

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**O**n 25 April 2015, a powerful 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal. Thousands were killed, tens of thousands were injured, and hundreds of thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed. A second major earthquake struck less than three weeks later, killing hundreds more and adding to the destruction. National and international aid providers quickly responded with emergency aid, but it took several weeks to institutionalize coordinated relief efforts directed by the government.

The Government of Nepal, donor agencies, and aid providers now need to plan for long-term, sustainable recovery. The development of effective plans requires learning from relief efforts to date and understanding the needs and challenges that lie ahead. The Independent Impacts and Recovery

## **Aid delivery and effectiveness**

Aid largely focused on emergency relief in the first two months after the 25 April earthquake. The main types of aid provided were tarps, food, household goods, and either corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets or cash assistance for temporary shelters. There was a strong emphasis at the local level that larger cash grants as well as permanent solutions for the displaced were urgently

Monitoring for Accountability in Post-earthquake Nepal (IRM) contributes to this by assessing five interrelated issues: (i) aid delivery and effectiveness; (ii) politics and leadership; (iii) social relations and conflict; (iv) protection and vulnerability; and (v) economy and livelihoods.

The report is based on qualitative field research that took place between 9 and 27 June 2015. Six teams of researchers conducted interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation in a total of 36 wards in six earthquake-affected districts. The study included three severely hit/high impact districts (Dolakha, Gorkha, and Sindhupalchok); two crisis hit/medium impact districts (Makwanpur and Okhaldhunga); and one hit/low impact district (Syangja).

needed to prevent aid dependency and begin rebuilding of homes and resume livelihoods as soon as possible.

Aid distribution was delayed and uneven, especially in the initial days and weeks after the earthquake when multiple aid providers acted without the coordination needed to effectively target and distribute relief,

often focusing their distribution on more accessible areas along highways and intact roads. This led to increased confusion and tension in some places but the formalization of local relief distribution committees improved coordination and ensured more equal distribution patterns. Further, local initiatives and distribution mechanisms played an important role in bringing aid to places that would otherwise have received little attention.

The government coordinated relief efforts through District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs), which channeled relief to the Village Development Committee (VDC) level to be distributed through relief distribution committees and their ward level subcommittees. Coordination and early response efforts at the district and VDC level were initially chaotic. Reasons for this most commonly related to insufficient disaster preparedness at the local level, delayed and unclear government directives to facilitate efficient coordination, the absence of government officials from affected districts and VDCs at the time of the earthquake, Nepal's mountainous terrain which makes accessing remote places difficult, and the second earthquake on 12 May 2015. After the initial difficulties of the first few weeks, however, DDRCs were generally effective, though their actual degree of control over relief distribution varied from one district to another.

VDC relief distribution committees generally worked cooperatively, succeeding in

avoiding local tensions and political infighting, and emphasized equal distribution of aid across all affected households. Further, they had strong ties with local communities and were fast to collect detailed information on local damages and needs. This increased people's trust in local relief committees and residents often assessed their efforts as fair. The absence of consistent independent monitoring and complaints mechanisms, however, meant relief distribution committees could not be formally held accountable. Citizen participation in decision-making on relief distribution was marginal in most places with All Party Mechanisms dominating local relief committees.

Levels of satisfaction with the aid received were mixed but higher in high impact areas where more aid reached and distribution was more even. Dissatisfaction was mostly directed at the government and was particularly high in relation to delays in the government response and the assessment of damages.

Damage assessments of homes were conducted inconsistently across affected areas, often in multiple rounds, leading to confusion and tensions around beneficiary lists created on the basis of these assessments. As a result, damage assessments were one of the most contentious processes of relief distribution, leading to protests in several places and difficulties and delays in the distribution of cash grants to affected households.

### **Politics and leadership**

The impact of the earthquake on political dynamics and leadership has been limited. There were no significant changes to the

roles of or levels of support for political parties and their leaders at the local level. On the contrary, the role of political parties and

leaders in local relief distribution committees was instrumental. Their leadership was rarely challenged and officials generally relied on All Party Mechanisms to take decisions and address conflicts related to relief distribution.

In general, there was no strong evidence that relief was politicized along party lines.

### **Social relations and conflict**

Social cohesion and intra-community solidarity remained strong after the earthquake in VDCs visited and no major security concerns and conflicts were reported. There was no evidence of distribution of aid based on willful social discrimination. Nevertheless, some groups felt discriminated against and resentments over perceived inequality were

Cooperation between political parties was reported to be good in relief committees, likely facilitated by the equal distribution model adopted in most VDCs. Political parties were, however, often accused of influencing the outcome of damage and needs assessments.

sometimes talked about with references to caste, ethnicity, or religion, indicating the potential for social tensions. Resentment over damage assessments and their impact on the reconstruction phase as well as over resettlement procedures was raised frequently and identified as a potential source of conflict.

### **Protection and vulnerability**

Vulnerability has increased since the earthquake, particularly in highly affected areas where people were displaced due to landslide risks. The displaced faced greater uncertainty and were more vulnerable to threats and conflicts and more exposed in inadequate temporary shelters.

No incidences of crimes and abuse targeting women, children, or the elderly were reported. Nevertheless, these groups are generally considered to be more vulnerable and often showed greater signs of distress. A lack of representation of women in government and relief distribution mechanisms is likely to mean that some of the issues affecting women are not voiced in official settings and are left unaddressed. High levels of damage

to schools meant that the education and routines of many children were interrupted. And the elderly faced greater difficulties accessing relief and cash grants.

There were strong indications that structural inequalities and prevalent forms of exclusion and discrimination will negatively affect the recovery of marginalized groups. People with limited or no access to extra-local resources, wider social networks, and local government offices are left with fewer options to cope with the impact of the earthquake, leading to some resentment against those perceived to be more privileged. People in geographically isolated locations, who faced greater difficulties in accessing relief, often perceive this as discrimination.

## **Economy and livelihoods**

The impact of the earthquakes varied by source of livelihood and depended largely on the level of damage caused by the earthquakes. Proportionally, the most significant impact was on farmers in wards highly affected by the earthquakes due to landslides or the risk of future landslides. For some manual laborers, the impact was positive because demand and wage rates increased after the earthquake, but the demand for skilled labor dropped. Several small business owners faced a complete loss of livelihood after the earthquakes as their stocks had been destroyed and no compensation was provided. The tourism industry was also highly affected.

The sale of assets remained low and was restricted to the sale of livestock. Borrowing significant amounts of money was uncommon, though most people planned to borrow money in the future depending on the scope of government financial assistance for home reconstruction and livelihood recovery and special interest rates. The flow of remittances, which are a major source of income for households in affected areas, was largely uninterrupted and even increased in some places after the earthquake.