



Life in Informal Settlements of Nepal: A reflection from Photovoice



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Background

- Over half of the global population resides in urban areas, which is projected to be 70% by 2050. Nearly one third of the urban residents are living in informal conditions [1].
- South Asia has the highest urban poverty levels in Asia and the Pacific with countries like Bangladesh (71%), Nepal (59%), and India (32%) reporting high proportions of urban populations living in slums [2].
- Nepal is experiencing one the most rapid urbanisation process in the South Asia with urban population growth reaching up to 7% annually [3]. Currently, a quarter of Nepal's population, approximately 1.3 million households, lives on land without formal tenure [4].

Objective

To explore the living condition, livelihood, access to basic services and environmental risks among the people living in informal settlements of Kathmandu Valley.

Methodology

- Study area: Two Informal settlements in Kathmandu Valley, Namuna Basti and Manohara Informal settlement
- Study method: Qualitative
- Study participants: 18
- Photovoice: A participatory research method that empowers individuals, especially marginalized groups, to document their experiences and advocate for change using photography to visually express their perspectives and share their stories.

Photovoice training

- Two-day training on photography, consent and fieldwork.
- They are provided a week time to capture pictures on the pre-identified themes using their own mobile phones and photos were collected and followed by interviews with the participants regarding the photo.
- Photo collection was done in three rounds.
- Participants selected five key images, to explore pre-identified themes in depth.

Findings

1. Living condition
2. Livelihood
3. Access to services
4. Mental Health
5. Environmental risks
6. WASH

Living condition



Challenges

- Housing conditions: zinc-sheet houses without insulation, ventilation, or safety
- Instances of temporary bridge for the transportation purpose
- Narrow alleyways lacking cleanliness



Livelihood challenges

- Two women carrying sacks of sand for the construction of houses sourced from Manohara river, and sells the sand in around NRs. 40-50 per sacks.
- A 63 years old man started livestock rearing and runs a hotel within the community for his livelihood.
- Starting a small business with small resources

Coping struggles with unemployment and social issues

I clicked this picture to showcase the harsh reality of life in the informal settlement., where job opportunities are scarce, leaving many youths idle. This idleness not only contribute to social issues like substance abuse but also exacerbates mental health problems, placing additional strain on already struggling families. The lack of employment and educational opportunities further compounds the vulnerability us, the marginalized population, deepening the socio-economic crisis we are facing.

“Participant”- Namuna Basti Settlement



Access to basic services



Challenge in collecting drinking water: takes almost 1 hour from to fill jar from Dhunge Dhara



- Handpump establishment in Manohara Basti in 17/18 years ago, which has been a crucial source for water for other purposes though not suitable for drinking.
- Water tank support from an organization

Access to health basic services

- ✓ Lack of healthcare services within the settlement
- ✓ Mental illness



Access to education services

Only if I had money.....

Every morning when I see these children all dressed up and going to school, I feel sad. Not because they are going to a **private** school to get a good quality education, but because I am not able to provide this level of education to my own children, only if I had enough money and financial stability. I am a single mother living in an informal settlement, struggling to make ends meet, so I can't afford to send my children to a good school. If there were good schools in or near our settlement with reasonable fees, it would be much easier for me. Both my sons have to travel around one hour every day to reach school. I think the government needs to be more sensitive in the education sector. Government schools should provide quality education so that people like us don't have to worry so much about our children's future.

-“One of the participant from Namuna Basti”



Mental Health



One of the participants from Manohara mentioned an instance of man suffering from mental illness since four years.

One of the participants from Manohara expressed fear of incident that could happen due to unsafe structures around the settlement.



Environmental Risks

Settlement situated in
river bank, Namuna
Basti



Vulnerability of
settlement

WASH



Conclusion

- Our findings highlights the need for inclusive urban planning, improved access to health services, safe drinking water and WASH services of people living in informal settlement.
- The study also provides insights for participatory approaches in public health research to identify the real needs of the marginalized population and inform policymakers for to ensure equitable and sustainable development in Nepal's urban landscape.

Link to the photobook:

<https://www.ariseconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Nepal-Responsive-Fund-Photovoice.pdf>

QR code





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Researcher Bio

Dr. Situ KC is a public health researcher with PhD in Health Sciences/Epidemiology from Tampere University, Finland. Currently she is working as a Research Lead in PHASE Nepal, leading the research project “Developing women’s role in policy making processes: shaping gender equity and inclusiveness in climate action for health and wellbeing in Nepal” funded by British Academy and in partnership with Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK. She has experience of more than 7 years in the field of public health research and academics, particularly in sexual and reproductive health, urban health, vulnerable population, climate change.



Thank You