

**Profiling Local Resilience:  
The Importance of Water for Households in  
Earthquake-prone Kathmandu**

Master Thesis submitted by Svend Jonas Schelhorn, born on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1986

to

Ruprecht- Karls- Universität Heidelberg, South Asia Institute, Department of Geography,

supervised by Prof. Dr. Marcus Nüsser

## Abstract

Access to safe drinking water is of utmost importance in large scale humanitarian crises. In order to satisfy live-saving water, sanitation and health needs, vulnerable communities need strong coping mechanisms. If and to what extent the affected local communities can aid themselves largely depends on resilient capacities and on local vulnerable conditions.

Based on a case study approach, this research investigates the resilience to water stress of local dwellers in Kathmandu in earthquakes. This vulnerable urban environment is characterized by high seismic risk and water scarcity, challenging the everyday life of citizens.

Despite the considerable research on disaster resilience and on the importance of water, particularly in disasters, no approach so far exists, which incorporates both components to investigate disaster resilience of social actors. This study suggests a definition of resilience termed *disaster water resilience*, that takes into account both resilience concepts and the importance of water in disasters. Based on this definition, an analytical framework is derived to evaluate and operationalize disaster water resilience on household level in Kathmandu Valley.

The study is conducted by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, involving a household survey, direct field observations and semi-structured interviews with local residents, government and non-governmental officials.

The study finds that context related conditions lead to water scarcity in Kathmandu Valley. In dealing with the "everyday-disaster", people have developed strong coping and adaptive capacities. The study reveals that these capacities also entail disaster resilience capacities, leading to an unintentional disaster preparedness. However, as there is a limited degree of intentional disaster preparedness, the importance everyday coping and adaptive strategies gains significance in disaster resilience.

The study makes a contribution to the theoretical debate of resilience, by piloting the application of a framework, recognizing important aspects of water in the frame of disaster resilience. The findings of this study and the analytical framework should be streamlined into existing programs to foster a better disaster resilience.