



Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal

Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Phase 1
Qualitative Field Monitoring: June 2015



The Asia Foundation



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September 2015

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Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Phase 1: **Qualitative Field Monitoring**

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The Asia Foundation

456 California Street, 9th Floor
San Francisco, CA U.S.A. 94104
www.asiafoundation.org

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PREFACE

Responding effectively to disasters requires knowledge of the needs of the affected, how they evolve over time, and the effectiveness of aid in addressing these. The international aid apparatus is a well-oiled disaster response machine. Within days, emergency relief can be deployed, pulling bodies from rubble and providing basic sustenance and shelter to those who have lost their homes. A now-standardized tool, the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, provides information on what immediate needs are and estimates the financial costs of replacing infrastructure and repairing economic damage and impacts on different sectors such as health and education. This helps determine the overall level of official development assistance and government money needed to repair damage, compensate for losses, and determines where and on what such money should go. This usually becomes the basis for a joint early recovery and development plan which guides the response over the short, medium, and longer terms.

Such damage assessments are valuable but their focus on quantifying impacts and costs means key information needed for disaster responses to be effective and accountable is missed. Issues such as local social relations are important, for recovery requires communities to work together to

overcome their challenges. Politics and leadership, at the local and higher levels, will help determine the extent to which aid is employed effectively. Understanding how local structures and norms change over time requires in-depth research in affected communities.

Further, ‘one shot’ assessments, conducted shortly after the disaster, are unable to capture how social, economic, and political impacts—and associated needs—change over time. The evolution of such needs will not only be a function of the intensity and nature of the impacts of the disaster but also of the disaster *response*. Aid may replace people’s homes, get people working again, or avert disease; however, it may also have negative impacts on the social and economic fabric, for example, by accentuating competition over scarce resources or changing local power relations. Understanding these evolving impacts and needs at the local level, and the interaction with the provision of aid, is vital for the effective delivery of emergency, early recovery, and development assistance. This requires continued visits to communities to see how things are changing.

This report is part of a larger, longer-term project aimed at tracking changing needs, and the impact of aid responses, in areas of Nepal that were affected by two devastating

earthquakes in April and May 2015. The report presents findings from in-depth fieldwork conducted around two months after the first quake. A sister report, outlining findings from a large representative quantitative household survey conducted at the same time, is released in parallel. In order

to track changes over time, future rounds of work—two per year—are planned.

We hope that the findings will help aid providers, Nepali and international alike, respond effectively to help the people of Nepal recover.



Patrick Barron
Regional Director for Conflict & Development
The Asia Foundation

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The study was conducted by a team of researchers from Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN), led by Sudip Pokharel. Analysis of the data was done by Anurag Devkota, Lena Michaels, Sudip Pokharel, Charlotte Ramble, Jacob Rinck, and Luke Wagner, who co-authored the report with Sasiwan Chingchit and Patrick Barron.

Special thanks goes to the team of researchers for their dedication in the field: the lead researchers Anubhav Ajeet, Amy Leigh Johnson, Subhash Lamichhane, Shekhar

Parajulee, Nayan Pokharel, and Ujjwal Prasai; and researchers Garima Adhikari, Prapti Adhikari, Sara Devkota, Ujjwal Ram Ghimire, Rukh Gurung, Tanka Gurung, Chitra Magar, Chiran Manandhar, Binu Sharma, Shahani Singh, and Aakash Upraity.

A number of people provided useful inputs at various stages, including in the formation of the research questions, finalization of the sample, and analysis of the data. They include George Varughese, Ed Anderson, Nandita Baruah, Anup Phayal, and Sunil Pillai.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 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.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

APM	All Party Mechanism
CDO	Chief District Officer
CGI	Corrugated galvanized iron
CPN-M	Communist Part of Nepal-Maoist
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
DDRC	District Disaster Relief Committee
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LDO	Local Development Officer
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Programme
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
NA	Nepal Army
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPR	Nepali Rupees
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
RDC	Relief Distribution Committee
RPP	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
RPP-N	Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal
UCPN(M)	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
UN	United Nations
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizen Forum

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	VI
LIST OF ACRONYMS	X
LIST OF FIGURES	XIII
LIST OF TABLES	XIV
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Focus Areas	3
1.3 Methods	4
1.4 Report Structure	6
2. LEVELS OF IMPACT	7
2.1 District Impact	8
2.2 VDC and Ward Impact	9
2.3 Needs Arising from the Earthquake	14
3. AID DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS	19
3.1 Aid and Assistance Received	21
3.2 Levels of Satisfaction with Aid Received	28
3.3 Distribution of Relief	29
3.4 Coordination of Relief Distribution	35
3.5 Transparency of Relief Distribution	46
3.6 Damage Assessments and Beneficiary Lists	48
4. POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP	55
4.1 Political Party Activities	56
4.2 Emergence of New Leadership and Institutions	58
4.3 Politicization of Relief	60
5. SOCIAL RELATIONS AND CONFLICT	63
5.1 Security	64
5.2 Social Cohesion	64
5.3 Potential Sources of Conflict	66

6. PROTECTION AND VULNERABILITY	71
6.1 Factors Increasing Vulnerability	72
6.2 Women, Children, and the Elderly	78
6.3 Structural Discrimination and Inequality	82
7. ECONOMY AND LIVELIHOODS	85
7.1 Common Sources of Livelihood	86
7.2 Impact on Farming, Labor, Small Businesses, and Other Sources of Livelihood	88
7.3 Sale of Assets	98
7.4 Debt and Credit	99
7.5 Remittances and Labor Migration	102
8. CONCLUSION	105
ANNEX A: MAP OF LOCATIONS STUDIED	109
ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY	110

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 2.1:</i>	Damages to homes in districts visited	8
<i>Figure 2.2:</i>	Number of deaths and injured in districts visited	9
<i>Figure 2.3:</i>	Damages to homes in wards visited	11
<i>Figure 2.4:</i>	Damages to public infrastructure in wards visited – by levels of ward impact	12
<i>Figure 2.5:</i>	Immediate needs identified by ward leaders – by ward damage (# wards)	15
<i>Figure 2.6:</i>	Immediate needs versus aid received by ward	15
<i>Figure 2.7:</i>	Needs over the next three months identified by ward leaders – by ward damage (# wards)	16
<i>Figure 2.8:</i>	Needs over the next three months identified by different by administrative unit (%)	17
<i>Figure 3.1:</i>	Types of aid received in wards visited	23
<i>Figure 3.2:</i>	Satisfaction with the process of relief distribution and coordination by district impact	28
<i>Figure 3.3:</i>	Local assessment of relief distribution and coordination by ward damage	29
<i>Figure 3.4:</i>	Local assessment of external relief response in meeting needs	29
<i>Figure 3.5:</i>	Level of aid received (average number of distributing organizations registered) by ward impact	33
<i>Figure 3.6:</i>	Government mechanism of relief coordination	35
<i>Figure 6.1:</i>	Level of damage to schools by level of ward impact	80
<i>Figure 7.1:</i>	Households that received remittances by number of wards	102
<i>Figure 7.2:</i>	Households for which remittances were the biggest source of income	103
<i>Figure 7.3:</i>	Remittances sent through IME Bank, Charikot branch, Dolakha (daily average)	103

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1.1:</i>	Selected districts by level of impact	4
<i>Table 7.1:</i>	Primary source of livelihood of households by ward	87
<i>Table 7.2:</i>	Extent of impact on livelihoods	88
<i>Table 7.3:</i>	Impact on farmers' livelihood by level of ward damage	90
<i>Table 7.4:</i>	Impact on laborers' livelihood by ward damage	94
<i>Table 7.5:</i>	Impact on small business owners' livelihood by ward damage	95
<i>Table 7.6:</i>	Impact on other sources of livelihood by ward damage	97
<i>Table 7.7:</i>	Wards in which at least some households have borrowed money	99
<i>Table B.1:</i>	Criteria for VDC/municipality selection	112
<i>Table B.2:</i>	Ward damage classification	113



Photo: Tenzing Paljor



Photo: Aneta Buraityte



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A devastating earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015, killing thousands, injuring tens of thousands more, and damaging and destroying hundreds of thousands of houses, as well as public infrastructure. Less than three weeks later, on 12 May 2015, another major quake hit, bringing further destruction and misery. Since then, aid providers—Nepali and international alike—have mobilized, providing emergency relief and, over time, cash and in-kind support aimed at helping the affected recover.

Beyond the immediate disaster response, Nepal now needs to plan for sustainable recovery. Doing so effectively requires learning from the post-disaster relief efforts to date, by assessing how effective the aid response has been; how the challenges that people in the earthquake zone face have changed since the initial days, and what challenges are likely to emerge in the coming months; and how the earthquakes, and the disaster response, shape economic recovery, social relations, leadership, and politics in Nepal.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

This report, which is based on in-depth qualitative field research conducted by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) and produced by The Asia Foundation, seeks to contribute to answering these questions. A second report based on a quantitative survey is published in parallel.¹ Together the reports present findings from the first round of what is planned to be a longitudinal monitoring of how people are recovering, the evolving challenges they face, how the aftermath

of the earthquake is affecting economic and social structures and political choices, and the role aid is playing in shaping these dynamics.

The field research on which this report is based was conducted from 9-27 June 2015, around six to eight weeks after the 25 April earthquake. It involved six teams conducting interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation in six earthquake-affected districts (Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Makwanpur, Okhaldhunga, and Syangja). The research primarily focused on the impact of the disaster and the aid response at the ward and VDC/municipality level.

¹ The Asia Foundation (2015). *Aid and Recovery in Post-Earthquake Nepal – Quantitative Survey: June 2015*. Kathmandu and San Francisco: The Asia Foundation

1.2 Focus Areas

The report focuses on five thematic areas and seeks to answer key questions for each of these:

Aid delivery and effectiveness:

How did affected villagers and communities experience the recovery effort at the local level and how effective was the effort in addressing their needs? Here, the report examines the types and volumes of aid provided and shortfalls, how assistance was targeted and delivered, coordinating mechanisms (including the government's institutional framework for coordination), how decisions were made and complaints resolved (including levels of local participation), and the levels of satisfaction with the response.

Politics and leadership:

What was the impact of the disaster and aid effort on the dynamics and leadership of local formal and informal institutions? This analyzes whether the aid effort has resulted in changes in the structure, influence, and leadership of local institutions. The report examines the roles of political parties and their leaders in local relief efforts and whether there have been any changes in local political dynamics.

Social relations and conflict:

What were the impacts of the disaster and subsequent aid effort on social relations such as relations within settlements and groups (among caste, religious, and ethnic groups) as well as inter-settlement and inter-group relations? Did patterns of violence and crime emerge that are directly related to the disaster and aid effort? Here, the report examines whether social relations changed in the aftermath of the earthquake and what the (potential) sources of conflict are.

Protection and vulnerability:

Did new vulnerabilities and challenges of protecting vulnerable groups arise due to the impact of the earthquake? The report discusses factors increasing people's vulnerability and examines which groups are particularly vulnerable.

Economy and livelihood:

What are the ongoing impacts of the disaster and the aid response on occupational groups such as farmers, entrepreneurs, and casual laborers? The report examines issues related to livelihoods, including debt and credit, land tenure, access to markets, in- and out-migration, and remittances.

1.3 Methods

This report is based on in-depth qualitative field research conducted from 9-27 June 2015. Researchers visited 36 wards in 18 VDCs/municipalities in six earthquake-affected districts: Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Gorkha, Okhaldhunga, Makwanpur, and Syangja.² Researchers spent around two days in each ward and one to two days in the district headquarters to finalize the selection of VDCs and gather information on the district-level dynamics of the aid response.

The research teams used key informant interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation to gather two kinds of data. First, they collected standardized data on the five focus areas at the district, VDC, and ward levels. This facilitated comparisons of the impact, emerging issues, and the disaster response across research sites. Second, teams provided a descriptive

picture of the five research areas through their in-depth field research.

The report focuses on the impact of the earthquake and the response at the ward level. Sampling of locations was done at three levels—district, VDC, and ward—to maximize variation in two key factors that were predicted to affect the nature and speed of recovery: (i) the degree of impact of the earthquake; and (ii) the degree of remoteness.

Districts were selected to vary by level of earthquake damage: three high impact, two medium impact districts, and one low impact district were chosen (Table 1.1). Affected districts were categorized based on government data on the number of houses destroyed.

Table 1.1: Selected districts by level of impact

High (severely hit)	Medium (crisis hit)	Low (hit)
Dolakha	Okhaldhunga	Syangja
Gorkha	Makwanpur	
Sindhupalchok		

² See Annex A for a map of research locations and Annex B for a fuller discussion of the research methodology.

Levels of impact within these districts varied widely. VDCs were chosen based on information on levels of impact and remoteness gathered by research teams at the district headquarters.³ Wards were then selected based on information gathered in the VDCs on levels of impact and location of the wards. In each VDC, teams conducted research in the ward where the VDC hub (center) is located as well as a less accessible ward located up to a day's drive or walk away from the VDC hub.

Limitations

Two important caveats apply with respect to the research design and results of this study. One is the timing of the research, the second, restrictions in terms of which VDCs could be reached.

Timing of the research: Field research commenced around six weeks after the 25 April earthquake. During the period of the research, emergency aid had already been distributed and government mechanisms were relatively well established in most places visited. This timing has several important implications. First, the actions of citizen relief groups, as well as NGOs and INGOs were less visible than they would have been several weeks earlier, when the distribution of emergency relief was more widespread. As a result, information in this report focuses largely on

the government response at the local level. Second, the period was relatively calm with earlier tensions around relief distribution largely resolved and conflicts rare due to an emphasis on equal distribution of incoming aid, strong social cohesion at the local level, and the fact that larger assistance packages were not yet being allocated.⁵

During the analysis stage, wards were classified separately to reflect the significant variance in levels of impact observed by research teams. Wards were classified according to an estimate of the actual level of damage taking into account the percentage of homes completely destroyed and homes rendered unlivable.⁴

Research locations: Research teams did not visit extremely remote areas. Given time constraints, as well as the increasing risk of landslides during the early monsoon period, teams were unable to visit very remote and inaccessible VDCs. VDCs considered remote for the purposes of this study were therefore those that were situated more than half a day's drive or walk from the district headquarters.

³ Teams were instructed to select VDCs of varying impact levels based on the same thresholds for levels of impact used for categorizing districts. However, at the time of the research, official information on damages at the VDC level was not published and teams relied on data shared by government offices and OCHA at the district headquarters to select VDCs and wards of varying impact levels.

⁴ A full explanation of the sampling strategy and ward classification is provided in Annex B.

⁵ See Section 5 for details on security issues, potential sources of conflict, and why social cohesion had remained strong in most places during the research period.

1.4 Report Structure

The report continues as follows:

- **Section 2** describes the levels of impact in the districts and wards visited and the needs arising as a result.
- **Section 3** discusses the types and volumes of aid distributed, patterns of aid distribution as well as government mechanisms for assessing damages and coordinating aid, local involvement in decision-making around aid, and levels of satisfaction with the response.
- **Section 4** focuses on the impact on local leadership structures and political dynamics as well as the role of political parties in aid distribution.
- **Section 5** discusses the impact of the earthquake and the response on social relations and identifies issues that may lead, or already have led, to conflict.
- **Section 6** focuses on protection issues and factors that increase vulnerability in affected areas, especially for some groups.
- **Section 7** describes the impact on livelihoods and the economy in the wards visited and discusses the implications this may have for recovery.

The report concludes with a discussion of main findings and policy implications.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

2. LEVELS OF IMPACT

The impact of the two earthquakes on 25 April and 12 May 2015 was observed to be significant in high impact districts as well as in several wards of medium and low impact districts visited. The government has published data, aggregated at the district level, on the number of deaths, injured, and missing, losses to livestock, and damages to public infrastructure and private houses.⁶ This data does not provide information, however, on the economic, social, and political impact of the earthquake—areas this research focuses on. Further, the lack of publicly accessible government data on VDC and ward level damages meant that targeting of aid and resources happened largely at the district level with negative consequences for highly impacted areas in less impacted districts. The impact was found to be most severe where communities were displaced by landslides or the risk of landslides, which created uncertainties over their long-term settlement and livelihood options.

⁶ Disaster Risk Reduction Portal, Nepal government: <http://drrportal.gov.np>

2.1 District Impact

In the high impact districts visited, the official count of houses that were reported fully and partially destroyed is higher than the total number of houses in the 2011 census (Figure 2.1).⁷ This may relate to

underreporting in the 2011 census, unclear definitions of what constitutes a household, as well as inadequate figures reported in local level damage assessments which were used as the basis for the official data.⁸

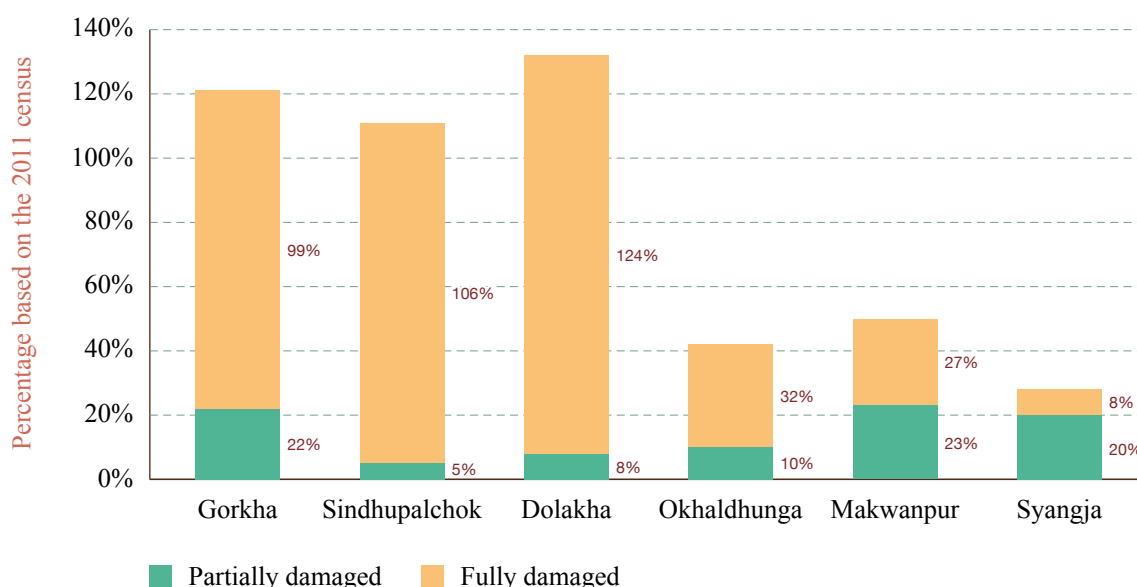


Figure 2.1: Damages to homes in districts visited⁹

In terms of deaths and injuries, the most highly affected district visited was Sindhupalchok, with a recorded total of 3,532 deaths and 1,573 injuries, both significant-

ly higher than any other district visited (Figure 2.2). The total numbers of casualties in Gorkha and Dolakha were still very high, 449 and 177 respectively, with 952 injured

⁷ Houses were officially categorized as ‘fully damaged’ (unlivable and requiring demolition and/or reconstruction), ‘partially damaged’ (needs repairing) and ‘normal’ (livable without repair). Red, yellow and green stickers were assigned to the above-mentioned categories of damages.

⁸ The PDNA prepared by the National Planning Commission states that data on damaged houses was extracted from the Home Ministry’s Disaster Risk

Reduction Portal. The information on the portal is based on VDC level assessments conducted either by VDC relief distribution committees (RDCs) or district technical teams. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PDNA-volume-B_0.pdf. See Section 3.6 for more information on damage assessments.

⁹ Data from <http://drrportal.gov.np>

in Gorkha and 662 in Dolakha. Though the medium affected districts of Okhaldhunga and Makwanpur had a comparatively low number of casualties, 229 injuries were re-

corded in Makwanpur. Syangja was the least affected district from the research sample, with only one death and 23 injuries recorded in the district.

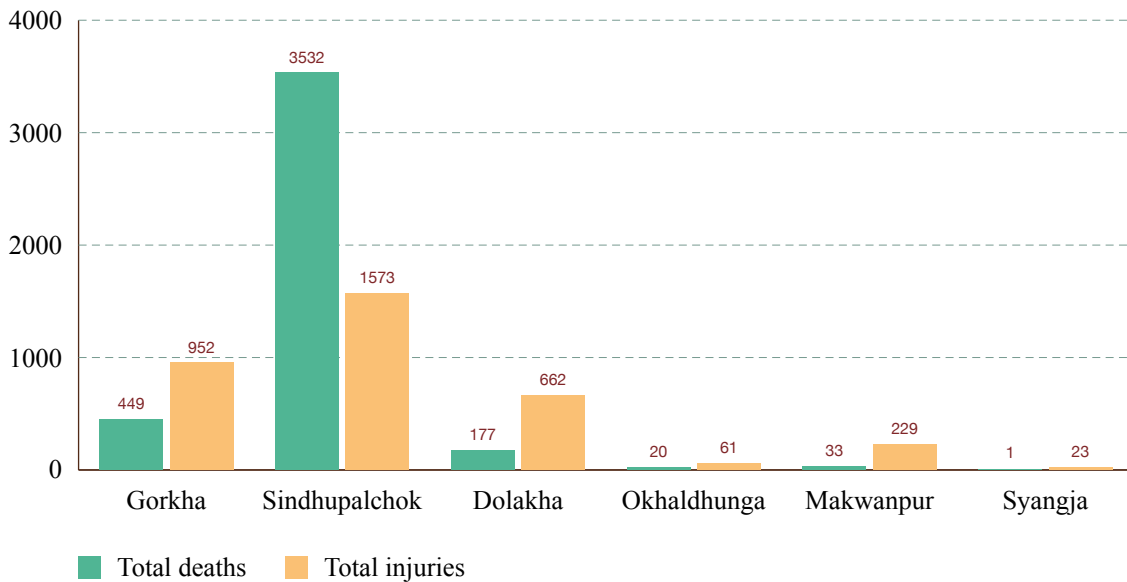


Figure 2.2: Number of deaths and injured in districts visited¹⁰

2.2 VDC and Ward Impact

This research found that the impact of the earthquake varied from ward to ward, particularly in medium and low impact districts—even within VDCs. Some wards in medium impact districts, for example, were almost as highly affected as wards in high impact districts in terms of destruction of homes and infrastructure and displacement

caused by landslides. This posed challenges in medium and low impact districts in terms of identifying the most affected areas and in targeting limited aid to those most in need. In high impact districts, aid could be targeted more easily as levels of destruction were more uniform and higher volumes of aid were distributed.¹¹

¹⁰ Data from <http://drrportal.gov.np>

¹¹ See Sections 3.3 and 3.4 for more information on the targeting of aid.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

Damages to homes

In all wards visited, more houses were observed to be unlivable (damaged to the extent that they had to be rebuilt) than were completely destroyed (collapsed and no longer accessible).

A significant number of houses in the wards visited were reported to be damaged to the extent that they could no longer be used but not all of these houses were completely destroyed in the sense of having collapsed fully (Figure 2.3). Many of the ‘unlivable’ houses were not officially classified as fully destroyed in government damage assessments, suggesting that the labels ‘fully

destroyed’ and ‘partially destroyed’ were applied inconsistently. This is significant as the official classification of damages has consequences for households’ entitlement to assistance schemes and has already led to high levels of discontent with damage assessments and protests from affected homeowners.¹²

Ward level impact varied significantly, especially in medium and low impact districts.

Damages to homes observed at the ward level did not always conform to district level data on the percentage of houses that

¹² See Section 3.6 on government damage assessments for further details.

were destroyed. In many wards in medium and low impact districts, for example, the levels of destruction were observed to be significantly higher than the aggregated district level data would reveal (Figure 2.3).

This was particularly acute in the medium affected districts of Okhaldhunga and Makwanpur, where the impact was uneven with some wards nearly as strongly affected as those in high impact districts.

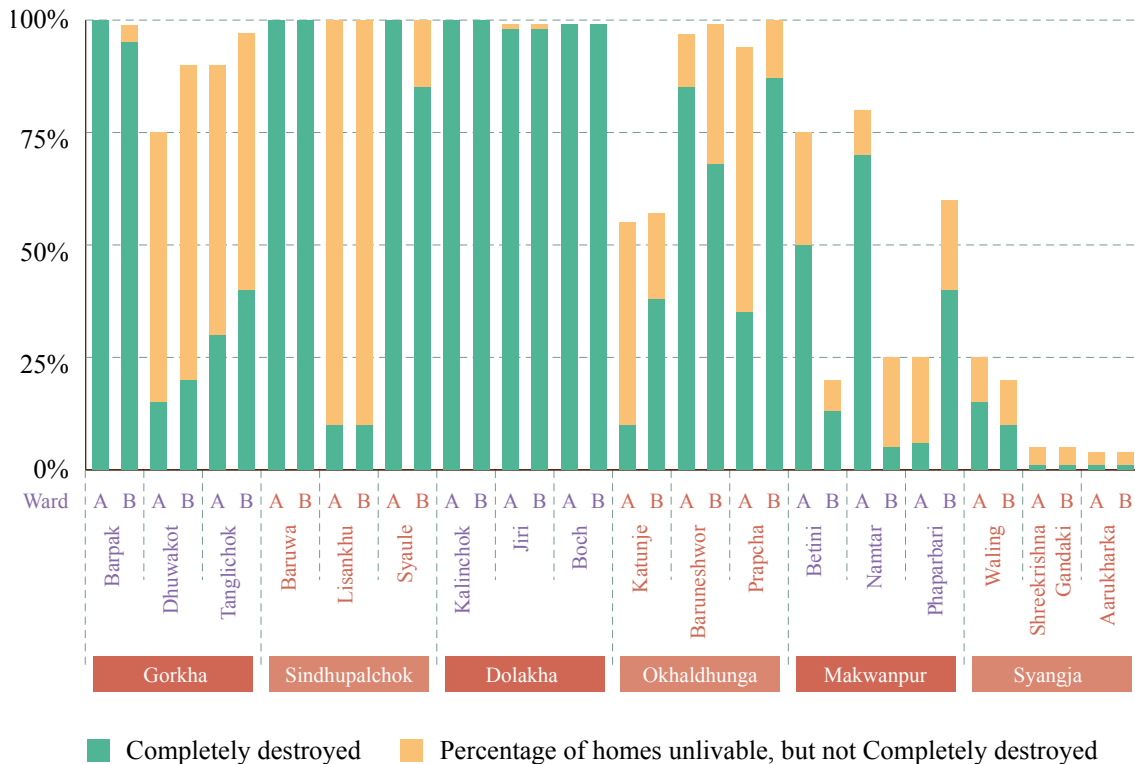


Figure 2.3: Damages to homes in wards visited¹³

Damages to public infrastructure

The level of destruction to public infrastructure in wards visited was correlated with the level of damages to homes (Figure 2.4). In the highest impact wards, 45% of public infrastructure was reported to be fully destroyed, and 47% partially destroyed, leaving only 8% undamaged. Damaged public infrastructure includes VDC offices,

health posts, schools, army barracks, post offices, irrigation channels, police posts, and phone towers. The VDC office in Prapcha,

¹³ This data is based on information collected by research teams from VDC officials and ward leaders and on direct observations in wards visited.

Okhaldhunga, which was destroyed during the 1996-2006 Maoist insurgency, has not been rebuilt. This suggests that it might be a very long time before the infrastructure

damaged by the earthquakes is reconstructed. Though temporary VDC offices were set up relatively easily, destruction proved more problematic for schools and health posts.

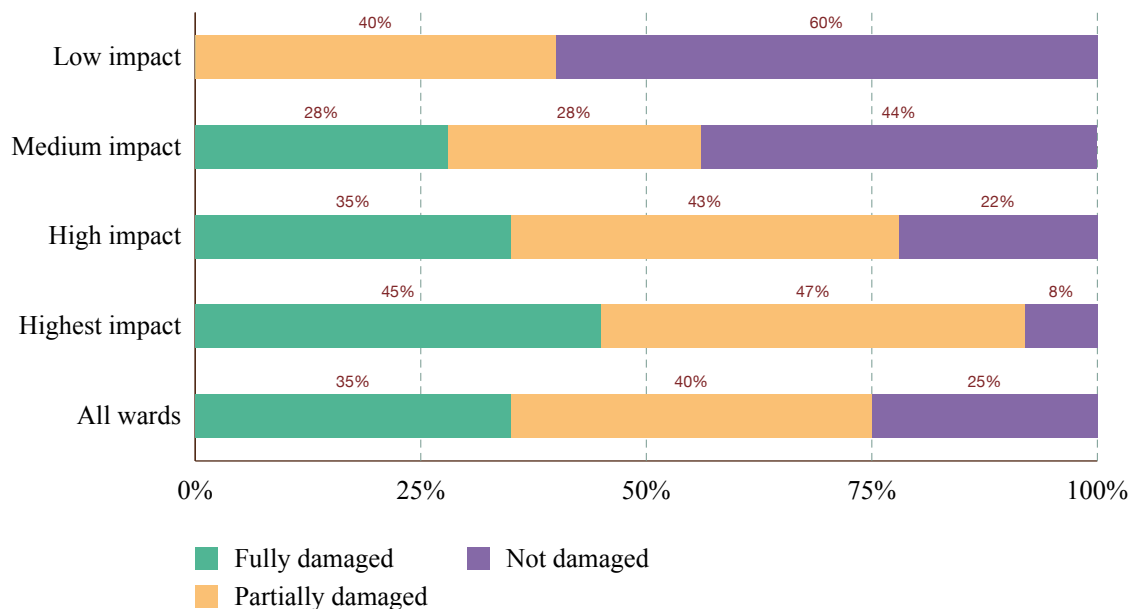


Figure 2.4: Damages to public infrastructure in wards visited – by levels of ward impact¹⁴

Landslides and displacement

In more than half of the VDCs visited, landslides or the risk of landslides posed a direct threat to settlements and were the most common cause of displacement.

At the time of research, geological assessments to determine landslide risks had not been carried out in most places visited, making it difficult to estimate the full long-term impact of the earthquakes on the landscape, settlements, and livelihoods. The monsoon rains were expected to only further degrade affected land, with many large landslides having already occurred and people fearing further landslides, especially where fissures and cracks were visible in land above or

around settlements. As a result, many households had to resettle within or outside their VDCs, for the monsoon at least.

¹⁴ This data is based on information collected by research teams at VDC offices and direct observations at the ward level. Each public building was considered as a unit and the percentage calculated on this basis.

Settlements displaced by landslide risks were most common in high impact districts: Baruwa and Syaule VDCs in Sindhupalchok, Kalinchok VDC in Dolakha, and Barpak, Dhuwakot, and Tanglichok VDCs in Gorkha. However, in medium impact districts, too—in Prapcha VDC in Okhaldhunga, and Namtar VDC in Makwanpur—communities had to resettle either in temporary community shelters or on the land of relatives and friends to escape potential landslides. In Syangja, a

low impact district, risks for one settlement in Waling municipality, which is generally vulnerable to landslides, has increased after the earthquake created cracks in the surrounding hills. People in this settlement had not yet moved but demanded to be resettled to a safer location. The scale of displacement ranged from all inhabitants being displaced from a ward in Prapcha to a few households or single settlements in other instances.¹⁵

Households from landslide-affected settlements mostly moved to temporary shelters in safer locations, generally to joint shelters within the same VDC.

Only in one VDC, Baruwa in Sindhupalchok, had people moved further away to the Kathmandu valley. Resettlement to temporary shelters was either organized by communities themselves (taking joint decisions on how and where to relocate for the time

being) or by local authorities (allocating public land and facilities to affected households). Some households, however, did not move to joint shelters and instead chose to resettle on land they owned elsewhere or with relatives.

It remained unclear whether communities were displaced temporarily or permanently.

Displaced households were generally waiting for the monsoon to finish, professional geological assessments of their land to ascertain the risk of landslides, as well as official policies on resettlement before taking further decisions on whether or not they would have to move permanently. In the

short term, the displaced were exposed in open shelters and uncertain what the future would hold for them. Long-term displacement will likely bring more challenges that will have an impact on the recovery of these communities.¹⁶

¹⁵ Displacement sites in post-earthquake Nepal were defined as sites where five or more displaced households sought temporary shelter. IOM defined sites of 20 or more families as priority sites (initially the definition was 50 or more families). <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2015-06-15%20-%20Nepal%20EQ%20DTM%20Report%20Round%202.pdf>.

These definitions leave out individual households that were displaced or those who chose to resettle independently.

¹⁶ See Sections 5 and 6 for more information on the impact of landslide risks and temporary resettlement on displaced communities.

2.3 Needs Arising from the Earthquake

Immediate needs

Emergency shelter, water and sanitation, education and schools, and reconstruction were among the highest ranked immediate needs in wards visited.

This reflects high levels of damages to houses and infrastructure, especially schools and people's wish to begin rebuilding as soon as possible. Food, health/medical care, needs and damages assessments, resettlement, as well as cash/credit were also ranked highly as priorities (Figure 2.5). The need for resettlement was mentioned only in highest and high impact wards while medium impact wards were more likely to cite other needs and damage assessments as an immediate priority. This can be explained by the fact that higher impact wards were more likely to be affected by landslide risk and associated displacement, while the varying levels of damages to houses in medium impact wards increased the need for thorough assessments.¹⁷

Farm inputs and replacing livestock killed during the earthquake were rarely mentioned as needs. This does not mean that the farming sector and livestock were not affected by the earthquake but is likely a reflection that these were not seen priorities in the immediate period, nor needs that were widespread across households; though a lot of households owned livestock, only a handful of households were farming livestock as their primary source of livelihood in all wards visited in Gorkha, in Jiri in Dolakha, in Waling in Syangja, and in Betini and Namtar in Makwanpur, and none in the other wards visited.¹⁸

Food and shelter were deemed as priority immediate needs despite wide distribution.

Local officials seemed conscious of the importance of storing food, especially for displaced communities, and identified ongoing food assistance as necessary (Figure 2.6). Further, the tarps that had been provided as

emergency shelter were seen as inadequate for the medium to longer term, and unsuitable for the monsoon period. Shelter assistance therefore also remained a priority.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Section 3.6 on government damage assessments for why these were more contested in medium impact areas.

¹⁸ See Section 7 for more information on damage to farm inputs and livestock.

¹⁹ The vulnerabilities arising from shelter life and displacement are described in Section 6. See Section 3.1 for details on shelter and food assistance provided.

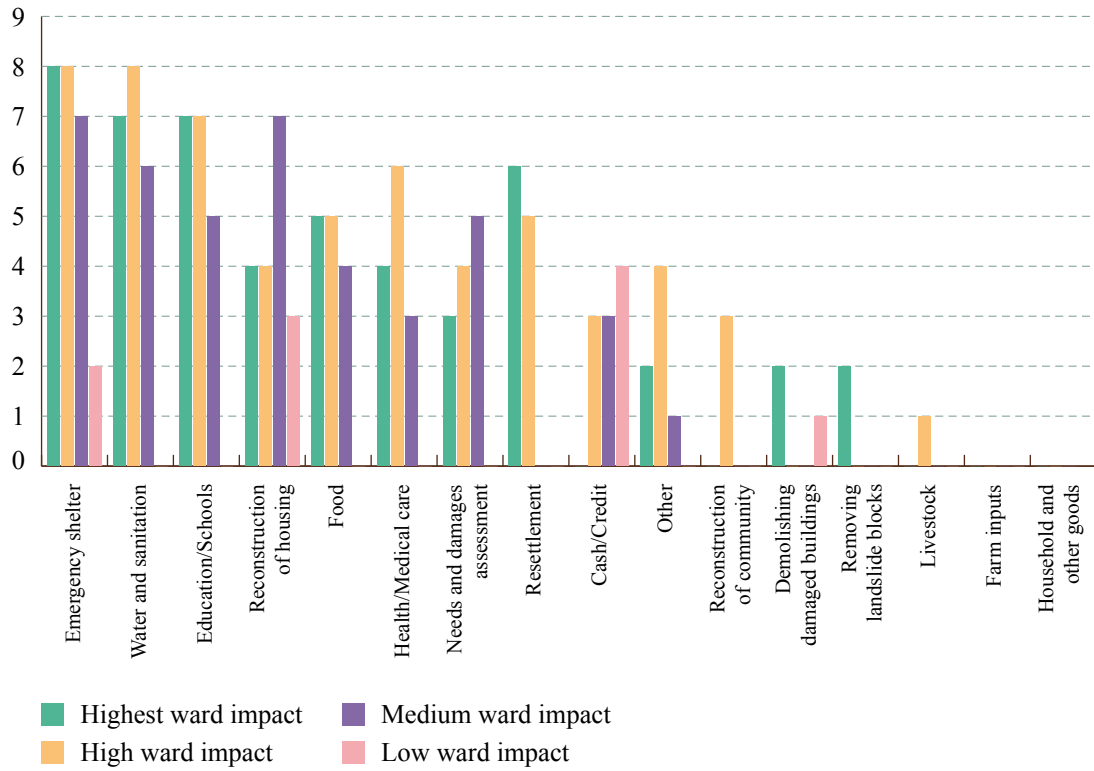


Figure 2.5: Immediate needs identified by ward leaders – by ward damage (# wards)

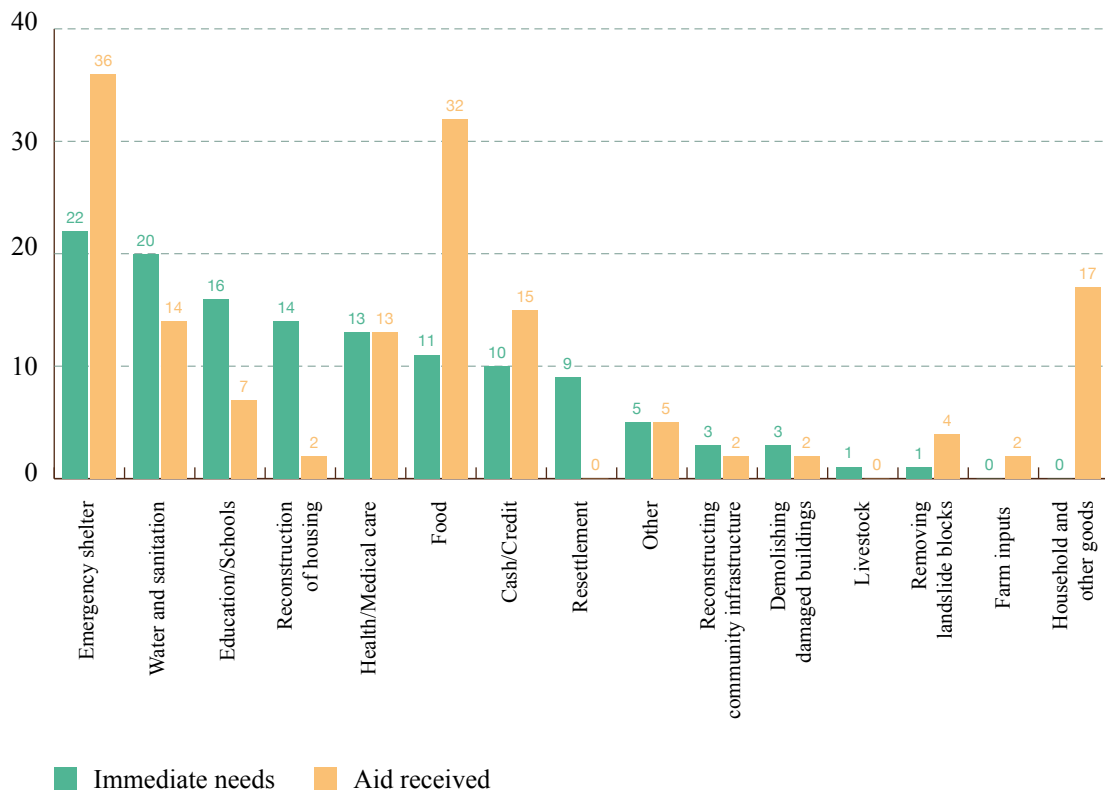


Figure 2.6: Immediate needs versus aid received by ward

Needs over the next three months

Priorities for the medium term differed significantly from immediate needs with a stronger emphasis on reconstruction of housing and cash/credit.

This is unsurprising as people across wards visited, eager to rebuild their homes, were waiting for clarity on reconstruction and resettlement policies as well as the types of cash grants they would receive as assistance for rebuilding. Medical care, resettlement and education/schools as well as food were also ranked highly as needs for the

coming months. The highest impacted wards emphasized reconstruction, resettlement, medical care, and education/schools more strongly than less impacted wards. The fact that schools and education were seen as an important need for the medium to longer term reflects the high levels of destruction of schools observed in most wards.²⁰

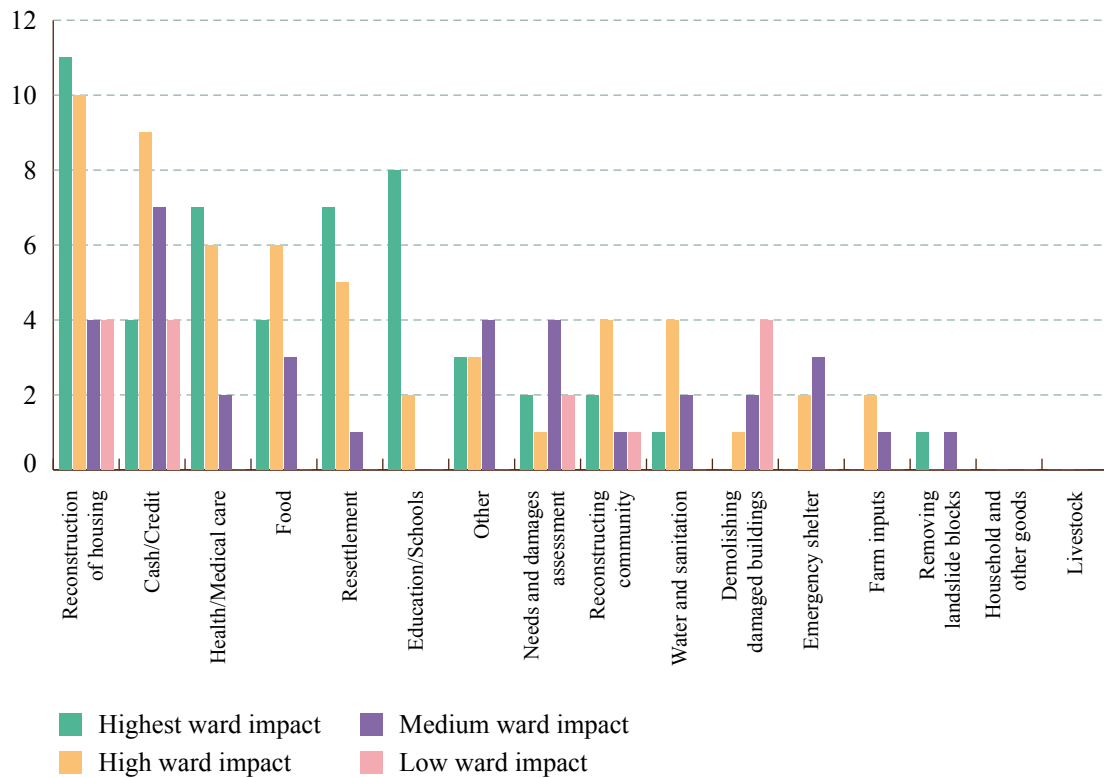


Figure 2.7: Needs over the next three months identified by ward leaders – by ward damage (# wards)

²⁰ See Section 6, Figure 15, for levels of damage to schools.

Government officials agreed with ward leaders on the importance of reconstruction and cash/credit assistance for the medium term.

VDC and district officials ranked medium term needs similarly to ward leaders, all listing reconstruction of housing, cash/credit, health and medical care, food and resettlement as priorities for the coming months (Figure 2.8). In addition, they considered reconstruction of community infrastructure an important medium term need. Compared to ward leaders, however, government officials ranked schools and education as well as

damage and needs assessments significantly lower. It is potentially concerning that district level authorities did not rank schools as a priority given widespread damages to schools. The same holds true for assessments. The need for better assessments was generally voiced strongly at the local level due to high levels of dissatisfaction with the assessments that had already been conducted by the districts.²¹

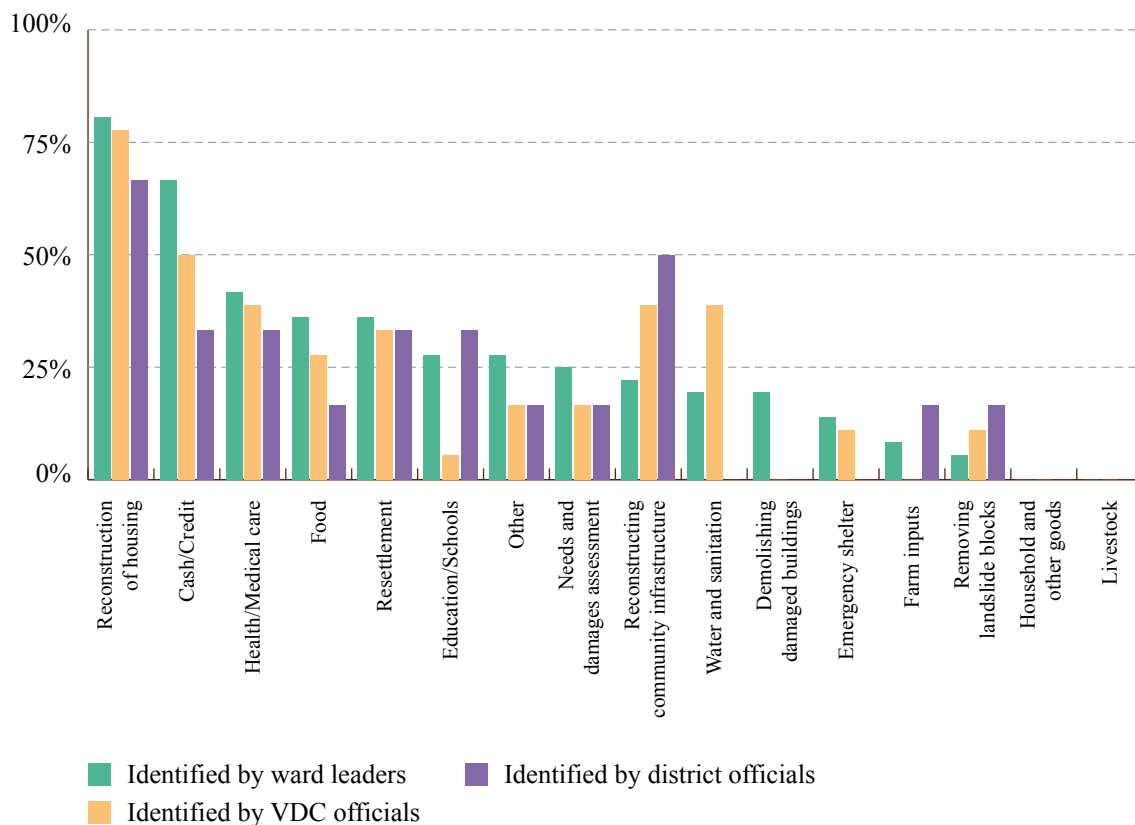


Figure 2.8: Needs over the next three months identified by different by administrative unit (%)

²¹ See Section 3.6 for details on damage assessments.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

The need for geological land assessments

Due to widespread displacement caused by landslides or fissures in the land, geological assessments were frequently cited as an urgent need.

People commonly emphasized the need for geological assessments. While officials emphasized the need for resettlement for displaced communities, those affected preferred the option of returning to their land but demanded professional assessments of the land and the risk of landslides to determine whether the land was safe or not. In the absence of such assessments, and

clearly formulated resettlement policies, those displaced from land that was severely affected by the earthquake remained unsure whether they could return to rebuild their houses and continue farming, posing challenges to their recovery.²²

²² See Section 6 for details on vulnerabilities and uncertainties related to displacement.



3. AID DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Photo: Tenzing Paljor

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) sheets²³ 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 needed to prevent aid dependency and to allow for the rebuilding of homes and the resumption of livelihoods.

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.

²³ Corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets are also commonly referred to as zinc sheets, or in Nepali, *jasta*.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

However, 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 and VDC relief committees were generally effective, though their actual degree of control over relief distribution varied.

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 (APMs) dominating local relief committees.

Damage assessments of homes were conducted inconsistently across affected areas, often in multiple rounds, leading to confusions

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.

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

3.1 Aid and Assistance Received

Immediate relief

The main types of aid received were emergency shelter, food, and household goods.

In the first two months after the earthquake, aid largely focused on emergency relief rather than medium to long-term recovery. Beyond the immediate impact of the earthquakes, the monsoon rains seem to have increased the need for a focus on fast relief—particularly in the form of emergency shelter, the priority of most aid providers. This delayed other forms of assistance. The fact that landslide and roadblock risks during the monsoon is making aid delivery to many settlements in Nepal's hills and mountains difficult, if not impossible, likely led to a decrease

in the number of aid providers present at the local level as well as to the delay in the implementation of schemes that assist recovery and reconstruction.²⁴ Long-term reconstruction and recovery schemes were

²⁴ As the UN's top relief official said: "We have a short window to reach people in need... With the monsoon season just around the corner, our imperative is to provide communities with roofs over their heads and meet their basic needs." <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50817#.VdmJ0tOqqko>

not yet established in places visited. In a few places, however, temporary centers for healthcare, women or learning were set up, mostly by INGOs and NGOs.

The primary relief materials distributed in nearly all wards, including medium and low impact wards, were emergency shelter and food (Figure 3.1). All wards visited received materials for emergency shelters, mostly tarps, and all wards except for two wards in Okhaldhunga and two in Makwanpur received rice, lentils, cooking oil, salt and, more rarely, packaged food such as noodles and biscuits.²⁵ In addition, around half of the

wards received household and other goods, such as kitchen utensils, blankets, mosquito nets, buckets, soap and hygiene packets, and one-third received assistance in the form of cash, water and sanitation, and healthcare/medical relief. Assistance for demolishing buildings and the reconstruction of private houses and public infrastructure was not yet provided in most places even though this was frequently cited as a priority. Some people, emphasizing the need for longer term assistance, even asked that food and emergency shelter aid be stopped to allow for a focus on rebuilding.

Food assistance was provided to households in relatively small volumes but was considered adequate in nearly all wards—in many wards it was even reported to be more than enough.

While the exact volumes of aid received at the ward and household level were difficult to determine, people across wards visited reportedly received some food aid albeit often in relatively small amounts.²⁶ Rice was the main food item distributed, generally in large bags of 50 kilograms of which most households had received at least one. A smaller amount of lentils, salt, and cooking oil was also commonly distributed in wards visited. The volumes of food aid were

initially smaller and targeted to displaced households or those whose houses had fully collapsed but were increasingly distributed evenly to all households as the amount of aid increased. Only in lesser impacted wards in medium and low impact districts, where many households were comparatively unaffected, did food aid remain targeted at those who had lost houses or were considered disadvantaged for other reasons.

²⁵ The extent to which aid reached extremely report areas cannot be assessed in this report as teams did not visit areas more than one-day's walking distance from the nearest road.

²⁶ Official records on aid distribution did not always include sufficient details to determine volumes of aid distributed at the ward and household level, even though the government tried to control and coordinate aid distribution by centralizing all relief before distributing from the district level to VDCs and from the VDC level to wards. These records

varied from one VDC to another in terms of the time period they cover as well as the level of detail on smaller or individual aid providers. Most VDC Secretaries indicated that individuals and ad hoc volunteer groups often circumvented government channels and did not report their distributions, which made record keeping of their distributions difficult or impossible. In the early days of the relief response, official channels were bypassed more often and, as a result, records from this time are particularly inconsistent.

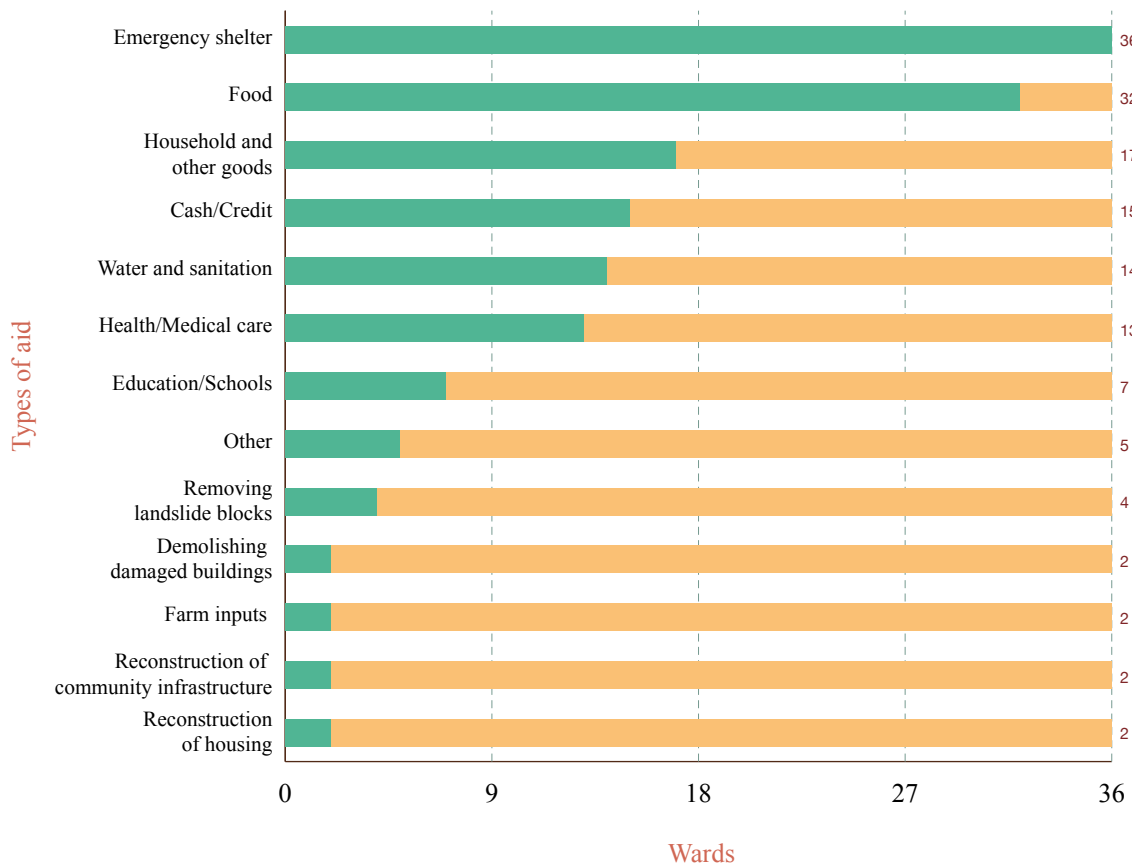


Figure 3.1: Types of aid received in wards visited²⁷

With enough food for the coming weeks or even months, markets functioning again, many affected households continuing to farm their fields, and people accessing previously stored food, food aid was no longer seen as a priority by many in the wards studied. Only in one VDC, Baruwa in Sindhupalchok, did people voice concerns over food shortages and pointed out the need for continued food aid—likely due to the fact that this VDC was particularly highly affected by landslides displacing many and preventing people from resuming farming. In other VDCs, people said food aid was welcome in the initial days after the earthquake but emphasized that they now needed assistance for rebuilding instead. It is important to note here that displaced

communities and those in inaccessible areas that are completely cut off during the monsoon period likely continue to be in need of food rations. However, the wide distribution of food, even to households that could have managed without, meant that many merely saw it as a welcome but not crucial type of assistance.

²⁷ This data is based on direct reports and observations of aid received at the ward level.



Photo: Nayan Pokharel

Aid in the form of emergency shelter was most widely distributed but often considered inadequate.

Nearly all affected households had received relief materials for emergency shelter, generally tarps. In all wards visited those whose houses were damaged had received at least one tarp, often more. In wards in high impact districts, most households had received 3-6 tarps each, and some had been provided tents instead. However, tarps were considered too small for entire families and were used alongside other materials to build more sturdy emergency shelters or not used at all. In two wards in Okhaldhunga, for example, people used the tarps they had received to dry grains and food in the

sun rather than for shelter. They said the tarps were not sturdy enough and too small and instead built temporary shelters from materials salvaged from their homes and cowsheds.

People in all wards visited preferred more sturdy shelters to protect them against monsoon rains and many had begun building shelters from bamboo, wood and CGI sheets salvaged from their damaged homes or given by donors. Others had bought CGI sheets with cash assistance provided or from savings and loans where cash assistance had

not reached. In wards where not all homes were fully destroyed, people continued to use partially damaged houses for cooking, as storage space or shelter—reluctantly and aware that their homes might be unsafe—since emergency shelters did not provide sufficient protection. With improvised

emergency shelters constructed immediately after the earthquake considered inadequate, shelter was seen as a priority in all wards visited. People also hoped for timely assistance to rebuild their homes to move out of emergency shelters as soon as possible.

Cash grants

Small cash grants for immediate relief were provided by the government and other donors but distribution was inconsistent.

Government cash assistance was distributed to earthquake-affected households on the following basis: NPR 30,000 for families of the deceased to cover funeral costs; NPR 15,000 for households whose homes were classified as ‘fully damaged’ to cover costs for emergency shelters; and NPR 3,000 for households whose homes were classified as ‘partially damaged’.²⁸ While this assistance was to be spent on immediate needs related to emergency relief, delays and inconsistencies in distribution meant that many households had not yet received cash assistance from the government by June 2015. Reasons for this varied. For example, the process of distributing NPR 30,000 to families of the deceased was found to differ significantly in Sindhupalchok and Dolakha districts. In Sindhupalchok, people were asked to show citizenship certificates to receive the grant. In Dolakha, in contrast, citizenship certificates were not required as officials assumed that people might have lost their documents in earthquake. In Gorkha, INGOs and NGOs were designated to distribute cash grants on behalf of the

government in some areas, causing many to believe that these grants were distributed in addition to government cash grants. And in Syangja district, funds were insufficient and the local government distributed NPR 5,000 instead of NPR 15,000 to those whose houses were reported ‘fully destroyed’. However, most households with damaged homes had not even received NPR 5,000 in the places visited in Syangja. In Dolakha, given delays in the distribution of cash assistance and emergency relief, the district administration decided to distribute NPR 2,000 to all affected households immediately after the earthquake but not everyone had received this assistance and accounts of how this money was distributed varied from VDC to VDC.

Logistical and security challenges also hampered the distribution of cash grants. In Dolakha, for example, some VDC officials feared security issues and preferred to distribute cash from Jiri municipality rather than their VDC offices. In some VDCs in Sindhupalchok, too, VDC Secretaries reportedly delayed the distribution of cash grants citing security concerns of traveling to remote places with large sums of money. Distribution from district headquarters or central relief distribution points likely

²⁸ Press Release, Government of Nepal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1 June 2015), available at <http://www.mofa.gov.np/en/news/detail/1081>

increased people's difficulties in accessing cash grants as they would have to travel larger distances to receive their share.

The most common reason for the delayed and partial distribution of government cash grants were difficulties in the process of identifying beneficiaries.

These related to a lack of updated and detailed data on the population, difficulties in determining what constitutes a household (the target unit for cash grants), and highly contested government damage assessments that were used as basis for identifying beneficiaries.²⁹ In several VDCs, locals raised protests against the lists used to determine beneficiaries and VDC officials had to delay or interrupt distribution of government cash assistance, in particular the grants of NPR 3,000 and NPR 15,000 for partially and fully destroyed homes.

No larger cash assistance schemes were provided in VDCs visited.

In some wards, individual donors or organizations were found to have distributed cash grants. For example in Namtar VDC, Makwanpur, Constituent Assembly (CA) members Kamal and Ganesh Thapa reportedly distributed NPR 25,000 to households where a member had died during the earthquake and in Katunje VDC, Okhaldhunga, a farmers' organization distributed NPR 4,400 to 23 households who were members of the organization. These grants, however, were given only to a small number of households.

LGCDP grants

Cash grants to VDCs and municipalities in affected areas, provided by the government, were generally used for purchasing and transporting food aid.

The government provided cash assistance to earthquake affected VDCs and municipalities under the Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP) grant immediately after the 25 April earthquake.³⁰ Decisions on how to spend these grants were to be taken by the respective VDC/municipality offices with the involvement of Social Mobilizers and Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs). Immediate needs of the area, for

²⁹ See also Section 3.6 on identifying beneficiaries and damage assessments.

³⁰ According to the Quake Affected Area focused Immediate Relief Assistance Operational Procedure-2072 BS, the government decided to provide NPR 200,000 to each ward of municipalities in 11 earthquake-affected districts; NPR 900,000 to

253 VDCs in Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, and Dhading; and NPR 450,000 to 242 VDCs in Lalitpur, Kavre, Dolakaha, Ramechhap, and Sindhuli districts. MoFALD later issued a notice to also provide assistance of NPR 450,000 to all 85 VDCs and NPR 200,000 to all wards of three municipalities (Hetauda, Thaha and Siddhicharan) in Okhaldhunga and Makwanpur districts.

example food, temporary shelter, or medical assistance, were to be identified and the funds spent accordingly within one month of receipt. The ways in which this grant was spent, however, varied widely and was not transparent, rarely following the guidelines on timeline and decision-making.

In many places, a large share of the grant was spent on the transportation of relief to the VDC or to more remote wards within the VDC as transport costs had increased significantly in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. For example in Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchok, the relief committee decided to purchase relief materials with the NPR 900,000 they received through the LG-CDP grant. According to the VDC Secretary, it was decided that the committee would purchase 146 sacks of rice, approximately 1-2 kg of rice per person. The committee was able to purchase these goods but had to transport them from Melamchi to Baruwa. They faced difficulties finding a driver willing to transport the supplies for the usual price and, as a result, most of the NPR 900,000 was reportedly spent on transporting the supplies to Baruwa. In other VDCs, too, the grant, or at least a significant share, was spent on transport costs, for example in Prapcha VDC in Okhaldhunga, Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchok, and Barpak VDC in Gorkha.

Apart from transport costs, the grant was mostly used for purchasing food. This did

not necessarily address local needs. In at least two VDCs, it was decided to use the money for food aid simply because spending it for other purposes did not seem possible given the timeline of the grant as well as high costs of other relief materials. In Dhuwakot VDC, Gorkha, it was decided that it would be best to use the grant for repairing water supplies. But given that repairs would take longer than one month—the timeline for spending and accounting for the money—it was used to purchase food instead. In Tanglichok VDC, Gorkha, people needed CGI sheets for temporary shelters. However, since transporting and distributing CGI was difficult, the grant was instead used to provide rice to affected households. Some VDCs took liberties to keep a share of the grant to be spent later: in Lisankhu VDC, Sindhupalchok, a share was reportedly put aside to repair a water source over the coming months.

Occasionally, the grant was channeled to the wards most in need of assistance. In Jiri municipality in Dolakha, for example, cash relief of NPR 200,000 was provided to one of the wards and was distributed among the households. The amount each household received was reported to be NPR 450. In another ward in the same municipality, each household was provided 2.5 liters of cooking oil bought with the LGCDP grant. In Boch VDC in Dolakha, all wards gave their share of the LGCDP grant to one of the wards to repair a broken water facility.

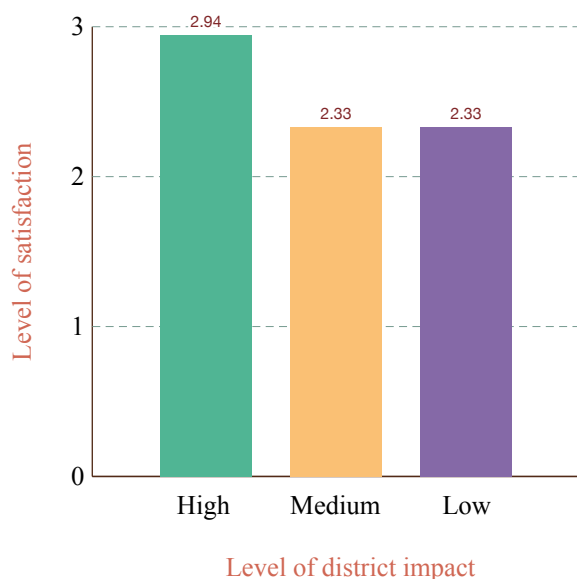
3.2 Levels of Satisfaction with Aid Received

Levels of satisfaction with the aid received were mixed.

As described above, people in areas visited had received some aid but it was difficult to assess whether the volumes received were sufficient. People reported mixed levels of satisfaction with the aid received, generally pointing out that it was enough for the time being but not for the longer term. Worries about the future and how to rebuild without adequate assistance were common and linked to a lack of clarity on

future assistance schemes and the selection of beneficiaries. As such, dissatisfaction was mostly directed at the government, in particular higher levels of government, over inadequate damage assessments and unclear policies.³¹ Satisfaction with local government officials and leaders, however, was higher, due to their fast response in coordinating, monitoring and distributing aid.³²

Satisfaction was higher in high impact areas.



Levels of satisfaction were higher in high impact districts than elsewhere, linked to the fact that these districts received more resources which were mostly distributed equally among households which had been similarly affected. In medium and low impact districts, where households had to be prioritized based on the level of impact and socio-economic status, dissatisfaction was more common (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Satisfaction with the process of relief distribution and coordination by district impact³³

³¹ See Section 3.6.

³² See Sections 3.3-3.5.

³³ 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.

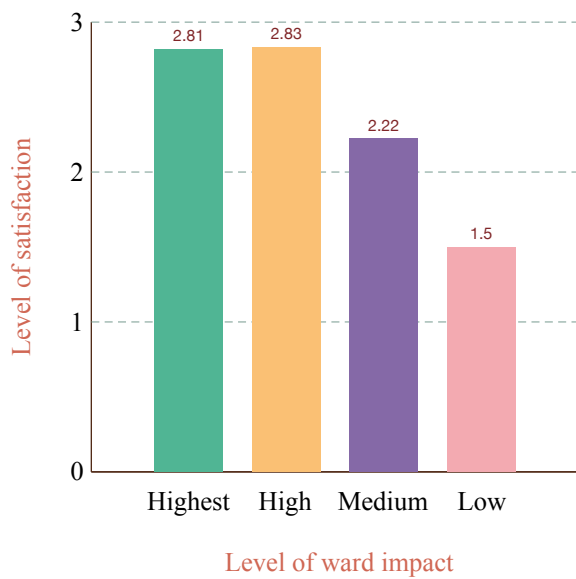


Figure 3.3: Local assessment of relief distribution and coordination by ward damage³⁴

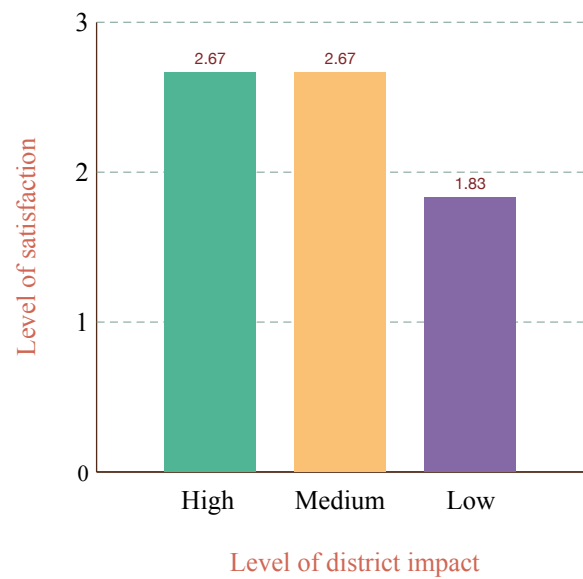


Figure 3.4: Local assessment of external relief response in meeting needs³⁵

The same pattern was found at the ward level with satisfaction greater in highest and high impact wards (Figure 3.3).

Similarly, those in high impact districts were more likely to assess their needs as being met, at least for the immediate term (Figure 3.4).

3.3 Distribution of Relief

Who provided aid?

Aid was provided by multiple donors, especially in high impact districts.

Relief and assistance were provided by a wide range of types of donors: individuals, NGOs/INGOs, volunteers and civil society groups, businesses, politicians, community-

based organizations, security services, and the government. Early on, the army provided emergency assistance while relief materials were mostly distributed through personal

³⁴ 1=very dissatisfied, 5=very satisfied.

³⁵ 1=very dissatisfied, 5=very satisfied.

channels or NGOs/INGOs that already had a presence in the area, and in few places the government. Later, external organizations and the government were reported to be distributing most of the aid. There were some accounts of political leaders and CA members distributing aid but political leaders and party activists were more likely to be involved in coordinating relief through local relief committees as well as volunteer activities than to provide direct assistance. Volunteer groups most frequently distributed relief in accessible and high impact areas but few were still active by mid-June 2015. Local volunteers such as youth groups and political party volunteers, on the other hand, continued to play a role facilitating relief distribution and constructing shelters.

The government's role was primarily to coordinate relief distribution efforts.

The government's role was primarily one of coordinating incoming relief and redistributing within districts and VDCs to ensure aid reached where it was most needed and distributed equally to affected households. Local coordination mechanisms were important in improving the response at the VDC and ward levels and were generally assessed positively.³⁶ Government funds and cash assistance were also made available for affected VDCs/municipalities and households. While people were aware

The Nepal army and security forces were seen as responding most effectively and providing crucial assistance to relief efforts.

The army was reported to have responded quickly and efficiently almost everywhere. Their role in immediate relief, particularly search and rescue as well as clearing rubble

It was difficult to determine volumes of aid given by different aid providers as many distributed aid directly to affected households or individuals without registering their activities at the district or VDC level, especially during the weeks immediately following the earthquake. Further, many donors arrived from outside and returned as soon as they had dropped relief materials, leaving local communities confused about where the aid came from. While the lack of clarity on donors and their activities led to confusion and in some cases conflicts, people generally appreciated the efforts of individual and non-governmental donors in particular for at least bringing some relief during the early days.

of and eager to access government cash assistance, the distribution was inconsistent. Nevertheless, people seemed to look to the government for further assistance for rebuilding and resettlement, waiting for policies and schemes to be implemented. Government assistance was particularly important in places where no other aid had reached, such as Syangja, a low impact district that received little assistance from NGOs/INGOs and other outside donors.

and roads, was widely appreciated. Security forces—the Nepal army (NA), armed police force (APF), and the police—were mobilized across affected areas to assist relief delivery and distribution, protect aid providers, secure the transportation and storage of aid, and facilitate distribution. In Makwanpur, for example, temporary security posts, so-

³⁶ See Section 3.4 on government coordination of relief distribution.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

called command posts, were set up within days after the earthquake in all VDCs and were still present in affected VDCs in mid-June. Their presence was reported to have

made relief distribution easier and safer. The other districts too were quick to send out security forces for emergency assistance and to secure relief distribution.

Where did aid reach?

Aid arrived late in many places, including in VDCs in high impact districts that later received more attention.

In many VDCs visited, assistance was reported to have reached only several days after the earthquake. For example in Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchok, help for the injured reached only after four days when a helicopter arrived to transport them to the hospital

and initial relief in the form of food reached eight days after the earthquake. In this VDC, people had to use food supplies from local shops which quickly ran out, leading to disputes. Once food aid and other assistance arrived, however, the situation improved. In

some wards of Katunje VDC, Okhaldhunga, aid also arrived late, more than a week after the earthquake. In Kalinchok VDC in Dolakha, people had to improvise tempo-

rary shelters from materials salvaged from damaged homes as no emergency shelter relief reached them until several days after the earthquake.

Settlements along roads received more timely assistance and higher volumes of aid, at least in the initial days after the earthquake.

Aid distribution was reported to be higher along highways and roads in all districts. Individual donors, including political leaders and businessmen, as well as ad-hoc volunteer groups and NGOs/INGOs were most likely to conduct their relief efforts in accessible areas, especially during the early days of the response when these donors were more active and distributed aid directly, bypassing government relief coordination mechanisms. For example in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok, people complained about private donors and NGOs

distributing aid only along the highways immediately after the earthquake. In Namtar VDC in Makwanpur, too, people said that settlements along the highway received a larger share of immediate relief. In Boch VDC in Dolakha, which received a large amount of aid due to its location on the road between the district capital and Kathmandu, local people admitted that they received more aid than people in other VDCs because it was on the highway and donors found it convenient to deliver aid there.

Overall, high impact districts received more aid than wards—even high impact ones—in medium and low impact districts.

Records on organizations that registered their aid distribution at the district level indicate that a larger number of organizations provided aid to higher impact districts. The government classification of damage at the district level thus seems to have directly influenced the number of organizations that provided aid and the attention a district received. In Sindhupalchok, for example, over 100 NGOs and INGOs were registered. Gorkha, too, had a high number of registered donors and relief distribution was particularly widespread in terms of volumes and types of immediate relief in Barpak VDC, the epicenter of the earthquake. Few donors visited Dolakha before the second earthquake but there was an influx of organizations and aid when the district was reclassified as high impact/severely hit after 12 May. In Okhaldhunga, a medium impact

district, officials complained that helicopters were sent to high impact districts such as Gorkha, Sindhupalchok and Dolakha, even though Okhaldhunga, a landslide prone district, also urgently needed helicopters to reach remote and cut-off areas after the earthquake.

While the damage in higher impact districts was significantly greater compared to medium and low impact districts, there are also many highly affected wards in lesser-impacted districts (see Figure 3.5). The fact that no official data on VDC and ward level impact was available made targeting at this level difficult, especially for non-government actors. Highly impacted wards in medium and low affected wards had on average half as many registered organizations providing relief to them than in highly impacted wards

in high impact districts. This is likely a key reason why relief distribution was observed to be more problematic in medium and lower impact districts, where insufficient volumes of aid demanded the prioritization of those most in need. In Namtar VDC in Makwanpur, for example, VDC officials were initially unable to distribute aid equally and therefore prioritized economically and socially marginalized households, leading to complaints from other equally affected households. In VDCs visited in Okhaldhunga, aid was also targeted at marginalized groups that were hard hit by the earthquake, for example Dalits in Prapcha VDC.

District and VDC relief coordination mechanisms tried to address this issue by distributing relief according to internal classifications of damages and needs, channeling more organizations to highly affected VDCs and, within these, to the most affected wards. This meant that to some extent, wards received aid proportionate to the level of impact. The wards classified as highest and high impact in this research—some of which are in medium impact districts—had more relief providers registered than those

classified as medium or low impact (Figure 3.5). However, highest impact wards, all of which are located in high impact districts, received more than double the attention compared to high impact wards, many of which are in medium impact districts.

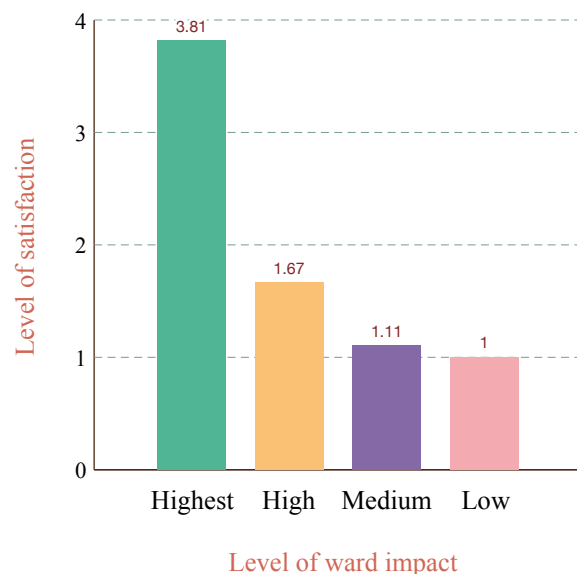


Figure 3.5: Level of aid received (average number of distributing organizations registered) by ward impact³⁷

Local distribution initiatives

Local initiatives and networks were instrumental in bringing aid to places that had received less, or less timely, attention from outside donors.

As aid often reached late, affected communities had to rely on their personal networks or the initiatives of local leaders to mobilize outside donors to provide relief. For example, in remote wards of Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga, local leaders and teachers decided to report local needs to the VDC Secretary and the district

headquarters after aid had still not reached their communities one week after the earthquake. This prompted concerned au-

³⁷ This information is based on data collected at the VDC and ward levels on the number of registered organizations and groups distributing relief.

thorities and a local entrepreneur to provide immediate relief in the form of food. In Lisankhu VDC in Sindhupalchok, people said that the help of community members living outside the VDC as well as of a community organization (Sewa Samaj) was crucial in providing relief. In Boch VDC, Dolakha, the VDC Secretary used personal

channels to invite donors to provide relief to the VDC; in Barpak VDC, Gorkha, people took advantage of the VDC's extensive external networks to former British and Indian army soldiers to bring in aid ranging from food to solar panels and even the internet.

While people in remote wards had more difficulties accessing aid, local communities and relief coordination mechanisms made efforts to redirect relief to areas that needed it most.

Reports that people from more remote wards faced greater difficulties in accessing relief were common. Not only was distribution higher along roads but VDC relief committees also commonly distributed relief either from the VDC center or a number of central locations across the VDC. This meant that even after relief had become more centralized and distribution more equal, people from remote and inaccessible areas faced greater difficulties in accessing and transporting their share of the relief that arrived in the VDC from distribution points to their homes. Such difficulties were encountered by people in remote wards of many of the VDCs visited: in Boch VDC (Dolakha), Barpak and Tanglichok VDCs (Gorkha), Namtar VDC (Makwanpur), Katunje and Prapcha VDCs (Okhaldhunga), and Lisankhu, Baruwa, and Syaule VDCs (Sindhupalchok). In some of these VDCs, people from remote wards not only found it more difficult to pick up relief from distribution centers but were entirely unable to do so as their settlements were cut off by landslides.

Local communities and relief distribution mechanisms, however, were often found to actively address this problem by sending relief to remote areas while those from accessible wards had to pick up their share of the relief at distribution points. In Lisankhu

VDC (Sindhupalchok) and Katunje VDC (Okhaldhunga), local relief distribution committees sent aid directly to the most remote wards. In Prapcha VDC, Okhaldhunga, youth groups volunteered to transport relief to remote settlements. Similarly, people in Boch VDC and Jiri municipality, Dolakha, decided to divert the relief they had received to more remote and more highly affected wards that had received less aid. Such redistribution was not possible where donors directly distributed to affected households, bypassing government coordination mechanisms. While redistribution efforts were notable and crucial in ensuring wider access to aid, logistical challenges in transporting relief materials remained. Local bodies often struggled to finance transportation costs especially for larger and heavier relief packages such as CGI sheets—likely a reason why much of the LGCDP grant to VDCs and municipalities was spent on transportation.³⁸ Further, people in remote wards were more likely to feel discriminated against during relief distribution, often stating that they had received less, although little evidence for this was found in places visited.³⁹

³⁸ See Section 3.1 for more details on LGCDP grants.

³⁹ See Section 6.3 on structural discrimination.

3.4 Coordination of Relief Distribution

Formation and roles of government relief committees

The government coordinated relief distribution through District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs) and VDC relief distribution committees (RDCs) and their ward subcommittees.

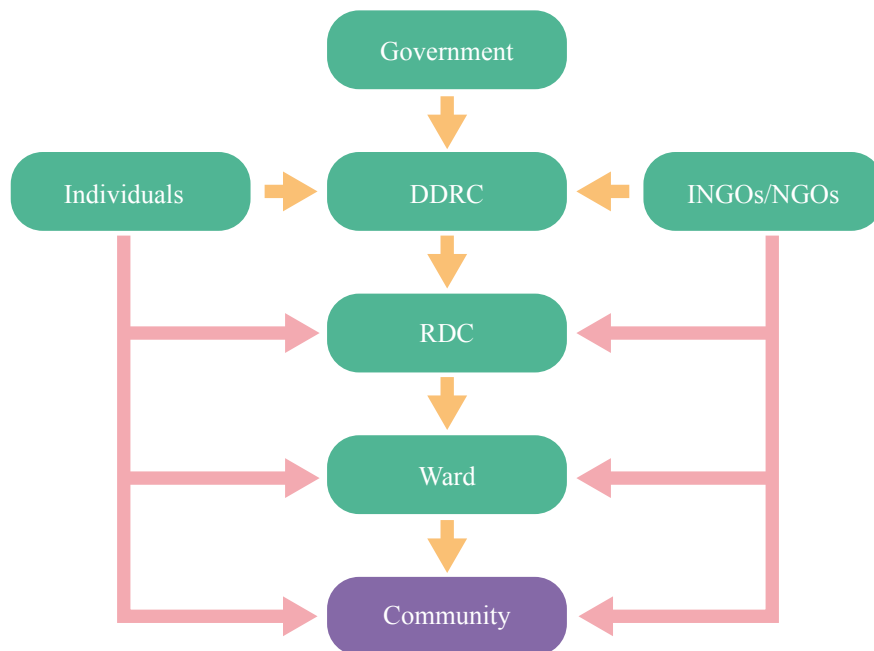


Figure 3.6: Government mechanism of relief coordination

In order to coordinate the response of aid providers and facilitate the more even distribution of relief across affected areas, the government established relief committees that were to centralize and redistribute incoming aid at the district and VDC/municipality levels. All aid, whether provided by the government, NGOs/INGOs, individuals or other donors, was to be channeled through

these government mechanisms, prohibiting direct distribution to communities or individuals (Figure 3.6). This so-called one-door policy faced much criticism from aid providers who preferred to distribute directly, particularly in the early days after the earthquake. Two months on from the first quake, however, aid delivery in the districts, VDCs, and wards visited was characterized

by the coordinating role of government relief committees and which were seen to be functioning fairly well. While some aid providers continued to bypass these mechanisms, by mid-June, most aid was channeled through DDRCs to the VDC level, and through RDCs and ward subcommittees to communities, with a strong emphasis placed on equal distribution to all households in affected VDCs or wards.

District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRCs) are chaired by the Chief District Officer (CDO), and include line ministry officers, police and army representatives, political party leaders, civil society, journalists, and NGOs. They are the key coordinating body for relief at the sub-national level, authorized to direct the distribution of relief across VDCs under their jurisdiction.⁴⁰ Organizations who wanted to deliver relief in a district were therefore required to register with the DDRC, which told them where they were allowed to work. DDRCs were actively coordinating relief in all districts visited, including Syangja, a low-impact district. The cooperation between the Nepal government and humanitarian organizations was organized through parallel thematic

coordination mechanisms called clusters that focus on specific areas such as shelter, protection, education, or health.⁴¹ The cluster system was found to be operating in high impact districts as well as in Makwanpur but not in Okhaldhunga or Syangja.

The institutional structure of the DDRC, still relatively new, was severely put to the test after the earthquake but seems to have provided an important platform for the coordination of relief efforts. Despite initial difficulties tensions between branches of the government were isolated. And even though political parties were heavily involved in the DDRCs from the start, their engagement generally seems to have been both collaborative and constructive in the districts visited.

VDC-level relief distribution committees (RDCs) were the key institutional mechanism coordinating relief below the district level: they were formed in all VDCs visited in high and medium impact districts—though not in Syangja, a low impact district—and worked with ward-level subcommittees to coordinate the distribution of incoming relief materials.⁴² The role of RDCs was to centralize and register incoming aid at the

⁴⁰ The institution of the DDRC is established in the Natural Calamities (Relief) Act 1982. The Local Governance Act 1999 encourages district and VDC authorities to assume primary responsibility for relief after natural disasters, without specifying working modalities.

⁴¹ The cluster approach had been in practice since the Koshi river flood in September 2008 and was officially endorsed by the Government of Nepal in 2009 by embodying it in the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Management 2009. The Guidance Note on Disaster Preparedness and Response Planning issued by the Disaster Management Section of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) outlines the cooperation between the government and humanitarian organizations

through clusters:http://www.moha.gov.np/uploads/publications/file/Guidance%20Note%202011%20for%20Preparing%20Disaster%20Preparedness%20&%20Response%20Plan_English_20110915060310.pdf See also <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal> for information on clusters operating to coordinate the response for various sectors after the 2015 earthquakes.

⁴² It remained unclear whether district administrations issued consistent directives on the formation of VDC and ward level bodies under their authority. The fact that RDCs were formed consistently across high and medium impact districts, however, suggests that VDC Secretaries received instructions to form local relief committees.

VDC level, take decisions on how it is to be distributed, and facilitate distribution to affected households or individuals.

RDCs were formed quickly after the earthquake, though with significant local variations in terms of their composition and leadership (see Case Study 3.1). In many of the VDCs visited, local government officers such as VDC Secretaries or Assistants were reported to have acted fast after the

earthquake, often at their own initiative. These local officers were the only government authority present in affected areas and coordinated rapid impact assessments to identify areas and households which most needed assistance and communicate needs for assistance to the district level and outside donors.⁴³ They rarely acted alone, however, cooperating closely with local political party representatives, ward leaders, and other local leaders through the relief committees.

Case Study 3.1: Formation and functioning of VDC level relief distribution committees (RDCs)

The ways in which local RDCs were formed varied significantly, even within districts. In Sindhupalchok, for example, the formation of RDCs directly depended on local circumstances and pre-existing political dynamics and leadership figures. In response to the earthquake, communities spontaneously formed committees that matched the political scenario and available resources at the disposal of the VDCs visited. The committees' organization and effectiveness was found to depend on the cooperation of donors, VDC leaders, and the VDC population—a relationship that was different in the VDCs visited.

In Baruwa VDC, the bulk of the aid received was from the government and large international donors and was

routed through the VDC relief committee. This committee was formed after the earthquake under the direction of political parties in the absence of the VDC Secretary. Representatives from the political parties, the VDC Secretary, and the Social Mobilizer were on the committee. In addition, two citizens from each ward (one male and one female) were chosen to represent their respective wards. In most cases, these citizens were not members of the Ward Citizen Forum (WCF). They were nominated at a mass gathering of people from seven wards on the day the committee was formed. Representatives from the two other wards—absent because the trails from their wards to the center were impassible due to landslides—were chosen by those present. The ward

⁴³ See Section 3.6 for more details on local and district level assessments.

representatives were declared the focal persons for aid distribution to wards. The coordinator of the committee, a political party leader, was responsible for registering the arrival of aid and communicating with ward representatives and other political party representatives. Aid was centralized, and in most cases, citizens were required to come to the VDC center to pick up aid packages.

In Lisankhu VDC, a 37-member committee was formed to coordinate aid. It consisted of political party representatives, ward representatives, the Social Mobilizer, teachers, and health care workers. The WCF was not used to determine ward representatives according to the president of the relief committee—a former Panchayat era leader affiliated with one of the major political parties today. The VDC Secretary was merely a member, not the coordinator of the committee. His prolonged absence and local criticism of his work have resulted in him being

sidelined. To facilitate relief activities, the committee collected donations through an already established charity, the Lisankhu Sewa Samaj. This additional source of funds was not subject to transparent auditing by the community and complaints were raised regarding this.

In Syaule VDC, the relief distribution committee consisted of VDC officials, WCF members, the Social Mobilizer, and political party representatives. However, due to the nature of the aid received in Syaule—mostly individual donors who completely bypassed the VDC aid distribution mechanisms—the committee’s ability to coordinate distribution was limited. The committee did effectively distribute the government aid assigned, however, suggesting their lack of activity may be related partially to uncooperative donors as well as to the fact that the VDC Secretary had only recently been transferred to Syaule.

RDCs were generally, though not always, headed by the VDC Secretary. At a minimum, the committees consisted of the VDC Secretary and local leaders of the three major political parties—NC, CPN-UML, and UCPN(M). Often, they also

included representatives of other locally influential parties. As such, the RDCs closely resembled All Party Mechanisms (APMs), which were officially abolished in 2012 but have since continued to operate informally in most places.⁴⁴ In many

⁴⁴ APMs were highly susceptible to corruption but also effectively helped to promote local political collaboration and stability post-2006. See The Carter Center (2014). *Local Governance in Nepal*:

Participation and Perception. 28 February. <http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/pr/nepal-022814-local-governance.pdf>

places, the committees also included schoolteachers, Social Mobilizers and WCF coordinators, respected elders, or selected ward representatives. Despite the fact that the formation and decision-making processes of RDCs were not always transparent, the committees were mostly successful in ensuring that relief was distributed equally to all households affected and played a key role in mediating between affected populations, the district administration, and humanitarian organizations.

Ward subcommittees were formed to help coordinate relief distribution at the ward level. Locally influential people, often politically affiliated, were chosen either by RDCs or by ward citizens to coordinate distribution at the ward level. In most VDCs,

Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) were involved in the formation of ward subcommittees.⁴⁵ Their influence over the aid distribution process, however, was limited. The role of WCFs was rarely instrumental in decision-making and it was WCF coordinators rather than the whole Forum that led or participated in the subcommittees.

Ward subcommittees often gathered information on the destruction of houses and other forms of damage for the VDC level RDCs. The RDCs allocated relief materials and prioritized distribution on the basis of these assessments, and liaised with the subcommittees, which would in turn inform ward residents about the modalities for receiving relief, for example, pick-up points.

Difficulties during the early response

The government initially faced difficulties responding to the earthquake and effectively implementing the mechanisms for relief coordination described above. A lack of preparedness, absence of officials and unclear lines of communication between

the different committees were some of the reasons why the days after the 25 April earthquake were reportedly chaotic in all districts visited, leading to confusion and, in some places, disputes.

Districts were not adequately prepared to respond to the impact of a major earthquake.

A lack of disaster preparedness at the local level was cited by government officials in districts visited as a reason for their initial difficulties in responding efficiently. None of the districts had stored sufficient emergency supplies. Government officials in Dolakha,

pointing to their difficulties in providing relief materials such as food and emergency shelters to all affected households due to the small volumes of stored supplies, said they had to find a different solution and decided to instead distribute NPR 2,000 so people

⁴⁵ Technically, wards are to be represented at Village Development Committees (VDC) and VDC Councils by elected ward presidents. In the absence of local elections, the government formed Ward Citizen Forums, apolitical committees of selected ward residents who are not actively engaged in

politics. Their primary responsibility is to identify and prioritize development needs for the wards and recommend these to the VDC. While formally the WCFs had led to some increase in citizen participation, their impact on actual local decision-making is often limited. *Ibid.*

could purchase relief materials themselves. In Gorkha, the lack of emergency response preparedness of the DDRC was reported to have been a challenge. Officials said they

had to fall back on a “learning by doing” approach in their attempt to respond to the earthquake.

Initially, multiple aid providers acted without the coordination needed to efficiently target and distribute relief, which increased confusion and tensions over aid distribution.

Some confusion and chaos is to be expected in the immediate aftermath of a major earthquake. Yet, several factors were seen as further increasing confusions and preventing a more efficient response during the early relief phase. First, many aid providers initially bypassed government channels for relief coordination, distributing directly along highways and accessible roads.⁴⁶ This meant that DDRCs and RDCs had trouble controlling incoming relief and distributing it more widely across affected areas, especially in high impact districts where the number of aid providers was high making it difficult to monitor their activities. As the number of aid providers, especially of private citizen relief efforts, decreased, centralization and coordination of relief became easier. In addition, some districts established control posts along access roads to register incoming aid providers, for example, in Gorkha.

in the early days as hindering a faster and more coordinated response. They said that clearer leadership and directives would have facilitated the coordination of aid providers and the more widespread distribution of relief to all those affected which could have prevented several disputes. During the early weeks, relief was generally distributed directly to affected people through various channels—by individuals, ad hoc volunteer groups, NGOs, INGOs, community-based organizations, businesses, security services, as well as the government—leading to high levels of confusion about what kinds and volumes of aid were being distributed as well as where aid was delivered. The lack of information on and coordination of incoming aid reportedly heightened confusion and tensions around distribution in most VDCs visited, but particularly those in high impact districts, where the number of aid providers was higher.

Second, local government officials frequently cited a lack of clear directives from the DDRC

Where government officials were absent during the earthquake, coordination was particularly difficult and the response was slower contributing to heightened tensions.

Several district officials were absent from their duty stations when the earthquake struck as it was a Saturday. In Sindhupalchok and Dolakha, two of the high impact districts observed, initial difficulties in coordinating

and distributing relief were particularly prominent due to the absence of officials and the resulting lack of leadership, which increased discontent and protests during the days immediately following the earthquake.

⁴⁶ See Section 3.3 for further details on aid providers and relief distribution patterns.

In Dolakha, several high-ranking officials were absent on 25 April and returned only after one or two days. The army responded most quickly and led early relief efforts. As a result, DDRC meetings initially took place inside the army barracks, restricting journalists' and civil society groups' access to the meetings, and eventually leading to tensions between the army, district administration and political parties, which encumbered early relief efforts. Residents of Charikot, the district headquarters of Dolakha, were so agitated over the delay of the government response that they tried to assault district administration and municipality officials. On 28 April, a group of local youths vandalized the CDO office. Over time, the situation improved as officials and political parties gave public speeches to inform residents of the situation and as coordination between different government agencies improved. By

the time of the second earthquake with its epicenter in Dolakha, the DDRC was reported to be better prepared and to respond efficiently as involved stakeholders had agreed on working modalities and established better lines of communication.

In Sindhupalchok, too, early relief efforts suffered from a lack of clear leadership. The CDO was outside the district when the earthquake struck and the army responded first. In the absence of the CDO, other district officials took responsibility for leading relief coordination in the days immediately after the earthquake, which reportedly strained their relationship with the CDO and led to quarrels which distracted from relief efforts. Here, too, locals, angry with the slow and ineffective government response, assaulted district administration officers, including the Assistant CDO, on at least two occasions.⁴⁷

The absence of VDC Secretaries also negatively affected early relief efforts.

At the VDC level, assistance was also reported to have been slower and less efficient where VDC Secretaries were absent. In Dolakha, for example, difficulties in relief distribution were reported in VDCs that had previously been without a VDC Secretary and the district soon decided to assign new Secretaries to the 14 concerned VDCs. In Dhuwakot VDC, Gorkha, local people and political parties complained about the absence of the VDC Secretary, who was assigned several VDCs at once, and demanded a new VDC Secretary to

improve the coordination of relief distribution. In Baruwa VDC, Sindhupalchok, the situation was similar; here, too, the absence of the VDC Secretary was seen to have hampered early relief efforts. It is important to note that while the arrival of new VDC Secretaries was reported to have facilitated coordination, the local response was most efficient in places where VDC Secretaries were based and present in the VDC, familiar with the population and local leaders and political party representatives.

⁴⁷ These assaults reportedly did not result in injuries. People seemed to have merely cornered officials to express their anger. The police, although present,

was said not to have intervened, choosing instead to exercise restraint and let people vent their anger against officials.

Difficulties during the early response were exacerbated by the mountainous geography of affected districts and the second earthquake on 12 May 2015.

Many areas that are generally difficult to reach became inaccessible after the earthquake due to landslides or damaged roads. This meant that much of the early response was concentrated in more accessible areas with more remote settlements often waiting for days before emergency aid arrived.

The 12 May 2015 earthquake rendered more areas inaccessible and caused significant additional damage in all of the districts visited. While coordination of relief distribution had improved across VDCs visited by the time of the second earthquake, facilitating a more effective response this time around, the 12 May earthquake at

least temporarily interrupted ongoing relief operations, further delaying the delivery of aid in some places. Targeting of aid was also rendered more difficult as damage had to be reassessed to adequately channel relief to those most in need. Only in Dolakha did the situation improve after the 12 May earthquake as the district was reclassified from a medium to a high impact district and therefore received more aid which could be distributed more widely to affected households across the district. In addition, district level coordination had improved by this time, with earlier disputes resolved, allowing for faster decision-making.

Functioning of government relief committees by June 2015

The DDRCs' ability to coordinate and direct relief varied widely.

After initial difficulties—described above—the DDRCs became more efficient at directing and coordinating relief efforts.⁴⁸ They played an important role in ensuring that the relief material at hand was distributed orderly and equitably, for example directing relief to VDCs that had initially received less. Yet, there were variations in

the performance of district administrations and ultimately in the efficiency of the relief process. These may at least partly be related to ambiguous and sometimes contradictory policy messages from the center.⁴⁹ Districts seemed to be conducting damage assessments and cash distribution differently, for instance, suggesting their relative freedom

⁴⁸ Note that research teams only spent 1-2 days at district headquarters and that the research methodology allowed for more detailed insights into VDC and ward level relief distribution mechanisms than district level coordination. Further, the implications of dynamics within DDRCs, and their ability to direct relief and reconstruction efforts, are likely to become

more apparent during the coming months once government policies are formulated and assistance schemes are running.

⁴⁹ In mid-June 2015, clear policies on government assistance and reconstruction efforts had not yet been formulated leaving district administrations without clear directives on how to respond.

to interpret ambiguous directives from the center.⁵⁰ Variations also seemed related to pre-existing power structures and relations of the different actors involved in DDRCs, in particular of political parties whose involvement in DDRCs was instrumental. Gorkha's DDRC, for example, was reported to have very strong control over relief activities in the district, to the extent that it was comfortable outsourcing the delivery of government relief such as the NPR 15,000 cash grants for fully destroyed homes to NGOs, who in turn coordinated closely with them, and VDC Secretaries. In Sindhupalchok, in contrast, INGOs and NGOs pushed back against the district administration's attempts at directing their activities. While many had signed agreements with the district administration specifying their planned activities and areas of work, it was reportedly common for INGOs and NGOs in Sindhupalchok to underreport their actual activities to both the DDRC and OCHA. The mistrust between the district administration and (I)NGOs in the district was seen as not only hindering

the official documentation of the latter's activities but ultimately also the efficient coordination of relief efforts.

UN OCHA was present only in the three high impact districts, tasked with helping the district administration with information management and coordinating between clusters, as well as between government and humanitarian organizations. While there were no reports of bad relations between the OCHA field offices and district administrations or DDRCs, coordination was not always effective. In some places, such as in Dolakha, the OCHA office was only set up weeks after the first quake and had to adapt to working modalities that had already been established. And occasionally, the reluctance of NGOs and INGOs to share information about their activities also extended to their relation with OCHA as well, for example in Sindhupalchok where mistrust between them and government relief committees was reportedly high.

Lines of communication between DDRCs and VDC relief committees were not systematic.

Generally, RDCs were informed of DDRC decisions but there seemed to be no systematic mechanism for feeding information the other way. Nevertheless, there were diverse lines of communication between district and VDC levels which allowed for the communication of local level needs to the district level. In Dolakha, for example, VDC Secretaries from across the district would hold joint meetings with the Local Development Officer. In other places, such as Gorkha, the

DDRC frequently reconfirmed information about damage and needs with the VDC mechanism. And in Sindhupalchok, VDC Secretaries communicated needs upwards which was crucial given the absence of district level damage assessments in this district. The informal ties between VDC party leaders and their district level counterparts were important as well in sharing information about the situation and needs at the VDC level with district level stakeholders. Despite these ad-hoc lines of communication, it is not clear whether the VDC mechanisms were able to feed the extensive information on damage and needs they had effectively into the planning processes within the DDRC.

⁵⁰ See Sections 3.1 and 3.6 for further details on inconsistent government assessments and cash distribution.

VDC relief distribution committees had considerable control over incoming relief and dynamics within the committees were generally collaborative.

After the chaotic first days after the earthquake, VDCs generally assumed centralized control over the distribution of all incoming relief materials. Most were successful, especially after VDC relief coordinating mechanisms had become fully functional. By mid-June most aid arriving in the VDCs visited was channeled and distributed through RDCs in ways that seemed fairly efficient. Despite differences in formation and local power dynamics shaping the RDCs (see Case Study 3.1), the committees operated similarly in VDCs visited and the relations between officials, political party leaders and others active on the committees were reported to be collaborative. Committee leaders, in most cases VDC Secretaries, played a key role in coordinating meetings, keeping records, and communicating with the district administration. Where VDC Secretaries were weak or had only recently arrived, party leaders had comparatively higher levels of influence. The only clear exceptions to the collaborative pattern were Jiri, a municipality in Dolakha recently formed out of three VDCs in which leaders from two of the former VDCs felt sidelined, and VDCs

in Makwanpur, traditionally a district with particularly high levels of involvement by central level leaders.

The geographic location of VDCs and the strength of district relief coordination had an impact on RDCs ability to control incoming relief. In VDCs located on major roads between Kathmandu and the district headquarters, for example in northern parts of Makwanpur or in VDCs in Sindhupalchok close to Kathmandu, citizen relief groups, political leaders and NGOs were more frequently distributing aid independently. Where the district administration had less authority over INGOs, such as in Sindhupalchok, relief providers similarly often either circumvented the VDC mechanisms, or merely informed them about their plans. In Syaule VDC, Sindhupalchok, for example, the aid arriving often did not go through official channels, especially in the first few weeks after the 25 April earthquake. Syaule is situated on the road from Kathmandu to Chautara, making it an accessible location for aid delivery.

VDC committees were instrumental in ensuring the more equal and widespread distribution of relief.

Most RDCs adopted the principle of equal distribution, dividing incoming relief materials equally among households. This seemed to strengthen social cohesion by addressing the dominant public opinion that the earthquake affected everyone equally and that distinctions should therefore not be made. It likely also facilitated the collaborative nature of relief committees. The principle of equal distribution was least problematic in VDCs in high impact districts, where the

vast majority of houses had been destroyed; village disaster relief committees often simply assumed the number of households in a ward to equal the number of affected families, and allocated relief materials proportionally. This led to disputes only in very few cases, for example, when residents of particularly heavily affected wards in Dhuwakot VDC in Gorkha argued that they should receive a larger share of aid.

VDC mechanisms in less highly affected areas faced a more complex environment. Their decisions were more frequently met with discontent as disputes arose over who should be categorized as affected and who should not. In medium and lower impact districts, people were more likely to perceive themselves to be in greater need compared to others around them. These were, for example, groups in wards that had been particularly badly affected, or marginalized groups who argued that others had more monetary or social resources to cope on their own. On the other hand, in a few wards there were also complaints from comparatively well-off or upper-caste families when socially and economically under-privileged households were prioritized during relief distribution.⁵¹ Yet, there were also cases in which people recognized and accepted an extent of need-based discrimination. This was the case, for example, in Syangja, the least affected

district examined, where VDCs prioritized the poor, old people, and women-headed households—apparently without triggering any discontent.

While generally, emphasis was placed on equal distribution, most RDCs were aware of settlements, households or individuals that were more highly affected or under-privileged. RDCs were found to target relief based on their own needs assessments to those most in need, especially in the days immediately following the earthquake when resources were too scarce to be distributed equally. But even later, relief was targeted in some cases. As mentioned above, RDCs in several VDCs decided to direct incoming relief to more remote areas, for example, making significant efforts to ensure easier access to relief for those who could not so easily pick up their share from relief distribution points.⁵²

Ward subcommittees of the VDC relief distribution committees played a crucial role in assisting the VDC in assessing needs and distributing aid but were rarely instrumental in decisions on aid distribution.

Ward subcommittees mostly served to coordinate between the population and the VDC relief mechanisms for the distribution of aid. There did not seem to be a common process, however, for including ward subcommittees in decision-making. Generally, decisions on aid distribution were taken by the VDC level committees and were dominated by political party representatives. Ward representatives, including WCF coordinators, participated in VDC level meetings in most places but rarely played an instrumental role in decision-making. Their level of influence was reported to be low in most places. A notable

exception was Jiri municipality, a recently formed municipality, where the influence of WCF leaders was strong.⁵³

The level of influence of ward subcommittees and their representatives also seemed to depend on the distance of wards to the VDC center where meetings generally took place. This geographical factor ultimately played an important role in coordination, as subcommittee members from remote wards often had more difficulty attending meetings and liaising with the VDC relief committee.

⁵¹ See Sections 5 and 6 for more on perceived and actual discrimination and complaints about targeting groups.

⁵² See Section 3.3 for more details on local initiatives to distribute relief more widely.

⁵³ See also Section 4.2.

3.5 Transparency of Relief Distribution

The generally cooperative nature of local relief committees and their emphasis on equal distribution seems to have increased people's trust. Further, the strong local presence of leaders active in relief committees facilitated accountability albeit in an informal manner.

The main local institution responsible for distributing relief—the VDC relief distribution committees—have operated under limited formal oversight. Yet the fact that local relief committees emphasized equal distribution and generally worked cooperatively seemed to have increased people's trust in them. People's assessment of their performance after the earthquake was largely positive. Equipped with detailed local information on damage and needs, and linked into local communities through manifold informal ties, they often succeeded in distributing relief equally if not always equitably, and avoiding local tensions and political infighting. This may in part have to do with the magnitude of the disaster, and the nature of the resources at stake; whether they will play as positive a role in reconstruction remains to be seen.

The VDC and ward committees were the only governance institutions that those affected by the earthquake had any way of holding accountable. Much of relief distribution at the local level was in the hands of unelected leaders in a chaotic situation. It is therefore surprising that there were few allegations of mismanagement. However, a number of

factors helped to hold local political leaders in relief committees accountable to the broader local population. Local politicians live in their villages and there are limits to the extent to which they can alienate the people who are also their neighbors, and often relatives. As several examples in the VDCs visited show, beatings by residents and competitors are a real risk should there be allegations of favoritism by any particular leader. The fact that there have not been local elections for more than a decade does not mean that there is no competition. District leaders still require local support, for elections and beyond, and local politicians are an essential link to the population. Local leaders active in relief committees were therefore answerable to their communities and likely felt a sense of responsibility toward earthquake victims in their area. In several places, local leaders took it upon themselves to coordinate the construction of community shelters, assist the distribution of relief to affected communities and lobby on their behalf where dissatisfaction over aid distribution or damage assessments was high. It is therefore not surprising that many people in the areas visited assessed the role of local leaders positively.

The absence of consistent independent monitoring and complaints mechanisms, however, meant relief committees could not be formally held accountable.

With the exception of some INGOs and NGOs, donors distributing aid locally lacked

formal mechanisms for information sharing, monitoring and complaints. Private donors

in particular could rarely be held accountable by local communities. In most places, the VDC relief distribution committees and their ward subcommittees were the only mechanisms with a strong local presence and complaints related to relief distribution were generally addressed at these. RDCs and their subcommittees, however, also lacked independent and systematic procedures to ensure transparency and register requests for information or address complaints. The fact that these committees operated in an ad-hoc manner in many places and were strongly influenced by informal unelected leaders through unofficial All Party Mechanisms (APMs) further weakened their formal accountability.

Citizen participation in decisions on relief distribution was marginal in most places with APMs dominating local relief committees.

Decision-making processes at the VDC level were often non-transparent. Most residents knew the kinds and quantities of relief they had received since the earthquake, but usually not who were the donors, and how much had arrived in the VDC in the first instance. While some VDC Secretaries kept records on all aid received and how it was distributed, others were less assiduous or reluctant to provide residents access.

While Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) were involved in relief committees in nearly all places visited, their role was generally not instrumental and their decision-making

There are also clear limitations to the accountability of local leaders. While the lack of popular elections finds some redress through the factors mentioned above, the informal relations these rest on are less likely to work effectively for those who are excluded from local power networks on the basis of caste, ethnicity, gender, or class. In some cases, leaders who represent smaller communities, felt that they were excluded from observing or participating in VDC committee meetings, either deliberately or structurally, for example because their wards were situated far from the VDC center, and meetings took place without them.

power was limited. Further, in most places only WCF coordinators attended committee meetings with other WCF members largely uninvolved and unaware of decisions around relief distribution. Rather than a conscious sidelining of WCFs, however, this may reflect a general pattern of WCFs having low levels of influence and activity even before the earthquake.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the limited influence of WCFs and general citizens in relief committees is important to note. WCFs are, at least in principle, inclusive in terms of gender and ethnicity and the domination of APMs in relief committees clearly limited citizen participation.

⁵⁴ In around half of the wards visited, the levels of influence and activity of WCFs were rated as low even before the earthquake. In around one-third of wards, WCFs were rated as having medium levels of influence locally and in only a quarter of wards, their influence was seen to be high.

This reflects trends observed previously: The Carter Center (2014). Local Governance in Nepal: Participation and Perception. 28 February. <http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/pr/nepal-022814-local-governance.pdf>

The participation of WCFs in deciding where and how the LGCDP money should be spent was also reported to be very low in places visited. As a result, the spending of LGCDP funds was not transparent. Research

teams observed that where the LGCDP grant had already reached, it was spent inconsistently, mostly on transportation, with a lack of clarity over how it was spent, as described above.⁵⁵

3.6 Damage Assessments and Beneficiary Lists

Damage assessments were often conducted inconsistently and in multiple rounds.

In most places visited, VDCs conducted assessments within days of the earthquake, often at their own initiative, to distribute relief according to households' needs. Early assessments focused on the rapid assessment of damage and were generally carried out by ward and VDC level relief committees. Information was then fed up to the district level but was also used to allocate resources locally. Such initial assessments were conducted in most VDCs of the districts visited. The way in which these early assessments were carried out, however, was not systematic and varied between locales. Some VDC or ward level assessments used the government criteria of 'fully damaged', 'partially damaged' and 'normal', while others used different and more nuanced criteria. One highly affected VDC in Makwanpur, for example, used their own criteria to rank households according to the level of damage suffered as well as economic capacity. In several VDCs, the criteria used in early assessments took into account the fact that economically disadvantaged or otherwise marginalized groups would have more pronounced needs.

This led to prioritization of these groups, for example, Dalits or single women, in the allocation of relief in the early days after the earthquake, especially in medium and low impact districts. In fact, the prioritization of relief allocation—both in terms of sending relief materials to higher affected wards as well as to more vulnerable households—seems to have been the primary purpose of early local-level assessments in all districts. This changed after government relief coordination mechanisms were implemented more systematically at the VDC level, emphasizing equal distribution of incoming resources.

Further, district-wide rounds of assessments were carried out by government officials in medium and high impact districts, both before and after the second earthquake on 12 May. These so-called technical teams consisted of engineers from the district

⁵⁵ See Section 3.1 for details on how the LGCDP money was spent.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

administration as well as local stakeholders in the VDCs visited, such as the VDC Secretary or Assistant, political party leaders, and ward representatives. While these teams were sent to conduct more systematic assessments, the manner in which they conducted assessments varied. While they seem to have worked diligently in some areas, people in most VDCs visited said that technical teams heavily relied on indirect reports and imprecise figures. Further, while they used the criteria of ‘fully damaged’, ‘partially damaged’ and ‘normal’, the ways in which these criteria were applied varied. In Dolakha, for example, technical teams assessed concrete pillar houses carefully while all mud-stone

houses were automatically declared as fully damaged, irrespective of whether they were fully destroyed or still standing. This was done in recognition of the fact that even partial damage to a mud house would render it unlivable and it would have to be torn down fully to repair. In Okhaldhunga, houses declared as ‘partially damaged’ by the technical team could be reclassified as ‘fully damaged’ if owners demolished their houses and submitted proof including photos to district authorities. This policy was implemented to address the complaints of those whose houses were classified as partially damaged even though they had become unlivable.

Damage assessments were widely considered problematic and are one of the most contentious processes of relief distribution.

Of all the relief processes examined, damage assessments were the most contentious by far. Assessments were seen as problematic by VDC officials, local leaders, and citizens, and were heavily criticized in most VDCs and wards except in places where nearly all houses were destroyed and therefore categorized equally as fully damaged, such as in Dolakha and parts of Sindhupalchok. Local stakeholders pointed to the lack of care and professionalism of the assessment teams but also thought the categorization of damaged houses (fully damaged, partially damaged, or normal) was flawed. Further, in many places no follow-on assessments were undertaken after the second earthquake on 12 May, which caused considerable further damage.

Most of the discontent related to houses being classified as ‘partially damaged’ even if they were unsafe and unlivable. Further, complaints were raised in many places about the inconsistent application of the categories of ‘fully damaged’, ‘partially damaged’, or ‘normal’ with equally damaged houses being labeled differently. Only in Dolakha, where technical assessment teams reportedly worked diligently, was satisfaction with assessments high. In other

districts, complaints about assessments and the demand for reassessments remained very common among ward leaders, citizens, and political leaders (Case Study 3.2).

There were some efforts to address concerns and complaints about assessments. In Gorkha, the district administration responded to protests by allowing locals to apply for the reclassification of houses and assuring them that all ‘partially damaged’ but ‘unlivable’ mud houses would qualify for reclassification as ‘fully damaged’ (see Case Study 3.2). Similarly, as mentioned above, house owners in Okhaldhunga could choose to demolish their homes and have them reclassified as ‘fully damaged’ if they thought they were unlivable and needed to be rebuilt. But such efforts were partial and did not necessarily satisfy local people who continued to have concerns about the implications of the classification of their houses. In Okhaldhunga, for example, people thought it was impractical to demolish their houses to classify for the ‘fully damaged’ category because of associated additional costs and the bureaucratic effort to submit various types of evidence and forms and doubts about whether this would lead to reclassification.

Formal complaints about and protest against assessments increased in relation to information about associated benefits.

Challenges to the outcome of assessments increased once they were linked to higher government compensation for fully damaged houses such as NPR 15,000 for the construction of temporary shelters as opposed to NPR 3,000 for partially damaged houses, as well as promises of compensation payments of NPR 200,000 for reconstruc-

tion.⁵⁶ Rumors on what assistance would be given based on assessments also raised the perceived stakes of the assessment process

⁵⁶ See Section 3.1 for details on government cash grants distributed as compensation for damages to houses.

and beneficiary identify card distribution. For example, in some VDCs of Gorkha and Okhaldhunga, there were rumors about

work visas for European countries and the US being given to certified victims of the earthquake.

Case Study 3.2: Protest against damage assessments

Dissatisfied with the timing and execution of government damage assessments, earthquake victims from a VDC in Gorkha raised formal complaints at the District Administration Office and organized a protest with over one hundred people. Their demand was that houses should be reclassified based on new and fairer damage assessments. Their main points of concern were that the official assessment was conducted before the second earthquake on 12 May and that it was done in an unsystematic manner leading to the listing of equally damaged houses under different categories.

“After the assessment, the engineer in the assessment team instructed me not to stay in the house as there are cracks on walls. How does he dare label my house as partially damaged, then? Since we cannot stay inside, this house has to be dismantled”, said the leader of the protest.

Initially, people were unaware of the consequences of the categorization of their houses and only protested once these became clear. They were worried when they found out that the assessments would be the basis for

relief provided by the government. When identity card distribution for earthquake victims was about to begin to allow for the distribution of government relief of NPR 15,000 as initial compensation payment for those whose houses were ‘fully damaged’, the people in the VDC got together to formally raise their protests. First, they met with district authorities who reportedly asked them to file an application for re-assessment at the DDRC through the VDC relief distribution committee (RDC). After the submission of this application, they were told that all mud houses would be re-categorized as fully damaged. However, district authorities later clarified that only those mud houses that were ‘uninhabitable’ could be relabeled as ‘fully damaged’.

When distribution of relief payments began, around 30 households in this VDC did not collect their share in protest against what they perceived as the faulty categorization of their houses and the lack of clarity over the methods and aims of damage assessments as well as the potential for future re-assessments or reclassifications.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

Complaints about assessments were raised more frequently in medium impact districts.

Dissatisfaction with assessments were raised most strongly in Makwanpur and Okhaldhunga, both medium impact districts. This is likely due to the fact that there were fewer discrepancies in high impact districts where nearly all houses were destroyed and therefore classified equally. Allegations of political interference in the damage assessments were also more pronounced in

medium impact districts. In several VDCs in Okhaldhunga and Makwanpur, locals accused the assessment teams of political bias when deciding whether to categorize houses as ‘fully damaged’ and ‘partially damaged’. In both districts, the disgruntled parties resorted to the DDRC to settle their disputes.⁵⁷

The level of satisfaction with local level assessments was generally higher than with district assessments.

People in VDCs and wards visited complained more frequently about the government technical assessments than earlier VDC level assessments. There were various reasons for this. Local assessments were conducted with the closer involvement of local stakeholders.

These stakeholders, mostly VDC officials, local leaders, or teachers, may have lacked

⁵⁷ See Section 4.3 on politicization of relief for further details.

technical knowledge or sufficient training on the categories to be used—VDC officials noted the difficulty of distinguishing between partially and fully destroyed houses—but seemed to have compensated by going from house to house to carefully discuss and assess damages together with house owners. The technical teams on the other hand, were reported to have worked with less sensitivity and attention to detail and local concerns and needs. There were reports of technical teams “getting drunk and eating meat”, assessing settlements from a distance, or finishing work within a few days rather than the several weeks that had been allocated for the process.

One of the main reasons for dissatisfaction with technical assessments was likely the fact that local level assessments were significantly more generous. Initial counts of houses destroyed in local assessments were often exaggerated, surpassing the total number of households counted in earlier censuses or surveys. For example, in Jiri municipality of

Dolakha, a massive inflation of household numbers (from 4,000 to 5,500) compared to the 2011 census was reported. It seems that local actors without official duties, such as local party leaders, had little incentive not to overstate the number of households or condone household separations, whereby different families living in the same house would each claim assistance. In contrast, district officials would have been responsible for how much money was being spent where VDC Secretaries were caught somewhere in between—with official obligations, but under pressure from local residents. In Makwanpur and Syangja, the DDRC reportedly mounted pressure to reduce the number of houses counted as fully destroyed, resulting in significant tensions. This reduced the count of houses completely destroyed from 150 to 35 in Shreekrishna Gandaki VDC and from 119 to 90 in Aarukharka VDC, both in Syangja district. In Makwanpur, counts of fully damaged houses decreased significantly during the second round of assessments conducted by technical teams.

Inconsistencies and uncertainties related to damage assessments have already led to the contestation of beneficiary lists and identity cards and are likely to cause further tensions in the future.

At the local level, there was a lack of information and clarity over which of these multiple assessments were used to prepare the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and to create beneficiary lists to distribute identity cards and relief payments to victims. The selection of beneficiaries for cash relief payments of NPR 15,000 per household with a ‘fully destroyed’ house, and the distribution of concomitant beneficiary IDs, was intensely contested and, in some places, politicized. In several instances, distribution had to be interrupted due to protests by locals or political parties contesting the existing lists, calling for the inclusion of

a larger number of households. Several VDC Secretaries reported difficulties in distributing identity cards, fearing protests, and instead waited for further decisions on whether reassessments would be conducted. These issues are likely to magnify during reconstruction, especially if it involves higher value packages for a smaller share of those overall affected. Tensions over the selection of beneficiaries are likely to encourage if not force parties to become involved. Resulting protests, or political influence over local-level administrative decisions and actions, may severely affect implementation.

By leading to ineffective planning, protests, and delayed distribution of relief, flawed assessments have ultimately left earthquake victims uncertain about what they will receive when and under what conditions, and have thereby undermined their ability

to effectively plan their own steps towards recovery. As discussed in the following sections, many people were anxiously waiting to see whether and how much assistance they would receive before planning for their longer-term recovery.

Damage assessments of public infrastructure were conducted separately and there were few complaints in relation to these.

While the levels of dissatisfaction with assessments of private houses were high, assessments of public infrastructure were seen more positively. These were conducted by separate teams. Schools for example were assessed by teams consisting of staff of the District Education Office as well as district technical officers. Schools across places

visited had been assessed and visibly labeled safe (green sticker), partially damaged (yellow sticker), or unsafe (red sticker). Nevertheless, schools in many places continued to be used despite being declared partially damaged or unsafe and it remained unclear whether and when they would be repaired or rebuilt.



Photo: Chiran Manandhar

4. 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. Parties did not conduct any explicitly political activities at the local level after the earthquake but they were strongly involved in relief distribution committees at the district and VDC levels and in some places were found to conduct their own relief and reconstruction efforts. The role of political parties and leaders in local relief distribution committees was important and their leadership was rarely challenged. Officials generally relied on All Party Mechanisms to take decisions and address conflicts related to relief distribution.

In general, there was little evidence that relief was politicized along party lines. Cooperation between political parties was reported to be good in relief committees, likely facilitated by the emphasis most VDCs placed on equal distribution. There were some indications, however, of the potential for increasing politicization of relief and reconstruction efforts and political parties were often accused of influencing the outcome of damage and need assessments.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

4.1 Political Party Activities

Political party participation in the DDRCs was consistent across all districts visited.

District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRC) were activated in the earthquake-affected districts in accordance with the relevant government law and policies which instructed the involvement of political parties in district-level decision-making. The cooperation between political parties and the district administration was generally good.

There were no reports of significant tensions either between political parties or between the district administration and political parties. On the contrary, it was widely reported across districts that the quality of political participation had increased after the earthquake and coordination between different stakeholders had improved.

In all districts except Dolakha, there were no reports of obstruction, boycott or tensions in DDRC meetings. In Dolakha, DDRC meetings were initially held in the army barracks. The political parties in Dolakha opposed holding DDRC meetings there

on the grounds that this led to a lack of transparency. After their boycott and the 12 May earthquake, the DDRC meetings were moved back to the district administration office, as officials realized the need for better coordination with political parties.

Political parties were strongly involved in VDC level Relief Distribution Committees (RDCs), the main mechanism for relief coordination and distribution at the local level.

While there were policies for the formation of district level relief distribution mechanisms and the involvement of political parties, no such instructions seem to have been issued on how VDC level relief distribution mechanisms were to be formed. For VDC level RDCs, local stakeholders resorted to a structure similar to the All Party Mechanisms (APMs)⁵⁸ with the VDC Secretary, representatives of the major political parties, and in many cases also WCF coordinators, local elders, and ward representatives included. Contrary to the general perception especially in Kathmandu that these mechanisms are a collusive partnership for corruption, they performed generally well and locals highly valued their

role in attracting and centralizing relief and coordinating distribution.

In most cases, political parties were assigned leadership positions in VDC and ward committees based on their performance during the 2013 Constituent Assembly elections. The three major political parties—NC, CPN-UML and UCPN(M)—were most active in the VDC RDCs across all areas. RPP and RPP-N were both active in some wards visited in Sindhupalchok, Dolakha and Syangja and most notably in all wards visited in Makwanpur. CPN-M was also present and active in some VDCs and wards visited.

⁵⁸ Nepal held its last local elections in 1997. During the conflict period, before the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, most VDCs were not functioning with the rebel Maoists running their own parallel government in large swathes of the country. Since 2006, local bodies have been run by overburdened bureaucrats, generally in close cooperation with political party representatives. In 2006, political parties introduced the All Party Mechanism (APM) in local bodies, a system of collective decision-making based on consensus. The APM was introduced to preserve consensual politics considered necessary for the peace process and constitution drafting. The APMs were formed in districts and VDCs with the

participation of political parties that had contested the CA election from their respective constituency. After widespread accusation that local political parties were colluding through these APMs to embezzle development funds and following a directive from the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), APMs were formally dissolved by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development in January 2012. However, District and Village Development Committees have continued to involve and consult with political parties on an informal basis for practical reasons. Political party engagement has thus continued at the local level, albeit in an informal manner.

None of the VDCs and wards visited had seen an increase in political activities unrelated to earthquake relief.

Political parties were reported to have remained inactive apart from their participation in the VDC and ward level relief distribution mechanisms. In some places, major political parties were reported to have conducted demolition and reconstruction campaigns and distributed cash relief. In Makwanpur, there were more political party activities

around earthquake relief than in other districts and CA members, as well as other high level leaders, directly distributed cash relief to affected households. Further, political party activists in Makwanpur were involved in lobbying for relief on behalf of displaced communities.

4.2 Emergence of New Leadership and Institutions

The fact that VDCs resorted to All Party Mechanisms to take decisions and address conflicts reveals that the decision-making authority of existing political parties remained unchallenged.

The earthquake and the subsequent formation of VDC and ward level relief committees presented political parties an opportunity to be active locally. As mentioned above, the VDC and ward relief distribution mechanisms comprised representatives from the local units of major political parties along other stakeholders, with the political party

representatives dominating most decisions. Despite the absence of local elections, the local networks of political parties, especially NC, CPN-UML and UCPN(M), run deep and remained intact after the earthquake, facilitating the role of parties in coordinating post-earthquake relief.

In some wards, the emergence of youth leadership was observed albeit along existing political party lines. In at least one case, Ward Citizen Forum leaders were seen to challenge the influence of political party leaders.

People in some wards of Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Makwanpur and Dolakha reportedly chose young members of the community over older political party leaders to represent them in the ward level mechanisms. One explanation for this was that ward level

mechanisms were less about decision-making and coordination and more about executing VDC level decisions on what, where and how to distribute relief. It was reported from Barpak, the epicenter of the 25 April earthquake in Gorkha, that



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

given the amount of work and energy needed to effectively respond to the crisis, locals appointed young members as ward committee leaders expecting greater mobility and efficiency from them compared to their older counterparts. However, it was not clear whether these young volunteers saw themselves as potential future leaders. Many of them had only temporarily returned to their homes to assist relief and reconstruction and may not stay in the longer term to take on leadership positions. Further, old party leaders reportedly felt little to no challenge to their leadership from these young members.

In Dolakha, WCF leaders challenged the influence of political party leaders. For example, in Jiri municipality, the relief distribution mechanism seemed to be less

effective due to competition between political leaders from different VDCs that had been merged to form a municipality. Leaders belonging to the former VDC, now located in the municipality hub, reportedly claimed leadership while leaders of adjoining VDCs felt sidelined. This dispute between political leaders allowed the WCF to have greater influence. Some tensions were reported between WCF coordinators and political party leaders as coordinators became more influential and began demanding more relief for their respective wards. This made WCF coordinators more popular in their wards and was considered by political party leaders as a challenge to their sphere of influence. WCF coordinators in Jiri, along with youths in Kalinchok, were reported to be emerging as potential local leaders through their participation in ward subcommittees.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

4.3 Politicization of Relief

There was little evidence of politicization of relief in VDCs visited, with a few exceptions.

In all the districts visited, people reported that political parties were working together to assist the centralization and coordination of relief distribution. In some high impact districts, namely Sindhupalchok and Dolakha, political party leaders were accused of appropriating relief for their constituencies and pocket areas at the very initial stage of the earthquake response. However, such tensions decreased after VDC mechanisms offered opportunities for political parties to coordinate relief distribution.

In high impact VDCs in high impact districts, where households sustained generally similar damages and incoming relief materials were of sufficient quantity to allow for equal distribution to all households, there

was little to no accusation of political parties appropriating relief for their stronghold or constituency after the establishment of local coordination mechanisms. Dissatisfaction was registered primarily in areas where VDC mechanisms had to prioritize among the affected households. For example in Dhuwakot, a lower impact VDC in Gorkha, political parties decided to prioritize 'needy' households as immediate beneficiaries. This decision was later challenged by locals of one ward accusing the VDC mechanism of subjectively deciding whether a particular household was 'needy'. Accusations of political parties interfering in distribution were most common in medium impact districts where VDC mechanisms faced greater challenges distributing limited resources.

Political parties were accused of influencing the outcome of damage and needs assessments.

People in the VDCs placed great importance on the damage assessments and distribution of ID cards as these will likely determine medium and longer term relief and reconstruction support. Damage assessments were problematic in all the districts visited except in Dolakha where assessments were conducted systematically across the district by teams of engineers sent from the district headquarters and Kathmandu. Conflicts around assessments were generally political in nature with parties lobbying on behalf of disgruntled locals demanding better assessments with more accurate damage

categories. In Makwanpur and Okhaldhunga, for example, damage assessments and allegations of political influence led to tensions (see Case Study 4.1). In Syangja and Makwanpur, the district level authorities had to order a reassessment after suspecting that the assessments, conducted by the VDC mechanisms involving political parties and VDC Secretaries, had exaggerated the number of houses damaged. Nevertheless, dissatisfaction over damage assessments were more likely caused by a lack of clear instructions to assessment teams and poor implementation than politicization.

Case Study 4.1: Politicization of damage assessments

Dissatisfaction over the politicization of household damage assessments was reported in two districts, Okhaldhunga and Makwanpur. In Katunje VDC, Okhaldhunga, the VDC Social Mobilizer, allegedly a CPN-UML cadre, led the damage assessment. Locals affiliated with other political parties, mainly UCPN(M) and NC, accused the Social Mobilizer of influencing the assessment team to categorize the houses of all CPN-UML sympathizers as ‘fully damaged’, ensuring them full government compensation, while categorizing other fully damaged houses as ‘partially damaged’. A meeting was scheduled to settle the dispute but was unsuccessful and locals divided along party lines ended up fighting each other. The police officer present to witness the meeting

was also beaten and three people were arrested in the incident, although they were later released on bail. This incident apparently strained the relationship between CPN-UML and UCPN(M) sympathizers. It was later decided that those dissatisfied with the assessment of their houses as ‘partially damaged’ should lodge a formal complaint at the DDRC. The DDRC had already decided that disgruntled locals should submit pictures of their fully damaged or demolished houses to qualify for reassessment under the ‘fully damaged’ category and be eligible for the compensation of NPR 15,000. But in the absence of official policies or formalized decisions, many people had doubts whether demolishing their houses would guarantee them full compensation.

Similarly, in Betini VDC in Makwanpur district, UCPN(M) led a group of around 40 protesters to the district headquarters to express their dissatisfaction over the assessment carried out by the district technical team. There were widespread complaints about the team's capacity, dedication and professionalism while assessing houses and there were allegations that the team was influenced by NC and CPN-UML. A local UCPN(M) party member complained that the technical team categorized "two identically damaged houses differently" and an elderly shop-owner complained that "members of the technical team spent only a third of the time they were supposed to take for assessments in the village."

While protests against damage assessments were sometimes politicized, it

is unclear to what extent the assessments themselves were influenced by political leaders. Problems with damage assessments and the poor and inconsistent data they produced also related to the lack of clear instructions to assessment teams, multiple assessments conducted at different levels, and insufficient or problematic categories. The widespread dissatisfaction with damage assessments was likely primarily caused by policy flaws as well as poor implementation rather than the politicization of assessments. Nevertheless, with dissatisfaction rising in relation to the prospect of higher benefits being distributed based on damage assessments, politicization of protests and demands for reclassification at the individual or broader levels are likely to increase.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

Social cohesion and intra-community solidarity remained strong after the earthquake in VDCs visited and no major security concerns or conflicts were reported. There was no evidence of willful discrimination in the distribution of resources. Nevertheless, some groups felt discriminated against and resentment over perceived inequality were sometimes mentioned, with references to caste, ethnicity, and religion indicating the potential for social tensions. Resentment over damage assessments and their impact on the reconstruction phase, as well as over resettlement procedures, were raised frequently and identified as potential sources of conflict.

5.1 Security

No major security concerns, crimes, or conflict were reported at the local level.

Security was generally good with almost no crimes or major conflicts reported in any of the wards visited. This is likely due to the fact that the security presence was strong in affected areas with security forces deployed to assist relief distribution and strengthen security. In some places, this even led to a decline in crimes. Most importantly, however, social cohesion and solidarity was strong at the local level. The equal distribution model adopted by VDCs in affected districts likely helped strengthen this communal spirit.

In the early days after the earthquake, however, the situation was reported to have been different with more frequent tensions and quarrels over relief distribution, including incidents of violence. In Sindhupalchok,

for example, a NC leader was assaulted after having been accused of distributing aid along party lines and there was a report of a ‘minor quarrel’ in Lisankhu VDC during the early days of relief distribution. At times, resentment was channeled into violent protests against administrative officials, for example in Sindhupalchok and Dolakha.⁵⁹ By mid-June, however, grievances had been aired and, for the most part, acceptable modalities of distribution had been established. Protests against government officials may have contributed to improving the government’s response. In Sindhupalchok, at least, the assault on the Assistant CDO spurred agreements, which improved the government response.

5.2 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion and intra-community solidarity was strong and there was no evidence of willful social discrimination.

Individuals and communities helped each other and cooperated to ensure that relief was distributed equally. Examples include assistance in constructing temporary shelters and in getting relief supplies to geographically isolated wards. In general, this assistance takes place within VDCs, rather than across them, and was generally grounded in pre-existing modes of cooperation. In both Dolakha and Okhaldhunga, for example,

communities had long-practiced *parma*, a system of labor exchange in which households take turns helping on each other’s land. This system facilitated cooperation to salvage goods from destroyed homes and to construct temporary shelters.

⁵⁹ Refer to Section 3, in particular subsection 3.4, for details on initial tensions over relief distribution.



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The equal distribution model of the VDC and ward relief distribution committees appeared to strengthen cooperation, or at least did not undermine it. Communities preferred equal distribution (and supplies sufficient for VDC-wide distribution), even if this meant forgoing higher value relief packages for smaller sections of the population. Only in one district, Makwanpur, were high levels of individual resentment observed. This may be due to the presence of outspoken individuals who were unhappy with the relief distribution. It may also be an indication that social cooperation is more difficult to maintain in medium affected districts, where fewer external resources were provided and there was greater divergence in damage and needs from ward to ward and from household to household.

No concrete examples of discriminatory distribution practices or social conflict along ethnic or caste lines were found. On the contrary, in several places strong intra-community solidarity included Dalits and other marginalized groups, at least temporarily overriding otherwise prevalent forms of discrimination. In Barpak VDC in Gorkha, for example, Dalits were sharing temporary shelters and a communal kitchen with Gurungs and others from the same settlement. They voiced a preference for relocating jointly with the other communities from their settlement, fearing discrimination elsewhere if they were to be resettled separately.

5.3 Potential Sources of Conflict

While there was no evidence of willful discrimination, some groups still felt discriminated against. Resentment over perceived inequality was sometimes talked about with references to caste, ethnicity, or religion, indicating the potential for social tensions.

In several places, teams heard complaints that one particular caste or ethnic group had received a larger share of relief, though no evidence for this was found. Dalit and *janajati* communities in Okhaldhunga reported that ‘clever and cunning’ (*batha thatha*) ‘big shots’ (*thula bada*) were capturing more than their fair share of relief materials, referring to Brahmin/Chettri village elites. Brahmin/Chettri communities in the same ward shared this suspicion, but directed the accusation at some powerful unknown figure outside the view of the community. Suspicions also ran in the reverse direction of the normal caste hierarchy. In Sindhupalchok, for example, one Brahmin/Chettri community reported that Tamang leaders in control of the distribution process were discriminating against them. While such perceptions were likely shaped by various factors, the fact that they were expressed as concerns about caste or ethnic discrimination reveals that caste and ethnic inequalities remain salient features.

Resentment of Christian communities also seems to have increased.⁶⁰ Several individ-

uals reported that aid delivered by Christian organizations or churches from Kathmandu was being directed solely to Christian communities, and some officials claimed that Christian organizations were consistently underreporting the aid they were delivering. Others reported that they suspected that Christian aid efforts were being used as a means to proselytize, citing rumors of Bibles being included in relief packages. No evidence for these claims could be found, especially in terms of how the activities of Christian organizations compared with other religious organizations.⁶¹

It is important to note that such accusations and the accompanying resentment was widespread and appeared to be increasing. Given the current political climate, this could be an indication of a potentially dangerous situation. Christian proselytization is often characterized as a threat to national integrity and religious harmony and Hindu nationalists have been increasingly active since the draft of the new constitution was released. Their rhetoric has also been increasingly violent, with some openly calling for religious war.⁶²

⁶⁰ There were indications that resentment was increasing in several districts, but it was most evident in Makwanpur, where the combination of a large Christian population and strong support for RPP-N may contribute to increased tensions.

⁶¹ Research teams observed one Christian church from Kathmandu distributing aid to a Christian community, but the circumstances of the aid

delivery and the extent to which such instances took place are not known.

⁶² For example, Kamalnayanacharya, a prominent Hindu nationalist, published an ‘appeal’ on the front page of the national daily *Annapurna Post* on 21 July 2015 in which he argues a ‘decisive religious war’ is necessary.



Photo: Nayan Pokharel

Resentment over damage assessments and their impact on the reconstruction phase, as well as over resettlement procedures, were frequently raised and are potential sources of conflict.

Resentment over damage assessments of homes remains high in most districts and may manifest in overt conflict if grievances are not addressed and policies are not clearly communicated in advance. Although grievances regarding assessment policies and procedures have been aired, and

mechanisms for appeal have been developed in some districts, resentment fostered by those whose homes were not classified as fully damaged can be expected to flare when actual cash disbursement for reconstruction takes place.

The possibility of this resentment developing into outright conflict is highest in medium and low affected districts where the proportion of partially damaged homes is higher. In most districts, resentment regarding assessment had thus far been directed primarily toward distant district-level officials.⁶³ As cash was unevenly distributed amongst differentially classified neighbors, however, this resentment may shift to an inter-personal level, especially in places where it is suspected that assessment classifications are the result of personal or political favors. If this occurs, the possibility of social conflict may rise.

Furthermore, there were already indications of resentment surrounding temporary resettlement solutions. Permanent resettlement of communities that cannot return to their homes may generate conflict if the concerns of all stakeholders are not adequately addressed. Although there were no instances of outright conflict over the temporary

resettlement of displaced communities, there were a number of indications of increased social tension due to resettlement decisions. In Okhaldhunga, for example, a unilateral decision by the CDO combined with caste tensions generated resentment (Case Study 5.1). In another example, a displaced community in Makwanpur resettled in the community forest, but this decision was challenged by others in the area and district officials had to intervene to declare that the displaced community could stay in the forest for the duration of the monsoon. At the time of the research, the recognition that such resettlement arrangements were required and justified on humanitarian grounds for the monsoon period prevailed over underlying resentments. Longer-term resettlement decisions, however, will need to carefully consider the potential for future tensions. At the very least, the concerns of all stakeholders should be heard and decision-making processes should be made more transparent.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

⁶³ Syangja is one exception to this, where many individuals blamed local leaders for favoring political allies in assessments.

Case Study 5.1: Resettlement and caste – different responses of displaced communities in Okhaldhunga

In two of the most affected wards in Okhaldhunga, all households were forced to seek temporary resettlement in other wards as a result of the destruction to their homes and the landslide risks that the earthquakes created. In this sense, all of the households were ‘equally affected’. The resources available to different caste groups, however, shaped how they were able to respond, with repercussions on social relations in the VDC.

Across the two wards, 40 households were Brahmin and 20 were Dalit. The Brahmin households were able to quickly resettle in safer wards throughout the VDC. Some were able to build temporary shelters on land they owned in these wards, while others built shelters on land owned by relatives. The Dalit households, however, neither owned land nor had relatives with enough extra land to allow them to stay. After negotiations, the Dalit households were allowed to build emergency shelters in the maize fields owned by Brahmin families in a neighboring ward, but they were only allowed to stay there for a few weeks.

A team from the DDRC, which included the CDO, visited the VDC after the divisional geologist from the Department of Mines and Geology submitted a report that recommended the resettlement of the entire community. The team offered to construct temporary communal shelters for

the displaced households. The Dalit households accepted the offer, but representatives from the Brahmin households declined and indicated that they would prefer the temporary shelters they had constructed to a communal arrangement. The DDRC team decided to build a temporary communal shelter for the Dalit households in an open space in another ward of the VDC. In making the decision, however, the team did not seek the input or consent of the people living in the surrounding area, who are primarily Brahmin.

At the time, residents of the surrounding area did not vocalize any objection to the arrangement. Within a few weeks, though, they began to complain about the decision. They were upset that the communal shelter occupied the only public space in the VDC and that they were not consulted before the decision was made. They also complained that the Dalit households, some of whom had brought livestock with them, were generating too much waste and pollution, indicating that their complaints were rooted in caste tensions. This was underscored by the complaint that the DDRC had unfairly provided disproportionate resources to this Dalit community. One Brahmin teacher remarked, “How can the government decide on the basis of caste? We are all affected in the same way. They got shelters, we got nothing.”

At the time of the research, the Brahmin households living near the communal shelter recognized that humanitarian concerns during the monsoon necessitated the arrangement. It is unlikely that this empathy will extend much beyond the monsoon period, and simmering resentments may manifest in outright conflict if the Dalit households are not able to return to their own lands or shift to a site for permanent resettlement. That members of the Brahmin community

complained that Dalit households received disproportionate aid—despite the fact that the same offer of communal shelter had been extended to the Brahmin community—illustrates how difficult it can be to balance needs and expectations. In such instances, full communication with all stakeholders during decision-making processes is critical. In this case, an alternative to the DDRC team’s decision does not seem to have been available.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

6. PROTECTION AND VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability has increased since the earthquake. Sources of vulnerability include displacement, inadequate temporary shelters, as well as inconsistent needs and damage assessments. These have left several groups more vulnerable and exposed to uncertainties, health risks, and exploitation. Decreased psychosocial wellbeing was also a common concern.

No incidences of crimes and abuse targeting women, children, or the elderly were reported. Nevertheless, these groups were 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 was 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 as being more privileged. People in geographically isolated locations, who faced greater difficulties in accessing relief, often perceive this as discrimination.

6.1 Factors Increasing Vulnerability

Displacement and resettlement

Displaced people faced greater uncertainty and were more vulnerable to threats and conflicts.

While many people whose houses had been destroyed were staying in temporary or semi-permanent shelters away from their original homes, those displaced by landslide risks faced greater uncertainty. With their land feared to be unsafe, they were uncertain whether they would be able to return and rebuild their houses and resume their livelihoods. Most were waiting for geological assessments before taking further decisions, indicating a clear preference for returning or resettling as close to their previous homes as possible. In Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchok, and Kalinchok VDC in Dolakha, for example, people had stopped farming stating that they would only return to their fields after a landslide risk assessment was conducted. In Syaule VDC in Sindhupalchok, on the other hand, people refused to leave despite having lost their land due to landslides, stating that they

had nowhere else to go. Uncertainties over landslide risks and resettlement had thus left many displaced households without the ability to plan ahead and without income security in the medium to longer term.⁶⁴

Settled under temporary and informal arrangements, and with uncertain futures, displaced groups were also exposed to threats of removal/resettlement and various forms of exploitation. A lack of clarity on needs and mechanisms for resettlement—the absence of thorough landslide risk assessments and longer-term resettlement plans—exacerbates uncertainty and various forms of vulnerability for displaced groups. In several places, households settled on

⁶⁴ See Section 7 for more information on income insecurity.

public land, such as community forests, were dissatisfied with the temporary nature of their resettlement arrangements; some had already been threatened with forceful removal. In Gorkha, a displaced community

was misled by what they thought was a government resettlement scheme only to find out that a Maoist faction was trying to resettle them on land they had captured (Case Study 6.1).

Case Study 6.1: Rumors and uncertainties of resettlement

“I felt what it meant to be a refugee”, said Ganesh, a young man from Barpak VDC in Gorkha, referring to his short stay in Chitwan where he had travelled following rumors that he and his family would be given land for resettlement. He said he had a good life with his family in Barpak but the 25 April earthquake completely destroyed his settlement and landslides had rendered their land unsafe. They were resettled in the same VDC. While staying in temporary community shelters and waiting for relief, Ganesh heard from a friend that the government would give land to earthquake victims in Chitwan.

Soon, Ganesh left for Chitwan with a group of others from Barpak on a reserved bus. In Chitwan, they stayed in shelters made from CGI sheets that had already been prepared for them. But the situation was chaotic. People from over 20 different VDCs were reportedly flooding the area to get land and the assigned plots rapidly decreased in size.

Increasingly irritated by the chaos and the Terai heat and mosquitos, Ganesh started doubting the resettlement scheme. “We realized that this was not from the government. Different kinds of rumors kept coming in. Some of the locals came and told us that this land is private property. We were very confused.” He further added, “In such a slum-like shelter I felt that I was about to be displaced again. At that time, I felt like a refugee.” After eight days in Chitwan and spending nearly NPR 7,000, he decided to return to Barpak. Others from his settlement also returned to Gorkha.

Reportedly, a hardline Maoist faction had captured the land from a private owner and was trying to distribute it to earthquake victims. The Chitwan district authorities on the other hand, tried to send people back, organizing buses filled with sacks of rice.

“It was a crude rumor that we followed blindly,” said Ganesh. “Chitwan is not a suitable place for us. We will be happy if the government helps us find safe land inside Barpak for resettlement.”

As resettlement questions remain unresolved, tensions may increase, leading to various forms of conflict that could further increase the vulnerability of displaced groups. As mentioned above, there were already indications that uncertainty around resettlement issues is a potential conflict driver. While temporary settlement arrange-

ments were generally tolerated by local communities, longer-term solutions are less likely to be easily accepted and may lead to conflicts over resources and social tensions (Case Study 6.2). Further, some groups are likely to resist government resettlement efforts, refusing to be resettled once more or on land too far from their previous homes.

Inadequate shelters

Inadequate temporary shelters left displaced communities exposed and, in many instances, feeling unsafe.

People in most places visited had already managed to construct semi-permanent shelters that were a significant improvement on the improvised tarp shelters of the period immediately following the earthquake. Nevertheless, living conditions for those in temporary or semi-permanent shelters remained difficult. In Barpak VDC, Gorkha, over 500 households were displaced and people had to stay in congested temporary settlements without adequate sanitation facilities. Given poor hygiene standards, the spread of diseases seemed likely, particularly during the monsoon. In Waling municipality in Syangja, and Namtar VDC in Makwanpur, people in temporary shelters also said they were concerned about their exposure to monsoon rains and insect or snake bites.

Those in joint temporary or semi-permanent shelters often feared for their safety and

wellbeing even though no incidents of violence or open conflict were reported. People reported disturbed sleep patterns, lack of concentration, and other signs of distress. In Dhuwakot VDC, Gorkha, for example, people said they feared sleeping at night due to their exposure in open shelters. In Makwanpur, people were similarly concerned, fearing for the safety of women and children in particular.

In places with landslide risks, those unable or unwilling to resettle to safer locations were especially scared, remaining in constant fear of landslides and the threat these posed to their lives. In a landslide-prone settlement of Waling municipality, Syangja, for example, people were in a state of “panic”. In Syaule VDC in Sindhupalchok, people reported fearing for their lives in open shelters on landslide-prone fields.

Case Study 6.2: The temporary nature of arrangements for the displaced

Several settlements in northern Makwanpur were rendered unsafe by active landslides and people were forced to relocate to safer areas after the 25 April earthquake. Young men of one of the settlements decided to build temporary shelters in a nearby community forest for over 20 affected families. These families normally earned comparatively generous incomes from cash crop farming on very fertile land. The area not only has lush and expansive forests offering various resources but also fertile ground which yields as many as three crops a year. For this reason, affected households did not want to relocate far from their previous homes; they were anxiously waiting to see how damaging the monsoon would be, and whether or not they would be able to return to their land. Finding a satisfactory resettlement solution for this community will clearly be difficult.

Even their temporary stay in the community forest, however, was challenged. They had already been accused of illegally cutting trees in the protected forest and officials had reportedly conveyed that they might be forcefully removed. With concerned authorities waiting for national policies on relocation and resettlement, longer-term solutions for this community remain uncertain.

Young political activists took up the role of voicing the concerns of the community and fighting for their rights. “We protected the forest all these years so that we could use some of it in times of crisis like this,” said a young leader. “It’s okay for the government and people in power to misuse the resources, but when we are using it in our desperate situation, they accuse us of misuse. How is this fair?” He seemed ready to fight: “If we survived the wrath of such monstrous earthquakes, we feel little fear in continuing the fight for our community’s survival.”

Various temporary settlements in this area seemed to be divided along political lines. Activists and party members were involved in resettling their respective communities in temporary shelters and accused each other of taking the bigger share of relief.

The fact that displaced households and communities were reluctant to leave—but uncertain about their temporary settlement arrangements as well as longer-term solutions—reveals that resettlement is already a sensitive issue. With local grievances and some level of politicization already surfacing, there are concerns that conflicts around resettlement might increase and indications that there could be protests against political leaders or government authorities.

Inconsistent assessments

Some individuals or households were left more vulnerable as their needs and the damages they suffered had not been assessed or had been assessed wrongly – leaving them without government assistance.

Damage assessments were conducted haphazardly in many places and this had already led to some tensions and protests.⁶⁵ The risk was high that people whose houses were wrongly assessed as ‘partially damaged’ even though they were uninhabitable would receive significantly less assistance. There had been some protests around damage

assessments and beneficiary lists and some had lodged complaints. However, marginalized groups and those facing greater difficulties accessing government services and political support, as well as those in geographically remote regions, were likely to be unable to lodge complaints and receive the support they were due.⁶⁶

Those in rented accommodation were found to be particularly vulnerable.

With assessments focused on damages to houses, the losses and needs of those in rented accommodation had not been assessed at all. Research teams encountered many cases of individuals who had rented rooms that were destroyed during the earthquake and who were left with nowhere to go as well as without government assistance. Many lost everything they owned and voiced concerns over how and where to rebuild their lives.

People in urban and semi-urban areas (bazaars) were more likely to be affected by this. In Sindhupalchok, for example, some people in urban areas were more vulnerable

as they had rented accommodation and hence were not receiving any compensation. They had no land to build temporary shelters on or to use for subsistence farming. In Makwanpur, too, small business owners whose rented shops and accommodation had been damaged were more affected and vulnerable (Caste Study 7.1). In Jiri municipality in Dolakha, people who owned land even said they felt guilty as they saw those who had stayed in rented accommodation struggling but were unable to help them.

Psychosocial wellbeing

Signs of the psychological impact of the earthquake were observed in all wards visited, particularly in high impact areas.

People often did not speak directly about decreased psychosocial wellbeing as a cause of concern, giving the impression of

resilience. However, many pointed out that they were constantly scared or in a state of panic, had difficulties sleeping, or found it

⁶⁵ Refer to Sections 3.6, 4.3, and 5.3 for further information on damage assessments and related protests.

⁶⁶ See also Section 6.3 on structural discrimination and inequality.



Photo: Nayan Pokharel

hard to leave their families to fetch relief materials or go to work. Concerns over the wellbeing of women, children and elderly were also raised (see the next page). In addition, worries over uncertain futures and how to cope with the impact of the earthquake in the longer term were frequently mentioned. In wards where lives were lost during the earthquake, the distress caused by the trauma of losing relatives, neighbors or friends was particularly visible.

Psychosocial counseling was rarely mentioned as a need by local people but was occasionally pointed out by activists or NGO workers. In Barpak VDC in Gorkha, where a Women Friendly Space provided rehabilitation support and counseling, people seemed to make use of it enthusiastically. The fact that psychosocial counseling and similar kinds of support were generally unavailable, however, could leave people vulnerable in the longer term.



Photo: Nayan Pokharel

6.2 Women, Children, and the Elderly

No incidences of crimes and abuse targeting women or children were reported. Nevertheless, women and children were generally considered to be more vulnerable and often showed greater signs of distress.

Gender-based violence was recognized as a consistent issue but reportedly had not increased since the earthquake. Teams did not directly come across any cases of trafficking of women or children. In Gorkha, the research team heard reports at the district level of children being transported from a monastery to Kathmandu and stopped by the police on suspicion of child trafficking. Investigation of this case was ongoing at the time of the research. In Dolakha, a case of child trafficking that had been mentioned in national media was found to be based on false reports; the children were leaving for boarding school as they do every year.

Women and children were nevertheless considered to be more vulnerable. Men were often concerned about the safety, health, and wellbeing of their wives and children in temporary shelters and there were several reports of women feeling unsafe and children having difficulties adjusting to their new and significantly changed environments and daily routines. In some places, there were concerns about the exposure of women and children to diseases in open shelters with inadequate hygiene standards. High levels of alcohol consumption observed in many wards visited may also have left women and children more exposed to domestic violence

or other forms of abuse. But the extent to which alcohol consumption had increased since the earthquake, if at all, was difficult to evaluate.

Single and widowed women were particularly vulnerable.

There were several reports of single women facing greater difficulties in coping with the impact of the earthquake. In Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga, for example, single women felt “helpless”. In order to access relief, they had to walk hours and carry the materials back themselves. They also had to leave their children behind, which seemed to cause them great distress. Widows in particular were adversely affected. In Dolakha, a district-level policy not to distribute beneficiary ID cards and associated benefits to elderly, left widowed women living on their own without support and access to cash relief (see Case Study 6.4).

A lack of representation of women in government and relief distribution mechanisms is likely to leave some of the issues affecting women unaddressed.

Women were underrepresented in various committees involved in relief distribution. Women’s lack of access to decision-making mechanisms meant that their concerns would potentially not be raised effectively and therefore would remain unaddressed, increasing their vulnerability. Issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination were also likely to remain underreported and, as a result, receive less attention.

The wellbeing of children was a common concern and had decreased significantly.

Children were in great distress, especially in medium and highly affected wards. In Baruneshwar VDC in Okhaldhunga, for example, children were too scared to enter their partially damaged houses during the day and reportedly faced difficulties sleeping in sheds and temporary shelters at night. In Katunje VDC in the same district, children were also scared and parents were concerned that their children were unable to concentrate since the earthquake. Children’s health was a common concern among displaced communities. Exposure to insects and bad weather conditions in inadequate shelters, as well as the lack of healthcare facilities, were often cited as problems for children’s health. In Katunje, Okhaldhunga, children had already become sick from leech bites, poor hygiene, and cold weather.

Children’s education has been interrupted severely due to damaged schools and displacement of households.

Most schools were damaged, either fully or partially, across the wards visited. Even in medium and lower impact wards, more than half the schools were affected. In the highest impact wards, over 90% of schools were fully damaged, while over 60% were fully damaged in high impact wards (Figure 6.1).

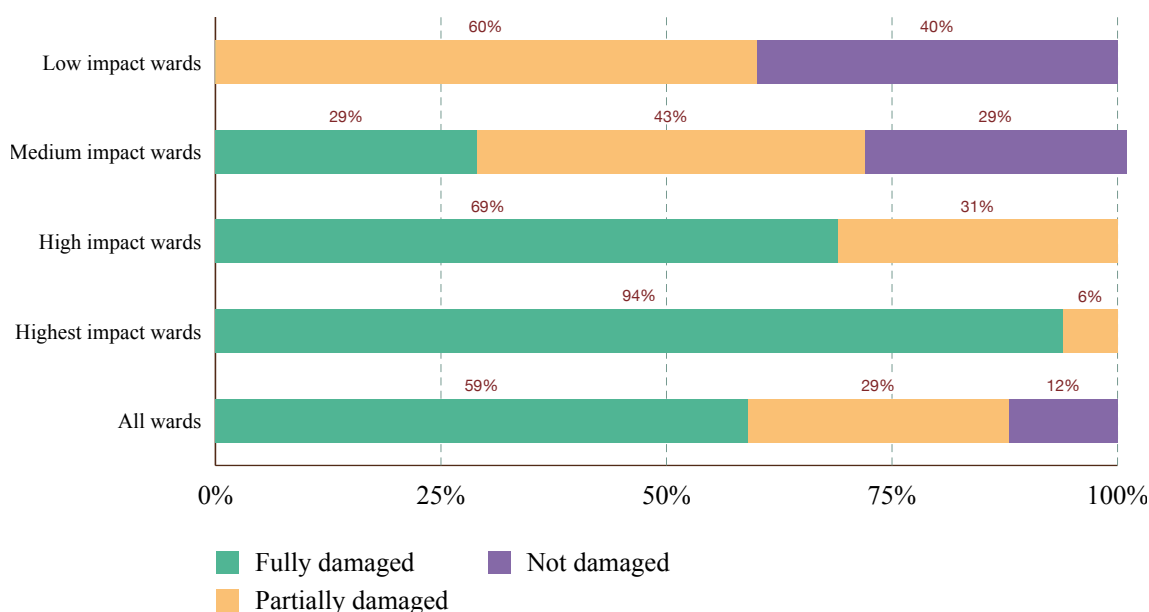


Figure 6.1: Level of damage to schools by level of ward impact⁶⁷

While temporary learning centers or alternative arrangements for classes were already in place in some of the wards visited, children’s education still seemed affected to a significant degree. In some places, children faced difficulties and risks on their way to school as they had to walk further to attend classes in a building that was not damaged, sometimes having to cross landslide-prone areas. Temporary classrooms were also reported to be too hot to use during sunny

days as they were mostly built from CGI sheets. Further, children scared or traumatized by their experience of the earthquake, reportedly had difficulties focusing on their studies. Children of severely affected families may no longer be able to attend school in the longer term but teams did not hear of children being taken out of school to help at home or to take up paid work (see Case Study 6.3).

The elderly were not only more exposed to the impact of the earthquake but also faced greater difficulties accessing relief.

As with children and women, the elderly were generally considered to be more vulnerable, particularly those whose houses had been destroyed, who were displaced by the earthquake, or who live in isolated areas. Older people not only had more difficulties

accessing relief on their own but were also more vulnerable to distress and trauma as well as health hazards. Older people catching diseases in inadequate shelters was a common concern but few such incidences had occurred by mid-June.

⁶⁷ This graph is based on information collected by research teams in wards visited. Each school

building was used as a unit and the percentage of damaged schools was calculated on this basis.

Case Study 6.3: A young boy's dreams of continuing his education

Pasang, a teenage boy in Sindhupalchok, was playing outside with his friends when the 25 April earthquake struck. He said he felt the earth move, panicked, and then saw houses collapse. Thinking of his family, he ran home only to find that their two houses had also been destroyed. One of his brothers and his younger sister had gathered together with their neighbors nearby, but his parents and one of his sisters were buried under the rubble.

Along with 23 members of his settlement, Pasang lost his parents, sister and nine other relatives during the earthquake. They were able to recover the bodies only several days after the earthquake. As the Buddhist priest was unavailable for the funeral ceremony, they decided to dig a grave for the bodies. But the old men of the settlement said that a dead body should be burnt or else their ghost

(bhoot) would return to haunt them. Pasang too believed that “if a body is not burnt it becomes a bhoot that enters the settlement at night and does bad things”. After three days, when the priest was free, they dug out the bodies and burned them according to Tamang cultural practices.

In order to help his family, Pasang had left school the previous year working on the family's fields and earning some money from collecting and selling stones. But his mother wanted him to return to school to finish his education. It was only a week before the earthquake that he rejoined school. With his village badly affected, both his parents gone and homes lost, achieving his dream of an education might prove difficult for Pasang. But he was determined to continue his studies and become a ‘big man’ to make his mother proud.

Displacement had a strong emotional impact on old people who lived on their land all their lives and were reluctant to leave. Some refused to leave, remaining exposed to the risk of landslides. A feeling of hopelessness was often observed among the elderly. As one old man in Sindhupalchok said: “Where would we go?”

In Dolakha, the elderly suffered structural discrimination and, as a result, were unable to collect the relief payment of NPR 15,000

distributed to those whose houses were classified as ‘fully damaged’. The CDO of Dolakha issued a directive that beneficiary ID cards for the elderly (those above 70 years of age, or above 65 for Dalits) would not be distributed directly to them but instead to one of their children. In practice this meant that old people were denied direct access to relief. They had to rely on their children, which was difficult for those living on their own, or whose children were temporarily absent or unwilling to help. Widows seemed

to be disproportionately affected by this (see Case Study 6.4). In the longer term, this may have deeper consequences as larger benefits will be distributed based on beneficiary ID cards that the elderly in Dolakha have not been received.

In some VDCs in Dolakha, the elderly had not received emergency relief for another reason. In these places, relief was distributed

based on data on those who bought shares of the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project. While most people in these areas had bought shares, old people often did not because they either lacked information, did not have enough money, or thought they would not live long enough to reap the benefits. As a result, they did not appear in the shares data used for allocating relief.

6.3 Structural Discrimination and Inequality

There were strong indications that structural inequalities and prevalent forms of exclusion and discrimination would negatively affect the recovery of marginalized groups.

With the shift from relief to reconstruction, many of the factors that contributed to the continuing exclusion of historically marginalized groups are likely to assume greater prominence. Access to bureaucratic representatives and administrative offices will become increasingly important for affected households. Decisions about the kind of resources that should be provided, and where those resources should be directed,

will largely be made by state officials in consultation with political party representatives. Those communities that are underrepresented in local governance mechanisms, that do not have access to state officials—whether as a result of their social and economic standing, geographic location, or both—and/or who do not register as significant constituencies with any political party will be at risk of not receiving the resources they need.

People with limited or no access to extra-local resources, wider social networks, and local government offices were left with fewer options to cope with the impact of the earthquake, leading to some resentment against those perceived to be more privileged.

Economically and socially marginalized groups were found to be more vulnerable in some places due to their lack of access to outside resources as well as government mechanisms. Tamangs, Dalits and Sunuwars in several wards in Okhaldhunga, for example, faced difficulties lodging complaints

over the wrong classification of their homes as partially instead of fully destroyed. Given their limited resources, they could not afford to repeatedly walk to the district headquarters to have their complaints addressed. Without relations to people in powerful positions or with better financial means who

Case Study 6.4: Widows facing difficulties accessing relief

At a VDC center in Dolakha where earthquake victim identity cards were distributed, a 75-year-old widow claimed that she had not received cash relief from the state that was distributed to all those in Dolakha whose houses were damaged. “I don’t know if my sons have claimed it,” she said.

“The VDC secretary said that I ought to get NPR 15,000, which was issued in my youngest son’s name. But my youngest son and his wife are not here – they have to look after their own family. All my sons live separately. I eat alone, wash dishes alone, sleep alone. Right now I live in a temporary shelter and I have been waiting for NPR 15,000 for three days.”

She was not the only widow denied her share of relief. In another ward in the same VDC, an old woman said: “I have my citizenship card but this is not enough. They need the citizenship card of my middle son who is not here; he only visits once or twice a year. I will not get relief, they say. We don’t have the support of our husbands – they are gone. Only our sons can support us but they are too busy with their lives.”

District officials in Dolakha explained that earthquake victim ID cards were

only distributed to the owner of the damaged property. If a mother has given her property to her son, an ID card will only be issued to her son, the property owner. Officials said: “It is the responsibility of the son to look after his mother, and to come back to his district to claim relief for her. The state cannot provide relief to a mother who is not a legal owner of the property, and cannot do much if the sons are not around.”

Unable to receive their share without the presence and citizenship cards of their sons, many widowed mothers were denied access to relief. This issue has become contested and already led to protests in Dolakha. In one VDC, a group of people reportedly vandalized the VDC office trying to forcefully claim ID cards and relief payments on behalf of widows who lived with their sons and therefore did not officially qualify for ID cards. The state then claimed to guarantee relief to women who live on their own and whose household can be attested for through a communal affidavit. Yet, researchers met several widows who were told that they could only claim relief through their sons, forcing them to rely entirely on their support and goodwill.

could support them by providing easy loans, jobs or other forms of assistance, these communities are likely to face difficulties recovering. In Sindhupalchok, some voiced resentment against those with second homes in Kathmandu receiving the same or an even greater share of relief materials as those with limited means. Economic differentiation in terms of access to extra-local resources may thus be a greater source of conflict than ethnic or caste tensions—although economic and social conflict are often linked given that lower castes and marginalized groups are disproportionately more likely to be poor and to have limited access to outside resources.

Dalits were found to be particularly vulnerable as they generally own less land than other groups and have limited alternative sources of income or support networks

People in geographically isolated locations face greater difficulties in accessing relief and often perceive this as discrimination.

Households in isolated settlements had to walk several hours, even days, to access relief and information on government aid. In Dhuwakot VDC, Gorkha, for example, people from the two remotest wards felt ‘left out’ and underprivileged in terms of accessing relief materials. They complained that even before the earthquake they would always receive a smaller share of resources routed through the VDC. While this was likely related to the geographic remoteness of the two wards, communities there were also underrepresented in VDC mechanisms and were largely uninvolved in decision-

making. Similarly, households in remote wards of Okhaldhunga and Sindhupalchok reported difficulties in accessing relief and said that they had received less than people in other wards. In a remote ward of Syaule VDC, Sindhupalchok, Brahmin and Chettri communities were vocal about what they perceived as discrimination against them in the distribution process. However, no evidence of such discrimination was found and it seemed likely that their perceptions were shaped by their geographic isolation from the rest of the VDC.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

7. 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.⁶⁸ 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 many manual laborers, the impact was positive because demand and wage rates increased after the earthquake, but the demand for skilled labor dropped. Several small businesses 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 highly affected, especially in Dolakha and Gorkha.

The sale of assets remained low and was restricted to the sale of livestock in places visited. Borrowing significant amounts of money was uncommon, though most people planned to borrow money in the future. Most said they were waiting for clarity on government assistance schemes and special interest rates for earthquake victims before taking loans.

⁶⁸ Throughout this section, ‘impact’ refers to the short-term, *negative* impact of the earthquake on different occupations, unless otherwise specified.

Remittances, which are a major source of income for households in affected areas, seemed to have increased after the earthquake. Yet, the long-term effects on

labor migration and remittances are not known and will likely depend on the scope of government financial assistance for home reconstruction and livelihood recovery.

7.1 Common Sources of Livelihood

Before the earthquakes, the primary source of livelihood in 33 out of 36 wards visited was farming (Table 7.1). This included farming of cash crops and raising livestock for sale, but the majority of households practiced subsistence farming. The impact on farming was high in over 30% of the wards in which farming is a primary source of livelihood. This can be attributed to an increase of landslides, disruption to harvests and the destruction of grain. In these wards, loss of livestock and displacement also made it difficult to continue farming before the monsoon. There were, however, no reports of decreases in consumption suggesting the food aid that was provided was sufficient in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

In all the wards visited, the majority of households had mixed livelihoods, mostly subsidizing farming with other sources of income. Some family members, for example, may engage primarily in agricultural work, while others work abroad or in urban areas like Kathmandu, providing external sources of income that have not been affected by the earthquakes. Still others may engage in wage labor nearby, tend to a small shop, or produce handicrafts that are sold in urban markets. Many households had at least one

family member working abroad or engaged in seasonal wage labor.

Labor was the primary source of livelihood for at least some households in 20 wards. This includes both landless laborers, who engage primarily in manual, daily wage labor, and skilled laborers, like blacksmiths or woodworkers. The impact on labor was high in over 20% of wards where labor is a primary source of livelihood. Wage labor was disrupted since the earthquake, as most construction projects were indefinitely interrupted. There were, however, some positive impacts on manual labor, as the damage caused by the earthquakes drove up demand for labor to assist with demolition and the removal of rubble. It is expected that the demand for manual labor will increase significantly when reconstruction begins.

Commerce through ‘small business’ refers primarily to shopkeepers and restaurant owners. The impact of the earthquake was high in 28% of the wards in which small businesses were the primary source of livelihood. Business owners whose shops were destroyed, and those who lived in urban areas and had no land to fall back on, seemed most severely affected. This was because



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

business owners renting their shops were not eligible for government compensation for damage to property, despite having lost their only source of income.

Table 7.1: Primary source of livelihood of households by ward⁶⁹

		Proportion of households in wards		
		Most	Many	Few
Primary source of livelihood	Farming	33	3	0
	Labor	0	5	15
	Small business	0	2	25
	Other	0	3	2

‘Other’ refers primarily to livelihoods dependent on the tourism industry, but includes occupations like teaching, the civil service, and work in the police or army. The two wards in Jiri VDC in Dolakha, where

tourism was the main source of income for many people, were severely affected as tourism drastically declined after the 25 April earthquake.

⁶⁹ This table and the tables below indicate the number of wards in which at least some households rely on a particular occupation as their *primary* source of livelihood. There are, for example, at least some households that rely primarily on labor in 20 of

the wards studied. This does *not* mean that some income from labor is not present in the remaining 16 wards, but only that labor is not the *primary* source of livelihood for any household in those wards.

Livelihoods that were highly affected were concentrated entirely in wards with high and highest levels of damage. The impact on livelihoods in medium and low affected wards was low (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Extent of impact on livelihoods

		Extent of impact in wards visited		
		High	Medium	Low
Primary source of livelihood	Farming	10	7	19
	Labor	5	1	14
	Small business	7	4	14
	Other	2	0	3

7.2 Impact on Farming, Labor, Small Businesses, and Other Sources of Livelihood

Impact on farming

Before the earthquakes, most households in the wards visited owned their own land and practiced subsistence farming.

Plots of land were generally small and only a few households owned more than two *ropanis* of land.⁷⁰ Primary crops were rice, wheat, maize, and potato. Due to the terrain

and available resources, farmers often had to rely on draft animals to plough their land. Annual yields were generally insufficient to sustain a household for an entire year and households reported being able to produce enough to last for as few as three and as many as nine months. Food for the rest of

⁷⁰ One *ropani* is roughly 509 square meters.



Photo: Nayan Pokharel

the year was purchased with cash income from various other sources of income. The most prevalent sources were daily wage labor, seasonal wage labor, and remittances. Some wards grew cash crops like off-season

vegetables and ginger, and low-lying wards in Gorkha were able to grow fruits like orange, banana, and lychee. These wards were located closer to major highways or market areas.

The impact on farming was most severe in the wards in which the earthquakes caused the highest level of damage. In almost all cases, this was the result of landslides triggered by the earthquakes or the risk of future landslides. In some cases the loss of draft animals also had a significant impact.

In wards with medium and low earthquake damage, the impact on farming was slight, in many cases negligible (Table 7.3). In those wards, farming had already resumed. The timing of the earthquake was such that the impact on agriculture was minimal, especially with regards to rice and wheat

as planting had not begun yet, and little work was required on those fields. The most damage was caused to maize and potato crops. The impact on farming was most severe in the wards with high and highest damage caused by the earthquake.

This was primarily due to landslides, which swept away the terraces. Many people reported that they would not return to their fields out of fear, at least until a formal landslide risk assessment had been conducted. In Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchok, only 15% of households had been able to return to their fields for these reasons. Fear of landslides kept most people away, but residents also reported that their fields were cracked and that the trails leading to them were ruined.

Second, many draft animals were killed in the earthquakes, and people could not farm without them. In high impact districts, there was a proportionally lower loss of large draft animals (cows, oxen, buffaloes) than of smaller animals (goats, sheep, pigs) and poultry. Based on the 2011 Census, losses ranged from 0.11% of large animals (112 counts) in Dolakha to 4.47% in Sindhupalchok, which amounted to 6,118 counts.⁷¹ In Baruwa, this has resulted in a shortage of draft animals, which will be hard to replace.

Table 7.3: Impact on farmers' livelihood by level of ward damage

		Impact on farmers' livelihood		
		High	Medium	Low
Level of ward damage	Highest	6	5	0
	High	4	2	6
	Medium	0	0	9
	Low	0	0	4

The loss of livestock, aside from draft animals, was a problem for many farmers.

For many, the sale of livestock like chicken and goats had been a major source of income. Others used them for milk and meat. In high impact districts, losses ranged from 0.21% of smaller animals in Dolakha (414 counts) to 26.08% of poultry in Sindhupalchok (or 105,693 counts) – a significant loss of property.⁷² In four wards visited, farmers, unable to care for their animals after they were displaced, also had to sell livestock. Though there were few reports of sale of livestock in medium impact districts, the total households selling livestock was as high as 30% in Baruwa, Sindhupalchok.

In Namtar VDC, Makwanpur, residents reported that they were forced to sell their livestock at a quarter of the normal market rate, as they were being displaced to Kathmandu, leaving them with little choice. In Dhuwakot VDC in Gorkha, some farmers with chickens reported they had to reduce the number they raise because they needed some of the space where the chicken shed had been for their temporary shelter.

⁷¹ <http://drrportal.gov.np>

⁷² <http://drrportal.gov.np>



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

There were some cases in which the earthquake directly affected crops that had previously been planted.

In Boch VDC in Dolakha, for example, disruption to the soil caused by the earthquakes ruined half of the potato crop. Stores of potato seed were also destroyed in Boch, which means that the impact will extend beyond the current harvest. In the short-term, the disruption caused to daily routines by imme-

diately responses to the earthquakes (including building temporary shelters, collecting aid, and tending to the injured) as well as displacement to other wards, meant crops were not being tended to in some wards such as in Prapcha.

In six wards, crops had been damaged prior to the earthquakes, so even a low impact on farming caused by the earthquakes could significantly affect many households' source of livelihood.

In Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga, for example, people relied heavily on potatoes for consumption. Earlier in the year, however, an unidentified disease significantly decreased the yield of the potato harvest, and their current stock will soon be depleted. In

Kalinchok VDC of Dolakha, an armyworm infestation destroyed much of the maize crop, and food shortages had already been anticipated. The delayed monsoon and the poor rainfall of this year's monsoon compounds problems.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

Despite varying levels of impact on farming, future consequences will likely be significant, especially for the displaced and those without alternative sources of income.

Despite these many challenges, there was no report of decreases in food consumption. This suggests that food aid delivery was effective, with large enough quantities of food arriving in all wards. However, future consequences will be significant. Of the 36 wards visited, only one ward in Dhuwakot, Gorkha, and one in Shreekrishna Gandaki,

Syangja, received aid in the form of farm inputs. Much more of it will be needed to overcome the obstacles to farming caused by the earthquakes. As the main threat to farming is landslides and risks of landslides, farming cannot resume until proper land assessments have been carried out to determine the damage to fields.

Since most households had mixed sources of income, the losses suffered in farming could be somewhat compensated by other sources.

For many farming households who were not displaced by the earthquakes, and whose cash income comes from sources abroad or daily wage labor, the long-term impact on their livelihood is likely to be limited. The financial burden of reconstructing homes,

however, may be severe. In many cases, cash income from remittances and seasonal or daily wage labor is sufficient to only meet basic needs. It will be difficult to continue to meet these needs if large loan repayments are required and whatever upward economic

mobility there may have been will likely be disrupted in both the short- and long-term. For farming households that have been displaced and/or are dependent on cash

income from industries also affected by the earthquakes, the impact on their livelihood will be significant.

Impact on labor

Before the earthquakes, most laborers in wards visited were engaged in manual labor such as farm work on neighbors' land, construction, and carrying goods.

Some households relied on income from skilled labor, such as blacksmiths, tailors, and handicraft producers. In general, laborers were found to work within the VDC

where they reside.⁷³ Income from labor was usually sufficient only to meet basic needs, and in many cases fell short even of that.

The immediate impact of the earthquakes on labor was positive for many manual laborers because demand and wage rates increased after the earthquake, but the impact was negative for skilled labor as demand dropped.

The impact on labor was mixed. For many manual laborers, the short-term impact on income was positive. Immediately after the earthquake, there was high demand for labor to demolish houses and clear rubble and wages rose accordingly. In Jiri municipality in Dolakha, for example, daily wage rates were NPR 500 prior to the earthquake, but have been as high as NPR 1,500 since then. This might mean that farmers who have lost their land or crops will turn to wage labor, though there had been no reports of people having changed or thinking of changing their primary occupation. On the other hand, demand for skilled labor such as handicraft makers has sharply declined.

employment in demolition or reconstruction in earthquake-affected areas. On the other hand, there was a positive impact for some skilled laborers. In Okhaldhunga, for example, laborers skilled in the construction of bamboo houses were in high demand. In Baruneshwor VDC, people would collect locally available resources such as bamboo and would seek help from those in the community capable of building shelters in return for a small amount of money. Even in cases where there was high demand for manual or skilled labor, however, many laborers with homes in wards with high levels of damage were simply unable to work immediately after the earthquakes because they had to take care of constructing their own shelters and salvaging assets from their destroyed homes.

There were exceptions to both of these trends. For instance, work on the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project in Dolakha had been halted, resulting in hundreds of local manual laborers losing what had been reasonably secure jobs. Similarly, laborers on construction sites in Jiri lost their jobs. Some of these laborers may have since found

⁷³ This does not include migrant laborers who provide income from remittances as discussed below.

Significant impact on laborers' livelihoods was concentrated entirely in wards with the highest levels of damage. Table 7.4 shows the negative impact on laborers' livelihoods by level of damage at the ward level. Four of the five cases of high impact were in Dolakha, where masons and carpenters

were out of work in Kalinchok VDC and construction sites and a dairy factory closed in Jiri. The remaining cases of high or medium impact on laborers were both in Gorkha, where skilled laborers were out of work.

Table 7.4: Impact on laborers' livelihood by ward damage⁷⁴

		Impact on laborers' livelihood		
		High	Medium	Low
Level of ward damage	Highest	5	1	2
	High	0	0	5
	Medium	0	0	3
	Low	0	0	4

During the reconstruction period, the impact on labor is expected to be largely positive.

It was expected that the negative impact on livelihoods for all types of laborers would reverse when the reconstruction period is in full swing and demand for all types of labor is likely to rise. Many migrant laborers who returned after the earthquakes, and many who migrate for seasonal wage labor,

indicated that they may remain in Nepal for the coming year to work on reconstruction in their community. Whether there will in fact be such a high demand for labor will likely depend on the financial support the government and international donors provide.

⁷⁴ This table illustrates the impact only for the wards in which labor is the primary source of livelihood for at least some households.

Impact on small businesses

Before the earthquakes, people in urban and rural areas were running small businesses such as shops and restaurants or hotels, with those in urban areas more likely to rely entirely on business as their source of income.

Most small businesses were teashops, restaurants/hotels, and shops that sell packaged food, toiletries, and other daily necessities. These businesses were located along the roads that traverse VDCs, but primarily served customers who live in the surrounding area. In rural areas, these businesses were mostly located on land and in buildings

owned by the shopkeeper's family, and most business owners also farmed other plots of land they owned. In urban areas, however, businesses usually operated in rented spaces, and business owners were more likely to rely exclusively on the cash income from their business for their livelihood.

The impact on small businesses varied, but many were completely destroyed. For those without land of their own to farm, this meant a complete loss of livelihood.

Most shops and restaurants were able to re-open soon after the earthquakes, but some were completely destroyed. The impact on small business owners in bazaars or urban areas was often positive as goods were purchased to compensate for losses occurred during the earthquake or by the influx of aid providers. In the cases where shops were

destroyed, however, it meant complete loss of livelihood for those shop owners who did not have land of their own to fall back on.

In most cases, the impact on small businesses was low. Significant impact was concentrated entirely in the highest impacted wards (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5: Impact on small business owners' livelihood by ward damage⁷⁵

		Impact on small business owners' livelihood		
		High	Medium	Low
Level of ward damage	Highest	6	3	1
	High	1	1	7
	Medium	0	0	6
	Low	0	0	2

In Namtar VDC in Makwanpur, for example, all of the shops along the highway were completely destroyed. Many shops in bazaar areas in Sindhupalchok and Dolakha were

⁷⁵ This table illustrates the impact only for the wards in which small business was the primary source of livelihood for at least some households.

also completely destroyed. In urban areas, the loss of reinforced concrete buildings will be a significant financial burden to the owners. In Jiri, the investment in many of these kinds of buildings often exceeded the bank loan that had been provided—in part because the number of floors often exceeded the approved design—which meant that these buildings were underinsured and the owners will have to bear the loss.

Even though households that relied on

small business as their primary source of livelihood comprised a small proportion of affected households, they should not be overlooked in considerations for long-term relief. The loss of livelihood was in many cases total and many small business owners felt neglected by the assessment and relief process (Case Study 7.1). Such concerns were echoed in urban areas in highly damaged districts, where some people complained that the damage to their property was not taken as seriously as it should have been.

Case Study 7.1: A woman owning a small business is hit hard by the earthquake

“Unlike most of my neighbors, I do not own land for farming... It’s been almost a month already and no-one has assessed the extent of my damage. They take accounts of losses of crops and livestock, but why not the value of my business that I lost?” asked Shanti, a woman who owned a small cosmetics shop in a highly-affected VDC in Makwanpur district. The house where she was renting rooms for her family and her shop collapsed when the earthquake hit. Recalling the moment, she still seemed in shock: “We were stranded, with nothing to eat, without any shelter in the rain, my kids were constantly crying. The image of the house coming down instantly still makes me sick, I never want to go back.”

Shanti lost her livelihood, the family’s sole source of income, during the earthquake. She initially took her children to a nearby town to stay with her

relatives. But when school resumed, she had to move back to the VDC and stay in a temporary shelter together with other displaced families as she was unable to afford life and educating her children in the city. “Both of them [the children] have been getting sick with diarrhea and coughs and colds. They are not very cheerful after the earthquake,” she said. “They did not want to come back.”

Unlike her neighbors whose livelihood is tied to the land where they cultivate cash crops such as off-season vegetables, Shanti was not opposed to being resettled elsewhere. “As long as the government can ensure us a proper shelter and respectful rehabilitation, I will not hesitate to move. But I need the assurance that I can restart my business. Alternatively, the government should provide us with income generating opportunities. I am not a farmer, I cannot farm.”

Impact on other sources of livelihood

Before the earthquakes, some households in wards visited relied on sources of livelihood other than farming, labor, and business. Some had secure jobs with consistent income, such as work in the armed services or police, the civil service, or teaching. Most, however, relied on less secure or seasonal

employment, such as work associated with the tourism industry: tour guides and porters, hoteliers, drivers, and agro-businesses that produce goods for tourists. Some skilled labor—especially handicraft production—was dependent on the tourism industry as well.

The impact on the tourism industry was high, especially in Dolakha and Gorkha. This also had an impact on associated industries, such as agro-business and handicraft production.

For the most part, the impact on other sources of livelihood was low. Those households whose primary source of income was from family members employed by the government were not impacted. The impact on the tourism industry, however, was high.

had the highest levels of damage (Table 7.6). Both are wards in Jiri municipality in Dolakha, where involvement in the tourism industry was the primary source of livelihood. People who lost their jobs here estimated that it would take at least a year-and-a-half before they would be fully employed again.

The only significant impact on other sources of livelihood was in two of the wards that

Table 7.6: Impact on other sources of livelihood by ward damage⁷⁶

		Impact on other sources of livelihood		
		High	Medium	Low
Level of ward damage	Highest	2	0	2
	High	0	0	0
	Medium	0	0	1
	Low	0	0	0

The impact on the tourism industry was also a concern in Gorkha. The Gorakhnath temple, Kalika temple, and Manakamana temple, as well as the Manaslu trekking route, were badly damaged and it was expected that this would lead to a decline in tourism. The impact on the tourism industry also affected associated industries, like handicraft

producers in Sindhupalchok and producers of agricultural products targeted to tourists in Dolakha who no longer had a market for the goods.

⁷⁶ This table illustrates the impact only for the wards in which an ‘other’ source was the primary source of livelihood for at least some households.



Photo: Aneta Buraityte

7.3 Sale of Assets

The sale of assets was low and was restricted to selling livestock. There were no instances of land sales.

Of the households that sold their livestock, most did so because they had been displaced by the earthquakes. They could not take their livestock to their new temporary shelter and could not properly care for them due to their new living arrangements. In Baruwa VDC in Sindhupalchok, which was very exposed to landslide risks, roughly 30% of homes sold their livestock when they moved to temporary camps in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu for at least the monsoon period and could not care for their livestock while they were away. There were some instances in which households were not displaced but had to sell their livestock because they needed the extra space to construct

temporary shelters. There were no reports of people selling their livestock because they could not afford to keep them.

Perhaps because of the difficulty of caring for livestock after the earthquakes, the price of livestock dropped significantly in some places. In one ward in Namtar VDC in Makwanpur, for example, an estimated 90% of households were displaced and all had to sell their cattle for a quarter of what the market rate had been prior to the earthquakes. In Prapcha VDC in Okhaldhunga, displaced families wanted to sell their livestock but prices had dropped too far for it to be worthwhile.

7.4 Debt and Credit

Borrowing large amounts of money was uncommon and took place more frequently in medium and low impact districts. But most people planned to borrow money in the future.

Households borrowed significant amounts of money in only ten wards. Most households planned to borrow money in the future but wanted to wait to see what the government compensation for destruction to their homes and/or subsidies for reconstruction loans would be first.

Table 7.7: Wards in which at least some households have borrowed money⁷⁷

	Level of ward damage			
	Highest	High	Medium	Low
	1	4	2	3
Percentage of wards studied within each damage category	9%	33%	22%	75%

	Damage at the district level		
	High	Medium	Low
	1	5	4
Percentage of wards studied within each damage category	6%	42%	67%

Borrowing was most likely to have occurred in wards with low levels of damage and in medium and low impact districts (Table 7.7).⁷⁸ It is striking, however, that borrowing took place at such a low frequency in high

impact districts, which comprise half of the wards visited. This might be because people were receiving a higher amount of relief materials and/or remittances from abroad in high impact districts than in medium and low

⁷⁷ This refers to wards in which at least some households borrowed substantial amounts of money.

⁷⁸ It is possible that this is simply a reflection of a bias in the sample and that Syangja happened to be a

low impact district where borrowing occurred at a high frequency. The survey research, presented in a separate report, found that a larger proportion of people in high impact districts were borrowing than in low impact districts.

affected ones. The one instance of borrowing in a high impact district was in Jiri, where people reported taking out small amounts of credit at local stores to purchase food and household goods. In Sindhupalchok, the president of one cooperative indicated that there had actually been a decrease in borrowing after the earthquakes and cash deposits increased in at least at one bank.⁷⁹

In all ten wards where borrowing had occurred, people borrowed from relatives and from local wealthy families. In only three wards did people successfully borrow money from moneylenders, whereas in five wards individuals tried and failed to borrow from moneylenders. When people did borrow, the reason was almost always to purchase materials for emergency shelters or to repair their homes. This is an indication that external relief to medium and low affected wards was insufficient. In many cases, people who borrowed money did so with the expectation that they would receive compensation from the government

that would allow them to repay the loan. Case Study 7.2 details one such instance in Okhaldhunga. It also illustrates how a reliance on local moneylenders may disproportionately burden Dalit communities or other marginalized groups, who often do not have the capital to secure a loan that would help them meet their needs or who are forced to take out loans with interest rates as high as 36%.

Across all wards, most people plan to borrow large amounts of money for home reconstruction, provided that the government implements policies to make credit widely available at low interest rates. Facilitating access to such loans will be critical for a speedy recovery. Particular attention will have to be paid to communicating policies in order to prevent local moneylenders from taking advantage of households that may have difficulty accessing the formal banking system as a result of class, caste, and/or geography.

Case Study 7.2: Dalit families at risk of high debts

Hopeful of future government compensation and low interest loans for earthquake victims, several Dalit households in a village in Okhaldhunga have started taking loans locally to rebuild their houses. Without land for subsistence farming, and living off meager incomes, these families

seemed to have no alternatives to taking out loans.

Maya, a single mother with three children, lost her house, which was partially damaged during the first earthquake on 25 April and became unlivable after the second earthquake.

⁷⁹ Many households in rural areas keep cash in their homes and the increase in deposits is likely due to the fact that many people no longer had a safe place to keep their cash.

Initially, she and her children stayed in a makeshift shelter made of old tarps on a small patch of rented land. Realizing they would not be able to use their house again, they eventually built a sturdier cowshed-type shelter using CGI sheets and tarps. After her house was classified as fully damaged by the government technical assessment team, Maya was optimistic that she would eventually receive government compensation and decided to take a loan to begin rebuilding her house.

“We cannot live in the cowshed forever. We will have to rebuild the house after this monsoon at any cost,” said Maya. Lacking financial means, having already spent several thousand rupees on building an emergency shelter, she was forced to take out a loan. Maya owned a very small patch of land that she used for planting maize but the land where she built her temporary shelter was rented. “We cannot pay the rent for the land on which we have built this emergency shelter,” she said. Like most of her Dalit neighbors, Maya worked on the land of higher caste households to make a living. But she explained that this income would not be enough to rebuild her house. “We cannot even afford two meals a day with our earnings, let alone save any money. So we are bound to take loans from other villagers.”

Maya took a loan from a wealthy neighbor at a high interest rate. But she was confident that she would be able to repay the loan. “They say the government will give us money to build our house. They say that since our house is fully damaged, I will be receiving an even bigger amount, including some loans at very low interest rates.”

Many people in this village, most of them Dalits, took loans from local moneylenders at high interest rates of up to 36 percent. Those who had not taken out loans were planning to do so. Most, like Maya, expected that government assistance would allow them to repay their loans—they often referred to the fact that the government had wiped the debts of victims of the last major earthquake in 1988.

But not everyone was as optimistic. One Dalit man was skeptical even though he too had to take out a loan. “Once the monsoon begins, there will be landslides which will affect more people and the government may forget about us. But how can I build a house without the government’s help?” he said. Another man exclaimed: “The government should look after poor victims like us. If not, I will have to go abroad to pay back my loan.”

7.5 Remittances and Labor Migration

Remittances were a major source of income for households in affected areas. There was an increase in remittances after the 25 April earthquake. The long-term effects on labor migration and remittances are not known and will depend largely on the scope of government financial assistance for home reconstruction.

Remittances are a major source of income for many affected households. As noted above, most farming households are not able to produce enough food to sustain their families for the entire year and rely on cash income to supplement their agricultural yield. Figure 7.1 illustrates the proportion of households that received remittances in the wards studied and Figure 7.2 shows

the proportion of households for which remittances were the largest source of income. In general, remittance income was sufficient to meet basic household needs but not for significant upward economic mobility. In many cases, a diversion of remittance income toward reconstruction may not be possible if households need the income to meet basic needs.



Figure 7.1: Households that received remittances by number of wards

The volume of remittances was reported to have increased in the weeks after the 25 April earthquake. It appears that the volume increased more in highly affected districts, especially Dolakha and Sindhupalchok. At

the Charikot branch of the IME bank, the total amount of remittances sent through the bank between 14 April and 24 April was NPR 27,13,737. Between 4 May, when the bank re-opened, and 12 May, when the second

major earthquake struck, the total amount jumped to NPR 10,362,688. Between 18 May, when the bank reopened again, and 29

May, the total amount transferred was NPR 84,14,007 (Figure 7.3).



Figure 7.2: Households for which remittances were the biggest source of income

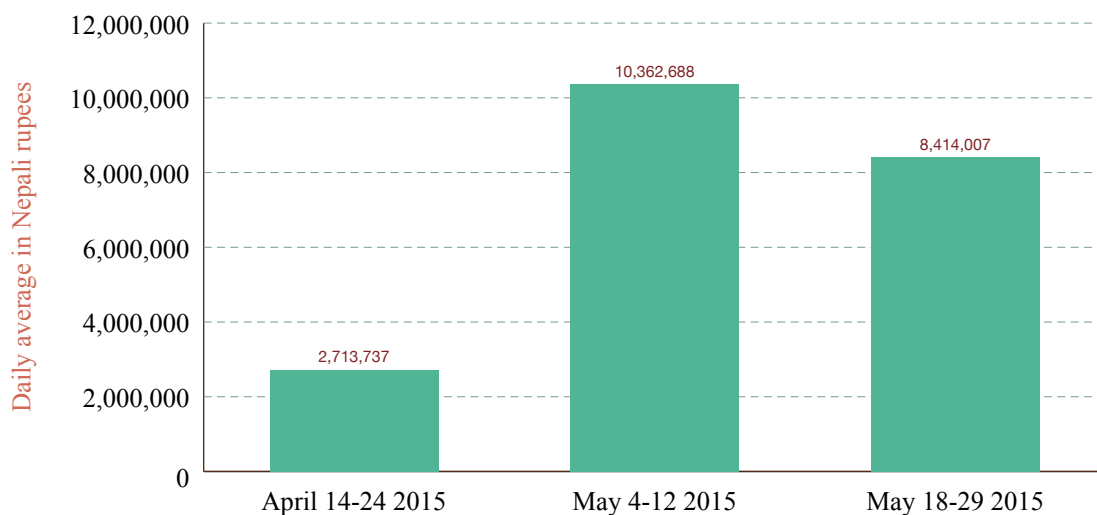


Figure 7.3: Remittances sent through IME Bank, Charikot branch, Dolakha (daily average)

Besides the increase in the volume of remittances in the first few weeks after the earthquakes, it did not appear that there was much impact on remittances in the short-term. Most families expected that they would continue to receive remittances to supplement their income. Some migrant workers from earthquake-affected areas returned shortly after the earthquakes to help with immediate recovery, but by mid-June most had either already returned to work or planned to return after government compensation is distributed. There were exceptions. In Katunje VDC in Okhaldhunga, for example, many men who work as wage laborers in India returned to their homes after receiving news of the 25 April earthquake. They had not finished their contracts in India, so they were not paid for the work they had done. Without a source

of income, they will be in financial distress because they still had loans to pay off for the fees to travel and will now likely also need to take out loans to reconstruct their homes.

The longer-term impact on remittances is less clear and will depend largely on the speed of the reconstruction process and on the scope of government compensation and financial support. Many households indicated that they may need to send more family members to work abroad to be able to pay for the reconstruction of their homes. Most, however, indicated they would wait until government compensation and financial policies are announced before making a decision. If the demand for reconstruction labor and wages are high enough, there may be a decrease in out-migration.



8. CONCLUSION

Photo: Tenzing Paljor

Despite the chaos and confusion surrounding relief distribution in the first few weeks after the 25 April earthquake, the government was ultimately able to institute effective distribution mechanisms. Although most earthquake-affected communities indicated that they needed more support than had been provided, the mechanisms of distribution—centralized through DDRCs and channeled through RDCs—were assessed positively at the ward level. By the time of this research, most aid was being channeled through these mechanisms, but some aid providers resisted working through the government. Moving forward, aid providers should work through government mechanisms to the greatest extent possible in order to ensure coordination and accountability.

The government mechanisms, however, could be improved. In particular, systematic accountability and complaint mechanisms at the VDC level need to be put in place. Furthermore, efforts should be made to ensure wider and direct participation at the ward and VDC level, especially with regards to the inclusion of women and marginalized communities.

Problems around damage and needs assessments were more pronounced than relief distribution. The most widespread concern was with the assessments that categorized damage at the household level. Inconsistent categorization of damage, a lack of clear policies, and multiple assess-

ments conducted at different levels were all considered problematic by affected communities. Suspicion of political interference in damage assessments was high in some wards, especially in medium impact districts. Given that these assessments may determine the extent of reconstruction support provided to affected households, discontent with assessment procedures could manifest in conflict directed at the government as well as within earthquake-affected communities. The government should re-assess damage to homes with full transparency regarding policies and procedures. In addition, mechanisms of appeal should be established and clearly explained.

An equal distribution model for relief was widely accepted and preferred by most communities. Donors and aid providers should acknowledge this and design programs accordingly to the extent possible. This does not mean that all programs must follow this model. Most people recognize that there are differential needs and access to resources—as well as a limited supply of relief available—and that targeted programs are justifiable. There were no reports of major contention around immediate relief after the government institutionalized mechanisms of distribution. However, complaints about being left out were more pronounced in villages where aid providers had to prioritize recipients based on needs, geography or social standings due to insufficient volumes of aid to give to all. Aid providers should be aware that unfairness, whether actual or perceived, could lead to social tensions. This calls for the establishment of a local review mechanism that allows communities to verify and amend lists of recipients for programs.

When direct aid cannot be provided to all households, donors and aid providers should

seek to provide at least some support to households that are not direct beneficiaries, even if this is only in the form of distribution of educational materials. For example, if direct support for home reconstruction is provided to the most vulnerable or lowest income households in a given area, aid providers should at least try to disseminate detailed information on how other households can access financing for home reconstruction or information on basic principles for constructing earthquake-resistant structures. At a bare minimum, aid providers should be transparent and make explicit efforts to communicate information about their decision-making processes, available resources, and operating procedures in order to avoid perceptions of unfairness.

The most vulnerable earthquake-affected communities are those that have been displaced due to landslides or the threat of future landslides. These communities have often resettled under temporary and informal arrangements, and are exposed to threats of removal and various forms of exploitation. A lack of thorough land assessments has left most of these communities with uncertain futures. Clear plans for assessment and permanent resettlement need to be developed. Among the displaced, women, children and the elderly were recognized as being the most exposed to security threats as well as future economic difficulties. Children and the elderly were more susceptible to suffering from mental and physical health problems, with cases of illnesses in displacement camps resulting from harsh living conditions already been reported.

Social relations were found to be intact after the earthquakes. There was no major incidents of crime reported nor a general increase. This could, however, change as the transition from relief to reconstruction takes

place. Again, the possibility of a breakdown in social relations will be higher if concerns regarding damage assessments are not addressed and if perceptions of unfairness in targeted distribution are not taken seriously.

While there were no reports of willful discrimination during relief distribution, donors and aid providers should be aware of the structural discrimination that exists in Nepali society. This will be of particular importance in the coming months as support for home reconstruction may depend largely on navigating various bureaucratic channels. Special attention should be given to those communities that may have the most difficult time accessing the bureaucracy due to their marginalized social standing or geographic remoteness.

Most households in earthquake-affected areas rely on subsistence farming as their primary source of livelihood. Households displaced due to landslides or the threat of landslides have experienced severe disruptions to their livelihoods, and long-term plans for recovery need to be developed in coordination with plans for resettlement. Relative to households that rely on farming, the number of households that rely on income from small businesses is small. Many of these households, however, lost their entire livelihood after the earthquake and have no land of their own to fall back on. Focused programs should be developed to help such households recover, such as access to financing to reestablish their business or skills trainings to develop new sources of income.

Most households plan to apply for substantial loans to repair or reconstruct their homes. Many may not have pursued such financing in the past, and aid providers should consider developing programs

that promote transparency in the financial industry, facilitate access to loans, and provide financial education to earthquake-affected households. Facilitating access to reconstruction finance will further improve the recovery process as a robust period of reconstruction will likely boost demand in local labor markets. Most households in earthquake-affected areas rely on at least some income from labor to supplement their agricultural yields, and a strong reconstruction economy will be of positive benefit to them.

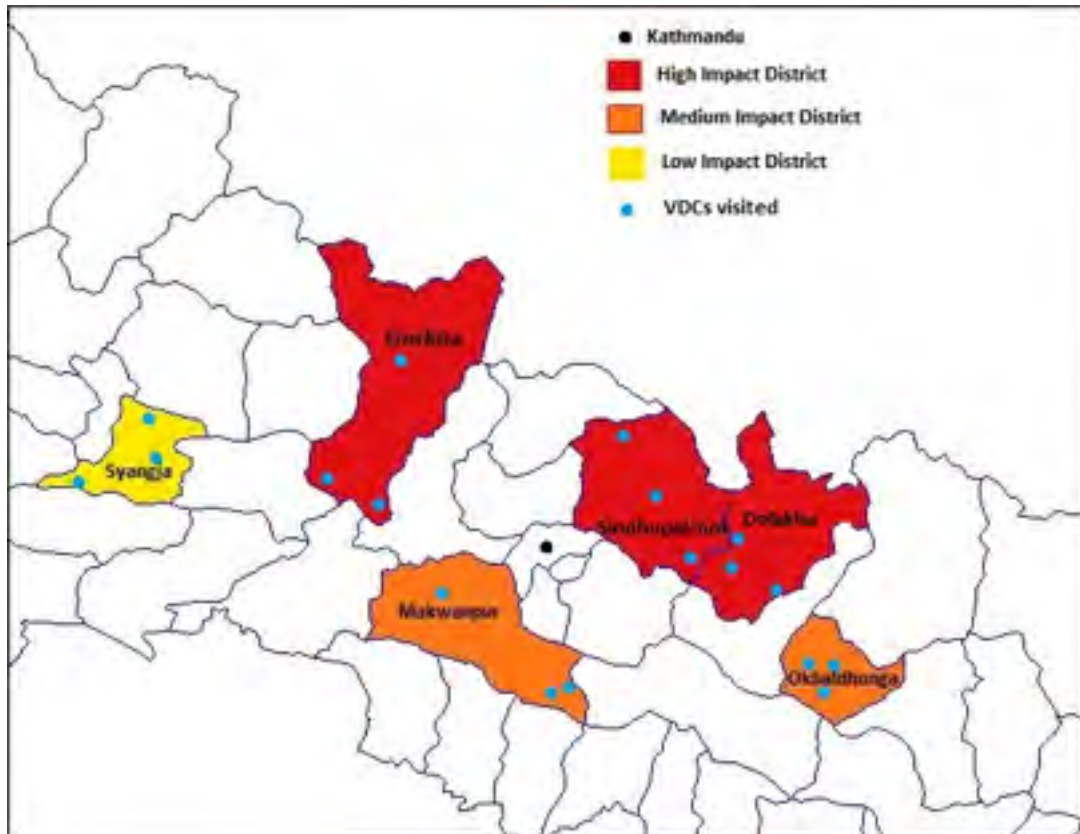
Ultimately, the Government of Nepal is responsible for the most important aspect of sustainable recovery: the development of a comprehensive plan for long-term relief and reconstruction. At present, a lack of clear plans and policies frustrates earthquake-affected communities because it hinders their ability to plan their own recovery. Donors and aid providers can and should contribute to the process by sharing their own plans and best practices, but the voices and concerns of the most important stakeholders—the earthquake-affected communities themselves—should be center.

This report has outlined findings on the impacts people have experienced, and the ways in which they are recovering, around two months after the April 25 earthquake. However, many of these impacts, and the ways they shape recovery, will evolve over time. The arrival of larger-scale reconstruction programs may pose challenges for social relations and cohesion. Political preferences, and the role of different leaders, may change over time, in part in response to how effective (or not) medium and longer term recovery programs are. And new economic challenges may emerge. As such, it is necessary to continue to monitor impacts and recovery over the coming months.



Photo: Tenzing Paljor

ANNEX A: MAP OF LOCATIONS STUDIED



Map of districts and VDCs/municipalities visited during the field research

ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY

This report is based on in-depth qualitative field research conducted from 9-27 June 2015. Six teams, each of three researchers, visited six earthquake-affected districts: Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Gorkha, Okhaldhunga, Makwanpur, and Syangja. Research teams visited 36 wards in 18 VDCs/municipalities across these six districts (three VDCs/municipalities per district and two wards per VDC/municipality).⁸⁰ The teams spent around two days in each ward (three to four days in each VDC). At the beginning of their research, teams also spent one to two days in the district headquarters to finalize the selection of VDCs and gather information on district-level dynamics of the aid response.

The research teams used qualitative methods to gather two kinds of data. First, they collected standardized data on the five focus areas at the district, VDC, and ward levels.

Site selection

Sampling of locations was done at three levels—district, VDC/municipality, and ward—to maximize variation in two key factors that were predicted will affect the

This facilitated comparisons of the impact, emerging issues and the disaster response across research sites. Second, teams provided a descriptive picture of the five research areas through in-depth field research at the ward level, using the following research instruments: (i) key informant interviews; (ii) focus group discussions and informal group discussions; and (iii) participant observation and informal interviewing. Case studies were also developed detailing the experiences of individuals, families, and occupational groups.

Collecting this information involved interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of people at the local level: elites and non-elites; men and women; government officials and traditional leaders; people affected to varying extent by the earthquake; aid recipients; and those who have not received assistance.

nature and speed of recovery: (i) the degree of impact of the earthquake; and (ii) degree of remoteness.

⁸⁰ Teams visited 16 VDCs and two municipalities (Jiri municipality in Dolakha, and Waling municipality in Syangja).

Districts. Affected districts were categorized into high, medium and low impact districts based on government data on the number of houses destroyed.⁸¹ High, medium, and low impact was defined as follows: High—more than 50% of houses destroyed; medium—20-50% of houses destroyed; and low—10-20% houses destroyed.

Six districts were then selected to vary by level of earthquake damage and geographic spread: three high impact, two medium impact districts, and one low impact district were selected:

- High: Dolakha, Gorkha, Sindhupalchok
- Medium: Okhaldhunga, Makwanpur
- Low: Syangja

VDCs/municipalities. Within each district, three VDCs/municipalities of varying impact and accessibility levels were chosen (Table B.1). The same threshold for levels of impact used for districts were used for selecting VDCs/municipalities. Accessibility was categorized as follows: accessible (high accessibility)—within a four-hour drive of the district headquarters; remote (low accessibility)—over four hours drive and/or walk from the district headquarters. This sampling strategy allows for an assessment of the extent to which both levels of damage and accessibility affect recovery.

Research teams conducted selection of VDCs/municipalities at the district headquarters level based on information on levels of impact and remoteness gathered from key informants at the beginning of the research in early June 2015. At the time, official information on damages at the VDC level was not available and teams relied on data shared by government offices and OCHA to select VDCs/municipalities.

In some cases, field teams had to adjust selection of VDCs/municipalities based on higher or lower levels of damages in VDCs/municipalities across the district or depending on which places they were logistically able to visit. This influenced the classifications of wards done for the analysis and used throughout this report—see below. See Table B.3 for a list of VDCs/municipalities selected.

Wards. Wards were selected based on information gathered in the VDCs/municipalities on levels of impact and location of the wards. In each VDC, teams conducted research in the ward where the hub (center) is located as well as a less accessible ward located up to a day's drive or walk away from the hub.

Wards are the main unit of analysis for this research and as such, wards classified based on levels of impact after completion of the field research for the purpose of analysis and comparisons between wards—see below.

⁸¹ Site selection was completed in May 2015, before the publication of the Post Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA). The high, medium and low impact districts selected are classified in the PDNA

as follows: high—severely hit; medium—crisis hit; low—hit. Post Disaster Need Assessment, Volume A. National Planning Commission.

Table B.1: Criteria for VDC/municipality selection

District	Level of Impact	Level of Accessibility
Low Impact (1 district, 3 VDCs/MCs) - Syangja	High (1 VDC/MC)	Either High or Low depending on where the most highly-affected VDC/MC is
	Medium (1 VDC/MC)	High (1 VDC/MC)
	Low (1 VDC/MC)	Low (1 VDC/MC)
Medium Impact (2 districts, 6 VDCs/MCs) - Okhaldhunga - Makwanpur	High (2 VDCs/MCs)	High (1 VDC/MC)
		Low (1 VDC/MC)
	Medium (2 VDCs/MCs)	High (1 VDC/MC)
		Low (1 VDC/MC)
	Low (2 VDCs/MCs)	High (1 VDC/MC)
		Low (1 VDC/MC)
High Impact (3 districts, 9 VDCs/MCs) - Dolakha - Gorkha - Sindhupalchok	High (4 VDCs/MCs)	High (2 VDCs/MCs)
		Low (2 VDCs/MCs)
	Medium (4 VDCs/MCs)	High (2 VDCs/MCs)
		Low (2 VDCs/MCs)
	Low (1 VDC/MC)	Either High or Low depending on where the least-affected VDC/MC is

Ward classification

During the analysis stage, wards were classified separately to reflect the significant variance in levels of impact observed by research teams. Wards were classified according to estimates of the actual level of damage. Estimates were based on information gathered by research teams at the VDC/municipality and ward levels. The factors taken into account here were: (i) the percentage of homes completely destroyed/collapsed; and (ii) the percentage of homes rendered unlivable (but not completely destroyed/collapsed).

Each ward was then given two scores. The first was calculated by doubling the percentage of homes completely destroyed.⁸² Extra weight was given to the completely destroyed indicator based on the assumption that complete destruction of homes gives the best overall measure of impact at the ward level given that a completely destroyed

⁸² A ward with 100% of homes completely destroyed received a score of 200, a ward with 30% of homes completely destroyed received a score of 60, and so on.

house would also likely indicate a loss of assets—especially food stocks and household goods—and captures the force of the earthquakes in that ward.

The second score was based on the percentage of homes reported/observed to be unlivable but not completely destroyed. This score was calculated by subtracting the percentage of completely destroyed homes from the percentage of unlivable homes.⁸³

The two scores were summed to allow for a ranking of wards. Based on the ranking, four categories of damage were established using the following breakdown:

- 190+ = Highest
- 101-190 = High
- 30-100 = Medium
- 0-29 = Low

Table B.2: Ward damage classification

District Impact	District	VDC/municipality	Ward #	Ward Impact
High	Gorkha	Barpak	A	Highest
			B	Highest
		Dhuwakot	A	Medium
			B	High
		Tanglichok	A	High
			B	High
	Sindhupalchok	Baruwa	A	Highest
			B	Highest
		Lisankhu	A	High
			B	High
		Syaule	A	High
			B	Highest

⁸³ A ward in which 90% of homes were unlivable and 30% of homes were completely destroyed received a score of 60, a ward in which 25% of homes were unlivable and 10% of homes were completely destroyed received a score of 15, and so on.

District Impact	District	VDC/municipality	Ward #	Ward Impact		
High	Dolakha	Boch	A	Highest		
			B	Highest		
		Jiri	A	Highest		
			B	Highest		
		Kalinchok	A	Highest		
			B	Highest		
		Medium	Okhaldhunga	Baruneshwor	A	High
					B	High
Katunje	A			Medium		
	B			Medium		
Prapcha	A			High		
	B			High		
Makwanpur	Betini			A	Medium	
				B	High	
	Namtar		A	Medium		
			B	High		
	Phaparbari		A	Medium		
			B	Medium		
Low	Syangja		Aarukharka	A	Low	
				B	Low	
		Shreekrishna Gandaki	A	Low		
			B	Low		
		Waling	A	Medium		
			B	Medium		

Eleven wards were classified as highest impact, 12 as high impact, nine as medium impact, and four as low impact (Table B.2).



Photo: Tenzing Paljor





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