

Polyphonic testimonial piece

Life after flood: Stories that echoed

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For the people of Melamchi and Helambu, the monsoon season is a recurring reminder of the losses they endured in devastating flood in 2021. Among the many forms of losses, psychosocial impact stands out as one of the most profound non-economic losses. Through these voices, the lingering weight of that year is felt that continues to shape life in Melamchi and Helambu post the event. The words that follow are left open allowing the weight of experience, grief, resilience and the new normal to speak in their own way.

- “After the flood, it felt like my child had an intense paralyzing fear (saato gako- soul leaving the body) for some time because flood’s noise was terrifyingly loud,” claimed by a concerned mother.
- “This wasn’t just a house; it was my ancestors’ home. Now, with everything gone, I can’t even imagine dying in peace, because I won’t take my last breath in my home,” reflected by an elderly man.
- “The house I worked so hard to build still had an unpaid loan. Now I’m in debt for this new house too,” whispered an elderly survivor.
- “I don’t know if I’ll be able to see him once again,” whispered a grieving old parent with teary eyes, as their son leaves home for foreign employment.
- “I don’t know where I’m from, anymore,” responds a young man.

- “With all these financial obligations, I don’t feel like I own this place,” another survivor adds quietly.
 - “We’ve learned to live with it (पचाई सक्थौ अहिले त!),” responds another survivor signaling quiet resignation rather than true healing.
 - “I lost my home, and then my husband left to pay our debts,” says a woman reflecting the weight of added obligations evident in her voice.
 - “The land tricks us. The river fed us for decades, now it’s taken everything. I thought we were safe here, now my family has nothing,” a farmer remarked bitterly.
 - “My peace of mind comes from acceptance. Some things in life are beyond anyone’s control, and no one can change fate,” another reflects, offering a quiet perspective.
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“After the flood, I lost my father. Suddenly, all the responsibility of caring for my family and running our small business fell on me, and the stress felt unbearable. I turned to smoking and alcohol to numb my pain,” revealed a young man.

- “My daughter told me she’s lost interest in school after all the disaster. She said she would rather work and support our family than stay in a place where nothing feels certain anymore. I will go to Kathmandu,” a parent responds, showing how disaster encourages the intergenerational loss of education.

- “All of this happened because they celebrated the inauguration of Melamchi Water Supply Project by sacrificing animals. The source of the water supply is very sacred, and such sacrifices are not supposed to happen,” an elderly person reflects, revealing the cultural lens.
 - “I always keep an emergency bag ready with documents, clothes, food, everything we might need if the flood recurs,” a survivor adds, describing the new normal.
 - “We’re always packing, always leaving”, proclaimed a female respondent.
- “When the earthquake hit, our house was destroyed, but we still had our land we could rebuild and use it in some way. But now with the flood, we’ve lost everything. I can hardly think of a way to carry on,” another survivor admits.

Four years on, these voices carry the tremors of fear, grief and the heartbreak of unsettled lives, the type of losses that are not always visible but deeply felt. Recovery is not only about rebuilding homes or infrastructure, but also about how people shoulder their memories, their resilience, and their exhaustion. The psychosocial wounds are evident in every voice only to those who pause long enough to listen. These voices remain open, inviting each reader to hear, feel and discern what it means to live with the echoes of disaster.



Chanaute Bazar after Melamchi River Flood 2021

Disclaimer:

This compilation presents the voices from Melamchi and Helambu collected in the aftermath of the 2021 flood. The purpose of this collection is to serve as a resource for exploratory readers, researchers, policy makers, and government to engage with the voices critically, interpreting and analyzing them in their own field of work as evidence while giving due credit. The privacy and anonymity of the respondents is maintained. This polyphony is intended to contribute to the broader understanding of psychosocial impacts of disaster and loss and damage.