



## MEDIA BRIEFING 25 October 2015

# The Nepal Earthquake Six Months On: What needs to happen now?

## Background

*It is six months since the 7.6 magnitude Gorkha earthquake destroyed more than half a million houses and affected more than eight million people in Nepal. <sup>1</sup> It left close to 9,000 people dead, and over 100,000 people were displaced. <sup>2</sup> But the people of Nepal have shown remarkable resilience and have started to rebuild their homes and their lives.*

*A month after the earthquake, the Government of Nepal set up the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and conducted a post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) in order to begin the recovery process as soon as possible. This process, however, has so far been plagued with delays due to the absence of a legally-mandated NRA and a fuel crisis that has crippled the nation for almost a month now. The result: confusion about reconstruction plans, and delays in delivering critical humanitarian support and services to affected communities.*

*This situation needs to be urgently addressed and recovery and reconstruction put back on track through the passage of an urgent bill that would reinstate the NRA, as well as addressing other barriers to the effective delivery of much needed humanitarian support before winter sets in.*

## Rebuilding homes and preparing for winter

Rebuilding more than 850,000 totally destroyed and damaged houses across a wide geographical area involves a massive recovery effort and requires policies and systems to achieve scale in social mobilization, training, information, financing materials and quality assurance.<sup>3</sup>

The government planned to provide a cash grant of NPR 15, 000 (\$150) to all families whose houses were fully damaged by the earthquake. Many humanitarian and development organizations are also providing Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) sheets to the affected families. A recent survey done by the UN Shelter Cluster showed that only 62 percent of affected families had received government cash assistance for shelter support and only 43 percent had received CGI sheets.<sup>4</sup>

Surviving in a CGI shelter throughout the upcoming winter – starting in November – will be difficult for families, especially for the elderly; children and new born babies; and pregnant and lactating mothers. A study by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) showed that 138,000 of the female population in Nepal are, or will be, pregnant in the next 12 months, and living across 14 of the most affected districts.<sup>5</sup> Many of the areas that these women are living in are at high altitude (over 1,000m above sea level) where the average minimum temperature in the winter months falls below zero degrees centigrade.

Moreover, 90 percent of respondents to the Shelter Cluster survey that was conducted with 19 Village Development Committees (VDCs) living at an altitude of between 750m and 3,000m said that they have inadequate resources to survive winter. To date, 58,690 people continue to live in 120 displacement sites across 13 districts,<sup>6</sup> and it is estimated that 81,000 households are in need of support to survive the winter season.<sup>7</sup>

### **The story of Ganga Parajuli**

Ganga Parajuli, 35, is a woman from Bhaktapur district who is landless. Ganga and her family have been living as informal settlers for as long as she can remember. She has lived her whole life without the facilities and privileges that come with having a land ownership certificate. Ganga worries that this situation may not change, even for her children.

Ganga used to work at a hotel as a housekeeper in Telkot, while her husband worked as a wage worker. She is currently living in a temporary shelter after her house on a relative's land was destroyed by the devastating earthquake that struck six months back on 25 April 2015. The hotel where she used to work was also damaged by the earthquake, and she became jobless.



*'[The] earthquake made us homeless and jobless. We had built a small house but the earthquake destroyed it. All that's left is the remains of our house and debt that we took to construct it.'*

*'We received NPR 15,000 from the government and utilized it to buy medicines for our son and make the temporary shelter. It would be much better if we instead received a small piece of land from the government.'*

Ganga Parajuli (October 2015). Photo: Roshani Kapali/Oxfam

## Reviving livelihoods and food security

The Gorkha earthquake affected the livelihoods of 2.29 million households and 5.6 million workers across 31 districts, of which 51 percent were women. This has resulted in the loss of 94 million work days and NPR 17bn of personal income in the 2015–2016 financial year.<sup>8</sup>

Around one million smallholder farmers, across 24 districts, and women and elderly-headed farm households have suffered the most.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, nearly 3.5 million people were considered vulnerable with immediate food needs, out of which 1.4 million people were considered highly vulnerable and requiring immediate food assistance.<sup>10</sup> According to the July 2015 report of the Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP), 529,000 people across 233 VDCs in 11 districts remain 'highly' and 'severely' food insecure<sup>11</sup>.

Daily wage earners have also suffered a great deal after the earthquake. Many of them ran out of work as there was a drastic shortfall after the earthquake. Even after five months, many complain that their earnings remain inadequate and lower than before the earthquake.

In order to support daily wage workers, humanitarian and development organizations have supported 1.29 million people through programmes that have covered debris management and safe demolition; community infrastructure and livelihood recovery; and restoration of critical local services.<sup>12</sup>

Food security and livelihoods work needs to transition now from relief to resilience. Livelihoods must be strengthened so that they are less vulnerable to the range of shocks faced, including floods, landslides, and droughts.

## Inclusive reconstruction and recovery

Women, children and the elderly, as well as people living with disabilities and other ethnic and caste-based minorities, were disproportionately affected by the earthquake. Inequality, exclusion and discrimination against these social groups have not only shaped who has died as a result of the earthquake, but also determined their capacity to cope with and respond effectively to the disaster.<sup>13</sup> More than half of those who perished were women and girls.<sup>14</sup>

Various civil society and international non-government organizations are working to address the needs of women, particularly targeting female-headed households. More than 23,000 female-headed households benefitted from debris removal and rehabilitation of community infrastructure. Meanwhile, almost 10,000 women and girls have accessed female-friendly spaces and 21,200 women received dignity kits.<sup>15</sup>

However, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) is of particular concern in temporary settlement sites, with incidents reported in Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Dolakha.<sup>16</sup> Trafficking of young women and girls has been on the rise, as women are forced to seek other sources of income to support their families.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, a narrow asset base, the burden of domestic work and limited access to economic resources, combined with the lack of alternative livelihoods and limited ownership of land, will significantly hinder recovery of women compared to men, who have more livelihoods options. However, women's dominance in the agricultural and informal sectors and their unique capacity to drive resilience building of communities can play a crucial role in the recovery and rebuilding if supported appropriately.<sup>18</sup>

## Landlessness

About 25 percent of the population is landless in Nepal.<sup>19</sup> Some were landless before the earthquake and were living in rented houses; others became landless as a result of the earthquake and subsequent landslides.

### The story of Kamala Khadka

Kamala Khadka is 26 years old and living in Lalitpur district, Nepal. She lives with her husband and their four year old son. Kamala is landless. Her family was allowed to live in a house on some landowner's land as she was working in his fields. Her husband works as a decorator. The earthquake destroyed the house that they lived in along with the grain they were storing.

They managed to construct a corrugated iron shelter on the landowner's land, but they had to pay rent to him as Kamala could no longer work as she had to take care of her son who has been sick since the earthquake. The landowner now says that he wants the land back in a few months, and Kamala and her family will have nowhere to go. Her husband's work has also dried up, as fewer people want decorating since the earthquake.

Kamala said that her family had not yet received any support from any organization. They did not receive the original financial support from the government because they did not have their own house to claim for the compensation.



*'We have not received any support from the government. The government discriminate against us because we are landless. We are landless but we are also victims.'*

Kamala Khadka, October 2015. Photo: Roshani Kapali/Oxfam

The government has agreed to secure public land and make it available for more permanent and safe settlement sites. However, plans for this are yet to be finalised and guidelines disseminated. In the meantime, people are still living in temporary settlements. Without land they have limited access to support, as documentation or proof of ownership is needed to claim. With temporary settlements closing, these people may be forced into more vulnerable situations.

## What needs to happen now?

Nepal has made significant achievements in reducing poverty, seeing a decline from a staggering 33.54 percent in 1990 to 16.4 percent in 2013, clearly meeting the first goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) of halving extreme poverty by 2015.<sup>20</sup> But while this has been achieved, a significant share of the population remains clustered around the poverty line. Over 70 percent of people in Nepal live on less than \$2.50 a day and over 90 percent on less than \$4 a day.<sup>21</sup> This segment of the population remains vulnerable to any major economic shock or natural disaster.

The PDNA states that the earthquake may have pushed an additional 700,000 people into poverty by 2016. What further aggravates this situation is the deep-seated inequality that pervades across Nepali society. Gender discrimination, as well as other forms of social inequality, is deeply entrenched in the traditions and culture of the country. While the new Constitution has partially addressed issues around citizenship rights, poor and single women are still less likely to own land. In addition, traditional norms of the caste system, whilst officially banned, still govern much of daily life.

The government rightly proposes that recovery and reconstruction should be equitable and inclusive, ensuring that benefits of the process reach everyone equally and empower local communities in the process. In order for this to happen, the government needs to immediately act on the following:

- Parliament needs to urgently pass a bill that reinstates the NRA so that the momentum can be regained in terms of developing recovery and reconstruction plans. Critical information and guidelines must reach local government authorities, as well as affected communities, so that implementation can commence immediately.
- Urgently address barriers to the delivery of humanitarian goods and services before winter sets in. The government and other concerned parties must immediately resolve the ongoing fuel crisis, ensuring that urgent humanitarian activities for recovery and reconstruction continue unhampered. This should include ensuring delivery of shelter provisions for those who are still in temporary shelters; blankets, mattresses, fuel and stoves; as well as adequate livestock shelter and grain storage to prevent further risk of food insecurity.
- Ensure that shelter and livelihoods recovery are prioritized and fully integrated into reconstruction plans. Plans need to give special consideration to women and marginalized groups, especially those without land, to ensure that inequalities are addressed and not reinforced.
- Establish clear mechanisms for the genuine participation of communities at district and village levels. Strategies should be designed with community engagement at the centre. Special focus and attention should be given to ensuring meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups.

### **Oxfam's Earthquake Response Programme in Nepal**

Oxfam was one of the international non-government organizations in Nepal to immediately respond to the 25 April earthquake. It has been working in seven of the 14 most affected districts: Gorkha, Nuwakot, Dhading, Sindhupalchowk, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. In the first three months, or the emergency period, it provided emergency food, water, shelter, latrines and awareness surrounding hygiene and sanitation to more than 400,000 people across these districts. Oxfam is now working in the early recovery phase, where it has prioritized providing improved temporary shelters, winterization kits, income generating opportunities for skilled and unskilled labour, and sustainable livelihoods support.

To date, Oxfam has supported 445,687 people in seven of the worst affected districts. Oxfam has distributed 55,000 shelter kits, 50,000 hygiene kits and constructed approximately 8,000 emergency latrines across the seven districts. They have also assisted almost 10,000 households with food and 30,000 farmers with rice seeds to ensure they did not miss the planting season. Oxfam's Earthquake Response Programme will continue until 2017.

# Notes

- 1 National Planning Commission (2015). Nepal Earthquake 2015: Post Disaster Needs Assessment. National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal.  
[http://www.npc.gov.np/images/download/PDNA\\_volume\\_BFinalVersion.pdf](http://www.npc.gov.np/images/download/PDNA_volume_BFinalVersion.pdf)
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Shelter Cluster Nepal (2015). Housing and Settlements Recovery: The need for a support approach. Nepal Earthquake 2015, Shelter Cluster Nepal Position Paper.  
[https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/nepal\\_recovery\\_2015\\_07092015.pdf](https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/nepal_recovery_2015_07092015.pdf)
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 National Planning Commission (2015) *op.cit.*
- 6 UNOCHA (2015). Humanitarian Bulletin: Nepal earthquake. <http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/humanitarian-bulletin-nepal-earthquake-issue-04-final-issue-1-30-september-2015>
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 National Planning Commission (2015) *op.cit.*
- 9 National Planning Commission (2015) *op.cit.* Smallholder farming households are defined as those with less than 0.7 hectares of land, and owning three to five livestock.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 UNOCHA and NeksSAP (2015). Nepal Food Security Bulletin, Issue 45.  
[http://neksap.org.np/uploaded/resources/Publications-and-Research/Food-Security-Bulletins/FSB\\_45\\_English.pdf](http://neksap.org.np/uploaded/resources/Publications-and-Research/Food-Security-Bulletins/FSB_45_English.pdf)
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 National Planning Commission (2015) *op.cit.*
- 14 National Planning Commission (2015) *op.cit.*
- 15 Gender Working Group (2015). Gender Equality Update No. 5. Response to the Nepal Earthquake. [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gender\\_equality\\_update\\_no\\_5\\_-\\_17th\\_september\\_2015.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gender_equality_update_no_5_-_17th_september_2015.pdf)
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Lal Prasad Sharma (2015, 26 June). Human trafficking in Pokhara on the rise. *The Kathmandu Post*. <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2015-06-29/human-trafficking-in-pokhara-on-the-rise.html>
- 18 National Planning Commission (2015) *op.cit.*
- 19 IRIN (2010, 8 December). Nepal: Land Tenure Reforms “Urgently Needed”  
<http://www.irinnews.org/report/91313/nepal-land-tenure-reforms-urgently-needed>
- 20 The World Bank Group (2014). Country Partnership Strategy for Nepal FY 2014–18. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/06/19/000470435\\_20140619122159/Rendered/PDF/888660WP0P13310on0WBG0CPS0201402018.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/06/19/000470435_20140619122159/Rendered/PDF/888660WP0P13310on0WBG0CPS0201402018.pdf)
- 21 *Ibid.*



Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations working together in over 90 countries: Oxfam America ([www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)), Oxfam Australia ([www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au)), Oxfam-in-Belgium ([www.oxfamsol.be](http://www.oxfamsol.be)), Oxfam Canada ([www.oxfam.ca](http://www.oxfam.ca)), Oxfam France ([www.oxfamfrance.org](http://www.oxfamfrance.org)), Oxfam German ([www.oxfam.de](http://www.oxfam.de)), Oxfam GB ([www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)), Oxfam Hong Kong ([www.oxfam.org.hk](http://www.oxfam.org.hk)), Oxfam India ([www.oxfamindia.org](http://www.oxfamindia.org)), Oxfam Intermon ([www.oxfamintermon.org](http://www.oxfamintermon.org)), Oxfam Ireland ([www.oxfamireland.org](http://www.oxfamireland.org)), Oxfam Italy ([www.oxfamitalia.org](http://www.oxfamitalia.org)), Oxfam Japan ([www.oxfam.jp](http://www.oxfam.jp)), Oxfam Mexico ([www.oxfamexico.org](http://www.oxfamexico.org)), Oxfam New Zealand ([www.oxfam.nz](http://www.oxfam.nz)), Oxfam Novib ([www.oxfamnovib.nl](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl)), Oxfam Quebec ([www.oxfam.qc.ca](http://www.oxfam.qc.ca)). In Nepal, we work with local civil society organisations and government authorities to promote rural livelihoods, and vulnerable communities' resilience to climatic shocks and disasters. We strive to empower community people, especially women and other socially and economically excluded groups.



**The National Network of Community Disaster Management Committee (NCDMC)** is a network of disaster victims working in communities across Nepal, to ensure the voices of those impacted by disasters such as earthquakes are represented in decision making by Government of Nepal.



**Himalaya Conservation Group (HCG)** is a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to promote Himalayan environment conservation from local to regional level through field studies, research works, and implementation and advocacy of safe and sustainable development approaches focusing primarily on disaster and climate change framework, geo-disaster management framework, and research-based technology framework.

**Humanitarian Accountability Monitoring Initiative (HAMI)** is the convergence of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with the right holders including women, children, indigenous nationalities, Dalit, youth, senior citizens, and persons with disability, LGBTIs/MSM, and other marginalised and excluded groups. It emerged after the devastating earthquake on 25 April 2015 and the continuous aftershocks which caused huge human and property losses in Nepal. HAMI monitors humanitarian accountability in times of emergency, documents issues, learning and best practices and facilitates discussion between the right holders and the duty bearers so that the voices of the victims are heard and addressed in times of emergency, recovery and reconstruction. HAMI aims to influence decisions affecting community people to bring about change at scale.