

# Developing Criteria for Identifying Open Spaces for Disaster Preparedness in Rural Nepal

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## SUMMARY

The identification and utilization of open spaces are vital for effective disaster response and humanitarian activities. Open spaces, defined as land areas free from buildings and other significant obstructions, serve multiple purposes, including emergency shelters, distribution hubs, and recreational areas. Nepal's rapid urbanization has significantly reduced the availability of public open spaces, complicating infrastructure development and undermining disaster preparedness efforts. In contrast, rural contexts often utilize various available lands, such as agricultural fields near homes, as temporary shelters during disasters. Humanitarian agencies also rely on such lands. Despite the International Organization for Migration (IOM) having established global standards for identifying open spaces in urban areas, there is a notable gap in guidelines tailored for rural settings. This study aims to address this gap by developing comprehensive criteria to help governments determine whether a location can be considered an open space in rural areas. Using reports and studies conducted by IOM Nepal in the Kathmandu Valley and other semi-urban and rural locations as case studies, this research adapts existing urban guidelines to the rural context. Urban guidelines typically include criteria such as minimum area size, slope restrictions, essential facilities (water and electricity), and cultural sensitivity. However, rural areas, characterized by scattered settlements and abundant agricultural fields, require different criteria. These include the proximity of available open government land to settlements, population size of scattered communities, and vulnerability of traditional homes to destruction. Temporary evacuation shelters or designated open spaces in rural areas must safeguard against hazards, power lines, and unstable land while ensuring connectivity to essential services. Agricultural fields during non-harvest seasons can benefit communities through recreational activities or educational events on disaster preparedness, with accessible entry-exit points for disabled individuals, the elderly, and children. This research develops a methodology and set of parameters for rural open spaces, ensuring they are practical and effective for rural communities. By analyzing and adapting IOM's

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urban open space criteria, the study proposes new criteria focused on land accessibility, proximity to scattered settlements, land usage patterns, and availability of basic facilities, while considering the unique rural landscape and community needs. The resulting guidelines provide a framework for local governments, NGOs, and disaster response teams to systematically identify, evaluate, and utilize open spaces in rural settings for emergency preparedness and humanitarian response. This research enhances disaster resilience in rural communities by ensuring the availability of designated open spaces for emergency use, ultimately improving the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster response operations.

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