



HERITAGE & RECOVERY:

Lessons from the Gorkha Earthquake

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Compiled by

Vanicka Arora, Lecturer in Heritage, University of Stirling

Laura Searson, Cultural Heritage Preservation Lead, V&A

Art, Design and Layout

Promina Shrestha , Virangana Collective

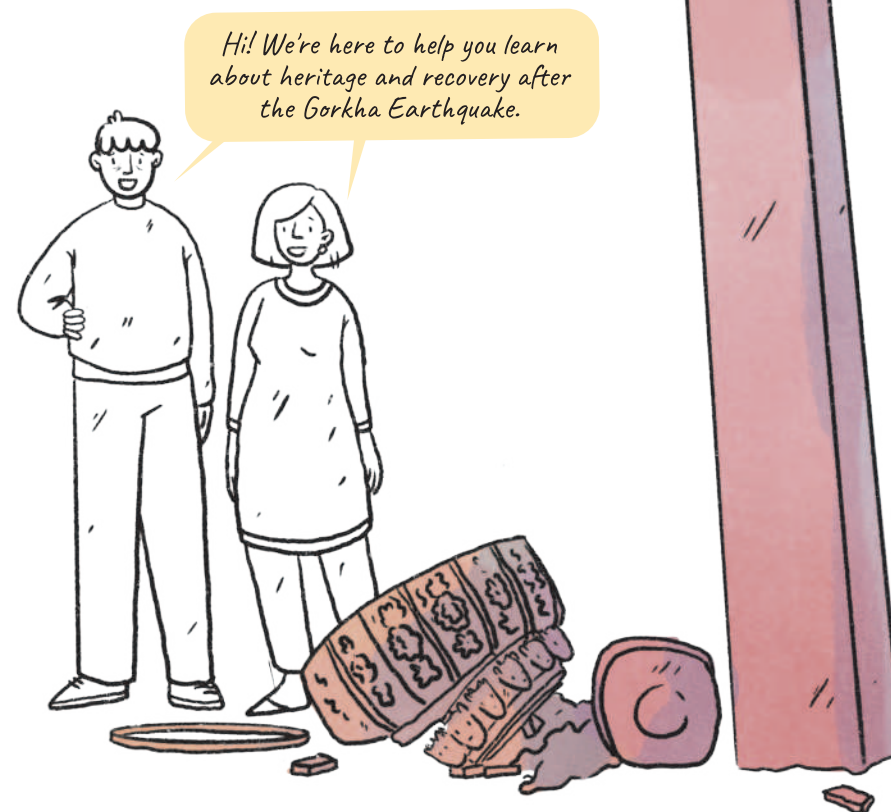
Visual Recording

Alina Chhantel, Virangana Collective

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INTRODUCTION

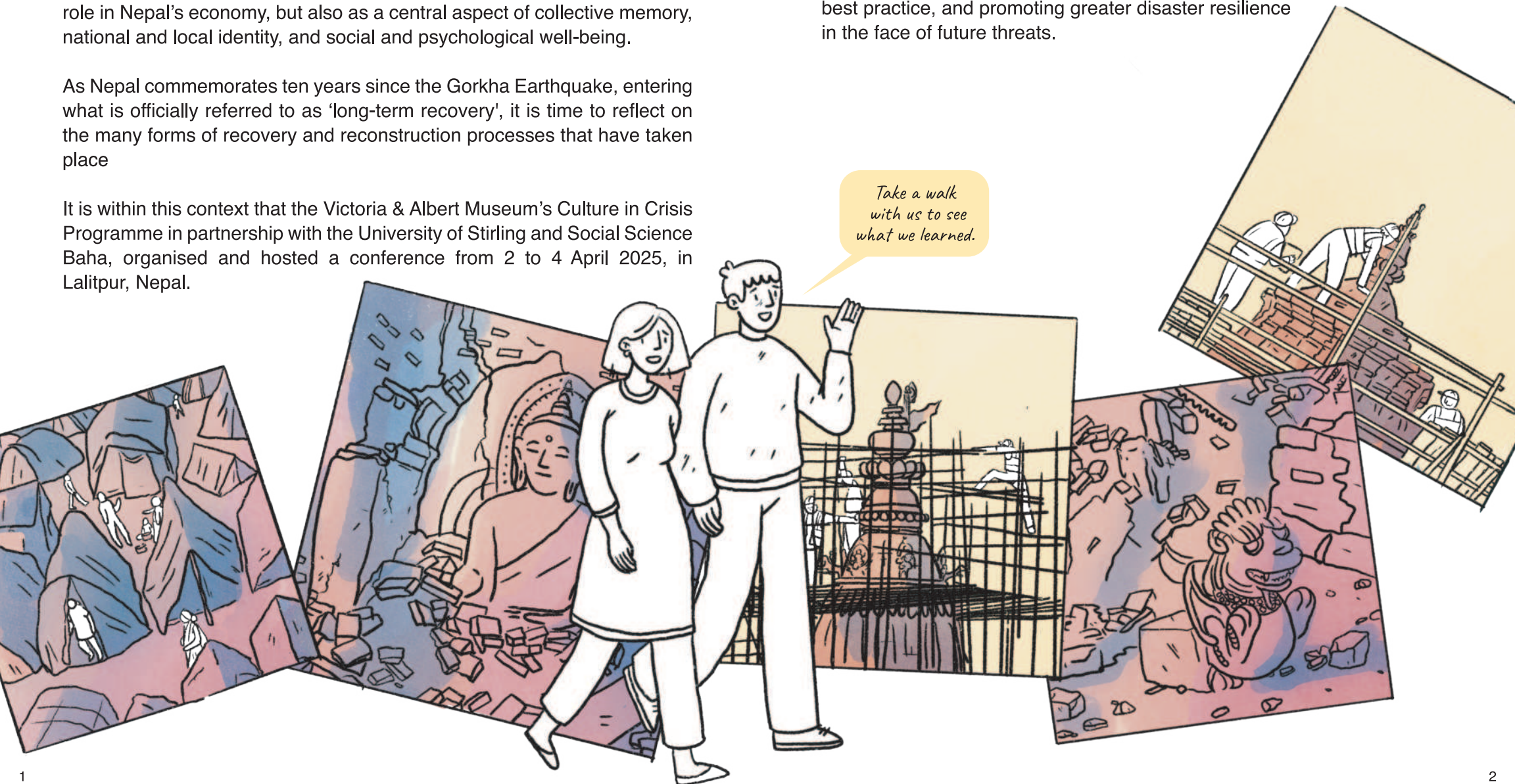
2025 marks ten years since the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake(s) struck Nepal, killing nearly 9,000 people, and causing catastrophic damage to lives and livelihoods, as well as physical, social, and cultural infrastructure. The disaster left a deep impact on heritage across the country; from internationally recognised monuments and heritage sites to community and religious heritage buildings and landscapes, objects and museums, and the myriad cultural practices that enrich the lives of Nepal's inhabitants. In the aftermath of the Gorkha Earthquake, heritage has emerged as a key sector for post-disaster recovery, not only because of its role in Nepal's economy, but also as a central aspect of collective memory, national and local identity, and social and psychological well-being.

As Nepal commemorates ten years since the Gorkha Earthquake, entering what is officially referred to as 'long-term recovery', it is time to reflect on the many forms of recovery and reconstruction processes that have taken place

It is within this context that the Victoria & Albert Museum's Culture in Crisis Programme in partnership with the University of Stirling and Social Science Baha, organised and hosted a conference from 2 to 4 April 2025, in Lalitpur, Nepal.

This conference, its workshops and site visits brought together Nepalese heritage professionals, activists, academics and community members involved in various forms of heritage recovery. Together we discussed efforts across the past decade; their challenges and successes, as well as exploring shared learning opportunities for the future. In particular, this conference highlighted a diversity of voices, bringing together different scales and conceptualisations of heritage

Situating its central narrative around the 2015 earthquake, the conference also brought together international experts to discuss comparable environmental disasters around the globe, sharing their experience and best practice, and promoting greater disaster resilience in the face of future threats.

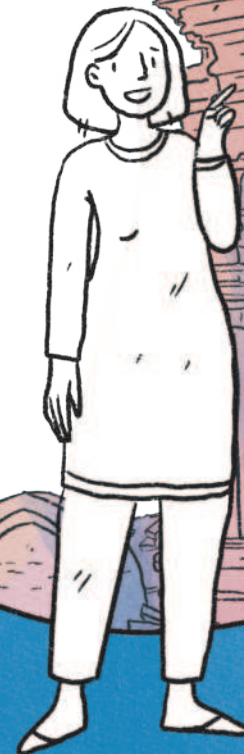


PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY OF HERITAGE

Recovery of heritage after a disaster is not a linear pathway, nor it is bound by fixed time-scales. It is sporadic and distributed and overlaps with other forms of ongoing development as well as other socio-economic crises.

Heritage in Nepal has had diverse trajectories of recovery in the aftermath of each catastrophic earthquake in its long history. These memories and histories continue to inform heritage recovery and reconstruction today.

Archival images

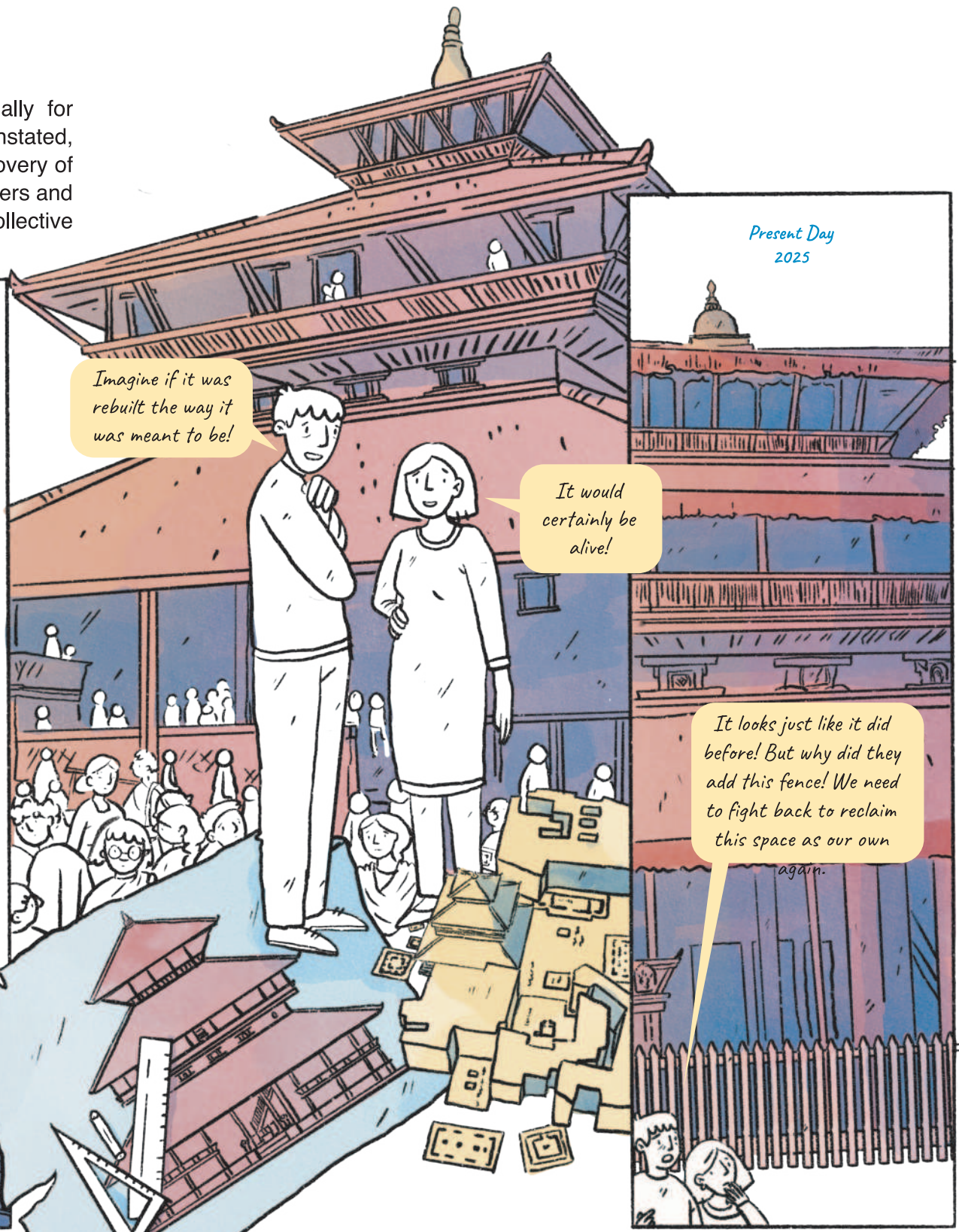
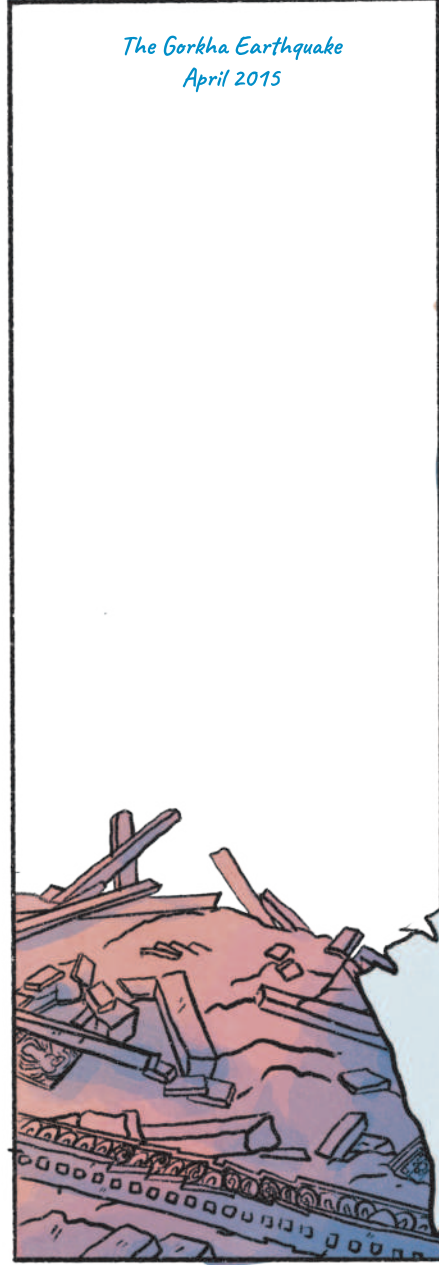


- Border Closure 2015
- Constitutional Crisis 2015
- Covid Pandemic- 2020

Anantapur, Suwayambhu, Kathmandu

ASPIRATIONS FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

Post-disaster recovery is always aspirational or utopic, especially for heritage. However, in practice, there is no static past that can be reinstated, and recovery always involves transformation and adaptation. Recovery of heritage curates the past we want to project onto the future. Disasters and other crises can often act as catalysts for bringing together collective aspirations and drive new forms of action.



INFRASTRUCTURES FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

Various forms of infrastructure enable sustainable and equitable recovery of heritage. These range from adaptable but robust legislation, policy and institutional frameworks, mechanisms of funding at different scales, materials, technologies and skills. But the most important of all infrastructures are networks of engaged people, professionals and communities.

Policy



Institutional Frameworks



Engaged Communities



Take these to the Museum,
where we placed all the other
artifacts.

This stone looks pretty
important with it's
scriptures

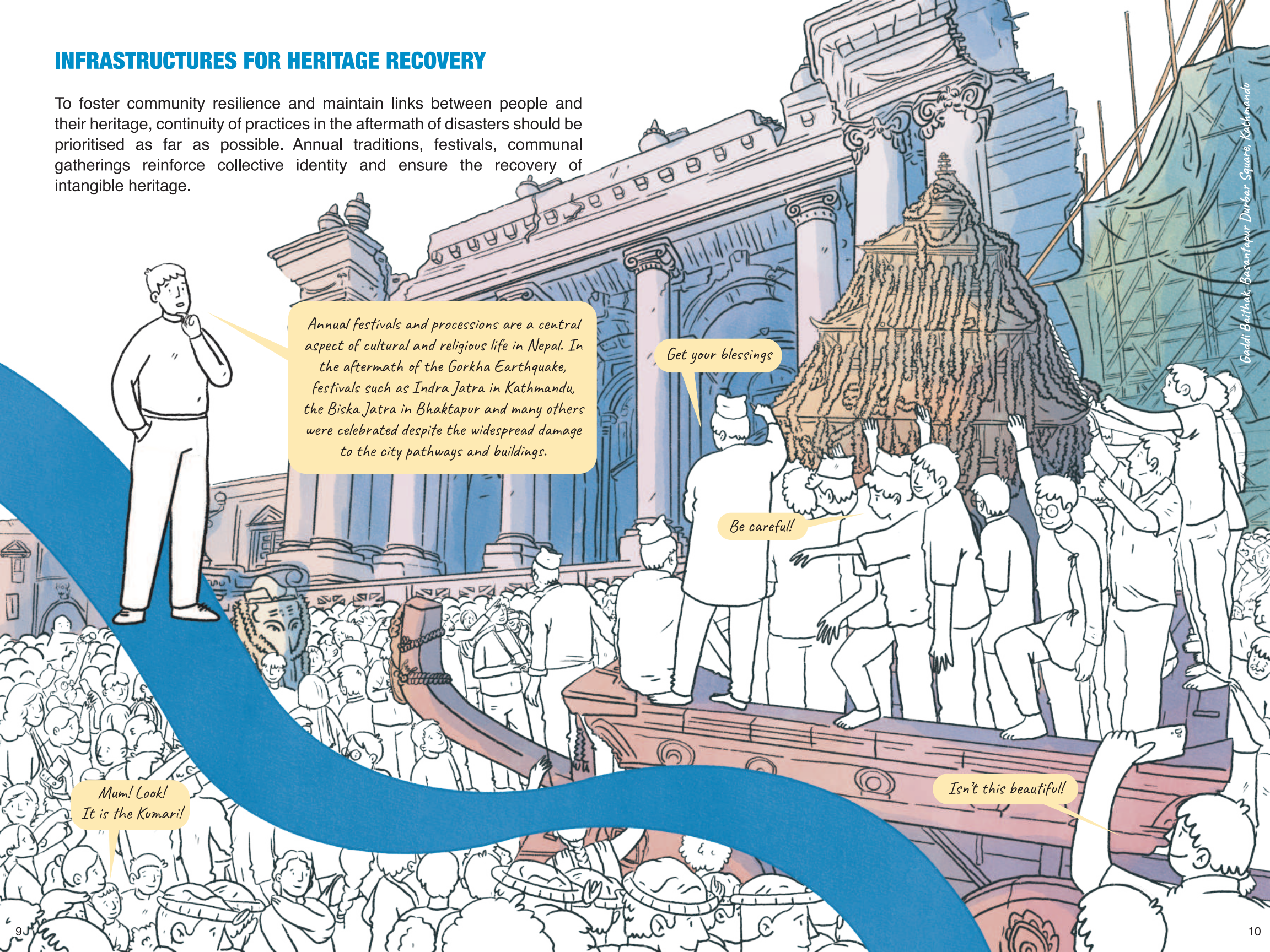
Volunteering, community activism and local
engagement have played a critical role in ensuring
the success stories of innumerable heritage buildings
and places in Nepal. International assistance works
only if it is locally responsive and flexible

This is heavy
work!



INFRASTRUCTURES FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

To foster community resilience and maintain links between people and their heritage, continuity of practices in the aftermath of disasters should be prioritised as far as possible. Annual traditions, festivals, communal gatherings reinforce collective identity and ensure the recovery of intangible heritage.



Annual festivals and processions are a central aspect of cultural and religious life in Nepal. In the aftermath of the Gorkha Earthquake, festivals such as Indra Jatra in Kathmandu, the Biska Jatra in Bhaktapur and many others were celebrated despite the widespread damage to the city pathways and buildings.

Get your blessings

Be careful!

Mum! Look!
It is the Kumari!

Isn't this beautiful!

DOCUMENTATION FOR RECOVERY

The importance of documentation for heritage recovery has long been emphasised. More importantly documentation needs to be accessible and usable by the people most closely involved in recovery and reconstruction. Technical drawings, complex archiving systems and digital technologies may not always be useful.

Many heritage buildings in Nepal have been reconstructed to a version that more closely aligns to their appearance preceding the 1934 Nepal Bihar Earthquake in an attempt to “correct” past mistakes in recovery. Here, local aspirations must negotiate with international conservation approaches which put firm emphasis on recorded evidence.

Why aren't you following the drawings I sent you?

We cannot read plans, plus this is not how it looked like in the old photographs we saw!

Do we use traditional mud?

Lime is a stronger material though!

But mud is more flexible!

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

Tensions persist between maintaining authenticity of materials, practices and skills or ensuring continuity of heritage values through adaptation. In disaster prone contexts, pragmatic concerns of safety and stability also need to be taken into account.

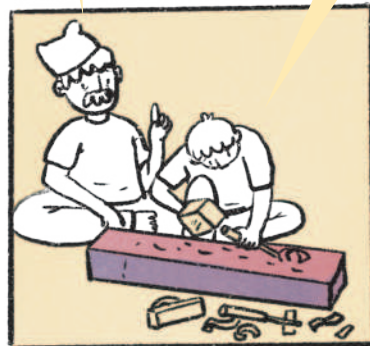
Watch carefully, one day you will be making such struts.

Yes, Bua!

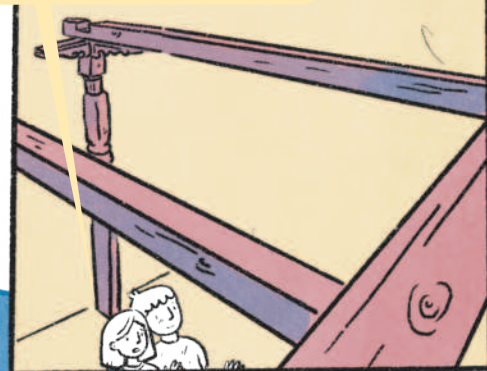
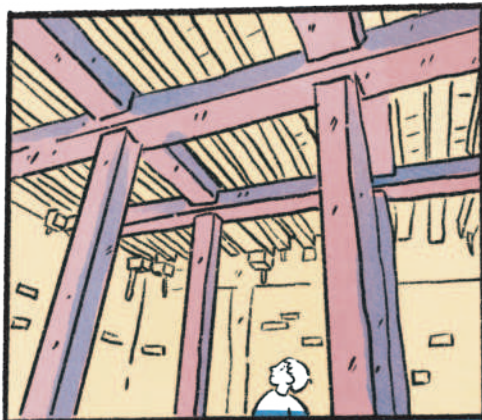


Gently!

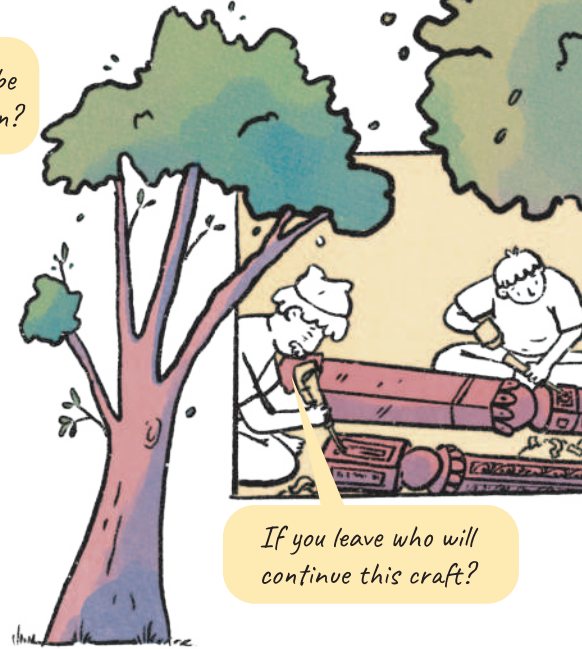
What if I want to be in another profession?



Getting the right timber size is hard these days, they come much too short in the market - that don't fit traditional architecture



You need to invest in traditional materials and crafts over time if you want to continue intangible heritage practices. Trees and craftspeople both take time and nurturing!

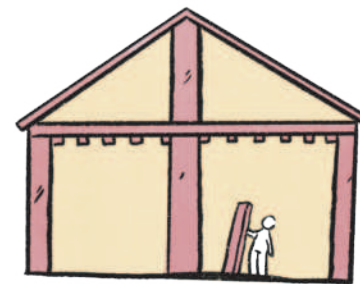


If you leave who will continue this craft?

Do you want to learn woodcarving like me?

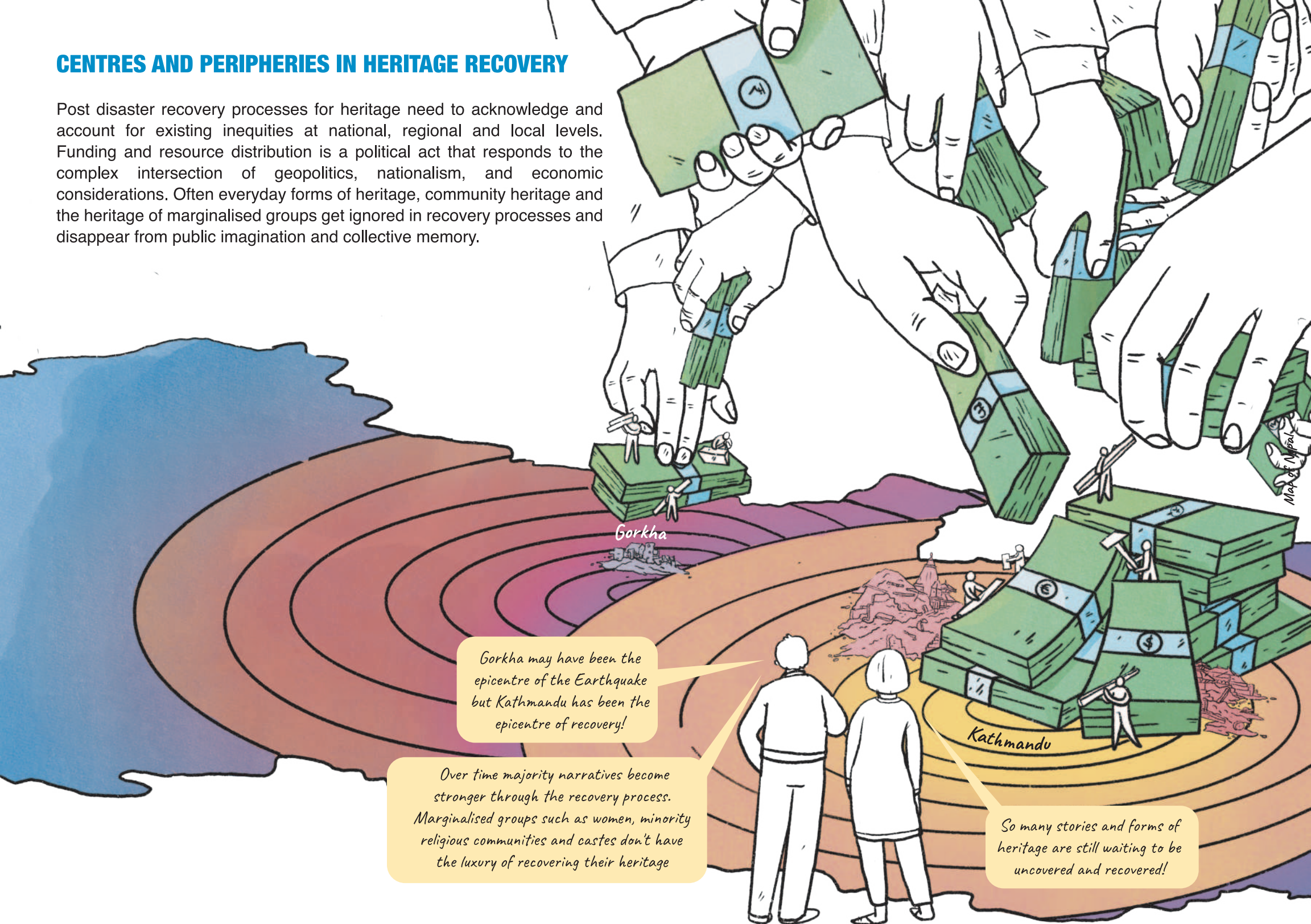


Disrupted supply chains and scarcity of traditional materials such as high quality, large sections of timber or of mud caused major delays across Nepal following the earthquake. Expert craftspeople have become rarer over time as intergenerational transfer of skills begins to decline and aspirations of new generations differ from those of their parents.



CENTRES AND PERIPHERIES IN HERITAGE RECOVERY

Post disaster recovery processes for heritage need to acknowledge and account for existing inequities at national, regional and local levels. Funding and resource distribution is a political act that responds to the complex intersection of geopolitics, nationalism, and economic considerations. Often everyday forms of heritage, community heritage and the heritage of marginalised groups get ignored in recovery processes and disappear from public imagination and collective memory.



Gorkha may have been the epicentre of the Earthquake but Kathmandu has been the epicentre of recovery!

Over time majority narratives become stronger through the recovery process. Marginalised groups such as women, minority religious communities and castes don't have the luxury of recovering their heritage

So many stories and forms of heritage are still waiting to be uncovered and recovered!

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

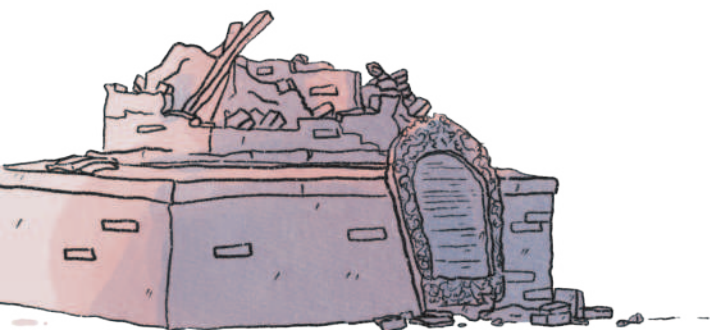
DAY 1: Conference , Wednesday 2 April, 2025

09:00 - 09:30	Arrival and Registration at Jyapu Pragya Bhavan
09:30 - 10:00	Welcome and Introductions
09:30 – 09:40	Prof. Nirmal Man Tuladhar, Chair, Social Science Baha
09:40 – 09:50	Laura Searson, Cultural Heritage Preservation Lead, V&A
09:50 – 10:00	Vanicka Arora, Lecturer in Heritage, University of Stirling
10:00 - 11:30	SESSION 1: HERITAGE RECOVERY BY AND FOR COMMUNITIES (Chair: Laura Searson)
10:00 - 10:20	Preserving the Past: Digitizing Visual Heritage Cristeena Chitrakar, Art Director, Lumbini Museum and Director, Chitrakar Legacy
10:20 - 10:40	Homes and Non-Monumental Heritage Sabin Ninglekhu, Principal Investigator of Heritage as Placemaking, Social Science Baha and Heidelberg University
10:40 - 11:00	‘Performing’ Heritage Reconstruction in Bhaktapur Vanicka Arora, Lecturer in Heritage, University of Stirling
11:00 - 11:15	Roundtable Discussion with Chair
11:15 - 11:30	Audience Q&A
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch Break
12:30 – 14:00	SESSION 2: INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND HERITAGE RECOVERY (Chair: Vanicka Arora)
12:30 - 12:45	The Kasthamandap and the Intersection of Activism and [Geo-]Politics Kai Weise, Architect, ICOMOS Nepal and ICORP
12:45 – 13:00	Crisis Response, World Monuments Watch, and Community Recovery: Lessons and Insights Hung-hsi Chao, Regional Director, East Asia, World Monuments Fund
13:00 - 13:15	Emergency Response and Heritage Recovery Processes Rohit Ranjitkar, Director, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust

13:15 - 13:25	ICCROM's Initiatives for Post Crisis Recovery of Cultural Heritage (Video Presentation) Aruna Francesca Maria Gujral, Director General, ICCROM
13:25 – 13:35	Role of International Organizations in Post Crisis Recovery of Heritage: Dilemmas and Opportunities Rohit Jigyasu, Programme Manager, Sustainable Urban and Built Heritage Conservation, Disaster and Climate Risk Management & Post Crisis Recovery, Programmes Unit, ICCROM
13:35 – 13:50	Roundtable Discussion with Chair
13:50 – 14:00	Audience Q&A
14:00 - 14:30	Refreshment Break
14:30 - 16:00	SESSION 3: LOCAL GOVERNANCE, ACTIVISM AND HERITAGE RECOVERY (Chair: Sabin Ninglekhu)
14:30 - 14:45	Heritage Recovery: Critique of Government / Governance Padma Joshi, Vice President, Madan Bhandari University; Advisor, Lalitpur Metropolitan City Office; formerly, UN-Habitat, Nepal, Country Representative
14:45 - 15:00	Architectural Documentation for Heritage Recovery and Beyond Jharna Joshi, Director, Kathmandu Institute
15:00 - 15:15	Heritage Activism for the Commons: Agents, Possibilities and End Goals Monalisa Maharjan, Resident Representative, South Asia Institute (SAI)
15:15 - 15:30	Power, People, Heritage: The Path to Recovery Alisha Sijapati, Founding Member and Director of the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign
15:30 - 15:45	Roundtable Discussion with Chair
15:45 - 16:00	Audience Q&A
16:00 - 16:30	Closing Remarks (and Audience Q&A)

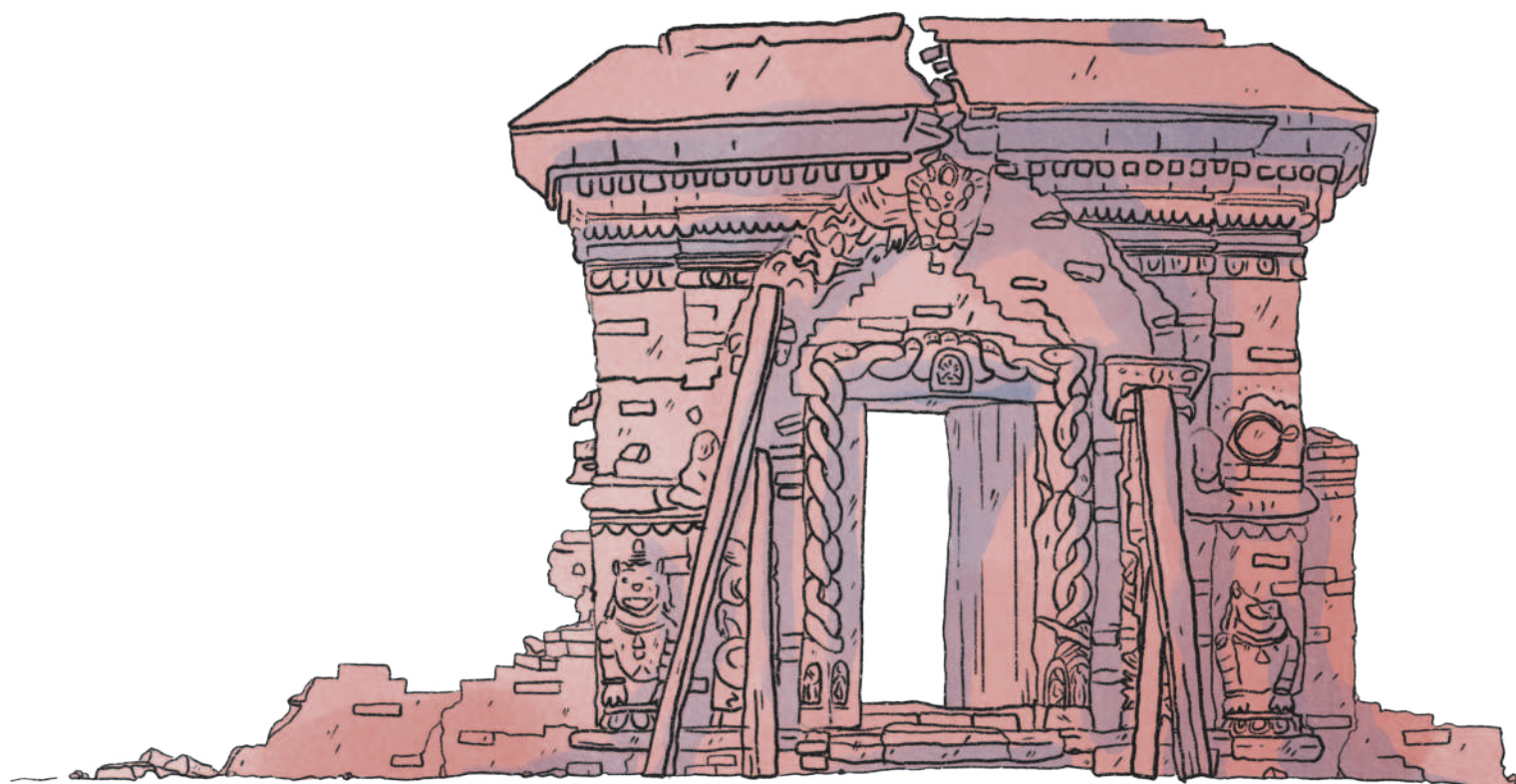
DAY 2: Workshop and Site Visit , Thursday 3 April, 2025

- 09:00 - 09:30 **Registration and Introductions at Jyapu Pragya Bhavan**
- 09:30 - 12:00 **Object Recoveries: Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign**
Alisha Sijapati, Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign
- 12:00 - 13:00 **Lunch Break**
- 13:00 – 13:30 **Education Outreach: New learning tools for Heritage Recovery, Documentation, and Seismic Safety**
Rishi Govinda Amatya, Writer and Heritage Researcher; Sophia L. Pandé, Director of Development, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust
- 14:00 - 16:00 **Tour of Reconstruction Projects in Durbar Square**
Rohit Ranjitkar, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust



DAY 3: Site Visit , Friday 4 April, 2025

- 09:00 – 09:30 **Registration at Hanuman Dhoka, Durbar Square**
- 09:30 - 12:30 **Reconstruction Trajectories in Hanuman Dhoka**
Kai Weise, ICOMOS-ICORP
- 12:30 - 14:00 **Lunch Break**
- 13:00 – 14:00 **Bus Transfer to Bungamati**
- 14:00 - 17:00 **Reconstruction and Recovery in Bungamati**
Rohit Ranjitkar, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust and Sabin Ninglekhu, Social Science Baha
- 17:00 – 18:00 **Return Bus Transfer to Hanuman Dhoka, Durbar Square**



Session-1

HERITAGE RECOVERY BY AND FOR COMMUNITIES

PRESERVING THE PAST :

DIGITALIZING VISUAL HERITAGE

-Crisleena Chitrakar

•Photographic archives documenting the history of Nepal. Can be used to shed light on the daily life of Royal Family as well as local communities.

Digitizing our archives allows them to be protected and makes them accessible for the future. We can use them in recovery efforts too!



'The past can help us to recover in the present, but we can't just replicate-Change is a part of evolution.'

HOMES & NON-MONUMENTAL HERITAGE

-Sabin Ninglekhu

•Architecture is about people and family as well as monuments.

NEWA: URBANISM

•blends community, spirituality and sustainable design.

3 Research location

- PHILACHYA: Sustainable Rebuilding Model
- BUNGAMATI: Craft Heritage Model
- HARISIDDI: Emulating Model from Bungamati embedding traditional heritage practices and materials.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FALLS SHORT

International aid & support for reconstruction & rebuilding.



'PERFORMING' HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION IN BHAKTAPUR

-VANICKA ARORA

Reconstruction as Practice and PROCESS



REPAIR religious ritual

1934 EARTHQUAKE Reconstruction 2015

'Ancestral Gift'

leads to the division of land and traditional styles of living.

'CONSERVATION is a compromise' : between people and their places.

CONCLUSION

1. Time & Commitment

Building trust with communities requires long-term, meaningful engagement.

2. Rethinking recovery

Not just about returning to past but adapting to new change.

3. Tangible and intangible heritage

Both aspects are equally important to review during recovery.

4. Cultural sensitivity

a deep understanding of cultural values is necessary to avoid conflict during recovery.

HERITAGE & RECOVERY

Decade of learning from Gorkha earthquake

THE KATHMANDU AND THE INTERSECTION OF ACTIVISM, RECOVERY and RECONSTRUCTION
both require strong foundation.

KAI WEISE

• The sites which ARCHITECT/ICOMOS/ICORI survived were the ones that embraced maintenance.
• We must understand and work with the construction process.
• REUSE is important in REBUILDING.

ARUNA FRANCESCA MARIA GURJAL

DIRECTOR GENERAL ICCROM

- CRISIS assessment for recovery.
- Technical Support and funds for training local community.
- Collaboration with community and government.

CRISIS RESPONSE, WMF

EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY
• TÜRKİYE
• SYRIA
• NEPAL

- Provide technical support and funding to help in CRISIS.
- Collaboration with local community
- Supporting long-term recovery & culture tourism

HUNG-HSI CHAO

REGIONAL DIRECTOR, EASTASIA WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST & PARTNERSHIP in community.

"The disasters are collaborating better than we are!"

- Although it is difficult, we must establish priorities for recovery with collaboration with the community.
- International organizations should play the role of facilitator.

ROHIT JIGYASU
PROGRAMME MANAGER ICCROM

invest in long-term sustainable strategies for recovery.

CONSERVATION - for whom? Who are we centering in recovery efforts, our work or our community?

2015 EMERGENCY RESPONSE :

- Local people coming together helping each other to collecting artifacts from rubble for safeguarding
- Understanding the cultural or religious context is important for successful recovery.
- community representation is necessary.

ROHIT RANJITKAR
DIRECTOR, KATHMANDU VALLEY PRESERVATION TRUST

Multiple Voices

Government

Heritage Organization

FUNDING AGENCY

COMMUNITY at center

Organization to organization collaboration is also important.

INTERNATIONAL AND HERITAGE RECOVERY

SESSION-2

सोशल साइन्स बहा
SOCIAL SCIENCE BAH



Culture in Crisis

UNIVERSITY of STIRLING



V&A



CRITIQUE OF GOVERNMENT/GOVERNANCE

COMBINING STAKEHOLDER CAPABILITIES

PADMA JOSHI

Civil Society: generated pressure and advocacy.

COMMUNITY REBUILDING WITH COMMUNITY

Lacked organisation and unity

Local Community

People's heritage

lack connection to people had limited resources, political influence in decision making.

Government

COMMUNITY SENTIMENT

SESSION - 3
LOCAL GOVERNANCE
ACTIVISM &
HERITAGE RECOVERY

ARCHITECTURAL DOCUMENTATION

JHARANA JOSHI



• Protect craftspeople by supporting them before crisis and using them after.

• Importance of indigenous technologies as sustainable methods.

CHALLENGES

• lack of archival records / information
• The climate crisis posing issues for raw materials.

• A lack of skilled labour due to migration.

• Building codes which are inflexible to the needs of heritage.

HERITAGE ACTIVISM FOR THE COMMONS: AGENTS.

POSSIBILITIES and END GOALS

MONALISA MAHARJAN



ACTIVISM grew in strength and organization after 2015 earthquake. Feeling of community belongingness.

EARTHQUAKE provided a catalyst for greater engagement between people and heritage.

'EVERYDAY HERITAGE'



'Social media was a powerful tool for community engagement and advocacy'

Local Activism for local heritage

POWER, PEOPLE, HERITAGE: THE PATH TO RECOVERY

ALISHA SITAPATI

HISTORY

- 1956 when Nepal was open to world...

- Royals gifting cultural heritage pieces.

- 90% of monument belong to Kathmandu Valley. (based on the limited records)

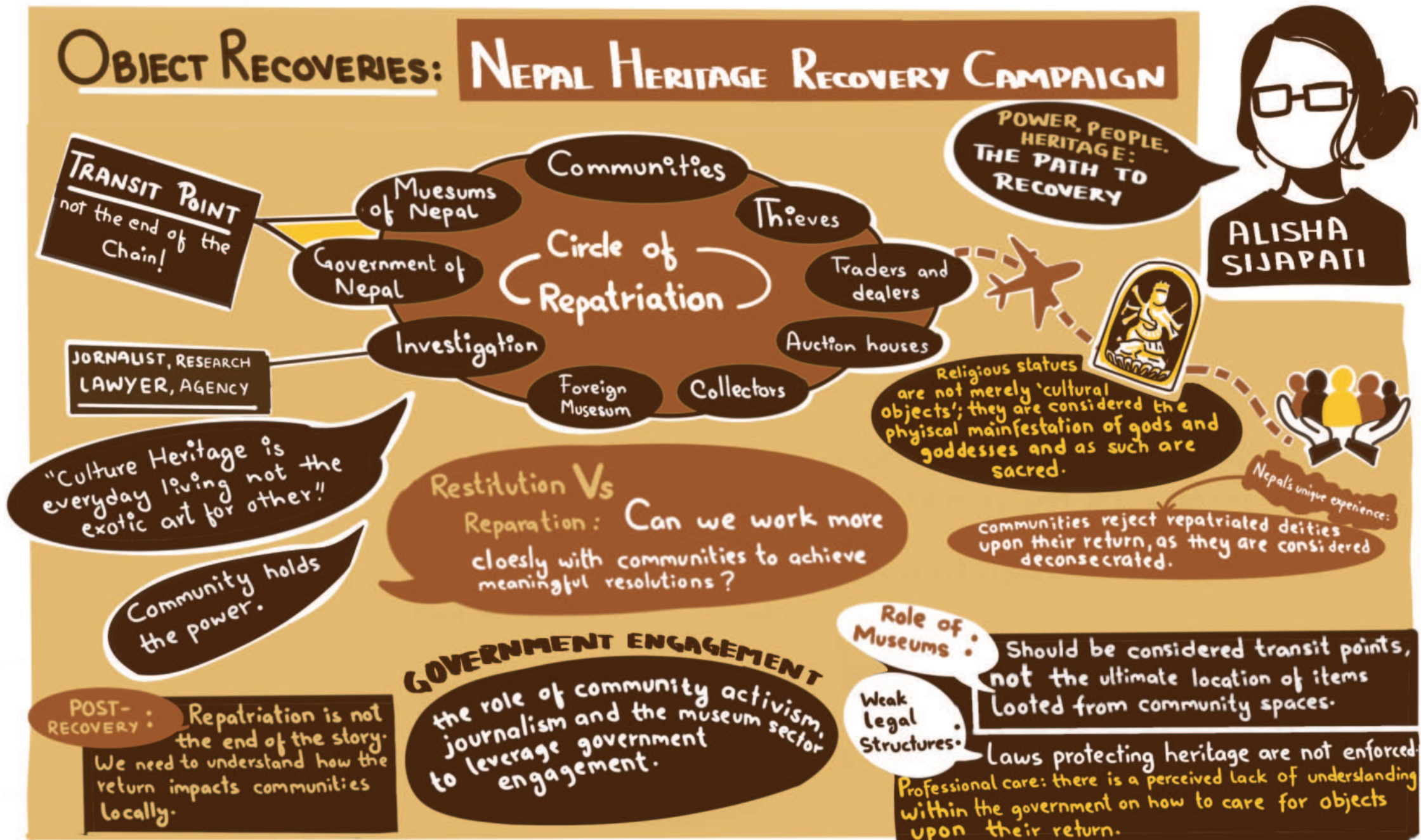


people taking monuments and idols as souvenirs.

Cultural + Spiritual value tied to community and heritage with faith.

• INTENTION VS • IMPACT

Reclaiming what was **STOLEN...**



Education Outreach: 'New Learning tools for Heritage, Recovery, Documentation and Seismic Safety.'

'Let's Discover Patan Durbar'
Series and School Tour Programme (2017)

'KATHMANDU VALLEY PRESERVATION TRUST:
EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAMME'



'Learn about the history of cultural heritage in our local area with fun and interactive maps, designed for young visitors.'

INTERACTING WITH
AND ENGAGING
STUDENTS
WITH
VISUAL RESOURCES

- VISUAL NARRATIVE
- EXPLORATION GAMES
- HISTORICAL FACTS



PATAN DURBAR SQUARE



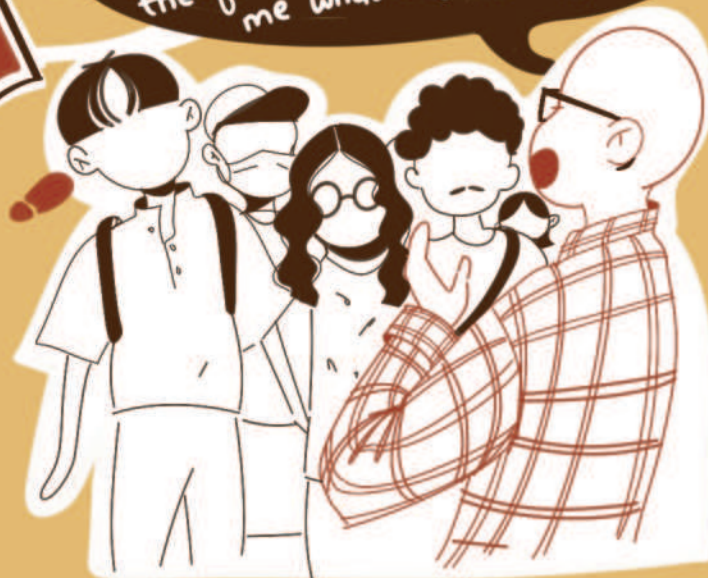
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



'together we can expand our learning experience with new and exciting activities.'

HERITAGE WALK

'now let me tell you an interesting story about the designs carved into the front of this temple... Can anyone tell me what they might symbolise?'



HERITAGE & RECOVERY



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DECADE OF LEARNING FROM THE GORKHA EARTHQUAKE

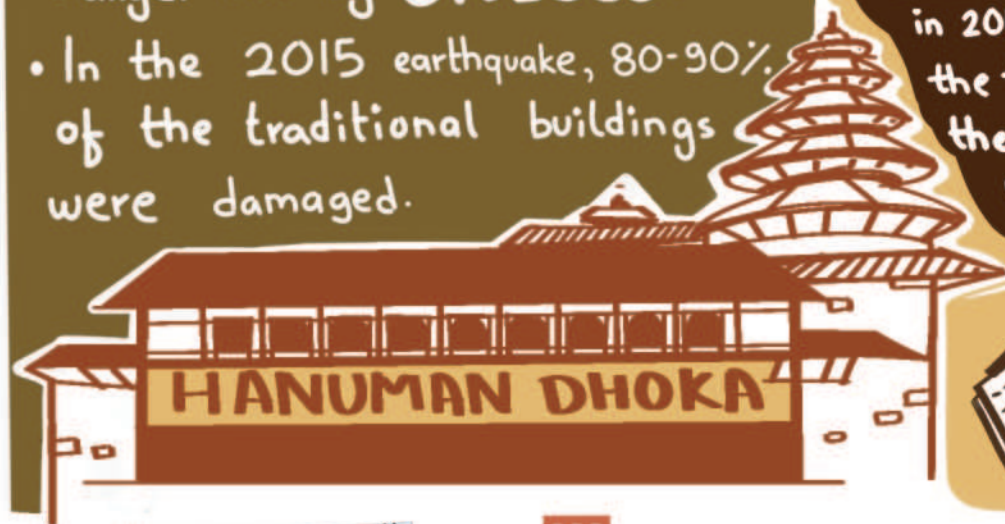
WHAT DID WE LEARN?



KAI WEISE

History of Hanuman dhoka:

- The area was established in the Pratap Mall Period (16/17th Century) and continued to develop throughout the subsequent periods
- In 1979 the site received world heritage status, but by 2003 it was listed on the World Heritage in Danger list by **UNESCO**.
- In the 2015 earthquake, 80-90% of the traditional buildings were damaged.



- Large-scale destruction during earthquake was caused due to low maintenance and inappropriate intervention.
- Earthquake recovery involves merging traditional design with new safety features, improving resilience against future.



UNESCO

World Heritage Site at Risk:

in 2015, local stakeholders believed the threat was not earthquake but the mismanagement of 'good' recovery.

POST EARTHQUAKE RESTORATION ASSESSMENT.



must consider not just financial investment needed for repair but also the skills and people infrastructure to achieve it.



Conflict between global standards (lime Mortar) and Local solutions (mud Mortar) meant that projects are failing.

Responsibility and Coordination



MAINTENANCE BEFORE A CRISIS IS CRITICAL



ORGANISERS

Culture in Crisis Programme, V&A

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is an international organisation with collections from around the globe. We are committed to protecting the world's cultural heritage and supporting communities that suffer cultural loss, whether through Conflict, Criminal Acts or the impacts of the Climate Crisis. Our Culture in Crisis programme brings together those with a shared interest in protecting cultural heritage, providing a forum for sharing information, inspiring and supporting action and raising public awareness.

Centre for Environment, Heritage and Policy, University of Stirling

The Centre for Environment, Heritage and Policy (CEHP) at the University of Stirling promotes and supports world-leading interdisciplinary research on environment, heritage and policy across the University and beyond. The Centre aims to make a difference by developing sustainable approaches to the challenges and opportunities surrounding environment and heritage in a world of accelerating change and increasing pressure on natural and cultural resources.

Social Science Baha

Social Science Baha (SSB) is an independent, non-profit organisation established in January 2002 with the objective of promoting and enhancing the study of and research in the social sciences in Nepal. Starting with setting up a social science library, the only one of its kind in the country so far, SSB soon diversified its activities to pursue other means of helping the growth of the social sciences. By the time of its formal registration in January 2007, activities included lectures, discussions, workshops and conferences as well as publishing books and other research papers. Soon afterwards, SSB also began undertaking research, both as a collaborating partner with academic/research institutions and on contract.

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Edited by

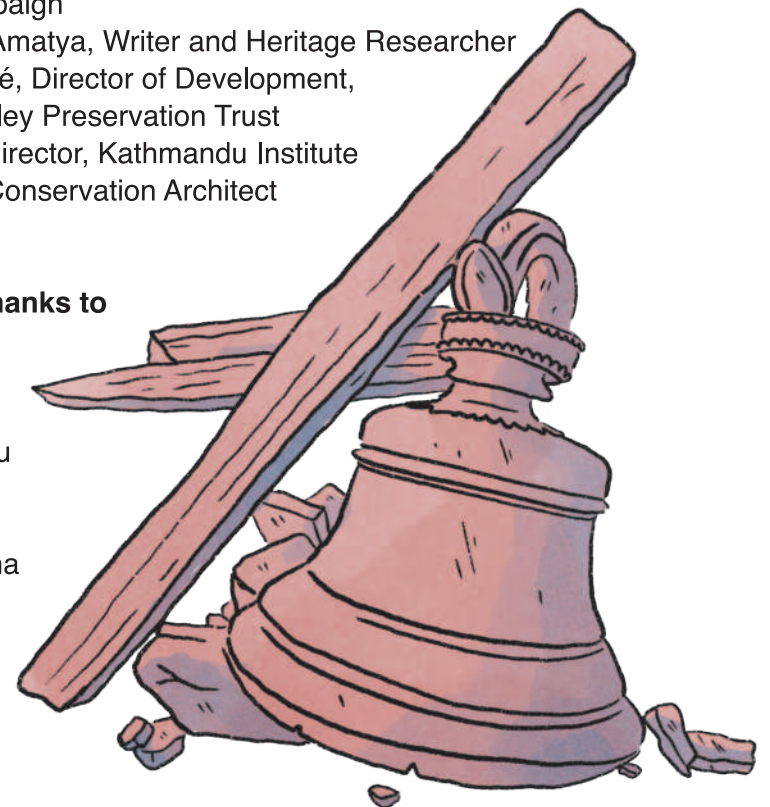
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Sophia L. Pandé, Director of Development, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust
Jharna Joshi, Director, Kathmandu Institute
Anil Tuladhar, Conservation Architect

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Bindiya Shrestha
Ajay Subedi





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