Work



WRI is candid about one design flaw: the project ran largely through winter. Engaging communities in conversations around extreme heat while temperatures outside were cold required facilitators to rely on memories of the brutal 2025 summer rather than anything currently felt. For a city only beginning to recognise heat as a threat, that timing gap made an already unfamiliar conversation harder. Future projects, WRI recommends, should run when the hazard is actually present.

Behind everything were 8 women teaching in under-resourced informal learning centres, without formal climate training, through an implementation period that included a devastating cloudburst in September 2025. All 8 have committed to continuing the COPE sessions after the project ends.

In a city just waking up to what heat will mean for its most vulnerable residents, that matters more than it might seem.

The Hill That Moves

(YAKKUM Emergency Unit)

In a village perched on the slopes of central Java, communities are learning to read their land before it reads them.

Living on the Edge

The roads into Banjarasri Village in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, are the kind that demand full attention. They wind up and around the Menoreh Mountains, narrow and steep, past houses and farms built on hillsides that look permanent until the rain comes. When it does, these slopes behave differently. The soil absorbs water until it cannot, then the ground cracks, shifts, and sometimes gives way entirely. Banjarasri is not a place that is occasionally at risk from landslides. It is a place where landslides are a condition of life.

The dry season brings a different problem. The same slopes that become unstable under heavy rain turn parched and hard when the rains stop. Streams shrink, crops fail, and households that depend on small-scale farming have to manage through months of water scarcity. Banjarasri faces both ends of the climate spectrum, and its 4,426 residents have learned to live in the space between.

What they had not yet done, before YAKKUM Emergency Unit (YEU) arrived, was to develop a structured way to understand, monitor, or prepare for either hazard.



Design Thinking on a Hillside

YEU's approach in Banjarasri was deliberately unhurried. Rather than arriving with ready-made solutions, the organisation began with a Participatory Assessment of Climate and Disaster Resilience, a process that brought community members together to map their own risks, name their own priorities, and propose their own ideas. From those conversations, two groups stepped forward with innovations they wanted to develop.

The first was the Banjarasri Disaster Risk Reduction Forum, known as FPRB. Their focus was landslide preparedness: strengthening early warning systems, installing evacuation routes, conducting first aid training, and planting vetiver grass on the most vulnerable slopes. Vetiver is not a dramatic intervention. It is a deep-rooted grass whose dense root system binds soil and slows erosion; a quiet, biological form of landslide mitigation that communities can plant and maintain themselves.

The second group was KWT Ngudi Rejeki, a women's farmer collective, who identified a different thread to pull. Their innovation addressed the dry season: an integrated goat farming system that produces fermented manure to improve soil health, while also supporting fodder planting on slopes. In addressing drought, they were simultaneously addressing erosion.

Both ideas came from the community. YEU provided design thinking workshops, technical mentoring, and capacity building. The direction came from the people who live on the hill.



What a Traverse Revealed

One of the most clarifying moments of the project came when the YEU team walked through Dusun Sumber Sari with local officials, conducting an environmental traverse of the terrain. Seeing the hamlets up close, perched on high-slope land with steep drops between them, brought the risk into sharp relief. It was also what convinced the team to bring in academics to formally study ground movement in the area. Community knowledge of the land was rich and specific, but an independent scientific assessment carried weight lent credibility for those who might otherwise have minimised the threat.

The traverse produced something else too. While picking their way across the steep terrain, the village secretary, known locally as Carik, had an idea: a sugar palm seed-throwing competition using slingshots, as a way to plant trees in areas too steep to reach on foot. It has not yet become official policy. But the fact that a government official, when walking a difficult hillside, responded to the landscape with practical creativity rather than resignation says something about what the project has been cultivating.

The Women Who Showed Up

Novitasari is a member of KWT Ngudi Rejeki from Padukuhan Nglebeng. In her daily life she scavenges with her family to get by, and the training venue at Banjarasri Village Hall is around 5 kilometres from her home. She walked there. She arrived with no complaints and a consistent smile that, as the community organiser who documented her story noted, reflected something real: the feeling of being included, of being valued.

She is not unusual in that regard. The project has been deliberate about involving people who are typically left out of disaster management conversations. Sutiyeem, a health cadre who participated in the workshops, put it plainly: *“In the past, women were rarely involved in activities related to disaster risk. Our hope is that this participation will continue, so we can provide motivation and support for at-risk groups such as young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities.”*

That inclusion is not incidental to the project’s resilience goals. On a hillside where a landslide can affect every household, preparedness that reaches only half the community is not preparedness at all.

What the Village Has Decided

Perhaps the clearest sign that the project has taken root is what Banjarasri’s village government has done with what it has learned. Officials have begun integrating a climate and disaster risk perspective into the village’s own work programme, including plans to plant perennial and fruit crops on higher ground and protect water sources to address dry-season shortages. These are village-budget decisions, made by the local government, shaped by a year of working alongside their own community on questions of risk and resilience.

The hill still moves when the rain comes. But in Banjarasri, more people now know what to watch for, what to do, and that their knowledge of this land is worth building on.



ADRRN Hubs

Not a Beneficiary. A Builder. (CBDRRM Hub)

The Microphone Belongs to Someone Else (Digital Storytelling Hub)

Eyes in the Sky, Hands on the Ground (Drone Hub)

The Gap Between the Blueprint and the Building (ERM Hub)

The Answers Were Already There (Localisation Hub)

Not a Beneficiary. A Builder.

(CBDRRM Hub)

The Centre for Disaster Preparedness has spent decades making the same argument: communities don't need to be saved from disasters. They need the tools and standing to protect themselves.

The Wrong Question

When disaster risk reduction professionals talk about 'THE LAST MILE', they usually mean the hardest stretch of delivery, the point where systems, resources, and knowledge finally reach the people who need them most. The metaphor is logistical. Something moves from the centre outward, from the expert to the community, from the institution to the individual.

The Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (CBDRRM) Hub, led by the Centre for Disaster Preparedness (CDP) in the Philippines, starts from a different premise entirely.

Communities are not the end of the delivery chain. They are the beginning of resilience. The knowledge, the networks, the understanding of local terrain and social dynamics that make disaster response actually work, already exist at the community level. The question is not how to reach people. It is how to resource and recognise what they are already doing.

This distinction sounds subtle. In practice, it changes everything.



What Community-Led Actually Looks Like

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-exposed countries in the world. Typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods: the country faces a convergence of hazards that would test any system. It also has, partly because of that exposure and partly because of decades of investment by organisations like CDP, a rich tradition of community-based disaster risk reduction that has been tested repeatedly by real events.

Community-based early warning systems that run on local knowledge of rivers, rainfall, and historical flood patterns. Local responders trained not by international agencies but by their own organisations, accountable to their own neighbourhoods. Risk assessments conducted by the people who live with the risk, not by consultants who visit it. These are not pilot programmes. In many parts of the Philippines, they are how disaster preparedness actually functions.

The CBDRRM Hub exists to document this, share it, and advocate for it as a model that the rest of Asia should take seriously. Through capacity building, peer exchanges, story-sharing, and inter-community dialogue, the hub supports ADRRN members across the region to build locally owned disaster risk reduction systems that do not collapse when the external support ends.



Science Meets the Street

In May 2026, CDP represented ADRRN at the 9th Asia Conference on Earthquake Engineering in Kathmandu, a gathering of seismologists, structural engineers, government officials, and researchers from across the globe. The conference theme was Risk to Resilience: Linking Science to the People. ADRRN took that theme literally.

The special session ADRRN organised, **“Frontline CSOs and Researchers: Stronger Together for Last-Mile Earthquake Resilience,”** was a deliberate intervention into a highly technical space. CDP’s Mayfourth Luneta, who serves as Vice-Chair of ADRRN, brought the community perspective directly into a room accustomed to hearing from engineers and academics. Her argument was straightforward: the knowledge that could protect communities from earthquakes exists in abundance. What is missing is not science but access, not expertise but inclusion.

She ran a live exercise in which conference participants seated at the back of the room, symbolising communities living in unsafe, non-engineered areas, were invited to move to safer spaces. The point was made without a single data slide: communities know their risk. What they lack is meaningful inclusion in the planning, the resourcing, and the decision-making that could reduce it.

The session landed. An audience of engineers and researchers, people trained to solve problems through calculation and modelling, sat with the realisation that the hardest problem in earthquake resilience is not structural. It is relational.

A Meeting on the Margins

The most consequential outcome of the Kathmandu conference happened not in the session hall but on its sidelines. CDP met with the Association of Structural Engineers of the Philippines, the professional body representing the engineers who understand exactly what it would take to make Philippine’s buildings safer.

The two organisations had never formally worked together. CDP spends its time with urban poor communities, marginalised households, people building homes on slopes and riverbanks without access to technical guidance. ASEP represents the profession that holds exactly that technical guidance. Between them sits one of the most important gaps in Philippine disaster risk reduction.

A partnership framework began to take shape. The connection, still early, points toward something the CBDRRM Hub has long argued: that community knowledge and technical expertise are not competing resources. They are complementary ones, and the communities most exposed to earthquake risk deserve access to both.

The Hub's Wider Work

Beyond the Philippines, the CBDRRM Hub is building a regional learning architecture that takes community voice seriously as evidence. Peer exchanges between communities in different countries. Documentation of locally led innovations that rarely appear in academic literature. Advocacy for CBDRRM to be embedded not just in civil society programming, but in national disaster risk reduction frameworks and government planning processes.

The hub's underlying conviction is that sustainable resilience cannot be imported. It has to be grown from within communities, through their own leadership, using their own knowledge, supported rather than supplanted by external expertise. An early warning system that a community designed and owns will outlast any project cycle. A local responder network accountable to its own neighbourhood will respond faster than any external team.

Mayfourth Luneta's formulation in Kathmandu stays with you: communities are not unwilling to act on risk. They are excluded from the resources and standing that would allow them to act more effectively.

The CBDRRM Hub is, at its core, a sustained effort to close that gap. Not by delivering resilience to communities, but by recognising that in the Philippines, and across Asia, communities have been building it themselves all along.



The Microphone Belongs to Someone Else

(Digital Storytelling Hub)

In the humanitarian sector, the people closest to the crisis are rarely the ones shaping the conversation about it. One of the hubs is changing that.

The Stories We Tell About Other People

She had been doing the job for years, and she was good at it. Writing reports, producing communications content, documenting her organisation's work in Sindh, Pakistan, in ways that made sense to donors and decision-makers. She understood narratives. She understood audiences. What she had not fully examined, until she sat through the Humanitarian Story Circle training, was the angle from which she had always been telling stories.

About people. For people. But rarely, if ever, with them.

"Whose story is this?" she found herself asking. *"Who does it serve?"*

The question sounds simple. In the context of humanitarian communications, where the pressure to produce content that satisfies institutional requirements is constant, it is quietly radical. The training run by words, rhythms, images (WRI), which leads ADRRN's Digital Storytelling Hub, had not just given her a new skill. It had given her a new discomfort. And that, it turns out, is where better storytelling begins.

A Conference and its Silences

The Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week (RHPW) in Bangkok draws some of the most influential actors in Asia Pacific humanitarian response. Panels are full. Agendas are packed. Conversations happen that shape priorities, budgets, and the direction of regional humanitarian action for the year ahead.

And in all of this, the people who actually live through the crises being discussed are almost entirely absent.

Not because nobody wants to hear from them. But because the architecture of large convenings, their formats, their funding flows, their default vocabulary, is built around organisations rather than individuals, around institutions rather than experience. Frontline workers and community members exist in these spaces mostly as data points, as the people programmes are designed for. The microphone belongs, almost always, to someone else.

The Humanitarian Story Circle set out to change who holds the microphone.





115 Stories From 15 Countries

Working with the Quality and Accountability Hub led by Community World Service Asia (CWSA), WRI ran 2 rounds of online training between July and September 2025, reaching participants from 21 countries. The sessions were practical: narrative structure, smartphone video basics, how to frame a story well. But the deeper work happened in the sessions on ethics. On consent. On what it means to hold someone else's experience carefully and be accountable to it.

Participants were not coached toward a message. They were handed tools and were directed towards their own truth.

115 stories came back from fifteen countries. 18 were curated into a digital booklet. 9 finalists were selected to present at RHPW 2025 in Bangkok, in the opening session, before the panels and the policy discussions and the coordination meetings. The selection criteria was deliberately, almost stubbornly, human: authenticity of lived experience, emotional resonance, dignity of representation. Polished production could not compensate for a story that did not feel real. And a story that felt deeply real needed nothing else.

The Woman Who Could Not Get a Visa

One of the 9 finalists could not make it to Bangkok. Visa delays, the kind of bureaucratic friction that is routine when you are travelling on a Pakistani passport to an international conference, kept her grounded. She recorded her story as a video and sent it in.

When it played in the conference hall, the audience of over 400 practitioners went still.

There is a particular quality to that kind of silence. It is not the polite quiet of people waiting for a speaker to finish. It is the involuntary stillness of people who have stopped thinking and started feeling. Her story reached them across the distance her visa would not allow her to cross.

Her absence was also, of course, its own story. About which voices get platforms and which ones get paperwork. About a sector that talks constantly about inclusion and still cannot reliably get a community storyteller into the room. Her video played anyway. The room listened anyway. Something got through.



What Actually Changed

For the communications officer in Sindh, the transformation was not about technique. It was about orientation. She had entered the training knowing how to produce content. She left it asking different questions. Her submission was selected in the top 18 of 115. More lasting than the recognition, she said, was the shift in how she now sits with someone else's experience before she starts to write about it. Stories, for her, are no longer deliverables. They are, as she put it, responsibilities to be honoured.

Across all participants, 72 percent reported increased interest in storyboarding and scripting, and more than half wanted to go deeper into understanding the nuances of ethical consent when telling stories. The skill the hub is building is not video production. It is a different way of relating to other people's lives, and communicating their truth.

A Permanent Seat

The RHPW organising committee has formally agreed to make the Humanitarian Story Circle a permanent fixture of the opening session. Every year, before the agenda moves to the business of coordination and policy, a regional audience will first hear from the people closest to what is being coordinated and decided.

It is a small structural change with a quiet implication: that the way a room begins shapes what the room becomes. That empathy, arrived at through story, is not soft programming. It is preparation for better decisions.

The stories were always there. They just needed a place to land.

Eyes in the Sky, Hands on the Ground

(Drone Hub)

This hub is asking a deceptively simple question: when disaster strikes and everything else fails, why does it still take a week to get a drone in the air?



When the Lights Go Out

There is a moment in every major disaster when the normal systems stop working. Roads become impassable, mobile towers go down, and the coordination platforms relief organisations depend on go dark. Responders are left making decisions about where to send help based on fragments of information and whatever they knew before the crisis began.

In that moment, a drone can change everything. It can fly above blocked roads, into places no human can safely reach, and transmit real-time imagery showing where people are stranded and which communities are cut off. It is, in the words of one field-level humanitarian respondent, *“the only eyes we have in the field.”*

And yet, across Asia Pacific, it typically takes 7 to 8 days to get a drone authorised and operational after a disaster strikes. The golden hours of response pass without it.

This is the problem the ADRRN Drone Hub was established to solve.

The Mapping Came First

Before any hub could be designed, someone had to understand what was actually out there. Humanitarian Solutions Hub Private Limited spent 3 months surveying 41 humanitarian organisations across 6 countries, 5 drone supply providers, and conducting 10 in-depth interviews with government officials, UN representatives, and industry leaders.

What they found reframed the conversation entirely. The challenge of humanitarian drones across Asia Pacific is not a technology problem. The drones exist. Local operators in Nepal and India have conducted real disaster deployments with capabilities that match international providers. The problem is coordination, regulation, and institutional readiness. Nobody has built the system to connect organisations that need drones with operators who can fly them before a disaster strikes. Every deployment is assembled from scratch during an emergency, when pressure is highest and time is shortest.



The Regulation Gap

Getting a drone airborne in a disaster zone requires approvals from district, state, and national authorities, sometimes including defence and home ministries, with no fast-track mechanism for declared disasters. Every single key informant interviewed, all 10 of them, identified this regulatory fragmentation as the top systemic barrier.

Baibhav Patel, founder of BonV Aero, the Indian company that deployed ground-penetrating radar drones in the Sikkim landslide of 2025, put it plainly: *“Legally we can do X, but the potential of the technology is Y. The gap between what the law allows and what the technology can do, that is the space where lives are lost.”*

His company, like others in the region, operates in a regulatory grey zone not out of recklessness but because the rules have not kept pace with what the technology can do and what communities need.

The Benchmark from Kathmandu

Among all the organisations that participated in the research, one stood out. IHRR Nepal is a small Kathmandu-based organisation that conducted three disaster deployments in 2024 and 2025, including the Rautahat floods and the Dodhara Chandani response. In each case, they deployed advanced sensor packages with capabilities that rival much larger international operators.

“In our flood deployments, the aerial imagery was the first reliable information anyone had about which communities were cut off and which evacuation routes were still passable,” their team reflected. *“Without it, we were responding blind.”*

What makes IHRR Nepal significant is not just their technical capacity but their model: locally owned, locally operated, locally accountable, building Nepal’s own humanitarian drone expertise rather than depending on international operators. The hub’s vision of a regional standby roster anchored by local expertise is not aspirational when IHRR Nepal is in the picture. It is already happening.

The Trust Question

Not every challenge is logistical. A field programme manager from a national NGO in the Philippines raised something the data alone could not capture: *“Communities where we work have seen military drones, surveillance drones, drones that fly over their homes without explanation. When we bring a drone for flood mapping, the first question is always: who is watching us and why?”*

30 percent of demand-side respondents raised concerns about community mistrust. In fragile contexts, a drone’s association with military operations is not abstract. Community consent and transparent communication are not optional ethics steps. They are what determine whether a drone can do its job at all.

What the Hub is Building

The research has produced something that did not exist before: a validated evidence base linking humanitarian drone demand to supplier readiness across South and Southeast Asia. 3 of the 5 supply providers surveyed have already agreed to join a pre-qualified regional roster.

The most urgent recommendation is a 24/7 regional coordination mechanism that matches humanitarian organisations with pre-vetted operators, paired with a fast-track regulatory exemption reducing deployment time from seven days to under three hours during declared disasters.

Mr. Ramjul of Jyoti Foundation, who works in flood-prone districts of northern India, said it simply: *“What we need is a single window, fast-track permission system. Without it, we lose the golden hours that drones are built to serve.”*

The technology is ready. The operators are ready. What remains is building the system that connects them.



The Gap Between the Blueprint and the Building (Earthquake Risk Management Hub)

Across Asia, engineers know how to make buildings survive earthquakes. The harder problem is getting that knowledge to the people who need it most.

Gathering the Expertise that mattered

At the 9th Asia Conference on Earthquake Engineering in Kathmandu, a young graduate engineer named Sugam Pokhrel raised his hand and said something that briefly stopped the room. He had just completed 4 years at Pulchowk Campus, one of Nepal's premier engineering colleges, in one of the most seismically active countries on earth. In that entire time, he said quietly, he had not participated in a single disaster risk reduction programme.

The silence that followed was telling. Nepal sits on a fault line that produced a catastrophic earthquake in 2015. Its engineers graduate by the thousands each year. And the two facts, the knowledge and the need, have never been properly introduced to each other.

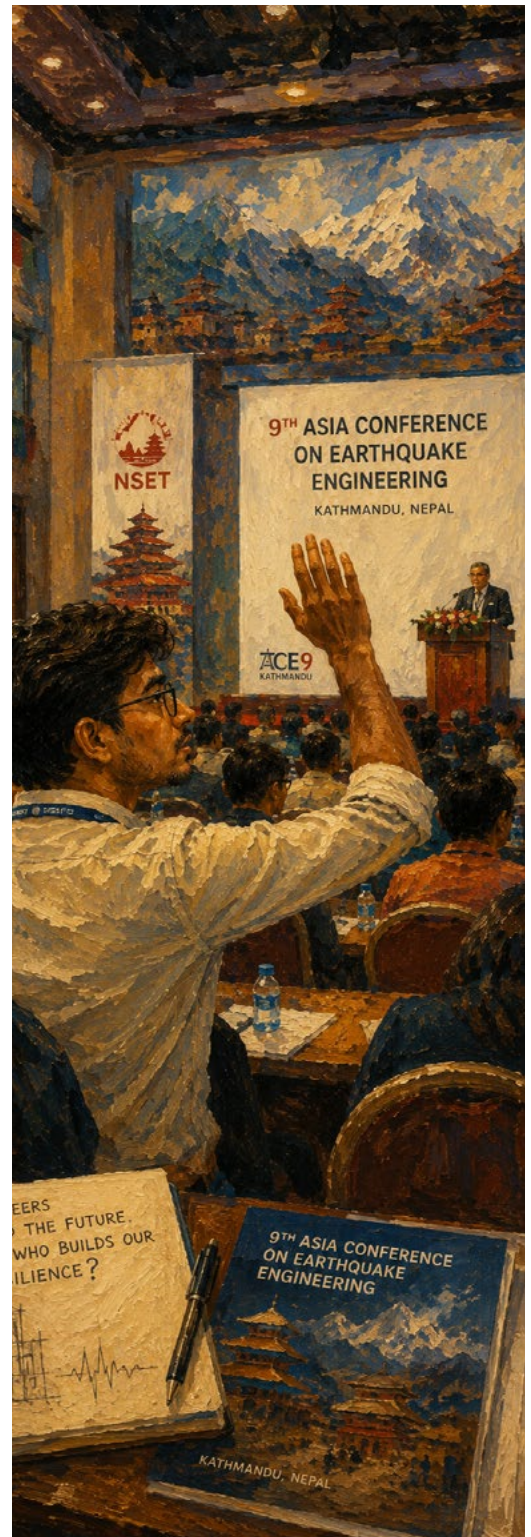
This is the problem the ADRRN's Earthquake Risk Management (ERM) Hub, led by NSET Nepal, exists to solve.

The Science is Not the Problem

ADRRN Chair Takeshi Komino put it plainly at the same conference: *"The science to reduce these losses actually exists. We have assessment models, structural assessments, early warning tools, retrofitting methodology and technology. So the question is no longer whether we can solve this, but whether we will."*

The gap is not technical. Across Asia Pacific, from Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the Philippines' Metro Manila, communities most vulnerable to earthquakes are also those furthest from the knowledge that could protect them. Technical guidance is written in engineering language. Retrofitting costs exceed what marginalised households can afford. Masons building homes in informal settlements have rarely been trained in earthquake-resistant construction. And civil society organisations working closest to these communities are rarely invited into the research and design conversations that shape the solutions meant to serve them.

The ERM Hub's Phase 1 set out to start bridging this gap. Not with grand infrastructure, but with training, dialogue, and the patient work of connecting people who needed to be in the same room.





Pakistan: Learning Across Borders

In April 2026, 42 engineers, architects, and technical officials from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Jammu and Kashmir attended an online training on NSET's Earthquake Safety Startup Package. The curriculum moved from seismology fundamentals through earthquake-resistant design to retrofitting techniques. Local expert Habib Mughal co-facilitated, grounding NSET's Nepal-developed content in Pakistan's own building codes, construction practices, and familiar failure cases.

The results were measurable. Average test scores rose by nearly 17 points. The minimum score in the group climbed from 20 to 60, meaning even the participants who began furthest behind made substantial gains. More telling was what participants asked for next: village-level mason training, field visits, hands-on construction exercises. The engineers who attended had already started thinking about the people further down the chain.



Philippines: Access and Inclusion

The experience sharing workshop in Quezon City in late April brought together 22 people with a deliberately cross-sectoral mix: care workers, construction professionals, social development practitioners, engineers, and community leaders. It was co-designed and co-led by the Center for Disaster Preparedness Foundation and TAO Pilipinas, two Philippine-based organisations with deep roots in urban poor communities.

Mayfourth Luneta, Vice-Chair of ADRRN and Deputy Executive Director of CDP, reframed the challenge during the 9ACEE panel using what she called an "AI" formulation. Not artificial intelligence, but Access and Inclusion. She ran a live exercise in which participants sitting at the "back" of the room, symbolising those living in unsafe, non-engineered areas, were invited to move to safer spaces. The point was simple and direct: communities are not unwilling to act on earthquake risk. They lack meaningful access to information and genuine inclusion in the planning process.

When urban poor community leaders at the Philippines workshop were actually consulted about their needs, they expressed willingness to relocate to safer areas and participate in co-designing solutions. It was, as Mayfourth noted, a demonstration of community agency that participatory approaches consistently produce and top-down interventions consistently miss.

The Translation Problem

Across all the hub's activities, a single challenge surfaced repeatedly and in different forms. Shakeb Nabi, Country Director of Welthungerhilfe Nepal, described it at the 9ACEE panel:

"The language the community speaks is not understood by researchers, and the language of researchers is not understood by the community."

Er. Suraj Gautam of IHRR Nepal put it differently: *"Knowledge is not the problem in Nepal. The major problem is how we translate that knowledge. Whatever learning we gather during events like earthquakes does not get institutionalised into our system."*

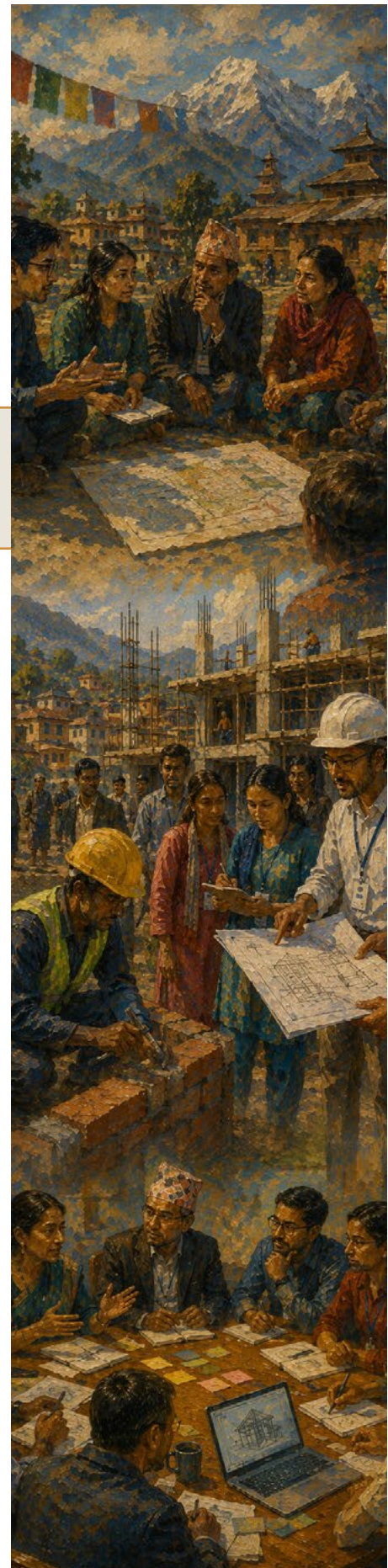
Both observations point to the same structural failure. Technical knowledge exists. Community need exists. Between them is a translation layer that is currently thin, underfunded, and often absent entirely.

The hub's response in Phase 1 was to bring different kinds of people into the same conversation: engineers and social workers, researchers and local government officials, Nepali retrofitting experts and Pakistani construction practitioners. The 9ACEE panel session produced concrete follow-up commitments, including a regional repository of simplified technical tools accessible to civil society, advocacy for community-based disaster risk management in undergraduate engineering curricula, and a formalised partnership between the Association of Structural Engineers of the Philippines, CDP Foundation, and NSET.

What Comes Next

Phase 1 has established the relationships and surfaced the demand. Phase 2 is where the work becomes structural, in both senses. Demonstrating retrofitting projects in selected communities, training for local instructors, and hands-on mason training are all planned. Mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, who joined the 9ACEE panel, offered both the challenge and the model: *"Local governments must act as a bridge to the last mile, ensuring that all efforts actually reach households, schools, and neighbourhoods."* In Lalitpur, ward-level volunteer training has already reduced earthquake damage in areas where building bylaws are enforced. The evidence exists. The question, as Komino said, is whether the will to act on it follows.

Sugam Pokhrel, the young engineer who had never once studied disaster risk in four years of training, stayed after the panel to join the discussion. That, perhaps, is where it begins.



The Answers Were Already There

(Localisation Hub)

When two major disasters struck Sri Lanka and Indonesia in 2025, the question was not only what happened, but why the damage ran so deep. The Localisation Hub went looking for the roots.

After the Storm, the Real Work

Cyclonic Storm Ditwah made landfall in Sri Lanka in 2025 with a force that left communities scrambling. Around the same time, floods and landslides triggered by the Senyar system tore through parts of Sumatra in Indonesia. In both cases, the physical destruction was visible and immediate. What was harder to see, but equally important, was what had made these communities so exposed in the first place.

This is the question the ADRRN Localisation Hub, led by SEEDS India, set out to answer. Not through a rapid damage assessment, but through a slower, more probing diagnostic study that asked a different kind of question: what conditions, built up over years, turned a natural hazard into a human catastrophe?



Looking Below the Surface

The study drew on 36 survey responses across both countries, alongside stakeholder consultations, community case studies, and secondary research. Conducted by SEEDS Technical Services with support from ADRRN member organisations in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, it used a Root Cause Analysis approach to trace disaster impacts back to their structural origins.

What it found was a familiar but important pattern. The devastation in both countries was the result of extreme weather meeting unsafe settlement patterns, degraded ecosystems, gaps in early warning dissemination, weak land-use regulation, and limited coordination between communities and the institutions meant to serve them. These vulnerabilities did not appear overnight. They had been accumulating quietly, in policy gaps and informal settlements and riverbanks stripped of protective vegetation, long before any storm arrived.

When Warnings Do Not Reach

One of the most consistent findings across both countries was the gap between early warning systems that exist on paper, and warnings that actually reach the people who need them in real-time to act.

In several cases, warnings were issued but did not travel the last mile. They arrived in formats that were difficult to understand, through channels not everyone could access, in the absence of local preparedness structures needed to translate information into action. Even where people received warnings; delays and lack of clarity slowed their response. The result was that communities made decisions during evacuations not based on official guidance, but on their own judgement and, crucially, on the advice of people they trusted.

Several respondents described depending on neighbours and community leaders in the moments that mattered most. A technical system had failed them. A human network had not.





The Infrastructure that Held

This observation sits at the heart of what the Localisation Hub is built around. Across both Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the study found that the communities that fared better during the disasters were not necessarily those with the most sophisticated infrastructure. They were those with stronger local networks, some prior preparedness experience, and clearer lines of communication between residents and local leadership.

Local volunteers, neighbourhood groups, and community leaders became the first point of support during emergencies in both countries. Working with limited resources and in the middle of their own losses, they organised evacuations, identified the most vulnerable households, and coordinated assistance before formal response systems could reach them.

This is not a reason to celebrate the absence of institutional support. It is a reason to ask why so much resilience depends on informal systems that receive so little formal recognition or resourcing.

What the Data Said

The study identified several recurring gaps across both countries: inadequate preparedness planning at the community level, unsafe land-use practices in high-risk zones, limited coordination between disaster management agencies during response, and livelihood disruption that continued long after the visible physical damage had been cleared.

That last finding deserves particular attention. Recovery is often measured in homes rebuilt and roads repaired. But in both Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the study found that livelihoods, particularly those dependent on agriculture, fishing, and daily wage labour, remained disrupted well after the immediate emergency had passed. Families that had survived the disaster were still struggling with its economic consequences months later.

This gap between physical recovery and livelihood recovery is one that formal planning often fails to close, and one that the Localisation Hub's recommendations specifically address.

A Framework Built From Experience

The study produced a resilience-oriented framework and a set of practical recommendations grounded in what communities and institutions actually experienced, not what they were supposed to experience according to existing plans. Strengthening last-mile early warning dissemination, improving coordination between local agencies and communities, integrating livelihood recovery into long-term response planning, and enforcing land-use regulations in high-risk areas are among the highest priorities identified.

These are not new ideas. What the Localisation Hub's study adds is evidence of why they remain urgent, drawn from the people who lived through two of the region's worst disasters of 2025.

The core argument of localisation is that communities closest to risk understand it best, and that disaster management systems which ignore that knowledge are weaker for it. The study from Sri Lanka and Indonesia does not make that argument in the abstract. It makes it through what people actually did when the storm arrived, and the systems fell short: they turned to each other.



In Good Hands

An Epilogue

The stories in this booklet come from different places, but they share a common lesson: lasting resilience is built when communities are trusted as leaders, partners, and innovators.

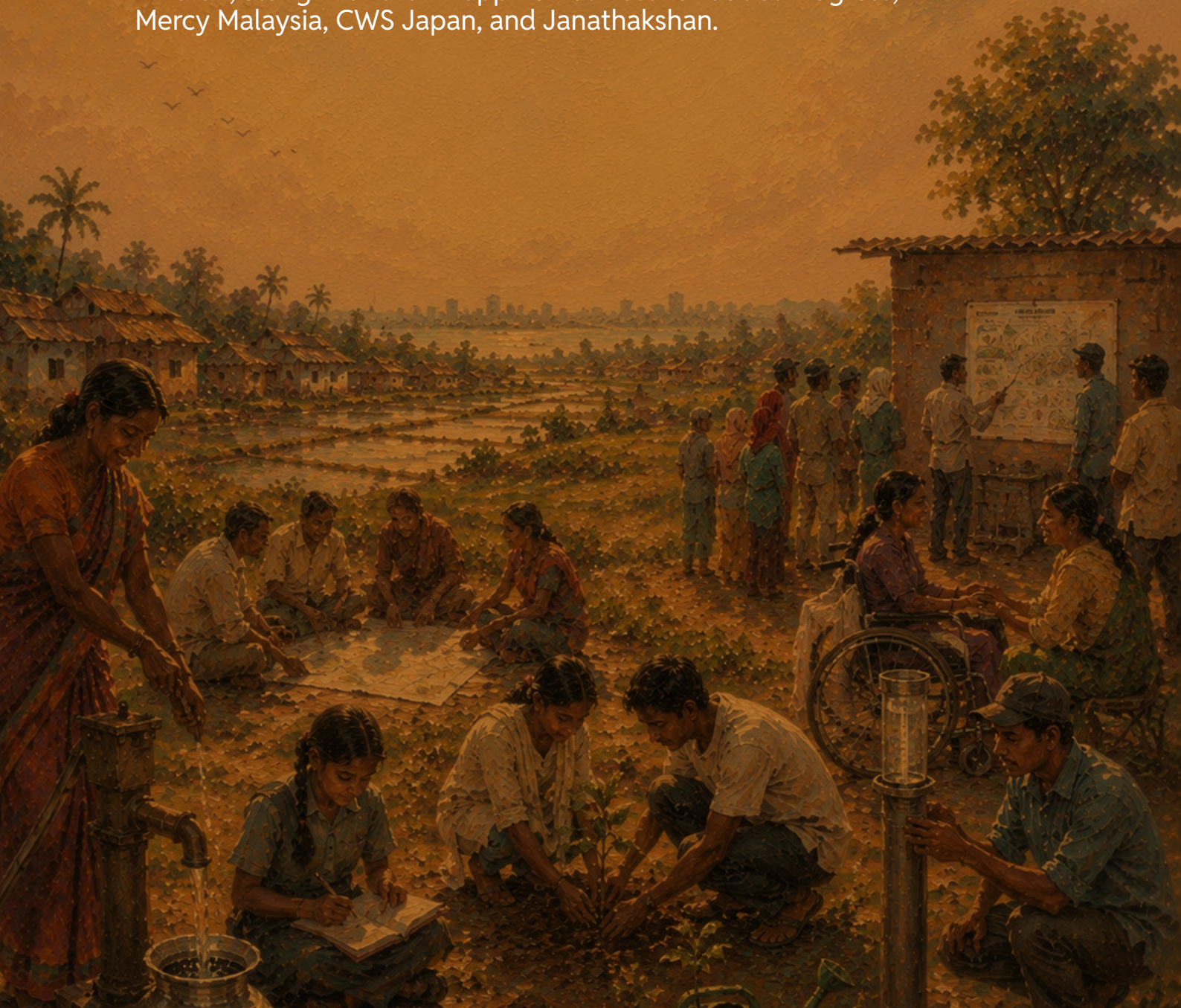
The SIDRRA project has been an opportunity to support local ideas, strengthen regional learning, and create connections across countries, organisations, and communities. The lessons documented here belong not only to the projects themselves, but to everyone who contributed to them.

We extend our sincere thanks to the SIDRRA project grantees, ADRRN Hubs, ADRRN Executive Committee and Secretariat, consortium partners, ADRRN members, and the communities whose experiences and leadership shaped this work. We are equally grateful to our donor, SIDA, for supporting an approach that places people, inclusion, and local leadership at the heart of disaster resilience.

As these stories travel beyond the places where they began, we hope they inspire new conversations, new partnerships, and new possibilities. The challenges ahead remain significant, but so does the collective knowledge, commitment, and creativity of the people working to address them.

The work continues. The learning continues. And together, so does the journey toward a more resilient Asia.

The Strengthening Inclusive Disaster Risk Governance for Climate Resilience in Asia (SIDRRA) project, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, is led by a consortium of the International Rescue Committee, the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network and Duryog Nivaran, along with the Philippine Business for Social Progress, Mercy Malaysia, CWS Japan, and Janathakshan.



Strengthening Inclusive Disaster Risk Governance for Climate Resilience in Asia (SIDRRA)

