Relocation, Resistance and Resilience: Squatter Community Responses to Government Intervention for Urban Development in Kathmandu

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Relocation, Resistance and Resilience: Squatter Community Responses to Government Intervention for Urban Development in Kathmandu

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Abstract

“Squatting,” or residing on public land illegally, is a modern urban phenomenon in developing countries. This phenomenon is attributed to rapid urbanization due to rural-to-urban migration, which leads to rising costs of living, exclusionary housing markets, a lack of affordable housing and urban inequality. Ultimately, unplanned urban growth encourages the formation and expansion of squatter settlements. These settlements are commonly characterized as slum due to the impoverished living conditions, highly congested spaces and lack of public services (water, sanitation, education, etc.) Without land certificates, squatters are denied their right to adequate housing and land security, which should be protected by the government. The growth of these settlements is not a natural process, but rather a byproduct of ineffective urban planning through weak governance. In Kathmandu, the government frequently attempts to evict and relocate squatters, but squatters resist relocation and demand for land rights. This study is conducted through semi-structured interviews with representatives from government agencies, squatter settlements and development organizations to identify and explain the processes and motives behind government-driven resettlement plans, responses to these plans by squatters and effective community mobilization strategies for urban development. Conflicting perspectives between how government views squatters and how squatters view themselves exemplify how squatter settlements react to government intervention. Through the perspective of squatters, this paper critically analyzes the role of government to build sustainable cities that include and uplift disadvantaged populations, including residents of squatter settlements.

Keywords: Development Studies, Squatter Settlements, Urban & Regional Planning.
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Introduction

As one of South Asia’s fastest growing cities, Kathmandu is experiencing rapid urbanization. Nepal is in the process of transitioning from a predominately rural to urbanizing economy, followed by mass rural-to-urban migration (World Bank 2013). Individuals are pulled to Nepal’s capital city for job opportunities, security and socioeconomic mobility. Kathmandu’s urban development is unplanned, leading to uncontrolled urban sprawl, rising costs of living, exclusionary housing markets, inadequate supply of affordable housing, decreased livability and a loss of open space (Bajracharya et al. 2015). Ultimately, the consequences of unplanned urban growth contribute to the expansion of informal settlements occupied predominantly by urban squatters.

Squatters, or sukumbasi in Nepali, reside on land without legal rights. By living in informal settlements, they are excluded from basic rights, social services and land security typically protected by government because of their landlessness (Acharya 2010). Without basic infrastructure and services provided by government, urban squatter settlements are commonly characterized as slums due to their impoverished living conditions, highly congested spaces and an absence of public facilities such as education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation and waste management (Khatiwada 2013). Residents of these settlements are also highly vulnerable to eviction because of insecure residential status, deprived of their right to security of tenure (Shrestha 2010). Therefore, the growth of squatter settlements is not just a negative byproduct of urbanization, but a failure of government to manage urban development and ensure basic human rights through inclusionary policies and protection of the right to adequate housing.
Managing urban development is claimed to be one of the most important development challenges of the 21st century (The Guardian 2014). Building sustainable cities will be a major factor in determining the success or failure of national governments and international institutions, testing government, civil society and the private sector’s ability to adapt to the needs of diverse populations with limited resources. Weak governance will not be able to effectively address social and economic inequality, shortage of resources, rising costs of living, risks to widespread disease and high demands on infrastructure in urban spaces (Wilson 2015). Ensuring the right to adequate housing and security of tenure for urban squatters in Kathmandu is a critical determinant of Nepal’s political institutions’ ability to create an inclusive, resilient and sustainable capital city and economic hub. The government has attempted multiple, unsuccessful agendas to address encroachment on public land by urban squatter settlements through eviction and, more recently, through resettlement to the periphery of the city (Tandan 2016). However, squatter settlements are resisting resettlement, preferring to acquire land ownership to the residential spaces where they currently reside. Instead of depending on government to provide basic services, these settlements are acting in their own capacity to improve their standard of living (Ninglekhu 2012).

The purpose of this research is to identify and explain the processes and motives behind government-driven resettlement plans, responses to these plans by squatter settlements and effective community mobilization strategies for urban development. This study intends to analyze the motivations behind government and squatter settlements actions in order to demonstrate why government has
been unsuccessful at managing squatter settlements in the past and how housing rights can be guaranteed. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight urban squatters’ perspectives and describe the role of good government in building sustainable cities that include and uplift marginalized populations, including residents of squatter settlements. In what ways does the state view informal settlements, specifically squatters, as a population for development and poverty alleviation intervention? How do squatters perceive their community, rights and resettlement policies and how does their perspective shape local responses to state intervention? How do squatter settlements supplement for the lack of government support and mobilize themselves to improve their lives and living conditions?

**Literature Review**

Squatting is an increasingly common, urban phenomenon in developing countries due to inefficient urban management and poor governance, unable to address the growing demand for adequate housing in cities (Shrestha 2010, Wendt 1997). Each year, Nepal’s urban population increase by 7 percent and Kathmandu’s urban population increases by 4 percent (World Bank 2013). Rapid urbanization contributes to the growth of Nepal’s urban population living in squatter settlements, which is estimated to be around 7 percent each year (National Planning Commission 2015) Although this phenomenon has occurred for the last 43 years in Kathmandu, squatters have been an increasingly visible population for the last 30 years due to the rapid flow of poor, low-income migrants (SDI 2015). In 1985, there were 17 identified squatter communities in Kathmandu Valley (CIUD 2008). Today, 4,000,000 squatters live in Nepal, of
which around 50,000 squatters live in over 45 informal settlements in Kathmandu Valley (CIUD 2008).

The standard definition of “squatter settlement” refers to the legal position of the settlement rather than the settlement’s social or physical characteristics. A squatter settlement is a type of informal settlement without legal claims to the land, typically located in public spaces owned by the government. Squatters are defined as individuals that do not have legal rights to the land where they are settled (Srinivas 2015). In Kathmandu, squatter settlements are heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, caste, place of origin, family structure and reason for squatting (Tanaka 2013). All squatters in Kathmandu currently lack security of tenure that prevents forced evictions (SDI 2015). The Nepali term for squatter, *sukumbasi*, was originally used in the rural context to mean a person without farmland, but has been extended to encompass urban landlessness (Tanaka 2013). Some settlements recognize themselves as *swabasi* in Nepali, which literally translates to “dwellers staying by themselves,” because these residents are not willing to be identified as squatters (Lumanti 2008). Instead, they are referred to as indigenous settlements. Alternative terms frequently used to describe squatter settlements include: informal settlements, low-income settlements, semi-permanent settlements, spontaneous settlements, unplanned settlements and unauthorized settlements (Srinivas 2015). For the sake of clarity, this paper will refer to these settlements as squatter settlements and residents of these settlements as squatters.

The term “slum” refers to the living conditions and physical and social characteristics of a settlement. A community is classified as a slum by one or more of the following characteristics: poor environmental conditions;
overcrowding; insufficient living space; and lack of durable housing, safe
drinking water and proper sanitation (UN Habitat 2005). Squatter settlements are
usually characterized as slums because many settlements lack basic
infrastructure, adequate housing and physical supplies such as water, drainage,
sewage, electricity and waste collection, services that the government is expected
to provide for formal settlements (Srinivas 2015). Most squatter settlements are
inhabited by disadvantaged populations; however, squatting is not synonymous
with poverty. Residents of these settlements are also heterogenous in terms of
household income and occupation, but are commonly characterized as informal
wage workers (Lumanti 2008). Without formal and secure employment, most
squatters in Kathmandu are identified as a sub-population of the urban poor.
Many squatters live in temporary or semi-permanent houses, frequently with
multiple families residing in one household\(^1\) (Lumanti 2008). These settlements
tend to cluster in ecologically sensitive or hazardous areas, such as river banks,
flood areas or near dumping grounds, which increases squatters’ vulnerability to
disease and disasters due to the dangerous and polluted spaces they inhabit
(Shakya 2005; World Bank 2013).

The mass exodus of people from rural areas to Kathmandu is motivated
by complex environmental, social, economic and political push-and-pull factors.
A study conducted by Lumanti found that the most frequently cited cause of
rural-to-urban migration amongst squatter settlements in Kathmandu is for better
employment opportunities (2008). This study also found that other reasons for

\(^1\) Studies of squatter settlements are conducted at the household-level instead of the
family unit because multiple families may live in one household.
migration are attributed to landlessness and poverty. Natural disasters that cause crop failure and destroy property and agricultural land, difficulties for small farmers to compete in international, globalized markets and years of political instability and conflict, such as the Maoist insurgency, also push people from rural communities to urban spaces (Dahal 2011). Migrants are pulled to Kathmandu in hopes of socioeconomic mobility, a higher standard of living and better health and education facilities (UN 2014).

Upon arrival to Kathmandu, many poor migrants are confronted with multiple internal and external barriers to adequate housing. Thus, they are denied access to formal housing markets and forced to reside in informal settlements. Internal barriers include the skill set and available resources of migrants. Many migrants are illiterate and unskilled, lacking collateral assets, savings and financial resources that enable them to afford the rising prices of land and costs of living in the city (Nakarmi 2003; UN 2013). Land prices in Kathmandu have increased annually by 330 percent within the last 30 years, which is a rapid escalation of price driven by banks instead of government (Acharya 2014). Furthermore, there an imbalance of housing needs and supply due to the high level of demand for affordable housing and adequate land. Government’s failure to meet housing demands of low-income, unskilled workers encourages squatting on unmanaged public land (Shrestha 2013).

Access to land is a determinant and consequence of poverty. Land is a form of wealth and power in Nepal; therefore, land ownership is critical for economic security and prosperity, political power and social capital (Adhikarim, et al. 2009; Gallagher 2016). Land ownership is also the basis of public services,
such as sanitation, waste collection, electricity and water; thus, squatter settlements do not receive such services from the government. Other basic facilities for livelihood such as schools and health centers are also not provided by government in informal settlements (Adhikari 2007; Acharya 2010). However, under the new Constitution of Nepal, everyone is entitled to basic rights such as adequate housing, basic infrastructure and living in a safe environment (Pradhananga and Upreti 2016, 3). Adequate housing is more than “four walls and a room;” it is classified by seven core components: legal security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habituality; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy (UN Habitat 2009, 4).

The Constitution also protects individuals’ right to security of tenure: “no citizen shall be evicted from the housing owned by him/her, or encroach on the housing,” safeguarding the right to shelter without fear of eviction (Pradhananga and Upreti 2016, 3). Legally recognized, security of tenure is necessary for urban equality, protection of human rights and sustainable livelihoods (Adhikarim et al. 2009). Insecurity of tenure perpetuates concentrated poverty as communities are excluded from basic human needs and rights typically provided and protected by the government, increasing individual fragility and community marginalization.

Without security of tenure through land certificates or usership rights, squatter settlements are vulnerable to eviction. Nevertheless, government has been unsuccessful at removing squatter settlements permanently from public land for the last four decades. Twenty-one commissions have been formed to handle encroachment, but none have managed to develop effective housing solutions (Kathmandu Post 2016, Tandan 2016). One frequently cited, unsuccessful
attempt at demolition and eviction is from May 2012, when the HPCIDBC, Kathmandu municipality officials and Armed Police Force forcefully evicted residents of the Thapathali squatter settlement along the Bagmati River. Forgoing UN human rights standards for eviction and displacement, government agencies did not adequately inform residents or ensure suitable housing alternatives (Human Rights Watch 2012). Eviction notices were published in various local newspapers and spread by word of mouth which created mass confusion. At least 250 homes and a local school were destroyed; the demolition left 994 people homeless (Habitat International 2012). The eviction resulted in a violent clash between the settlement’s residents and police as residents attempted to resist the eviction (Ghimire 2012). Following the event, dozens of families were unwilling to live away from the center city, returned to the settlement and rebuilt temporary houses. They claimed they returned because they cannot afford to rent in Kathmandu; thus, in Thapathali they can live rent-free (Manandhar 2014).

Although unable to effectively manage squatter settlements in the past, the national government has recently adopted numerous international agendas concerning the right to housing. These agendas recognize the importance of housing in building inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (MoUD 2016). For example, in response to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030) and the national goal of graduating from least developed country status by 2022, Nepal’s National Planning Commission developed a sustainable development agenda in 2015 as a guide for operationalizing the SDGs. Squatter settlements are addressed in SDG Goal 11, which aims to make cities and human
settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable while undertaking the consequences of rapid urbanization (NPC 2016).

Following Habitat III, the United Nation’s “Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development,” an action-oriented document called the “New Urban Agenda” was developed to plan for challenges accompanying rapid urban growth such as inequality, social and economic exclusion and environmental degradation. The “New Urban Agenda” for Nepal is expected to tackle SDG 11 through a detailed action plan to upgrade slums, enhance human rights and ensure sustainable urban mobility by providing decent jobs, infrastructure, services and affordable housing to the entire urban population. Action items to address squatter settlements include forming an “Organized Settlement Commission” to control encroachment on public land, implementing slum upgrading and resettlement projects and facilitating the private sector to build affordable rental housing (MoUD 2016). In reference to these agendas, Prime Minster Pushpa Kamal Dahal recently announced that the government will soon decide on the modalities to address urban squatters. He also claimed that he prioritizes education, health and employment of these individuals (Rato Pati 2016).

Such intervention agendas and claims leave the methods of implementation vague, calling into question the processes in which resettlement and intervention will occur. The only current plan to address squatters is through a pilot housing project in Ichangu Narayan that is near completion, intending to relocate settlements along the Bagmati River (Tandan 2016). Squatters from Thapathali, the first target settlement for relocation, claim that they will resist relocation to the outskirts of the city (Sharma 2014). Conflicting interests like this
example will impede government from achieving SDG 11. How government will translate language in their agendas concerning the right to adequate housing to practice remains unanswered.

Scholars argue that government should be a structure that secures protective security, an instrumental freedom that contributes to the foundation of individual agency, or the capacity to act on one’s will and make decisions (Foucault 1982; Sen 1999). Nepal’s constitution acknowledges government’s responsibility for ensuring adequate housing and living conditions based on UN international human rights law (UN Habitat 2009). Government-driven relocation and forced eviction can be considered as housing polices for protective security, but can also be considered as an imbalance of power between squatters and government. This imbalance of power is because squatters are excluded from participating in policy decisions that affect their livelihood (Lukes 2005). Through the latter perspective, the government lacks inclusive governance for the weakest sector of society because it exploits its power over the poor by excluding squatter communities’ participation in relocation strategies. In turn, squatters are relatively powerless in policy decisions because more powerful actors, in this case the government, control future events (Wood 2003). Thus, squatters are limited participants in social, economic and political arrangements concerning their personal security and standing of living. This research aims to study their ability to mobilize internally and claim their individual agency.

Contextualizing this power dynamic through Scott’s theory of “everyday resistance,” squatter communities claim their space through daily acts that undermine government’s power over their livelihood (1985). Squatters
supplement for the lack of governmental support through local advocacy groups protesting exclusionary housing policies and property rights; microfinancing groups providing financial security; shared infrastructure providing safe drinking water; self-directed policing systems providing security (Ninglekhu 2012; Shekhar 2012). Such everyday forms of resistance are responses to the imbalance of power; thus, squatters become “reflexive actors,” realizing their rights and detachment from government functions (Beck et al. 1994).

Research on squatter settlements state the problems and complexities of urban poverty and vulnerability of squatters: they are excluded from economic, political and social arrangements and must mobilize internally to improve their quality of life. However, literature rarely analyses government and squatters’ perspectives and motivations concerning the modalities to address development of squatter settlements. Understanding the roots of conflict between government and squatter settlements can uncover what actions are necessary to implement effective policies that include squatters in urban development, uplift marginalized populations and benefit urban society. Literature also falls short in understanding government’s power over squatters through land rights and security of tenure. There are few studies identifying the incentives to include squatters in decision-making processes for sustainable urbanization.

Methodology

The research presented in this paper was conducted over a four-week period in Kathmandu, Nepal. Comprehensive quantitative data surveying the socioeconomic status of Kathmandu squatters was acquired from Lumanti to serve as background information. Qualitative data was collected through 22 semi-
structured, in-depth interviews with squatter settlement community leaders and residents, government agencies, INGOs, NGOs and urban planners. Two additional interviews were conducted over email, one with an urban planner and a local government representative. Residents of squatter settlements were informally and spontaneously interviewed before, during or after scheduled, in-depth interviews with community leaders. This study includes representatives from the following stakeholders (see Table 1):

- **Squatter Settlements**: Residents and Community Leaders from Bansighat, Ramhit, Kumarigal, Sankhamul and Thapathali.
- **Squatter Federations**: Leaders from Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj (NMES) and Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakshan Samaj² (NBBSS), the two national squatter federations in Nepal.
- **NGOs and NGOs**: Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Action Aid Nepal, Lumanti Support Group Shelter, Centre for Integrated Urban Development (CIUD), Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN) and Included Nepal.
- **Government**: Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM), Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KVDA), Kathmandu Municipality City Office (KMC) and Higher Power Commission for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization (HPCIDBC).
- **Autonomy Bodies**: Nepal National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Urban Planners

² NBBSS is also referred to by its English name, the Society for Preservation of Shelters and Habitations in Nepal (SPOSH–Nepal).
My methods for finding interview participants started by emailing and calling relevant organizations and agencies. Following the first few interviews, participants provided me with direct contact information of other potential participants. Interviews with INGOs, NGOs and government representatives were conducted in the offices of their respective places of work. I was connected directly to community leaders through my network at Lumanti, NMES and NBBSS. Interviews with community leaders were conducted inside residences and tea shops in squatter settlements, followed by an in-depth tour of the community and spontaneous, informal conversations with other residents. Residents translated interviews with community leaders who did not speak English. These residents also participated in interviews before or after translating. Participants of in-depth, semi-structured interviews were provided an informed consent form that was signed before the interview began. The purpose of this study and the option to record the conversation and/or remain anonymous, were also verbally reiterated before each interview. Written consent was received for all interviews conducted over email. Informal interviews participants that occurred before, during or after scheduled interviews were verbally explained their rights as a participant and verbal consent was received.

Research on Kathmandu’s urban squatters rarely involves semi-structured interviews with numerous stakeholders; therefore, my primary source of data for this paper is through interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions based on participants’ responses while inquiring comparative, qualitative information through questions that were asked to multiple participants. Interviews with INGOs, NGOs and urban planners involved in
promoting squatters’ livelihood and/or housing rights invited additional
perspectives of the role of government and views and processes behind
government intervention in squatter settlements. Community leaders were
interviewed instead of multiple residents from one settlement because I sought to
acquire a variety of perspectives from the most active community members
directly with local government. I was also recommended both squatter
federations and Lumanti to speak primarily with community leaders because they
claimed that these individuals are well-informed about the history, perspectives
and demands of the settlement. Interviews with community leaders were sought
out through my connections in the squatter federations because I wanted to
establish rapport and avoid approaching a squatter settlement without a defined
purpose, invitation and contact. When meeting with community leaders, informal
interviews naturally occurred, which provided additional, local perspectives and
multiple accounts of community-led projects and experiences with government.

The four-week time frame of this study inhibited interviews with
additional government agencies, such as the Ministry of Urban Development, and
INGO organizations, such as UN Habitat. Potential participants from these
agencies were out of the country or unable to schedule an interview during my
timeline. Another obstacle for conducting this study is my perceived identity as a
researcher and foreigner. Although I am aware of my positionality as an
American, white, female, undergraduate researcher, my findings cannot account
for any data collected from interviews that was skewed or influenced by
participants’ perception of my identity. Land rights is also a political-charged
topic and social stigma surrounds the label of squatter, which may have
influenced bias, but nevertheless informative, responses concerning squatter settlements. This research intends to analyze various perceptions of squatters; therefore, the misconceptions and attitudes surrounding this population invites further analysis on why such discrepancies, social stigmas and conflict exists.

**Research Findings**

**Perceptions of Squatter Settlements:**

The first research question aimed to understand how government views urban squatters, but evolved to also encompass squatters’ perceptions on how government and civil society\(^3\) view them and their settlements. Inquiring various perspectives of government agencies and squatter settlement leaders revealed a dichotomy between “fake” versus “genuine” squatters and their actions as “capturing the land” and “protecting the land,” with land referring to public land.

**Fake Squatters Capturing the Land**

Representatives from government agencies associated squatters with creating problems for local government and urban development. Ramesh Ghimire described squatters as a “burden for local government; they create waste in [Kathmandu] but they do not contribute tax to local government.” Instead of the term “squatter settlement,” Yozendi Chitrakar claimed the HPCIDBC refers to these settlements as “unauthorized settlements” that are a “nuisance socially and physically,” contributing to solid and liquid waste in rivers near their settlements and prohibiting the agency from installing sewer trunk lines around the Bagmati River. Even though many settlements are located in hazardous flooding zones,

\(^3\) Civil society refers to non-squatters who live in formal settlements in Kathmandu.
Bhagwat Khokhaki stated that squatters are willing to risk their lives and live near the rivers because of the locality and affordability of the space.

These participants questioned the landlessness of residents in squatter settlements, each claiming that most urban squatters are “fake.” Gopal Giri described “fake” squatters as people who live on public land “just for sleep,” only needing shelter. However, their existence does not mean they are “genuinely” homeless and do not own land elsewhere. Many government representatives speculated that “fake” squatters hope government will distribute land squatters so they can turn around, sell the land and return to their original settlements.

Yozendi Chitrakar speculated that “fake” squatters demand for higher standards of living in resettlement housing projects. Government representatives claimed that intervention programs will only work with “genuine” squatters, but a definition of a “genuine” squatter has yet to be defined. Identifying the causes of displacement will determine who is a “genuine” squatter, but many suggested rigorous data needs to be collected. Then, government representatives claimed they would act based on the research findings.

Many government representatives also claimed that squatter settlements are affiliated and highly influenced by political parties. They associate squatter communities with “board banks,” explaining that political parties seeking power use this population as the foundation for their political rallies, protests and voter basis. Political parties essentially bribe squatter settlements by stating they will implement policies that will promote squatters’ quality of life, such as job security and land ownership, once the party is in power. Incentivized, political parties gain a mass of support that is “cheap and easy to bribe,” but do not fulfill
promises once in office and the process repeats each election cycle. Government representatives agreed that political parties are not handling the problems of squatter settlements, but creating more problems for the city. Bhagwat Khokhaki explained the situation, “if they [squatters] do all get jobs, who will promote parties if everyone is happy?” He added that this method of gaining power means that squatters need to remain “unhappy,” referring to happiness determined by jobs and land certificates, to rally for another party during the next election.

The “effectiveness” of development organizations’ activities was called into question by multiple government representatives, speculating that these organizations attract squatters. Promoting dependency and an unwillingness to work, they claimed that INGOs and NGOs provide free services that improve local quality of life. INGOs’ and NGOs’ motivations were also questioned; they suggested that these organizations will stop running their programs once urban squatters are relocated because donor agencies may not fund projects if squatters have proper residency. Thus, rumors circulate that these organizations prefer squatters to reside on public land, which secures jobs for INGO and NGO workers. Concerning civil society’s perceptions of squatters in Kathmandu, government representatives mentioned that residents of formal settlements have similar views to government. Basudev Bajagain stated that civil society associates squatters with crime and contributors to river pollution. He followed that claim by noting that civil society is “unwilling to share community resources” with squatters or have squatters resettled near their homes.

INGO and NGO representatives expressed similar sentiments concerning government’s view of urban squatters as a population for development and
intervention. They stated that government does not act because they view squatter settlements as illegal settlements no applicable for formal services. Prakash Amatya and Sundarshan Rajbhandari both claimed that government in unable to see past the legality issues of the settlements. However, Prakash Amatya stated that the national government needs to realize this is not a “legal vs. illegal issue, but this is a humanitarian issue...local ward authorities fully agree, but they cannot accept it because of the policies” restricting investment in informal settlements. Overall, they each speculated that government views squatters’ actions as “littering the area” and “capturing the land” rather consequences of inequality. Shubha Pokharez asserted that government is confused on who is poor and landless, while John Samuel noted that this confusion is linked to misperceptions behind real motivations and reasons for squatting. He emphasized that the national government is not on-the-ground, so the notion of “fake” squatters is attributed to government’s lack of local information.

When asked about government’s perception of INGO and NGOs that work with squatters, these representatives acknowledged that government criticizes their organizations for attracting squatters to urban informal settlement by providing services that improve their quality of life. Instead of working in rural areas, Prakash Amatya claimed that investing in rural villages will not stop migration “people are still going to come [to Kathmandu] because of urban economic growth and better opportunities regardless of village development.”

Every representative of squatter settlements I interviewed is aware of how government views squatters. Sukumbasi has a negative connotation; it is a “scolding word” and is not a “realistic definition for Kathmandu squatters.”
Without a “realistic definition,” community leaders acknowledged that
government and civil society have several misconceptions about their
settlements. Community leaders claimed that government views squatters as
“rubbish” and the “a problem creator.” Manika and Sabita extended these
associations with not only how government views squatters, but also civil society.
They stated that government and civil society see squatters as “illegal,
unmanaged and garbage” and live freely in squatter settlements to avoid paying
taxes. Raju Tamang emphasized that “there are so many names outsides give to
squatters such as land mafia, city polluters capturing government land.” These
names are also reinforced through local newspapers, calling squatter “Bagmati
polluters.” Squatters perceive everyone else viewing them as the problem,
constantly portraying squatters in a negative light. They ultimately feel that
government and civil society “do not think we [squatters] are from the same
community, but from a different society.”

All representatives of squatter settlements are aware of the concept of
“fake” squatters by government and civil society, which means that they are not
actually landless and have a decent livelihood. For example, the term “fake”
squatter is a label for people who “live too nicely for slum conditions,” like
owning a television, cell phone, refrigerator, motor bike and other amenities that
outsiders do not associate with being landless and/or poor. This study found that
squatters believe the fraudulent association of squatters informs government
actions. If seen as “capturing the land,” then policies are oriented strictly around
squatting as an illegal activity, only a matter of wanting free shelter. Bhagavati
Adhikari stated that government is only concerned with policies that address
“how they can erase the name [sukumbasi] from each household.” From all sides, there is overwhelming recognition that government views squatter settlements as purely an issue of legality.

**City-Makers Protecting the Land**

When asked how squatters view themselves, many representatives of squatter settlements claimed they are not “capturing the land, but protecting the land.” In their eyes, the notion of a “fake” squatter is a misconception because there is not an actual definition of a “genuine” squatter. According to Moti Lama, the squatter federations have been pushing government to define and differentiate “fake” versus “genuine” squatters, but have not been provided an answer. He views squatters as “protectors” of the land because families came in search of opportunity decades ago and found opportunity on neglected, public land. The government did not protect the land at the time when they settled, so overtime, squatter settlements made the land “beautiful and created a small society.” Representatives from squatter settlements questioned why the government did not protect public land from encroachment when it began 30 to 40 years ago, justifying their actions to “protect the land.” There was mutual agreement that if the squatter settlements were not on public land, the land would have been sold and belong to the private sector by now. Instead, Pawan Gurung described that squatter settlements “saved” the land for development by government.

Representatives of squatter settlements acknowledged and verified government’s view of squatters being affiliated with political parties. According to community leaders, political parties persuade their settlements to vote for them by offering jobs and opportunities once they are in power. However, once the
party is in power, little to no change occurs. Leaders of NBBSS recognized that they are used as “board banks,” however, they feel they do not have any alternatives. There is hope with each election cycle that the political party may represent them in office, but community leaders are not confident with these parties upholding their promises to improve the lives of squatters.

Discrepancies with civil society are also recognized as they address concerns of formal settlements having squatters resettle in their neighborhoods. Representatives of squatter settlements and development agencies identify the conflict of interest between civil society’s opinions of squatters and their needs for informal, inexpensive wage workers, which encompasses many squatters’ economic opportunities. Prakash Amatya summarized this conflict: “city people want cheap labor, but will not provide for travel of cheap labor and do not want to live close” to squatters. Leaders of squatter federations referred to squatters Kathmandu’s “city-makers” because they take on the construction and service jobs that keep the city functioning. Joshi Jibgar stated that you need the poor to sustain the life of the rich; thus, debates surrounding squatter settlements is not just an isolated issue of land, but involves their economic opportunities, livelihood and what value they add to the city. Echoing similar thoughts, representatives of squatter settlements expressed that their contributions to the city are vital to urban development. Their perception of being the “protectors of land” and “city-makers” motivates how they perceive their community, rights and government-driven resettlement policies.

**Responses to Government Intervention:**

*Fear of Eviction*
Squatter settlements were described to be more than a space for shelter, but strong communities that support their livelihood. Many community leaders noted living in squatter settlements is the only option for most families seeking better opportunities in Kathmandu, establishing their families near adequate jobs and schools and health facilities for their children. In addition to being the only housing option, Manika and Sabita referred to their community as a “family without a caste system that celebrates all cultural and religions.” Manika exclaimed that everyone lives together and supports each other, which contributes to their fear of government-driven eviction and resettlement. If local representatives do not participate in government decision-making processes, then the community may be physically separated in resettlement housing projects. Lakpa Lama expressed similar sentiments about his community, Ramhiti, because everyone knows each other and “with whatever we do, we speak for everyone.” Every squatter settlement representative justified their length of tenure in their settlement as a reason why they should be allowed to stay. Ambiguous resettlement plans threaten their livelihood and the communities they created.

Fear drives responses to government intervention in squatter settlements, specifically the fear of forceful eviction. Lakpa Lama and Moti Lama claimed that without security of tenure, there is always a little fear regarding eviction because squatters do not have land ownership rights that protect them from evictions. The eviction of the Thapathali squatter settlement in 2012 was constantly referred to in interviews with community leaders and the federations. This eviction resulted in confrontation through protests and riots between government and squatter settlements because government acted on their own
agenda instead of working with squatters to manage the settlements. Government representatives stated that in this incident, force was mandatory because squatters violently revolted against the eviction. However, community leaders claimed the act of eviction without resettlement plans or community participation was confrontational within itself. Raju Tamang stated that “confrontation leads to more confrontation,” shedding light onto why forceful evictions typically result in violence, protests and defiance. Thapathali residents described their response to eviction as violent because they feared losing the livelihood they created in their community. After rebuilding the settlement, Aashish BK claimed that returning to live in the settlement is their form of resistance to eviction, a peaceful protest to state their demand for land certificates.

Past threats of eviction cause squatters to be more organized and prepared (Tanaka 2009). According to community leaders, both squatter federations were created in response to a history of threats and forceful evictions by government and civil society. They claimed that in the past, people from the city would attempt to set their settlements on fire since their homes use to all be constructed out of bamboo. In response, squatters stayed in their houses all day in fear of demolition from government and civil society in Kathmandu, which inhibited their ability to work. Seventeen years ago, the founder of NBBSS visited other squatter settlements in Kathmandu and realized all squatters faced similar problems; thus, they organized and formed the federation. Two years later, NMES was established to increase female participation, which encouraged women to unite to improve their livelihood and advocate for their rights. The federations partnered with Lumanti, a development agency focused on housing
rights, and SDI, an international movement for the urban poor. Their network has expanded over the past two decades to squatter settlements across the country through local, district and regional-level committees and leaders advocating for the protection of their fundamental rights.

In Kathmandu, the federations organize protests, rallies, advocacy campaigns and partner with local government through ward and municipalities offices to voice their demands. Not only do the squatter federations lobby for squatters’ right to adequate housing at local and national levels of government, but also create awareness within the settlements about their fundamental rights. Through these methods, residents and relevant development agencies are aware that “if the government has the power to evict, then they have the power to relocate” and the responsibility to provide immediate housing options. Therefore, the main demand of NMES and NBBSS is to stop forceful evictions.

**Demand for Land Ownership**

The second demand of the squatter federations is to negotiate with government to provide land certificates for squatter settlements in safe areas that have been well taken care of for years by residents. According to community leaders, their settlements are working towards obtaining land certificates for the land they currently reside on. They want land ownership so they can take their development into their own hands. For example, Harimaya Jimba stated that her community’s goal is to obtain land ownership in order to build more resilient houses. Currently, houses in her settlement are temporary, constructed out of tarp and bamboo because when families returned after the eviction in 2012, they minimally invested in their homes in fear of a repeat event. She also stated that
their community does not need houses, just land; they can build their houses themselves based on their needs. Lakpa Lama was confident that with land certificates, his community “can do anything.” When land certificates are granted, he claimed that his community will “immediately build better housing…we can develop ourselves; we don’t need any help from government.”

Settlements represented in this study are willing to pay a tax for their land certificates. Once granted land ownership, they plan negotiated tax prices with local government based on what each household can afford. Although they recognize the value of the land, creating affordable price points and land ownership is justified through squatters’ perception of being a “city-maker” and “protector of public land.” Raju Tamang further explained this reasoning: “when [squatters] have protected public land and saved it for development by government, [government] should give us a small piece of the land registered under the name of the community people.”

**Relocation Must Include Livelihood**

Although obtaining land certificates for their current residence is preferred, there was overwhelming acceptance by all representatives of squatter settlements that resettlement in unavoidable for some squatter settlements. From a livelihood perspective, they fear resettlement will mean a loss of employment opportunities and community. However, the federations and Lumanti acknowledged that squatter settlements located in vulnerable areas, such as flooding zones along the river banks, should be relocated. These bodies argue that there should be certain norms that ensure the livelihood and wellbeing of relocated families. Health, education, basic services such as roads, water and
sanitation, and access to jobs must all be accounted for in relocation plans and “absorbed into new communities.” Many representatives of squatter settlements affirmed that skill-building and IGAs are also necessary in resettlement areas in order for residents to build on their capacity and improve their quality of life. Ultimately, NMES and NBBSS recognize that a house is not sufficient for ensuring livelihood, which is also advocated for by NHRC Nepal, SDI, Included and Lumanti. As Lakpa Lama put it, “government needs to provide community, not just housing” for any relocation attempt to be successful.

**Nothing For Us Without Us:**

NMES and NBBSS also advocate for their right to participate in government decision-making processes concerning squatter settlements. NBBSS and SDI representatives emphasized “nothing for us without us.” They claimed that the local community knows best because “the best person to tell you about me is me.” These agencies asserted that one major downfall of past government plans concerning squatter settlements has been the lack of participation by the settlements, which leads to confrontation. Unanimously, representatives of squatter settlements stated that they want to be actors in their own development. John Samuel explained that “eviction does not work, people will continue to find another place” unless they are involved in the process and work with government to negotiate alternatives. He called for “joint development” between squatters and government, followed by, “the government must be ready to be partners in development.” Community leaders expressed their willingness to negotiate with government; claiming negotiation is the most effective way to meet their demands and protect their fundamental rights.
The mutual confusion between “fake and genuine” squatters is attributed to a lack of partnership and dialogue between squatters and government. All participants cited data collection as the means to disseminate confusion and address the motivations and reasons behind residing in squatter settlements. However, community leaders each noted that the most effective method to collect this data is through the community because “they know their neighborhoods best.” Community leaders of Thapathali and Bansighat challenged government to come into their communities and conduct the research to directly diffuse misperceptions about everyone being “fake” squatters, but also recognized that they will be more effective at collecting detailed data about their settlement. John Samuels claimed that settlement responses to the notion of “fake” squatters are now to organize and conduct community profiles to use as proof of tenure and a source of sincere information about the settlement. John Samuels stated that “if you have the information, you will have the power, and will have the knowledge to prioritize what you need.” According to John Samuels, organized settlements are able to understand how to effectively engage with government, but if the settlement is not organized, they cannot expect to be able to properly negotiate with government and meet their objectives.

Squatter community leaders have claimed their rights and understand there are right-holders, users of the land and actors in urban development. They claimed that resettlement policies are currently oriented around removing squatters from the center city to build green parks, open spaces and a more “beautiful city.” However, many stated that government needs to focus on the livelihoods of squatters and include squatter settlements in the process to
implement sustainable solutions that address the demands of both government and squatters. Community leaders claimed that their participation in government decision-making processes can shape policies and agendas that counteract the multiple factors encouraging squatting and limiting their ability to enter formal housing markets.

An example of effective negotiation between government and squatter settlements is in Kumarigal. Kumarigal is a small squatter settlement in Kathmandu with 11 households, not located near a river bank. Samita, the community leader, explained that the settlement is not located in a hazardous area, but the government attempted to evict residents 2 years ago in order to widen a road near the settlement. After negotiating with local government 54 times to stop the eviction, an agreement was reached: squatters will rebuild their houses near their original settlement, but provide 2 meters of space to widen the road. In return, each household was compensated with 200,000 Nepalese rupees to rebuild their houses, marking this negotiation as the first-time government compensated squatters for resettlement in Nepal. Sankhamul and Thapathali community leaders also discussed how they negotiated with government to relocate their settlements slightly inland so the government could build a road along the river. Although they were not compensated, they still sited this as an example of how government and squatter settlements can work together to identify solutions for development.

**Community-driven Development:**

Nepal’s government is unstable because it is constantly in a period of transition as new leaders with new political agendas do not have sufficient time to
implement policies. Bhagavati Adhikari claimed that government is not effectively managing squatters because each transition of government means restarting development plans and negotiation processes with squatter settlements. All participants, including representatives of government agencies, agreed that a lack of consistency in the government creates this ineffective development cycle. However, squatters can still play a role in their development regardless of government effectiveness, suggesting that progress can still be made even with government is not stable. By internally mobilizing, squatters are claiming their existence, saying “we are the visible of the invisible, we are the communities you have not seen.” All five squatter settlements included in this study collaborate with the squatter federations and development agencies, such as SDI, Included and Lumanti, to improve their quality of life through community-led projects.

**Ramhiti: A Model for Community Development**

Established 40 years ago, Ramhiti is squatter settlement near Boudha with over 120 households. The settlement has organized multiple community-led projects including running a school, building roads, organizing local banking systems and installing solar power road lights. Lakpa Lama has been the community leader for the past 18 years. He claimed that these community projects start with asking “how do we make a stronger community?” He determined that education is the biggest issue facing development of residents because education is necessary for socioeconomic mobility. Motivated to provide quality education for the youth, the community funded and built a private boarding school that he claimed is one of the top performing schools in Kathmandu. The government has acknowledged the success of the school and
now is a partner by providing safe drinking water and additional teachers. Currently, the school serves 600 students in two daily sessions because the demand for the school is greater than the capacity. The community is in the process of expanding the school to meet the demand of students who want to enroll. He attributed the success of the school to the community’s management abilities, stating that the school is strong because the community is strong and invested in education.

Installing solar power street lights is a new project the community has taken on to promote safety. The community funded 15 percent of the costs and contributed local labor to install the street lights. INGOs and local government also contribute to funding projects like this, but such projects are initiated and implemented by and for the community. Paving the local roads is another example of the community taking responsibility for implementation while partnering with government and development agencies for funding support. The community voluntarily paved the roads and raised part of the funds necessary for the project. Lakpa Lama said these projects are created through democratic processes. Because of their democratic processes, he stated that all families are active participants in designing and implementing these projects.

For example, Pasang Tamang is a community member of Ramhit of moved to the settlement a decade ago for job opportunities, but could not afford the cost of living in Kathmandu. The community helped him open his tea shop by offering him a loan. Locals also contributed to physically constructing his business. Pasang Tamang is now a highly-involved community member and
volunteers his spare time without pay to implementing community projects, such as building and expanding the school and paving roads.

**Mobilizing Within Communities**

Squatters face multiple barriers to saving their money in banks or receive loans because many do not have citizenship certificates or enough assets to borrow from banks. Saving and credit co-operatives within squatter settlements reduce barriers to accessing loans and encourage small-scale saving habits for long term economic security. Loans are used for funding higher education, sending youth abroad for work so they can send back remittance, expanding homes and starting businesses. According to Bhagavati Adhikari, women have especially benefited from the savings and credit groups because it a tool for empowerment, enabling women greater access to economic opportunity and financial autonomy. Moti Lama explained that savings groups are not only about collecting money, but a means to build community by “sharing happiness and uniting people to save together and keep everyone accountable.”

Community members also come together for personal and professional development. Each squatter settlement that participated in this study conducts awareness and skill building trainings for women and children. Trainings teach women about their rights, domestic violence, life skills, literacy and IGAs such as creating art, bags and jewelry to sell. Women’s groups empower women to participate in their social and economic development and provide emotional support. These groups also act as the basis for saving and credit co-operatives and training opportunities for women with little formal education and skills. Youth groups teach children about their rights and act as a space to advocate for the
community. Youth make crafts and art, perform in shows and design magazines that create awareness about injustices that squatter settlements face. Topics for recent youth advocacy campaigns include domestic violence and child labor laws.

Community centers in squatter settlements are hubs for community activities and meetings. These centers offer a space for interaction and education. Many centers offer after school and tutoring programs for local students, some even double as early childhood development centers. Preparing youth for better education, these programs expose students to the value of education and how education can improve their livelihoods. These education programs also provide security for children when their parents need to work, reducing the chances of children being exploited. Included, an INGO that builds and manages community centers in slum areas including Bansighat squatter settlement, invests in youth’s education to alleviate poverty in the long-run. Their programs aim for behavior change and skill development that will empower youth to overcome urban poverty. Education is viewed as a tool to gain access to more socioeconomic opportunities; thus, four of the squatter settlements represented in this study host education programs outside of formal schooling for youth.

**Mobilizing Across Communities**

Squatter settlements in Kathmandu participate in cross-cultural partnership and collaborate with other squatter settlements outside of the city. The squatter federations promote connectivity and unity between settlements in Kathmandu and Nepal. The national network of squatters strengthens advocacy and lobbing activities for housing rights. Mobilizing across geographic and cultural borders also promote local community development. The squatter
federations adopted the concept of saving and credit co-operatives when their leaders visited slums and squatter settlements in India through SDI. SDI sponsors horizontal partnerships between squatter settlements across countries to share ideas and learn from best practices of other communities. Another idea adopted from squatter settlements in India is conducting community profiles and producing family ID cards.

Community profiles are tools used to negotiate with government, assessing the state of the community and identifying top priorities, such as access to health, sanitation, drinking water and education. Shekar Guna Guna stated that conducting community profiles enables squatter settlements to understand the needs of their community, appraise the problem and design local solutions to challenges they face. These profiles can act as a source of leverage and the data government wants about squatter settlements. This information can be shared when the national government is ready to negotiate. Family ID cards document each household in squatter settlements. The card has a photo of a family in front of their house and information about the family on the back. Obtaining a family ID card requires the settlement to be well established, at least 20 years old, and the family must have resided in that settlement for a significant amount of time.

Raju Tamang stated that is not easy to obtain the family ID card, which he also suggested can be a method of defining “fake and genuine” squatters.

**Discussion/Analysis**

Misconceptions and a lack of communication between government, urban squatters and development agencies creates conflict and confusion. There is not a agree-upon definition for “squatter” in Kathmandu. Many participants claimed
that being landless means that three generations of men in a family must have not owned land in order for them to be landless, but stated that reasons for displacement and migration would more accurately describe urban squatters. However, government is focused on the legality of squatters rather than the complexities driving exclusion from living in formal settlements. The illegality of these informal settlements associates squatters with negative labels that influence policy and public opinion. Labeling squatters’ actions as “capturing the land” associates them with crime, which forms a divide between their identity and that of civil society. Thus, it becomes easy to label squatters as the “problem,” “burdens” and “social and physical nuisances” for urban development. Distance between squatter settlements and formal settlements in Kathmandu ultimately leads to social tension that restricts development because squatter settlements are viewed isolated societies detached from the social, economic and political arrangements in the city.

Applying Sen’s Social Choice Theory of development, this division undermines the connectivity of people through the economy, public health, disaster resiliency and urban systems (1999). The urban economy is heavily dependent on the informal sector, but their settlements are excluded from city-wide development and squatters are deprived from housing related services. They have yet to successfully participate in large-scale, government decision-making processes. Representatives of government agencies acknowledged that community-level participation is necessary for effective planning, but hesitate to invite squatters into the conversation until they can distinguish “fake” from “genuine” squatters. Again, the notion of a “fake” versus “genuine” squatter is
rooted in the legality of their settlements. Local government is restricted to intervene in informal settlements due to settlement’s legal status; however, viewing squatter settlements as only an issue of shelter underestimates the consequences of social injustice and inequality experienced by marginalized populations in Kathmandu. Although squatting can be viewed as a choice, there are no other alternatives. The challenge and solution come from understanding why alternatives to squatting are inexistent.

The value of public land squatter settlements occupy is above the price point squatters can afford. Along the Bagmati, the government envisions green, open spaces that will contribute to the city’s livability and image. Government views squatter settlements as a barrier to the development of these public spaces and ecological and waste management of the rivers. However, this perspective is oriented around the primary interest for a greener city rather than the settlement as a negative externality of unmanaged urbanization that becomes a humanitarian crisis. Without attention to the primary causes of squatting, squatters’ existence is dehumanized because resettlement policies’ end goal is to move squatters from desired land rather than a tool for urban poverty alleviation and protection of housing rights. Thus, eviction and resettlement policies are shaped by how government views squatters. These policies are inevitably ineffective because governments’ view of squatters and squatters’ view of themselves are at conflict. This conflict stems from squatters’ perceived value in the city. Squatters do not see themselves as completely marginalized, but rather see themselves as the backbone to city, “the city-maker,” by performing the cheap physical and service labor that is demanded. Yet, government and civil society value the land of
squatter settlements over the value of their economic contributions. Government does not recognize squatters as a “protector of land” because they are prohibiting development of public spaces. Representatives of squatter settlements have not had the ability to justify why they consider themselves the “protector” of public spaces because they have historically been excluded from government decision-making processes at the national level.

Squatter settlements respond to government and resettlement plans through fear of insecurity. Regardless if their interactions are confrontational with government or collaborative amongst themselves, they demand security for their families. Security is not just defined as security of tenure, but security of livelihood. Livelihood involves economic stability, health, education, means of saving, and access to basic services such as sanitation and clean water. Although government does not ensure these forms of livelihood in squatter settlements, residents develop local methods to access these elements of livelihood. They establish their socioeconomic space and sense of community through everyday forms of resistance by remaining on public land and organizing themselves to improve their quality of life (Scott 1985). Therefore, squatters are actors in their own development rather than helpless victims, achieving some power over their lives to claim their individual agency (Sen 1999). They act on their individual agency by investing their limited resources into their livelihood. Community-led projects such as infrastructure development, savings and credit co-operatives, IGAs and skill building trainings, early childhood education and advocacy work are all everyday forms of resistance that challenge the lack of public services and protection of housing rights by government. If they did not internally mobilize,
they would be accepting the consequences of unplanned, haphazard urbanization: urban inequality, poverty and few opportunities for socioeconomic mobility.

Regardless of local success, security cannot be achieved until it is protected by government through the right to adequate housing. Squatter settlements and the federations believe that the most effective means to securing their right to adequate housing is through land ownership. Land certificates offer a means of security because the fear of eviction is eliminated with legal entitlement to the land. Squatter settlements also refer to the length of time they have resided in their community as a justification for land certificates. The emphasis of time suggests that what they created in their community took years to build and cannot be easily replaced. Thus, squatters prioritize ownership of the land they currently reside on because not only would this ensure security, but retain the benefits of the community they created.

At a minimum, government should be responsible for ensuring people’s fundamental rights. The right to adequate housing includes the security of tenure. Security of tenure would eliminate fear existing in squatter settlements. Then, squatter settlements are no longer a matter of legality, but a humanitarian issue that exposes urban socioeconomic inequality in Kathmandu. Sustainable strategies to begin eliminating inequality require active engagement with squatter settlements and the federations. If squatters participate in government decision-making processes concerning their settlements, they will be able to negotiate with government and be mutual partners in their development. The community profiles generated at the local level can serve as a tool for negotiation and diffusing misconceptions about each settlement, exposing the reality of the
situation. The processes and implementation of slum upgrading activities and resettlement policies can be developed by collaboration between development agencies, government and squatter community leaders, tailoring intervention to the needs and social context of each settlement.

Resettlement is a long-term investment, not a quick solution. Thus, the implementation of resettlement must be monitored and evaluated to determine the sustainability and replicability of the model. Livelihood must also be provided, which can be sustained through community-driven development efforts and partnership with development agencies. For example, incremental affordable housing is one option for resettlement policy suggested by squatter settlements. A pilot program can be conducted to test the feasibility of such resettlement program. Success will be determined based on agreed goals by government and squatter settlements and, if successful, the model can be replicated. Within squatter settlements, regardless if they are relocated or not, the community should manage their own development and seek support from government and development agencies when they are organized and committed to their community. Best practices from the ground level can serve as the basis for development in other settlements. Government is then investing in people and supporting the creation of environments for mobility so with each generation, the root causes expanding squatter settlements and urban poverty are eliminated.

Conclusion

The formation and growth of squatter settlements in urban areas is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained exclusively as a place for shelter. Through a rights-based approach, squatting is a consequence of the national
government’s inability to ensure the fundamental right to adequate housing. Ensuring the right to adequate housing is a determining factor to measure government’s ability to manage rapid urbanization and meet the demands of marginalized populations. One challenge to achieving SDG 11 in Kathmandu is attributed to the instability of the national government. Without consistent leadership and political agendas, the national government does not have enough time for policy implementation when it transitions every six to nine months.

Squatter settlements will continue to be actors in their own development regardless of support by government. This study found that squatter settlements mobilize internally to improve their quality of life through community-driven projects that address needs in education, savings and credit co-operatives, skill-building and IGAs and basic infrastructure. However, security of tenure, a fundamental element of the right to adequate housing, cannot be protected at the community level. Squatter settlements depend on government to ensure security of tenure and eliminate the fear of forceful eviction. Security of tenure promotes livelihood, which is how government should view this situation rather than a matter of legality. Focusing only on illegal encroachment of public land hinders government’s ability to create policies that recognize and address the complex causes and consequences instigating the phenomenon of squatting. This study also found that civil society, the voters of government officials, contribute to the narrative of squatters as “burdens,” “polluters” and “the problem.” Negative attitudes towards squatters creates a divide between formal settlements and squatter settlements. Such division isolates squatters from social, economic and political arrangements and devalues their role in urban spaces. Integration of
squatters into political processes will avoid division. However, integration will only be possible if government can commit to their inclusion.

Further research should be conducted to analyze the relationship between civil society and squatter settlements and how this relationship affects development processes. Additionally, rigorous monitoring of upcoming resettlement project should be conducted in order to evaluate the success and consequences of relocation. Such research can inform future resettlement policies that address the needs and demands of government and squatter settlements.

Many squatter settlements in Kathmandu are developing into organize communities that are ready to negotiate with government. Community leaders want to participate in decision-making processes that affect their livelihood. Once partners of development, government and squatters can collaborate to design resettlement programs and slum upgrading policies that meet the needs of both stakeholders. Negotiating terms of resettlement and relocation will not be a simple task, but the only method to ensure that resettlement is sustainable requires squatters to be included in the process. Ultimately, squatter settlements must be integrated into urban development for Kathmandu to become a sustainable, inclusive and resilient city.
Glossary of Terms

CIUD – Centre for Integrated Urban Development

CWIN – Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre

HPCIDBC – Higher Power Commission for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization

IGAs – Income Generating Activities

INGO – International Non-government Organization

KMC – Kathmandu Metropolitan City Office

KVDA – Kathmandu Valley Development Authority

MoLRM – Ministry of Land Reform and Management

MoUD – Ministry of Urban Development

NBBSS - Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakchan Samaj

NHRC – National Human Rights Commission

NMES – Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SDI – Slum Dwellers International

*Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakchan Samaj (NBBSS) - Nepal Settlement Protection Society

*Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj (NMES) – Nepal Women’s Unity Society

*Nepalese rupees – currency of Nepal

*sukumbasi – squatter

*swabasi – residents of informal settlements that do not identify with the term “squatter”
## Appendix/Appendices

### Table 1: List of Interview Participants with Descriptions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhagavati Adhikari</td>
<td>Program Manager; Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prakask Amatya</td>
<td>Program Director, Included Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basudev Bajagain</td>
<td>Human Rights Officer, Nepal National Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aasish BK</td>
<td>Community Member, Thapathali Squatter Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimala</td>
<td>President, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogendra Chitrakar</td>
<td>Deputy Program Manager, Higher Powered Committee for Integrated Development of The Bagmati Civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramesh Ghimire</td>
<td>Survey Officer, Kathmandu Metropolitan City Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gopal Giri</td>
<td>Under Secretary, Ministry of Land Reform and Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shekar Guna Guna</td>
<td>Representative, Slum Dwellers International</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pawan Gurung</td>
<td>Founding Member, Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakchan Samaj; Community Leader, Sankhamul Squatter Settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harimaya Jimba</td>
<td>Community Leader; Thapathali Squatter Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jibgar Joshi</td>
<td>Urban planner; former Acting Secretary, Ministry of Population &amp; Environment; former Advisor, National Planning Commission; former Director General, Department of Housing and Urban Development</td>
</tr>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Position/Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhagwat Khokhaki</td>
<td>Urban Planner, Kathmandu Valley Development Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lakpa Lama</td>
<td>Community Leader, Ramhiti Squatter Settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moti Lama</td>
<td>Community Leader, Sankhamul Squatter Settlement; Member, Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakchan Samaj; Former Program Director, ActionAid, Activista and Lumanti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renu Lama</td>
<td>Manager of Information and Systems; Lumanti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manika</td>
<td>Community Leader, Bansighat Squatter Settlement; Community Mobilizer, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sundarshan Rajbhandari</td>
<td>Program Manager, Centre for Integrated Urban Development</td>
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<td>Shubha Raj Rokharez</td>
<td>Representative, CWIN</td>
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<td>Sabita</td>
<td>Community Member, Thapathali Squatter Settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samita</td>
<td>Treasurer, Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakchan Samaj; Community Leader, Kumarigal Squatter Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Samuel</td>
<td>Program Coordinator; Slum Dwellers International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasang Tamang</td>
<td>Community Member, Ramhiti Squatter Settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raju Tamang</td>
<td>Secretary, Nepal Basobas Basti Samrakchan Samaj; Community leader of Sankhamul Squatter Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masako Tanaka</td>
<td>Urban Planner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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List of interviews


Access, Use, and Publication of ISP/FSP

Student Name: Rita Reilly Brooks

Email Address: rrb5@rice.edu

Title of ISP/FSP: Relocation, Resistance and Resilience: Squatter Community Response to Government Intervention for Urban Development in Kathmandu

Program and Term: Fall 2016 Nepal: Development and Social Change

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