



Together saving more lives.

NEPAL EARTHQUAKE APPEAL RESPONSE REVIEW

Executive Summary

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake which struck Nepal's Gorkha district on Saturday April 25, 2015 was the biggest disaster Nepal had experienced since the earthquake of 1934. Over 8,790 people were killed and more than 22,300 injured, followed by a second earthquake measuring 7.3 on Tuesday May 12 close to Mount Everest. Hundreds of aftershocks - many large - since remind terrified people of the scale of the disaster. The damage and loss is calculated at some US\$ seven billion, with over half a million houses partially or fully destroyed, and the Government of Nepal estimates some additional 700,000 Nepalis will be pushed into poverty as a result.

The Disasters Emergency Committee (UK)¹ and the Humanitarian Coalition (Canada)² have both responded to the earthquake by launching appeals for funds for their members to enable them to respond to the extensive humanitarian needs. The DEC, joined by the HC, commissioned a response review to provide an overview of the response so far; identify gaps, priority areas and unmet needs. In doing this key lessons from this response were identified along with innovations and exemplary programming.

Key lessons and recommendations:

Immediately after the disaster, preparedness measures such as government coordination, some prepositioning and clusters at district level worked well. Many preparedness efforts of some international NGOs (INGOs) in anticipation of a big earthquake had however been modelled on the Kathmandu valley; this earthquake primarily affected rural areas, although three of the crisis-hit districts (located in the Kathmandu valley) are urban. Those affected here, such as low-income renters who do not receive government's housing compensation, have largely gone unnoticed by INGOs.

The operating environment in Nepal provides considerable challenges. Access to remote mountainous communities, many of which are widely disbursed and small, makes coverage

¹ DEC member agencies are: ActionAid; Age International; British Red Cross; CAFOD; CARE International UK; Christian Aid; Concern; Islamic Relief; Oxfam; Plan UK; Save the Children UK; Tearfund & World Vision.

² HC member agencies are: Save the Children Canada, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam-Québec, Plan Canada and CARE Canada.

hard. The Government provided a strong response, which while positive and quick at first, led after some months to INGOs and others having to stall actions while decisions are delayed. Nepal has a recent history of complex governance, marred over the last few years 'by political instability and violence'. Districts interpret and apply rules differently, leading to a complicated operating environment. The country is at a critical juncture in the process of drafting its constitution, which continues to demand government and civil society efforts.

INGOs, including all DEC/HC members, cannot directly implement, but have to work through national and local NGOs. While there are some challenges in the relationships between national/local NGOs and their international partners (nearly all national NGOs rely on INGO funds to survive), effective INGO/NGO partnerships which strategically use the influx of recovery funds could go a long way to strengthening local civil society and governance processes. Coordination between DEC/HC members and with others has largely been effective. Relations with government at central and district levels are strong, while engagement in clusters has been good, although more could be done to share information and analysis for wider use.

Following the initial distribution of relief, the primary needs now are for permanent housing (many villages were nearly or totally wiped out) and help in livelihoods recovery, which in rural areas is mostly agriculture and livestock. DEC/HC member agencies' responses so far in shelter have mostly comprised, beyond initial tarps, the provision of CGI (the default material across the response) and tools, and/or cash grants to enable purchasing of CGI. The challenge now is to shift gear to think of inputs into permanent housing, which are probably best served by providing quality and certified training to masons, carpenter and others, both to improve livelihood opportunities as well as to improve housing quality. Supporting traditional building approaches and use of traditional materials in seismically-safe ways presents an opportunity for INGOs and their partners to invest in long term recovery.

Energy now needs to go into helping communities recover using their own strengths to counter a sense of dependency that exists in some places; part of this lies in clarity on what communities need and how best to help. Early reports of communities' feedback of the relief effort has been critical - in one survey over half of respondents said they felt they were not being heard at all, and nearly two thirds said they were seeing no progress in the relief effort. Nearly three quarters (73%) of women said their needs were being met hardly, or not at all. Gender is an issue upon which agencies need to focus more; so is reaching the most marginalised, especially Dalit communities and others considered to be on the fringes of society. Rechecking with community members and on lists who might have been left off is therefore necessary.

Cash transfers, used both by government and INGOs, have provided the backbone to the response. A range of cash grants exist which at times has caused some confusion and fuelled rumours between communities. Cash however has worked well so far with distribution methods including envelopes, bank transfers and the piloting for some of mobile phones, something that will only grow in the future.

Technology has also been put to good use with widespread use of mobile phones by field staff for more efficient assessments and monitoring. Effective information management initiatives

such as the IFRC's Surge Information Management System (SIMS) sift and present complex information in easily digestible ways. INGOs (and others) need to do more of this: right now large inefficiencies exist in the ways information is exchanged, often in overly-complicated and poorly communicated ways. This happens between agencies and also from NGOs to communities. More space could be created in the recovery phase for collaborative reflection and learning, and greater thought and ingenuity needs to go into how information is presented.

At a policy level, the earthquake and the subsequent flurry of actors provides an opportunity to jumpstart the ratifying of the Disaster Management Act, under discussion since 2007. Ambitions could be high, with this becoming a world-class piece of legislation from which others could learn. INGOs could contribute to this more effectively by bringing their experiences from elsewhere to bear; also through developing a more collective voice, for example through the Nepali Association of International NGOs (AIN). Finally, recovery efforts need also to tie in with wider pre-earthquake preparedness efforts, such as the inclusion of the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium's (NRRRC) 'nine minimum characteristics of a resilient community' into recovery actions.

Recommendations:

1. For the recovery, identify and address the needs of those excluded so far from the response, such as unreached VDCs and wards, those missed off registers, urban renters and the most marginalized in communities, and develop strategies to listen and respond to needs prioritized by people;
2. Get ready for the next disaster: apply the NRRC Nine Minimum Characteristics of a Resilient Community to recovery activities;
3. Capitalize on the 'recovery window' to advocate for the passing of a world-leading Disaster Management Act that prioritizes equity, inclusion and gender equality, and which stipulates dedicated local level government funds for emergency preparedness;
4. In cash distributions, be mindful of equity within communities and co-ordinate amounts and distribution modalities between agencies. Proactively facilitate learning and sharing to establish an evidence-base of what works;
5. Build the right housing based on listening to people's realities: support traditional building practices that use existing approaches and materials, adhering to seismic standards;
6. Invest in both safer rebuilding and future livelihoods by training women and men carpenters, plumbers, masons and others using recognized certified schemes such as CTEVT;
7. Ensure an INGO collective voice in representing common issues to government and other stakeholders, making use of established networks such as AIN
8. To contribute better to national and local NGO capacity, recovery plans must be jointly developed with NGO partners, wherein these partners have an equal stake in strategy, direction and sign off;
9. Work collaboratively to improve two-way communication with communities to counter rumor, maintain clear and consistent messaging and to share feedback and analysis useful to agencies, coordinating bodies and government. To ensure INGOs are listening

- to people, monitor and report on how programs have adapted as a result of community feedback; and
10. To improve efficiency and effectiveness, invest in significantly improving communication between agencies, within clusters and to government making use of available and emerging digital tools.

The full report is available at <http://humanitariancoalition.ca/about-us/reports/evaluation-reports>

The field mission took place from 2nd-14th August 2015 and the review team comprised David Sanderson (team leader, UK), Andrea Rodericks (consultant, India) and Nabina Shresta (consultant, Nepal). Ben Ramalingam (consultant, UK) undertook the innovation desk review from the UK. The team in Nepal was joined by DEC/HC staff/members Karuna Amatya (Oxfam Nepal for week two), Frances Crowley (DEC, UK), Monique Morazain (Save the Children Canada for week two) and Anthony Scoggins (Oxfam Canada for week one).