



**Challenging the Romance with Resilience: communities, scale and climate  
change**

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The spectre of climate change has brought into popular circulation notions of resilience and socioenvironmental change. As the global climate warms and temperature and moisture regimes are predicted to make fairly radical shifts in many regions of the world, policy makers are increasingly focused on whether or not so-called vulnerable communities are resilient enough. Resilience is assumed to be closely related to adaptive capacity, or direct responses to perceived environmental change that moderate harm or capitalise on possible benefits ([Klein et al., 2007 p. 750](#)). As a result of this association of resilience with adaptation, there is emphasis on knowledge, response systems and hazard management. Much like social capital or sustainability, resilience is a term that resonates for many people and invokes a sense of strength, flexibility and durability. Yet, precisely what resilience is, who is responsible for gaining or conferring resilience and how it is to be maintained over time and space is unclear. Perhaps of most concern, increasingly ‘adaptive capacity’ and ‘resilience’ are considered inextricably linked to economic growth and diversification.

At the moment, resilience is being institutionalised into policy and practice across the globe in relation to climate change. Some countries like Scotland, have a ‘resilience strategy’ while in other places, like Nepal, resilience appears in numerous policy documents across a range of sectors. As I explore in more detail below, resilience remains poorly defined and can take on significantly different meanings in different contexts. These different definitions of resilience are in part linked to the scales at which climate change is assumed to occur as well as current neo-liberal efforts to rescale governance. As such, I argue that ‘resilience’ is not an innocent concept, but rather is both bound up in and reflective of the politics of scale within climate change debates.

In this chapter, I take a look at resilience policies from Scotland and Nepal and compare them to how local people understand what is required for long-term community existence. I show that there is a ‘scale mis-match’ between the way policy makers define resilience and the technologies through which they believe it will be achieved, and how local people define community resilience and their aspirations for livelihood security. Through this analysis, I interrogate how scale is enrolled as both a limitation and an emancipatory factor when people assert new socio-environmental notions of ‘the local’ and ‘connection’ in the face of top-down policies and programmes aimed at generating resilience. In order to contextualise the use of resilience in my two case studies, I first briefly outline what is meant by the politics of scale. Afterwards, I review relevant scholarship on resilience and then explore in detail two policy documents from Nepal and Scotland and compare them to field-based data on ‘community’ in both places. I

conclude by arguing that a closer interrogation of scale offers an exciting new direction for feminist political ecology.

### Scale<sup>1</sup>

Scale has been theorised in both the social and the ecological/ biophysical sciences. It generally refers to the physical dimensions of observed phenomenon, or the content or extent of the scale, such as a segment of a territory ('national scale'). Scale, however, is not equivalent with level. Rather, level refers to locations upon a scale, or the way that scale is organised. The national scale—i.e. territory or population—are not the same as the national level which refers to various institutions and actions—i.e. national government—that apply to the entire nation. Scale and level are often conflated, but when a more careful conceptualisation of scale is used, it becomes possible to understand that for example, the scale of knowledge, is not the same as the level at which that knowledge is mobilised or the level of the actors who use it. In this view, 'local knowledge' is not scaled to the local, but rather refers to the level of the actors who hold that knowledge. The scale of 'local knowledge' is most often global given that local level actors incorporate understandings from a wide range of worldwide sources to form their own perceptions and conceptions of the world. So while it may be called 'local knowledge', 'local' signals the level of the actors rather than the extent or content of the knowledge itself. This is a crucial part of my argument, as the way that knowledge is scaled and the levels at which it is assumed to be required are deeply embedded in the politics of resilience.

Most often scale is assumed to exist 'out there' as something that is real and which simply needs to be measured or named. In contrast, human geographers have argued that scale is socially constructed and some have suggested it is purely a social product (Marsden). Yet, I would argue that scale is not simply arbitrary or *only* political. Rather, scalar concepts reflect relationships that do exist 'out there' in the world, even if the act of privileging and making visible some relationships rather than others is thoroughly social, and thus political. In other words, regardless of how 'natural' the relationships may appear, the moment of defining and measuring scales serves to order the world. And this ordering by different actors cannot be politically neutral.

For my purposes here in trying to push forward theorising in feminist political ecology, retaining a clear distinction between scale and level provides theoretical leverage to illuminate how global and national programs targeted at localities carry with them crucial assumptions about the scale of access to, control over, distribution of and knowledge of resources for local level actors. Resources here are broadly defined: i.e. financial, technical, ecological and social resources. These assumptions can come into conflict with local peoples' understandings of the same, and it is this moment of conflict that should be of most concern to policy makers who genuinely have an interest in promoting

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<sup>1</sup> My conceptualisation of scale is deeply indebted to Helene Alhborg's thinking on scale and the joint paper we wrote.

‘resilient communities’. Below, I illustrate how these conflicts emerge through the case studies and speculate on their implications for resilience policies.

### **Resilience:<sup>2</sup> the new holy grail of climate change adaptation**

The concept of resilience that informs current policy usage emerged from socio-ecological systems theory, or SES in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Socio-ecological systems thinking is based in the natural sciences and mobilises an understanding of systems as dynamic and revolving around multiple stable states rather than equilibrium. This was a fairly radical intervention into ecosystems thinking as prior to that, ideas of ‘dynamic equilibrium’ and ‘climax stable states’ were still widely accepted (Botkin, Clements)

‘Resilience’ itself refers to the capacity of a system to absorb shocks while retaining the same populations and properties (Hollings, Cote). When systems lose resilience, they reach a ‘tipping point’ where they shift into another phase all together. This phase shift can be negative or positive depending on which kinds of populations and properties emerge, how they are valued and by whom. Thus, while ‘resilience’ at first glance appears to be a value neutral concept, I have argued elsewhere (Cote) that it is inherently embedded within normative ideas of what states are desired and what kind of shocks are acceptable.

Resilience is thus a concept linked to a natural science understanding of environmental systems, which accounts for both dynamic change and the capacity of systems to cope with variability and disturbance without causing a phase shift. These concepts have been translated into socio-ecological systems with a rather wholesale application of ecosystem principles to social systems when modelling how societies change.

Academics and policy makers concerned with climate change have found important resources within resilience thinking to predict how climate fluctuations might be absorbed by society, or how societies might experience various kinds of crises due to environmental shocks. Most ideas of adaptive capacity within climate change policies have been taken from resilience thinking and reflect how socio-ecological systems are understood to transform across scales:

coupled socio-ecological systems (SES) grow, adapt, transform and collapse, at different scales – the stages of adaptation and collapse are not viewed as alternative routes but rather as part of a cycle that is driven by fast and slow, small and big events that can cascade up the scales. (Lambin, 2005: 177)

Within climate change arenas, resilience is thus assumed to be built and expressed at multiple scales, with coordination across scales to be particularly important.

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<sup>2</sup> My thinking on resilience is deeply indebted to Muriel Cote and the joint paper we wrote on resilience and social theory.

These ideas appear harmless enough on the surface and they raise important questions about the interconnectedness of different processes, actors and responsibilities across scales. In this chapter, however, I want to argue that the framing of resilience and its grounding in the natural sciences are contributing to a fundamental devaluing and sidelining of local people's own understandings of community, flexibility, adaptation and livelihood security. The ecological systems metaphor does not translate well to social systems, and of more concern, it is adding further justification for the narrow economic logic that underpins what is ultimately a technocratic and neo-liberal, managerial approach to climate change adaptation.

This kind of logic subsumes the profound social-political struggles that necessarily surrounding changing resources and economies. As the feminist political ecology literature has amply shown, such struggles are manifest in contestations over distribution of, access to, control over and knowledge of resources (loads of cites...), struggles that also have profound consequences for the (re)production of social inequalities and ecologies (Nightingale 2006). It is therefore imperative to challenge the current romance with resilience and to think about other framings of 'adaptive capacity' that reflect the alternative rationalities people apply to their own livelihood aspirations and strategies for long-term livelihood security.

### **Resilience in Nepal and Scotland**

Given the proliferation of discourses and policies aimed at 'resilience', it is not surprising to find that in both Nepal and Scotland policies linked to climate change adaptation have been framed in terms of resilience. What is more interesting, is the content of these policies and how they reflect the confusion and (mis)use of the concept of 'resilience'. Here I focus specifically on the *Building Community Resilience: Scottish Guidance on Community Resilience* (2013) document and Nepal's *Strategic Program for Climate Resilience* (2010). In this section, I briefly introduce the two policies and then analyse them for content. In the following section, I compare these results to how local people frame similar issues.

#### ***Scotland***

The *Building Community Resilience: Scottish Guidance on Community Resilience* (2013) policy is fundamentally oriented towards disaster management, including political as well as environmental events. However, environmental events are seen as caused by 'nature' and thus are not political. In July 2103, it was the only one of two resilience statements/policies available in Scotland, the other being the 2012 document, *Preparing Scotland*, which is similarly oriented towards disaster management and coordination across scales by emergency responders. There are no other resilience policies in Scotland to date, but beginning in late 2013 communities are able to apply for resilience funding in addition to carbon reduction activities from the Climate Change Challenge Fund. The 2013 document follows the 2012 policy and defines resilience at several scales, particularly in relation to infrastructure and institutions:

"the capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure and identity". (1.1.1) (p.7)

For resilience professionals, this usually means thinking about how to sustain the range of interdependent infrastructure and systems which support the functioning of a community, and particularly, their ability to continue to deliver their priorities, and to "bounce back" after being hit by an emergency or disruptive challenge. (1.1.2) (p.7)

The document acknowledges the influence of ecology and systems thinking in its development, and of most concern to me, makes a direct link to individual and collective behaviour in the same sentence:

Community resilience is based on a culture of preparedness, in which individuals, communities and organisations take responsibility to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. It has evolved as a way of thinking from a number of academic disciplines, notably ecology and systems engineering, and more recently has emerged as one of the most important concepts in the literature of resilience management. (1.1.4) (p.7)

The three components of resilience are assumed to be: awareness, assets and propensity to act. Awareness is framed as a quality held by individuals, whereas assets are assumed to exist at multiple levels and propensity to act is notably vague in terms of the level at which such motivation is believed to be derived. Yet, when one probes in more detail the proposed mechanisms for achieving resilience in these domains, the solutions are technical (training, infrastructure improvements) and include private sector and community investment.

In short, the Scottish resilience policy is fundamentally about producing networks of actors and 'assets' that can operate across scales and levels to help communities cope with disasters. Importantly, it is underpinned by the sense that individuals and communities at present are located within not only smaller territorial scales, but that their knowledge is either inadequate, or needs to be brought together with knowledge from larger scales. They are therefore assumed to be inadequately prepared to cope with disasters, *and* that emergency services provided by the central state cannot be relied upon to have adequate capacity to address community needs.

Here, the authors of this policy have revealed a profoundly scaled notion of the state as well as climate change /severe weather events. Emergency services in Scotland are decentralised on the whole—in fact a key purpose of the 2012 document is to ensure coordination between dispersed forces—but are also believed to be located at scales beyond the locality. Places are assumed to need support from other scales to build the kind of assets and propensity to act that will make them resilient. It is noteworthy that the plan does not propose an expansion of emergency services across scales, rather it is designed to build awareness and assets within the business and voluntary sectors that are 'outside' the state, located at the local scale, that can be relied upon to collaborate with the state emergency services in an extreme event.

Both political and environmental disasters are similarly assumed to occur at scales beyond the locality, although not in all cases. This is consistent with climate change predications which at present are only accurate at very large scales. In most instances, it is not possible to model temperature and moisture changes at the scale of the nation state, let alone community level. And politically derived disasters (ie. terrorism) are also assumed to be perpetuated from other scales, even if the event is local. The Scottish resilience strategy is designed around the assumption that many communities will be affected at one time, or individual communities will be cut off from outside services, and the impacts in different localities will not necessarily be the same:

In practice, community resilience will reflect the diversity of Scottish communities and the risks which they face. (1.1.10 p. 8)

The policy is firmly grounded in systems thinking that believes if the parts of the system are adequately connected, then problems of crossing scale and coordination between individuals and institutions that may not have the same goals can be overcome. Altering the behaviour of individuals and ensuring adequate assets is believed to be all that is needed to cope with potential conflicts of interest or political struggles over response behaviours and systems. Indeed, conflicts are carefully side stepped and rather the need to involve businesses in ensuring their own resilience, commitments from the voluntary sector and ensuring that individuals feel free of legal ramifications if they respond, are all emphasised.

Before moving onto the Nepal policy, I want to pull out two other conceptual points to which I return in more detail below. First, there is an assumption in this document that the *assets* (knowledge, resources, skills and networks) of communities are contained to the same scale as the *territory* of the community. The goal of implementing this policy is therefore to try to link scales and ensure that community level awareness and assets are adequately informed by larger scale knowledge and decisions.

Second, part of the implicit message here is that preparedness at the community level is an advantage, whereas reliance on centrally supported systems cannot guarantee resilience. And since this kind of preparedness is assumed to be lacking, the policy is filled with strategies to ensure communities have at hand what they need locally. While there is much emphasis on services, propensity to act, etc., there is much less emphasis on the redistribution of central state resources to achieve these goals and how much it might cost. It is worth mentioning here that even in the context of Scottish devolution, the UK is one of the most centralised states in the EU in terms of its taxation and state financial policies. Neo-liberal reforms that began in the 1990s mean that local authorities have had their local development budgets stripped and such funds are now available through the quasi-public 'Scottish Enterprise' or 'Highlands and Islands Enterprise' which disperse funds for business innovation. This means that localities have almost no state sponsored mechanism to raise their own funds, and rather have to depend on donations and community fund raising efforts such as festivals (staffed by volunteers)

and other events. The emphasis on business and voluntary sector engagement in resilience preparation and training therefore should not be surprising.

### ***Nepal***

I now want to turn to Nepal, considered to be one of the world's climate change 'hot spots'. Nepal's *Strategic Program for Climate Resilience* (2010) is very different from the Scottish policy. In the first place, the strong sense that resilience has a financial base to it is explicit, perhaps reflecting the fact that the funding for writing the document came through climate investment funds, and the three donors involved are all well known finance-private sector oriented donors: Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the World Bank. The document begins from a biophysical perspective and places an emphasis on response to hazards, building community capacity and private sector involvement in response mechanisms. But this document diverges from the Scottish one in placing much more emphasis on finance. In both documents, 'soft' mechanisms are emphasised, but how to achieve them is profoundly different. Nepal is framed as needing development and mobilising people through participatory user-groups, practices which by now are well established. In Scotland, the focus is on knowledge sharing and building trust within communities, practices which are somehow believed to be lacking at present.

The Nepal document identified five areas of intervention / themes:

1. Building Climate Resilience of Watersheds in Mountain Eco-Regions. Addresses the problem of too little or unreliable access to freshwater resources by communities in mountain eco-systems for drinking, irrigation, and other uses. (p.18)
2. Building Resilience to Climate-Related Hazards. Addresses the priority risk of floods and droughts that take human lives and undermine progress on economic growth and poverty alleviation. (p.19)
3. Mainstreaming Climate Change Risk Management in Development. Facilitates the integration of climate change risk management into development planning and practices. (p.20)
4. Building Climate Resilient Communities through Private Sector Participation. Addresses some of the key agricultural productivity constraints. (p.20)
5. Enhancing Climate Resilience of Endangered Species. Addresses the risks of climate variability and change on the habitats of endangered wildlife species. (p.21)

These five areas of focus may seem rather random to those unfamiliar with Nepal, but in many respects they are well known domains of development intervention. The policy does not depart from the overall logic of development aid which assumes that people lack knowledge and skills and that outside intervention is required to overcome inadequacies in human and financial capital. The watershed as a domain of practice signals some of the new terminology in development following the Paris Accord, wherein donors promised more cooperation each other and coordination across sectors. However, the strong emphasis on water resources as 'watersheds' indicates they have not

really embraced the more holistic use of the term to encompass cross-sectoral planning. In the USA, watershed management is a term used to integrate together a variety of ecology and political levels such that socioenvironmental problems at the scale of the watershed are holistically addressed. The more narrow interpretation in Nepal is not surprising given the biophysical environment-oriented Ministries that were involved in its development. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that the decline in water resources is considered one of the most concerning climate impacts predicted for the Himalayas.

Hazards management has also been in the central frame of development intervention in Nepal at least since the 1970s. Much of the initial investment in the forestry sector was driven by a belief that deforestation causes landslides. While the equation has proven to be substantially more complex and also linked to continental uplift, heavy rains and poor vegetation cover do increase the rate and severity of landslides. It is therefore not surprising that hazards management is emphasised, and this of course is also consistent with the Scottish policy.

The main departure here from the Scottish policy, is the focus on private sector investment. In Scotland, the engagement of the private sector seems to be more at the level of awareness and preparing businesses to rapidly return to 'normal' functioning after a disaster. Whereas in Nepal, the promotion of enterprise and small scale entrepreneurs, markets, and access to finance for the agricultural supply chain, including farmers are all key areas of 'climate proofing' development (pages 20, 47). It is noteworthy that out of 4 components deemed to be the focus for strengthening resilience one of them deals directly with private sector involvement (#4) and one other includes contributions by the private sector. Component 1 engages the private sector in conserving water resources, "Participation of the private sector will be sought, especially in promoting water saving technologies. NGOs are expected to play an important role in project implementation," p.19. Component 3 refers to development, but here, the emphasis is more technical, emphasising how programs can be 'climate sensitive'. The remaining three components are clearly technical and relate to biophysical hazards.

Within all five components, there is a strong assumption that financial resources and economic diversification are required for resilience. And indeed, the document is noteworthy for the extent to which it places monetary figures on either investments to be made, or the costs estimated for generating resilience. The document focuses especially on the need for the private sector to take control of key infrastructure such as hydropower installations and for more credit availability to the agricultural sector. The emphasis on investment in the agricultural sector in part reflects the general view within development practice in Nepal that rural residents remain dependent on subsistence agriculture. While this picture is no longer very accurate (see below), most climate change projects begin with the poor, resource dependent victim of natural hazards as a starting point. But the financial emphasis also reflects the move towards enterprise development and market formation as *the* solution to under development. These solutions to 'resilience' reflect the turn towards neo-liberal models of development practice and are

relatively new (although increasingly ubiquitous) tropes of development practice. I probe this last point more fully below.

### ***Resilience, neoliberalism and the devolution of responsibility***

Taken together, there are two points to be made about these policies and how they represent a disturbing trend in the way states expect to support their populations in the face of major biophysical transformations, namely: the framing of resilience, and the promotion of a neo-liberal logic of governance.

First, in both we find that resilience is framed as responses to biophysical shocks, however, the type of shocks that are assumed to be important are very different. This clearly reflects the prevailing logic within the IPCC, which defines adaptation as driven by biophysical change. Therefore an environmental determinist understanding of adaptation and resilience is not necessarily surprising, but it does require critical scrutiny. As I have argued elsewhere, I firmly believe that the most challenging adaptation issues will emerge from the social-politics that surround ‘climate change’ as a discourse and policy instrument, rather than from biophysical change itself. Yet, in each of these policies, social-politics are considered only in terms of institutions and techno-engineering mechanisms.

Second, the documents are clearly embedded within an overarching neo-liberal framing of ‘good governance’. They are both concerned with devolving responsibility for resilience to locally-based populations, and yet how they propose to do this, and what support is required to achieve these goals is very different. And perhaps most importantly, as I demonstrate below, they reflect very different understandings of livelihood security than that expressed by local people themselves. Therefore, I believe we are seeing a top-down dictating of governance needs for local people, providing a new twist in what are otherwise becoming rather common-place networks for devolving responsibility without centrally redistributing resources.

I now turn to case study material from both countries to show how ‘local’ people are expressing very different kinds of understandings of community and aspirations for long term livelihood security.

### **“It’s how we do things”: community in Scotland**

Communities in Scotland are generally fairly dispersed outside of the ‘central belt’ which runs between the main cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The *Building Community Resilience* (2013) document in some ways is implicitly oriented towards the Highlands and Islands where communities can be quite remote and emergency services quite far away. There are many single-track roads and some places can be cut off for days by icy roads in the winter. While of course major disasters in the central belt would be equally challenging given the number of people potentially affected, those communities are also in closer proximity to emergency and medical services.

In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland there are strong narratives about community. Here I am going to contain my discussion to the northwest coast where my case study material derives from. As the policy itself acknowledges, communities in Scotland are extremely diverse and my discussion should not be taken as ‘this is how it is’. Rather, I am interested in showing how some people and some communities express rather different understandings of their own capacities and linkages to other scales, than those assumed in policy.

Some communities are deeply divided, and often such schisms reflect either multi-generational disputes or tensions between ‘in-comers’ and those with longer roots in the area. The two communities I focus on here are no different. Both are small coastal villages, relatively remote from other settlements. They are popular as places for holiday homes and for people seeking an alternative to professional lives in the city (often London). Despite these tensions, both places also have a strong sense of ‘community’ and have cooperated on a number of initiatives.

The first community mobilised approximately 15 years ago to build a village hall. They received match funding from Highland and Islands enterprise, but were required to raise a significant amount of capital themselves. In a village with about 300 households, this was not a trivial task. The most successful of their fund raising activities was an annual village gala (festival) which became known as the ‘best’ gala for hours around. A committed group of local people volunteered their time to organise and run the event. As a testament to their dedication, the toilets were clean and well supplied at 3 am after 15 hours of non-stop drinking, dancing, and games. As one organiser told me, “yeah, that’s because we were in there every half an hour to check they were OK. No one working the gala is allowed to drink. We have our own party a day or two later.”

While clean toilets in a remote muddy field covered by a large marquee might not seem like a big deal, it was attention to such details that helped cement the reputation of the gala. The community raised enough money over the course of 10 years to pay off all the debt for the village hall (which has a full sized basketball court/gym, tables and chairs to host large dinners or events, community computers, a kitchen and space for the village shop). The hall is now a source of revenue and has a large capital fund (over £100,000) that can be used for building maintenance and to pump-prime other village activities. While the intention was not to promote economic activity, the hall is definitely an important village asset that can be used to help generate local enterprise. The village shop a key example.

In this place, community is defined by who gets involved, and who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ tends to shift with the context. Some summer residents are considered ‘in’ if they have family roots in the area and if they take an appropriately respectful attitude towards full time residents. Other full time residents are considered ‘out’ if they are too pushy about their own agendas. Many of these tensions manifest around the environment. ‘In-comers’ are often attracted to the nearby ‘wildlands’ and stunning vistas of the sea. Long time residents also place a strong value on the aesthetic qualities of their homes, but they

equally value the signs of a working community: fishing creels, boats, tractors, ploughed fields and other technologies that literally sit on the landscape and help to sustain their economic activities. Community, therefore, is a concept that is rooted in place but not equivalent with place. The scale of the community at times stretches to people who have long since moved away, and at other times is contained to those who live on tenant farms inherited from their grand parents' grand parents.

In the other place, they have established a community company which runs a petrol pump and is looking to invest in a hydroelectric scheme to generate electricity for community consumption. The company has served to pull various networks together, but also acts as a divisive force, starkly emphasising who is committed to the community by patronising the petrol pump (where prices are necessarily higher than outside the village given its location) and those who do not. In this place, the shared sense of isolation and a commitment to staying in such a remote place is a cornerstone of building a sense of 'community'. As one man put it, "...what it is like to live here... the blues and greens, people in the city don't have that." In contrast to the first place, some people who have been in this place the longest are often seen as regressive and a barrier to innovation and investment in activities that will contribute to long-term livelihood security for full time residents. A number of 'in-comers' are rather highly valued for their capital investments in businesses that provide employment and their willingness to think creatively about how to create a viable local economy.

These kinds understandings of 'assets and capabilities' are very different from that expressed in the *Building Community Resilience* document. On the ground, people are well aware that some alliances are short term and only oriented towards specific events, whereas other alliances (ie. the gala committee and the community company) reflect deeper alliances and commitments that can be deployed towards a number of activities. Conceptually in these understandings, the scale of the community is not static. Rather, at times 'community' is understood to be particular networks of people, many of whom may not actually live in the area anymore or who are there temporarily (perhaps equivalent to 'communities of practice' named in the *Building Community Resilience* document, although I would argue that the networks I am referring to are more transient), and at other times, they encompass anyone in close proximity. Thus 'community capabilities' are not only derived from the locality, yet when confronted with policy initiatives, local people's experiences are confined to a rigidly conceived local, place-based scale.

Perhaps most importantly, the agenda to 'build trust' and 'abilities to cooperate' written into a national policy document grates on people's understandings of themselves. There is a deep distrust of policy makers, not least because of the patronising attitudes local people have experienced. As one man said in reference to a local environmental group's attempts at 'educating' local people on the importance of environment, "They tell us we need to learn to care for the environment. I find that offensive. I *am* the environment. My family has lived on this piece of land for over 250 years..." Local people's commitments to and understandings of their environments are based on multiscale

knowledges learned through schools, work activities, everyday experience, popular media and stories passed down from generations. And importantly, they define environment to encompass work, history, tenure and the social-politics of governing their landscape. In fisheries, (a core economic activity in both places), such experiences are even more pronounced. Local attempts at self-regulation in the fishery have been consistently overturned by national priorities. Yet when sitting in ‘consultation’ meetings about fisheries governance, the same people are blamed for over exploitation of the stock. Fishermen consistently express a sense of being misunderstood, not listened to and their needs not taken into account by policy makers (cites).

‘Local’ people express a commitment to community that goes well beyond ‘trust’ and place. In my fisheries work, I found that there was strong social pressure for fishermen to adhere to local ‘gentlemen’s agreements’ that sought to reduce conflict and competition in the fishery. When I asked a local respondent if she agreed with this assessment, she cut across me and said, “They don’t have a choice. It’s how we do things here. I doubt it’s conscious”. This quote shows the way that people in these two communities frequently mobilise ‘place’ as a way to separate their culture from ‘outsiders’ (or ‘in-comers’) and yet, this understanding of place is not simply territorial.

Their sense of ‘it’s how we do things here’ is a powerful motivation for bringing people together, fostering certain kinds of networks and instilling a commitment to community cooperation. Yet, as the above quote on environment demonstrates, if people perceive that top-down policies fail to recognise those local understandings and commitments, they are likely to be resisted. I have witnessed Scottish Government ‘consultations’ on Marine Protected Areas and heard the kind of disparaging and ethnocentric attitudes many policy makers and ‘outsiders’ have towards the residents of the west coast. It is the clash between those practices and attitudes that is most likely to undermine resilience in Scotland, not the lack of ‘assets and capabilities’ of local people.

### **The experts taught us all we know: Nepal**

In Nepal, understandings of community are also contextual and multi-scalar. Most people have strong ties to extended family networks that are often not place based. Caste distinctions serve to further create divides among people who may be living in close proximity, in ways that are not so dissimilar from the ‘insider’-‘outsider’ distinctions made on the west coast of Scotland. The importance of these networks is perhaps best captured through the concept of ‘*aphno manche*’, or ‘your own people’. *Aphno manche* relations are most often based on filial ties, but they can be cultivated as well.

Increasingly in the new political context, *aphno manche* ties are sought with government officials by ‘ordinary people’ at all levels as it is through those relationships that access to resources is secured. Added to these networks, are the ubiquitous user-groups that have been formed through development projects to tackle everything from mother’s groups, micro credit and community forestry to road management. Each of these networks serves to bring people together in different ways, for different purposes, and often in a transitory manner.

Nepal's resilience policy document mainly recognises user-groups as a technology through which cooperation and 'development' can be achieved, and where mentioned, see caste and other culturally defined networks as barriers for marginalised people to gain access to knowledge, inclusion and to remove their dependence on natural resources. Most user-groups are assumed to be place based and rely upon the 'equitable' engagement of diverse users. Yet, equitable engagement itself is designed to help overcome gender, caste and other socially-based inequalities. This kind of understanding of 'community' is extremely naïve in light of the current mobility of Nepal's population. The civil war that raged between 1996-2006 helped to fuel what was already significant out migration of young people from rural villages. The war, combined with economic opportunities in southeast Asia and the Middle East, and a quest for higher education in Kathmandu, India, Europe and North America by those able to find opportunities, means that many rural villages are now almost completely devoid of able-bodied people aged 17-40. For example, when travelling into the District of Khotang in eastern Nepal, porters were in such short supply that we had to pay the few we found twice the daily rate we were paying our highly educated research assistants. We were assured we had not been singled out, and the same exorbitant rates were charged to migrants from abroad returning with accumulated capital (often migrants do not manage to accumulate). The lack of productive labour power in rural Nepal therefore sits uneasily with desires to devolve governance of key livelihood resources to voluntary community user-groups. Thus, to assume that resilience will be built through cooperating user-groups, based upon proximity and shared commitment to place is problematic.

In contrast to the resistance many people in Scotland express to 'external' narratives of their knowledge and capabilities, the assumption in the resilience strategy that Nepalis need more knowledge is one that few local people contest. On the one hand, this is due to the poor education system which tends to leave people hungry for more understanding, rather than feeling they have been 'educated'. On the other hand, people have taken up and readily repeat developmentalist narratives of lacking knowledge and understanding, or 'awareness' as it is translated in Nepali. This has become so strong that 'awareness' is used as a verb in Nepali, and when speaking in English, people will talk of 'awaring backwards' villagers.

In addition to this outward acceptance of their 'backwardness', many people in Nepal see education as the best path for improving their life chances. I have known people starve seasonally for years on end after selling their land in order to educate their sons. Their gamble paid off, their educated sons now have jobs and the family no longer goes hungry for several months a year. Their intentions with education is to allow their off spring to 'jump scale' such that they can operate outside the locality, whether that is through immigration or through having access to larger scale networks that can bring them long term access to resources (developmental, financial and political).

So while the emphasis on knowledge in the resilience strategy is in line with local people's own aspirations, there is a scale mis-match between the two. The resilience strategy is concerned with linking scales such that local people will have a greater

understanding of the hazards in their own locality (assuming that to be a relatively clearly defined space), to have better access to advance warning systems and to take up new agricultural technologies. This is in contrast to the desire for education by local people. Educating children is targeted at removing young people from the confines of their locality. Indeed, these days success is often measured by whether or not one's children manage to successfully emigrate to either Kathmandu or 'the west' (Europe or preferably, North America).

All this mobility adds another mis-match between the strategy document and local people's experiences. The strategy places a lot of emphasis on increasing economic diversification and removing people's dependence on natural resources. While this is in line with local people's own desires, the strategy is at least ten years out of step. Reliance on rain-fed agriculture was abandoned long ago by many rural Nepalis. While there are no statistics available, based on twenty-five years of experience working in some of the poorest and most remote districts, my data show that migration and multiple occupations have long been a livelihood strategy for the rural poor. The poorest households tend to divide their time on a daily basis between primary production, wage labour, entrepreneurial activities (the production of handicrafts, etc) and labour obligations for households with whom they still maintain patronage relationships. This diversity of livelihood strategy helps to ensure they are not dependent on one source of food/income. So, while on the one hand the resilience strategy could help to support this trend, on the other hand, the assumptions embedded in the document mean that it is not likely to recognise or support the kinds of locally initiated livelihood diversification I describe here.

Finally, the resilience strategy document places a lot of emphasis on financial resources and the need to either generate more locally, or to provide access to credit as a solution to disaster recovery. Access to credit is definitely a major issue for people in rural Nepal. Many end up paying astronomical interest rates to local money lenders (sometimes in excess of 40-50%) and find themselves losing their land and other assets as a result. Yet this desire for cheap credit and more cash is subsumed to their sense of which activities and networks are most important for their long-term livelihood security. I have shown elsewhere (N and Ojha) that at least in a forestry context, people have chosen to support a program which gives them fewer material benefits in favour of one that seems to 'represent' them. And I found similar behaviours in relation to my work on political change, where people supported politicians who they believed were *aphno maanche* in some way, as opposed to party platforms that spoke to their more immediate needs. These findings suggest that while access to financial assets is certainly important, it is often not considered the most important for Nepal's marginalised people. Rather they rely on wider networks of patronage and kinship to ensure access to state and developmental resources, and invest in education and migration as livelihood diversification strategies.

### ***Community, belonging and livelihood security***

In both the Nepali and the Scottish cases, there are three key issues that emerge. First, sense of belonging is very important. Cultural recognition and maintenance of community ties are very strongly valued in both places by many people. In some respects, both resilience plans try to build from this, but they are fundamentally uninformed by the realities of the multi-scalar politics through which 'belonging' emerges. Belonging is produced relationally with social exclusion, and the same processes through which one comes to be accepted as part of the community, or can access resources through the community, simultaneously serve to exclude others. So in terms of resilience, belonging is a tricky business, and regardless of whether it works to include more than exclude, it is certainly not going to be fostered by top down policies.

Second, in both places there is a desire for economic diversification. There is a strong understanding in the two Scottish villages that local jobs as well as services (the shop, petrol pump) are crucial to the maintenance of the community. A lot of volunteer effort goes into ensuring that those institutions are maintained and can serve as meeting places or otherwise crucibles for other economic and social activities. In Nepal, there is much less commitment to 'community' in rural villages, but rather the desire for economic diversification is expressed through family networks. This is not to suggest that families always help each other. On the contrary, I have been close to families where brothers and sisters or first cousins are in competition with each other over who can be the most successful. Nevertheless, one family member diversifying is often used as a vehicle for other family members to also emigrate or gain access to new educational opportunities. The resilience strategies, in contrast, take a far more instrumental approach to financial assets and economic diversification. Resilience is assumed to come from having enough alternative resources to cope with the complete loss of core livelihood assets (i.e. through a landslide, flood or disruption in electricity supply). Whereas for local people in Scotland and Nepal, livelihood security tends to be more rooted in sense of place, community, family ties and the desire to transform the 'backwards' image of their villages.

Third, the scale at which villages are conceived by local actors is different than that used in the resilience plans. At times, local people bound their community in territorial terms, but more often, they think in terms of networks which extend through and well beyond the territorial space of the village. They are linked in through a variety of mechanisms, and when required, these wider networks are used to help generate capital, act as safe refuges or to provide emotional support for relationships that are otherwise too close to discuss with neighbours. The resilience plans are aimed at cultivating similar networks, but they take a far more technocratic and static approach to them. They talk explicitly about linking scales, but here they are equating scale with territory, and assume that networks do not cross and penetrate into different scales. As a result, they miss a crucial feature of so-called remote communities, namely, their abilities to be connected outside of place. It is these connections which will be vital in disasters, and indeed, local people are well aware that their long-term 'resilience' depends on such networks. Response to a big flood, for example, will be based more on these kinds of connections than on the sorts of 'trust' relationships described in the policy documents.

Thus, in both of the Nepali and the Scottish example, people are expressing very different kinds of understandings of and aspirations for long-term livelihood security than those written into their respective resilience strategies. The emphasis on disaster management and economic activities fails to capture other aspects of everyday livelihood security important to people in localities. And perhaps most importantly, the static conception of scale that both use cannot account for the multi-scalar networks local people mobilise in their own attempts at generating long term resilience for themselves and their communities.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have compared two ‘resilience’ policies from very different parts of the world, Scotland and Nepal. My purpose in doing so has been to highlight first that the current romance with resilience is quite problematic given the lack of clarity over precisely what resilience is and what is required to promote it. The two cases show that resilience is generally framed in terms of sudden shocks, and that most often, it is assumed that those shocks will be caused by biophysical change. This framing obscures the social political mechanisms through which biophysical change is mediated and thus serves to depoliticise what are inherently contested issues, and to justify the technocratic approach to climate change currently dominating the world. Locally based people tend to view environmental shocks differently. For many local people a shift in the social politics that changes their relation with the land *is* an environmental shock (CITE), whereas within policy, environmental shocks are assumed to have a purely biophysical derivation. Thus when we probe this scale mis-match between policy and on the ground realities, it becomes clear that ‘resilience’ is not an innocent concept, but rather is both bound up in and reflective of the politics of scale within climate change debates.

The cases also indicate the scale mis-match between how communities are conceived in policy and how they are practiced on the ground. Both policies take a territorial approach to community and indeed, to disasters. It is assumed that resources and knowledge need to be built within the local scale, and thus there is emphasis on cooperation across scales and the need for capacity building locally. An approach that better reflects the realities of today’s communities, however, would recognise how people at the local level can access multi-scalar resources. Local people and resources are not contained to the local scale, but rather are produced through interactions and exchange across scales such that they manifest within territories.

This devolving of responsibility for response to the local level is not new to resilience policies or disaster response. Rather, it clearly reflects the wider neo-liberal logic that has become embedded in social, political and financial policies in most parts of the world. The Scottish strategy is in many respects a direct recognition that in the event of a wide spread disaster, the state does not have enough resources to respond. The solution is to build resources within localities that are outside of the state, but that can come into efficient cooperation with state services when required. Communities are not given additional state resources to build up this capacity, but are rather encouraged to do so for

their own good. Making resilience funding a possibility through competitive grants to the Climate Change Challenge Fund similarly reflects this logic.

The Nepal document places far more emphasis on the lack of resources within both the state and localities, but also assumes that the building of local user-groups, gaining private sector involvement and education will solve those problems in addition to the continuance of international development projects. In part because it is funded through external donors, there is more promise of funding to implement these plans, but it should be noted, that most of this money goes to expensive international and national consultants. For example, the procurement mechanism insisted upon by the World Bank to access funds earmarked for preparing Nepal to administer Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) funds meant that only groups attached to international institutions would be eligible. Very little money is available to communities for developing their own initiatives, but rather pilot projects are brought in to certain communities, most often those which are reasonably accessible to urban hubs where donor have their country offices. Top-down imposition of policy without the same flow of centralised resources is characteristic of neo-liberalism. This kind of logic has been blamed for the decline in social services, a widening gap between rich and poor and over exploitation of resources across the globe, but somehow that has not dampened the enthusiasm of those who continue to promote these programs.

Finally, and of most concern to me, the comparison of these two policies highlights a number of ethnocentric assumptions embedded within them. Each document emphasises dissimilar issues and proposes different mechanisms for response. These divergences are in part driven by the underlying environmental determinist logic in both documents, but they also reflect ethnocentric assumptions about the capacities and access to resources by 'local' rural populations. In Scotland, people are assumed to need 'information' and 'community trust', whereas in Nepal, they are assumed to need 'economic diversification' and 'capacity building'. In other words, Nepal is seen to lack financial and human capital, whereas Scotland is believed to lack social capital. Not only do such assumptions help to perpetuate a problematic global order (cite), but they also are potential blind spots if policy makers are truly interested in promoting 'resilience' to climate change. The reality is that both places need more state investment and would be far more resilient if taken seriously as people and places with already existing knowledge, capacity and assets.

In conclusion, the romance with resilience is disturbing because it seems to be providing fresh justification for technical solutions, investment in planning and policies (the Nepal case is particularly strong here with success being measured by the number of plans written) and placing responsibility for access to resources and services in the laps of local level actors. If the emergency services cannot respond adequately, the blame can be placed on the local community who failed to have their own emergency warning systems in place. Or if people continue to engage in land use practices that place them at high risk in a disaster, it is because they failed to diversify their livelihoods or understand the knowledge that was given to them. Yet, I would argue that their precarious situation is

equally if not more caused by centralised states that fail to redistribute resources and a global economic system that concentrates wealth, knowledge and resources into relatively small parts of the world and which through new fears over climate migrants and terrorism is increasingly ensuring it stays that way by tightening immigration policies and border controls. Promoting a resilient world in the face of major climatic change will certainly not be achieved through such a silo mentality. Rather, we need to be thinking and acting across scales, recognising how we are connected rather than separated and to place greater demands on both the state and the private sector to redistribute resources. Feminist political ecologists can make significant contributions towards these ends by exploring scale mis-matches and recognising how scale is enrolled by local people as a way to both distinguish themselves from the outside and to engage across scales.

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